



The Signs and their Divisions

...each sign of the zodiac has something to contribute to the whole, and each individual is a potential channel.¹

Dennis Elwell

The signs of the zodiac, as they sit on the different natal house cusps or as they fall [intercepted](#) between two cusps, offer valuable information about our creative expression, authentic desires, talents and aspirations and how we can go about our deliberate creation in more powerful ways. When we live out the nature of the signs in various areas of life, we generate a sense of wellbeing and fulfillment. Think of the zodiac as a treasure trove of counsel, inspiration, ideas and encouragement, available whenever we ask! By examining the signs and their divisions, we can fine tune our understanding of authentic needs in ourselves and clients, making deliberate creation easier to leverage as vital energy flows freely.

The twelve signs of the zodiac are divided up into numerous fragments – polarity, modality, element, orientation, decan, dwad – each modifying and adding nuances to the nature of the original sign. Understanding these divisions can help illuminate the subtle, and not so subtle, differences between the *degrees of the signs* and how they naturally express. The following explores the divisions of the signs and their meanings, with an emphasis on the relationship to health and vitality.

Polarity

Opposition is the basis of polarity...²

--Joanne Wickenburg

Firstly, each sign has a polarity. Traditionally called *male/female* or *positive/negative*, this represents a *direct* verses *receptive*, or yin/yang orientation of the signs. All the FIRE and AIR signs are yang (♂ ♀ ♁ ♂ ♁ ♁), with FIRE having the strongest charge. Think of them as outgoing, direct and certain in nature. All the Earth and Water signs are yin in polarity (♁ ♁ ♁ ♁ ♁ ♁), with WATER the more deeply yin of the two. Think of them as

receptive, embracing and responsive in nature. Signs of the same polarity aspect each other by the 60 degree *sextile*, the 120 degree *trine* and the 180 degree *opposition*. Signs of the opposite polarity aspect each other by the 30 degree and 150 degree *inconjunct*, and the 90 degree *square*. The balance of polarity in the chart reveals how the individual is *charged*. Is there a positive charge that needs to assert overtly and directly, or is there a negative charge that needs to soak up energy and respond to it? What is the balance between the two?

Quadruplicities or Modalities

One way of understanding the various energy patterns represented by the zodiac is to analyze them in terms of their modalities. ³

--Stephen Arroyo

Each sign has a modality or form of motion. These are called the quadruplicities, as they link two **elementally different** signs together by the 90 degree square and two elementally like signs by the 180 degree opposition.

Cardinal	Fixed	Mutable
♈ ♀	♌ ♎	♊ ♋
♉ ♋	♍ ♏	♈ ♉

The Cardinal signs all have a sense of initiation and action about them. They are on the move! ♈ as a cardinal sign can be assertive and initiating on a physical, body, level. It gets what it wants with a direct push, and does not usually mind feeling a push back. This cardinal fire sign on the Ascendant needs plenty of activity and physical challenge.

♉ is emotionally active. The body may not be moving, yet the undercurrents are. It can get what it wants through the use of emotional power. This cardinal water sign on the Ascendant needs bonds and connections to traverse the world of feelings. ♋ as a cardinal sign

initiates, and processes, through the intellect and verbal communication. It talks and charms its way in, or out, of everything. Libra on the Ascendant needs social interaction and mental stimulation where Capricorn, by contrast, initiates tangibly. ♄ is not known by its words, but by what it forms or builds. Cardinal earth on the Ascendant needs access to raw materials and the development of honed skills to fashion their empires.

The fixed signs are about stability and tenacity. ♋ stabilizes on a material level where ♎ represents unwavering creativity and self-expression. ♏ perseveres emotionally, and ♐ represents immovable intellect and conceptualization.

The mutable signs are adapting, fluid and obliging. ♌ adjusts and flows intellectually. ♍ represents flexibility and service in practical ways. ♎ courses with spontaneous versatility, and ♏ dissolves into a stream of moving feelings and emotions. All mutable signs tend to talk, a lot.

Analyzing the chart for emphasis by modality leads to a greater understanding of the natural energy requirements of the native. Is a cardinal sign rising, indicating the need to initiate and take control? Is it a fixed sign, bent on endurance? Is it mutable, ready to adapt and adjust to outer circumstances?

Elements

You can really figure out the elements by envisioning them in their physical nature...⁴

--Stephen Arroyo

The next division of the signs are the Triplicities or Elements, which correspond to the basic natural manifestations of fire, earth, air and water. They divide the zodiac into four groups of three based on the 120 degree trine, one of each modality, all the same polarity:

Fire

Earth

Air

Water

♈ ♈ ♈

♉ ♉ ♉

♊ ♊ ♊

♋ ♋ ♋

Fire signs - ♈ ♈ ♈ - represent pure energy and inspiration. They are the fastest conductors by element. Fire tends to be the most naturally active, giving and receiving energy freely. A person with the sun in the pragmatic and sometimes plodding Taurus who has fiery Aries rising will have quicker and more immediate energy than if the Ascendant were in the earthy Capricorn. With the Ascendant or Sun in Fire, physical activity is important. All that conducted energy needs to move and forms of expression that are playful and challenging suit best: Sports, competitions, adventure walks, biking, martial arts and creative pursuits like dance, music (especially drumming) and active theater.

The next most conductive element is the mental and relationship oriented Air - ♊ ♊ ♊. These are intellectual signs, and although they conduct life force quickly, they can also dissipate it equally as fast through the release of nervous energy. The mind can wear the body out if time is not given to physical activities that burn up the abundantly produced adrenaline. Air Ascendants or Sun signs can encourage the vital force through disciplines that contain an component of intrigue, philosophy or historical tradition. They need physical activities that also stretch the intellect: field study and research of all kinds, martial arts, acting, horseback riding, hunting, ballet, games of strategy or Olympic sports fit the criteria.

Next in line of conductivity come the sensitive and feeling water signs - ♋ ♋ ♋. Here energy conducts unpredictably though it is not necessarily sluggish. (Consider what happens when a live wire falls into a stream!) This element can be diffuse though, and energy levels may prove inconsistent, like the ebb and flow of the ocean tides. Water also takes on the energy of the immediate environment, always seeking the lowest common denominator, mirroring the joy or sorrow, health or dysfunction of those around them. Activities that support water's conduction of the vital force include anything that awakens the feelings and capture the imagination: Music, poetry, dance, artistic pursuits, relationships, water sports of all kind, surfing, sailing, swimming, skiing, snow boarding, scuba diving, and activities done in emotionally clear and un-manipulative environments.

The pragmatic and solid Earth signs - ♁ ♋ ♎ - are the 'resistors'. They ground energy as opposed to conduct it. Those born with an earth sign rising can be slower to develop in childhood, gaining strength as they mature. Diet is important here, as it can be hard, at first, to assimilate nutrition. The vital force will increase naturally with time, especially with Capricorn, (who can be prone to illness or weakness at birth) and may be enhanced by encouraging earthy activities like gardening, pottery, sculpting and building (arts and crafts). The pursuit of a martial art or yoga can teach those with earth rising how to animate and conduct *chi* energy. They may find they act as an essential grounding force for those around them, especially the versatile air and the exuberant fire signs.

Nurturing the basic energy drives of the elements can help improve and sustain good health. Astrologer/author Stephen Arroyo said, “*Everyone has to feed themselves at the air, fire, earth and water levels.*”⁵ A predominance of fire needs activity and exhilaration. Earth wants to ground energy in practical ways. Air wants a diet of mental stimulation and water needs a pool of feelings to immerse in. Feeding at this level is as vital to wellbeing as what is set on the dining room table.

Decanates of the Elements

*It may be mentioned that these influences (decanates) are real and actual in their natures, quite as much so as those of the signs.*⁶

--Alan Leo

The elements of the signs are further divided into decans, or divisions of 10 degrees. There are several traditional ways to assign the decanates although the following is the most popular, and the one I like! Here each sign is divided into three lots of 10 degrees, the first taking on the nature of the sign itself. The second decan takes on qualities of the **next sign in its element** and the third taking on the subsequent sign of its element. The sub-rulers, and their aspects to other planets and the original sign ruler, are always important to consider.



♈Aries

0-10 degrees ♈ - ♈

This is a raw and vigorous decan with the assertive and action packed energy of Aries expressing without modification. It needs to release a potent, healthy aggression.

10-20 degrees ♈ - ♋

This decan modifies the energy of Aries with the life force of the Sun. Here the expression is more aspiring and determined—able to stick to goals easier and be magnanimous.

20-30 degrees ♈ - ♌

The Jupiter decan brings wisdom to the Aries fire, filling it with a greater sense of adventure and understanding of the big picture. They can be unsettled, seeking and philosophical.

♉Taurus

0-10 degrees ♉ - ♉

The first decan of Taurus is creative, sensual and obliging. Once decided, there is no changing them. Takes stubborn to new levels—can see a project through to completion.

10-20 degrees ♉ - ♊

This decan adds the mercurial powers of discrimination and flexibility. Sensuality is still strong, yet needs a more social or intellectual expression. Some affinity for change.

20-30 degrees ♈ - ♉

The Saturn decan increases the need to express healthy ambition by setting and reaching goals. Less indulgent, more serious. Given to being thrifty, enterprising and resourceful.

♊ Gemini

0-10 degrees ♊ - ♊

Talkative, curious and flighty, this decan needs to multitask like nobodies business. Fluid and changeable, this is the hardest sign to pin down. Loves to learn—eternal student.

10-20 degrees ♊ - ♋

This Venus decan brings fine arts, creativity and elegance to the mental energy of Gemini. Needs to develop personal one-to-one relationships—adds sensuality, yet still restless.

20-30 degrees ♊ - ♌

Aquarius increases social consciousness to this decan and the ability to deal with the larger whole. Hates routine, thinks big and thrives on excitement, stimulation and surprise.

♋ Cancer

0-10 degrees ♋ - ♋

The double lunar symbolism brings extreme sensitivity, intuition and empathy with those in the environment. Receptive and giving. Needs outlet for deep and primordial emotions.

10-20 degrees ♋ - ♌

This decan modifies Cancer with a powerful survival instinct and the ability to delve into the unseen or occult. Less vacillating, more determined. Emotions contained then explode.

20-30 degrees ♋ - ♍

Compassion and feeling for others paramount. Extreme sensitivity to psychic undercurrents and needs to develop creative channels to express this ability. Longing for divine love.

♌ Leo

0-10 degrees ♌ - ♌

Strong vitality. Enterprising, confident, noble and devoted to those they love. Needs to shine in the spotlight in some way to emphasize their sense of uniqueness. Ego-centric.

10-20 degrees ♈ - ♉

This decan adds the abundance of Jupiter and the urge for freedom. Needs open spaces.

More abrupt, less diplomatic. The truth is spoken without hesitation. Philosophical.

20-30 degrees ♈ - ♈

The Mars, or Aries, decan increases aggressive and assertive powers. Apt to be impetuous and quick to act. Generous, flamboyant and needs independence. Knows what they want and how to get it.

♍ Virgo

0-10 degrees ♍ - ♍

Active and astute mind that needs to come out of its shell. Shy and restrained, they contain feelings inside their potent thoughts. Working with others brings them to their full glory.

10-20 degrees ♍ - ♎

This decan awakens ambition and pragmatic concerns. Stabilizes the restless Mercury so that much can be achieved. More serious, less optimistic. Desire to teach and learn.

20-30 degrees ♍ - ♍

The Venus (Taurus) decan brings creativity, sensuality and a desire to socialize to analytical Virgo. Less compulsive in nature; more inclined to embrace the circle of friends. Needs outlets.

♎ Libra

0-10 degrees ♎ - ♎

Easy going, with a cultivated and gentle nature. Nothing coarse or raw here. Sensual and artistic; social and attracting. Doesn't like to do things alone. Needs to express creativity.

10-20 degrees ♎ - ♏

This decan enhances the love of freedom, revolution and experimentation. Can be a rebel yet hates to upset the apple cart. Mind powerful and fixed. More stubborn; less vacillating.

20-30 degrees ♎ - ♎

This decan brings a refreshing mutability and lively mental approach. Intuitive yet extremely restless in nature. Finds it hard to decide; easy to bolt. Creative writing strong.

♏ **Scorpio**

0-10 degrees ♏ - ♏

This decan has a glass smooth surface underneath which flows the turbulent waters of emotion, upheaval and desire. Potent nature that needs creative, positive outlets in life.

10-20 degrees ♏ - ♎

The Neptune decan adds empathy, compassion and longing to the powerhouse of Scorpio. Victim or savior, redeemer or deviant. Seems to be little room for in between.

20-30 degrees ♏ - ♎

The lunar (♌) decan softens Scorpio, modifying the sign with compassion, love and the desire to give and nurture. Psychic abilities strong. Conflict between the need to contain vs express.

♐ **Sagittarius**

0-10 degrees ♐ - ♐

This decan needs to explore the world, figuratively or literally. Unstable nature that is always on the go. Loves freedom, friends and cutting edge excitement. Trendy and fun.

10-20 degrees ♐ - ♐

The Mars (Aries) decan adds a measure of assertive action and doubles the desire for independence. Spontaneous to the point of risk, there is a need to test the courage and ability. Wants space.

20-30 degrees ♐ - ♌

The Sun (Leo) brings containment and staying power to restless Jupiter. Vision is strong and goals are necessary. Generous and gregarious. Seeks adventure for a higher purpose.

♑ **Capricorn**

0-10 degrees ♑ -

The healthy ambition is well developed here, along with practicality and general desire for self-sufficiency. Very capable. Can be reclusive. May work alone, but always working.

10-20 degrees ♄ - ♂

Venus softens Capricorn with increased sensuality, artistic affinity and refinement. Must watch overindulgence if Venus is stronger than Saturn. More social, less introspective.

20-30 degrees ♄ - ♎

Mercury lightens Capricorn with a swift and alert intellect, fresh curiosity and flirtatious appeal. Can be critical if unhappy. Needs practical and intellectual means of expression.

♊ Aquarius

0-10 degrees ♊ - ♊

Powerful mind set. Can be dogmatic if Saturn is stronger than Uranus. Willful, capable and self-contained. Maturity brings insight, and revolutionary ideas bordering on genius.

10-20 degrees ♊ - ♋

Increases curiosity, refinement and attention to details. Needs practical application for ideas and goals. Future oriented. More friendly, flexible and flirtatious; less predominate.

20-30 degrees ♊ - ♌

The Venus (Libra) decan enhances Aquarius with social desires, creativity and sensual expression. Aspects between Uranus and Venus bring freedom-closeness paradox.

Humanitarian.

♋ Pisces

0-10 degrees ♋ - ♋

Tremendous longing for the ineffable. Needs to seek fulfillment through the facilitating of others. Easy to get lost in a sea of feelings and impression. Intuitive, sensitive and creative.

10-20 degrees ♋ - ♎

The lunar decan increases psychic sensitivity, moodiness and susceptibility to movements in the unconscious. Very giving nature. Retreats from challenge. Needs to nurture others.

20-30 degrees ♋ - ♎

This decan strengthens and protects Pisces with a large measure of survival power. Not so likely to be victim/savior. Less retreating; more independent and adventurous. Most active.

Orientation of the signs

“Each sign sees things in an entirely different way...because each perceives the world in a different way.”

--Richard Idemon 1985

Richard Idemon proposed a new and important addition to the division of the signs which he called *orientation or perspective*.^{7, 8} This orientation revolves around time and space, a kind of *Einstein-like* theory of astrology. Where Einstein said that *what was observed is dependent on the observer*, Idemon suggested that what is observed by each sign is also dependent on that sign’s point of view.

Consider Aries. What sort of orientation or viewpoint does this positive, fiery, cardinal sign have? Aries experiences things in an **immediate** way with an orientation towards self, right here, right now! Goals are focused and single minded, while they last. Contrast this to the orientation of the yin (polarity), watery, mutable sign of Pisces. Here the orientation is defuse and mysterious, moving out towards *everything, everywhere, all the time*. The following summary divides the signs up into three groups of orientation, each containing all of the elements—fire, earth, air and water.

Personal Orientation (towards pleasure and survival or Me + Me)

- ♈ me and me . . . the pleasure of my will
- ♉ me and my possessions, the pleasure my senses
- ♊ me and my mind, the pleasure my thoughts
- ♋ me and my emotions and the pleasure of my feelings

Social Orientation (me + you, relating, away from self and towards others)

- ♌ hey you, watch me! Play and performance
- ♍ hey you're different, me and you through comparison and contrast
- ♎ hey I like you! Me and you through harmonizing and relating
- ♏ hey how you doing? Me and you through erotic transformation

Collective Orientation (me + the transpersonal, principles and ideals)

- ♈ me and the collective truth
- ♉ me and the collective manifestation
- ♊ me and the collective humanitarianism
- ♋ me and the collective unconscious

These orientations reflect a perspective or viewpoint from *personal, social and transpersonal* values. Each orientation ends with a Water sign, echoing the act of birth and separation, and is begun anew with a Fire sign, expressing the born again quality and enthusiasm of that element. The cycle starts all over again, in circular fashion, as Pisces dissolves into the collective unconscious and springs forward again as the self-reflecting Aries.

The orientation of a sign helps us understand the energy expressed by each section of the Zodiac, giving ideas to how deliberate creation can come into authentic alignment there. If a sign with *social orientation* is found rising, the energy is best flowed through interactions and relationships with others. If it is a *personal orientation*, the need is for self-development. If a *transpersonal orientation* predominates, universal interests come to the foreground. Honoring the orientation of the signs results in a more authentic and healthy approach to life, and more powerful deliberate creation!

Dwadashamshas and the Self-Similar Nature of the Zodiac

*A self-similar object is one whose component parts resemble the whole... This reiteration of patterns occurs at progressively smaller scales and can, in the case of abstract mathematical entities, continue indefinitely, so that each part of each part, when magnified, bears an exact resemblance to the whole, the likeness continuing with the parts of the parts and so on **ad infinitum**.*⁹

--Alan Richmond

The final consideration here of the division of the signs is the Dwadashamshas, the Hindu word for *division of twelve*. In use long before fractal geometry became popular, (which, like occult teaching, tells us that within the division of each part is mirrored the whole), this technique divides each sign into twelve equal parts of 2.5 degrees. Those unfamiliar with this method may be startled, yet considering current theories in quantum physics and *self-similar geometry*, it makes perfect sense to find each of the twelve separate signs reflecting the entire zodiac within them.

Sign	First Decanate Degrees				Second Decanate Degrees				Third Decanate Degrees			
	0	2.5	5	7.5	10	12.5	15	17.5	20	22.5	25	27.5
♈	♈	♉	♊	♋	♌	♍	♎	♏	♐	♑	♒	♓
♉	♉	♊	♋	♌	♍	♎	♏	♐	♑	♒	♓	♈
♊	♊	♋	♌	♍	♎	♏	♐	♑	♒	♓	♈	♉
♋	♋	♌	♍	♎	♏	♐	♑	♒	♓	♈	♉	♊
♌	♌	♍	♎	♏	♐	♑	♒	♓	♈	♉	♊	♋
♍	♍	♎	♏	♐	♑	♒	♓	♈	♉	♊	♋	♌
♎	♎	♏	♐	♑	♒	♓	♈	♉	♊	♋	♌	♍
♏	♏	♐	♑	♒	♓	♈	♉	♊	♋	♌	♍	♎
♐	♐	♑	♒	♓	♈	♉	♊	♋	♌	♍	♎	♏
♑	♑	♒	♓	♈	♉	♊	♋	♌	♍	♎	♏	♐
♒	♒	♓	♈	♉	♊	♋	♌	♍	♎	♏	♐	♑
♓	♓	♈	♉	♊	♋	♌	♍	♎	♏	♐	♑	♒
♔	♔	♈	♉	♊	♋	♌	♍	♎	♏	♐	♑	♒

All placements may be evaluated through the Dwadashamshas, including the planets, luminaries, asteroids, Arabic parts, midpoints, angles and house cusps. They can offer particular insight when applied to the Ascendant, natively or in return charts or progressions. **The ruling planet of each subdivision is considered as well to refine the interpretation.** This brings clearer distinctions between degrees of the signs, even when they are within small orbs of conjunction.

For example, an individual with 20 degrees of Taurus rising natively falls into a Capricorn (Saturn ruled) decanate and a Capricorn Dwadashamsha. This is a powerful grounding force, and although this combination indicates ambition and capability, it may take time, discipline (Capricorn) and patience (Taurus) for the vital force to build up to a point of productive expression. If that same Taurus rising was at 18 degrees, it would fall into a Mercury ruled decanate (Virgo) and a Jupiter ruled Dwadashamsha (Sagittarius). This quickens the ability to conduct energy, indicating a more communicative, spontaneous nature. More playful! With only a two degree difference, a subtle yet important change in the orientation of the Ascendant occurs. Using the Dwadashamshas, and other divisions of the signs, brings clarity to the natural expression of the zodiac. Once applied to individual charts, this view can offer a more intricate understanding of the natural vitality, inner joy and ways and means to leverage deliberate creation! ie Fulfillment!

- ¹ Elwell, Denise, *Cosmic Loom: The New Science of Astrology*, Unwin Hyman, London 1987 p174
- ² Wickenburg, Joanne *Intercepted Signs: Environment Versus Destiny* Search Seattle, Washington 1978 p 12
- ³ Arroyo, Stephen ,*Astrology, Psychology, and the Four Elements*, CRCS Publications Reno, Nevada 1957 p 4
- ⁴ Arroyo, Stephen, *Relationships and Life Cycles*, CRCS Publications Reno, Nevada 1979 p85
- ⁵ Ibid p 81
- ⁶ Leo, Alan *The Progressed Horoscope*, L. N. Fowler & Co. LTD London, 1969 p62
- ⁷ Idemon, Richard, *Breaking the Silver Cord*, Cassette recording from 1985 lecture available from Pegasus Tapes P.O. Box 419, Santa Ysabel, CA 92070
- ⁸ Idemon, Richard, *The Magic Thread: Astrological Chart Interpretation Using Depth Psychology*, Samuel Weiser, Inc. York Beach, Maine 1996 pp19-21
- ⁹ Richmond, Alan (editor), *Fractals and Self-symmetry*, <http://encyclozine.com/Science/Mathematics/Fractals/> October 2001