

## Calculating Dates according to the Roman Calendar

The Roman "*pontifices maximi*," or high priests of ancient Rome, were "moon-watchers," men whose job it was to determine the number of days *before* the various phases of the moon:

A. The **first day** of every month was known as the "**Kalends**." [Kal.]

B. The **fifth** of every month was known as the "**Nones**." [Non.]

EXCEPT . . . .

"In March, July, October, and May

The Nones fall on the **seventh day**."

C. The **thirteenth** of every month was known as the "**Ides**." [Id.]

EXCEPT . . . .

"In March, July, October, and May

The Ides fall on the **fifteenth day**."

The **DAY BEFORE** the Kalends, Nones, or Ides is referred to as "**pridie**." [pr.]

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*"Kalendae" comes from the Latin verb "calare," meaning "to call out" or "to announce." On the Kalendae, priests announced the date on which the Nonae, the Idus, and festivals would occur. It was also on this day that citizens paid their debts, hence the Latin word "kalendarium," or "ledger," and the English word "calendar."*

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*The word "Idus" comes to Latin from an Etruscan word which means "divide." The Ides come at the halfway point of the month.*

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*"Nonae" is a Latin adjective meaning "ninth." The Nones always come nine days before the Ides. The days immediately following the Kalends, the Nones, and the Ides were thought to be ominous and foreboding. Thus, no business was transacted on those days, the "nefasti."*

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In determining Roman dates, one must either **COUNT TOWARD** the Kalends, toward the Nones, or toward the Ides, *whichever is closer*.

**Remember these rules for adding Roman Numerals:**

When **adding** Roman numerals, smaller numbers follow larger numbers.

For example: 7=VII 36=XXXVI 23=XXIII

When **subtracting** Roman numerals, smaller numbers precede larger numbers.

For example: 4=IV 9=IX 90=XC

Often you will **add and subtract** Roman numerals all within the same number:

For example: 264=CCLXIV 1997=MCMXCVII

The year 1996 reads as follows: M + CM + XC + VI, or MCMXCVI.

Until the time of Julius Caesar, dates were determined by the *lunar* calendar. However, Caesar hired an astronomer named Sosigenes to formulate a new *solar* calendar. Sosigenes determined that a year should include 365.25 days --

and he added an extra day every four years, a day that would fall after February 24 and before February 25. This day, called "*punctum temporis*," or "a point of time," repeated day number six before the Kalends:

February 24 in a normal year was written as "ad vi Kal Mart."

February 25 in a normal year was written as "ad v Kal Mart."

*February 24 in a leap year was written as "ad vi Kal Mart."*

*[The extra day was written as "ad vi Kal Mart, bis"]*

*February 25 in a leap year was written as "ad v Kal Mart."*

Persons born on leap-day celebrated their birthdays on February 24.

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*Try to determine the English word for "leap year," bearing in mind that the Latin "bis" means "twice."*

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Now, to calculate Roman dates . . . . Let's take January as an example:

New Year's Day, being the **first day** of the month, is written as

**Kal. Ian** . . . meaning "the Kalends of January"

January 2: Because we have now *passed* the Kalends, we begin counting *toward the Nones*:

**a.d. iv Non. Ian.**, or "four days before the Nones of January"

[We count January 2 as day-one; we also count January 5 (the Nones) -- hence, 4 days.]

January 3: We are still counting *toward the Nones* . . .

**a.d. iiii Non. Ian.** -- We count January 3 as day-one as well as the Nones of January [January 5]. That makes *three* days.

January 4: This is the *day before* the Nones, so we write it as "*pridie*": **pr. Non. Ian**

January 5: Now we are at the Nones of January. **Non. Ian**

January 6: We have now *passed* the Nones, so we count *toward the Ides*: **a.d. viii Id. Ian**

January 7: We are still counting *toward* the Ides. Counting January seventh as day-one and the thirteenth, we have **a.d. vii Id. Ian**

January 8: We are still counting *toward* the Ides. If January 8 is day-one, and if we count the thirteenth, also, the date is **a.d. vi Id. Ian**

And so on . . . .