Holding Patterns Simplified

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The purpose of a hold is to park aircraft in the sky somewhere until ATC is ready to sequence the aircraft inbound for approach & landing. It can happen when TRACON can’t get you passed off to Center (called a departure hold) or when TRACON can’t get you sequenced into an approach (arrival hold).

Holding patterns baffle most pilots. I see a lot of students holding up three fingers to the DG and mumbling nonsense to themselves. In order to end the confusion, and simplify this for easy learning, use this 3-step method described below. Once you get the idea, check your instrument textbook for a diagram that shows the "official method" of hold entries.

The Easy Way...

**Step 1**, Diagram the instructions given. "Hold on the 270 Radial, west of the 15 DME fix from ABC VOR, standard pattern, 1 minute legs." Standard pattern means right turns.

**Step 2**, Determine what side of the hold you are entering from. Here’s the simple method that handles most of all hold entries.

- Chop the holding pattern in half as shown (see the red line). If you are entering from the fat side, it’s always a direct entry. Go to Step 3 for an example.

- If you are entering the hold from the thin side, chop the holding pattern between the protected side and the non-protected side (see the blue line). If you are entering from a heading on the protected side, and thin side, it’s always parallel entry. If you are entering on the non-protected side, and on the thin side, it’s a teardrop entry.

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Step 3. What does each look like? As you can see from the red dashed line, sometimes your ground track executing the hold isn't perfect.

**Direct Entry**, entering on the fat side of the hold, in-bound heading for this example is approximately 060 degrees:

![Diagram of Direct Entry]

**Parallel Entry**, entering from the thin, protected side, in-bound heading for this example is approximately 330:

![Diagram of Parallel Entry]

**Teardrop Entry**, entering from the thin, non-protected side, in-bound heading for this example is approximately 240 degrees:

![Diagram of Teardrop Entry]
Examples of Holding

1. Holding at an outer marker.
2. Holding at an intersection of VOR radials.
3. Holding at a DME fix (or enroute fix).
   a. Outbound hold - holding course away from navaid
   b. Inbound hold - holding course toward navaid