

House Rulerships and Dispositors: Useful Tools for the Beginning Astrologer

by Dena DeCastro

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I once had a college roommate who was a skeptic; we were always arguing about astrology. Since I had newly discovered the wonders of reading charts, it was important for me to prove astrology's merit. When she finally agreed to let me to do a reading for her, I spent hours preparing – writing down every “cookbook” interpretation for each of her planets and noting all the important natal aspects. I wrote pages and pages of notes. The time of the reading arrived, and I confidently offered her *tons* of information – which is what I assumed she would want. I thought that the more information I could throw at her, the better the reading would be. Honestly, I was trying to “prove” astrology to her by blowing her away with how much data a reading could produce.

After about an hour or so, I noticed that her eyes had started to glaze over. I asked if the reading seemed “accurate” so far. She said, “Yeah, some of it is accurate, although I kind of already knew those things about myself. But I’m still waiting to hear – what does that all *mean*?” I was devastated. I thought I’d just spent more than an hour telling her what it meant. But she was right. What I’d offered her was a bunch of bits and pieces of data, some of it very accurate, but all adding up to nothing much. I also found out later that she’d had some burning questions about her current relationship, and she was waiting for me to tell her about that area of her life, assuming that I would automatically see it in the chart. But I didn’t know that going into the reading.

In retrospect, nearly 20 years later, I can now see a few of the obvious mistakes I made. One: I bombarded her with too much information, rather than distilling the presentation down to a few potent concepts. Two: I forgot to ask her *what she actually wanted to know*. I could have answered her relationship questions if I had checked in with her first, to see what she was expecting the reading to cover. [1] And, three: I gave her lots of disjointed pieces without any kind of thread or narrative. Indeed, I had no idea about “what that all meant.” And if I didn’t know, how was I supposed to convey any sense of meaning to my client?

My story is not uncommon among new astrologers. Throughout my time as an astrology instructor who specializes in working with beginners, I’ve often found that many are frustrated by the feeling of being overwhelmed. A sense of inundation leads young astrologers to cling too closely to the cookbook interpretations. The kind of reading that comes from this place ends up feeling cobbled-together, lacking coherence. Ultimately, any astrologer must take that first leap beyond interpreting planets in signs and houses. The astrologer needs to be able to build a narrative that connects all the pieces and creates a sense of *meaning* for the client.

But how does one begin to actually do that? Fortunately, two techniques I learned early in my own practice helped me to avoid repeating some of those same

mistakes. The awareness of *dispositors* and *house rulerships* has been vital in improving my understanding of each chart I've worked with.

A *house ruler* is the planetary ruler of the sign on the house cusp. A *dispositor* of a planet is the planet that rules the sign that the other planet resides in. I'll give examples of these a little later. Attending to these two simple concepts can help the astrologer to see connections among planets, as well as the often-overlooked relationship between planets and houses.

When we take a first look at a chart, we notice the most obvious things: the sign and house placement of the Sun and Moon, the Ascendant, and maybe even the chart ruler.[2] Then, we interpret the "bits" – each planet in its sign and house. But once you have interpreted the planet-sign-house combinations and noted the more obvious patterns, such as aspects and stelliums, you may wonder: What next? Using dispositors and house rulerships as part of your interpretation can help you to:

- Directly answer your clients' questions about specific life areas
- Obtain information about empty houses
- Make connections and highlight important themes
- Give the reading more flow and continuity.

I've found that many astrology students who come my way are unaware of these techniques, even if their understanding of planets, signs, and houses is quite advanced. I only wish I'd been introduced to house rulerships and dispositors sooner. So, here I offer my understanding and experience of these valuable tools.

A Brief History

The concepts of both house rulerships and dispositors are rooted in the principle that planets "rule" signs. The assignation of planets to the signs they rule dates back to the Hellenistic texts and, even further back, to Egyptian origin.[3] Beginning with the two lights – the Sun and the Moon – the Sun was given rulership of Leo and the Moon given rulership of Cancer, the two signs which hold the most hours of daylight in the Northern Hemisphere. From there, rulerships were organized by the order of distances of the planets from the Sun as that order corresponds to the order of the signs of the zodiac. For example, the planet Mercury, closest to the Sun, was given rulership of the two signs closest to Cancer and Leo: Gemini and Virgo. Saturn, the farthest-known planet from the Sun at the time of the creation of this system, was given rulership of the two signs farthest from (opposite) Cancer and Leo: Capricorn and Aquarius. Modern rulers, then, were added by general consensus among astrologers based upon archetypal affinity – meaning that Uranus had an archetypal resonance with Aquarius, Neptune with Pisces, and Pluto with Scorpio. The following table lists each of the planet-sign rulerships:

Sign	Planetary Rulers
Aries	Mars
Taurus	Venus
Gemini	Mercury
Cancer	The Moon
Leo	The Sun
Virgo	Mercury
Libra	Venus
Scorpio	Mars and Pluto
Sagittarius	Jupiter
Capricorn	Saturn
Aquarius	Saturn and Uranus
Pisces	Jupiter and Neptune

However, there is ongoing discussion among traditional and modern astrologers about whether these modern rulerships are valid, since they are not connected to the earlier system of assignation.

I use both the traditional and modern rulers. As a modern astrologer, I think it's important to remember that the traditional rulers did not disappear; they were not "replaced" by modern rulers. For example, when considering Scorpio, I am always thinking of both Pluto *and* Mars as the co-rulers. I have personally found both the modern and traditional rulers to be useful. As with any technique, you as the astrologer will have to experiment and see which approach yields meaningful results for you.

House Rulerships: A Word about House Systems

The ruler of a house, then, is the planet that rules the sign on the house cusp. Therefore, before entering a deeper discussion of house rulerships, it is helpful to understand that there are different house systems, so house rulers may change from one system to another. Some of the common house systems are Koch, Placidus, Porphyry, Equal, and House = Sign (Whole Sign houses). However, it should also be noted that there are four cusps you can always count on, regardless of the house system: those of the angular houses. The rulers of the angular houses — the 1st, 4th, 7th, and 10th — will not change, no matter which house system you use. In fact, the angular houses are considered to be more powerful in terms of forecasting and natal chart interpretation for this very reason.

There is not a "right" or "wrong" house system. Choosing which house system you will use is based upon a combination of factors and is a more complex subject than I can fully address within the scope of this article.^[4] Some factors include your astrological training (the system your mentor or teacher used), your philosophical approach, and your viewpoint on astrological history. As with the use of modern and traditional sign rulerships, I encourage astrology students to practice with different house systems and see what feels right for them. In keeping with my astrological training and experience, I use Placidus houses.

Directly Answering Client Questions

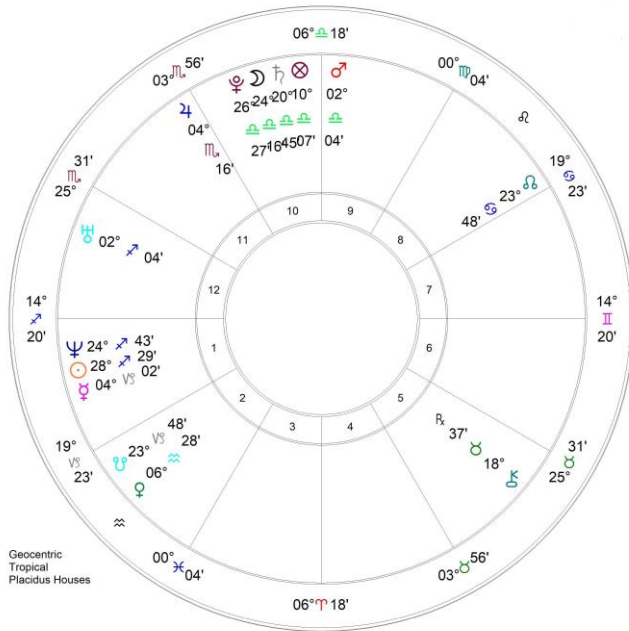
When clients come to see a counseling astrologer, they may not be asking for a general reading or an overview of their natal chart. They might have a specific question in mind – the likely reason they wanted a reading in the first place. It's important to know where to look within the chart to find answers to these specific questions. The first step is to consider what house the question would be related to: For example, a career question would point you toward the 10th house. If the house contains natal planets, then you would be able to answer the client's question based upon the interpretation of the planet(s) in that house and the sign(s) they occupy. It would also be necessary to look for any transits to those natal planets. However, additional information can be gained from the *ruler* of the house in question, its natal sign and house placement, and any transits affecting it. This information can lead to the discovery of important themes that can help tie the reading together, particularly when this ruling planet serves multiple roles within the chart: as the ruler of the house in question (the 10th house), but also as the dispositor of a stellium in that house.

For example, a client recently came to me with questions about her career. "Andrea" (a pseudonym) was in the midst of her Saturn return and was feeling some confusion about what her next steps should be. She had a satisfying job, but it was seasonal and temporary. She felt pressure to figure out what direction to take next. I looked at the chart and saw a huge emphasis on her 10th house, both in the natal chart and by transit. (See **natal chart**, above right). Her Saturn return was occurring in the 10th, and she has natal Moon, Saturn, and Pluto conjunct in the 10th. Of course, career direction was already a deeply important issue for her. But I was able to give her more information based upon the ruler of her 10th house, also known as the ruler of the Midheaven (MC), a significant planet in relation to career matters.

Andrea had a feeling that she was supposed to take a leap in a new and perhaps risky career direction, was considering a business venture, but was hesitant to act upon it. Because Venus is her 10th-house/MC ruler, I emphasized the importance of

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Andrea



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transiting Jupiter in Gemini: Jupiter would soon trine her natal Venus in early Aquarius. I was able to offer her support and encouragement regarding the trine of Jupiter to the 10th-house ruler, which portends an opportunity period regarding career. With Jupiter transits, we are invited to take a leap of faith into something bigger and better than the situation we have been settling for. Transiting Jupiter trining the 10th-house ruler, Venus, also speaks to a period of potential financial growth. The financial theme was particularly relevant for this client as well because of Venus's placement in the 2nd house of finances and resources. Had I not looked to the ruler of the 10th house and the trine from transiting Jupiter, the reading would have been mainly focused upon the Saturn return in the 10th. Although the Saturn transit was the main influence, it was not the only factor at play. Venus, as the 10th-house ruler *and* the dispositor of her 10th-house Libra stellium (which we'll soon explore in more detail), is a second important focal point regarding the question of career in her chart.

House Rulers and Empty Houses

I've often received this question from clients: "What does it mean that I have empty houses?" I explain that, statistically, it's quite common to have at least a couple of empty houses; in fact, it's impossible *not* to have them, unless you are including asteroids or other minor planets. But these clients express concern that there's something "wrong" with these areas of life for them if the house is empty. Considering the house rulers as part of your interpretation can provide information about these empty houses.

For example, a client with an empty 7th house might be worried that there will be no partner in their life or that they will never get married. These are unfounded concerns, of course. While you might be able to assure your client of this, it is also handy to have a way to offer information if they have questions about this area of their life. And relationships are eternally one of the top areas of concern. If a client does not have any natal planets conveniently placed in the 7th house, has no transits through the 7th, and has nothing happening with Venus, you can look to the house ruler for an alternate trail of information.

If our hypothetical client has Pisces on the 7th-house cusp, for example, then the planets Neptune and Jupiter are the co-rulers of that house. We can then consider the natal placements of both Neptune and Jupiter, by sign and house, to find out more about this important area of life: partnership. Additionally, any natal aspects that Jupiter and Neptune make to other planets will add to our understanding of the 7th, and any transits to Jupiter or Neptune give us a **way** to make forecasts regarding 7th-house matters. Thus, we can directly answer the concerns of the client, rather than avoiding the issue because the house related to their question is "empty."

Dispositors: Making Connections

A *dispositor* is the planet that rules the sign that another planet resides in. For example, if Venus is in Gemini, then Mercury is its dispositor. There is a relationship,

then, between Venus and Mercury. This is a different kind of relationship than that expressed by an *aspect*, such as a conjunction between Venus and Mercury. Aspects describe a relationship between the two planets, and the angle between them indicates the dynamic of that relationship: how we can grow and learn by bringing these two planetary energies together. In contrast, the relationship between the dispositor and the planet it disposes is that the dispositor is an outlet for the energies of the planet being disposed. The dispositor may also modify how the disposed planet functions. Staying with the example of Venus in Gemini, Mercury's sign and house placement would point toward another place in the chart where Venus's energy is playing out. Mercury also has an influence upon the natal Venus and how that Venus expresses itself. Because of the connection between the dispositor and the planet it disposes, when either one is receiving a transit, it will affect both planets. If Venus is in Gemini, any transits to Mercury may also affect Venus. Working the other way, any transits to Venus will also reach back to Mercury.

An awareness of this relationship between dispositors and the planets they dispose allows you to spot themes that would otherwise go unnoticed. In Andrea's chart, Venus becomes a factor not only in career matters, but also in matters related to her Saturn, Pluto, and Moon in Libra. Because her Venus is in the 2nd house of financial and material resources, her finances are affected by matters related to her Saturn, Pluto, and Moon as well. Her Venus, then, becomes an important and greatly influential planet in her chart. In fact, much of how she is able to function in an optimal way overall depends upon how she works with that Venus. By understanding dispositorship as well as rulership, we see how very prominent that Venus becomes.

Finding Focal Points

When you are aware of house rulerships and dispositors, you're able to spot the planets that play a more predominant role in the chart. Knowing which planets stand out in this way can help you to prioritize information. An awareness of the focal planets in a reading can provide you with a starting point and, furthermore, a thread to follow throughout the reading. The following conditions mark a planet as a potential focal point:

- It is the dispositor of a stellium.
- It is the ruler of the house that contains a stellium.
- It is the ruler of an angular house.
- It is a planet that plays multiple roles (angular house ruler and stellium ruler).

In the case of my client with the Libra stellium, for instance, I immediately noted that her Venus was the ruler of the 10th house, an angular house, as well as being the dispositor of all of her Libra planets. Because of this, I was able to see that Andrea had not one, but two important career-related transits going on. The Saturn return in her 10th house was the obvious one, but transiting Jupiter trine her natal Venus was also

directly related to her career, because Venus is the dispositor of her Libra stellium in the 10th *and* the ruler of her 10th house.

When a chart contains a stellium, the planet that rules the disposes the stellium becomes significant and can reveal information when you consider the following:

- Its natal placement by sign and house and any natal aspects to it;
- Any transits to this planet.

The natal sign and house placement of Andrea's Venus, as well as any transits to her Venus, will also be affecting the stellium. Her natal placement of Venus in Aquarius in the 2nd house was important to my understanding of how she might make a good living. Aquarius points toward the use of innovation and unusual approaches in order to make money. Transiting Jupiter trining that Venus was also stimulating the stellium in Libra in the 10th, speaking to the potential need to take a leap of faith (Jupiter) in regard to finances. The Jupiter transit also opened up a time frame in which she should "think big" and even be willing to take some risks. Investment, with the right partners (Venus), might be a viable way to get her business up and running. I also suggested that she would be good in a one-on-one counseling role (Venus/Libra) with others. Ultimately, she came away from the reading with a better understanding of her career direction and a specific sense of timing based upon the transit to her Venus.

Conclusion

Looking back to that early reading with my roommate, I feel compassion for the novice I was then and how much I didn't yet know how to do. There is no way to become an effective counseling astrologer other than to practice. So many tools are at our disposal, and an overwhelming amount of information is available to astrology students today. I offer these two straightforward tools in the hopes that you'll be able to add them to your tool kit early in your practice. I know that house rulerships and dispositors will continue to deepen your understanding of each chart and will aid you in speaking directly to your clients' needs.

Chart Data and Source

"**Andrea,**" birth data withheld by client's request, but the source is rated AA: birth certificate. Client has agreed to my use of her chart and content from the reading for this article.

References and Notes

1. Clients may come to an astrologer for a general reading, meaning that they'd like a thorough overview of the natal chart as the astrologer sees it; they may not always have specific questions for the astrologer beforehand. However, if a client *does* have specific questions, it is very important for the astrologer to be aware of those so that the client doesn't leave the reading feeling that major concerns have gone unaddressed. A deeper discussion of this point is included in the article by Ray Grasse, "The 7 Most Common Mistakes Made by Astrologers," in *The Mountain Astrologer*, April/May 2012.
2. The "chart ruler" is the ruler of the sign that is rising (on the Ascendant) at the time of birth.
3. An excellent resource for understanding the history of zodiacal sign rulerships is Demetra George, *Astrology and the Authentic Self*, Ibis Press, 2008, pp. 40-47.

4. For more about the history of house systems and the controversy surrounding this topic, I recommend the article by Deborah Houlding, "The Problems of House Division," www.skyscript.co.uk/houprob_print.html (accessed in June 2012).

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