



It's All in the HOUSES

by Eric Francis Coppolino

When you look up an encyclopedia or dictionary definition of astrology, you usually get something like “the study of the positions of the planets as they influence affairs on Earth.”

That’s quite a leap. How we get from the “positions of the planets” to “affairs on Earth” is to understand the houses. The houses focus the topics of astrology into something coherent. Sometimes described as representing the departments of life, the houses are a practical matter. There’s nothing cosmic or mystical about them, except for a hint of poetry that reflects human existence.

Patric Walker, one of the great astrologers and horoscope writers of the 20th century, once remarked to his colleague Jonathan Cainer that “it’s all in the houses.” He meant that the secret to reading a chart is reading the houses. Walker was a master of timing, but even better at getting the topic correct. The way you do that is to know what house you’re writing about.

In the simplest terms, the houses project the zodiac onto the Earth, where astrology actually happens. They are a local affair; if you cast a chart for the same date and time for cities around the globe, what changes is the configuration of the houses. Similarly, if the time at

one location advances, the most noticeable thing that changes is the pattern of the houses.

The houses are the most specific and most useful tool in the chart, providing the context for the reading. They also provide an organizational framework for understanding all of astrology by subject area. By all means, study the planets, the aspects, and the signs. Then, when you want to interpret, you will depend on what you know about the houses in order to deliver a relevant reading.

The houses are the equivalent of the positions in a Tarot spread. You can know what all the cards mean, but the way you extract that meaning is by understanding the positions they land in. Think of the planets, aspects, and signs as the Tarot cards themselves, and the houses as the placements within the spread. The Magician card suggests one thing as the first card (the significator) and another thing in the position of negative feelings, or the outcome. Any given card represents one idea as a past factor, and another as a future factor. Looking only at the card itself, you get half of the meaning. Looking at where it lands, you get the rest of the meaning and can deduce the wider context from the cards around it.

As with the positions in the Tarot spread, the houses provide the basic

syntax of the reading: how to frame a question; how to know where the action might be in a client’s life; how a planet in your own chart manifests. When doing horary astrology, houses are indispensable, due to the refined topical nature of such readings.

Most discussions about the houses are not about how to use them, but rather are debates about the supposedly right system and, more lately, the feud between the Whole Sign houses camp and the quadrant houses (Placidus- or Koch-type houses) camp. I’ve followed these discussions for a long time. They tend to be as ridiculous as the 13th-sign hoax, and about as intellectually satisfying. I’ll come back to that supposed controversy, since it holds a key to understanding how houses work and how to read them.

Using the Tarot metaphor again, we rarely hear arguments among Tarot readers about what’s the best deck or the best spread. The discussion is how to understand your cards and how to read the spread you work with. Seasoned Tarot readers can read any spread, or make up a new one. They can read any deck, including playing cards. As long as you know what the positions in the spread mean, the message will be legible. Astrologers would benefit from adopting this viewpoint.



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Applying the idea of a Tarot spread to astrology, let's say there's a conjunction of Venus and Mars in a chart. If that conjunction is in the 1st house of a natal chart, it will suggest one meaning (for example, the person might identify as bisexual), while the same conjunction in the same sign, but placed in the 10th house, will suggest something different (perhaps a power partnership between a man and a woman). It's the same conjunction in the same sign. The house placement is what provides the context and therefore the meaning of the conjunction. There are other contexts, such as aspects, but those still gain their relevance based on what house the planets occupy.

I'm here to offer you a simple idea: If you want to understand astrology, under-

stand the houses. If you want to do coherent readings, understand the houses. It's easy, and it's fun — fun like riding a bike instead of just looking at one.

Technical: Houses and Signs

The Earth orbits the Sun, and it also rotates within the zodiac. The zodiac we use is centered around the Earth. Yet objects move through the signs relatively slowly. When we talk about the houses, we're talking about that rotation, the rapid spinning of the Earth on its axis. This is how, during the course of the day, all 12 signs cross the horizon and indeed occupy each of the houses at some time. When someone asks why the time of birth is important, it is because of the speed of the Earth's rotation. A difference of five minutes can change a chart radically — and this is about the houses.

Imagine that the Sun is in Aries. At sunrise, the Sun will be in the east, and Aries will be the rising sign or Ascendant. At noon, the Sun will be high in the sky, and Aries will be on the Midheaven. At sunset, the Sun will be in the west, and Aries will be the setting sign or Descendant. The Sun, Moon, and planets move slowly, and they follow the signs as the world turns.

The houses don't move much. The 1st house is always to the east, just below the horizon. The 12th house is

always to the east, just above the horizon. The 10th house is always at the top of the chart and slightly to the east; the 9th house is at the top and slightly to the west. From any place on Earth, at any time of day or night, you can point to the approximate position of the houses without the use of an ephemeris, a table of houses, or a computer. It's true that the house cusps wiggle in their positions, based on the time of day and the time of year, but the house is always located in the same general direction.

This reminds you that the houses are a mundane affair, associated with existence on our home planet. All the planets follow the course of the Sun through the day; they rise, culminate, and set. If you cast a chart for any given

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moment, the rotation of the Earth is stopped, and the various planets and signs fall into the context of the houses. If you're new to astrology, understanding this one idea will save you years of puzzlement and frustration.

House cusps do not exist physically. They are imaginary lines extending from the Earth, which intersect the various signs. That meeting of a house cusp and a sign is the first step to reading the houses. That's the primary context. Most astrology theories agree that the 4th house represents one's home. What kind of home will someone have? Well, it'll be one kind with Taurus on the 4th, and a very different kind with Aquarius on the 4th.

We might speculate and say that someone with Aquarius on the 4th will be content having all the cables for their electronic gear exposed; it's easier to arrange your stuff and to troubleshoot a

problem that way. Someone with Taurus on the 4th will either have a lot less gear (and it will have wood cabinets), or they'll want the cables tucked into the walls and ceilings where they don't have to look at them — the cables are just tacky.

That is an interpretation. How did we get there? As Debbi-Kempton Smith says in *Secrets from a Stargazer's Notebook*, the house represents the topic, and the sign represents the style of expression of the topic.

Some of the houses have planets associated with them, though it's not as simple as "Mercury rules the 6th house because Virgo is ruled by Mercury." There's another very old set of associations called the "joys." The 6th house is said to be the place where Mars has its joy. The joys, which come from ancient astrology, cover five planets and the two luminaries. (Mercury's joy is the 1st house, the Moon gets the 3rd, Venus gets the 5th, the Sun gets the 9th, Jupiter gets the 11th, and Saturn gets the 12th.) These can pro-

vide clues when deciphering the meaning of a house.

It is true that Mercury rules Gemini and, therefore in a specific chart, whatever house Gemini happens to occupy. When reading a house, you look at what's in the house and where the ruler of the sign connected to that house lands in the chart. Someone might have Leo on the 3rd-house cusp (which covers writing) and the Sun in the 10th (which covers reputation), and be a well-known and respected writer. The houses take on the tone or style of the signs that occupy them. It's the intersection of houses and signs that makes astrology comprehensible.

The signs of the tropical zodiac are each 30 degrees wide. They are the division of the wheel of the heavens into 12 equal slices. The houses (except for Whole Sign and Equal houses) will be of varying sizes. In one chart, the 8th house might be 15 degrees across, while the 11th house is 45 degrees across. This will vary with the time of year, the

HOUSE KEYS

A Basic Introduction to the 12 Places

by Eric Francis Coppolino

Western astrology pretty well agrees on the basic meanings of the houses, but the nuances and application of the ideas differ from astrologer to astrologer. The delineations below are based on my 22 years of practice in several areas: consulting astrology, forensic astrology as a news reporter, and writing horoscope columns.

The meaning of the houses evolves over time. There were no telephones the first time someone delineated the 3rd house, but we need a place to fit this modern invention. So, that would go with the nearest approximation by topic and functionality of the thing or event.

Think of the houses as "the game of life." There's nothing abstract, astrophysical, or mathematical here. The houses are about us, living our lives on Earth — often in a house.

1ST HOUSE

Also called the Ascendant, this is your personal boundary: what distinguishes you from the rest of the world. Sometimes called the house of self-concept, it goes deeper: One must aspire to become and master one's Ascendant, in a kind of quest for incarnation. As the beginning of the chart, it's a personal boundary or entrance to self. The precursor would be the 12th, which has the feeling of gestation, subconscious or unconscious; one should become fully aware, alert, and breathing in the 1st. So, in essence, one is born into this house, and when it's working well, it has that sensation more or less ongoing. There's the sense of questing, and

"that which is being discussed is also arising." Appearances (both innate and contrived), names and identity, how you present yourself, what you call yourself, and what you identify with are covered here, with many clues elsewhere. Gender identity and sexual orientation have a role. The phenomenon of "it becomes what you call it" is a 1st-house thing.

2ND HOUSE

This house covers value, things of value, available cash, and self-esteem. The 2nd is about what you have, and whether and how you value it. It's a direct extension of the 1st, taking things to a deeper or more established level. The 2nd is one of the most reliable sources of information and questions about how a person feels about herself. It describes the sensation of lack or of abundance; how hard you think you have to work for what you want; your idea of what you don't have; and what personal assets assist or limit you. The relationship of money to self-esteem is an important keynote of this house, under the general rubric of "the resources that you're working with." Any planet placed in this house, particularly close to the cusp, can describe a challenge to self-esteem, which would be addressed in the style of that planet (and its sign).

3RD HOUSE

This is a local zone, such as your neighborhood, village, or stomping ground, and who shows up (or whom you discover) there. Neighbors, siblings, and what they say to one another give the house its theme of communication. Also covered are messages and the devices that convey them (starting with notes, postcards, and letters), though generally, distribution is to an audience of

The house represents the topic, and the sign represents the style of expression of the topic.

place on Earth, and, to a lesser extent, the time of day. To give an extreme example, if you cast a chart for Iceland on the winter solstice using Koch houses, the 2nd and 8th houses come out to 92 degrees each! In that chart, the 4th and 10th houses are about six degrees each.

If you cast a chart for the same data using Placidus houses, the 7th house comes out to 120 degrees, intercepting three full signs and containing part of two more. This is where Equal houses or Whole Sign houses could come in handy as a practical tool, though they are obviously not the only game in town.

Astrologers must have access to all their tools, which include different approaches to the houses.

Play around with your astrology software using different places on Earth for the same date and time, and you'll see what I mean. If you cast a chart, using Koch houses, for the winter solstice in Panama City, which is right near the equator, you get a chart with nearly equal houses.

How You Know You Understand a House

An intellectual key that would be helpful to astrology is epistemology. That's the study of how you know what you think you know. It's the philosophical equivalent of fact-checking. When a reporter writing an article states a fact, the editor has a right to ask, "How do you know that?" Astrology needs this concept rather desperately, and I'd like to introduce it today, as it relates to the houses, by offering three keys to knowing when you understand a house.

The first is seeing the relationship between the themes that authors describe. The second is identifying the physical places that a house represents and knowing when you're in one of those places. The third is understanding the human relationships described by a house.

Initially, the various meanings of a house can seem to be an abstract or random pastiche of themes. Astrology students try to memorize them and then match situations to keywords. Let's see, the 8th house represents shared finances, spouses, funeral homes, and really intense sex. The 5th house represents gambling, artists and art studios, children, and sex. The 11th house represents hopes and dreams, your friends, and professional income. This all makes perfect sense if you're on mushrooms.

The key to understanding the houses involves study and experience — lots of study, meaning reading diverse viewpoints by different authors from different eras of astrology, and then

one or a few. The daily routine activities of the household are covered here. This house represents the childhood phase when you're crawling around and bumping into things. The 3rd and its rulers describe talent for writing and communication. The 3rd, particularly late in the house, can also describe the unresolved psychological issues of the father.

4TH HOUSE

The 4th describes the emotional response of the child to the early environment, which is then carried forward as imprinting that manifests in the adult experience. The 4th represents the structure and grounds of the ancestral home, out to the garden wall. In one sense, it expands the 3rd (where one bumps into people's legs under the table), and in another sense, it's a little smaller and even more local than the 3rd (the household set within the village). The 4th, particularly the IC and its ruler, often describes the father's lineage, homestead, estate, and so on. The overall result is a house that describes one's feeling of safety (or lack thereof) in one's physical dwelling, physical body, and emotional body. It's the house of secrets that are confined to the household or immediate family.

5TH HOUSE

All things exciting, entertaining, and a little risky — like art, rock music, teenage-style sex, and the babies that come from free and spontaneous sexual activity — belong to this house. The 5th is fun, but it always runs the risk of things getting serious (such as pregnancy), though risk itself is much of the allure of this dimension. So, the 5th is about more than fun: 5th-house fun needs an edgy quality. Some can get this from sculpting boldly or scaling a

cliff. For some, the thrill of unprotected sex obviates the notion of rearing a child for the next few decades.

In her book *Astrology: A Cosmic Science*, Isabel Hickey references Theosophical literature describing the 5th as the house of "esoteric karma." This implies that there's a deeper undercurrent to this house — for example, being lured in by spontaneous sex and getting pregnant, or going to Las Vegas to gamble and losing everything. That aside, think of the 5th as the art studio, the playroom, the practice room, the rock wall, or any recreational space, what's done there, and whom it's done with. It's okay to get paint on the art studio couch, and it's a great place to fuck. Herein lies a clue to the origin of the universe.

6TH HOUSE

This is the house of "Ritual de lo Habitual" — important everyday things that must be done mindfully, such as the work you do and how you feel about it. Sickness, health, healing, and recovery are described here. Commitment to service or to "the process" is a meta-theme. The ideal nature of the work environment is also described, particularly by the sign on the cusp. Collegial relationships are included and, to some extent, supervisory ones, such as sergeant-level (lieutenants, captains, and generals are in the 10th). Relationships to healers, physicians, and health practitioners of all stripes will be described by occupants of the house, ruling planets, and aspects to these. The 6th describes one's relationship to one's health and wellbeing, and will provide clues to how the notion "psychosomatic" manifests. Qualities of wellness, of weaknesses, and of points of healing can be read here as well. Wellbeing means a positive relationship to life and how one spends one's days.

All in the Houses

reading charts: both natal and mundane. While you're studying, I suggest casting a chart for everything that has a time, such as when you read a news article, and then trying to find the event in the chart.

One of the flaws of modern astrology is its overemphasis on psychology and its de-emphasis on understanding events. Robert Hand once remarked in a personal conversation that "all modern astrology is psychological astrology." What's interesting is how little I read in astrology articles that references the many brilliant psychologists we have to learn from; many astrologers are typically playing psychologist, without much training in the field. Lacking such training, psychological astrology, such as inquiry into someone's motives, is speculative by definition. A news event is a tangible, usually understandable thing in the world. Even when you're doing some

form of psychological astrology, it helps to put the issue onto the ground and learn to see the specifics.

Let's take the first key, seeing and understanding the confluence of themes represented by a house. We can start with the premise that the themes are indeed related — they're not randomly tossed into the house. It's true that they collect over time. There are 12 houses,

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and astrology as we know it has been around for 2,400 years and counting. So, there will be more and more things to include in a house, while the meta-theme of the house that weaves them together remains more or less the same. The 3rd house is the house of brethren, neighbors, gossip, and postcards. It also includes modern personal communication devices like telephones and iPads. The meta-theme is communication devices, used on a relatively small scale.

Understanding the confluence of themes (or meta-theme) of a house takes some study, some imagination, and lots of practice reading charts. Study would include looking at modern definitions of the houses, and then tracing that history back through older books to see some of the seed ideas.

For the early historic meaning, I suggest going back as far as William Lilly in a book called *Christian Astrology*. This was the first astrology textbook published in the English language. Yes, it's fun to dive into ancient

7TH HOUSE

Relationships and projections, meaning your connection point to others, whether real or imagined, are covered by this house. You might think of it as a holographic mirror that reflects your reality back to you by way of the external world and the people who show up in your life. Understanding the contrast between projection and reality is essential to understanding the 7th (and why it can be so confusing). It's not quite accurate to say that everything that happens in the 7th is merely a figment of the mind, but how we perceive things certainly is, and that's almost always a matter of projection. Traditionally, this house is about relationships, partnerships, marriage partners, and open enemies. Because the 7th cusp is on the horizon, this house can serve as an "event horizon," describing what is manifesting or developing and will soon have a direct influence. The 7th covers the local courts, which would mediate between individuals or handle cases involving individuals.

8TH HOUSE

This is the 2nd house of the 7th — hence, it covers shared finances and resources, mutually agreed or contested values, matters of inheritance and dowry, and thus sex as a property right. In practice rather than theory, this house describes the sex one needs the most and is willing to do the most to have. Strong placements here can make someone appealing to a shocking degree, someone who is followed home from school by the guy in the slow-moving car, and so on. The death element, which enters initially through the concept of inheritance, describes relationship to orgasm as well as attitudes toward death. Many shades of ego transformation, surrender to the other, and what one lives and dies for can be read here. In horary and

event charts, this house can point to the "nature and cause of death." I think of the 8th as the house of the secrets that one shares with others, if only in whispers.

9TH HOUSE

The first of the "wide world" houses, this is the region of religion, international affairs and travel, and all things exotic. This is the house of one's personal ethics. Themes of the 9th center around the church and its officials, which expands into beliefs and belief systems, philosophies, theories, and the ideas one lives by (and one's life vision). The 9th describes one's relationship to higher learning and professors. Think of it as a meta-3rd, with a worldly feeling rather than a small-town feeling. Instead of the communication being local, gossipy, or individual, the 9th is about wide-scale publishing and broadcasting, including to a global audience. The 9th covers national and international law, maritime law, and the higher courts in general (specifically, federal and appellate courts). The worldliness of this house expands into cosmic or universal consciousness when someone is doing their spiritual work. The 9th, particularly leaning up against the 10th, can peer into the unresolved psychological material of the mother.

10TH HOUSE

If the 9th is about the church, the 10th is about the government and the corporation, which is a feudal form of government. It describes one's relationship to government and corporate authority as a direct derivative of parental authority. It can describe whether one will be part of the official establishment. Structurally, the 10th represents high command, officers, the board, the president, the admiralty, and anything that goes "all the way to the top." In every-

Greece and go exploring with the guys in togas. It helps to contemplate the joys of the planets, which are apparently sourced in very early Greek astrology. However, reading Lilly, a British astrologer from the 17th century, we start to hear a familiar voice and see a world that we recognize: cases involving someone figuring out where the shipment of fish went, trying to locate a dead body, determining whether the client will inherit money, whether a marriage will last, and various questions that real people ask astrologers to the present day.

Let's look at two house examples somewhat thoroughly. I cannot explore all 12 houses at length for this article, so these are intended as models to help train your thinking. Note that there are different kinds of houses: *angular* (1st, 4th, 7th, and 10th), *succedent* (2nd, 5th, 8th, and 11th), and *cadent* (3rd, 6th, 9th, and 12th). There are many theories that attempt to sum up how these types of houses work. I suggest that you read published ideas about them as com-

mentaries rather than as gospel truth. For the purpose of this article, a house is simply a house.

The 6th House: Doctor's Office, Barnyard, Everyday Life

In a modern context, the 6th is about health and wellbeing. It's also about service, in terms of servitude, slavery, and being an employee. There's the "small animals" aspect of the 6th, and there's the military service aspect. It has also been described as the house of everyday affairs, though it would seem to share this role with the 3rd.

If we refer to Lilly's take on the 6th, he sums it up as "Of Sickness, Servants, Small Cattle." Small animals fit the picture because they're a kind of employee that serves its master. Sheep, goats, donkeys, and dogs all work for a living, and their health is important to the family homestead. In a sense, humans serve them as much as they serve us. This hints at a mutual service theme of the 6th.

Still, it can seem abstract to connect questions of sickness with servitude. The 6th house is where one refers for information about the length of an illness, the diagnosis, and the healing process. The relationship might be that we must, in a sense, live in service or servitude of both sickness and wellness. We live in service of the body, as it serves us — more mutuality.

The gradual (and still ongoing) translation from serving sickness to serving wellness is an interesting evolution of ideas, reflective of society at large. Wellness and health maintenance are still nascent concepts in our society. The 6th can indeed provide clues to both: Neptune in the 6th by transit or natal placement cautions of difficulty making a firm diagnosis, for example. Neptune in the 6th might also describe someone who has challenges keeping a job.

The maintenance factor applies to taking care of animals, taking care of one's job responsibilities, and, for a military person, maintaining their skills and

day practice, it's about one's highest aspirations, one's reputation, being known for one's work, and what one must do to get there. Tenth-house effort involves establishing one's reputation through sustained effort and cultivation of relationships, talent, and integrity. Whatever happens in the 10th can be subjected to special scrutiny, exposure, and public evaluation. There must be an attitude of *noblesse oblige*, of example-setting, and of mentorship.

11TH HOUSE

The 11th is one's personal public, one's friends and acquaintances, one's client base, and an audience out to a countable number of people. Borrowing from Alice A. Bailey, it represents the group rather than the mass. As the 2nd house of the 10th, the 11th describes income and benefits from one's professional activities (which often accrue as a result of cooperation and popularity, both being functions of this house). The 11th is described in some books as the house of hopes and dreams, which you might think of as a positive vision for life. It's the space into which one expands oneself; the house opposite it is the 5th, the creative studio, so you can think of the 11th as the gallery space or performance area (though smaller than a stadium). Anyone who has not done the work of the 9th (cultivating ethics and a vision) and the 10th (working to earn one's reputation) may feel brittle and insecure in the 11th.

12TH HOUSE

This house represents existence in any parallel dimension: in utero (before birth), dreams, the creative imagination, astral projection, hallucinations, drug trips, and related experiences. It has been called the "dustbin of the zodiac" because the 12th is a common place

to accumulate karma, on the basis of "out of sight, out of mind." What ends up there is often left unresolved, hence karma accumulates.

You can think of it as the ancestral attic, or the secret room behind the drawing room bookshelf. (Everyone loves secret rooms, and you have one!)

In the artistic sense, we can be transported to another dimension through this house; for example, the magical experience of a movie seeming real is a perfect 12th-house experience. It's also the house that describes one's relationship with the nonphysical realm. In the most practical sense, what's located in the 12th can have the feeling of having gone missing. Planets there can represent cloaked, veiled, or hidden elements of one's psyche, including missing people and things. In physical space, old books say it describes overwhelming institutions, such as the government of New York City, a large hotel or resort, or any space so big that it takes weeks, months, or years to explore it.

Vedic astrologers say this house is about the pleasures of the bed, which can manifest as an alternate reality that can be vividly real and then vanish into another dimension, sometimes barely memorable, by the time daylight arrives. The 12th is the most encompassing and cosmic of houses, where the difference between truth and illusion is blurred. Twelfth-house events are recognizable by their system of internal logic (like dream logic) that doesn't hold up outside of the space where it originated. It's one of the houses associated with secrets — to wit, the secrets you wouldn't dream of telling other people and that you might even keep from yourself.

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equipment. Indeed, for most people, maintaining their lives takes up most of the day with routine activity. The 6th is where we spend much of our time. Doing it well takes motivation and mastery. If we refer to the joys, Mars having its joy in the 6th references the military service aspect of this house, but also the need for motivation applied to everything we do in this house.

In *Chiron: Rainbow Bridge between the Inner & Outer Planets*, Barbara Hand Clow described the ideal mental state of the 6th as getting lost in one's work. It's the feeling of embarking on a task, then looking up and noticing that three hours have gone by, but it seems like a few minutes. When that happens, you know you're fully involved in what you're doing. Sadly, plenty of people experience boredom at work. That "fully involved" feeling of time going by in an instant means you have a job you love. Boredom means you don't love what you're doing; Gestalt therapy suggests that the underlying feeling is anger (a reference to toxic Mars).

Because the 6th is about work, we might mistake that for career. There are indeed people whose professional ambitions are located in the 6th: They might want to do a job they like, and go home. Or they might just need to work for

money, and not care much about what they do as long as it pays — though that would add the "servitude" theme. I think of the 6th as describing attitudes and values toward work itself, and the 10th as describing aspirations and ambitions. Ideally, we would get the two houses into harmony and integrate their themes.

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Physical spaces described by the 6th are one's office, study, workshop, or work area; the healing room, the doctor's office, or the small medical center (as opposed to a hospital); the barn and its surroundings; and the base camp or training camp for a military operation. In prior eras, people spent much more of their time in the latter two kinds of places. Physical locations of the 6th have

the feeling of purpose, order, and productivity (a bit Virgo-ish and a bit Mars-y).

But the particular style of the space or activity and the specific interpretation of that house in a particular chart are also dependent on the sign on the cusp.

For example, someone with Libra on the natal 6th needs a beautiful and appealing workplace, with light and plants and decent furniture, where people get along. Someone with Sagittarius on the 6th might travel for work, or work across international lines. Someone with Sagittarius on the 6th also needs a lot of space to work, to spread out their various diverse and undoubtedly interesting projects. They should probably design a space with the bookshelves built in.

Relationships of the 6th house tend to be work relationships. These include colleagues, co-workers, supervisors, and clients. While the 7th house is usually considered the house of relationships, it's interesting to note how many of those relationships originate in the 6th. For people who spend as much time at work as most of us do in Western society, the 6th is an important source of social contact, which frequently morphs into 7th-house-type partnerships and marriages. Note that there's a progressive step from the 6th to the 7th in this regard. People who meet as co-workers could collaborate on an idea and become business partners, or fall in love and become marriage partners.



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The 5th House: Children, Sex, Games of Chance, and Art

Let's look at a neighboring house for a second example. Contemporary astrologers seem to associate the 5th house with art and creativity, with children, and with gambling, which I've always found amusing. This is less random a collection than it may seem at first. The meta-theme of the house is the relationship between pleasure, creativity, and risk. Or, paraphrasing Jesus, it's the house where we become as little children, or make them. Children are often unafraid of risks; there's no way to grow without taking some chances — and that's the essence of the 5th.

Lilly devotes nearly all of his chapter on the 5th house to questions of pregnancy, childbirth, and whether a woman will have children and how many. In horary, one would look to the 5th for determining whether a woman is pregnant, how long since a woman has conceived, what time the birth will be, whether it will be a day or night birth, or whether the child will be male or female. As medical science has caught up with most of these matters, we're free to take a wider view of this house. The 5th is a good example of how the meaning of houses develops as society evolves.

One of my teachers once said that procreating does not necessarily mean making children. It can include that, but

now, at least with the relative privileges of Western society, we have the option to procreate as people who create our lives. This includes co-creating in relationships. Yet success is not guaranteed; one must take a risk to live in this way, and that risk has the feeling of a game of chance, or what some describe as speculation.

To embark on a life path as an artist is to gamble or speculate on your own creativity. If you go to school to be an accountant or lawyer, you're a lot more likely to get a job than if you embark on a career as a bass player. That said, many people with professional degrees are now finding themselves in a position where they need to put some real creativity into finding satisfying work.

Unlike those who live in the 6th house, where service and duty are necessary, an artist who lives in the 5th will often live in a way that's pleasurable and fun, in order to maintain the creative flow. There is indeed something childlike about many artists; they are motivated by intentions different from those of people who see their role as to perform a func-

tion. With the 5th, there is the feeling of doing something for its own sake, rather than because you have to.

However, the service aspect of the 6th also has that quality of doing things for their own sake — only you're usually doing whatever that is *for someone else*. Art must always be *in service of the art and the artist first*, and if others like it, all the better. You could make a lot of money as a painter, but it's not guaranteed: That's the element of speculation or risk. Another is the "happy accident" quality of art. Many artists will tell you that one key to their work is honoring mistakes or unexpected outcomes as hidden intention.

Brian Eno, the consummate artist — musician, painter, programmer, producer, philosopher, and midwife to the careers of many talented artists — is depicted in a famous portrait with dice in front of him. (It's called "Portrait of Eno with Allusions," by Peter Schmidt.) Schmidt and Eno invented a method of creative self-guidance called *Oblique Strategies*, a 101-card deck of creative advice, from which the artist draws cards randomly



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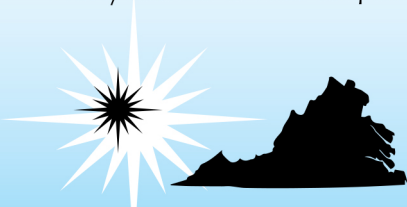


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All in the Houses

for a bit of advice. The deck offers such ideas as “tidy up,” “switch instruments,” “take a break,” or “honor the error as hidden intention.” In true 5th-house style, Eno has combined divination with art, to great success.

Let’s consider the sexual aspects of the 5th house, which are distinct from any other house. (Many houses describe sex, though the 5th has a special flavor.) Clearly, since sex sometimes makes babies, that theme originates from the 5th-house questions, issues, and themes around pregnancy and childbirth. However, we now live in a time when pregnancy is optional, when we just might admit that sex is for fun and that procreation is not just about making babies.

Sex in the style of the 5th is like a spontaneous encounter on the art studio couch. It might be risky. It may involve the chance meeting, echoing the “games of chance” theme of the 5th. It might be sex in the back seat of a car or in the supply room. It’s the sex that happens spontaneously, in the style of teenagers, or of adults still in possession of their volition and individuality. It’s not the marriage bed. There’s no sense of duty with 5th-house sex, there does not have to be a shared bank account, and it may never happen again. Sex in the style of the 5th is creative, passionate, and experimental, just like art. And that’s why it’s so much fun.

Places associated with the 5th house are art studios, recording studios, anywhere games of any kind are played (from casinos to climbing walls to Off-Track Betting), art supply stores, playrooms, adult play spaces, and the recreational area of a house (the man cave — whereas the family room would be part of the 4th).

The relationships of the 5th house include artist–model, artist–assistant, creative collaborators of any kind, bandmates, passionate lovers, young lovers, dealer–player relationships, friendly competitive relationships, and playmates of any stripe.

Transition Zones: Brackish Estuaries of Astrology

Now that we’ve delineated two example houses, let’s introduce a new concept: the transition zone between houses. There is a quirk of the astrological chart that causes a distortion. The houses are visually separated by a line, while the signs don’t get a line; you read the degree number for confirmation of where the new sign begins. This creates the illusion that houses have distinct beginnings and endings, and that the signs blend into one another. I often notice astrology students trying to be sticklers about what house a planet is in.

A house cusp is a like a brackish estuary. Where a body of saltwater meets a body of freshwater, there’s an exchange of the two types of water, which meet at what’s called the “salt front” — the place where mostly salty water transitions into

Not only are the house cusps permeable, but they also represent distinct transition areas, in astrology and human society.

mostly fresh water. The salt front can move up or down the estuary, depending on the tides, the weather, and the time of year. Unusual kinds of creatures live in brackish estuaries, and these are delicate ecosystems.

In my experience, the signs are the elements with the clear beginning and end, and the houses are the elements that blend into one another, like saltwater and freshwater mixing. William Lilly references this in his five-degree rule: Anything coming within five degrees of the house cusp can count as being part of the next house.



Signs do not really have cusps. They begin and end, rather than transition. I recognize that there are other viewpoints; for example, some people born in late Libra feel like they're part Scorpio, though that may be due to having inner planets placed in Scorpio. The sign division is significant for many reasons, especially when considering rulerships. Libra is ruled by Venus, and Scorpio is ruled by Mars. That's a clear distinction. Sign divisions make aspects to the Aries Point, another clear metric.

Yet I suggest experimenting with the idea that not only are the house cusps permeable, but they also represent distinct transition areas, in astrology and human society. The houses are about existence on Earth, where there are many transition areas and people who serve in blended roles, and sometimes these are represented as house cusps.

Let's use the 5th and 6th houses as an example. If the 5th house represents the art studio and the 6th house represents the office, we have a little zone that talks about spaces that serve both purposes and people who work both aspects of life at once. Imagine a place that serves as both studio and office. An herbalist's workshop, where the practitioner is part artist and part clinician, would also count.

I once visited a prominent literary agent living in the Seattle area. She had an office built into her custom-designed kitchen. It was like a fully functional desk nested in right next to the oven and kitchen counter. This is a little like the 4th house (home, kitchen) blending into the 6th house. The creative work she did at her desk bridged the gap with the flavor

of the 5th. There are professional bakers and caterers who work out of their homes; you might look for symbols of their workplace where the 4th and 5th houses meet. Look for planets that straddle the cusp; study anything unusual about the meeting zone.


Each of the houses has a transition area on either end. You can delineate them using our three-step guide: confluence of themes, physical spaces, and relationships.

The state of mind associated with the house also counts. For example, the 12th house is associated with dreams and trancelike states. The 1st house is associated with some tangible notion of identity and physical reality. Yet many people walk around all day long in a mild (or deep) trance state, leading one astrologer I've read to somewhat humorously define the 12th house as representing "normal waking consciousness." This perplexed me a bit; I've considered this idea many times over the years, and it's an interesting rubric for the 12th.

The film *Waking Life* describes lucid dreaming, and the action morphs back and forth over the 1st/12th line. The film addresses the question of what it means to be dreaming versus what it means to be awake. This is the inherent question of the 1st/12th line.

Seen another way, the 1st house is *who we think and say we are*, and the 12th house is *who we know we are but would never (or rarely) reveal*. I consider the 12th house that of unspeakable secrets. (Contrast this with the 8th, the secrets we love to tell others, and the 1st house, which is more like a press release.)

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All in the Houses

As another example, the 10th, 11th, and 12th houses all have a public quality, though it expands from house to house. The 10th is about one's reputation, the 11th is about groups where the number of people is countable (the small public), and the 12th is very large audiences (the general public, a mass readership, and so forth). This works as a gradient, with the house cusps describing the transition areas as the size of the audience or public increases. Follow that pattern through the 12th and into the 1st, and we could say, "It all comes back to you."

In order to read a chart, it's necessary to loosen up your thinking and not be as rigid as many modern theories of astrology strive to be. Astrology requires imagination, observation, and experience as well as study of its various theories and supposed orthodoxies. I recognize that the classical astrology movement, in its many forms, often pressures students into thinking there are absolutes, or that the reading of a

chart must drive toward some provable resolution of the question.

However, astrology is never provable; it is at best demonstrable. Reading a chart is always based on value judgments, and it's always subjective. Understanding what houses mean to you helps you orient a little more objectively. You must go through a conscious process to assign a specific topic of a reading to a specific house.

There are lots of astrology books and articles and theories. In truth, no chart you will read as part of your actual work as an astrologer will be in one of those books or articles. You're almost always reading a chart that has not been written about or that no other astrologer has ever seen. Therefore, you must bring your own interpretative skills and your own fresh — and informed — perspective.

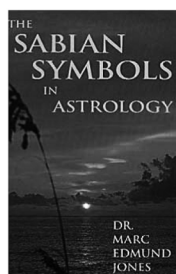
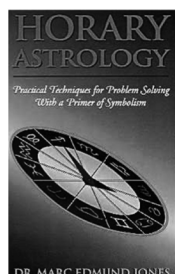
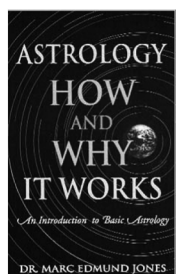
The Whole Sign House Non-Controversy

Long before Project Hindsight told us about Whole Sign houses, and way before astrologers started dividing up into camps accusing one another of

reading the wrong kind of chart, newspaper astrologers were using Whole Sign houses as part of their busy trade. They call them "solar houses," meaning houses counted from the Sun's sign position, with the first degree of the Sun's sign counting as the 1st-house cusp. When someone knows how to read using this method, you can get stunning relevance and accuracy without any natal data at all. With the houses, it's not the system you use but rather how you use it. It's necessary to be flexible and be open to as many sources of information as possible.

Then came the monograph *Whole Sign Houses* by Rob Hand, which is on my short list of books I would bring to another planet. Rob is a philosopher who takes a circumspect view of the matter, which I would recommend. This is not a question of right and wrong; rather, it's a matter of Whole Sign houses adding an extra layer to the chart. While I don't have space to give a detailed chart example, we can illustrate an idea using a random chart cast for the moment I'm writing this article. (See **Diagram**, following page.)

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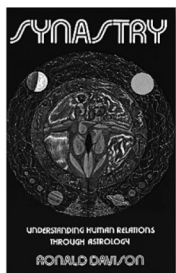
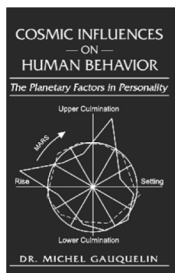
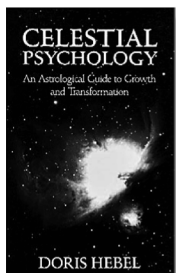
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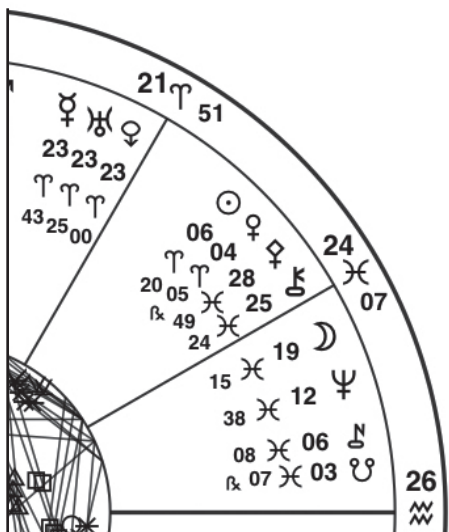


Diagram: 7th/8th-house chart segment

This diagram (using Koch houses) shows the 7th and 8th houses of a chart. Using Whole Sign houses, we would say that the 7th house actually begins at 1° Aquarius rather than at 26° Aquarius. Under this approach, all of those Pisces planets would count as being in the 8th house. The 8th cusp (using quadrant houses of some kind, such as Koch or Placidus) — in this chart, 24° Pisces — would do what a cusp is really supposed to do: *indicate a peak of energy within the Whole Sign 8th house itself*. This method inherently blends Whole Sign houses and quadrant houses.

There are other ways to look at this. For example, you can view all the Pisces in the 7th as a wide zone where

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All in the Houses

the themes of the 7th and 8th houses overlap. The overlay widens the transition zone in the approach that I described above. It's true that the themes of the 7th and 8th have a lot in common (the 8th formalizes and monetizes the relationship commitments of the 7th), and this chart emphasizes that fact. For example, the Moon is in the transition zone between the 7th and 8th. Neptune inherently has a wide orb of influence, which expands the effect, and so on.

*With the houses,
it's not the system
you use but rather
how you use it.
It's necessary to be flexible.*

Rather than debating what house system is right, why not look at the situation you're reading for, then look at the chart and ask how you would best describe the scenario astrologically. Just embarking on that questioning process will help to loosen up your thinking. If you think of the chart as a sketch with some interesting details, rather than as a concrete map of reality, your approach to reading will become more flexible, and you'll give yourself room to experiment. As astrologers, we must mediate a dialogue between the subject matter and the chart. Or, as Melanie Reinhart describes the process, it's a metalogue: *That which is being discussed is arising.*

Astrology is a living system. Its meaning, purpose, practices, and customs are redefined many times by each new generation of astrologers. Rather than being strictly adherent to history, it's wise to know where you're coming from, and pay attention to where you are and where you're heading.

Houses are a tool — granted, an important tool for reading a chart. What they teach is not law but rather guideline, similar to the relationship between music theory and music itself. Like music, astrology is part art, part craft. It's both technical and intuitive, rooted in tradition and also a facet of the modern world. If you honor both sides of these various equations, and offer some curiosity and passion, you will bring elegance and originality to your work.

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Eric Francis Coppolino has been a consulting astrologer for 22 years, writing newspaper and magazine horoscopes all along the way. He's the astrologer for the New York Daily News and the Omega Institute, and hosts Planet Waves FM for the Pacifica Radio Network. He offers online courses, including one called "It's All in the Houses." For more information, you may contact him at efc@ericfrancis.com



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