



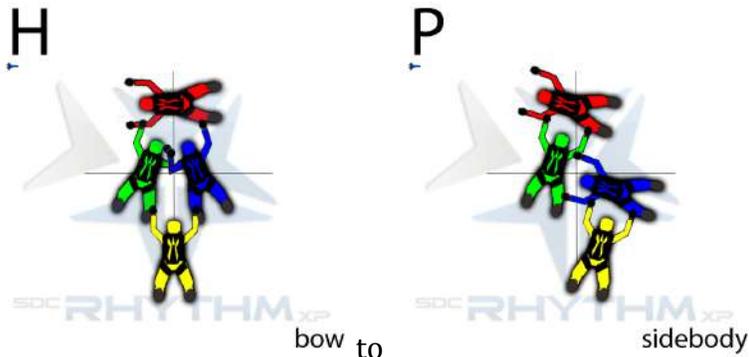
Red, green, blue, yellow: what color are you? Fourway Positions Explained

Fourway Competition can be a lot of fun and very challenging. It's the kind of sport you can enjoy casually on the occasional weekend, or you could devote your life to it – like we do on Rhythm! This article describes the five positions on a fourway team.

In competition fourway, skydivers are assigned a set of formations from a fixed pool of formations. There are various divisions, and as you move up to more advanced divisions, the pool of formations you work with increases. For example, there are 60 total formations, but in the Rookie class you will only draw from 16 of those. The pool of formations is relatively fixed, set by the International Parachuting Commission (IPC), with only small changes made every few years.

A lot of theory has been developed to help simplify the sport of fourway, and applying that theory can help to make each dive easier and more efficient to execute.

Defining the positions:



Every formation is designated by a name and a letter. We'll consider the formations "bow" (H) and "sidebody" (P) to describe some of the basic concepts of fourway. The first thing you might notice is that there are four different colors. Each one indicates a different position: red - point; green - outside center; blue - inside center; yellow - tail. They are designated by where they are typically positioned in a standard exit.



Positions during a standard Bow exit

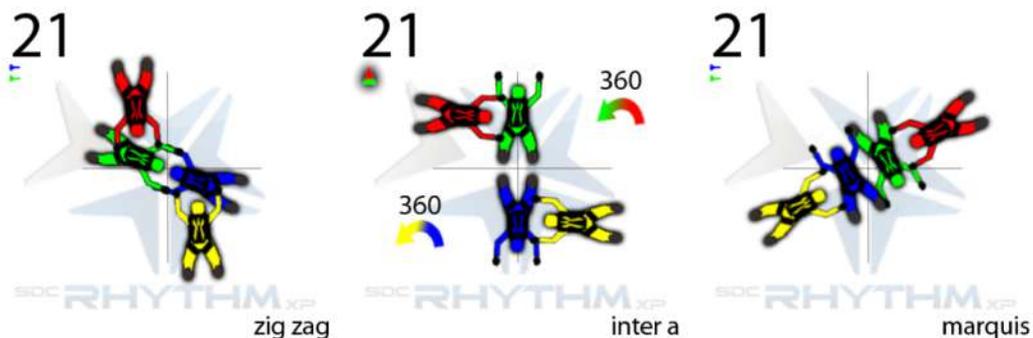


Though there are plenty of exceptions, typically:

- Point is inside the plane toward the front, or front diver
- Tail is outside the plane toward the rear, or rear floater
- The point and tail are collectively called the “wings”
- Outside center is outside the plane, in between the point and tail
- Inside center is inside the plane, in between the point and tail
- The outside center and inside center are collectively called the “centers”

There is no rule requiring that a certain position play a certain role. There is no mention of positions in the rules at all. In fact, as teams get more advanced, different positions often play different roles both in exits and in the formations. However, there is good reason to have these positions. They act as a guide for transitioning from one formation to the next as efficiently as possible, which is to say with minimal movement from each skydiver. Taking the example of transitioning from bow to sidebody, you can see what a small move it can be for each skydiver if the skydivers follow the color-coding in the diagrams. In reality, the blue flyer in the bow could play the role of the yellow flyer in the sidebody, but it would be less efficient to do it that way.

It is also worthwhile to briefly explain the difference between randoms and blocks. Randoms are single formations. You earn one point for making that formation. Blocks are defined as a starting formation, a prescribed move, and then an ending formation. During blocks, the formation typically breaks into smaller subgroups, spin around, and come back together. Sometimes, one group will fly vertically over the other to complete the block.



Block 21: Zigzag Marquis



Block 21 with verticals. The point and outside center go over.

Next we'll talk about each position (also called a slot), and what makes them unique. However, while there are differences between each position, we believe just about any skydiver can excel at any position over time. Most of the top competitors have played several roles over their careers, and you do yourself a disservice if you limit yourself to only flying one position.

Point:

On exit, the point is usually in the front of the door inside. They exit from a somewhat cramped position, so smaller people have a slight advantage in that respect. Upon leaving the plane, they usually have to use a combination of timing and jumping to put themselves above the rest of the group in the sky. In the air, the point is often outfacing. During randoms, they often have small precise moves in which they are presenting grips to their teammates. During blocks, they have bigger moves with a lot of individual spinning and moving. When there are verticals, they often go over. Because the point often presents grips and goes over during verticals, it helps if they are not the heaviest on the team.

Tail:

On exit, the tail is usually in the rear of the door outside. They are often hanging or squatted down in the door and they have to drop down aggressively as they exit. In the air, the tail is usually infacing. During the randoms, they turn a lot and take a lot of grips, especially cat grips (or two legs grips on the same person). Because the centers are often more focused on each other and the point and not on the tail, tails do a lot of responding to where the rest of the formation goes. In blocks, the tail often has very physical moves where they are spinning and moving the subgroup they are part of. When there are verticals, they typically go under. Because the tail drives the subgroups a lot in the blocks, it helps if they are strong and on the bigger side among their teammates.



Outside Center:

On exit, the outside center is usually in the middle of the door outside the plane. Their exit is typically very gymnastic, requiring a balance of power, presentation, and timing. During the randoms, they turn a lot. They work with the inside center to set the angles that the point and tail must respond to. They have a mix of infacing and outfacing, presenting and taking grips. In the blocks, they often have small precise moves that control the distance and levels between subgroups, while at the same time being driven by their teammates. When there are verticals between subgroups, they typically are the over group.

Inside Center:

On exit, the inside center is usually in the middle of the door inside the plane. Like the point, they are often in a cramped position. They usually have to sneak out the door trying to get lower than the outside center, which requires a balance of timing and aggressively sneaking through a very tight space. During the randoms, they take a lot of grips and decide when to “key,” or move on from one point to the next. They don’t have as big moves as the outside center or tail, but because they take a lot of grips and get gripped by others a lot, they have to be tough flyers who can deal with being pushed and pulled various ways. In the blocks, they often have small precise moves that control the distance and levels between subgroups, while at the same time being driven by their teammates, much like the outside center. When there are verticals between subgroups, they typically are the under group.

Because the outside center and inside center set the angles and distances and often drive the pace of the skydive, typically the most experienced teammate will go in one of these slots.

Videographer:

On exit, the videographer is outside the plane on the camera step. They usually leave slightly before or slightly after the rest of the formation. They use a combination of flying skill and timing to place themselves in position to capture all the grips on video immediately after the exit. They have the added challenge of being responsible for their video equipment. In the air, they have to keep the group in frame no matter where they move, or how far they get from each other.

The videographer has the unique position of being an integral part of the team, while also being somewhat outside the group. This is true during the skydive and also on the ground during preparation and debrief. As a result, the videographer may feel ignored at times, and they should be comfortable with that. Also, the videographer should be very responsible for their equipment. They should be comfortable solving problems without bringing additional drama to the team.



Because the videographer's jump experience can get repetitive over time, it helps if they enjoy working on their canopy skills or photography as an added benefit of their role on the team.

Here are some thoughts about selecting positions. First, be flexible about what position you fly. While you may have a preference, every slot is a lot of fun and very challenging. Most importantly, never let your preferred slot keep you from being on the best team you can join. I cringe when I hear someone say, "That team is looking for a tail but I'm a point."

On most teams choosing slots is less about perfect placement and more about teammates compromising to satisfy everyone's preferences and inclinations. Once your slot is chosen, try to get practice at that one slot rather than switching around a lot, but at the same time, balance that with being flexible if team opportunities require switching slots. Keep that in mind, and you're sure to have a great team experience and continue to grow in the sport.

About the author:

Steve Lefkowitz is a founding member of SDC Rhythm XP. Since it's founding in 2007, Rhythm has become one of the world's top 4way teams, earning medals nationally and internationally. As a coaching organization, they love working with skydivers at all levels, running tunnel workshops at Paraclete XP, and jumping events and team coaching at Skydive Chicago and Skydive Sebastian. They created the free Rhythm Skydiving 101 app, and they founded the Women's Skydiving Leadership Network. More info on Facebook, at their website rhythmskydiving.com, or contact steve@rhythmskydiving.com