

The Twenty Day Signs & Counting to Twenty in Nawatl

Module 3 handout · The Count of Days: Twenty Signs, Thirteen Numbers

The tonalpawalli pairs twenty day signs with the numbers 1 through 13. Because 20 and 13 share no common factor, a sign and number meet again only after 260 days. Learn the signs in order and the numbers in Nawatl, and you can name any day in the count. Spellings below follow modernized Nawatl orthography; the meanings are working glosses, not fixed translations.

The twenty day signs

#	Day sign	Gloss	Meaning and character
 1	Zipaktli	Crocodile / earth-caiman	Beginnings, the raw earth, primordial matter; a day for laying foundations.
 2	Ehekatl	Wind	Breath, movement, speech; unseen force that carries change.
 3	Kalli	House	Enclosure, family, rest and inward work; the ordered space.
 4	Kwetzpallin	Lizard	Vitality, abundance, quick regeneration; sun-warmed energy.
 5	Koatl	Serpent	Life force, transformation through shedding; earth and water currents.
 6	Mikiztli	Death	Release and transition; honoring ancestors, closing cycles.
 7	Mazatl	Deer	Sustenance, the hunt, the road; gentleness and endurance.
 8	Tochtli	Rabbit	Fertility, harvest, drink and plenty; also excess if unchecked.
 9	Atl	Water	Flow, purification, feeling; storms and cleansing alike.
 10	Itzkwintli	Dog	Loyalty, the guide of the dead, companionship on the journey.
 11	Ozomahtli	Monkey	Play, art, craft and humor; skilled hands and improvisation.
 12	Malinalli	Grass / twisted herb	Persistence, medicine, what is braided and made useful.
 13	Akatl	Reed	Straightness, authority, the arrow and the measuring rod.
 14	Ozelotl	Jaguar	Night, the interior earth, courage and the hidden.
 15	Kwawhtli	Eagle	Height, sight, the warrior sun and clear judgment.
 16	Kozkakwawhtli	Vulture	Long life, cleansing what has ended, elder wisdom.
 17	Ollin	Movement	Earthquake, change, the day sign of the present Sun.
 18	Tekpatl	Flint knife	Cutting, decision, hardness and sacrifice.
 19	Kiawitl	Rain	Storm, nourishment and sudden force; renewal by water.
 20	Xochitl	Flower	Beauty, art, song and the completion of the cycle.



Counting to twenty in Nawatl

Nawatl counts in twenties. Five (makwilli), ten (mahtlaktli) and fifteen (kaxtolli) are the hinges: after each one you simply add ze, ome, yei, nawi. Twenty closes the cycle as zempowalli, “one whole count.”

#	Nawatl	#	Nawatl
1	ze	11	mahtlaktli wan ze
2	ome	12	mahtlaktli wan ome
3	yei	13	mahtlaktli wan yei
4	nawi	14	mahtlaktli wan nawi
5	makwilli	15	kaxtolli
6	chikwaze	16	kaxtolli wan ze
7	chikome	17	kaxtolli wan ome
8	chikwei	18	kaxtolli wan yei
9	chiknawi	19	kaxtolli wan nawi
10	mahtlaktli	20	zempowalli

Naming a day

A day name is number + sign, spoken in that order: ze Zipaktli (1 Crocodile), chikwei Ozelotl (8 Jaguar), mahtlaktli wan yei Akatl (13 Reed). Only the numbers 1–13 are used for day names — the rest of the count words above are for counting days, veintenas and years.



Quiz

1. How many day signs are in the count, and how many numbers turn against them?

2. How many days pass before a given sign and number pair repeats?

3. Name the first and the twentieth day signs in Nawatl.

4. Which sign means “Movement” and names the present Sun?

5. Write the next five days after 10 Tochtli.

6. Count aloud: what are the Nawatl words for 5, 10, 15 and 20?

7. What does zempowalli literally describe, and why does it fit a twenty-day cycle?

8. A trecena opens on 1 Kiawitl. What is the eighth day of that trecena?

9. Which two signs bracket the idea of endings — one as release, one as cleansing?

10. Translate: chikwei Ozelotl.



Answer key

1. Twenty day signs and the numbers 1–13.
2. 260 days (20×13) — the full tonalpowailli.
3. First: Zipaktli. Twentieth: Xochitl.
4. Ollin — the Fifth Sun is Nawi Ollin, Four Movement.
5. 11 Atl, 12 Itzkwintli, 13 Ozomahtli, 1 Malinalli, 2 Akatl. (After 13 the number resets to 1; the signs keep going.)
6. 5 makwilli, 10 mahtlaktli, 15 kaxtolli, 20 zempowalli.
7. “One full count” — powalli is a count of twenty, the base unit of Nawatl numbering, matching the twenty signs.
8. 8 Mikiztli. (Counting forward from Kiawitl: Xochitl, Zipaktli, Ehekatl, Kalli, Kwetzpallin, Koatl, Mikiztli — the eighth day is 8 Mikiztli.)
9. Mikiztli (death, release) and Kozkakwawhtli (vulture, cleansing what has ended).
10. Eight Jaguar.

Study tip: recite the twenty signs in order every day for a week, then recite them paired with 1–13 until the 260-day wheel turns without effort. The count is learned by speaking it, not by reading it.