
Kate: Hello, I'm Kate Colin and this is 6 minute English. Today I'm joined by Jackie Dalton and we're talking about horoscopes and astrology. This is the idea that you can find out what's going to happen to you based on what's going on in the sky and your star sign.

Jackie: Yes, astrology is a practice which started many years ago and the idea is that each person has a particular star sign which depends on when they were born.

Kate: So you could be Taurus, Capricorn, Scorpio, Cancer or numerous others. Each sign is said to have particular personality characteristics. So Jackie...what star sign are you?

Jackie: I'm a Virgo which means I'm supposed to be practical, intelligent and a bit of a perfectionist!

Kate: Sounds pretty accurate to me.... I'm Aquarius and I'm supposed to be friendly independent, but frequently late - mmm – not sure about the last one, I'm always on time!
So here's my question for this week. How many different star signs are there in the Zodiac?

- a) 10
- b) 5
- c) 12

Jackie: answers

Kate: Well, astrology and horoscopes are very popular here in the UK, even though they are often taken with **a pinch of salt**. To take something with 'a pinch of salt', means that we don't believe something to be entirely accurate or true.

Jackie: Horoscopes usually appear in daily newspapers and magazines and every morning thousands of people read them to try to find out what's **in the stars** for them that day. To say something is 'in the stars' means it's set to happen in the future.

Kate: My horoscope this morning said that money would come from an unexpected source, that I should be careful not to lose my temper and that I should wear a lucky colour tonight...! Interesting.

Next we're going to hear from a journalist, Jan Muir, who actually had to write the horoscopes. Have a listen – did she always want to be a horoscope writer?

Clip 1

It was my very first job in journalism when I started for a newspaper group in Scotland, and I thought I was going to be rushing round doing all sorts of exciting things, but in fact I was told to sit down and write the horoscopes.

Jackie: She said that it was her first job in journalism and she thought she'd be doing exciting things. I don't think she was expecting to be writing horoscopes.

Kate: So did she have any knowledge or interest in astrology?

Clip 2

Not at all at that time and then certainly after I'd been writing them for a few months, I believed even less because I noticed then as I do now – I mean, we were given this **formula** where you had to write a positive, a negative and a maybe.

Jackie: She said she didn't have any interest and believed even less in astrology as time went on. She was given a **formula**. A formula is a standard way of doing something, when it is always exactly the same. Her formula was 'a positive, a negative and a maybe' so she had to say something good, something bad and something else was possibly going to happen.

Kate: So if this is the way that some horoscopes are written, why does she think that they are still so popular? In the next extract she uses the word '**endure**'. If something 'endures' it means that they continue to exist despite overcoming difficulty, in this case, people not believing in horoscopes.

Clip 3

Well I think that's one of the reasons they **endure** because when people read a newspaper or a magazine it's full of all sorts of information about the world at large, about politics, famine and film stars and all sorts of things and the one little bit in the newspaper refers to them, it's all about them.

Jackie: She said that horoscopes **endure** because they're actually about the people who read the newspapers so they always want to know about themselves.

Kate: Yes, it could be... but people are often **sceptical** about astrology and horoscopes. To be **sceptical** is when you have doubts or don't believe in something. There are numerous associations and societies offering training in astrology and there is even university which teaches it at postgraduate level. We're going to hear from Dr Nicholas Campion who is in charge of a course in Wales. What did he say when we asked him if he gets irritated or annoyed when people **trivialise** astrology? **Trivialise** means to make something out to be unimportant or a bit of a joke.

Clip 5

No it doesn't annoy me actually, in fact I quite enjoy it! Because you've got in a tabloid newspaper, probably on the same page as the cartoons, a piece of ancient wisdom, that's pre-Christian – stretches back to ancient Babylon. So just from a cultural sense, I find this survival absolutely fascinating. I mean there is a direct lineage between the people writing the horoscope columns and the priests 4000 years ago advising Babylonian Emperors.

Jackie: Interestingly, he doesn't get annoyed at all. He said he enjoys seeing a piece of 'ancient wisdom' in our daily newspaper. He's right in a way - whether we believe in it or not, it is fascinating that astrology dates back thousands of years, yet here we are, still talking about it and still reading our daily horoscopes.

Kate: Let's have a look at the vocabulary we've come across today:
We had '**to take something with a pinch of salt**' which means that to believe something to not be entirely accurate or true
a formula - a standard way of doing something, when it is always exactly the same
endure – to continue to exist despite overcoming difficulty
to be sceptical - to have trouble believing in something
trivialise - means to make something out to be unimportant or a bit of a joke

Kate: And finally to my question – I asked you how many star signs are in the Zodiac?

Jackie: I said 12.

Kate: And you were correct - there are 12 signs in the Zodiac. Too many to list here unfortunately because that's all we have time for. Until next time...

Both: Goodbye!