

Sight Resolution Principles

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CALLERLAB Convention 2014

Introduction

There are many documented methods of sight resolution. The recently published "Sight and Modules Resolution Systems" document describes more than forty of them. Undoubtedly, there are others whose practitioners have not taken the time to write them down. It is therefore unsurprising that callers, particularly newer callers, can find this topic somewhat overwhelming.

Fortunately, all methods rely on some generic underlying principles and understanding them can help you categorize the methods you read about and select the ones that might work best for you.

So What Is It?

Sight resolution is about returning dancers to a resolved state by observing their current state and applying appropriate calls to change that current state to a resolved state. This means you have to know the original relationships of the dancers, one to the other. Fortunately, the principle of square symmetry means that you only have to know the relationships of four dancers, not all eight. Theoretically, you can choose to watch any four dancers who are not diagonal opposites, but in practice most methods assume that you will choose one man and his partner as one pair and the man's corner and her partner as the other pair. The man and his partner are often termed the "key" couple or the "primary" couple, while the other pair is usually referred to as the "secondary" couple, or "corner" couple. Before you start calling, you must memorize as many such pairs as you can. Most callers write them down.

Sight resolution consists of two parts:

- ◆ Observe the current state of the square.
- ◆ Apply a memorized getout that works from the state observed.

What? You were expecting something more elegant? Well, actually, since most normal mortals can't memorize getouts from every possible permutation of a setup we have to insert a preceding step to **engineer** a square state for which we **have** memorized getouts.

So with that engineering step added, we have:

1. Return the square to some recognizable situation, sometimes referred to as the "snapshot", which has a small number of possibilities (typically, but not necessarily, four) for the state of the square (i.e. key dancer locations, partner pairings, and sequence).
2. Identify which of that small number of possibilities actually exists – an exercise in pattern recognition from a (now) small set of known possibilities.
3. Use a memorized getout that works from the situation identified.

While sight resolution systems often superficially appear quite different from one another, the differences are found mainly in step 1: how they approach returning the square to a recognizable snapshot. They all require you to:

1. be able to recognize specific snapshot setups, and
2. have memorized getouts for each snapshot.

Clearly, the more snapshots for which you have memorized getouts in your head, the easier it will be to maneuver the square into one of them. However, attempting to memorize all possible snapshots is not a viable strategy (for mere mortals anyway). For example, in general facing lines of four there are 384 different permutations of dancer placement. Well, actually, there are only half that many (192) because half of them are simply 180 degree rotations of each other. Given a random facing line of four, few people can instantly recognize which one of the 192 possibilities exists and supply a getout for it.

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However, if you can maneuver the dancers into a "normal" arrangement (meaning normal couples, boy on the left, girl on the right), that same line represents only 32 possibilities. By pairing your key man with his partner, you reduce the number of possibilities to eight. Then by placing the paired couple in a particular place in the line, you reduce the possibilities to four. And, if necessary, by bringing your key man to face his corner, you reduce the possibilities to two.

All resolution systems are really methods for reducing the number of snapshots that you have to memorize down to something that is workable for you.

One of the big differences between systems rests in the square attributes they require you to detect in order to make decisions. For example, some systems require you to detect the sequence state of the dancers, some to detect which person is partnered with the key man (or woman), some whether anyone is paired. Some systems involve recognizing who is in a particular position on the floor, while others depend on recognizing the location of particular people. People vary widely in what attributes of the square they can easily see while the dancers are moving. Therefore it is important when learning sight resolution to begin by working with a resolution method that is predicated on seeing the patterns you find most obvious.

Once you have chosen a method to learn and work with, practice it with dancers until you feel completely comfortable with it. If you attempt to learn multiple methods simultaneously, you will only confuse yourself.

Basic Skills

Regardless of the sight resolution method you choose, there are certain skills and knowledge that you will need. You can acquire the knowledge by reading and by pushing checkers. You can only acquire the skill needed to apply that knowledge at dance speed by calling to dancers. This knowledge is:

1. Call Knowledge. You must have a thorough and detailed knowledge of every call you use: possible starting formations, possible ending formations, standard vs extended usages, rolling direction of the dancers at the end, sweeping motion at the end, number of people required to do the call, hand usage, number of parts the call has, number of dancer roles (e.g. leader/trailer, center/end, boy/girl, beau/belle).
2. Formation Knowledge. Which formations afford the most flexibility for maneuvering dancers into desired positions?
3. How to effectively select some dancers whose relationship to one another you can memorize.
4. What arrangements are considered "normal" and how you can create them, and, once created, maintain them through subsequent calls.
5. How specified people can be swapped or traded. For example, from facing normal couples, what calls will exchange the girls (e.g. Ladies Chain) and what calls will exchange the boys (e.g. Flutterwheel).
6. How specified people can be "paired" – meaning they are adjacent to one another, either as a couple or as end and adjacent center in a wave.
7. How a specified pair of people can be placed in a specific position in a formation, for example as the left side of facing lines, or as the outside of an 8-Chain Thru.

Summary

Sight resolution methods all have a similar basis. They differ in what patterns they require you to be able to identify quickly when building a resolution. The general structure is:

1. Return the square to a specific formation and arrangement, usually with key couples paired in a specific location. The substeps for this are:
 - a) Create a usable formation

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- b) Create a normal arrangement
 - c) Pair somebody
 - d) Put the pair in a specific place in the formation
2. Using that square state as a "snapshot" ask some defining questions, usually about partner pairings and/or relationships, the answers to which permit the selection of an appropriate memorized getout.
 3. Choose a memorized getout that resolves the square using good flow and with an appropriate degree of difficulty.

Callers can vary their calling and make their getouts unique by designing their own getout tables for the methods they prefer to use. Callers can further vary their getouts by using a familiar method, but changing who they pair up.

When evaluating a new resolution method, try and organize it into the framework we've described. What formations does it ask you to work with? What snapshot do you have to create, and what manipulations might be necessary to accomplish that? How many snapshots do you have to memorize resolutions for?

All methods rely on you being able to engineer certain conditions in the square. Therefore it is important to know what calls, or series of calls, accomplish certain effects in the formations you choose to work with. Common "engineering" tasks include:

- ◆ Reversing the sequence of specific dancers or trading their positions
- ◆ Pairing up two specific people
- ◆ Creating "normal" couples or arrangements
- ◆ Creating specific formations (commonly, Facing Lines, Right-Hand Waves, 2-Face Lines, 8-Chain)
- ◆ Moving a specified person to a specified location

For each method that you choose to work with, you need to study how to accomplish the above types of manipulation.

References

There are many references that go into deep detail about particular methods of sight resolution. Most of the references below contain multiple pointers to such documents.

1. Sight And Module Resolution Systems, available from Callerlab at <http://www.callerlab.org>
2. Starter Kit for Newer Callers, available from Callerlab at <http://www.callerlab.org>
3. Rich Reel's Square Dance Caller's Notes, available at <http://www.all8.com>
4. Vic Ceder's site, technical articles at <http://www.ceder.net/ArticleCoOp/view.php4?section=11&category=16>
5. Dave Wilson's Ocean Wave Resolution Method, available at <http://www.tiac.net/~mabaker/ocean-wave-resolution.html>