

Principles Of Partner Dancing

Partner dancing is moving in synchrony with **music and one other person**.

Dance Frame is the physical connection with your partner and is **THE critical element** in partner dancing.

Step in dance refers to the same movement as it does in walking. Step can also refer to a *sequence* of foot movements associated with a particular dance *style*.

Close - step next to the stationary foot.

Style refers to the features that make distinctions among the different *dances*.

When to step is determined by the music and the style of dance.

Where to step is **generally discretionary** so long as we follow the **Line of Dance**: fast progressive in the outside lane, slow progressive in the inside lane, non-progressive in the center of the floor.

Music Synchrony. Music sets the tempo for the style/cadence. **Waltz** is based on **3 beats per unit**, social dancers step on each beat of each unit. In social dance, there are two popular forms of synchrony associated with **4-beat units**, the **One Step** and the **Two-Step**. For **One-Step** dances, dancers step on each beat.

Two-Step dances incorporate steps on alternate as well as successive beats. The most popular two-step, and the one to learn first, is to **step on beats One, Three, and Four** of each 4-beat unit. (a.k.a. SQQ) The second most popular two-step is to step on beats One, Two, and Three of each 4-beat unit. (a.k.a. QQS) (Note. The time interval following the *slow* step, S, is twice the time interval following the *quick* step, Q.)

That's It! All popular dance styles are variations on the preceding. You can have an enjoyable lifetime of social dancing without ever going beyond the aforementioned.

Applying the Principles

Step Normally. When we walk, we step forward, backward or to the side, and that is the way it should be when we dance. When changing direction, we typically turn to face the direction in which we wish to go, and then step step in that direction, and that is the way it should be when we dance.

Step Smoothly. OK, there is a *slight* difference between walking and dancing. Stand up straight and keep your feet close to the floor. The degree of change is determined by the style of your walk. If you already walk upright and smoothly, little initial change need be considered. If you slump, bounce, clunk or stomp when you walk, then you need to make some adjustments when you dance.

The Dance Frame is the most important, and most neglected, aspect of partner dancing, and neglect creates problems. A good *dance frame* is essential to comfortable, enjoyable partner dancing. If you know one "step" (e.g. SQQ), and have a good dance frame, you, and a *partner with a good dance frame*, can enjoy dancing. A good dance frame can enable strangers to dance comfortably and enjoyably, it can enable leaders to provide an enjoyable dance to a more experienced follower, and it can enable followers to dance comfortably and enjoyably with a more experienced leader. A good dance frame will allow precise leading and following, necessary for collision avoidance on a crowded floor. **You cannot learn enough "steps" to compensate for a poor dance frame.**

Position. Stand in front of your partner, shoulders parallel and shifted slightly to the left so that you are looking over your partner's right shoulder, your feet pointing to their own, parallel *tracks*, each person's right foot *tracking* between the other's feet. This precludes hitting each other or stepping on each other's toes. Whether in closed or open position, and whether connected physically or simply visually, returning to this position following any separation is critical to a good partnership, for **it is from this position that most variations are initiated**. Just as our feet feel at *home* when they are side by side, this is *home* for the torsos; unless otherwise directed, go *home*.

Closed Position. Man's left palm and woman's right palm connect at her face level and slightly forward of the torsos, arms extended, elbows bent slightly, fingers *gently* wrapped around each other's hand. The man's fingers are almost parallel to the floor; the woman's fingers are almost perpendicular to the floor and draped over the man's hand. **Neither should pinch, grip, squeeze or hold any portion of their partner between their thumb and fingers, ever!** The man's right wrist should be at the back edge of the woman's armpit, fingers and thumb together, hand cupped slightly, resting gently on her shoulder blade. The man is responsible for keeping his hand in the proper position, and the woman is responsible for keeping gentle pressure against his hand. The woman's left arm is extended along the top of the man's arm with her left hand placed gently on his upper arm, wherever it naturally falls. The woman's hand should be relaxed, fingers together, neither pushing, pulling, nor pinching. There is also a connection between the upper part of his forearm and the underside of her upper arm. The torsos occupy two, parallel planes; the extended hands and the opposite elbows define a *plane of symmetry*. Dancers should maintain symmetry, and, after

turning, strive to regain symmetry. Elbows may move up or down as appropriate, but they should remain slightly forward of the torso. See "**Position**," above, for torso orientation.

Body Connection. The body connection begins at the upper thigh and continues to the right side of the diaphragm. Though this connection is not made in most Latin dancing, and though many neglect, or even avoid, this connection in smooth ballroom dances, this connection can add visually and functionally to the dance, especially with some expansion at the top of the frame.

Posture at the top. If each partner stands tall, with their shoulders back and their head straight, the aforementioned frame components will give them a conical shape, much like a spinning top or an ice cream cone. Such posture, along with a good frame, will enable them to step in synchrony, with precision, and without stepping on each other, looking over each other's right shoulder, along the line of movement, though not necessarily in the direction of movement. With certain partners, dancers might wish occasionally to make eye contact, or even converse; we are talking about social, not competitive, dance.

Open Position. The open frame should be as solid as the closed frame. Symmetric or parallel torso planes should be maintained; otherwise the connection is weakened. Upper arms should be vertical. Lower arm of the shorter dancer should be parallel to the floor. The man should present his fingers parallel to the floor, thumb against the side of forefinger, fingers pointing inward. Woman's fingers should remain together and draped solidly over the man's fingers. Generally there is more oppositional movement in open position, so this connection, though flexible, should remain intact, but **do not grip**.

Underarm Turn. Maintaining the frame during underarm turns is critical to leading and following. This is often done with "pin and pivot" to keep the connection yet allow rotation. The man raises his forearm to almost vertical, his lower arm parallel to the floor, forms a "pin" with his fingers, or his middle two fingers, pointing downward. The woman forms a pivot with her fingers curled toward her palm, sufficiently open so as not to twist the "pin." The woman's upper arm should be parallel to the floor; her lower arm should be vertical, elbow slightly forward of torso. The man reaches up, but not directly above the woman's head. By maintaining proper hand position, he can guide the direction, acceleration, deceleration, and termination of the turn. This arm position also helps keep the couple in appropriate proximity; neither should drift away so that the elbow must be straightened and the arm extended. Alternately, the turning frame can be maintained with the leader's fingers gently pressing the open palm of the follower.

Step with confidence. Know when to step, and step, neither hesitating nor anticipating. When given opportunity, the follower should step boldly, whether forward or backward, and, when reaching back, a full step with the toes pointed downward will make it all but impossible for the man to step on her toes. This also goes for the man when he is stepping backward. Stay in position, step boldly, smoothly, naturally and in cadence, and you will never endanger feet or toes.

Common Errors. Failure to maintain frame, thus forcing the other either to break frame or hold more than their share of the weight. Breaking cadence. Moving out of position, such as a traveling turn in a non-progressive danced or a spot turn in a progressive dance. Leader - failing to accommodate the follower's height, relaxing the frame, late signals, extending hand above partner's head, "cranking" during turns. Follower - limp right arm, anticipating direction, stepping too soon, not responding to pressure, extending the arm fully on turns and in open position, allowing the extended arm to drift behind the shoulder line, gripping, moving beyond partner's reach on turns.

Stick Frame. You can simulate partner dancing with a stick held across your forearms near your elbow.

Stick to a Good Frame. Pun intended. Get a stick about 40 inches long, hold one end with the palms of the extended hands, and rest the other end on the leader's elbow; hold it in place with the followers arm. The stick defines the plane of symmetry, and it will help keep the extended hands from drifting out of position. If your partner habitually extends their hand too far forward or lets it drift back too far, suggest using a stick to help identify the plane of symmetry.

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