

Teach Like a Pro

THE ULTIMATE GUIDE FOR BALLROOM DANCE INSTRUCTORS

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Chapter 1:

Fundamentals of Being an ★ Outstanding Dance Teacher

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Students are eager to learn and hunger to become good dancers. They entrust us to teach them correctly, efficiently and simply. We owe it to them to know, and be able to communicate, the essentials of dancing.

This chapter lays a foundation of general principles for the activities that comprise the bulk of a dance teacher's work—teaching and reviewing figures, choreographing routines, giving students feedback and teaching them dance etiquette, and conducting group classes—and includes information on becoming professionally certified. To help you synthesize everything, the chapter ends with a checklist of the skills of outstanding dance teachers.

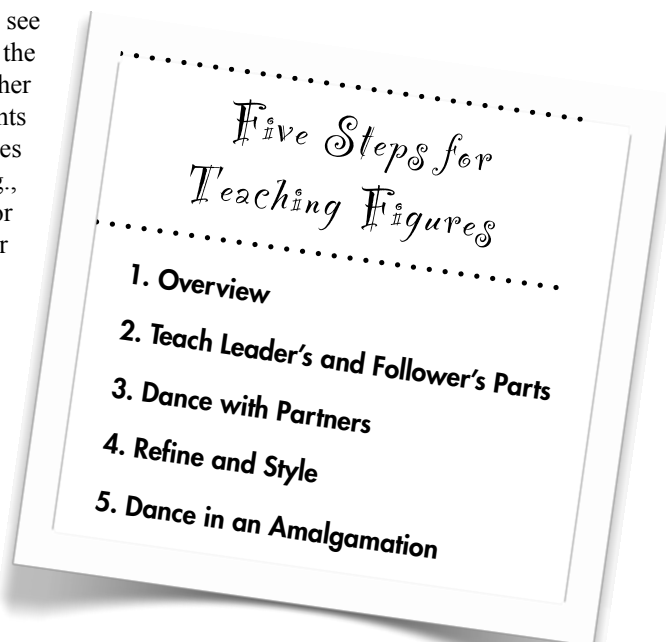
Teaching Figures

Outstanding teachers present new figures in a systematic way. First, give an overview to introduce students to the figure, then delve into the details of the Leader's and Follower's parts. Always give students ample opportunity to practice dancing the new figure and offer constructive feedback to refine students' technique and style. Once students are ready, give them an amalgamation that combines the new figure with figures they already know. The following sections explain this practical, structured approach in more detail and suggest ways to adapt it in different situations.

1. GIVE AN OVERVIEW OF THE FIGURE

Demonstrate and Demystify: Start by demonstrating the figure so that students see what they are going to learn. Help demystify the new figure by noting how it is similar to other figures (or components of figures) that students know. If a student is a beginner, use analogies comparing the steps to familiar shapes (e.g., square, circle, the number seven, etc.) or common actions (e.g., backing up a car or sitting in a chair).

Generate Excitement: Tell students why the figure is important or what makes it fun (and therefore worth the effort to learn). Give students a framework of when and how this figure is commonly used. For example, in the Smooth dances, a twinkle from Closed to Promenade Position is a common opening to many figures. In the Rhythm dances, a Follower's underarm spot turn to the right is a common way to end figures.



Mention Variations: When appropriate, explain that what you are teaching is one of many ways to dance the figure. You may want to teach (or at least demonstrate) other ways the figure may be danced or modified (taking care not to overwhelm students with too many options).

- * *Other Common Entrances or Exits:* For example, fifth position breaks in Rumba may be entered from half a side basic or box plus a side step. The fifth position breaks can end with half a side basic, with a Follower's right underarm spot turn or with both the Leader and Follower dancing free spin spot turns.
- * *Parts that Can Be Eliminated:* Rumba, Cha Cha and Mambo figures that start with a cross-body lead may be danced without the cross-body lead.
- * *Parts that May Be Repeated, Extended or Interchanged:* For example, measures 2 and 3 of turning twinkles and promenade twinkles in Waltz may be repeated and/or interchanged.

Summarize: Demonstrate the figure again, verbally breaking it down into components (e.g., open break or half a box).

2. TEACH LEADER'S, THEN FOLLOWER'S PARTS

The following format is designed for teaching a couple or group class a new figure with significantly different parts for the Leader and Follower. It is written as if you are the solo teacher and cannot teach the Leaders and Followers at the same time. If you are the solo teacher, be mindful of how much time you spend teaching the Leaders, as you do not want to keep Followers waiting too long. Of course, when teaching with a skilled assistant, both roles can be taught simultaneously—you teaching one role while your assistant teaches the other.

Teach the Leader's Part



Choose Direction: Have the Leaders stand behind you, facing the direction that makes most sense. For example, face the correct alignment for a Smooth or Standard dance figure; face the mirror when it is important for students to see themselves (or for you to be able to watch them).

Walk Through: Walk the Leaders through the figure step by step, saying the Leader's foot positions. Repeat this process, adding other elements such as amounts of turn, dance positions, footwork, etc. (see *Chapter 2: The Technical Language of Dance*). Continue walking through the figure until Leaders feel comfortable with their part.

- * *Modify Figures as Necessary:* When teaching less experienced students, you may want to simplify a difficult figure.

Chapter 2:

The Technical Language of Dance

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The elements of dance are like the posts and beams of a house—each has its purpose. Just as we admire a “well-built” house, we prepare our students to be “well-trained” dancers by teaching the elements clearly and thoroughly.

Introduction to the Technical Language of Dance

The *elements* are sometimes called the technical language of dance. In general usage, an *element* is an essential part or characteristic of something larger. Among dance teachers, the elements are nearly a dozen characteristics that a dance syllabus manual uses to describe the figures.

Like a real language that gradually evolves, the list of recognized elements has grown over time. For example, the DVIDA® syllabus manuals now include the dance position and summary elements. While dance teachers have always used these elements, they had not been consistently included in manuals.

Real languages also typically have regional variations. Likewise, dance manuals vary slightly in the way they use elements to describe figures, although there is fundamental agreement about how the elements are defined. In some cases, the differences between manuals are because some dances do not require all of the elements. For example, sway is an important element in the Smooth and Standard dances but is not used in most of the Rhythm and Latin dances. In other cases, manual publishers simply use different conventions. For example, some manuals use the term *timing*, while others use *count* to refer to the same element. Similarly, in some manuals, foot position and dance position are treated as separate elements, with separate columns. In contrast, other manuals mention dance positions as part of the foot position, only when the dance position deviates from the default Closed Position.

If you wonder why a dance teacher would need to master so many elements, then imagine how your students' Waltz boxes would look if the only elements you could teach them were foot positions (i.e., forward, side, close) and count (i.e., 1 2 3). Your students would not be dancing the true dance—without the elements of turn, sway, rise and fall, etc. it would not be very interesting. Moreover, their boxes would look so plain that without music it would be difficult to tell whether they were dancing Waltz, Foxtrot or Rumba!

Now imagine that you can teach three more elements—contra body movement, turn and alignment. These allow your students to move around the room and have more fun. Then imagine you can teach three more elements—footwork, rise and fall, and sway. Your students' boxes begin to look and feel like Waltz, because you have used the elements as tools to sculpt your students into dancers.

A teacher who does not know the elements must demonstrate repeatedly for students, hoping that they see what it is the teacher is trying to teach.

Alternatively, the teacher urges students to “feel it” because he or she lacks the words to describe the actions that would create the feeling.

This chapter defines and explains how to teach all of the elements listed below, providing you with knowledge of how to improve your students’ dancing and the vocabulary to communicate it to them!

<i>Foot Position</i>	<i>Rise and Fall</i>
<i>Dance Position</i>	<i>Count</i>
<i>Lead</i>	<i>Swing and Sway</i>
<i>Alignment</i>	<i>Contra Body Movement (CBM)</i>
<i>Turn</i>	<i>Summary</i>
<i>Footwork</i>	

Foot Position Element



Foot Position: *The direction of the moving foot in relation to the standing foot and the torso.*

Foot position is arguably the most important element—without knowing where the feet should be placed, a student cannot move at all! Foot position does not refer to the path the foot takes to arrive at its destination, as that may differ from the final position. Foot position can describe more than just where the foot goes—it can include qualifiers about the step (e.g., toe turned in, small step or pivot) or actions of the free foot (e.g., brushes or rondés).

Not to Be Confused with Footwork: Foot position is often confused with *footwork*, which is the *part* of the foot in contact with the floor (e.g., heel toe, toe, toe heel), not the *direction* the foot is moving. Footwork is discussed in more detail in the *Footwork Element* section later in this chapter.

FOOT POSITION VARIATIONS

Every foot position has two parts—the first part specifies which foot moves (i.e., either right foot or left), and the second part specifies where the foot goes. Since it can be difficult to visualize a foot position just by reading about it, photographs of the most common foot positions are included in the *Appendix*.

Chapter 3:

Dance Frames

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The dance frame is the magical, elastic glue that allows two people to dance as one.



Frame: *The means of connecting with your partner using correct positioning of the arms, shoulders, elbows and hands. A toned frame is essential for good leading and following.*

Ballroom dancing differs from most other forms of dance in that it is almost entirely done in partnership with another person. In most styles of dance (e.g., ballet, jazz, contemporary, etc.), dancers develop themselves as individuals, cultivating qualities such as balance, coordination, strength, flexibility and sensory awareness. Ballroom dancing requires all of these, as well as the additional necessity of developing a physical and mental harmony with a partner.

Two people are able to “dance as one” through an excellent frame. While it is not the only means, frame is the primary medium through which partners communicate. This chapter first describes several useful practice holds, then details the frames for the most common closed and open dance positions for the major dance styles. At the end of the chapter, there is a handy summary of the important points to cover whenever you teach a new dance position to students.

Practice Holds

Having seen dancing on television and in the movies, students usually have ideas about what ballroom dancing looks like. Students sometimes try to emulate a beautiful ballroom frame without knowing *how* to create a functional, connected frame.

While it is important to develop students’ frames, with beginning students the main thing is to get them moving with their partners. When teachers overly emphasize frame with beginners (e.g., endless fine tuning or requiring close contact with partners), it tends to become an obstacle that limits students’ ability to move and learn. This is why practice holds are so useful!

Practice holds are great for both beginning and advanced students. Usually a variation on a Closed Position frame, practice holds are designed to facilitate good partner connection without the restriction of a formal frame. In this way, practice holds are great tools for improving students’ frames and connection. It is also very useful for students to dance new figures using a practice hold before using a formal frame.

Here are a range of practice holds to use when teaching your students.

Elbow Practice Hold: All Dances

The Leader and Follower hold their arms in a circular shape in front of their chests. The Follower places the arms on top of the Leader's arms, and then both partners hold on to the other's upper arms above the elbows.

Best for practicing Closed Position figures, this hold has the advantage of a connection similar to a formal frame but has more space between the partners. Also, because this frame does not have a handhold, it reduces students' tendency to distort the frame and arm-lead, while cultivating the ability to lead (and follow) from the center of the torso.



Variation: Shoulder Blade–Elbow Hold

This variation retains the elbow hold for the Leader's left and Follower's right arms. The Leader's right and Follower's left arms are arranged as in a normal frame (e.g., Closed or Promenade Position frame).

This is an excellent intermediary practice hold to use with students between the elbow hold and a completely formal frame. This variation also eliminates the handclasp thus helping students maintain their frame and lead and follow from their torsos.



Chapter 4:

Music

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We hear it and we want to move to it. But do we understand it?

Music and dancing are inseparable, making it imperative for dance teachers to be knowledgeable about various aspects of music. Teachers with a background in music (e.g., who play an instrument or read music) may have an easier time hearing subtleties in music and explaining musical information to students than teachers who do not. However, even teachers with musical experience may not be clear about how music relates to ballroom dance.

This chapter explains what you need to know about music to teach effectively, beginning with selecting music and hearing the beat. We then define the musical terms that are most important for teachers to understand—measures, musical notes, time signatures, tempo, count and beat value, and musical phrasing. Lastly, we cover how to start students to music, count in beats and bars, use sound systems and practice music etiquette. The chapter ends with a checklist summarizing all these key aspects of a dance teacher's musical knowledge.

Selecting Teaching Music

As a dance teacher, it is vital to be prepared and have access to the appropriate music for each teaching situation. Whether you keep your music on an mp3 player (e.g., an iPod), a laptop computer or on CDs, your collection must have all types and tempos of music.

Criteria for Selecting Music

When selecting music, consider what is appropriate for the type and level of students you are teaching. No matter how well you teach, beginning students are likely to feel frustrated if the music does not meet the following criteria.

- ★ **Slow Tempo:** Generally, it is best to choose slower than average music for beginners.
- ★ **Clear Beat:** Choose songs with a very distinct, easy-to-hear beat.
- ★ **Correct Feel:** Select music that is characteristic of the dance being taught (e.g., play Latin music when teaching Cha Cha). This helps students learn what to dance to each type of music. It also contributes to a fun, themed atmosphere, which students often desire when learning to dance.
- ★ **Familiar:** Beginners usually appreciate hearing popular music with which they are familiar. This also helps students find music in their own collection (or obtain new music) for practicing at home.

As your students progress and get more familiar with ballroom music in general, you can play a greater range of tempos and songs in which the beat is more subtle. This gives students experience dancing to a range of music in the safe environment of a dance lesson and prepares them for success when they go out social dancing or encounter a new song on the competition floor.



Listen Before You Teach

Listen to songs in their entirety before using them to teach. Check for unusual features that might cause difficulties for students, such as:

- ⊙ Quiet sections in which it is difficult to hear the beat.
- ⊙ Overly loud sections that may hurt students' ears.
- ⊙ Long, undanceable introductions.
- ⊙ Long fade-outs at the end of a song.
- ⊙ Tempo (speed) changes.
- ⊙ Breaks (silences), especially that last two or more measures.
- ⊙ Unexpected bridges (extra measures, often shorter than a normal phrase) between phrases.

Building Your Music Collection

Purchasing music is easy these days with online stores and the ability to purchase single songs (as opposed to entire albums). It is best to listen to a sample of a song before purchasing to confirm it will be good for teaching. For example, determining the most appropriate dance for that particular piece of music, whether the song has a clear, easy-to-hear beat and whether it is the right tempo.

Ideally, teachers have 10-20 songs (or more) in a variety of tempos for each dance. This allows you to play songs at the appropriate tempo for a range of student skill levels. If you are unable to speed up and slow down music through your equipment, it is particularly crucial to have songs from the slowest to fastest range for that particular dance.

Having an assortment of songs for each dance also gives students the opportunity to get comfortable dancing to a variety of music and aids their

learning to identify what music goes with which dance. Having variety also helps reduce the monotony of only a few songs. That said, sometimes dance teachers get carried away and play their favorite songs for students even when the songs are not good for teaching. Remember to put your students' needs first—what might be a boring piece of music to you is often what is optimal for your students' learning.

Hearing the Beat



Beat: *The regular rhythmic pulse in a piece of music.*

The most important feature of music for a dancer to identify is the beat. Many students hear the beat easily, while others find it elusive. Sometimes students are able to hear the beat in some songs but not in other songs. This is because some music is relatively simple in structure, while other music is complex, with many instruments and rhythms (e.g., Salsa).

Exercises for Hearing the Beat



Use these exercises to help students hear the beat in the music.

Clap Hands: Begin to clap out the beat in the music and have students join you. Once students hear the beat, stop clapping and let them continue on their own. Assure students that they are “on the beat” (and as necessary, help them get back on beat).

Tap with Fingers (or Feet): Tap out the beat in the music with a pencil (or your fingers) on a table and have your students join you. Students can tap their fingers on the table or on their laps. You can switch tapping to a different part of your body on each measure, having students do the same. Even if you have not explained the term *measures* yet, doing this will begin building their instinctive sense of the measures.

Alternatively, have students tap out the beat with their feet. Students can tap their heels (rather than their toes), as this tends to be easier for people.

Hand on Heart: Without music, have students close their eyes, place a hand on their hearts, and softly say, “beat, beat, beat” in time with their heartbeats. Then play a song and have students tap out the beat of the music using the hand over the heart. Even though the musical beat will be at a different rate than students' heartbeats, it will still help them to experience the feeling of what a beat is.

Say “Beat”: Have students close their eyes and say “beat, beat, beat” in time with the music.

Count Silently and Aloud: Play a game where you have students count the beats by saying “beat” (as in the previous exercise). Tell them when your palms are up to count aloud, and when your palms are down to count silently to themselves. Switch your palms every few phrases throughout the song.

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Measures



Measure

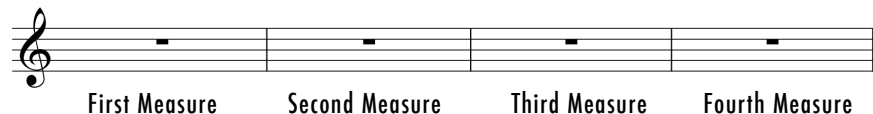
What You Hear: A rhythmic grouping of notes with a fixed number of beats that repeats throughout the piece of music. Also called a bar.

What You See: In sheet music, the space between two bar lines in which there is a fixed number of beats.

After hearing the beat, the next important aspect for students to be able to hear is the start of each measure.

Let your students know that there are typically two, three or four beats in a measure. Explain that in music, the first beat of every measure is accented. This is the “one” (i.e., count 1), also called the *downbeat* (because of the downward swing of the conductor’s arm at the start of every measure). At the end of every measure there is a kind of a breath, or a change—a sense that something new is coming. This works especially for songs in which count 1 may not be so obvious.

Showing your students actual sheet music is a great way to clarify their understanding of beats and measures. Point out the vertical lines (called *bar lines*) and the spaces between them, which are the measures (also called *bars*). Here is an example:



Have your students count “one, two, three, four” (for 4/4-time dances) using their voice to accent the “one.”



Chapter 5:

Posture and Warm-Up Exercises

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An interior designer might say, “Color is everything.” A chef might say, “Spice is everything.” In dancing, we say, “Posture is everything!”

Introduction to Posture and Warm Ups

The most important physical attribute that we bring to our dancing is posture. It is the key to good balance, powerful movement, partner connection and a professional appearance—without good posture, it is impossible to dance well. Warming up is one of the most important ways we prepare ourselves to dance, in part because it helps awaken efficient, upright posture. This chapter describes the best posture for ballroom dancing and the importance of warming up, then describes 20 exercises you can use with your students.



Posture: *The alignment and carriage of the body's blocks of weight (head, shoulders, rib cage and pelvis) over the feet.*

Posture is Dynamic

All of us have ideas about good posture that have been drilled into us since childhood by our parents, teachers, coaches, etc. Our society's images of "good" posture tend to be that of standing completely straight (i.e., without any curves in the spine) or in a military-like position (i.e., chest out, shoulders back and feet together). People also think of posture as static—that is, a fixed position in which to hold themselves.

The truth is that posture is complex and dynamic—not simply conforming to a particular aesthetic when standing or sitting still. Therefore, a more useful way of thinking about posture is in terms of movement—the coordination between all parts of the body in a way that allows for maximum ease, strength, balance and control.

What is "Good" Posture?

"Good" posture varies from person to person depending on factors such as body size and structure, injuries and physical limitations. That said, there are some common components of good posture in ballroom dancing.

- ☉ Minimum of muscular tension (i.e., the weight of the body is held mostly by the skeleton).

- ⊙ Alignment of body allows easy movement in any direction (i.e., dancer is in a neutral place of balance).
- ⊙ Spine is lengthened.
- ⊙ Head balances easily on top of the spine.
- ⊙ Shoulders are free of extraneous tension and the shoulder blades rest down into the back (i.e., anchored).
- ⊙ Abdominal and pelvic floor muscles are appropriately engaged.
- ⊙ Breathing is continuous and free.

Benefits of Warming Up



Warm-Up: *Stretches, exercises and other activities done as a preparation for dancing.*

Injury Prevention and Performance Enhancement: Like any other athlete, ballroom dancers warm up before dancing, competing and performing to activate their muscles to help prevent injury and to refresh coordination of movements so as to perform at their best.

Bringing Students Into Their Bodies: Many students come to dance lessons after spending eight hours (or more!) doing mental tasks, sitting at a desk, driving and/or carrying a bag on one shoulder. Warm-ups bring students into the present moment and get them ready for dancing by increasing awareness, reducing muscular tension and stimulating upright posture.

Developing Yourself as a Teacher: Warm-ups are important for teachers too. In addition to helping prevent injuries, warming up is your time to mentally and physically prepare to teach. You can also use it to focus on an aspect of posture, flexibility or coordination that you want to improve. Finally, taking time to warm up sets a good example for your students.

Using Exercises to Develop a Dancer's Presence

A lengthened spine, easy flow of movement and a radiance of grace and confidence are qualities that create a dancer's presence. These require development and practice—people do not just wake up one day exuding these qualities. The exercises in this chapter are excellent for improving your students' posture and presence.

Chapter 6:

Partner

Connection

Exercises

.....

It's why we have chosen partner dancing—sensing the aliveness not only within ourselves, but also within another.



Connection: *A means of communication between partners, either visual or through physical contact, that makes leading and following possible.*

Good partner connection has many ingredients, starting with attributes and actions *within* each individual in a partnership. These individual factors include posture, balance and clear weight changes. Before addressing any issues a student couple has with their connection, take a moment for both partners to notice (and change, as necessary) their own personal balance and weight changes. You can use the posture, balance and weight change exercises from Chapter 5 to refine these qualities in your students on an on-going basis.

In addition to the skills within each individual, good connection also depends on attributes and actions that partners develop *together*. The focus of this chapter is on developing these relational partnering skills in your students. The exercises are grouped into three broad categories—frame and connection through the frame; leading and following from the center of the body; and compression and leverage connection in open positions. Besides these exercises, the *Practice Holds* section in Chapter 3 is also helpful for partner connection.

Frame Exercises

Exploring Arm Tone



Use this quick exercise to bring attention to students' arm tone and partner connection.

1. **Too Tense:** Ask students to flex their arms like a body builder showing off the arm muscles. Let them know that this is extreme tone and is too much for dancing.
2. **Too Loose:** Have students bend their arms, but this time just let them flop without making any muscle whatsoever. This is too loose and not enough tone for dancing.
3. **Just Right:** Then ask students to find a place in between the two extremes in which the arms are relaxed yet toned. Have students imagine that there is a garden hose running down the center of each arm with some water running through to give the arm a feeling of substance and energy. This is the type of tone to cultivate for good partner connection.

Engaging the Lat Muscles



Commonly called the *lats*, the latissimus dorsi (plural: latissimi dorsi) muscles connect each arm to the torso. Dancers use the lat muscles to support the arms being held in a frame, allowing the arm muscles to stay as relaxed and flexible as possible (while still maintaining appropriate tone in the arms). When the lat muscles are engaged, dancers are able to feel the movements of their partners' centers. Use the following to help students find and explore their lat muscles.

Find the Lats

1. **Feel the Lats:** Have students touch your back as you engage and release *your* lat muscles (if you are unsure how to engage your lats, take time to do this entire exercise yourself before teaching it to students). Then place your hands on students' backs for feedback as they find and engage *their* lat muscles.
2. **Use Lats to Support the Arms:** With the lats engaged, tell students to allow their arms to slowly rise to the sides and slightly forward. Have them notice how the lat muscles help support the arms, making the arms feel lighter. For comparison, have students relax the lat muscles and notice whether the arms feel heavier. Give students a short rest.
3. **Shift Weight:** Once again, have students engage the lats and raise the arms, this time shaping the arms into a Closed Position frame. Then lead students in shifting weight completely from foot to foot, allowing the spine to stay vertical (i.e., do not lean or tilt). Have them find how this supportive engagement of the lats allows the arms to be toned and connected to the torso, yet remain fluid and flexible.

Hold a Bottle

1. **Get Bottles:** Procure some empty (or nearly empty) slender water bottles for this exercise. If those are not available, use whatever is handy (e.g., an orange, a cup, a small book, etc.).
2. **Hold in Right Armpit:** With the right arm down at the side, have each student hold a water bottle in the right armpit. Tell them to engage the lat muscle in order to slightly squeeze the bottle so it does not drop. Direct them to let the lat muscle under the armpit and shoulder blade do the work, and to reduce any muscular effort in the arms.
3. **Hold in Left Armpit:** Repeat the same process with the left arm.
4. **Hold in Both Armpits:** If you have enough bottles, have students hold one in each armpit. Ask students to shift weight from foot to foot, becoming familiar with the sensation of engaging the lat muscles and moving.

Use the Lats to Create Connection

Have students take partners and stand facing each other in double handhold.

1. **Leaders Engage Lats:** Ask Leaders to engage their lat muscles. Have both partners observe what this does to the connection between them. It should create slight leverage (i.e., moving weight away from each other) without the arm muscles having to work. Have Leaders relax the lat muscles and then repeat a few times. Prompt Leaders to engage the lats gently and to reduce any unnecessary tensing of the arm muscles.
2. **Followers Engage Lats:** Repeat the same process, this time having the Followers engage the lat muscles and having Leaders notice the effect.
3. **Both Partners Engage Lats:** Finally, have both partners simultaneously engage their lat muscles. Continue to coach students in differentiating between using the lats and using the arm muscles (i.e., the goal is to engage the lats without tensing the arm muscles).



Anchoring the Shoulder Blades



The following is a highly effective way for students to learn how to *anchor* the shoulder blades (i.e., rolling the shoulder blades down and into the back), and to re-anchor them time and time again.



Shoulders Raised (Incorrect)

Shoulder Blades Anchored (Correct)

1. **Educate About Shoulder Blades:** Educate students that the shoulder blades (i.e., the scapula) are two inverted triangular bones in the upper back. Each shoulder blade connects with its collar bone and upper arm bone (i.e. the humerus).

2. **Palpate Shoulder Blades:** Ask students to pair up with one partner standing behind the other. Have the student standing behind use an index finger to trace the outline of first one, then the other, of the partner's shoulder blades. The purpose is to give the student being touched a clear sense of where his or her shoulder blades are. Make sure the student who is tracing finds the bottom tip of each shoulder blade. Then have couples switch roles and repeat this process.
3. **Explore Movements of Shoulder Blades:** The shoulder blades have the ability to move in four directions (up, down, away from the spine and toward the spine) and to rotate. Explain that this exercise will focus on the four directions. Still in pairs, have students once again place the palms firmly yet gently on the partner's shoulder blades.
 - ⊙ *Up:* Start with sliding the shoulder blades up toward the ears. Instruct partners to do this together—the student being touched actively moves his or her shoulder blades while the partner gently assists the movement with the palms of the hands.
 - ⊙ *Down:* Move the shoulder blades down toward the waist. Remind students to do this gently, *not* to force them down.
 - ⊙ *Away from Spine:* Move the shoulder blades away from the spine (i.e., spreading them wide apart toward the sides of the rib cage).
 - ⊙ *Toward Spine:* Finish with moving the shoulder blades toward the spine (i.e., bringing them closer to each other).

Have couples switch roles and repeat these four directions.
4. **Two Directions Used in Dancing:** Ask students which two of the four directions are combined and used for anchoring the shoulder blades in a dance frame. The answers are *down* and *away from the spine*. Do not be surprised if your students say down and toward and spine—this is a common idea people have about “good” posture. Show students how moving the shoulder blades toward the spine pulls the elbows back. This prevents the elbows from being in the correct position—slightly forward of the plane of the shoulders.
 - ⊙ *Move Down and Away:* Return to one student standing behind with palms on the partner's shoulder blades. Have both partners participate in moving the shoulder blades (of the student being touched) in the two directions—down and slightly away from the spine.
5. **Complete the Anchoring of the Shoulder Blades:** Explain that the final step to anchoring is to think of tipping the bottom point of each shoulder

Chapter 7:

Basic

Technique

.....

We share the joy of dancing with our students by teaching them to move, spin, twist and fly!

So far, this book has addressed general concepts all teachers should know. There are also several specific topics and techniques to know how to teach. This chapter covers the most common topics—forward and back walks in Smooth and Standard, Latin hip action, forward and back walks in Rhythm and Latin, arm styling and underarm turns—including effective exercises for developing your students’ technique in these areas.

Forward and Back Walks in Smooth and Standard



Forward and Back Walks: *In the Smooth and Standard dances, these are forward and back steps taken from a lowered position. They may have no rise (as in Tango and some Foxtrot and Quickstep walks) or may commence to rise or completely rise at the end of the step (as in Waltz, Foxtrot, Viennese Waltz, Quickstep and Peabody).*

The ability to walk forward and back with ease is essential to dancing with grace and power. Despite being called *walks*, these powerful steps make Smooth and Standard dancers look like they are dancing (or even flying!)—not just walking. The challenge is to take powerful strides while maintaining balance and control. Therefore it is important to take the time to develop your students’ walks.

The following discussion applies to forward and back walks in Waltz, Foxtrot, Viennese Waltz, Quickstep and Peabody. In Tango, the feet are slightly lifted off the floor and placed into position, in contrast to the other Smooth and Standard dances in which the feet skim the floor.

FORWARD WALKS

Demonstrate: Start by demonstrating a simple figure from the dance students are learning, first with casual pedestrian walks, and then with powerful “made for dancing” walks.

Lead Warm-Up Exercises: Prepare students for some of the elements involved in forward (and back) walks by leading the following exercises.

- ⊙ *Grow Two Inches Taller:* Help students find tall, upright posture by leading the *Grow Two Inches Taller* exercise (see Chapter 5).

- ⊙ **Working Ankle Joints:** When dancing forward and back walks, the ankle joints flex and extend (i.e., bend and straighten). For example, a forward walk uses a heel lead, which requires the ankle to bend so that the foot is flexed. When dancing a back walk, the ankle extends to reach the foot back. Bring awareness to your students' ankle joints by leading the *Oil Your Ankle Joints* exercise (see Chapter 5).
- ⊙ **Neutral Pelvis:** Help your students find the neutral position of the pelvis by leading the *Pelvic Tilts* exercise (see Chapter 5).
- ⊙ **Easy Leg Swing:** Develop your students' ability to swing the legs freely from the hip joints by leading the *Get a Leg Up* exercise (see Chapter 5).

Teach Left Foot Forward Walk: Ask students to stand behind you with the feet together, knees softly flexed, and weight on the right foot. Have them follow along as you break down the components of a left foot forward walk.

- ⊙ **Swing Leg Forward:** With the ball of the left foot in contact with the floor, begin to slowly swing the left leg forward from the hip joint (i.e., keeping the pelvis in neutral). As the left foot moves forward, allow contact to transition from the ball of the foot to the whole foot. Allow the whole foot to lightly skim the floor as long as possible.

At the same time, begin to release the right heel from the floor. Then, as the left knee begins to straighten, flex the left ankle in coordination (this lifts the toes so that the left heel now skims the floor).

- ⊙ **Balance in Middle of Stride:** Continue to skim the left heel on the floor, and then stop at the mid-point of the stride. At this point, the weight is equally divided between the heel of the left foot and the ball of right foot. The left (front) knee is straight and the right (back) knee is slightly flexed (see photo).



Chapter 8:

Beginners and Wedding Couples

.....

We give people the gift of dance. We get to watch them grow, prepare them for the most important day of their lives, and turn them on to a hobby for a lifetime.

This short chapter offers advice and tips for dealing with two specific types of students with unique needs—beginners and wedding couples.

Teaching Beginners

Every student starts dancing as a beginner. They all progress at a different pace, depending on their aptitude, commitment level, attitude, physical health and a host of other factors. Meanwhile, most dance teachers—including you, since you have read this far!—know far more than they can teach to a complete beginner in the first lesson, the first month of lessons, or even in the first year or two of lessons.

The following tips are intended to help you decide how to prioritize all that you know about dance, so that your beginners make progress without feeling overwhelmed. The goal is that your beginning students have so much fun that they keep coming back to you long enough to develop into the dancers they dream of being!

Keep It Simple

- ⊙ Give an overview of what you will be doing in each lesson.
- ⊙ Use simple terminology.
- ⊙ Break down figures into components (e.g. half a box or open break) so that students see how they are put together.
- ⊙ At first, teach only the technique that is essential to make the dancing work.
- ⊙ Have students practice repeatedly until they feel comfortable and competent.

Make It Fun

- ⊙ Be light, friendly and enthusiastic in your teaching. Use humor and positive encouragement as much as possible.
- ⊙ Talk less, move more.
- ⊙ Play music as soon and often as possible. Adjust the tempo (usually slower) to give students the experience that it is easy to dance to music.

Chapter 9:

Competitions, Showcases and Medal Tests

.....

Our ballroom dance world provides our students with experiences they would have otherwise thought impossible.

Often beginners will come to you for dance lessons with a vague feeling of wanting to learn to dance. Others will specifically come in preparation for an event in their lives at which there will be social dancing, such as a wedding receptions, cruise or holiday ball.

Part of your job as a dance teacher is providing students with the many possibilities for pursuing dance that are available to them, beyond their original motivation for taking lessons. These options include introducing your students to the local social dance scene, taking them to competitions, performing with them on stage, and coaching them through a medal testing process. It is important to be aware of the range of opportunities you can offer your students, since students differ from each other (and can themselves change over time) in their interests and aspirations.

If you have not yet competed, performed or done medal testing with a student, this chapter will give you the information you need to confidently enter these realms of the dance world.

Competitions



Dancesport Competition: *An organized event where people of all ages and levels participate in the sport of ballroom dancing, both as amateurs and professionals.*

WHY COMPETE?

Going to a competition is a fun and thrilling experience. Competitions are usually held at a hotel so that dancers from all over the country (and even the world) can attend. It is typically a one- to three-day event, running from morning until midnight, consisting of competitions, professional shows, workshops and general dancing.

Dancing in a competition has many benefits. Students who participate in competitions tend to learn faster and dance with better technique and more style than students who focus solely on the social aspect of dancing. One of the biggest advantages is that competitions create goals. As students learn the figures and technique they need for the competition, they get more value from their private lessons. Students' dancing improves by leaps and bounds, and they enjoy the experience of increased poise and confidence on the dance floor.

Competitions are also a great place for students to meet people with whom they have something in common. Everyone at the competition—from the newest dancer to the seasoned veteran—has worked hard to get there. This builds a feeling of camaraderie among the dancers. By the end of the weekend, students usually feel a tremendous sense of accomplishment and are inspired to learn even more.

Some of your students might tell you that they don't like "competition." You can reassure them that the environment at most dancesport competitions is one of friendliness and support—most students are focused on the progress in their own individual dancing. Competitions also give your students the opportunity to work with you on setting their goals, practicing hard, and then going out on the floor and dancing their personal best.



Pro/Am Division: *When students (amateurs) dance with teachers (professionals), and students compete against other students who are also dancing with their teachers.* Generally, entries are judged on the ability of the student in each couple. Students are able to

focus on their own dancing because they are dancing with experienced, professional partners.

Amateur Division: *When students (amateurs) dance with each other and compete against other amateur couples.*

FREESTYLE AND SOLO EXHIBITION EVENTS

Whether you compete in the Pro/Am or the Amateur divisions, you can dance two main types of events: *Solo Exhibition* and *Freestyle*.

Freestyle Events: In *Freestyle* events, you and your student dance to part of a song (in the appropriate tempo range for the dance) selected by the competition's music director. While you and your student will have prepared the dance (e.g., Foxtrot), you will not get to pick the music. There will be other couples of the same skill level dancing on the floor with you. Your student will receive a placing from the judges (1st, 2nd, 3rd, etc., relative to the other couples).

Solo Exhibition: In *Solo Exhibition* events, you and your student dance a choreographed routine to a specific piece of music of your choice, with an entrance and an exit. Routines are generally limited to two minutes and 45 seconds. You and your student are the only couple on the dance floor. Entries are judged solely on the performance of the student. Your student receives a written critique and score from the judges. Scores are based on a standard of good

Chapter 10:

Selling Dance Lessons

.....

Selling is simple. Just genuinely care, know your students' dreams, and plan lessons to make those dreams come true.

The ability to enroll students in dancing is as integral to being a good dance teacher as being knowledgeable about dance figures and technique. Many teachers dread selling, seeing it as an unpleasant business procedure separate from their teaching. The ballroom dance industry has an unfortunate history of using rote scripts, high-pressure sales and being more concerned with selling than with students or ethics.

The reality is that selling is more successful and satisfying (to both teachers and students) when there is a two-way, win-win exchange of energy and ideas. This way, selling is a natural extension of your role as an educator—teaching a lesson well and responsibly is what selling dance lessons is all about!

Teaching a lesson well requires more than just teaching figures and technique—it requires building relationships that engage students in dancing. Strong, sincere relationships, and the excellent communication skills necessary to build them, form the foundation for both teaching and selling lessons. These allow you to better identify your students' needs, to respond with sensitivity to their concerns and to support them in pursuing their desires. They also help you guide your students with transparency and truthfulness in purchasing the dance lessons needed to fulfill their desires.

Six Stages of a Sale

The process of selling dance lessons can be divided into six stages: introduction, discovery, benefits, readiness, purchase and retention. While each stage is treated here as distinct and separate, real selling rarely follow a neat and tidy structure. That is, the boundary between stages is not always clear, stages may happen in a different order, and sometimes a stage is brief or even absent. Improving your communication and customer-focused sales skills will enhance your teaching by strengthening every aspect of your work with students. You will better tailor lessons to the needs of each individual student and will be more responsive to your students overall. The result will be successfully transforming new students into consistent, long-term customers.

Introduction Stage

The introduction stage is when you first meet your students. It is important to create rapport and a positive relationship from the very beginning. Things that contribute to a successful introduction stage include being on time for your lessons, warmly greeting students and introducing yourself, and showing students around the studio.

Appendix

This appendix contains photos of foot positions and footwork. It also includes charts with musical information for all the dances and written music diagrams of basic notes and of each dance's basic count.

Foot Position Photos

The following photos depict the Smooth and Standard foot positions. The foot positions are the same in Rhythm and Latin except that the feet will be slightly turned out. (*Note:* The “left foot behind right foot toe to heel” photo depicts this foot position as danced in Rhythm and Latin. This foot position is the same in Smooth and Standard except that the front right foot will be parallel.) Also, while the left foot is featured as the moving foot in these photos, know that a right foot counterpart exists for each foot position.



Left Foot Closes to Right Foot



Left Foot Forward



Left Foot Forward and Slightly Side



Left Foot Diagonally Forward



Left Foot Side and Slightly Forward



Left Foot Side



Left Foot Side and Slightly Back



Left Foot Diagonally Back

Musical Information

MUSIC FACTS FOR EACH DANCE

International Standard and Latin Dances

Dance	Time Sig.	Tempo Exams/Comp.	Basic Count	Beat Value
Waltz	3/4	28-30 mpm	1-2-3	1-1-1
Tango	4/4	32 mpm	SQQS Q QS Q QS	2-1-1-2 1-1-2, 1-1-2
Viennese	3/4	56-58 mpm	1-2-3	1-1-1
Foxtrot	4/4	28-30 mpm	SQQ	2-1-1
Quickstep	4/4	48-52 mpm	SQQS SQQ SSS	2-1-1-2 2-1-1 2-2-2
Cha Cha	4/4	31 mpm	1-2-3-4&	1-1-1-1/2-1/2
Samba	2/4	48-50 mpm	1a2*	3/4 -1/4-1
Rumba	4/4	27 mpm	Q QS	1-1-2
Paso Doble	2/4	60-62 mpm	1-2-3-4	1-1-1-1
Jive	4/4	38-44 mpm	1-2, 3a4, 5a6*	1-1, 3/4 -1/4-1, 3/4 -1/4-1

* In Samba and Jive, the "a" count is equal to 1/4 of a beat of music.

American Smooth and Rhythm Dances

Dance	Time Sig.	Tempo (in mpm)		Basic Count	Beat Value
		Ex./Comp.	Social		
Waltz	3/4	30-32	30-32	1-2-3	1-1-1
Tango	4/4	30-32	30-32	SSQQS Q QS Q QS	2-2-1-1-2 1-1-2, 1-1-2
Foxtrot	4/4	32-34	32-34	SSQQ SQQ	2-2-1-1 2-1-1
Viennese	3/4	54	54	1-2-3	1-1-1

American Smooth and Rhythm Dances Continued

Dance	Time Sig.	Tempo (in mpm)		Basic Count	Beat Value
		Ex./Comp.	Social		
Peabody	4/4	60-62	50-62	SSSS, SSSS	2-2-2-2, 2-2-2-2
Cha Cha	4/4	30	28-30	1-2-3-4&	1-1-1-1/2-1/2
Rumba	4/4	32-36	28-36	SQQ	2-1-1
East Coast Swing	4/4	34-36	32-37	1-2, 3a4, 5a6* 1-2, 3&4, 5&6	1-1, 2/3 - 1/3-1, 2/3 - 1/3-1 1-1, 1/2-1/2-1, 1/2-1/2-1
Bolero	4/4	24-26	24-26	SQQ	2-1-1
Mambo	4/4	47-51	44-51	2-3-4(1)	1-1-2
Merengue	4/4	29-32	29-32	1-2-3-4, 5-6-7-8	1-1-1-1, 1-1-1-1
West Coast Swing	4/4	28-32	25-32	1-2, 3a4, 5a6*	1-1, 2/3 - 1/3-1, 2/3 - 1/3-1
Samba	2/4	52	48-54	1a2†	3/4 - 1/4-1

* In East and West Coast Swing, “a” is equal to 1/3 of a beat of music. Teachers may casually say “and” (technically 1/2 beat of music) even when dancing “a” timing.

† In Samba, the “a” count is equal to 1/4 of a beat of music.

Nightclub Dances

Dance	Time Sig.	Tempo Social	Basic Count	Beat Value
Nightclub Two Step	4/4	16-22 mpm	1&2, 3&4, 5&6, 7&8 or QQS, QQS x 2 or SQQ, SQQ x 2	1/2-1/2-1, 1/2-1/2-1 x 2 1/2-1/2-1, 1/2-1/2-1 x 2 1-1/2-1/2, 1-1/2-1/2 x 2
Hustle	4/4	28-30 mpm	&1-2-3	1/2-1-1-1/2
Salsa	4/4	29-47 mpm	1-2-3(4), 5-6-7(8) or QQS, QQS	1-1-2, 1-1-2 1-1-2, 1-1-2
Lindy Hop	4/4	33-45 mpm	1-2, 3&4, 5-6, 7&8	1-1, 2/3 - 1/3-1, 1-1, 2/3 - 1/3-1*
Argentine Tango	There is no fixed timing in Argentine Tango. Steps may be taken over any number of beats and pauses of any length may be taken in between steps, in accordance with the dancer’s musical interpretation.			

* In Lindy Hop, the “&” count is usually spoken as “and” (technically 1/2 a beat of music) but is danced as “a” (1/3 of a beat of music).

WRITTEN MUSIC BASICS

Common Musical Notes



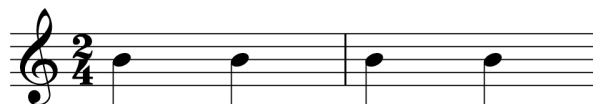
4/4 Time Signature with Four Quarter Notes



3/4 Time Signature with Three Quarter Notes



2/4 Time Signature with Two Quarter Notes



Three Quarter Notes and a Quarter Rest



MC*: 1 2 3 4

An Eighth Note and Eighth Note Rest (twice), and Two Beamed Eighth Notes



MC: 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 &

* MC: Musical Count

*I*ndex

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