

The Roman Calendar – Months and Days

Although there were some similarities between the Roman calendar and our own, they were not exactly the same. Here you can learn how to give the date like a Roman.

A. Months

It took lots of experimentation before they found something that worked, but finally the Romans settled on a calendar which had 365 days in a year, a leap year every four years, and 12 months. This system was first introduced by Julius Caesar in 45 BC, which is why we call it the **Julian Calendar**.

Januarius	Februarius	Martius	Aprilis	Maius	Junius
					
Named in honour of the Janus, the two-faced god of ending and beginnings	Named after the <i>februa</i> , a purification festival which happened in this month	Named in honour of Mars, the Roman god of war	Possibly named as the month in which the flowers opened (from the Latin <i>aperire</i> – to open)	Named in honour of the nymph Maia, a goddess of growth	Named in honour of Juno, Queen of the gods
Julius	Augustus	September	October	November	December
		7 VII	8 VIII	9 IX	10 X
Named in honour of Julius Caesar, who introduced the Julian calendar	Named in honour of Augustus, one of the first Roman emperors	<p><i>Septem-</i>, <i>Octo-</i>, <i>Novem-</i> and <i>Decem-</i> are the Latin for 7th, 8th, 9th and 10th. This is a bit confusing because they are actually the 9th, 10th, 11th and 12th months of the year in the Julian calendar!</p> <p>Long ago, the very early Romans had used a ten month calendar which began with March. In those days, September really was the 7th month. Later, when Januarius and Februarius were added, these four months kept their old names.</p>			

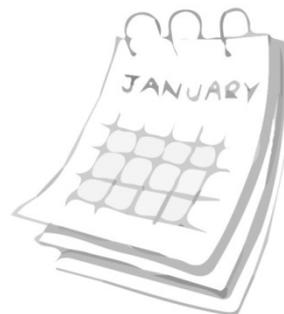
Exercise 1:

1. What Roman month are we in today?
2. What Roman month were you born in?
3. Do you know the names of the months in any other languages? Are they similar or different from the Roman names?
4. Take some time to look at the Roman months, and then cover them up. Can you remember what they were called and why?

B. Days

Instead of describing the date as 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th and so on, the Romans used a very different system. There were **three** special days in every month:

- The **Kalends**: the first day of the month, when the moon was thin crescent
- The **Nones**: a day in the first week of the month when the moon was a quarter-full
- The **Ides**: a day near the middle of the month when the moon was round and full



Romans described dates by saying how close they were to one of these special days.



Exercise 2:

1. What English word, connected with dates, comes from the Latin word *Kalends*?
2. What modern celebrations happen on these days:
 - a. The Kalends of Januarius
 - b. The Kalends of Aprilis
 - c. The Kalends of Maius
3. Which famous Roman was murdered on the Ides of Martius?

This is how a Roman would have described the dates in the month of Januarius.

In Januarius, the Kalends is on the 1st, the Nones is on the 5th, and the Ides is on the 13th.

Eagle Eyes Question:
Something funny is going on with the Roman numerals here. Can you see what it is?



Januarius

1 st Januarius The Kalends of Januarius	2 nd IV days before the Nones of Januarius	3 rd III days before the Nones of Januarius	4 th The day before the Nones of Januarius	5 th The Nones of Januarius	6 th VIII days before the Ides of Januarius	7 th VII days before the Ides of Januarius
8 th VI days before the Ides of Januarius	9 th V days before the Ides of Januarius	10 th IV days before the Ides of Januarius	11 th III days before the Ides of Januarius	12 th The day before the Ides of Januarius	13 th The Ides of Januarius	14 th XIX days before the Kalends of Februrarius
15 th XVIII days before the Kalends of Februrarius	16 th XVII days before the Kalends of Februrarius	17 th XVI days before the Kalends of Februrarius	18 th XV days before the Kalends of Februrarius	19 th XIV days before the Kalends of Februrarius	20 th XIII days before the Kalends of Februrarius	21 st XII days before the Kalends of Februrarius
22 nd XI days before the Kalends of Februrarius	23 rd X days before the Kalends of Februrarius	24 th IX days before the Kalends of Februrarius	25 th VIII days before the Kalends of Februrarius	26 th VII days before the Kalends of Februrarius	27 th VI days before the Kalends of Februrarius	28 th V days before the Kalends of Februrarius
29 th IV days before the Kalends of Februrarius	30 th III days before the Kalends of Februrarius	31 st The day before the Kalends of Februrarius	1 st Februrarius The Kalends of Februrarius			

Exercise 3:

Turns these modern dates into Roman ones:

- 2nd January
- 13th January
- 15th January
- 28th January
- 30th January

Exercise 4:

Turn these Roman dates into modern ones.

- The day before the Ides of Januarius
- XIV days before the Kalends of Februrarius
- III days before the Nones of Januarius
- VIII days before the Kalends of Februrarius
- The Kalends of Januarius

Eagle Eyes Answer: The Romans didn't count in the same way we do. They counted 'inclusively'.

When working back to work out a date, they included the day they started on in their counting. So while the day before the Ides was described in words as 'the day before the Ides', but the day before *that* was described as 'III days before the Ides'!

Exercise 5 – Your Roman birthday:

Unfortunately, there's a catch! The Nones and Ides were not on the same day every month. The Romans had to learn the rules by heart. You can memorise the rules with the rhyme "March, July, October, May, the Nones fall on the 7th day" (and the Ides are always 8 days later). All other months have the Nones on the 5th and the Ides on the 13th.

Julius Caesar's calendar reform in 45 BC established the month lengths that we still use today: 28 days in February (with an extra day every 4 years) 30 days in April, June, September and November; 31 days in the other months. This keeps the calendar in line with the movements of the sun, since the solar year is very close to 365.25 days long

You can use the blank calendar sheet below to work out your birthday on the Roman calendar.

1. Mark the days of the month using the modern system of counting (make sure you get the right number of days)
2. Mark your birthday
3. Work out when the next important day (Nones, Kalends or Ides) is after your birthday
4. Count towards that day. Don't forget to count inclusively!

Exercise 5 :

Turns these modern dates into Roman ones:

1. 3rd May
2. 12th April
3. 17th February
4. 28th July
5. 7th November
6. 13th October
7. 5th March
8. 21st June
9. 15th July
10. 29th September

Extension Exercise:

Make a wall calendar showing the Roman dates for each month, and illustrate each with a suitable picture.