Astrology 101
Beginning to understand your chart
So you’ve just got your chart… now what the heck does it mean?

At its most basic level an astrological chart is a four dimensional representation of a series of interconnected cycles. These cycles can be readily seen in the regular, repeating patterns of nature, in the flow of cause and effect and in the longer-term patterns of our own lives. The planets do not cause these cycles but are themselves subject to them. Each planet (except the Moon) orbits the Sun, the source of all life. Each time a planet completes one revolution of this constant point the principle represented by it is expressed in its entirety.

To read your natal chart begin by familiarising yourself with the Planets, Signs and Houses. These will be covered in the coming pages of this ebook. Then look at your chart to see in which sign and house the planets fall. This will tell you where in the cycle the planets were at the time of your birth and which area of life they will most influence. For example if Mercury is in Aries in the seventh house your communication (Mercury) is likely to be assertive and direct (Aries), especially with others who are close to you (7th House).

Bear in mind that you cannot read any aspect of your chart in isolation. It needs to be viewed as an interconnected system in which the elements interact. However it is important to learn the alphabet before beginning to read. If you first gain an understanding of the principles represented by the planets, signs and houses, you will then be able to tell the likely manner of their expression in your life by studying the inter-relationships formed by their positions in the chart.

Humans are positioned on the planet Earth and therefore our cycles correspond with hers, differing between individuals only according to where on the Earth we are at any given moment and at what point in the cycle we happened to begin our existence. Keep in mind that humans have free will, can ignore nature’s cycles very easily and that our upbringing has a substantial part to play in who we become. The extent to which these early experiences influence a person’s life is shown in part by the position of the Moon in the chart, as she is representative of response and reaction.

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The Sun is the most powerful of all horoscopic factors. As it is the source of all life it is representative of the creative force that springs from the essential self, or soul. It indicates our basic motivations in life, our modus operandi. The manner of its expression will be indicated by its sign and house placings, which are likely to be emphasised in the native’s life.

After the Sun, the strongest planet in the chart is the ruler of the sign on the Ascendant, which is referred to as the ‘ruling planet’. Its influence will be very strong and the characteristics of the sign in which it is positioned will be emphasized. The area of life ruled by the ruler’s house position will probably be of importance to the native.

Next in significance comes the Moon. Because the Moon revolves around the Earth rather than the Sun, it tends to lack its own energy, usually taking on the colour of the sign and house in which it is placed. It is also easily influenced by other planets in relationship to it. Thus the Moon rules emotional response and reaction. Its cycles are very noticeable in our lives, as it is in close connection with the Earth and because its cycles are completed so rapidly. This is why those with a strong Moon in their chart often feel as though they are on an emotional roller coaster!

The expression of each of these planets is further modified by the relationships formed between them. These include mutual reception and disposition, however the major relationships that you should understand are the aspects. Understanding the relationships between the planets will open your eyes to the interconnectedness of the elements in a chart and allow you to begin looking at the current influence in your life created by the planets as they transit your natal chart.
The principles of the planets

The principles represented by the planets are as follows:

- **Sun**: action, power, vitality, self-expression, creativity, soul purpose, motivation. The Sun is ruler of Leo and the 5th house.
- **Moon**: reaction, fluctuation, inner life, habitual response patterns, emotional response. The Moon is ruler of Cancer and the 4th house.
- **Mercury**: communication, decision making, planning, intellect. Mercury is ruler of Gemini and Virgo and the 3rd and 6th houses.
- **Venus**: harmony, relatedness, connection, relationship, balance, beauty. Venus is ruler of Taurus and Libra and the 2nd and 7th houses.
- **Mars**: energy (enthusiasm, sexual passion, life force), activation. Mars is ruler of Aries and Scorpio and the 1st and 8th houses.
- **Jupiter**: expansion, exploration, searching, journeying. Jupiter is ruler of Sagittarius and the 9th house.
- **Saturn**: contraction, limitation, caution, sacrifice, will, structure. Saturn is ruler of Capricorn and the 10th house.
- **Uranus**: change (revolution, disruption, evolution), Uranus is ruler of Aquarius and the 11th house.
- **Neptune**: receptivity, sensitivity, illusion, the sub-conscious, collective soul. Neptune is ruler of Pisces and the 12th house.
- **Pluto**: elimination (can be explosive or painful), death, renewal, regeneration. Pluto is ruler of Scorpio and the 8th house.
- **Chiron**: healing and woundedness. No rulerships are assigned.

Each planet expresses itself most fully in one (or sometimes two) signs and houses that are most similar to it in nature. That sign and house is said to be ruled by that planet. If you compare the description of the signs and houses with their rulers you will see how this works.

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A note about the Moon Nodes

- **The North Node** represents what must be learned in this lifetime. This involves the resolution of paradoxes into completeness. At its most basic level it represents our destiny.
- **The South Node** indicates something of the native’s previous life, the mode of being that we naturally fall back onto when we are afraid. At its most basic level it represents our karma.

The Moon Nodes are often referred to as the Dragon’s head and tail; the dragon eternally attempts to catch up with and swallow its own tail, whereupon it would know completeness and unity. This is a most intriguing aspect of astrology and a little research would probably be enriching.

The keywords used in this brief outline give a far from complete insight into the way in which each element will manifest itself in an individual chart. Astrology is similar to the Tarot in that too literal a reading that relies heavily on conventional symbolic interpretations and keywords will blind the mind to the deeper meanings revealed by the soul. A clear understanding of principles is important however, and these should be expanded upon by intuition and research.
Astrology signs and their meanings

The quality of a planet remains constant but is expressed in different ways according to the sign through which it passes. For example with Mercury in Aries, you will tend to communicate assertively, courageously, passionately and energetically.

The planets are expressed in astrology signs as follows:

- **Aries**: assertively, courageously, passionately, energetically. Cardinal fire sign.
- **Taurus**: dependably, practically, determinedly, sensually. Fixed earth sign.
- **Gemini**: communicatively, diversely, mentally, flexibly. Mutable air sign.
- **Cancer**: sensitively, protectively, nurturingly, responsively. Cardinal water sign.
- **Leo**: proudly, creatively, powerfully, joyfully. Fixed fire sign.
- **Virgo**: obligingly, analytically, practically, with attention to detail. Mutable earth sign.
- **Libra**: affectionately, harmoniously, justly, with empathy. Cardinal air sign.
- **Scorpio**: passionately but secretly, penetratingly, deeply. Fixed water sign.
- **Sagittarius**: widely, expansively, ardently, exploratively. Mutable fire sign.
- **Capricorn**: prudently, aspiringly, coolly, practically, determinedly. Cardinal earth sign.
- **Aquarius**: detachedly, scientifically, questioningly, revolutionary. Fixed air sign.
- **Pisces**: sensitively, with an appreciation of the intangible. Mutable water sign.

The chart below will help you become familiar with the symbols for the astrology signs.

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For a more detailed understanding of the astrology signs head over to [DK Foundation](#). They hold an exceptional archive of excellent articles on astrology and other esoteric topics.

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Elements and qualities

The elements are the basis of astrology as they are indeed to our life on Earth. Each of the signs is ruled by one of the four elements.

- **Fire**: active, passionate, hot, rash, expressive (positive). Fire signs are Aries, Leo and Sagittarius.
- **Earth**: steadfast, practical, cautious, receptive (negative). Earth signs are Taurus, Virgo and Capricorn.
- **Air**: intellectual, communicative, expressive (positive). Air signs are Gemini, Libra and Aquarius.
- **Water**: emotional, intuitive, responsive, receptive (negative). Water signs are Cancer, Scorpio and Pisces.

In addition, the signs can be divided into groups of three qualities, each quality having on sign from each element.

- **Cardinal**: each in its own way acts, begins, initiates, leads. Cardinal signs are Aries (fire), Capricorn (earth), Libra (air) and Cancer (water).
- **Fixed**: each in its own way remains unchanged, stable, determined. Fixed signs are Leo (fire), Taurus (earth), Aquarius (air) and Scorpio (water).
- **Mutable**: each in its own way is adaptable, obliging but unreliable, and likely to be open to differing perspectives. Mutable signs are Sagittarius (fire), Virgo (earth), Gemini (air) and Pisces (water).

Understanding the element and quality of each sign gives us a great deal of insight into how the signs relate to each other. Imagine for example how Sagittarius (the mutable fire sign) would relate to Cancer (the cardinal water sign). Sag would likely experience Cancer as a bossy wet blanket while Cancer would find Sag over enthusiastic and unreliable. On the other hand, Taurus (the fixed earth sign) would likely enjoy Cancers nurturing and leadership qualities.
The houses and what they represent

The houses, or sectors of the heavens, represent the area of life in which the planets will manifest themselves most strongly and where their influence will be most apparent. Each house has a sign that is native to it. Thus Aries is the natural ruler of the first house and so on. The basic nature of each house derives from this natural sign.

However because everybody is not born at the exact moment of the vernal equinox, the positions of the signs around the chart will be different according to the sign that is ascending over the horizon at birth. These signs modify the nature of the houses and are said to ‘rule’ them.

You might think about it in this way: Aries built the first house, but after a while he sold the house and it was bought by Gemini. Capricorn, being an entrepreneur, rented the house out to Mercury who moved in with all his stuff and renovated to his taste. The house now bears the influence of Mars (Aries), Saturn (Capricorn) and Mercury. This is an example of one of the multitude of inter-relationships found in a chart.

- **The 1st house**, known as the Ascendant, is native to Aries and represents the Self.
- **The 2nd house** is native to Taurus and represents the Material world, our immediate environment and possessions.
- **The 3rd house** is native to Gemini and represents Communication, Short Journeys and our relationship with Siblings.
- **The 4th house** is native to Cancer and represents Security, Family, Home and the Mother, as well as how we are formed by our early experiences.
- **The 5th house** is native to Leo and represents Creativity, Pleasure, Fun and Children.
- **The 6th house** is native to Virgo and represents Health, Service and Work.

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• **The 7th house** is native to Libra and represents Close Relationships and Partnerships (both business and personal).
• **The 8th house** is native to Scorpio and represents the Life Force, Birth, Sex, Death and Rebirth. It also relates to other peoples money including inheritance.
• **The 9th house** is native to Sagittarius and represents the native’s Philosophy, Education and Values. It also represents Travel.
• **The 10th house**, known as the Mid-heaven is native to Capricorn and represents the native’s Career, Achievement, Status and Social Role.
• **The 11th house** is native to Aquarius and represents the native’s Friends and Social Networks.
• **The 12th house** is native to Pisces and represents the Hidden Secret Self and The Unconscious. Thus it represents our Addictions, Escape Mechanisms and Self Undoing.

The sphere of life represented by a house is made more prominent if there are planets positioned within it. A planet will have most influence in the areas of your life represented by that house. Its influence will also be important in those houses brought into relationship with it by aspect or mutual reception (described later in this ebook), but to a lesser degree.

The planets and signs express themselves particularly well in the houses to which they are native. Other houses suit particular signs and planets according to nature. For example, Mercury (communication) can be more easily realised in the seventh house (which represents close relationships), than in the twelfth house where its expression will be more limited. This can be easily understood by sense and experience.

**Angular, Succeedent and Cadent Houses**

• **Angular Houses:** As can be seen, the 1st, 4th, 7th and 10th houses are native to Cardinal signs. They represent areas of life involving initiation and the use of power.
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- **Succedent Houses**: The 2nd, 5th, 8th and 11th houses are native to Fixed signs. They represent the situations brought about by the initiatory action that takes place in the Angular houses, i.e. the results and consequences of: our effort and the decisions we make (1), our upbringing (4), the influence and effort of our partners (7) and our career (10).

- **Cadent Houses**: The 3rd, 6th, 9th and 12th houses are native to Mutable signs. They represent areas of life involving the dispersion of ideas and energies.

The Sun passes through four of these cycles each year and we call them the seasons.

Fire, Earth, Air and Water Houses

- **Fire Houses** (1, 5, 9) represent life, creativity, expansion, energy.
- **Earth Houses** (2, 6, 10) represent possessions, wealth, physical realities and earthly status.
- **Air Houses** (3, 7, 11) represent association, relationships and communication.
- **Water Houses** (4, 8, 12) represent the areas of life in which we exercise psychic receptivity, whether actively or passively.
Disposers: who’s in charge in your chart

A planet is influenced by the the qualities of the planet ruling the sign where it’s placed. This influence is so strong it is said to be the dispositor of that planet. For example, if Mars is placed in Taurus, then the active principle of Mars will be modified by the harmonising influence of Venus, the ruler of Taurus. Thus, the native will be more likely to use their energy to create stability and beauty rather than disruption. In this case Venus is said to be the dispositor of Mars.

Often a chain of dispositors will be formed. For example Mars is in Taurus, dispositor Venus; Venus is in Pisces, dispositor Neptune; Neptune is in Virgo, dispositor Mercury and so on. Sometimes there will be one planet that is the final dispositor of all the rest and in such a case that planet will be of great importance in the chart. Usually however there will be several chains and thus several prominent dispositors, as in the example below.

Mutual Reception
When two planets are disposited by each other, for example if the Sun is in Gemini and Mercury is in Leo, then they are said to be in mutual reception. Their expression will be closely connected and they will react off and modify one another. The relationship will be similar in effect to a Conjunction, a relationship between planets where the planets are forced to work closely together. Whether this relationship is successful depends on the planets involved, as well as the signs they are in! Some get along just fine, while others will struggle for power over each other.
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Understanding astrology aspects

In astrology, aspects are relationships created between planets, based on their position within 360 degrees of a circle. The planets, as well as the houses and signs where they’re placed, are brought into each other’s influence, often with one planet dominating the other or modifying its effects.

Astrology aspects are indicated on your chart by lines drawn between some planets. Those marked in red are traditionally considered challenging, while those marked in blue are considered flowing or easy. However in reality all astrology aspects can be beneficial or detrimental depending upon the strength of a person’s character and the manner in which they choose to create themselves. The charts of those who are successful in life and strong in character generally show both ‘difficult’ and ‘easy’ aspects.

The major astrology aspects

The major astrology aspects are discussed below. Angular sizes are given exactly, however in reality an ‘orb’ of plus or minus several degrees is allowed. With most planets this orb is 3 degrees plus or minus, but with the Sun and Moon you can allow up to 8 or 10 degrees either side.

• **Conjunction - 0 degrees:** Any conjunction will be a strong focal point particularly if it involves the Sun, Moon or Ascendant. It will usually create a strengthening effect, especially in the area of life represented by its house placing, but this depends on the nature of the planets involved and occasionally the relationship will cause tension.

• **Opposition - 180 degrees:** Two planets are connected to each other by polarity and in general tension is the result. The tension will be exaggerated if another planet (or planets) is square to both ends of the opposition. It will be lessened if another planet (or planets) is trine to one end and sextile to the other. The lesson of the opposition is to reconcile opposites.
• **Square - 90 degrees**: Causes tension between the planets involved and the areas of life shown by the houses they tenant. The effect is increased by formation of a T-square, which is when an opposition is squared at both ends. Conflict is also increased when four or more planets complete a square. This is called a grand cross. The crosses formed by different qualities differ in effect. With the cardinal cross the native will probably surmount the difficulties due to the tendency to initiate action; with a fixed cross the native may be inclined to put up with difficulties because of the settled nature of the fixed signs (or he may be stubbornly determined to overcome them!); with a mutable cross the native often adapts to or tries to by-pass the problem rather than struggling with it.

• **Trine - 120 degrees**: Generally a very beneficial relationship, especially when three trines form an equilateral triangle, or grand trine. The grand trine will be between planets placed in the same element, e.g. fire, and this will be strongly evident in the person’s life. Good fortune and success in life are generally the result of a grand trine, however it may be detrimental for a person of little will or strength as it allows for laziness.

• **Sextile - 60 degrees**: Helpful, though less so than the trine. Positivity or negativity emphasised depending on the signs.

It must be remembered that the working of each aspect is two-way; one planet interacts and reacts with the other. Moreover, the effect of the aspect is further modified by the planets’ sign and house placings, as well as any other aspects formed to them.

When considering an astrology aspect, take note of which planet is stronger. Sometimes this will be obvious (e.g. one planet is the Sun, Ruling Planet or a major dispositor), but often you will have to study the chart carefully. It is important to have a good understanding of which planets in your chart are ‘running the show,’ so to speak. It will then be much easier to grasp the power relationships involved in the aspects and other connections between them.
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As well as being drawn in coloured lines on the wheel of your chart, the aspects are also shown in a tabular format at the bottom of the page. The following chart will help you understand which is which!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Symbol</th>
<th>Degrees</th>
<th>signs (usually)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CONJUNCTION</td>
<td>◊</td>
<td>0°</td>
<td>same sign</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OPPOSITION</td>
<td>◊</td>
<td>180°</td>
<td>6 signs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SQUARE</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>90°</td>
<td>3 signs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TRINE</td>
<td>△</td>
<td>120°</td>
<td>4 signs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEXTILE</td>
<td>★</td>
<td>60°</td>
<td>2 signs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There are many more aspects than are described here but these are the ones with the strongest effect. It is also plenty to go on when you are just starting out! If you want to read about aspects in more detail check out this [article by Astrodienst](#).
Astrology transits and how they affect us

To live consciously is to be fully aware in the current moment and this is where astrology gets interesting. We can look at where the planets are now, the astrology transits, and how these affect you personally. For example if Saturn is currently in 13 degrees of Leo and you have Leo on the cusp of the 6th House at 10 degrees then Saturn is said to be transiting your 6th house. This means that the limiting, heavily structured and regimented energy of Saturn will be affecting the area of life represented by the 6th, namely health, work and service.

The important astrology transits are those of the outer, slowly moving planets. The cycles of the fast moving planets, and especially the moon, are so short that they rarely have any lasting impact. Thus a romance begun when transiting Venus was conjunct Pluto would be hot and steamy but burn itself out quickly, whereas a transit of Pluto to natal Venus is likely to result in a slowly developing but very intense and long-lasting affair.

Moon transits are so short that this heavenly body stays just two and half days in a sign, giving us the emotional (Moon) roller-coaster so many people with strong moons experience. Remember that a woman is inherently very influenced by the Moon due to her monthly cycles being synchronised with her macro-cosmic counterpart.

When a transiting outer planet planet aspects one of your natal planets funny things can happen, things that appear to come out of nowhere and are usually perceived as external events. They are also often game-changers. You might lose your job, move to a new city, meet the love of your life or conceive a child. It all depends on the transiting planet, its sign and house placing, as well as the house and sign placing of the natal planet.

How astrology transits affect you personally

Transits to the natal planets can set off aspect patterns that already exists in you birth chart. For example if a man has Uranus in square aspect to the Mid-heaven and finds that he is always at odds with
and rebellious towards authority figures in his career, a transit of Pluto to Uranus might cause an eruption that leads him to self-destruct his career all together. This may not be seen clearly however; the man may think he has been treated unfairly, that he is not responsible and that the event has 'happened' to him. Playing the victim is a great way to miss the lessons these transits have to teach us. And remember, some of them will only happen once in a lifetime!

To understand more about the influence of the outer planet transits on your life, read this excellent article by Mary Shea.
Secondary Progressions

Secondary progressions are another way of looking at how our astrology is changing over time and to forecast possible changes that may occur in the future. However in contrast to the externality of the transits, secondary progressions reflect the inner changes that occur in all of us over the span of a lifetime. This evolution follows a predictable course but as we all begin our lives at a different point in the cycle the lessons each one of us learns will be different. This is because the outer planets move so slowly that they will usually never leave the sign and house position in which they began.

The Sun, Moon and Ascendant, as well as Mercury, Venus and Mars, will all shift significantly from their natal placings over the course of our lives.

The Moon, our fastest mover, takes just two and a half years to pass through each sign. It’s shift from one sign to the next heralds a sudden, seemingly inexplicable change in our emotional lives: what we feel we need, how we respond to life and what we feel drawn to. For example a busy, sociable communications professional may wake up one day to discover she has a strange desire to turn inward. Upon honouring these feelings and examining her feelings she realises that her career no longer matters to her. In fact all she wants to do now is have a child, to build a nest and become a mother. Her moon has likely progressed from Gemini into Cancer.

If you learn the principles of the planets, houses and signs you will soon be able to begin interpreting the progressions for yourself. All you need is a secondary progressions chart which you can generate for free at AstroDienst. You don’t even have to make an account!
So long but not goodbye...

I hope you've enjoyed this short introduction to reading your own astrology chart. With any luck it's given you some basic knowledge to begin building a better understanding of this fascinating language of personal and spiritual growth.

But of course this is just the beginning! To continue honing your skills you may be interested to subscribe to Insight Astrology and get twice weekly blog posts in your inbox, as well as quarterly discounts and special offers on astrology readings offered only to subscribers.

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