

In our number system (called Arabic numbers), we have ten digits (from 0 to 9) and we can make as big a number as we want with these. We use all ten digits to count to nine, then we combine them to make bigger numbers. So we never run out of numbers, as long as there is room to write them down ! The more digits there are, the longer the number is.

The ancient Romans didn't think this. They repeated symbols, so one was I and 2 was II. For larger numbers, they invented new symbols, so five was V, ten was X, fifty was L, one hundred was C, five hundred was D and one thousand was M. They didn't have a symbol for zero, they didn't need it.

The ancient Romans combined their symbols, so VII meant 5+1+1 or seven. This is called a unary system. However, they found that IIII and VIII were too confusing (for four and nine), so they introduced another idea.

If the I comes after the V then you add it (VI is 6). But if the I comes before the V then you subtract it (IV is four). The rule is that you are allowed to add up to three (VIII is eight), but only subtract one (IX is nine).

This means that you have to be very careful what order Roman digits are in. XI (eleven) is a different number from IX (nine) !

Two examples :

- MM X III is 2013
- MM X IV is 2014

One



Five



Ten



Fifty



One hundred



Five hundred



One thousand



1. Write down the following Roman numbers in English :

D IX / MMM D CCC L XXX V III / MMM CM XC IX (make a comment).

2. Write down the following numbers in the Roman number system.

Six hundred and sixty six / eight hundred and eighty eight / One thousand five hundred and fifteen / One thousand nine hundred and seventy five.