

# The Last Mercury Retrograde of 2017

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Because Mercury is the planet closest to the Sun and has an orbital period of only 88 days, it's always within 28° of the Sun (from our perspective on earth) and exhibits the parallax factor of apparent retrograde motion in the heavens three times a year, on average. That means that, relative to our ecliptic (i.e., the Zodiac) and the background of fixed stars, about every four months Mercury's forward motion through the heavens gradually slows, then stops. The stopping point is called Mercury's *retrograde station*. After that, Mercury begins to apparently move backwards, very slowly at first, but accelerating over the next ten days or so. After that, the backward motion slows again over the following ten days, and Mercury stops for a second time, at what's called its *direct station*. Then it resumes forward (or direct) motion, gradually increasing its speed through the heavens until the next Mercury retrograde loop begins, after another roughly four months has passed.

Among the public, Mercury retrograde is probably the most well-known phenomenon in astrology. Even people who have never seen their natal charts and know precious little about astrology beyond their Sun Sign have often heard of Mercury Retrograde.

On November 14th, we enter the last Mercury Retrograde Loop of 2017. On that day, Mercury will still be in direct motion, moving forward, but it will pass over the degree of the zodiac to which it will later retrograde back in December. That begins the roughly eight-week Loop, which is composed of three phases: the entry phase (sometimes called the "Set-up" or "Shadow") from November 14th to the retrograde station on December 3rd, then the actual retrograde period in the middle, from December 3rd until December 23rd, and finally the last phase of resolution of denouement from December 23rd until January 10th.

So, all told, this Mercury Retrograde Loop is from *November 14th, 2017, through January 10th, 2018* — a total of *58 days*.

The astrological interpretation of a Mercury Retrograde Loop can be approached from any or all of three perspectives. The first is generic. Every Mercury Retrograde Loop shares certain qualities and presumptions in astrology. These include a larger-than-average number of communication glitches through mistakes or misunderstandings; confusion in logical thinking, unanticipated

changes, delays, or setbacks in schedules or travel itineraries; and breakdowns of machinery, especially those of a technological nature.

In this most general way, Mercury Retro Loops are considered within astrology to be lousy times for moving forward or beginning new projects in our personal lives, since the risk increases of making premature or hasty decisions that may backfire on us. During the Loop, the possibility of mentally overlooking relevant factors is greater than normal, but even when we don't — even when we think we've dotted every "i" and crossed every "T," new factors may emerge by surprise.

Major purchases, contracts, and/or commitments are typically cautioned against: Don't buy a house, a car, or an expensive piece of art. On the other hand, finishing up projects already underway that may have stalled or been pushed to the back burner is recommended. My approach — here as in many things — is to Keep It Simple. A Mercury Retrograde Loop is a great time to exercise patience and restraint by allowing our thoughts and understanding to gradually take shape, so that after the Loop ends we can make better decisions and move forward with greater certainty, with improved chances of achieving the results we hope.

Part of why contracts, commitments, and major purchases are advised against during Mercury Retrograde has to do with odds rather than certainties. If the odds of buying a home, then later, after escrow closes, discovering a serious problem with the house or the deal, are — let's say — 10% during normal business times, those odds may increase during a Mercury Retro Loop to perhaps 20-30%. Even so, 70% of Mercury Retro homebuyers will still be fine. Life goes on, as it always does, and people continue to feel all the same pressures they normally experience. It's just that the odds counsel greater caution and restraint during a Mercury Retrograde.

One factor here is that Mercury Retrograde snafus don't always occur within the time frame of the Retrograde Loop. They can be delayed, lurking invisibly until triggered later. If something turns out to be amiss in the aftermath of acting on a decision during Mercury Retro, the issue might not surface until months or even years later. Whenever the problems show up, if they do, addressing and correcting them can be a hassle for everyone concerned — the buyer, seller, agent, etc. Everyone suffers.

Do I believe all the various do's and don't's? Sort of. They're too specific for my tastes, and often far too cut-and-dried, but I understand why such presumptions have become associated with Mercury Retrograde. More classic (and, I think, trustworthy) astrological advice about any Mercury Retrograde Loop is to slow down, wait if possible, let things "cook," and watch how life unfolds over the eight weeks of the Loop. Do I believe that to be sound wisdom? Yes.

Beyond these general meanings of Mercury Retrograde, astrologers can examine the specific symbolic features of any particular Mercury Retro Loop, including the section of the zodiac through which Mercury will back up, as well as the entire charts for the exact moments of the two stations. This particular Mercury retrograde occurs in the second half of the sign Sagittarius (from 30° back to 13°), so — in the textbook terms of traditional astrology — decisions involving travel, higher education, or group endeavors may be affected. From this somewhat more tailored perspective, considering going back to school or taking a trip to New Zealand might better be postponed until the beginning of 2018, if possible.

Then, and most importantly, we can check to see what Mercury cycles are activated within any individual's personal chart during the Retrograde Loop. To me, this is the most revealing of the three perspectives.

The activation by Mercury (as a moving body) of a significant phase change in any of its paired cycles to planetary, angular, or other symbolic positions in someone's natal chart — called a "transit" — is a brief event that heightens the nervous and mental energies. Depending on all the different variables — the particular cycle, the specific phase change, and the overall condition of the individual's chart — a Mercury transit may be pleasant or unpleasant, stimulating or over-stimulating (and thus debilitating). Some Mercury transits wake up our intelligence; others over-amp our nervous systems. They may clarify our thinking or muddy the waters.

What's worth noting is that most Mercury transits have an effective period of only one or two days. These transits come and go quickly during Mercury's "normal" forward motion. During a Mercury retrograde Loop, however, that effective period changes dramatically. The one- or two-day alteration of our nervous system, mentality, and presumably our consciousness stretches out, so that the event becomes what's called a "three-pass" transit that lasts for almost seven weeks.

Below are some examples of how this works and what certain three-pass Mercury transits might feel like for an individual.

Consider the Mercury-Mars cycle (meaning Mercury as a moving body relative to the Mars position in someone's natal chart). When Mercury passes over Mars in a natal chart, which it does once each year, that is normally a one- or two-day period when the "desire" and "assertion" factors in the person's psyche fuse with the mental-nervous factor. We might find ourselves suddenly thinking about what we want — not that we wouldn't think about that otherwise, but, during the Mercury conjunct Mars transit, the connection spikes up. Desire is on our minds, so to speak, and we weigh all the variables about getting whatever we want. We might also feel more assertive or even combative, almost like an itch we need to scratch. A day or two later, however, we're back to normal.

If Mercury passes over natal Mars during its Retrograde Loop, however, that transit becomes eight weeks long, and it goes through all sorts of changes (internal and external) over that period. After eight weeks, the cumulative stress of increased adrenaline can exhaust both the body and the psyche.

Or consider a Mercury square to natal Saturn. Ordinarily, that's a one- to two-day event when one's thoughts are "infected" by pessimism or personal fears. If that transit occurs during a Mercury Retro Loop, however, it's not just a blip on the radar screen, but an active, prolonged force within the mind, with potent emotional effects. During that transit, we tend to think of our lives not in terms of making things right, but fearfully, considering every possible thing that could go wrong. (What Mercury square Saturn could be good for, on the other hand, is facing our fears head-on. It's a chance to learn which of our fears are groundless and which are about real danger. Even in that case, though, the experience of the transit is likely to be hard for the ego.)

By contrast, a Mercury opposition to the natal Sun can represent, during an eight-week Retro Loop, an extended period of thinking about the core meaning in one's life, especially as relationships with others might affect that. Interactions hit closer to home, bringing up questions and negotiations. What do we need to communicate to the significant people in our lives? How can we best do that, and how do we respond to what others tell us? With patience and observation, an extended three-pass Mercury oppose Sun transit can be fruitful in stimulating us to understand any changes in socialization that might enhance our overall sense of personal meaning or purpose.

These examples don't go into much detail because the more specific, custom-tailored correspondences that might occur are dependent on the particular chart in question and vary widely from one chart to another. My point here is simply that personal transits during a Mercury Retrograde Loop can have a major impact.

Here's a metaphor for understanding what happens during a Mercury Retro Loop. We all know how dreams defy common sense logic. One moment we're in high school, then suddenly we're at a wedding or in a boat on a lake. In the dream, that all seems perfectly reasonable, but when we wake up, we think, "*What the hell?*" Well, Mercury Retrograde is a little like that. During the Retro Loop, our brains expand beyond ordinary logic to include the realm of the unconscious or super-conscious. Unlike in dreams, however, where the shift is total (logic no longer applies at all), during Mercury Retrograde the shift is extremely subtle, with regular logic still appearing to be in place, but with the dream realm interacting invisibly. The alteration is so subtle that we don't even know it's happening. We may still believe that we're making rational, pragmatic decisions, but in fact, dreams have merged with realities.

Does this mean that we should follow our dreams or intuitions blindly during Mercury Retrograde? No. What I think it means is that we should strive to remain aware of the interpenetration of different realms and act accordingly by not leaping at (or away from) whatever comes up, but instead waiting to confirm if it's real and right for us.

What Mercury Retrograde offers us is the periodic opportunity to slow down and smell the coffee. The urgency of modern civilization tends to disconnect us from the natural rhythms of life. Business moves at breakneck speed, and it's all too easy to get caught up in the illusion that life is a race. Mercury Retrograde Loops comprise almost half our time each year, and, while I don't want to imply that this how life "should" be, that's how it is. Move forward for awhile, then move back. To everything there is a season — Turn, Turn, Turn.

Those who have lived long enough have gone through Mercury Retro Loops that were very difficult for us, where we felt that the travail of mistakes, misunderstandings, delays, breakdowns, and screw-ups would last forever. We've also lived through Mercury Retrogrades that hardly touched us and through which we breezed without so much as a scratch. Either way, the advice is the same: *Slow down. Don't push the river. Assess where you've been, where you are, and where you're headed.* You don't even have to do that with any special attention or conscious effort. It will happen by itself. All we have to do is notice the cosmic telegrams when they're delivered and read them thoughtfully. After the Retro Loop ends, we can begin making whatever changes seem warranted and reasonable.

As a final comment, I don't wish to over-emphasize the importance of Mercury Retrograde. Given the sheer number of important astrological events that occur in our charts, I wouldn't put Mercury Retrogrades anywhere close to the top of the list. Realistically, it's much closer to the bottom. Over a full life, we'll go through literally hundreds of Mercury Retro Loops of greater or lesser significance in our charts and our lives. Whether a given Loop is positive or negative for us, the rule that "*This too shall pass*" still applies.

The fact remains, however, that many people are interested in Mercury Retrograde, and I hope this brief guide may be helpful in navigating the upcoming passage.