

Explanation of Solar Eclipse Diagrams

The solar eclipse diagrams show the region over which different phases of each eclipse may be seen and the times at which these phases occur. Each diagram has a series of dashed curves that show the outline of the Moon's penumbra on the Earth's surface at one-hour intervals. Short dashes show the leading edge and long dashes show the trailing edge. Except for certain extreme cases, the shadow outline moves generally from west to east. The Moon's shadow cone first contacts the Earth's surface where "First Contact" is indicated on the diagram. "Last Contact" is where the Moon's shadow cone last contacts the Earth's surface. The path of central eclipse, whether for a total, annular, or annular-total eclipse, is marked by two closely spaced curves that cut across all of the dashed curves. These two curves mark the extent of the Moon's umbral shadow on the Earth's surface. Viewers within these boundaries will observe a total, annular, or annular-total eclipse and viewers outside these boundaries will see a partial eclipse.

Solid curves labeled "Northern" and "Southern Limit of Eclipse" represent the furthest extent north or south of the Moon's penumbra on the Earth's surface. Viewers outside of these boundaries will not experience any eclipse. When only one of these two curves appears, only part of the Moon's penumbra touches the Earth; the other part is projected into space north or south of the Earth, and the terminator defines the other limit.

Another set of solid curves appears on some diagrams as two teardrop shapes (or lobes) on either end of the eclipse path, and on other diagrams as a distorted figure eight. These lobes represent in time the intersection of the Moon's penumbra with the Earth's terminator as the eclipse progresses. As time elapses, the Earth's terminator moves east-to-west while the Moon's penumbra moves west-to-east. These lobes connect to form an elongated figure eight on a diagram when part of the Moon's penumbra stays in contact with the Earth's terminator throughout the eclipse. The lobes become two separate teardrop shapes when the Moon's penumbra breaks contact with the Earth's terminator during the beginning of the eclipse and reconnects with it near the end. In the east, the outer portion of the lobe is labeled "Eclipse begins at Sunset" and marks the first contact between the Moon's penumbra and Earth's terminator in the east. Observers on this curve just fail to see the eclipse. The inner part of the lobe is labeled "Eclipse ends at Sunset" and marks the last contact between the Moon's penumbra and the Earth's terminator in the east. Observers on this curve just see the whole eclipse. The curve bisecting this lobe is labeled "Maximum Eclipse at Sunset" and is part of the sunset terminator at maximum eclipse. Viewers in the eastern half of the lobe will see the Sun set before maximum eclipse; *i.e.* see less than half of the eclipse. Viewers in the western half of the lobe will see the Sun set after maximum eclipse; *i.e.* see more than half of the eclipse. A similar description holds for the western lobe except everything occurs at sunrise instead of sunset.

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