

HOUSE SYSTEMS: Differences Between Them

IHSX

An Information Special from Astro Communications Services, Inc.

House systems are methods of dividing the sphere into 12 parts. Quite a lot of controversy exists among astrologers as to which of several methods “works” the best — or if, indeed, any of them work! (The latter point of view is generally held among Cosmobiologists, who study charts primarily on a 90° dial which ignores house positions entirely.)

Placidus

The majority of astrologers in the English-speaking world use the **Placidus** house system, but this is not because it has been “proven” best, but rather because the Placidus system was the first one to be widely published and therefore got the inside track. It was invented in the 17th century by an Italian monk, Placidus de Titus, and became popular in English-speaking countries with the annual publication of Raphael’s Almanac, which included Placidian tables. Books that include Placidus house tables are still the most easily and inexpensively available in most places. Therefore they have been widely used over the years by astrology teachers who, of course, tell their students to use them, thus perpetuating their popularity.

Some astrologers would disagree with the observation that the Placidus system is unproven, because the Gauquelein research (one of astrology’s only claims to statistical proof) puts forth sectors that are closely akin to Placidian houses. This is undoubtedly a point in favor of Placidus, but nevertheless, we dare say that the majority of people use Placidus houses merely because of our first reason given above, rather than the latter.

In the Placidus system the house cusp curves are formed by points each of which trisects its own diurnal or nocturnal semi-arc. If you are not familiar with spherical astronomy, that definition is probably, shall we say, less than clear, but a detailed description of this complex exercise in mathematics is beyond the scope of this **Information Special**. For now, important facts to point out are:

1. It is an **unequal** house system, resulting in interceptions in some locations (see also **Information Special IHX** — *Intercepted Signs: Why All Houses Aren’t Equal*);
2. The Midheaven is the cusp of the 10th house and the Ascendant is the cusp of the first house;
3. The system gets very weird near the polar regions — over half the zodiac signs can be intercepted (not appearing on any cusp); and finally (but very important that you know)
4. **The Placidus system is Astro’s computer default** — if you don’t specifically request an alternate system when you order, Placidus is what you will get! (Majority rules.)

Koch

In the Koch system only the diurnal semi-arc of the MC is trisected. The MC is then rotated backwards through its diurnal semi-arc to the horizon to determine the 11th house cusp, and then again to determine the 12th and so on. The Koch system (first published, though not invented, by Dr. Walter Koch, 1895-1970) originated in Germany, home of the Uranian and Cosmobiology schools, so if a Cosmobiologist looks at houses at all, they will no doubt be drawn in the Koch system. This is the next most popular system after Placidus, and is the choice of this author (whose technical specialty is Uranian/Cosmobiology) not because anyone has satisfactorily proven its superiority to me, but merely because I like my own chart best in the Koch system. (And believe me, for most astrologers, this is the only honest answer!)

Joyce Wehrman, whose system of **Winning Transits** is offered through Astro (see **Information Special IWIX**), was a strong advocate of Koch houses, and Koch house cusps are an important part of her *Winning* system.

Equal

Astro’s third most frequently ordered house system is Equal Houses. No doubt this is because a significant number of people prefer to avoid the whole controversy of dealing with interceptions and unequal houses. Here the ecliptic is divided into twelve equal houses by lunes (think of lunes as sort of like 12 sections of an orange) whose poles are those of the ecliptic itself. The Ascendant is the cusp of the first house, and each successive house cusp is then the same degree of the next sign. The Midheaven rarely winds up on the 10th house cusp and instead usually falls somewhere in the 9th or 10th house. This system is said to have been used in India around 3000 BC (and is still used there today), so it “takes the prize” for antiquity, so far as we know.

Of the other house systems we offer, none are ordered in any great volume, but each has its strong advocates, so that is why we make them available. So...in no particular order:

Meridian

Here the MC is the cusp of the 10th house and the East Point or Equatorial Ascendant (whichever you prefer to call it) is the cusp of the 1st house. (The East Point is defined in **Information Special IXBX**, which covers the freebies you can request on your basic charts). The equator is divided into 12 almost equal arcs by lunes from the poles of the celestial equator, and the intersections of the lunes with the ecliptic are the house cusps. This system is fairly widely used among Uranian astrologers.

Campanus

This system divides the prime vertical into 12 equal arcs by lunes whose poles are the north and south points of the horizon. The house cusps are the degrees at which the lunes intersect the ecliptic. As with other unequal house systems, there is extreme distortion at birthplaces far from the equator. Two brothers, Joseph and Matthew Campanus, who lived in the late 15th century, may have originated this system, but it is also possible that it dates back to the 13th century. This system has had strong support from a number of famous astrologers; notably, Dane Rudhyar and Charles Jayne.

Regiomontanus

Here we have the celestial equator divided into 12 equal segments beginning at the East Point, and lines perpendicular to the prime vertical drawn through the points of division and projected onto the ecliptic as house cusps. This system is identical to Campanus for birthplaces on the equator, and like Campanus it gets extremely distorted in the polar regions. It was invented in the 15th century by a German astronomer whose name, of course, was Regiomontanus.

Alcabitius

This one dates back to at least the 1st century AD, and is the one used in the few surviving examples of Greek horoscopes. The Ascendant is the first house cusp, and from there house cusps are determined by means of trisecting the diurnal semi-arc. A point in favor of this system is that even though it is unequal, it does not fall apart in polar regions. But at certain birthtimes, there can be a large variation in house size, no matter what the latitude.

Porphyry

Attributed to a Neoplatonist named, of course, Porphyry, this system dates from the 3rd century AD. The Midheaven is the cusp of the 10th, the Ascendant is the cusp of the 1st, and intermediate houses divide each quadrant equally as measured on the ecliptic. As with many of the others, you get very strange distortions in polar regions.

Topocentric

This one is considerably different in that it was derived empirically, rather than from mathematical theory. Its theoretical basis was formulated after empirical evidence for house cusps was gathered through the study of primary directions. It was introduced in the 20th century by two Argentine astrologers, Wendel Polich and Anthony Nelson Page. Its cosmography is topocentric rather than geocentric, meaning that the birthplace remains on the surface of the Earth, rather than being projected to the center in order to take advantage of the great circles of the celestial sphere. It is interesting that although the mathematical basis for this

system is entirely different, it produces cusps that are within 1° of the Placidus cusps up to about 56° north or south latitude. Avid proponents of the system would say that this is not enough, for primary directions to topocentric cusps “work” within very few minutes of arc. Those interested in exploring this system might like to order Dr. Margaret Millard’s **The Genetics of Astrology: A Study of the Topocentric System**, which demonstrates these extremely close primary direction “hits” through fascinating case studies of members of her family. (B209X — \$9.95)

Recommended Reading

Those who are interested in much more detailed and technical explanations of these house systems than are given here should write to Mary Downing, Executive Secretary of NCGR, P.O. Box 1220, Dunkirk, MD 20754-9998, (or call (301) 731-5954) and inquire about getting copies of the technical articles from the Winter 1988-1989 **NCGR Journal**. That issue contains an excellent “Astrological House Formulary” by Michael Munkasey, and a wealth of other articles by Dr. Millard and by other prominent technical astrologers, that are sure to be an intellectual feast for anyone interested in astrological mathematics and computer technology. Much of the material in this issue is just not available from other sources.

Other **Information Specials** that relate to this one:
IHSCX House Systems: How to Choose One
IIHX Intercepted Signs: Why All Houses Aren’t Equal

And a way to compare **all** of the house systems according to **the** most important measurement — **your** chart:

House Comparisons

This one page Add-On calculation option lists all house cusps (degrees and minutes) for all nine of the different systems that have been described in this **Information Special**.

Or, since some of our options do require that you order a basic natal chart in order to get them, why not request a different house system every time you get your chart until you have all nine? Then you can line them all up and consider the differences according to your own personal frame of reference.

But remember — if you **don’t** request an alternative at the time you place your order, your charts will come in **Placidus**. **Exceptions** to this are our regular customers, who, if they request, may have an alternate house system specified in their accounts as a personal standard default to be automatically used every time they order.