

FEDERAL AVIATION ADMINISTRATION AIR TRAFFIC BASICS | Lesson 4: Separation

ALL LESSONS FRAME: 1

Separation

NEXT



With the ATC System

Without the ATC System

Safe movement through the National Airspace System (NAS) requires that aircraft maintain distance between them.

LEARN MORE

In Air Traffic Control (ATC), separation refers to keeping aircraft spaced appropriately. A controller's primary responsibility is to ensure separation of aircraft.

To effectively provide ATC service and issue appropriate ATC clearances, you must understand all separation rules and know how to apply them. Failure to apply proper separation can result in catastrophes.

In 2008, there were in excess of 140 million operations controlled by all FAA facilities. Each aircraft received a clearance requiring some type of separation.



Purpose

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This lesson will introduce you to the different types of separation used every day by controllers to provide safe, orderly, and expeditious separation of air traffic within the NAS.



Objectives

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You will be able to identify the following types of separation, including the basic minimum requirements for providing each type.

1. Vertical Separation
2. Non-Radar Lateral Separation
3. Non-Radar Longitudinal Separation
4. Radar Separation
5. Visual Separation
6. Runway Separation

You will meet the objectives in accordance with the following references:

- FAA Orders
 - JO 7110.65, Air Traffic Control
 - 7210.3, Facility Operation and Administration
- Aeronautical Information Manual (AIM)





Separation

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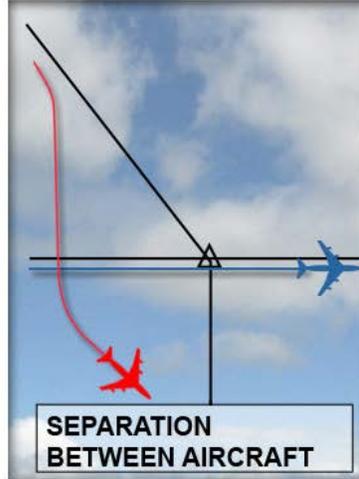
Separation Definition

Within the primary purpose of the ATC system is the requirement to prevent a collision between aircraft operating in the system.

- This is accomplished by applying separation between:
 - Aircraft
 - Aircraft and protected airspace

In air traffic control, separation is the spacing of aircraft to achieve their safe and orderly movement in flight and while landing and taking off.

JO 7110.65, Glossary Chap. 2



LEARN MORE



Separation

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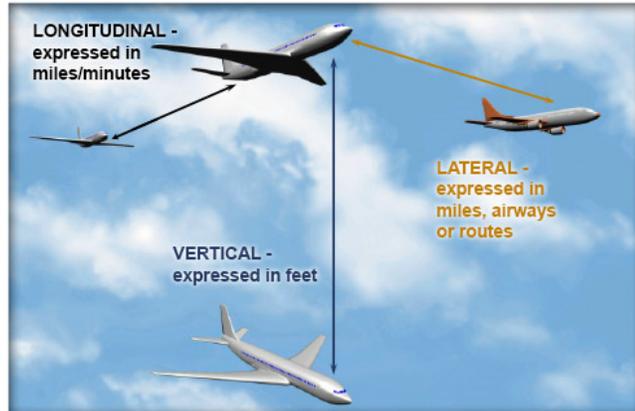
Separation Minima

In a radar or non-radar environment, aircraft can be separated:

- Vertically
- Laterally
- Longitudinally

NOTE: Vertical, lateral, and longitudinal separation are applied in both radar and non-radar environments, but there are different minimum distances (separation minima) used depending on whether it is a radar or non-radar environment.

Separation minima are the minimum longitudinal, lateral, or vertical distances by which aircraft are spaced through the application of air traffic control procedures.




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Vertical Separation

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CURRENT PRESSURE 29.92



Current Pressure Higher than 29.92
Flight Levels Move Up

CURRENT PRESSURE 30.92



Current Pressure Lower than 29.92
Flight Levels Move Down

CURRENT PRESSURE 28.92

Above are examples of how pressure affects altitude.

LEARN MORE

Flight Level Definition

To understand vertical separation, you must have an understanding of Flight Levels.

Flight Level (FL) is a level of constant atmospheric pressure related to a reference datum of 29.92 inches of mercury. Each is stated in three digits that represent hundreds of feet. For example, FL250 represents a barometric altimeter indication of 25,000 feet; FL255, an indication of 25,500 feet.

All aircraft operating at or above 18,000 MSL shall have the altimeter set to 29.92, regardless of the local altimeter settings at stations they fly over.

In layman’s terms, an aircraft’s flight level is an altitude referencing a standard barometric pressure. (Altitude is usually measured using an altimeter, which is essentially a calibrated barometer – it measures air pressure.)

Aircraft travelling long distances and at higher speeds need to use a standard measurement because:

- It is impractical to assign a new altimeter setting every 100 miles.
- If aircraft do not use the same setting, safety issues arise.
 - ♦ Two aircraft would be flying at different heights, even though their altimeters show the same altitude.
 - ♦ Two aircraft could be flying at the same height, even though their altimeters show different altitudes.

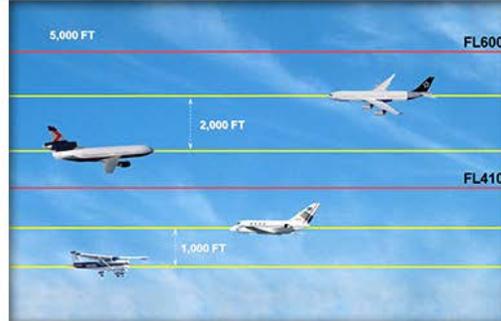
Example:

An aircraft level at FL300 in a geographic location experiencing a barometric pressure of 29.42 is actually at 29,500 feet MSL. However, other aircraft in the vicinity are affected similarly, resulting in constant vertical positioning relative to each other.

Reference: JO 7110.65, Glossary AIM, Chap. 7



Vertical Separation



Vertical Separation

Vertical Separation is the vertical spacing of aircraft achieved by the assignment of different altitudes or Flight Levels used with radar or non-radar procedures.

Instrument Flight Rules (IFR) aircraft are assigned different altitudes/Flight Levels to meet standard separation requirements.

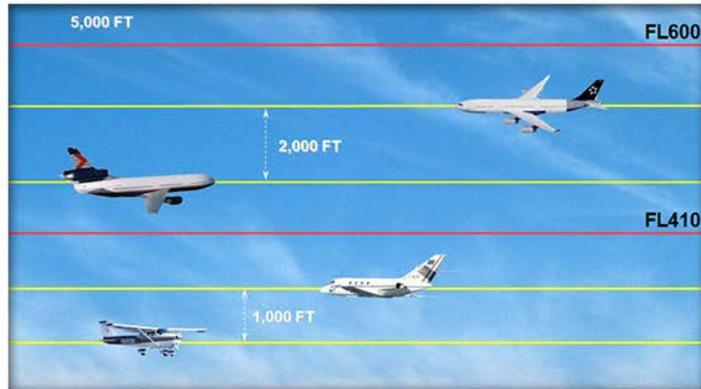
JO 7110.65, Glossary



Vertical Separation

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Vertical Minima

The basic minimum altitude separation between IFR aircraft is:

- 1,000 feet for aircraft up to and including FL410
- 2,000 feet for aircraft above FL410 up to and including FL600
- 5,000 feet for aircraft flying above FL600

NOTE: The separation minima increase with altitude because altimeter errors are more likely at higher altitudes, so greater separation is needed.

JO 7110.65, Chap. 4



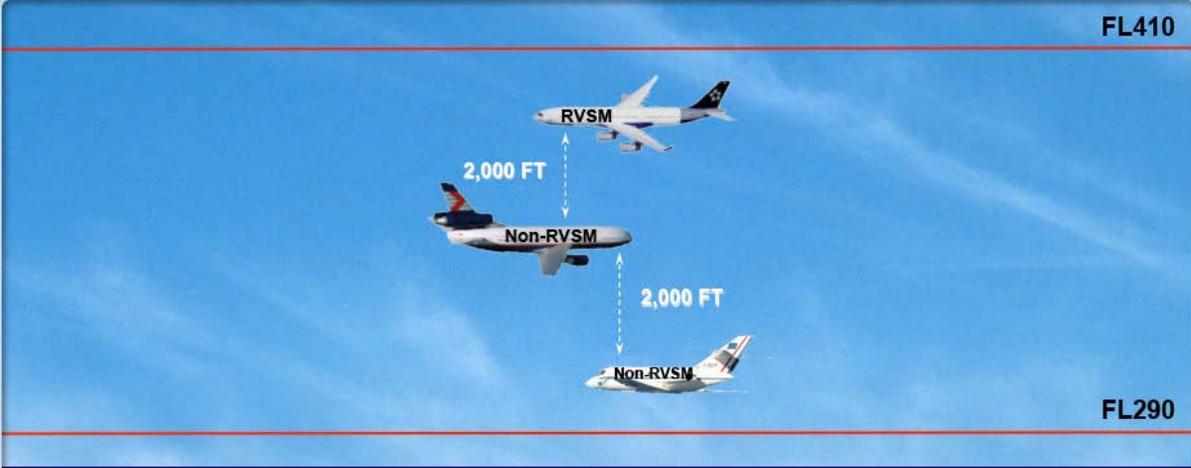
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Vertical Separation

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FL410



Reduced Vertical Separation Minima (RVSM)

Some aircraft are not equipped with the required vertical navigation avionics, which allows for application of the standard 1000' separation from FL290 to FL410.

LEARN MORE

- These aircraft are referred to as “non-RVSM” (reduced vertical separation minima).
- These aircraft must be assigned FL280 or lower, or FL430 or higher.
- Non-RVSM aircraft may only **climb** or **descend** through RVSM altitudes (FL290 to FL410). While transiting this airspace, 2000’ vertical separation must be maintained with all other aircraft.

Exceptions: The following aircraft may be assigned altitudes between FL290 and FL410 without RVSM equipment, but require 2,000 vertical separation:

- Department of Defense (DOD) aircraft
- Lifeguard air ambulance aircraft
- Aircraft flown by manufacturers for certification and development
- Foreign state aircraft
- Most NASA aircraft
 - Application of RVSM separation standards to formation flights is dependent upon the RVSM status of all aircraft involved. RVSM separation is only applied to formation flights consisting of all RVSM approved aircraft.

Reference: JO 7110.65, Chap. 2 and 4



Vertical Separation

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Vertical Separation from Block Altitudes

At times, aircraft are assigned a range of altitudes (blocks). This may be due to weather or other operational requirements.

- Standard vertical separation is used and separation is applied from the upper and lower limit of the block.

JO 7110.65, Chaps. 5 and 9; AIM, Chap. 6



Vertical Separation

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Vertical Separation from Fuel Dumping

Fuel dumping aircraft:

- IFR aircraft are vertically separated from fuel dumping aircraft by the following criteria:
 - 1,000 feet above the fuel dumping aircraft (through FL410)
 - Exception: Between FL290 and FL410 – 2,000 feet above the fuel dumping aircraft if either aircraft is non-RVSM
 - 2,000 feet above the fuel dumping aircraft (above FL410)
 - 2,000 feet below the fuel dumping aircraft (regardless of altitude)

JO 7110.65, Chaps. 5 and 9; AIM, Chap. 6



NOTE: In other words, vertical separation above fuel dumping aircraft is standard. Separation below a fuel dumping aircraft is always 2000', regardless of altitude.



Vertical Separation

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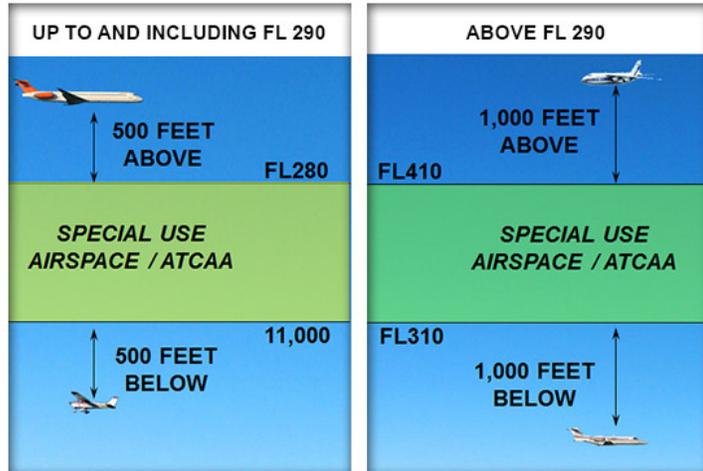
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Vertical Separation from Special Use Airspace

Non-participating aircraft (aircraft not allowed in a particular area) are separated from Special Use Airspace and ATC Assigned Airspace (ATCAA).

- Up to and including FL290
 - By at least 500 feet above/below the upper/lower limit
- Above FL290
 - By at least 1,000 feet above/below the upper/lower limit

JO 7110.65, Chap. 9; AIM Chap. 3; JO 7210.3, Chap. 2

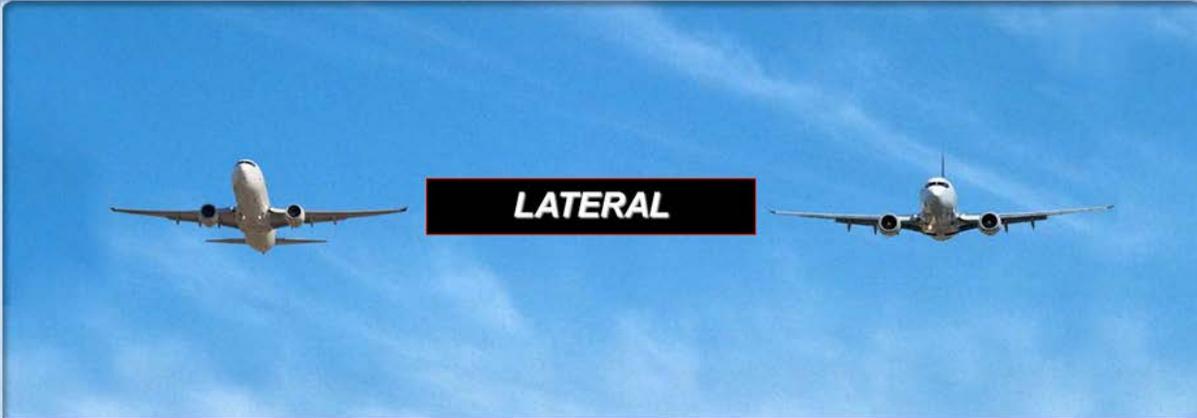




Non-radar Lateral Separation

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Lateral Separation

Lateral separation is the lateral spacing of aircraft at the same altitude by requiring operation on different routes or in different geographical locations.

Lateral separation is applied in traffic situations when neither vertical nor longitudinal separation exists.

JO 7110.65, Chap. 6; Pilot/Controller Glossary

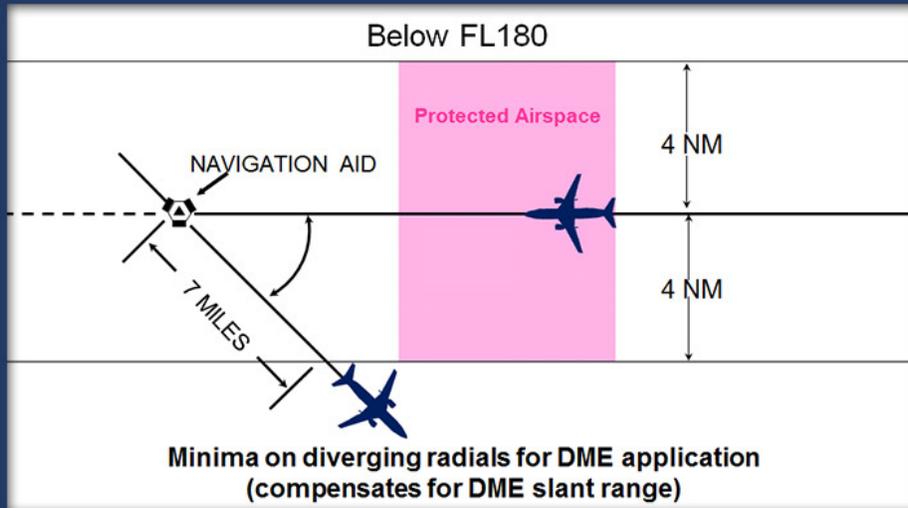


Non-radar Lateral Separation

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Non-Radar Lateral Separation Example



Aircraft are cleared to fly on different airways or routes whose widths or protected airspace do not overlap.



Non-radar Lateral Separation

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Uses of Lateral Separation by Degree Divergence

Clear departing aircraft to fly specified headings which diverge by at least 45 degrees.

JO 7110.65, Chap. 6



Non-radar Longitudinal Separation

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Longitudinal Separation Definition

Longitudinal Separation – the longitudinal spacing of aircraft at the same altitude by a minimum distance expressed in units of time or miles.

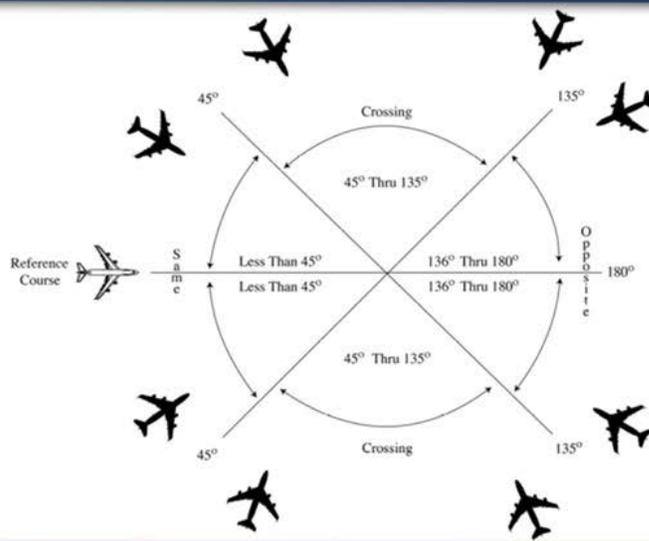
7110.65, Pilot Controller Glossary



Non-radar Longitudinal Separation

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JO 7110.65, Chap. 1

LEARN MORE

An aircraft on a course within 45 degrees of another aircraft is considered to be on the same course.

An aircraft on a course between 45 degrees and 135 degrees is considered to be crossing through the course of another aircraft.

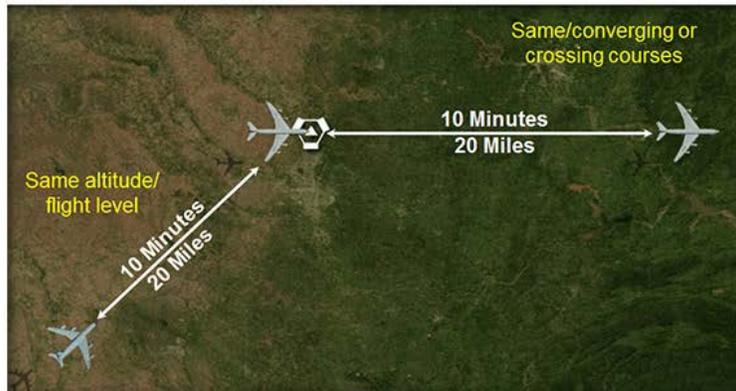
An aircraft more than 135 degrees from another aircraft is considered to be on an opposite course.



Non-Radar Longitudinal Separation

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The standard minima for non-radar longitudinal separation is:

- 10 minutes or 20 miles
 - Depending on speed, 10 minutes is usually more than 20 miles.
- Example: Using 450 knots ground speed, separation between two aircraft 10 minutes in trail is approximately 75 miles.

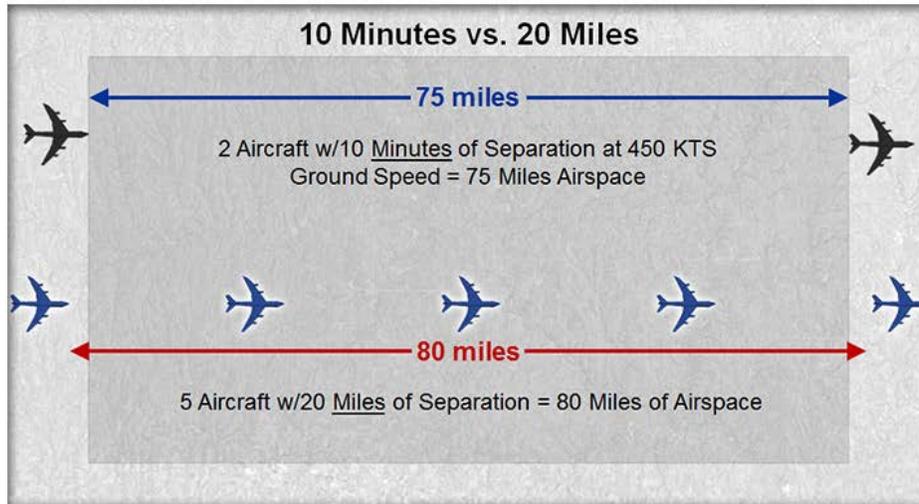
JO 7110.65, Chap. 6



Non-radar Longitudinal Separation

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JO 7110.65, Chap. 6



Basic Principles Using Time

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To establish non-radar longitudinal separation using time, the following methods can be used:

- Depart at a specified time
- Arrive at a fix at a specified time
- Hold at a fix until a specified time
- Change altitude at a specified time or fix

JO 7110.65, Chap. 6



Basic Principles Using Time

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Example of Departing at a Specified Time



Example of Arriving at a Fix at a Specified Time



JO 7110.65, Chap. 6



Basic Principles Using Time

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Hold at a Fix Until a Specified Time



Change Altitude at a Specific Time or Fix

JO 7110.65, Chap. 6





Basic Principles Using DME

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Establishing non-radar longitudinal separation using Distance Measuring Equipment (DME) requires pilot position reports.

- Always get the report of the lead aircraft first.

JO 7110.65, Chap. 6



Non-radar Longitudinal Separation

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Basic Principles Using DME





Radars Separation

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Radars Separation

Radars separation is radar spacing of aircraft in accordance with established minima.

Radars separation is applied between:

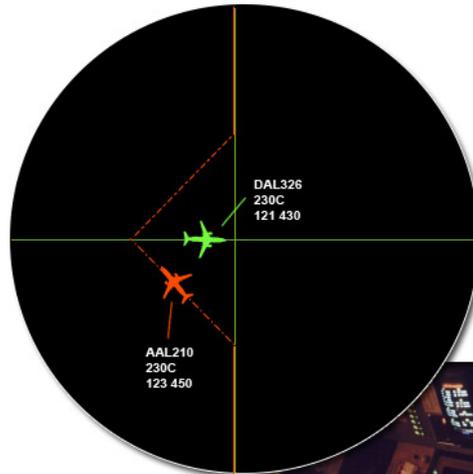
- Aircraft
- Aircraft and adjacent airspace
- Aircraft and obstructions depicted on the radar display

Separation minima requirements are established for:

- Terminal
- En Route

NOTE: Vertical separation minima are the same in the radar environment as they are in the non-radar environment.

JO 7110.65, Chapters 3, 5, 6, and 7



“AMERICAN TWO TEN, TURN LEFT HEADING THREE THREE ZERO, VECTOR FOR TRAFFIC.”





Radars Separation

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Terminal Radar Separation Minima

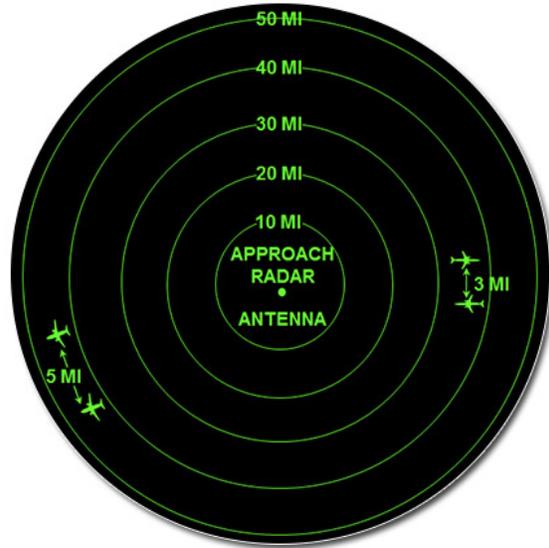
When radar data is received from a single radar antenna, use the following minima.

- When two aircraft are less than 40 miles from antenna, 3 miles separation is required.
- When two aircraft are 40 miles or more from the antenna, 5 miles separation is required.

NOTE: These minima apply to both lateral and longitudinal separation.

If radar data from more than one radar antenna is presented on a radar display, 5 miles separation is required.

JO 7110.65, Chap. 5

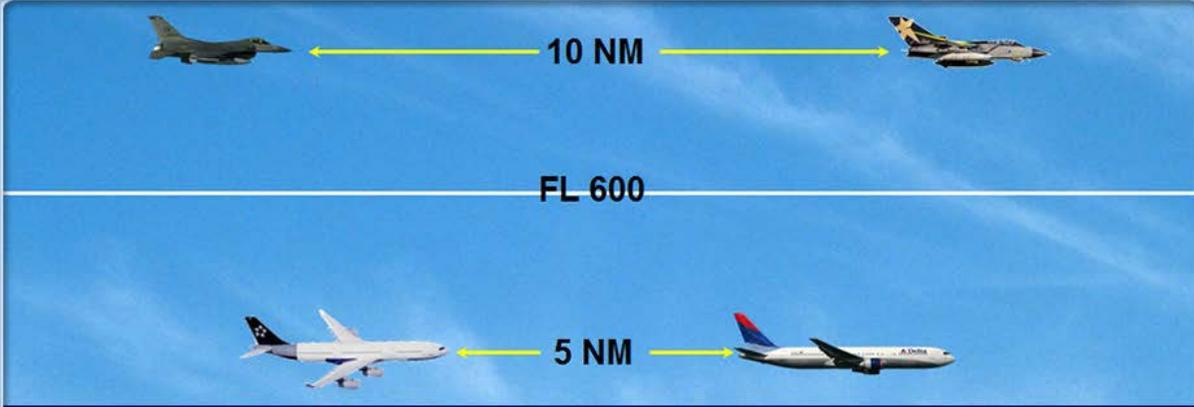




Radars Separation

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En Route Radar Separation Minima

For aircraft at or above FL600, 10 miles separation is required.

For aircraft below FL600, 5 miles separation is required.

NOTE: These minima apply to both lateral and longitudinal separation.

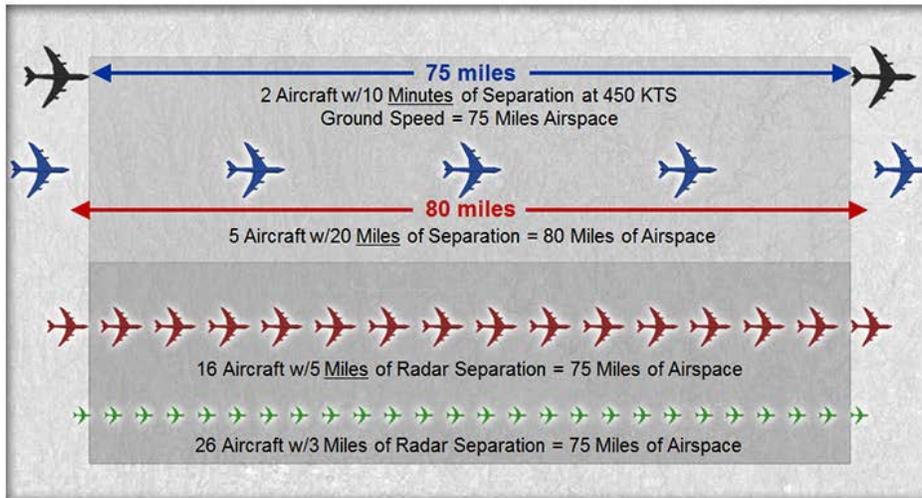
JO 7110.65, Chap. 5



Radars VS. Non-Radar Separation

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Radars operations gain a significant advantage over non-radar operations.

JO 7110.65, Chap. 5



Visual Separation

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Visual Separation

Visual Separation is a means employed by ATC to separate aircraft in the NAS.

- In this type of separation, there are no time or distance minima, per se, but separation is accomplished by visually avoiding other aircraft.

This separation requires visual contact of aircraft by either the Tower Controller or the pilot of an aircraft.

Three types of visual separation are explained in this lesson:

- Tower Visual Separation
- Radar Visual Separation
- Visual Separation used in conjunction with visual approaches



JO 7110.65, Chap. 3



Visual Separation

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Visual Separation - Tower

A tower controller may use visual separation provided both aircraft are in sight and instructions can be issued to keep them apart.

- There must be another form of separation used before and after visual separation has been applied.

Communication must be maintained with at least one of the aircraft involved or the capability to communicate immediately must be available.

JO 7110.65, Chapters 3 and 7



Separation Review

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Separation is the spacing of aircraft to ensure the safe and orderly movement of aircraft, while in flight or on the ground.

Separation occurs in both radar and non-radar environments.

Different separation minima are applied depending on the environment (radar/non-radar).

In both radar and non-radar environments, aircraft can be separated:

- Vertically
- Laterally
- Longitudinally

Note:- In the next sections we will discuss two other types of separation: visual and runway.





Visual Separation

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Visual Separation - Radar

Visual separation may also be used up to, but not including, FL180 when the following conditions are met:

- Direct communication is maintained with one of the aircraft involved and there is an ability to communicate with the other

After the pilot sees another aircraft, the controller instructs the pilot to maintain visual separation from that aircraft as follows:

- The pilot is informed about the other aircraft's position, direction, and unless it is obvious, the other aircraft's intentions
- The controller obtains acknowledgment from the pilot that the other aircraft is in sight
- The pilot is instructed to maintain visual separation from that aircraft
- The controller advises the pilot if the two radar targets appear likely to converge
 - If the two aircraft are on converging courses, the controller informs the other aircraft of the traffic, and that visual separation is being applied.

There must be another form of approved separation used before and after visual separation has been applied.

JO 7110.65, Chap. 7; AIM, Chap. 4





Visual Separation

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Visual Separation - In Conjunction with Visual Approach Procedures

Controllers may use visual separation in conjunction with visual approach procedures.

Clear an aircraft for a visual approach when:

- The aircraft is number one in the approach sequence, or
- The aircraft is to follow a preceding aircraft and the pilot reports the preceding aircraft in sight and is instructed to follow it, or
- The pilot reports the airport or runway in sight but not the preceding aircraft. Radar separation must be maintained until visual separation is provided.

JO 7110.65, Chap. 7; AIM, Chap. 4





Runway Separation

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Runway Separation

Runway separation is applied by Tower Controllers only.

Generally, only one aircraft at a time is authorized to use a specific runway.

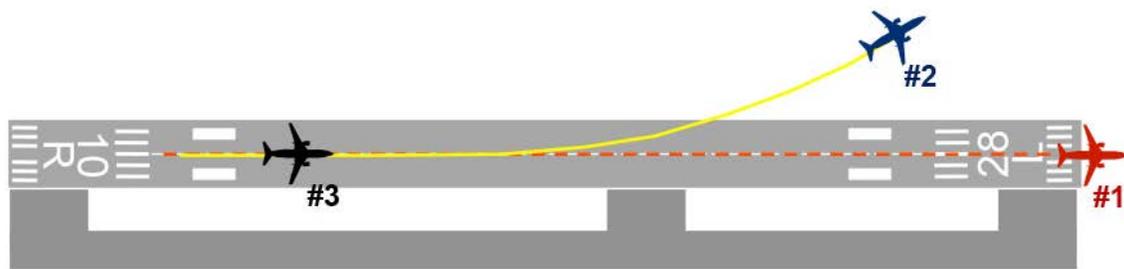
JO 7110.65, Chap. 3



Runway Separation

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Same Runway Separation

Ensure takeoff roll does not begin until a preceding departing aircraft has crossed the runway end or has turned to avert a conflict.

Ensure an arriving aircraft does not cross the landing threshold until a preceding departing aircraft has crossed the runway end or has turned to avert a conflict.

JO 7110.65, Chap. 3



Runway Separation

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The red aircraft must be clear of the runway before the yellow aircraft can begin its takeoff roll.



Departure vs. Arrival

Ensure takeoff roll does not begin until preceding arriving aircraft has taxied off the runway.

JO 7110.65, Chap. 3

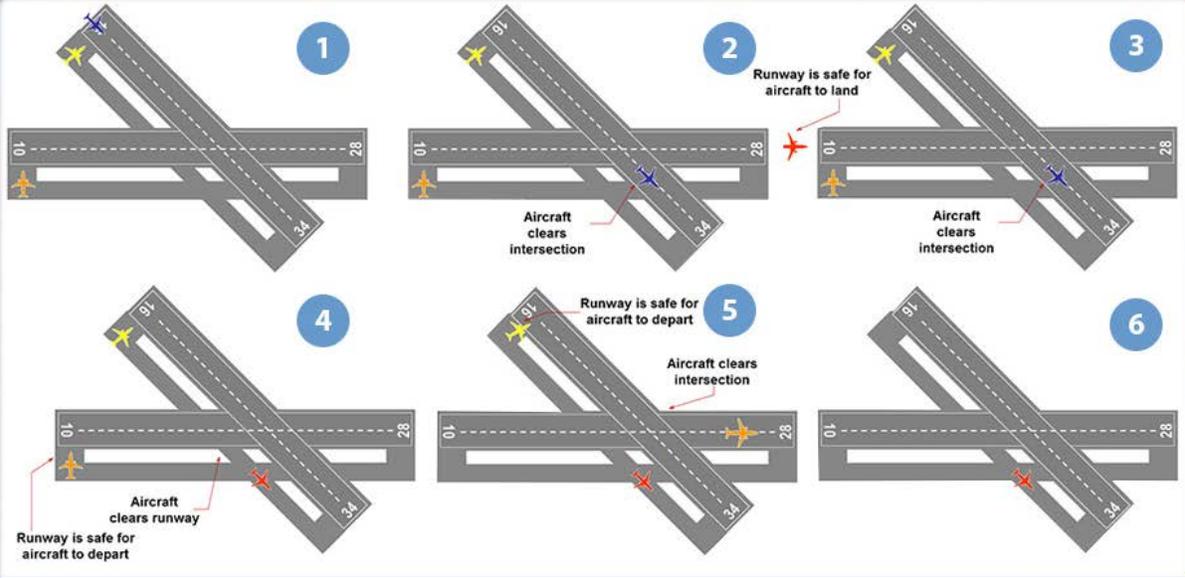


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Runway Separation

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Intersecting Runway Separation

Issue traffic information to each aircraft operating on intersecting runways.

[LEARN MORE](#)

Separate departing aircraft from an aircraft using an intersecting runway, or nonintersecting runway, when the flight paths intersect by ensuring that the departure does not begin takeoff roll until one of the following exists:

- Preceding aircraft has departed and passed the intersection, (has crossed the departure runway) or is turning to avert any conflict
- Preceding arriving aircraft is clear of the landing runway, completed the landing roll and will hold short of the intersection, passed the intersection, or has crossed over the departure runway

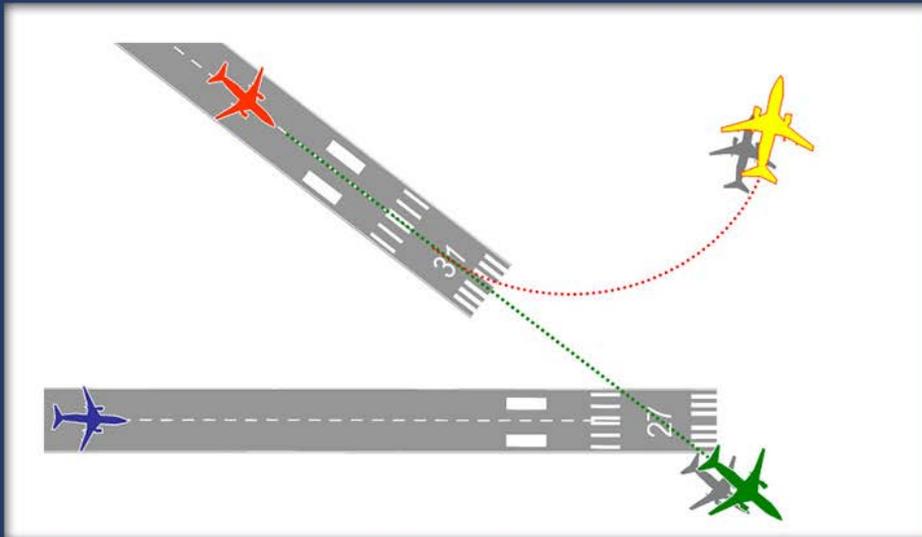
Reference: JO 7110.65, Chap. 3



Runway Separation

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Nonintersecting Runway Separation

JO 7110.65, Chap. 3



Holding Procedures

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Holding Terms and Definitions

A holding procedure is a predetermined maneuver which keeps an aircraft within a specified airspace while awaiting further clearance from Air Traffic Control (ATC). Also used during ground operations to keep aircraft within a specified area or at a specified point while awaiting further clearance from ATC.

Flow control refers to measures designed to adjust the flow of traffic into a given airspace, along a given route, or bound for a given airport, so as to ensure the most effective utilization of airspace.

A holding fix is a specified fix identifiable to a pilot by NAVAIDs or visual reference to the ground used as a reference point in establishing and maintaining the position an aircraft while holding.

A clearance limit is the fix, point, or location to which an aircraft is cleared when issued an air traffic clearance.

Expect Further Clearance (EFC) refers to the time a pilot can expect to receive clearance beyond a clearance limit.

JO 7110.65, Pilot-Controller Glossary; AIM, Chap. 5





Holding Procedures

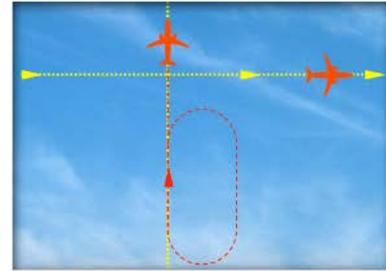
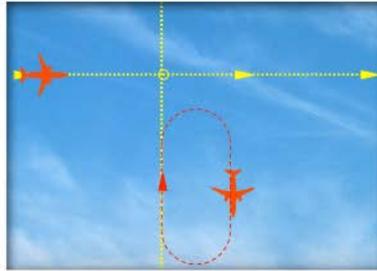
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Holding Uses

Holding is used for:

- Traffic en route
- Arrival delays
- Weather at destination
- Flow control
- Spacing





Holding Procedures

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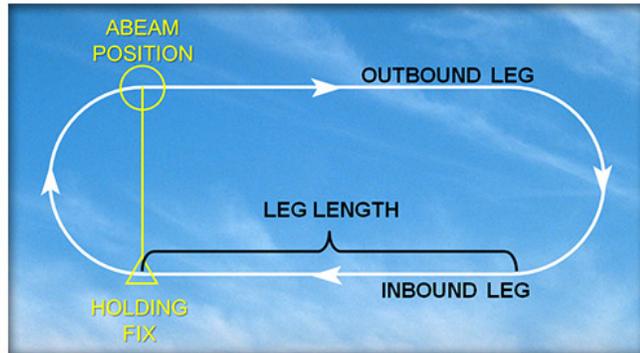
Typical Holding Pattern

Holding Fix (see definition)

- Standard pattern
 - Right turns
 - One minute legs (1 ½ minute above 14,000 MSL)
- Nonstandard Pattern
 - Left Turns
 - Other than standard timing, or DME leg length

Abeam - An aircraft is "abeam" a fix, point, or object when that fix, point, or object is approximately 90 degrees to the right or left of the aircraft track. Abeam indicates a general position rather than a precise point.

AIM, Chap. 5FAA-H-8083, Chap 10





Holding Procedures

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Holding Procedures Using Vertical Separation

Clear aircraft to hold over the same fix using vertical separation.

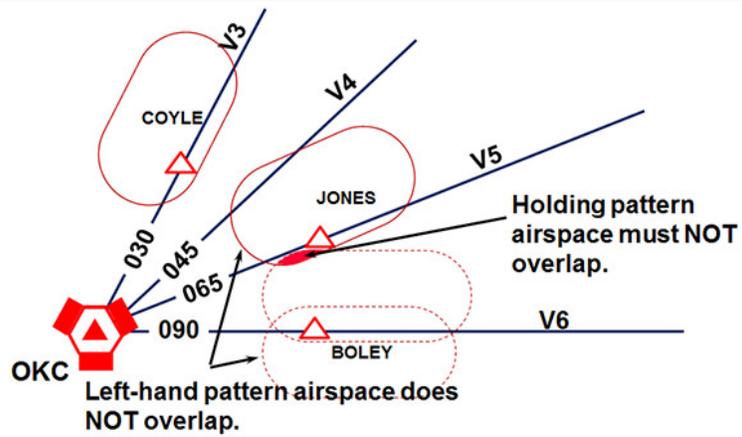
JO 7110.65, Chaps. 4 and 6



Holding Procedures

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Holding Procedures Using Lateral Separation

Clear aircraft to hold over different fixes, at the same altitude, whose holding pattern airspace areas do not overlap:

- Each other
- Other airspace to be protected

JO 7110.65, Chaps. 4 and 6



Holding Procedures

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Typical Holding Pattern

Outbound Leg (Holding Side)

- The outbound leg timing begins over/abeam the fix, whichever occurs later.
 - If the abeam position cannot be determined, start timing when turn to outbound is completed.
- The outbound course of a DME holding pattern is called the outbound leg of the pattern.
 - The length of the outbound leg may be specified by the controller.

Inbound Leg - The inbound radial, course, bearing, azimuth, airway, or route to the holding fix on which the aircraft is to hold, usually expressed in units of time or distance.

AIM, Chap. 5





Holding Procedures

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Holding Procedures Using Lateral Separation

JO 7110.65, Chaps. 4 and 6





Conclusion

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Lesson Summary



This lesson covered:

- Vertical Separation
- Non-Radar Lateral Separation
- Non-Radar Longitudinal Separation
- Radar Separation
- Visual Separation
- Runway Separation
- Holding Procedures

