CLARITY GUIDES

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FREE GUIDE · ASTRONOMY · TRADITION · EVIDENCE

Mercury Retrograde

Why the planet only looks like it goes backwards, what astrologers say, and what the evidence shows

◆ **Verified 2026 dates inside: 24 Oct – 13 Nov**

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WELCOME

About this guide

Every few months, the same message goes round: “Mercury is in retrograde!” It gets blamed for broken phones, lost parcels, delayed trains and awkward texts.

This free guide explains what is really happening in the sky, where the astrological idea came from, and what the evidence says. It also gives the 2026 dates, checked against astronomical sources, and some practical habits people use, which are worth doing at any time of year.

Whether you follow astrology closely, read it for fun or are just curious, you’ll find a clear and fair answer here.

How to use this guide

1. **Chapters 1 to 3.** The basics, the checked dates and a day-by-day calendar.
2. **Chapters 4 to 8.** The astronomy, the other planets, history, myth and astrology.
3. **Chapters 9 to 11.** The evidence, ten myths checked, and the psychology.
4. **Chapters 12 to 15.** Tips, a calm comms toolkit and journal, seeing Mercury from Scotland, and FAQs.

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Every fact, figure and phone number in this guide was checked against reputable sources in October 2026, and the sources are listed at the back. Where we could not confirm something, we say so or leave it out. Some chapters mention using everyday AI tools like Grok to help with a task; always check what they tell you against an official source.

PLEASE NOTE

Astrology is presented here as a tradition, for culture, entertainment and personal reflection. There is no good scientific evidence that Mercury retrograde affects events, technology or people. Don’t put off medical care, legal deadlines or important payments because of it.

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CHAPTER ONE · START HERE

Mercury retrograde in one page

The short answer, for anyone in a hurry.

In the sky

For about three weeks, three or four times a year, Mercury **appears** to drift backwards against the stars. It never really reverses. It's a trick of viewpoint as Mercury overtakes the Earth on the inside track.

In astrology

Mercury is linked to communication, travel, trade and thinking. Many astrologers say these areas get muddled while it is retrograde, so it's a time to review rather than start new things.

In the evidence

No reliable study has shown any effect on people, technology or events. Mercury's pull on you is tiny, smaller than a parked car's. Our memories do the rest.

This autumn

24 October to 13 November 2026. Mercury turns retrograde at about 8:15am BST on Saturday 24 October and turns direct again at about 4pm GMT on Friday 13 November (after the clocks go back).

CLARITY TIP

The good habits people adopt for Mercury retrograde, such as backing up your phone, double-checking travel and reading the small print, really do help. They just help all year round.

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CHAPTER TWO · THE DATES

The 2026 dates, checked

Times are UK clock time, rounded. A “station” is the moment the planet seems to stand still before changing direction.

RETROGRADE	TURNS RETROGRADE	TURNS DIRECT	ZODIAC SIGN
1st	Thu 26 Feb, about 6:50am GMT	Fri 20 Mar, about 7:35pm GMT	Pisces
2nd	Mon 29 Jun, about 6:37pm BST	Thu 23 Jul, about 11:59pm BST	Cancer
3rd	**Sat 24 Oct, about 8:13am BST**	**Fri 13 Nov, about 3:56pm GMT**	**Scorpio**

What the evidence says

- **Two independent astronomical sources agree.** The SkyEye almanac lists Mercury as stationary in ecliptic longitude at 08:00 on 24 October and 16:00 on 13 November 2026 (rounded to the hour).[1] An ephemeris calculator gives 07:13 and 15:56 UTC.[2] Our own calculation gave 07:09 and 15:57 UTC.[3]
- **Watch the clock change.** UK clocks go back one hour at 2am on Sunday 25 October 2026.[4] So the retrograde begins in British Summer Time (07:13 UTC is 8:13am BST) and ends in Greenwich Mean Time (15:56 UTC is 3:56pm GMT).
- Stations are slow, gentle turning points, so different sources can differ by an hour or so. The **dates** are firm.

The “shadow” periods

Many astrologers also talk about a **pre-shadow** and **post-shadow**: the days when Mercury is moving through the same stretch of sky it will cover (or has covered) while retrograde. For this one, the pre-shadow begins around **4 October** and the post-shadow ends around **30 November 2026**.[2]

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CHAPTER THREE · SURVIVAL CALENDAR

Your day-by-day retrograde calendar

From the first "shadow" day on 4 October to the last on 30 November, with what the sky is really doing and one useful job for each day.

Astrologers split a retrograde into three parts: the **pre-shadow**, the **retrograde** itself and the **post-shadow**. We've listed what the planet is actually doing in the sky on each day, worked out by Clarity Guides.[5] We've also given each day one small, practical job. These jobs are worth doing whatever you believe, and together they add up to a proper autumn tidy-up.

Before: the pre-shadow, 4 to 23 October

DATE	IN THE SKY	WORTH DOING
Sat 3 Oct	**Venus** turns retrograde at about 8:15am BST, also in Scorpio. It stays retrograde until 14 November, so it covers this whole Mercury retrograde.	Nothing special: it's just a busy autumn in the sky.
Sun 4 Oct	**Pre-shadow begins** (about 10:15am BST). Mercury reaches 5° Scorpio, the spot where it will turn direct on 13 November.[2]	Plan your mishap diary (chapter 11). It starts on 20 October, so you have "before" days to compare.
Mon 12 Oct	Mercury is at its farthest east of the Sun (25°). But from Edinburgh it sets just 15 minutes after the Sun, so it's lost in the dusk.	List the trips and appointments you have between now and the end of November.
Thu 15 Oct	Pluto, the dwarf planet, turns direct after five months of retrograde.	Check any contracts or renewals due before Christmas.
19 to 23 Oct	Mercury slows from half a degree a day to almost nothing as it heads for its station.	Start your mishap diary on Tue 20 Oct (chapter 11). Check travel bookings and tickets for the next six weeks.

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During: the retrograde, 24 October to 13 November

DATE	IN THE SKY	WORTH DOING
Sat 24 Oct	**Station: turns retrograde about 8:13am BST.** nearly 21° Scorpio, **standing still**; 20° from the Sun.	Back up your phone and photos: two copies, one of them off the device.
Sun 25 Oct	UK clocks go back at 2am.[4] 20° Scorpio, drifting **back** 0.2° a day; 19° from the Sun.	Check the clocks on the oven, car, boiler timer and alarms. Phones usually change themselves; older gadgets don't.
Mon 26 Oct	20° Scorpio, drifting **back** 0.3° a day; 18° from the Sun.	Write down this week's appointments, with times, addresses and how you're getting there.
Tue 27 Oct	20° Scorpio, drifting **back** 0.5° a day; 16° from the Sun.	Clear one inbox folder and unsubscribe from five mailing lists you never read.
Wed 28 Oct	19° Scorpio, drifting **back** 0.6° a day; 15° from the Sun.	Check passport and driving-licence expiry dates for any trip in the next six months.
Thu 29 Oct	19° Scorpio, drifting **back** 0.8° a day; 13° from the Sun.	Read the terms of one subscription you pay for. Cancel it if you don't use it.
Fri 30 Oct	18° Scorpio, drifting **back** 0.9° a day; 11° from the Sun.	Reply to one message you've been putting off. Short and kind beats perfect.
Sat 31 Oct	Halloween. 17° Scorpio, drifting **back** 1.1° a day; 9° from the Sun.	Update your phone and apps, and switch on automatic updates.
Sun 1 Nov	Mercury is fading into the Sun's glare. 16° Scorpio, drifting **back** 1.2° a day; 7° from the Sun.	Journal day: what caused this week's biggest mix-up?
Mon 2 Nov	14° Scorpio, drifting **back** 1.2° a day; 5° from the Sun.	Check bank and card statements for anything you don't recognise.
Tue 3 Nov	13° Scorpio, drifting **back** 1.3° a day; 3° from the Sun.	Read any important email aloud once before you send it.

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DATE	IN THE SKY	WORTH DOING
Wed 4 Nov	**Inferior conjunction:** Mercury passes between us and the Sun, about 101 million km away, its closest in this cycle. 12° Scorpio, drifting **back** 1.3° a day; 0° from the Sun.	Halfway. Count your mishap diary entries, but don't look at the dates yet.
Thu 5 Nov	Bonfire Night. 11° Scorpio, drifting **back** 1.3° a day; 2° from the Sun.	Confirm weekend plans by message: who, where and what time.
Fri 6 Nov	9° Scorpio, drifting **back** 1.2° a day; 4° from the Sun.	Change any password you've reused on an important account, such as email or banking.
Sat 7 Nov	8° Scorpio, drifting **back** 1.1° a day; 6° from the Sun.	Phone an old friend instead of texting.
Sun 8 Nov	Remembrance Sunday. 7° Scorpio, drifting **back** 1.0° a day; 9° from the Sun.	Finish one small, unfinished job: a form, a repair or a parcel to return.
Mon 9 Nov	6° Scorpio, drifting **back** 0.8° a day; 10° from the Sun.	Forward any scam texts to 7726 and scam emails to report@phishing.gov.uk (chapter 13).
Tue 10 Nov	Mercury creeps back into the dawn sky, still very low. 5° Scorpio, drifting **back** 0.6° a day; 12° from the Sun.	Look at your diary for the next fortnight and spot any clashes.
Wed 11 Nov	Armistice Day. 5° Scorpio, drifting **back** 0.4° a day; 14° from the Sun.	Take one decision you've put off "until after the retrograde" and judge it on its merits.
Thu 12 Nov	5° Scorpio, drifting **back** 0.2° a day; 15° from the Sun.	Add up your mishap diary so far. Still don't check the dates.
Fri 13 Nov	**Station: turns direct about 3:56pm GMT.** 5° Scorpio, **standing still**; 16° from the Sun.	Does today feel different? Write down an honest answer.

NOTICE THE NUMBERS

Mercury only drifts back about 16 degrees in all, roughly a fist and a half at arm's length. It is also nearest to us, and lost in the Sun's glare, right in the middle of the retrograde. So none of this can be seen with the naked eye. The "backwards" part happens while Mercury is hidden.[5]

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After: the post-shadow, 14 to 30 November

DATE	IN THE SKY	WORTH DOING
Sat 14 Nov	**Venus** turns direct, just after midnight (12:31am GMT).	Move any back-ups you made onto a second device or the cloud.
16 to 25 Nov	Mercury climbs into the dawn sky. From Edinburgh it rises about two hours before the Sun (chapter 14).	Set an alarm and try to see it on a clear morning.
Fri 20 Nov	Mercury is at its farthest west of the Sun: about 20° (the exact moment is around midnight on the night of 20–21 November).	Best week to see it. Brilliant Venus nearby is a good guide.
Mon 30 Nov	**Post-shadow ends** (about 6:15am GMT): Mercury passes nearly 21° Scorpio (20°59′) again, where it turned retrograde. It's St Andrew's Day too.[2]	Keep your mishap diary going to 19 December, then compare the dates (chapter 11).
10 to 13 Dec	Saturn turns direct (10 Dec), then Neptune (12 Dec). Jupiter turns retrograde on 13 Dec.	Note how often "something" is retrograde.

The 2027 dates (calculated)

These are our own calculations, using the same method that agreed with the SkyEye almanac (to its nearest hour) and an online ephemeris calculator (to within minutes) for 2026, and cross-checked with a second, independent calculation (Skyfield with NASA JPL's DE440 ephemeris), which agrees to within 4 minutes.[5] Check a published almanac nearer the time. UK clocks go forward on 28 March 2027 and back on 31 October 2027.

	PRE-SHADOW BEGINS	TURNS RETROGRADE	TURNS DIRECT	POST-SHADOW ENDS	SIGNS
1st	Mon 25 Jan	Tue 9 Feb, about 5:36pm GMT	Wed 3 Mar, about 12:35pm GMT	Tue 23 Mar	Pisces to Aquarius
2nd	Wed 26 May	Thu 10 Jun, about 7:17pm BST	Sun 4 Jul, about 8:39pm BST	Mon 19 Jul	Cancer to Gemini
3rd	Fri 17 Sep	Thu 7 Oct, about 3:34pm BST	Thu 28 Oct, about 3:12pm BST	Sat 13 Nov	Scorpio to Libra

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CHAPTER FOUR · THE ASTRONOMY

Why a planet seems to go backwards

Retrograde motion is real in the sense that you can see it. But it's an effect of where we're watching from.

Mercury is the closest planet to the Sun and the fastest. It goes round the Sun in about **88 days**, at about 47 kilometres a second.[6] The Earth takes 365 days. So Mercury keeps catching up with us and overtaking us on the inside track.

What the evidence says

- **It's an apparent motion.** NASA explains that retrograde motion is an apparent change in the planet's movement through the sky. The planet does not physically start moving backwards in its orbit. It just appears to, because of how it and the Earth are moving around the Sun.[7]
- **The motorway effect.** When you overtake a slower car, it seems to slide backwards against the distant hills, even though both cars are going forwards. All the planets show retrograde motion from Earth at some point, because they orbit at different speeds.[8]
- **Why three or four times a year?** Mercury lines up with the Earth and Sun again every **116 days** or so (its "synodic period").[9] That's just over three times a year, and in some years a fourth one sneaks in at the edges.

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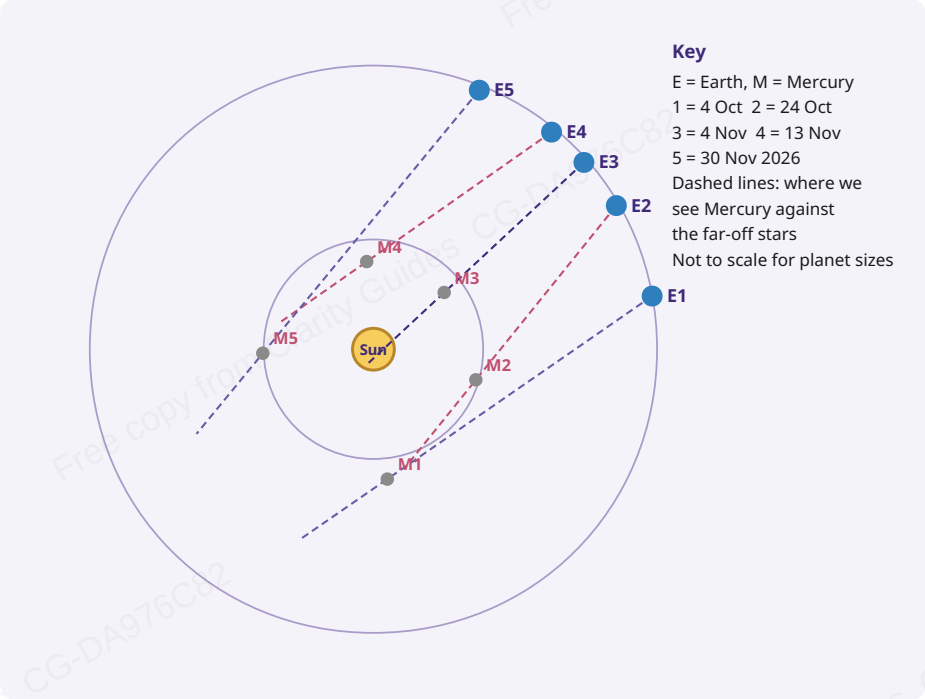
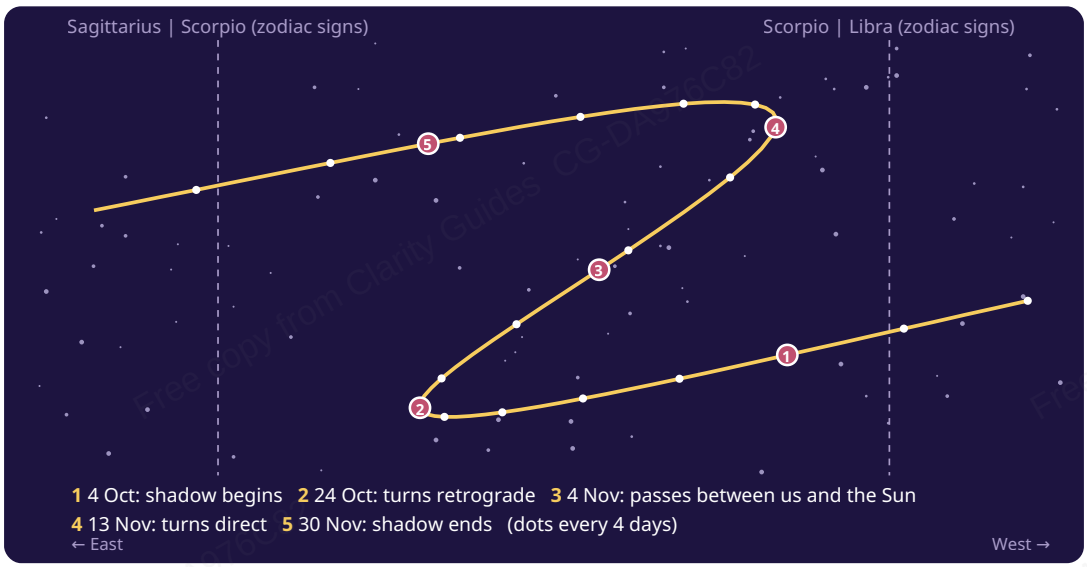


Real positions of Earth (E) and Mercury (M) on five dates this autumn, seen from above, calculated by Clarity Guides. Follow the dashed sightlines: as Mercury swings between us and the Sun, the direction we see it in swings backwards, then forwards again.

The path in our sky this autumn



Mercury's path against the stars from late September to early December 2026, as if you were facing south, calculated by Clarity Guides. It moves east (left), stops at 2, slides back west to 4, then carries on east. The dashed lines are where astrologers' zodiac signs begin and end.

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CHAPTER FIVE · THE OTHER PLANETS

Every planet goes retrograde

Mercury gets the headlines, but from Earth every planet seems to go backwards from time to time. Some spend almost half their time doing it.

Two kinds of retrograde

INNER PLANETS

Mercury and Venus orbit **inside** the Earth's orbit. They seem to go backwards when they overtake us on the inside track and pass between us and the Sun. So they are always close to the Sun in our sky, and usually hidden in its glare, while it happens.

OUTER PLANETS

Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus and Neptune orbit **outside** us. Here it's the Earth doing the overtaking. They seem to go backwards when we sweep past them, around the time they are opposite the Sun. That's when they are highest at midnight and at their brightest. Mars, for example, is opposite the Sun on about 19 February 2027, in the middle of its next retrograde.[5]

How often, and for how long

We worked out every station of every planet from 2000 to 2039.[5] The orbit lengths come from NASA.[10]

PLANET	ONE ORBIT OF THE SUN	A RETROGRADE COMES ROUND EVERY	EACH ONE LASTS	SHARE OF THE TIME SPENT RETROGRADE	AROUND NOW
Mercury	88 days	116 days (3 or 4 a year)	20 to 24 days	**19%**	24 Oct to 13 Nov 2026
Venus	225 days	584 days (about 19 months)	41 to 43 days	7%	3 Oct to 14 Nov 2026
Mars	687 days	about 26 months	60 to 81 days	9%	10 Jan to 1 Apr 2027
Jupiter	11.9 years	13 months	about 4 months	30%	13 Dec 2026 to 13 Apr 2027

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PLANET	ONE ORBIT OF THE SUN	A RETROGRADE COMES ROUND EVERY	EACH ONE LASTS	SHARE OF THE TIME SPENT RETROGRADE	AROUND NOW
Saturn	29.4 years	12.4 months	about 4½ months	36%	26 Jul to 10 Dec 2026
Uranus	84 years	12.1 months	about 5 months	41%	10 Sep 2026 to 8 Feb 2027
Neptune	164 years	12.1 months	about 5 months	43%	7 Jul to 12 Dec 2026
Pluto (dwarf planet)	248 years	12.1 months	about 5 months	44%	6 May to 15 Oct 2026

What the evidence says

- **The farther out, the more often.** A distant planet barely moves in a year, so it's retrograde once every year or so, each time the Earth laps it. Neptune and Pluto spend over 40% of their time looking as if they're going backwards.[5]
- **The farther out, the smaller the loop.** On average, Mercury slides back about 13 degrees, Venus and Mars about 16, Jupiter 10, Saturn 7, Uranus 4 and Neptune under 3.[5]
- **Mercury is the frequent one.** Its 116-day cycle (its synodic period) is the shortest of any planet.[9] That's why it gets the headlines.

THIS AUTUMN IS CROWDED

On 4 November 2026, five of the seven other planets will be retrograde at once: Mercury, Venus, Saturn, Uranus and Neptune. Only Mars and Jupiter are moving forwards.[5] If retrogrades caused trouble, autumn 2026 would be chaos. In fact, from 2000 to 2039 at least two planets (not counting Pluto) were retrograde on about 62% of days, and on only about 14% of days was none of them retrograde.[5]

DID YOU KNOW?

A planet looking retrograde is different from a planet *spinning* backwards. Venus really does spin the "wrong" way, all the time: its axis is tipped over by 177 degrees.[10] Astrology doesn't treat that as a permanent retrograde.

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CHAPTER SIX · HISTORY

From ancient Greece to an Edinburgh encyclopaedia

People have watched the planets loop backwards for thousands of years. Explaining it took a revolution in thinking.

1. **Ancient sky-watchers.** Planets were called "wanderers" (*planētes* in Greek) because they move against the fixed stars. Their backward loops were one of the great puzzles of ancient astronomy. Dr Nicholas Campion, a historian of astrology, says the retrograde of Mercury in particular was recognised in the last century BC.[8]

2. **Ptolemy's circles on circles.** In the 2nd century AD, Claudius Ptolemy put the Earth at the centre and explained the loops with "epicycles", small circles riding on bigger ones. It worked well enough for predictions for over a thousand years.

3. **Copernicus moves the Sun to the centre.** In 1543, Nicolaus Copernicus published his Sun-centred system. Retrograde loops suddenly made simple sense: they happen when one planet overtakes another. Kepler and Galileo built on this in the early 1600s.

4. **The astrologers' tables.** Astrologers kept careful tables of the planets' motion. In 1647 the English astrologer William Lilly wrote that Mercury "is Stationary one day, and retrograde 24 dayes".[11] That's close to the modern figure of about three weeks.

5. **Scotland's contribution.** The first *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, published in Edinburgh between 1768 and 1771, printed a famous diagram of the looping paths the Sun, Mercury and Venus would trace if the Earth were the centre.[12] It was based on work by the self-taught Scottish astronomer James Ferguson.

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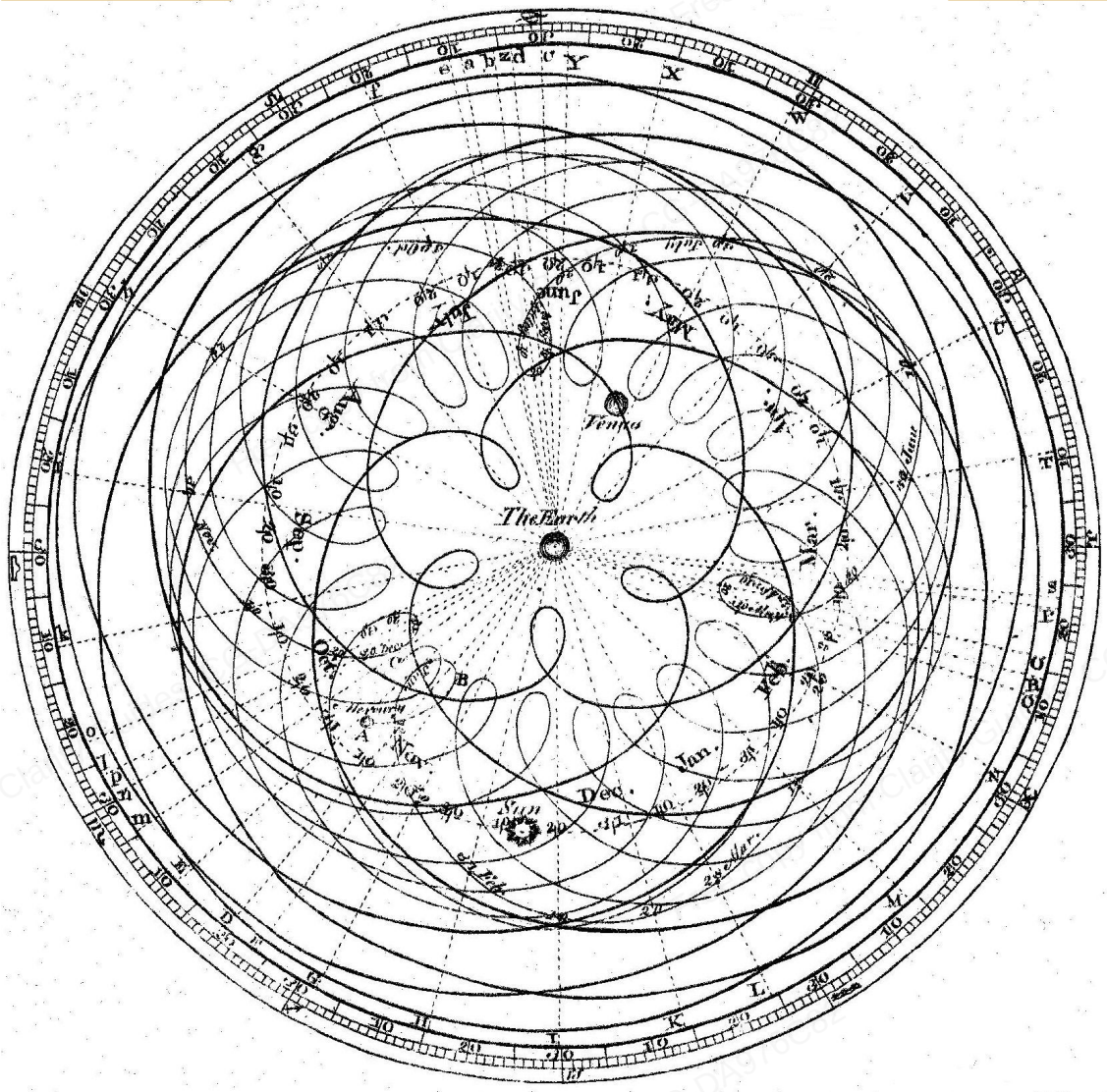

The apparent paths of the Sun, Mercury and Venus as seen from Earth: Mercury over 7 years, Venus over 8. Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1st edition, Edinburgh, 1771, after James Ferguson (based on Cassini). Public domain.

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CHAPTER SEVEN · MYTH

The messenger planet around the world

Long before horoscopes, people across the world noticed this quick little planet that never strays far from the Sun. Many of them made it a messenger.

Mercury is never more than about 28 degrees from the Sun in our sky. It darts between the evening and morning sky every few weeks, faster than any other planet. The Roman writer Cicero noted that it "never departs from the sun further than one sign".[13] A fast, restless go-between: it's easy to see why so many cultures linked it with messages, writing, trade and cleverness.

BABYLON AND ASSYRIA

The oldest known records of Mercury are on the MUL.APIN tablets, based on observations probably made around the 14th century BC. They name it the "jumping planet".[13] Babylonians later linked it with **Nabu**, the god of scribes, writing and wisdom. His symbol was a stylus resting on a clay tablet, and his name means "announcer".[14]

ANCIENT GREECE

The Greeks first thought the morning "star" and the evening "star" were two objects. By about 350 BC they realised they were one. They called it *Stilbōn*, "twinkling", and **Hermēs**, after the messenger god, for its fleeting movement. In modern Greek it is still *Ermis*.[13]

ROME

The Romans named it after **Mercurius**, their swift-footed messenger god, whom they equated with Hermes, because it moves across the sky faster than any other planet. The planet's symbol ☿ is a stylised version of the messenger's staff, the caduceus.[13]

GERMANIC AND NORSE

The Germanic god **Woden** (Norse Odin) was linked with Mercury, and that's why we have **Wednesday**. The Old English *wodnesdæg*, "Woden's day", translated the Latin *dies Mercurii*, "Mercury's day". Historians aren't sure why Odin was matched with Mercury. One suggestion is that both were gods of eloquence. German broke the pattern: its *Mittwoch* just means "mid-week".[15]

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INDIA

In Sanskrit the planet is **Budha**, personified as a god of intelligence and one of the nine planetary deities (Navagraha), linked with an agile mind and memory. Wednesday is *Budhavara*, Budha's day, in Hindi and many other Indian languages.[16]

CHINA AND EAST ASIA

In ancient China, Mercury was the "Hour Star" (*Chen-xing*), linked with the north and with water in the Five Phases system. Chinese, Korean, Japanese and Vietnamese still call it the "water star" (水星).[13]

Good observers, long ago

Myth and careful measurement went together. The Sūrya Siddhānta, an Indian astronomy text completed between the 5th and 10th centuries AD, gives Mercury's orbit as 87 days, 23 hours, 16 minutes and 22 seconds. The modern figure is 87 days, 23 hours, 15 minutes and 44 seconds: less than a minute's difference.[16] In the Americas, the Maya *may* have shown Mercury as an owl, a messenger to the underworld, though scholars aren't certain.[13]

WHAT THE MYTHS DON'T INCLUDE

None of these ancient traditions, as described in our sources, tells us that Mercury going backwards makes phones break or messages go astray. The "messenger" idea is ancient. The "everything goes wrong when it's retrograde" idea is mostly 20th century (chapter 8).

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CHAPTER EIGHT · THE TRADITION

What astrologers say it means

This chapter describes astrological beliefs, as the people who hold them explain them. It doesn't claim they are true.

Mercury the messenger

In Roman myth, Mercury (the Romans' version of the Greek god Hermes) was the quick-footed messenger of the gods, and the god of travellers, merchants and clever tricks. Astrology gives the planet the same jobs. Mercury "rules" communication, writing, learning, short journeys, buying and selling, and the signs Gemini and Virgo.

From one small rule to a big idea

WHEN	WHAT RETROGRADE MEANT
Medieval and early modern astrology	A retrograde planet was counted as weakened. Lilly lists "Retrograde" among a planet's *accidental debilities*.[11] In horary astrology (answering a question from a chart of the moment it was asked), Mercury retrograde suggested a negative answer: "nothing will come of it".[17]
20th century	In English-speaking astrology it came to mean "delays" in particular. A researcher found evidence of oral traditions about it in the US from the 1960s, and a spike in mentions alongside home computers in the 1980s, including in a newsletter called *Mercury Hour*. In the UK it became popular in the early-1980s "traditional revival" of astrology.[18] Dr Campion says the "delays" reading took over in the 1980s, and that Mercury retrograde "was always a very minor phenomenon in astrology".[8]
The internet age	A website asking "Is Mercury in retrograde?" launched in August 2009, and its traffic took off from 2011.[19] Social media turned it into a meme and an easy excuse when things go wrong.[17]

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What believers say to do, and not do

OFTEN ENCOURAGED

- Review, revise, reflect and reconnect
- Finish old projects
- Back up devices and check details
- Be patient with misunderstandings

OFTEN AVOIDED

- Sign big contracts
- Buy new phones or computers
- Launch a business or start a job
- Move house, or get engaged or married

A Beirut-based Reiki practitioner interviewed by BBC News said clients who believe in it "usually avoid purchasing electronics during that period, or postpone signing contracts, moving to a new home or taking the step of getting married or engaged".[8]

THIS TIME: MERCURY RETROGRADE IN SCORPIO

Astrologers link Scorpio with depth, secrets and intensity. So you'll read forecasts about hidden truths coming out and private conversations. Remember these are interpretations: two astrologers can read the same retrograde quite differently.

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CHAPTER NINE · THE EVIDENCE

Popular beliefs versus the evidence

Some claims about Mercury retrograde can be checked. Here's what we found.

WHAT PEOPLE SAY	WHAT THE EVIDENCE SHOWS
"Mercury goes backwards."	**No.** It only appears to, from Earth (chapter 4).
"Its pull messes with our minds and machines."	**No known way.** See the gravity box below. Mercury gives off no special signal during retrograde.
"Technology breaks more."	**No good evidence.** We found no published study showing more faults, crashes or outages during retrograde.
"Contracts signed now go wrong."	**No good evidence.** No reliable studies. Contracts go wrong when they aren't read carefully, at any time.
"Travel goes wrong."	**No good evidence.** Delays follow weather, staffing and engineering works, not planets.
"It's an ancient warning."	**Partly.** The idea of a weakened retrograde planet is old. The everyday "delays and broken phones" version is mostly 20th century (chapter 8).

What the evidence says

- **Scientists' view.** Dhara Patel of the National Space Centre told the BBC that "the general scientific consensus at present is that astronomical phenomena like retrogrades don't have any predictable effect on people's lives".[8]
- **Even an astrology historian is cautious.** Dr Campion pointed out that "lots of things happen very well when Mercury is in retrograde".[8]

THE GRAVITY CHECK

Mercury's mass is about 0.33×10^{24} kg.[9] On 4 November 2026 it will be about 101 million km away. Using Newton's law of gravity, its pull on you then is about **2 billionths of a metre per second squared**. A family car (1,500 kg) parked 5 metres away pulls on you about twice as hard. And Mercury's pull barely changes whether it looks retrograde or not. *(Calculation by Clarity Guides.)*

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CHAPTER TEN · MYTH-BUSTING

Ten retrograde myths, checked

Some of the most-repeated claims about Mercury retrograde are about astronomy, so they can be checked. Here's what we found.

MYTH 1: "MERCURY ACTUALLY REVERSES."

What we found: It never does. It keeps orbiting the Sun in the same direction at about 47 km a second. The backwards drift is an effect of our viewpoint.[7]

MYTH 2: "MERCURY IS AT ITS STRONGEST AND BRIGHTEST WHEN RETROGRADE."

What we found: The opposite. In mid-retrograde Mercury is a thin crescent, hidden in the Sun's glare. At inferior conjunction it's too faint to see at all, averaging magnitude +5.9.[13] It is brightest when it's on the *far* side of the Sun.

MYTH 3: "IT'S CLOSER, SO ITS PULL IS STRONGER."

What we found: It is closer: about 101 million km on 4 November, against about 181 million km on 30 November.[5] But even at its closest, its pull on you is smaller than a parked car's (chapter 9).

MYTH 4: "MERCURY RETROGRADE IS RARE AND SPECIAL."

What we found: Mercury is retrograde about **19%** of the time: 126 times between 2000 and 2039.[5] It's one of the most regular events in the sky.

MYTH 5: "ONLY MERCURY DOES IT."

What we found: Every planet does. Neptune spends about 43% of its time retrograde, and this autumn five planets are retrograde at once (chapter 5).[5]

MYTH 6: "A RETROGRADE IN SCORPIO IS A RARE EVENT."

What we found: From 2000 to 2039, Mercury turns retrograde in each sign between 9 and 12 times. It starts in Scorpio 11 times, about once every three or four years.[5] There's another one in Scorpio in October 2027.

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MYTH 7: "YOU CAN SEE IT GOING BACKWARDS."

What we found: Not this time. The backwards part happens while Mercury is within about 20 degrees of the Sun, and it's invisible from late October to about 10 November.[5]

MYTH 8: "RETROGRADE PLANETS SPIN BACKWARDS."

What we found: Retrograde motion isn't about spin. The one planet that really spins backwards is Venus, all the time, whatever its position.[10]

MYTH 9: "ASTROLOGERS ALL AGREE ON WHAT IT MEANS."

What we found: Studies have found astrologers often disagree. Across 25 studies, researchers Geoffrey Dean and Ivan Kelly found very low agreement between astrologers reading the same charts.[20]

MYTH 10: "SCIENCE HAS NEVER TESTED ASTROLOGY."

What we found: It has, many times, including a 1985 double-blind test in *Nature* designed with astrologers' help (chapter 11). Controlled tests have not found astrology performing better than chance.[20]

THE TWO-QUESTION TEST

When a claim sounds scientific, such as "Mercury's magnetic field" or "its energy", ask: *how big is the effect, and who measured it?* If nobody can tell you, treat it as a story, not a fact.

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II

CHAPTER ELEVEN · WHY IT FEELS TRUE

Why it can feel so accurate

If there's no effect, why do so many people notice one? The answer is in how all our brains work, not in anyone being foolish.

Confirmation bias

We notice and remember things that fit what we already believe, and forget the rest. The phone that died during retrograde sticks in the mind. The one that died in April doesn't.

It's retrograde a lot

In 2026 Mercury is retrograde on parts of 69 calendar days: nearly **one day in five**. Add the shadow periods and it's about 170 days, **almost half the year**. Plenty of mishaps are bound to land in those windows.

Expecting trouble

If you expect misunderstandings, you may read a short text as rude, or feel more stressed. Expectation can change how things turn out.

A handy explanation

"It's Mercury" is a quick, shared, often jokey way to shrug off a bad day. That can be comforting, and it's part of why it spreads.

What the research says

Psychologists have studied each of these habits of mind for decades. None of them is a sign of being foolish. Nickerson's review finds confirmation bias in many practical settings, among experts as well as the public.[21]

1. CONFIRMATION BIAS

Psychologist Raymond Nickerson describes it as "the seeking or interpreting of evidence in ways that are partial to existing beliefs, expectations, or a hypothesis in hand".[21] Studies of astrology find believers tend to remember the predictions that came true and forget the ones that didn't.[20]

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2. THE BARNUM (OR FORER) EFFECT

In a classroom experiment in 1948, published in 1949, psychologist Bertram Forer gave 39 students what he said was a personal profile based on a test they had taken. In fact every student got the same text, taken from a newsstand astrology book. On average they rated it about 4.3 on a scale of 0 to 5 for accuracy.[22] Here are three of the statements. Do they fit you?

> **THREE OF FORER'S STATEMENTS**
>
> - "You have a tendency to be critical of yourself."
> - "At times you have serious doubts as to whether you have made the right decision or done the right thing."
> - "At times you are extroverted, affable, sociable, while at other times you are introverted, wary, reserved."
>
> They fit almost everyone. That's the point.[22]

Retrograde forecasts work the same way. "Old issues may resurface" and "check the details" are true for almost anyone, almost any week. Later research found that people who believe in astrology rate these vague profiles more highly than sceptics do.[20]

3. ILLUSORY CORRELATION

This is seeing a link that isn't there. The term was coined by the psychologist Loren Chapman in 1967. People judging whether two things go together (pain and bad weather, for example) lean heavily on the few memorable times they happened together, and pay little attention to all the other cases.[23] Here's how it plays out for Mercury, using round, illustrative numbers:

OVER TWO MONTHS (61 DAYS)	RETROGRADE DAYS (21)	OTHER DAYS (40)
Mishaps you notice	7: you remember these, because you were expecting them	13: these feel "normal" and fade
Mishaps per day	**0.333**	**0.325**

The rate is almost exactly the same (0.333 against 0.325). But if you only ever count the first box, retrograde looks guilty. Your mishap diary (below) is designed to fill in all the boxes.

4. THE GREAT TEST: CARLSON, 1985

Physicist Shawn Carlson ran a double-blind test of natal (birth-chart) astrology, published in *Nature* in 1985.[24] The test rules were agreed in advance with astrologers, and astrology advisers nominated by the National Council for Geocosmic Research helped make sure it

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was fair. Twenty-eight astrologers tried to match more than 100 birth charts to personality profiles from a standard psychological test (the California Psychological Inventory). They did no better than chance, and the study concluded that the test "clearly refutes the astrological hypothesis".[24,20]

> **BEING FAIR**
>
> Carlson tested birth charts, not Mercury retrograde. As far as we could find, nobody has run a large controlled study of Mercury retrograde itself (see the sources page). But it rests on the same idea, that planetary positions shape human events, and that idea has failed every controlled test we found.[20]

5. EXPECTATIONS SHAPE EXPERIENCE

Studies have found that people who know astrology tend to describe themselves using the traits linked with their own sun sign, and the effect is stronger when they know the study is about astrology. People who don't know astrology show no such tendency.[20] Expecting a muddled three weeks can work the same way: you read more into small slips.

Try it yourself: the mishap diary

From **20 October to 19 December** (61 days), jot down every annoying mishap: tech trouble, missed buses, mix-ups. Don't check the dates until the end. Then fill in the tally. 21 of those days are retrograde days (24 October to 13 November) and 40 aren't.

DATE	WHAT WENT WRONG	ORDINARY CAUSE, IF ANY

Run out of rows? Carry on in a notebook or your phone's notes.

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TALLY	RETROGRADE DAYS (21)	OTHER DAYS (40)
Number of mishaps		
Divide by days		
Mishaps per day		

If the two "per day" numbers are close, you've seen confirmation bias at work. If retrograde days come out higher, look at the causes column: did you notice more, or did more really go wrong?

Five questions to ask any forecast

1. **Could it apply to anyone?** "Old issues may resurface" fits almost everyone, almost any week. That's the Barnum effect.
2. **Can it be wrong?** A useful prediction says something that could clearly fail, such as a date, a number or a named event. If nothing could prove it wrong, it isn't telling you much.
3. **Would I notice if it didn't happen?** We remember hits and forget misses. Write predictions down and check them later.
4. **What's the ordinary explanation?** Train delays, dead batteries and crossed wires have causes. Look for those first.
5. **Is someone selling something?** A forecast that ends with a paid reading, crystal or "protection" deserves extra care.

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CHAPTER TWELVE · PRACTICAL TIPS

Make the most of it, whatever you believe

Many people use Mercury retrograde as a reminder to slow down and tidy up. These habits are useful any time of year.

A three-week checklist

- ☐ Back up your phone and computer. The NCSC suggests keeping two backups, for example one online and one on a storage device.[25]
- ☐ Check travel details twice: dates, times, the right station or terminal, and passport expiry dates.
- ☐ Read contracts and terms before you sign or click “agree”. Ask questions if anything is unclear. Everyday AI tools like Grok can help you summarise long terms in plain English, but always check what they tell you against the document itself.
- ☐ Reply to the messages you’ve been putting off, and reconnect with an old friend.
- ☐ Finish one unfinished project before starting a new one.
- ☐ Proof-read important emails, and pause before sending angry ones.
- ☐ Update your phone and apps, and clear out old files and photos.

Things not to put off

WATCH OUT

Don’t delay medical appointments or treatment, tax or benefit deadlines, court dates, rent or bill payments, or urgent repairs because of Mercury retrograde. Missing them can cost you money or harm your health. The planets won’t mind if you go ahead.

Beware retrograde scams

Some sellers use retrograde fear to push paid readings, “protection” crystals or rituals. Be wary of anyone who says you’re in danger unless you pay. You can get free consumer advice from Advice Direct Scotland on 0808 164 6000.

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CHAPTER THIRTEEN · TOOLKIT

The calm comms toolkit

Mercury is the planet of messages, so here are practical tools for clearer, calmer communication. They work in any month.

Pause, check, send

1. **Pause.** Before replying to anything that annoys you, breathe. The NHS suggests breathing in gently through your nose and out through your mouth, counting from 1 to 5 each way, if that helps, for at least five minutes. It works best done regularly.[26]
2. **Read it as them.** Read your draft as if you were the person getting it, on a bad day, on a small phone screen.
3. **Check the facts.** Date, day, time, place, names, amounts and attachments. Most "Mercury" mix-ups are one of these.
4. **Ask, don't assume.** If their message is unclear, ask a short question rather than guessing.
5. **Send, or sleep on it.** If it still feels risky, save it as a draft and look again in the morning.

Phrases that prevent mix-ups

WHEN YOU NEED TO...	TRY SAYING
Confirm a plan	"Just to confirm: Thursday 5 November, 7pm, at the front entrance. Is that right?"
Check you've understood	"So what you need from me is... Have I got that right?"
Buy time	"Thanks, I want to give this proper thought. I'll reply by Friday."
Clear up a misunderstanding	"I think my last message came across wrongly. What I meant was..."
Say no kindly	"I can't this time, but thank you for thinking of me."
Apologise properly	"I'm sorry I got the time wrong. I've put the new one in my diary." (Say what you'll do differently. Don't blame the planets.)

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WHEN YOU NEED TO...	TRY SAYING
Chase politely	"Just bumping this up in case it got buried. Could you let me know by Monday?"

Spot the scam message

- ☐ It's urgent, or threatens you with a fine, a lost parcel or a closed account.
- ☐ It asks you to click a link, scan a code, or give a password or bank details.
- ☐ The sender's address or number doesn't match the organisation.
- ☐ It offers "protection", a cleansing or a reading in exchange for money.

REPORT IT

Forward scam texts free to **7726** (works on most UK networks for ordinary texts; for WhatsApp and similar apps, use the app's own report button).[27] Forward scam emails to **report@phishing.gov.uk**. If you've lost money in Scotland, call Police Scotland on **101**.[28]

Worksheet: the message makeover

Use this for any message that matters: a complaint, a tricky family text or a work email.

STEP	YOUR NOTES
What I want to say (first draft, get it all out)	
What they actually need to know	
What I need them to do, and by when	
Anything that could be read the wrong way?	
Final version, in two or three sentences	

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Worksheet: plans double-check

PLAN	DAY, DATE AND TIME	PLACE OR ADDRESS	CONFIRMED WITH	BOOKING REF

The 21-day calm comms journal

One prompt for each day of the retrograde. A sentence or two is enough. On the last day, compare your answers with your first one.

Sat 24 Oct. What am I expecting from the next three weeks? Write it down so you can compare later.

Sun 25 Oct. Which conversation have I been avoiding? What's the smallest first step?

Mon 26 Oct. Think of a recent misunderstanding. What was actually said, and what did I hear?

Tue 27 Oct. Which message did I send this week that worked well? Why did it work?

Wed 28 Oct. Who would be glad to hear from me this week?

Thu 29 Oct. Where do I tend to rush: emails, texts, calls or forms?

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Fri 30 Oct. Week one: list the mishaps in my diary. Which had an ordinary cause?

Sat 31 Oct. What is one thing I can say “no” to, kindly?

Sun 1 Nov. When did I last ask someone to explain something again? How did it go?

Mon 2 Nov. What’s on my mind that I haven’t written down anywhere?

Tue 3 Nov. Has anything happened that I’d blame on Mercury, but that also happens in other months?

Wed 4 Nov (halfway). Which habit from this guide (backups, checking travel, reading terms) do I want to keep?

Thu 5 Nov. What did someone else do this week that made talking to them easier?

Fri 6 Nov. Week two: did I feel different on days I expected trouble?

Sat 7 Nov. Draft the message I’d like to send to an old friend.

Sun 8 Nov. What decision am I putting off? What would I decide if there were no retrograde?

Mon 9 Nov. What helped me stay calm this week?

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Tue 10 Nov. Which mix-up this month was nobody's fault?

Wed 11 Nov. What would I say to a friend who blames everything on Mercury?

Thu 12 Nov. Which one habit do I want to carry into December?

Fri 13 Nov (last day). Read my answer from 24 October. What actually happened?

Talking about it with friends and family

Plenty of people you love may enjoy astrology. You don't need to win an argument to have a good conversation.

- ☐ **Ask what it means to them.** For many people it's a ritual, a reason to reflect or a shared joke, not a belief about physics.
- ☐ **Share what you find interesting.** The astronomy is genuinely surprising. Mercury is closest to us, and invisible, right in the middle of the retrograde.
- ☐ **Agree on the useful bits.** Backing up, checking travel and reading the small print are good ideas whatever anyone believes.
- ☐ **Speak up gently if it causes harm.** If someone is delaying medical care or paying for "protection", that's worth a kind, direct word.
- ☐ **Try the mishap diary together.** It's a fair test, and you can both look at the results with an open mind.

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CHAPTER FOURTEEN · LOOK UP

See Mercury for yourself

Mercury is famously hard to spot. Your best chance this year is just after this retrograde ends.

Mercury appears farthest from the Sun in the morning sky (its "greatest elongation") on **20 November 2026**, about 20 degrees away.[1] For a week or so either side, look low in the south-east from about an hour to 45 minutes before sunrise, on a clear morning with a flat horizon. It looks like a small, steady star.

> **CLOSEST TO US, AND HIDDEN**
>
> In the middle of a retrograde, Mercury passes between the Earth and the Sun. This is called **inferior conjunction**. This time it happens on **4 November 2026**.[1] Mercury is then lost in the Sun's glare, so you can't see the retrograde happening with your own eyes.

1. **Pick your spot.** Somewhere with a low, open view to the south-east, such as a beach, a hilltop or a field edge.
2. **Use an app.** A free stargazing app shows exactly where Mercury is.
3. **Be early.** Once the sky gets bright, Mercury fades into the dawn.

Spotting Mercury from Edinburgh and Fife

From Scotland, Mercury is tricky because it never gets far from the Sun, and our northern latitude makes it rise at a shallow angle. The late-November 2026 morning window is one of the better ones. Autumn evenings are poor because the planets' path lies low in the sky then;[13] autumn mornings are far better, as the figures below show. Here are our calculated times for Edinburgh (GMT).[5] Times for St Andrews in Fife are within a minute of these.

DATE	MERCURY RISES	SUNRISE	HEAD START	DAWN BEGINS*	HEIGHT OF MERCURY AT DAWN
Tue 10 Nov	06:22	07:38	1h 16m	06:57	4°, south-east
Fri 13 Nov	06:01	07:44	1h 43m	07:03	7°, south-east
Mon 16 Nov	05:51	07:51	1h 59m	07:08	9°, south-east
Thu 19 Nov	05:51	07:57	2h 06m	07:14	10°, south-east

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DATE	MERCURY RISES	SUNRISE	HEAD START	DAWN BEGINS*	HEIGHT OF MERCURY AT DAWN
Fri 20 Nov	05:52	07:59	2h 06m	07:15	10°, south-east
Sun 22 Nov	05:57	08:02	2h 06m	07:19	9°, south-east
Wed 25 Nov	06:07	08:08	2h 01m	07:24	8°, south-east
Sat 28 Nov	06:21	08:14	1h 53m	07:29	7°, south-east
Tue 1 Dec	06:36	08:19	1h 43m	07:33	6°, south-east
Fri 4 Dec	06:52	08:23	1h 32m	07:38	4°, south-east
Mon 7 Dec	07:09	08:28	1h 19m	07:42	3°, south-east

**Civil dawn, when the Sun is 6° below the horizon. That's about the latest you can still pick out Mercury easily. Rise times assume a flat sea horizon; hills or buildings will delay them.*

Best mornings

16 to 25 November. Mercury rises around two hours before the Sun and is 8 to 10 degrees up at civil dawn, about a fist's width at arm's length. Its brightness rises from about magnitude 0 to −0.5, as bright as the brighter stars.[5]

Use Venus as a pointer

On 20 November, brilliant Venus (magnitude −4.4, brighter than any star) rises at about 4:35am. At dawn it is about 18° up in the south-east. Mercury is about 15° to its lower left, nearer the horizon.[5]

Good spots in the east of Scotland

Anywhere with a clear, low view to the south-east and no hills in the way: the summit of Arthur's Seat in Edinburgh, for example, or the south-facing Fife coast around Elie, Anstruther and Crail.

Binoculars

Mercury is often easier to find with binoculars, sweeping low over the horizon. But put them away well before sunrise: the Sun rises close to where Mercury is.

Your next chances in 2027

WHEN	WHERE TO LOOK	FROM EDINBURGH (CALCULATED)
Late January to early February 2027	Evening, low in the south-west after sunset	On 3 February Mercury sets at about 6:41pm, nearly two hours after the Sun, and is about 8° up at dusk. A good window.

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WHEN	WHERE TO LOOK	FROM EDINBURGH (CALCULATED)
Mid-March 2027	Morning	A poor window from Scotland: Mercury is still below the horizon when dawn begins, despite being 28° from the Sun.
Late May 2027	Evening, low in the west-north-west	On 20 May it sets at about 11:43pm BST, over two hours after the Sun, and is 8° up at dusk. A good window, but in light skies.
Late September 2027	Evening	Poor: Mercury sets only about 15 minutes after the Sun.
Late October to mid-November 2027	Morning, low in the south-east	On 4 November Mercury rises at about 5:24am GMT, two hours before the Sun, and is 10° up at dawn. The best window of 2027.

All times are our own calculations.[5] Mercury is so close to the Sun that a few minutes' difference or a slight haze can matter, so give yourself a margin.

SAFETY FIRST

Never look at or near the Sun with binoculars or a telescope. It can blind you instantly. Put them away before sunrise.

WANT TO GO FURTHER? ASTROLOGY & YOUR BIRTH CHART

Our full guide explains the 12 signs, the planets, houses and birth charts, the real history from Babylon to the Sunday paper, the big scientific tests, and worksheets to draw your own chart. Read a preview at **goclarity.uk/guides/astrology-birth-chart.html**

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CHAPTER FIFTEEN · QUICK ANSWERS

Frequently asked questions

DOES MERCURY ACTUALLY STOP AND REVERSE?

No. It keeps going round the Sun the same way. It only appears to stop and go backwards from Earth.

DO OTHER PLANETS GO RETROGRADE?

Yes, all of them do as seen from Earth. Mercury gets the attention because it happens most often (chapter 5).

IS VENUS RETROGRADE TOO?

Yes. Venus is retrograde from 3 October to 14 November 2026, so this whole Mercury retrograde sits inside it. Venus does this about every 19 months.

HOW MANY PLANETS ARE RETROGRADE RIGHT NOW?

On 4 November 2026, five: Mercury, Venus, Saturn, Uranus and Neptune. Two or more planets are retrograde on most days of most years.

CAN I SEE MERCURY GOING BACKWARDS?

Not this time. It happens while Mercury is close to the Sun and hidden in its glare. Your best chance to see Mercury at all is in the mornings of 16 to 25 November (chapter 14).

SHOULD I PUT OFF MY WEDDING, HOUSE MOVE OR NEW JOB?

There's no evidence it makes any difference. Losing a deposit or a good opportunity is a real cost. If you'd simply feel happier waiting and it costs nothing, that's your choice to make.

WHY DOES IT GET BLAMED ON TECHNOLOGY?

The link with computers and phones grew in the 1980s, when home computers spread (chapter 8). Old astrology linked Mercury with messages and trade, not machines.

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IS MERCURY THE CLOSEST PLANET TO EARTH?

On average over time, yes, surprisingly. Venus comes closer at its nearest, but Mercury spends more of its time near us because it stays close to the Sun.

DO RETROGRADES HAPPEN IN THE SAME SIGN EACH YEAR?

No. They move round the zodiac. In 2027 they start in Pisces, Cancer and Scorpio, and end in Aquarius, Gemini and Libra.

IS IT BAD LUCK TO BUY A PHONE NOW?

There's no evidence of that. Buy it when you need it, keep the receipt, and check the returns policy.

WHEN IS THE NEXT ONE AFTER THIS?

Our calculation shows three in 2027: about **9 February to 3 March**, **10 June to 4 July**, and **7 to 28 October** (full times in chapter 3). Check a current almanac nearer the time.

WHY DO THE DATES DIFFER SLIGHTLY BETWEEN WEBSITES?

Stations are slow turning points, and sites use different time zones. The dates for 2026 agree.

WHAT IS THE "SHADOW"?

The weeks before and after, when Mercury is passing through the same part of the sky. It's an astrological idea, not an astronomical event.

IS IT HARMFUL TO BELIEVE IN IT?

Usually not, if it's a bit of fun or a nudge to be careful. It becomes harmful if it leads you to miss medical care, deadlines or payments, or to pay someone for "protection".

I ENJOY ASTROLOGY. IS THAT SILLY?

Not at all. Many people enjoy it as a tradition, a language of symbols or a prompt for reflection. The key is not to let it make big decisions for you.

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REFERENCE

Help

Advice Direct Scotland (consumer advice)	0808 164 6000 · consumeradvice.scot
National Cyber Security Centre (backing up and staying safe online)	ncsc.gov.uk
Scam texts (free reporting service)	Forward to 7726
Scam emails	Forward to report@phishing.gov.uk
Police Scotland (to report fraud, non-emergency)	101
Samaritans (if you're feeling low or anxious)	116 123 (24 hours)
Breathing Space (Scotland)	0800 83 85 87
Royal Observatory Edinburgh	roe.ac.uk

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Glossary

Apparent motion
How something seems to move from where we watch, rather than how it really moves.

Direct (prograde)
A planet's normal eastward drift against the stars.

Ephemeris
A table of where the planets are on each date.

Epicycle
In Ptolemy's Earth-centred model, a small circle a planet moved on, carried round a larger one.

Horary astrology
Answering a question from a chart drawn for the moment it was asked.

Inferior conjunction
When Mercury or Venus passes between the Earth and the Sun.

Retrograde
A planet's apparent backward (westward) drift against the stars.

Shadow period
In astrology, the weeks before and after a retrograde when the planet covers the same stretch of sky.

Station
The moment a planet seems to stand still before changing direction.

Synodic period
The time between one line-up of planet, Earth and Sun and the next: about 116 days for Mercury.

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REFERENCE

Sources

Facts checked October 2026. Web addresses are given without https://. **Weak or limited claims, flagged:** (1) the 2027 dates are calculations, not from a published almanac (PyEphem, cross-checked with Skyfield and NASA JPL DE440s: within 4 minutes); check an almanac nearer the time; (2) the history of the modern "delays" meaning rests mainly on one historian (Dr Nicholas Campion) and one master's dissertation, as reported in the press, not on a published book or peer-reviewed paper; (3) "no evidence of effects" means we found no published studies either way, not that a large study disproved it; (4) station times are rounded and can differ by about an hour between sources; (5) the day-by-day positions, other planets' dates and statistics, and Scottish rise and set times are our own calculations, accurate to a minute or two, and assume a flat horizon; (6) the myth chapter and parts of the psychology chapter rely on encyclopaedia summaries (Wikipedia) that cite the original scholarship, rather than on the original books and papers themselves; (7) we found no controlled study of Mercury retrograde itself, so the tests we cite are of astrology in general.

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WHY A PLANET SEEMS TO GO BACKWARDS

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HOW WE WORKED OUT THE DATES

Every planet date and time in this guide (stations, shadows, rise times) comes from our own calculations, made in October 2026. We used the free PyEphem astronomy library to track Mercury against the stars day by day, and to find every station of every planet from 2000 to 2039. A “station” is the moment its daily movement changes direction. We then repeated the 2026 and 2027 stations with a second, separate program, Skyfield, using NASA JPL’s DE440s planetary tables. The two agree to within 4 minutes. For 2026 our dates also match the SkyEye almanac (to its nearest hour) and an online ephemeris calculator (to within minutes).

Times are UK time: BST until 25 October 2026, then GMT. Rise times are for Edinburgh and St Andrews, with a flat horizon. Hills, buildings or haze make Mercury appear later and lower. Signs are astrology’s 30-degree slices of the sky, not the star patterns behind them.

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Orbit and sky-path diagrams	Drawn by Clarity Guides from positions calculated with the PyEphem astronomy library.

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Mercury Retrograde

Making the confusing clear.

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