

Nomen: _____

Dies: _____

The Roman Calendar

Early Roman Calendar

Rome was founded in the year **753 B.C.** At that time Rome was a small village made up of **farmers**. The people measured time and determined dates according to the cycle of their crops. According to tradition, Romulus, the first **king** of Rome, created the Early Roman Calendar to help his people as they took care of their crops and fields. The calendar he created was lunar, which means the days and months were measured according to the phases of the **moon**. Romulus' calendar had only 10 months. They were named:

1. Martius = **Mars, god of war (legendary father of Romulus)**
2. Aprilis = **Aphrilis (a Greek name for Venus, goddess of love, mother of Aeneas)**
3. Maius = **Maia, star in Pleiades (mother of Mercury)**
4. Iunius = **Juno, queen of gods, goddess of marriage**
5. Quinctilis = **fifth**
6. Sextilis = **sixth**
7. September = **seven**
8. October = **eight**
9. November = **nine**
10. December = **ten**

The first month, Martius, began with the arrival of **spring** and the new planting season. The last month, December, ended with the harvesting and storing away of the **crops**. In between these two months was a **winter gap**, when the fields rested. The Romans did not measure this period of rest. The local pontifices (**priests**) would decide when it was time for the new year to begin. Romulus' calendar consisted of **10** months that had a total of **304** days.

This winter gap in the calendar, however, could cause some confusion. So, Numa Pompilius, the second king of Rome, added two months after December.

11. Ianuarius = **Ianus, god of doorways, beginnings and endings**
12. Februarius = **a purification festival that took place during this month**

This updated calendar now had **12** months and lasted a total of **355** days.

The Romans did not have a seven day week, and they did not have weekends. Instead they had three festival days each month. The phase of the moon determined each one of them. The Kalends (*Kalendae*) fell on the **first** day of each month. The Ides (*Idus*) fell on the **13th** in the short months and the **15th** in the long months. The Ides celebrated the full moon. The Nones (*Nonae*)

came 9 days before the Ides. The Nones, therefore, fell on the 5th in short months and the 7th in long months. The Romans numbered the rest of the days by counting down to these festival days; much like we count down to **name favorite holiday**.

This new system worked out fine for a while, but eventually the farmers realized the seasons were not coming out quite right. The year was still too short. So, Tarquinius Priscus, the 5th king of Rome, added a new month at the end of Februarius. The Romans called this month the “Intercalans” because it was placed **between** (*inter*) the last and first months of the year. This 13th month did not come every year. The pontifices (**priests**), who were in charge of the calendar, decided which years should add the new month. The intercalans became a kind of “leap month.”

The Julian Calendar

This latest version of the calendar seemed to work well for several centuries. Overtime, however, the old calendar system still had problems, and the priests sometimes abused their power to control it. In 45 B.C. **Julius Caesar** became the new Pontifex Maximus (**High Priest**). He decided to completely reform the calendar. He saw that Egypt had a solar calendar, determined by the **sun**. He hired Sosigenes, an Egyptian **astronomer**, to help him create a new solar calendar for Rome. Caesar changed the first month of the calendar from Martius to **Ianuarius**. He gave the months alternating lengths of 30 or 31 days, but left Februarius with only 29. He also created an extra day called the Bissextile, which was the very first **leap day**. The bissextile day came once every 4 years. In those years, February would have 30 days. This gave the new Julian Calendar, named for Julius Caesar, 365.25 days.

On March 15, **44 B.C.** Julius Caesar was murdered. The Roman Senate renamed the month Quinctilis “**Iulius**” in honor of Caesar. In 31 B.C., Octavian, Caesar’s nephew became the first emperor of Rome. He persuaded the Senate to rename the month Sextilis “**Augustus**” in honor of his new title Augustus Caesar. The emperor’s new month had only 30 days, so he took a day from Februarius and added it to his own month. Now the month of August has **31** days, but Februarius has only **28**.

Days of the Week

Strange as it may seem to us, the Romans did not have a seven-day week. They relied solely on the numbering system that revolved around the festival days. It was the Emperor Constantine (**313 – 337 A.D.**) who introduced the seven-day week. Constantine had converted to **Christianity** shortly before becoming the Roman Emperor. He believed that God had granted him his rule and, therefore, was deeply interested with the Judeo-Christian Religion. In the ninth year of his reign he issued an edict creating the seven-day week based on that of the **Jewish** Calendar. He gave each of the seven days a name according to the **heavenly** bodies that rose in the sky. These names have

remained a part of our calendar until this day, although some use the Norse version of the name instead.

Diēs Sōlis = Sun's Day

Diēs Lūnae = Moon's Day

Diēs Martis = Mars' Day Norse Mythology: Tyr, god of war

Diēs Mercuriī = Mercury's Day Norse Mythology: Woden, cunning god

Diēs Iovis = Iove's Day (Jupiter) Norse Mythology: Thor, god of thunder

Diēs Veneris = Venus' Day Norse Mythology: Freya, goddess of love

Diēs Saturnī = Saturn's Day

The Gregorian Calendar

The Julian Calendar worked very well for more than a thousand years. In the 16th century A.D., however, the Church began to realize that something was terribly wrong. The Easter Holiday, whose date is determined by the stars and moon, was off by 10 days. At the Council of Trent in 1545 A.D. Pope Gregory XIII determined to fix this problem. He commissioned astronomers Christopher Clavius and Luigi Lilio to reform the calendar. They discovered that the Julian Calendar was off by 11 minutes and 14 seconds! That is a difference of just .0078 days! In order to fix the problem they moved leap day (the bissextile) to the last day of February, and created the Century Leap Year Rule:

Three out of every four centennial years (a year divisible by 100) are "common." No centennial year, however, can be a leap year IF it is divisible by 400.

Because of this rule the year 2000 was not a leap year, even though 1996 and 2004 were leap years.

What year will the century leap year rule next effect?

Create Your Own Roman Calendar

Step One: Decide which month you would like to create and see how many days it has.

Step Two: Determine when the Kalends, Nones and Ides will occur.

"In October, July, March and May the Nones fall on the 7th day!"

Step Three: Count backwards from these festival days until you run into a preceding festival day. The day before a holiday is the *pridie* the day before that will always begin *a.d. III*. When counting backwards, the Romans always counted the holiday itself as day #1.

Step Four: Find other holidays for your month (modern or ancient) and decorate your calendar.

Important Notations for the Roman Calendar

Kalendae

Kal.

1st of every months

Nonae	Non.	5 th or 7 th of the month
Idus	Id.	13 th or 15 th of the month
Pridie	Prid.	day immediately preceding a festival day
Ante diem	a.d.	other days leading up to a festival day

Note to Teachers:

It would be wise to use abbreviations for festival days and months within the calendar. This is easier and less confusing for the students. If you choose to write out the days in full, then please be aware of the following:

- The festival day should be in the ablative case (ablative of time when).
- The days preceding the festival day will follow the phrase “ante diem” or “pridie.” These days should be in the accusative case (accusative of duration of time).

Sample Calendar

September MMVII

DIES SOLIS	DIES LUNAE	DIES MARTIS	DIES MERCURIS	DIES IOVIS	DIES VENERIS	DIES SATURNIS
			Kal.	a.d.iv Non.	a.d.iii Non.	Prid. Non.
Non.	a.d. viii Id.	a.d. vii Id.	a.d. vi Id.	a.d. v Id.	a.d.iv Id.	a.d. iii Id.

Prid. Id.	Id.	a.d. xviii Kal.	a.d. xvii Kal.	a.d. xvi Kal.	a.d. xv Kal.	a.d. xiv Kal.
a.d. xiii Kal.	a.d. xii Kal.	a.d. xi Kal.	a.d. x Kal.	a.d. ix Kal.	a.d. viii Kal.	a.d. vii Kal.
a.d. vi Kal.	a.d. v Kal.	a.d. iv Kal.	a.d. iii Kal.	Prid. Kal.		