

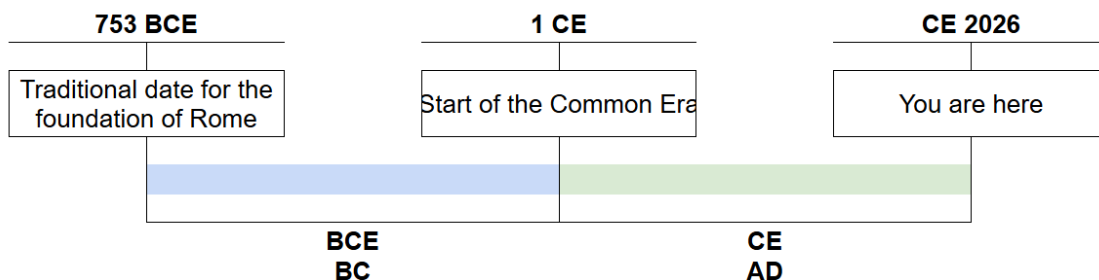


History 101: How to Read a Timeline

By The History Nook

Welcome to the first part of the History Nook: History 101 series of resources. This series was inspired by everyone who approached me while I was working in a museum and asked what most would consider a stupid or obvious question. First of all, there is no such thing as a stupid question; if you don't ask, you won't know. Secondly, some of these people seemed so embarrassed by their lack of knowledge. To anyone reading this, please don't be embarrassed about not knowing things. If someone reacts poorly to you not knowing something they consider to be 'simple', they are being a @&#%!

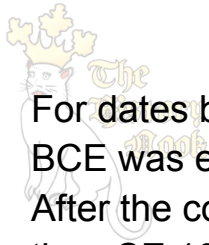
I was once asked what BC and AD meant, and I think that would be a great place to start, so let's look at how to read and understand a historical timeline.



On the timeline above, you will find that I have marked three years: 753 BCE, 1 CE, and 2026 CE.

Typically, when a timeline is horizontal like this, the earliest date will be on the left and the most recent on the right. Vertical timelines work in a similar way, with the earliest date at the bottom and the most recent date at the top.

CE 1 marks the beginning of the Common Era. Traditionally, dates have been divided into BC (before Christ) and AD (Anno Domini). Today, some choose to use BCE (Before Common Era) and CE (Common Era). Whichever system is used, BCE and BC both end at the same point and CE and AD start at the same point. CE 20206 is also AD 2026.



For dates before the common era, the years count backwards. So 753 BCE was earlier 500 BCE, which in turn was earlier 43 BCE, and so on. After the common era, the years count forward. So CE 410 is earlier than CE 1066, which is earlier than CE 1901.

Sometimes a timeline will not include AD / CE, so if you see a date without letters next to it, it is safe to assume it is in the common era.