

Oberon

A moon of Uranus.
Its surface features are named after
heroes from Shakespeare's plays.

Uranus

Seventh planet from the Sun.
Its moons are named after characters
from Shakespeare's plays,
especially female characters.

Mimas

A moon of Saturn.
Its surface features are named after
characters from the King Arthur
legend.

Io

A moon of Jupiter. Surface features are named after gods and heroes associated with fire, sun, thunder, or volcanoes.

Mercury Astronauts

In 1958, the newly-created NASA space agency selected seven test pilots as the first group of astronauts. Of these, six flew in the Mercury program and most went on to fly on other NASA missions.

Classical Science Fiction

In the 1800s and 1900s, astronomers were seeing the surfaces of the Moon and Mars in greater detail. Incorrectly, some of them thought they saw signs of life. In reaction to this, authors started writing about traveling to these worlds or aliens coming to Earth.

Missions/Spacecraft

NASA missions and spacecraft are often named after famous astronomers or explorers from history.

Planets

Eight large heavenly bodies that orbit the Sun and shine by reflected light. They are named after gods and goddesses from Roman mythology.

The Moon

A natural satellite that orbits Earth. Its surface features are named after scientists, engineers, Earth's mountains (Latin), states of mind (Latin), and first names.

Meteorites

Rocky fragments from outer space that fall to Earth, they are named after the nearest city, town, or permanent landmark.

Neptune

Eighth planet from the Sun.
Its moons are named after gods and places associated with water.

Meteor Showers

Meteors are the light we see as tiny particles burn up in the Earth's atmosphere.
Meteor showers are named after the constellations they appear to come from, and occur at about the same time every year.

Animal Astronauts and Cosmonauts

Before humans flew into space, the United States and the Soviet Union used animals to test out their space capsules on sub-orbital and orbital flights.

Exoplanets

An extra-solar planet is what we call a planet that orbits another star light-years from our Sun. A few have been given formal names, but most use the star's name and a lower-case letter.

Mars Rovers

Seven spacecraft have successfully landed on Mars: three stationary landers, three rovers, and one that had both a stationary lander and a rover.

Charon

Names of features on Solar System objects must follow certain rules and get accepted by an international naming committee. However, the New Horizons team has unofficially named craters on Pluto's moon Charon after Star Trek and Star Wars Characters.

Asteroids

Asteroids are small, rocky bodies that orbit the Sun. They receive a number, and a name chosen by the discoverer, often someone from mythology or a scientist.

Comets

Comet "names" can have a year and letter (their order of discovery), the name(s) of the discoverer(s) and a number if they have discovered more than one, and sometimes a "P" for periodic if we know when the comet returns in its orbit.

Mercury

Closest planet to the Sun.
Its surface features are named after authors, painters, composers, and other contributors to the humanities.

Venus

The second planet from the Sun.
Its surface features are usually named after famous women or female first names. Canyons are named after moon or sky goddesses from around the world.

Asterisms

An asterism is an easily recognized star picture that is not one of the 88 official constellations.
An asterism can be part of a constellation or can be made of bright stars from several constellations.

The Big Dipper

The Big Dipper is what we call the seven brightest stars of Ursa Major. Other cultures have different names for this star pattern.

The Summer Triangle

Three bright stars make its shape. They are the brightest stars in the constellations Aquila, Lyra, and Cygnus.

Constellations

There are 88 official constellations, or groups of star patterns. Many have Greek or Latin names for animals.

Stars

Most star names come from Arabic or Greek words.
Stars are also described by color,
size, and brightness (magnitude).

Galaxies

Galaxies are very large groups of stars.
They come in several types that describe
the galaxy's shape. They can have names
(Andromeda) or Messier numbers (M31).