



AN INTRODUCTION TO ASTROLOGY



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Astrology is a complex study. It has ancient origins and is still evolving and developing. It takes several years of study to become a competent astrologer and the subject is so large that it would be impossible to understand every aspect of it in a single lifetime.

People are often introduced to astrology by reading star sign columns in newspapers and magazines. These vary enormously in quality and the comments made in them have to be very general because they are only based on one piece of data - the sign of the zodiac occupied by the Sun on a particular day of the year. Astrology is capable of giving much deeper insight but to do this requires a complete set of birth data - the day, month, year and time of birth (to nearest minute) together with place of birth on Earth (latitude and longitude). This information allows a full horoscope to be calculated. (See Figure 1 - the natal chart of Elvis Presley: 8 January 1935, 04.35 CST, Tupelo, MS)

Horoscopes are also called natal charts since they usually refer to the birth (nativity) of a person but they can be calculated for anything that

has a beginning - the formation of a nation, a marriage, starting a business or even the construction of a building. It provides a way of expressing the energies of the universe at a specific moment in time, as experienced at one particular location on the Earth.

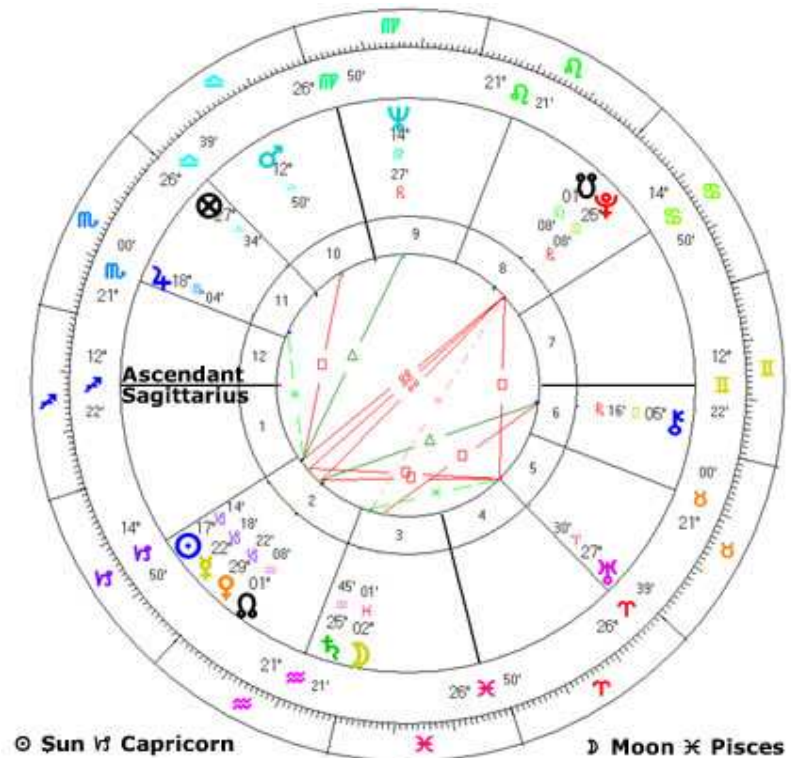


Figure 1 Elvis Presley

Figure 2 shows how a natal chart is a representation of the energies filtering through the solar system to fall on a particular spot on the Earth's surface. From this an astrologer is able to work out the important characteristics of the person or event and then to deduce how these might change or be influenced in the future. Look at Figure 2 and imagine a child being born or an event taking place somewhere on Earth. From this location the Sun, the Moon and the planets would be seen against the background of stars in our region of the universe. The natal chart is a two dimensional map of this view.

● THE EVOLUTION OF ASTROLOGY

From the times of the earliest civilisations on earth there is evidence that people have always followed the movements of the stars and planets across the sky. These observations led to the development of both astronomy and astrology. Archaeologists have located records of the study of astrology in the ruins of ancient civilisations in China, Greece, Babylon and Rome. The Three Wise Men, described in the Bible as arriving to pay homage to the new-born Christ, are believed to have been astrologers.

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Until relatively recent times, astronomy - the study of the actual movements of the heavenly bodies and astrology - the translation of these movements into events on Earth, were one and the same study. More recently, astrology and astronomy have gone in different directions. Astronomers focus on studying observable facts about the solar system and the universe whilst astrologers continue to investigate the connection between the movements of the planets in our solar system and people's lives. People have always acknowledged the connection in some way. In ancient times, astrologers connected the planets to the gods who were believed to rule every aspect of daily life. Certainly the myths associated with the ancient gods and goddesses reflect patterns of human behaviour that are ageless. Modern astrologers do not see the planets as gods; rather they perceive significant relationships between the positions of the Sun, the Moon, the planets and how we experience events. We are all a part of the universe. Every atom of our bodies and the energy that radiates from the Sun and every star are all part of the same universe. Astrology is just one tool that acknowledges this. The planetary bodies and our individual experiences are different aspects of one coherent whole. In other words, everything in the universe is linked together. There have been various attempts to explain why astrology works, with hypotheses ranging from lines of magnetic flux to radiation emanating from the Sun (our closest star). Astrology does work and we still want to know why.

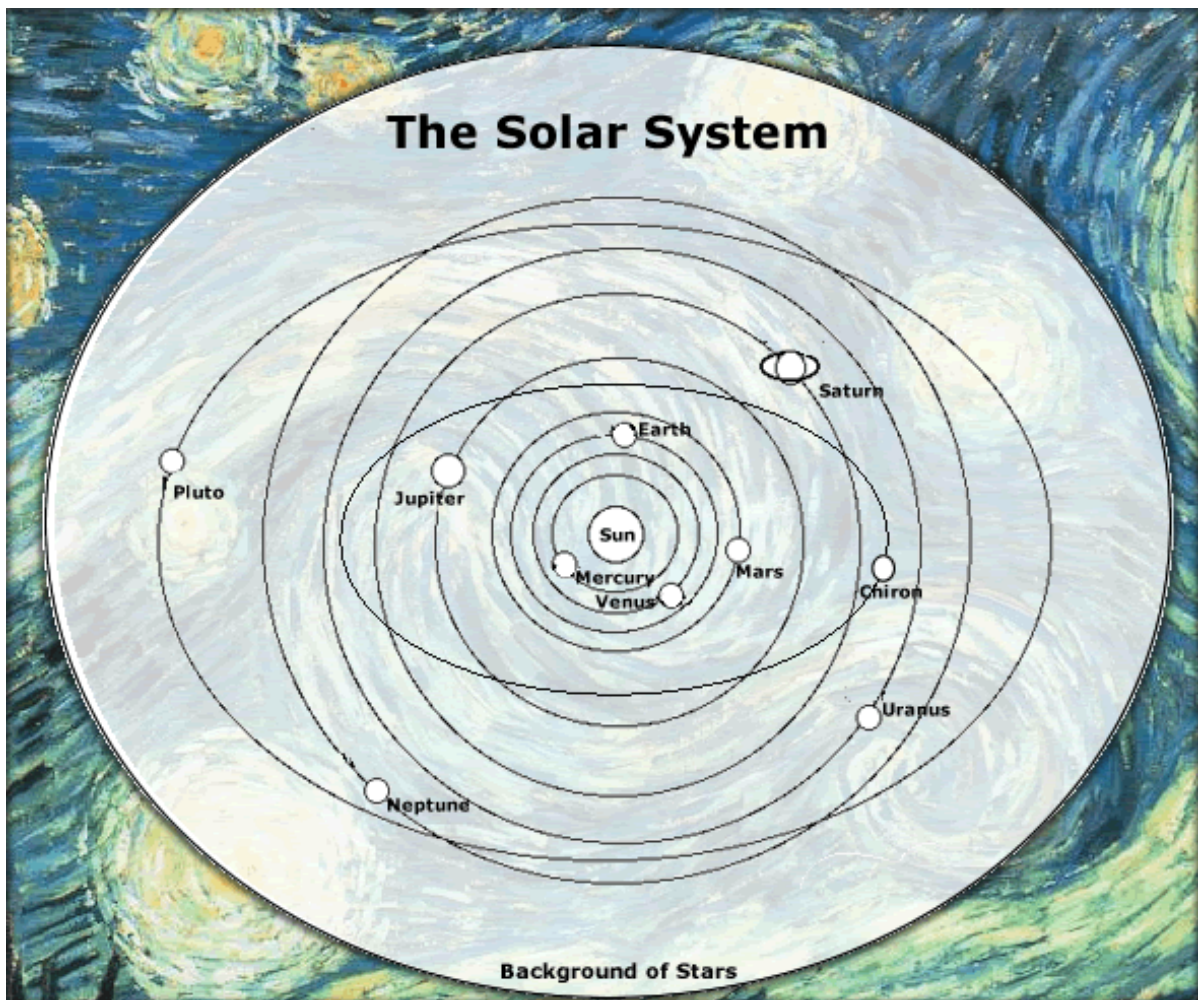


Figure 2 - A SCHEMATIC DIAGRAM OF THE SOLAR SYSTEM

● THE ZODIACS

When astrology and astronomy had their first beginnings, the actual positions of the stars were slightly different from where they are now. The ancient astrologers/astronomers saw the positions of the Sun, the Moon and those planets that are visible to the naked eye (from Mercury out to Saturn - see Figure 2) against the background patterns of the actual constellations. During the year, as the Earth orbits the Sun, our view of the universe changes. The apparent path of the Sun is referred to as the ecliptic and the band of constellations that falls within this is called the **sidereal zodiac**. The different constellations vary quite a bit in size and it is debatable whether there are 12, 13 or 14 constellations that could be considered to lie along the ecliptic.

Around 200 CE, at the spring equinox for the northern hemisphere (when the Sun was directly overhead at noon on the equator, appearing to move north) the Sun lay at the beginning of the constellation of Aries. Both then and now, western astrologers take this moment of time as the beginning of their zodiac - the **tropical zodiac**. Over thousands of years, the stars and the solar system have shifted in their relative positions. Western astrologers still take the northern spring equinox as the beginning of their zodiac but the actual position of the Sun at this time of the year has drifted backwards so that it now has the constellation of Pisces as a backdrop in the sidereal zodiac. Throughout this guide, as in any other astrological text, when the zodiac is mentioned, it implies the tropical zodiac. It is important to realise that astrologers use a particular time in the Earth's orbit around the Sun, not a constellation, as their reference point.

● HOROSCOPES

The diagram or chart that is used by astrologers is called a horoscope (see Figure 1) It is a two-dimensional representation of the positions of the Sun, Moon, planets and certain other important points as seen from the place where the person was born, at the precise time of day, on the date and year of his or her birth. However, instead of making an actual drawing showing the position of the Sun, Moon and planets at the time and place in question, astrologers use symbols (glyphs) which they place on the chart. See Table 1.

TABLE 1 - ASTROLOGICAL SYMBOLS

PLANETS		SIGNS	
☉ Sun	♄ Saturn	♈ Aries	♎ Libra
☾ Moon	♅ Uranus	♉ Taurus	♏ Scorpio
☿ Mercury	♆ Neptune	♊ Gemini	♐ Sagittarius
♀ Venus	♇ Pluto	♋ Cancer	♑ Capricorn
♂ Mars	plus the asteroid -	♌ Leo	♒ Aquarius
♃ Jupiter	♁ Chiron	♍ Virgo	♓ Pisces

● THE TWELVE SUN SIGNS OF THE ZODIAC

The tropical zodiac begins with the position of the Sun at the March equinox (the vernal equinox) and is then divided into twelve equal zodiacal signs. These are the ‘Sun signs’.

For historical reasons the twelve signs of the tropical zodiac have the same names as the twelve main constellations (star patterns) of the sidereal zodiac, although they now refer to different sections of the heavens. The actual date on which the Sun passes from one sign to another varies from year to year. This is what gives rise to confusion when newspapers or magazines give different dates for the beginning and end of each sign. In order to determine the correct sign of the zodiac when one is born near the end of one sign and the start of a new sign (this is called being born on the cusp), the time of birth and world time zone as well as the day and year are needed. For example, if you were born between April 19 and April 22, you might have an Aries or Taurus sun sign. The correct sign of the zodiac can be determined using a reference book called an ephemeris. This gives the tropical zodiac positions for the Sun, Moon and planets based on time and date, all referred back to Greenwich Mean Time (GMT). The following is a guide to your Sun Sign:

1	♈	Aries the Ram	March 21 - April 20
2	♉	Taurus the Bull	April 21 - May 21
3	♊	Gemini the Twins	May 22 - June 21
4	♋	Cancer the Crab	June 22 - July 22
5	♌	Leo the Lion	July 23 - August 23
6	♍	Virgo the Virgin	August 24 - September 23
7	♎	Libra the Balance	September 24 - October 23
8	♏	Scorpio the Scorpion	October 24 - November 22
9	♐	Sagittarius the Archer	November 23 - December 21
10	♑	Capricorn the Goat	December 22 - January 20
11	♒	Aquarius the Water-Bearer	January 21 - February 19
12	♓	Pisces the Fish	February 20 - March 20

● THE PLANETS

The Sun is the only body in the solar system whose position in the zodiac can be deduced from the date in the year. Because the Sun represents the fundamental life-urge of an individual, magazine astrology uses birthdates to deduce the Sun sign, and hence the position of the Sun in the tropical zodiac to give some indication of the overall personality. The positions of other planets and the Moon vary enormously and would have to be looked up in an ephemeris. They will be given on your natal chart if you have had it drawn up. The Moon and each of the planets describe other aspects of your personality. For example, the position of Mercury in the zodiac and its location in your horoscope focuses on how you communicate, Mars relates to how you use energy, Saturn indicates how your life is structured and how you may be limited, and so on. The information in Table 2 summarises some of the keywords which capture the essence of the concepts which are represented by each planet.

TABLE 2 - PLANETARY KEYWORDS

Sun	☉	ego, identity, purpose, vitality, authority, masculine principle
Moon	☾	emotional self, instinctive responses, receptive, nurturing, feminine principle
Mercury	☿	communication, intellect, nervous energy, early education
Venus	♀	harmony, affection, love, art, balance, the feminine impulse in both sexes
Mars	♂	energy, drive, action, aggression, the masculine impulse in both sexes
Jupiter	♃	expansion, optimism, extravagance, luck & gambling, religion, philosophy, higher education
Saturn	♄	restriction, discipline, duty, tradition, structure, inhibition, boundaries
Chiron	♄	spirit wound, compassion, wholeness, alternative, the quest, experiential
Uranus	♅	nonconformity, invention, freedom, the unexpected, technology
Neptune	♆	mysticism, intuition, transcendence, illusion
Pluto	♇	transformation, regeneration, elimination, sexuality, power.

● THE TWELVE HOUSES

Most people are aware of the twelve signs of the tropical zodiac but there are also twelve other divisions of the horoscope. The natal chart is divided into twelve sectors called the houses. There are various systems for dividing the chart up into houses. Most of the systems use a combination of the time of birth plus the latitude and longitude of the birth place. The houses each relate to different areas of people’s lives. For example, finance and things that are valued relate to the Second House, communications relate to the Third House, marriage or partnerships are described by the Seventh House, travel and higher education belongs to the Ninth House, career and public acclaim is signified by the Tenth House, and so on. Figure 3 summarises the significance of each of the houses.

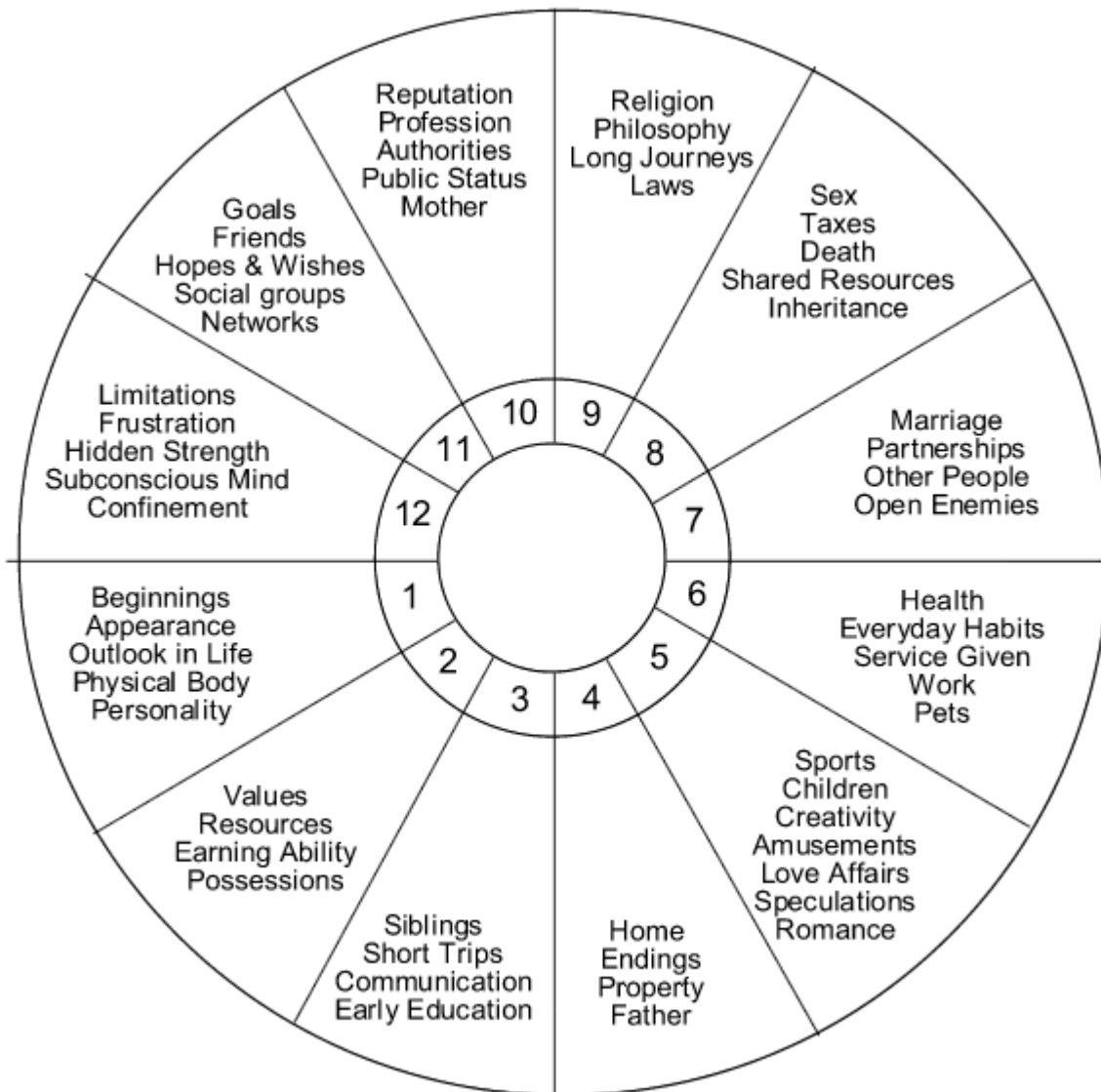


FIGURE 3 SUMMARY OF THE AREAS OF LIFE INDICATED BY THE HOUSES

The Sun, Moon and planets each exert their own influences. They are said to ‘rule’ particular areas of life. For example, Saturn produces structure and/or potential limitation, whereas Jupiter brings expansion and/or possible wastefulness. The area of life affected by, say Jupiter or Saturn depends upon which house the planet is occupying in the horoscope and the way in which it produces its effects is indicated by the sign of the zodiac.

The date of birth determines in which signs of the zodiac the Sun, Moon and all the planets will be placed but it is the time (to the nearest minute) and place (latitude and longitude) of birth which determines which houses of the horoscope these bodies will occupy.

The Sun, for example, spends one month in each sign of the zodiac; the Moon spends approximately two and a half days in each sign of the zodiac whereas Saturn spends about two and a half years in a sign. This is due to the planets moving around the Sun in elliptical orbits of different size.

Hence, as seen from the Earth, the planetary bodies appear to move through the zodiac at different speeds. However, as the Earth spins on its axis, the Sun, Moon and planets pass through all 12 houses of the horoscope in 24 hours; this means that they only occupy any one particular sector for about two hours.

Astrological calculations are not covered in this brief introduction. If you wish to find out how to do these you should consult an astrological textbook or refer to an astrological chart calculation service.

● ASTROLOGICAL ASPECTS

When the map of the heavens (the horoscope) is completed it shows the sign of the zodiac in which the Sun, Moon and planets are situated and the houses in which the planetary bodies are located. (See Figure 1). The astrologer also wants to know how the energies represented by each planet relate to each other. These relationships are called 'aspects'. They are the angles between the various bodies, measured in degrees and minutes of longitude. Since the Sun, Moon and the eight known planets are moving through the zodiac at different speeds, they are constantly forming all sorts of angles (aspects) to one another as seen from our vantage point on Earth. For example, a square is a 90 degree aspect between two planetary bodies and a trine is a 120 degree aspect. The aspects represent the ways in which the energies of the two planetary bodies interact. The square tends to make the energies more challenging whereas a trine makes the interaction more harmonious. Table 3 summarises some of the more important aspects. A discussion of aspects can be found in basic astrological textbooks.

TABLE 3 - ASPECTS

ASPECT	Degrees apart (approx.)	SIGNIFICANCE
♌ Conjunction	0°	Integration of the two planetary principles involved
✳ Sextile	60°	Opportunity, easy flow of energies involved
□ Square	90°	Challenge, inner conflict
△ Trine	120°	Positive flow of energies working together
⚡ Quincunx	150°	Some strain and incompatibility
♌ Opposition	180°	Tension, open conflict, awareness

The sample chart of Elvis Presley (Figure 1) shows examples of these aspects. You might find it interesting to try putting together some of the aspects on his chart to begin to develop an understanding of the issues within his personality.

● THE ASCENDANT - YOUR RISING SIGN

In order to calculate the ascendant, the actual date, time and place of birth is needed. The eastern horizon is known as the ascendant and the sign of the zodiac which is on that horizon at the actual hour and minute of birth is termed the rising or ascending sign. The ascendant is the start of the First House of the horoscope in most of the House systems currently in use. The ascendant is one of the more important points in the horoscope since it indicates how you are likely to be perceived by other people. The ascendant can be thought of as the mask you wear and the veil through which you look out on the world.

On first meeting, a person tends to project their ascendant sign so that very often the characteristics initially seen in a person are those of the ascendant sign and not the Sun sign. This is one reason why it is easy to be wrong when trying to guess someone's Sun sign. Twelve people born at approximately two hour intervals on any particular day would share the same Sun Sign (unless the day happens to fall on the cusp of two zodiac signs) but they would have a different ascending signs. This, together with the movement of all of the other planets from year to year, is why there can be so many differences in the personalities and behaviour of people who are born in any one of the twelve signs of the zodiac.

● INTERPRETATION OF THE HOROSCOPE

Astrology is only one of many tools that can be used to understand life and our existence on Earth. Cycles play a particular role in shaping our lives and astrology is a study of cycles - the movement of planetary bodies represented symbolically in the horoscope. Since the possibilities of combinations are almost infinite, each birth chart is a representation of the unique individual.

It takes years of study and experience in order to become proficient in interpreting the complete horoscope in terms of character, potential talents, aptitudes, career, strong and weak points, health, ability to relate to others and so on. Becoming an effective astrologer involves learning how to decode the ways in which the Sun, Moon, planets, zodiac signs, Houses and Aspects interrelate. Rather than indicating fate, astrology portrays potentialities. Talent in a particular area may be evident in the horoscope but the individual might not even be aware of the potential. Astrology has great value in the development of greater self-awareness and in helping us to understand the spiritual nature of existence.

● PREDICTIONS

There are a number of techniques that an astrologer can use to make predictions. The simplest is called 'transits'. This involves looking at the placement of the slower moving planets relative to the natal chart. Of course, if you don't have a full chart to refer to, the predictions can only be based on the position of the natal Sun. Magazine astrologers often make their predictions by putting the Sun sign on the Ascendant and then look at where the transiting planet falls in artificial 'solar houses'. For example, if you are a Gemini and transiting Jupiter (expansion and good fortune) happens to be in Cancer, the next sign after Gemini, hence the solar second house of finances and personal property, the magazine prediction might be something like:

“Next month will bring opportunities for financial gain. A good time to buy that large item you’ve been hanging out for.”

However this prediction is really only likely to be accurate if you also happened to have a Gemini Ascendant. If you know your ascendant sign, you may find it more useful to look at the magazine predictions for that sign.

If you know your time of birth accurately, the astrologer can make use of more complex techniques such as progressions and directions but a full description of these is well beyond the scope of this introduction.

● CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS IN ASTROLOGY

Astrology is a fascinating subject. As well as being used for personal counselling, it is now being used to assist in making stock market and other business decisions (Financial Astrology), to choose the best time for beginning new ventures (Electional Astrology) and also to answer particular questions (Horary Astrology).

Other current areas of interest include a study of the asteroids (the smaller interplanetary bodies that travel in our solar system), the fixed stars and a rediscovery of traditional astrology made possible by modern translations of ancient texts written centuries ago in Latin and Ancient Greek. There is also growing interest in Vedic (Hindu) astrology. This is based on the sidereal rather than the tropical zodiac.

● QUESTIONS THAT ASTROLOGERS ARE OFTEN ASKED

Q Why do astronomers say that astrologers have ‘got it wrong’ when they say that a planet is in a particular sign?

A Astronomers are usually not aware that they are using a different zodiac from western astrologers. (See the earlier section on The Zodiacs.) The confusion arises from the fact that the astrological signs of the tropical zodiac are not the same as the astronomical constellations in the sidereal zodiac, even though they have the same names. (Refer to the section on The Twelve Sun Signs of the Zodiac.) Astrologers find that by linking the positions of the planets to the orientation of the Earth towards the Sun in the tropical zodiac, they get a better indication of the universal energies affecting existence on Earth.

Q Why do magazine star columns show different dates for the beginning of each sign?

A The cusp (beginning) of each sign in the tropical zodiac varies slightly from year to year. If you were born on a date which falls on the cusp, you would have to look up the position of the Sun at the exact minute of your birth in a book of tables called an ephemeris.

NB All times in an ephemeris are given in GMT (Greenwich Mean Time). Allowances have to be made for births in any other time zone around the world.

Q I am a Leo but when I read the Star sign column in the newspaper, the predictions for Libra usually seem to be more accurate for me.

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A Predictions from a natal chart are usually based on planets passing through Houses (see the section on Predictions). The writer of a Star Sign column has to use 'solar houses'. These are worked out by putting the Sun sign on the Ascendant, then dividing the rest of the chart into 12 equal-sized houses. If you find the predictions for Libra more accurate for you, it may mean that you have a Libra Ascendant or possibly a large number of natal planets in Libra.

Q How can I find out what my ascendant is?

A By having your natal chart cast accurately. The website of the Association for Professional Astrologers (APA) Inc carries a list of fully qualified, experienced astrologers who can be contacted via www.apainc.org.au

Q What do astrologers think about the significance of Pluto now that it has been reclassified as a dwarf planet?

A The technical classification of the objects in the solar system has no effect on their astrological significance. A great deal of work has gone into deducing the significance of the outer planets and the asteroids. Very often the year in which the object was discovered bears interesting links to a development in the global awareness of relevant issues.

THE FEDERATION OF AUSTRALIAN ASTROLOGERS (FAA) INC.

This national organisation was formed in 1971. It represents a group of people dedicated to astrological principles of education and research. It is a non-profit, non-sectarian and non-political body. The Federation of Australian Astrologers (FAA) supports a National Code of Ethics for astrologers. Most states in Australia have affiliated branches of this organisation. They hold regular meetings, usually on a monthly basis with speakers, workshops, seminars and events of interest. Non-members are welcome to attend.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This document has been produced by Duane Eaks, Susan Jarrett and Nikki Worth - committee members of the Victorian Astrologers' Association. Much of the material first appeared as the *Student Project Guide on Astrology* (1991), edited by Duane L Eaks. Susan Jarrett later compiled it into the booklet: *An Introduction to Astrology*, published by the Victorian Astrologers' Association in 1998.

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It is hoped that by making the material freely available on the internet it will be useful to anyone seeking a basic introduction to Western Astrology.