

# Teach Like a Pro

THE ULTIMATE GUIDE FOR BALLROOM DANCE INSTRUCTORS



*"This book is the best investment you'll ever make for your ballroom dance career."*

## Chapter 1

Diane Jarmolow

with Brandee Selck

# *Teach Like a Pro*

## **THE ULTIMATE GUIDE FOR BALLROOM DANCE INSTRUCTORS**

**DIANE JARMOLOW  
WITH BRANDEE SELCK**



**BALLROOM DANCE  
TEACHERS COLLEGE**

**Oakland, California**

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To my husband Peter. You had no idea that you would have a wife who worked swing shift, arrived home for dinner at 11pm, worked most weekends, traveled half the year, danced in other mens' arms, and could talk about only one topic—dancing. It takes a loving, confident, non-possessive man to accept this life, and I love you for it.

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# *Introduction to Chapter 1 Ebook*

This ebook contains Chapter 1 of *Teach Like a Pro: The Ultimate Guide for Ballroom Dance Instructors*. We hope you enjoy and find value in its contents.

## **Buy the Book**

A print version of the complete book may be purchased at [TeachBallroomDancing.com/shop](http://TeachBallroomDancing.com/shop)

## **Interested in a Complete Ebook?**

We are considering making the entire content of *Teach Like a Pro* available in ebook form, but we need to hear from you! If you are interested in an ebook version of *Teach Like a Pro*, please let us know by sending email to [ebooks@teachballroomdancing.com](mailto:ebooks@teachballroomdancing.com)



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# Personal Message from Diane Jarmolow

## Teaching Dance is a Real Career

“Oh, you are a dance teacher? But what *else* do you do? What’s your *real* job?”

Many dance teachers have shared with me that they, too, have been asked these questions by well-meaning new acquaintances. It seems that most people have no idea that being a professional dance teacher *is* a real job. Indeed, it is a career that has profound effects on the lives of others.

Our influence on our students has been compared to the work of therapists and doctors. Children become graceful, learn lifelong social skills and develop self-confidence. Adults conquer fears, experience dreams come true, enjoy a comfortable social outlet, begin to exercise, learn to play again and challenge themselves.

In short, we change people’s lives. Talk to people about their dancing and their faces light up, their energy softens, and they are happy.

Because of all this, we dance teachers need to take our jobs seriously.

## A Resource for Becoming an Outstanding Teacher

Becoming a dance teacher is definitely a journey—and it was a long one for me. When I started down this road, I innocently believed I could learn a few steps and then teach. I soon realized it could take more than a lifetime to learn everything I needed to become the dance professional I wanted to be. In part, this was because it was so difficult to find good resources and training about *how* to teach ballroom dance well.

I founded the Ballroom Dance Teachers College and wrote this book so that other dance teachers would not have to struggle to find quality information. My hope is that *Teach Like a Pro*® will serve as a valuable resource to help *you* develop into the dance professional you aspire to be, whether you are just getting started or are further along in this amazing career.

Use the checklists and suggestions offered in this book. Strive to embody the characteristics of great dance teachers (listed on the next page). Can any one of us embody all of them? I’m not sure. But knowing what they are, and striving

for them one by one, will certainly lead any dance teacher to a more successful and fulfilling career.

My hope is that the next time someone asks you “What *else* do you do?”, you will be able to answer proudly, “I am a dance professional. This is my full time, rich and rewarding, one and only career!”

## *Characteristics of a Great Dance Teacher*

- \* Make lessons fun
- \* Give students what *they* want
- \* Give students their full lesson time
- \* Give cards of congratulations
- \* Express appreciation for students hard work
- \* Suggest resources for study
- \* Give specific praise
- \* Do not take students for granted
- \* Recognize your student’s accomplishment publicly and proudly
- \* Treat all students equally
- \* Love the one you are with
- \* Leave moodiness and negativity at home
- \* Make students’ lessons the highlight of their day
- \* Make your studio a great place to be
- \* Prepare in advance
- \* Refer students to other teachers *if* that would be best for them
- \* Find effective and kind ways to make corrections
- \* Do not show off
- \* Do not make excuses
- \* Touch students respectfully and gently and with their permission
- \* Do not harp on mistakes
- \* Do little “extras”
- \* Be absolutely non-judgmental
- \* Always look “put together”
- \* Walk on and off the floor with grace and poise
- \* Have a clear intention for each lesson
- \* Create options for students
- \* Believe every student can grow and succeed

- \* Connect emotionally with students while dancing
- \* Remember facts about students
- \* Practice active listening
- \* Read body language
- \* Know when to push and when not to
- \* Have an excellent system for teaching
- \* Recognize and adapt to all learning styles
- \* Do not gossip
- \* Do not waste time
- \* Play appropriate music for student's level
- \* Record lesson material (i.e., keep track of what has been taught)
- \* Get professionally certified
- \* Practice yoga, Pilates, Feldenkrais, or other complementary disciplines
- \* Know how the body works (i.e., use *Move Like a Champion*® principles)
- \* Be 100% committed to your students
- \* Teach incrementally—first things first
- \* Show students that you care
- \* Apologize for mistakes and make amends
- \* Be worth what you charge—and more
- \* Build students' confidence and self esteem
- \* Read and learn about relationship building and communication
- \* Be a better teacher today than you were yesterday
- \* Encourage friendship among your students
- \* Do not play favorites
- \* Notice and model your favorite teachers
- \* Review and reinforce figures
- \* Design well thought out amalgamations
- \* Know your precedes and follows
- \* Cue figures correctly
- \* Rotate partners often and in an organized way
- \* Project your voice
- \* Be respectful of your assistant when teaching group classes
- \* Know your dance positions
- \* Know how to teach leading (i.e., the *lead* element)
- \* Know your alignments
- \* Know your amounts of turn
- \* Know your ballroom terminology

- \* Know the footwork for each dance
- \* Teach the history of each dance
- \* Know the count of each dance
- \* Know the musical elements of each dance
- \* Have a good method for teaching sway
- \* Know the difference between CBM and CBMP
- \* Speak musically
- \* Know your phrasing
- \* Have a good method for teaching posture
- \* Know your anatomy
- \* Lead great warm ups
- \* Teach body awareness
- \* Teach Latin hip action simply and correctly
- \* Have exercises for teaching arm styling
- \* Know how to teach wedding couples
- \* Give clear and constructive feedback
- \* Know how to teach rise and fall
- \* Know the different dance frames
- \* Teach tone and connection
- \* Be open and honest
- \* Be passionate
- \* Be creative
- \* Be inspiring
- \* Be warm and kind
- \* Encourage your students
- \* Be empathetic
- \* Be a good listener
- \* Take responsibility
- \* Be gender neutral
- \* Avoid divisive issues (religion, politics, money, etc.)
- \* Keep your promises
- \* Keep the student's best interest in mind
- \* Walk in with a good attitude everyday
- \* Make each lesson an exciting and memorable experience

# Introduction

Welcome to *Teach Like a Pro*®! This book is a culmination of Diane Jarmolow's long and distinguished career of training ballroom dance teachers, owning and directing one of the nation's largest and most successful independent dance studios, creating and administering professional certification exams in the U.S. and abroad, writing dance manuals, and co-creating *Move Like a Champion*®. A highly certified and renowned dance instructor herself, Diane has written *Teach Like a Pro*® to support dance teachers in becoming confident, top-quality professionals.

## Teach Like a Pro Benefits

Whether you are a new or experienced teacher, you will find *Teach Like a Pro*®:

- \* Provides structure for your thinking and teaching.
- \* Expands, deepens and refines your dance knowledge and vocabulary.
- \* Validates and gives you words to articulate knowledge you may already have at an intuitive level.
- \* Supplies you with exercises with which to develop your students' technique.
- \* Gives you new ideas for presenting material.
- \* Improves your own dancing and technique.
- \* Provides supplemental support for becoming professionally certified.
- \* Increases your overall confidence as a dance teacher.

If you are a brand new teacher, this book is intended to be a supplement to your teacher training and a foundation on which to build your dance knowledge and teaching. If you are an experienced teacher, this book will be an inspiration and resource to take your career to the next level. We encourage you to experiment with the ideas and exercises presented here to find what works best for you and your students. With this book as a guide, your dance teaching will grow and evolve in new and amazing ways!

## How to Use This Book

**Organization of Topics:** *Teach Like a Pro*® is organized with your needs as a dance teacher in mind. It is packed with juicy teaching tips, useful analogies,

important technical information, and exercises and games that have been field-tested and proven effective for teaching ballroom dancing.

- \* **Chapter 1—*Fundamentals of Being an Outstanding Dance Teacher*:** Build a solid foundation for outstanding teaching and reviewing of figures, choreographing routines, giving feedback, and other essential teaching skills.
- \* **Chapter 2—*The Technical Language of Dance*:** Delve into the technical language of ballroom dancing—the 11 dance elements.
- \* **Chapter 3—*Dance Frames*:** Gain thorough knowledge about teaching dance frames for all the main dance genres.
- \* **Chapter 4—*Music*:** Broaden your understanding of music and its relationship to the dances.
- \* **Chapter 5—*Posture and Warm-Up Exercises*:** Expand your repertoire of warm-up and posture exercises.
- \* **Chapter 6—*Partner Connection Exercises*:** Learn effective exercises and tips for teaching partner connection.
- \* **Chapter 7—*Basic Technique*:** Acquire great information about a range of technique topics, such as Latin hip action and arm styling.
- \* **Chapter 8—*Beginners and Wedding Couples*:** Gather tips for working with two groups of students with unique needs—beginners and wedding couples.
- \* **Chapter 9—*Competitions, Showcases and Medal Tests*:** Learn about taking students to dance competitions, and preparing them to perform (e.g. in a studio showcase) and to take medal tests.
- \* **Chapter 10—*Selling Dance Lessons*:** Rethink your ideas about sales with *Salesfree Sales*—a customer-focused approach to selling dance lessons.

**Applicable to Any Syllabus:** The information and ideas contained in this book are universal principles and are applicable to all syllabi of American style (i.e., Smooth, Rhythm and Nightclub) and International style (i.e., Standard and Latin). That said, a majority of the examples in this book are drawn from American style figures.

**Gender-Neutral Language:** This book uses gender-neutral language. The traditional terms *Man* and *Lady* have been replaced with *Leader* and *Follower* respectively. Both amateur and professional dancers experience many benefits from learning both roles, and some dancers simply prefer to dance in the non-

traditional role for their gender. To foster an environment that is supportive of all dancers, we encourage you to use gender-neutral language in your teaching.

**Helpful Icons:** To help you find information quickly, look for the following icons throughout the book.



Dance Term Definition



Tip / Information



Professional Pointers



Teaching Script



Exercise



Game

..... Exercise



Resources from Ballroom Dance  
Teachers College (BDTC)



**Move Like a Champion®:** Exercises from the revolutionary training for ballroom and Latin dancers *Move Like a Champion®—The Power of Understanding How Your Body Works*. For more information, see *Additional Resources* at the end of this book.





# Chapter 1:

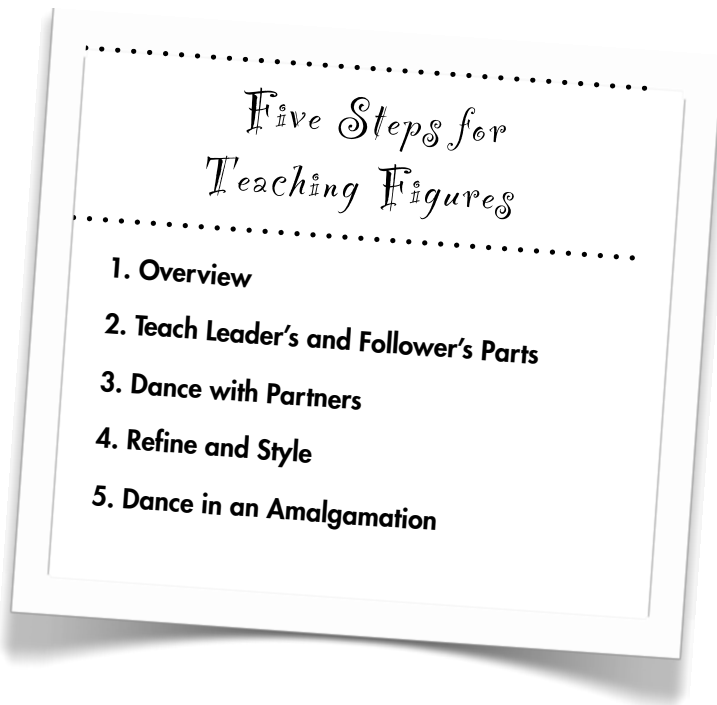
## Fundamentals of Being an ★ Outstanding Dance Teacher

.....  
*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.
- \* *Use Summaries:* Figures in the second half of a syllabus often contain, or build on, components of figures from the first half of a syllabus. Teach these more complex figures using summaries to help speed the teaching process.

**Explain Anything New:** If the figure has any new foot positions, footwork, dance positions, etc., take a few moments to teach these.

**Explain the Lead:** Taking time to explain the lead before dancing with a partner makes everything faster and smoother when Leaders dance with Followers. First, explain how Leaders will lead the figure (i.e., when to raise the hand or change dance positions). Then have Leaders dance their part again, practicing leading an imaginary partner, as if actually leading a partner. You might joke that Leaders are dancing with the most flawless partner they will ever lead!

**Focus on Key Parts:** As necessary, focus on parts of the figure you think would benefit from a more detailed breakdown or provide a good opportunity to work on an aspect of technique. For example, teach how to create good sway in the Foxtrot sway step or practice keeping the thighs together on a forward break in Bolero.

**Dance with Music:** Play music for Leaders to practice dancing their part of the figure while simulating the lead.

## Teach the Follower's Part

**Choose Direction:** For spot dances (i.e., ones that do not travel around the room) have the Followers face the appropriate direction relative to the Leaders—where they will be when starting the figure. For a figure that starts in Closed Position, if you taught the Leader's part starting facing the front of the room, then have Followers start facing the back of the room. For a figure that starts in Promenade Position, if you taught the Leader's part starting facing diagonal wall, then have

Follower start facing diagonal center.

When teaching dances that travel and use alignments, you have a couple of options. You can use the same method as just outlined for spot dances by imagining the entire room is one big line of dance. The other option is to teach figures so that students learn their alignments based on where they are in the room. For instance, if Followers are standing close to a wall, you can use the room's actual line of dance. Simply have the Followers orient to this line of dance as they will do when dancing the figure with a partner.

*Use Same Format:* Then teach the Follower's part using the same format as for the Leader's part.

### When and How to Teach Both Parts Simultaneously

The most important modification to consider for the format just explained is whether it is possible to teach the Leader's and Follower's parts simultaneously. If the Leader's and Follower's parts for a figure are the natural opposite, such as a box or fifth position breaks, it is often preferable to teach both roles at the same time. This method is faster and keeps everyone engaged because no students are kept waiting while the others are being taught.

*Face Same Direction:* Have all students face the same direction.

*Leader's and Follower's Starting Foot:* Teach the figure, pointing out the left foot and right foot halves, or the forward and back halves. Tell Leaders they will start with the left foot half of the figure when dancing with a partner. Tell Followers that they will start with the right foot half when dancing with a partner.

## 3. HAVE STUDENTS DANCE WITH PARTNERS

**Clarify Lead/Follow:** Explain and demonstrate how to lead and follow the figure successfully. Lead any exercises necessary to develop the lead or follow for the figure before incorporating the feet. For example, when teaching students' first figure with an underarm turn, you might have Leaders practice raising the arm and teach couples how the handhold works during the turn.

**Go Through Figure Without the Feet:** Depending upon the difficulty level of the figure, it is often useful to have students go through the figure several times doing just the arm and body positions, without bothering with correct foot positions. Tell students to shuffle or "robot" through the figure as you show where their arms and bodies go.

**Dance the Figure:** Lead couples in dancing the figure, using correct foot positions, several times. For longer or more complex figures, consider using the Watch-and-Go method (see grey box). Rotate partners and repeat.

**Add Music:** One of the biggest complaints students make is, “We hardly got to dance with music!” Start couples dancing to music as soon as they know enough of the figure to have some success with it. Then play 30 seconds to 1 minute of music before rotating partners. Continue in this fashion for at least 3 minutes. Over the course of a one-hour class, play at least three different songs.

*Music in Private Lessons:* A similar, but somewhat more customized approach may be used for private lessons. Some students are happier when spending more time dancing with music than without, and identifying this need is an important skill as a dance teacher. Take the opportunity to play different music to help train your students to hear the beat of a variety of songs. This way they will be ready to dance in social and competitive situations, as you may not be there to help them identify the type of dance and the beat.

### *Watch-and-Go Teaching Method*



Watch-and-Go is an effective teaching method that helps students dance new figures more quickly (especially long or difficult figures). By allowing students to watch you demonstrate *and then* dance, Watch-and-Go alleviates the problem of students trying to both see you and dance at the same time.

★ **How It Works:** First, make sure Leaders are facing the same way you are (i.e., same wall or alignment). Then say “watch” and dance the first measure (or segment) of the figure while students watch you demonstrate. When you finish the measure, say “go” to cue students to dance what you just demonstrated. Continue this process until the figure is complete. Sometimes before you say “go,” you may want to remind Leaders and Followers which foot they should have ready to use for the next part of the figure.

★ **Explain to Students:** Before using Watch-and-Go, take time to explain it to students. Say something like this:

I will say “watch” (or “watch us” if you are demonstrating with a partner)—this is your cue to simply *watch* me (us) dance the first part of the figure. Then I will say “go”—this is your cue to *dance* the part of the figure you just watched me (us) dance. Then I will say “watch” again, and you will watch me (us) dance the next part of the figure. We’ll continue like this until we’ve danced the entire figure.

## 4. REFINE STUDENTS’ DANCING AND STYLING

**Refine Dancing:** Refine students’s ability to understand and dance the figure, making any necessary corrections (e.g., to foot positions, technique, leading and following, etc.) and sharing additional tips. You may draw information about the figure from the syllabus manual or your own experience. Tips might include helpful images or analogies, pointing out common errors and ways to correct them, or suggesting exercises to develop the technique for this figure.



**Teach Styling:** Show how to add grace and finesse to the figure (e.g., arm positions and styling, head position, leg lines, etc.). Lead exercises to practice the styling you are teaching.

*Focus on a Figure's Feature:* Many figures have a main feature—that is, a part of the figure to emphasize. Work with students on presenting and maximizing the figure's feature. For example, in a Tango corté, work on beautiful shaping and leg lines. In a Rumba crossover break, practice sharp (rather than gradual) turns into Left and Right Side Positions.

## 5. GIVE AN AMALGAMATION

Give students an amalgamation that includes the new figure and one (or more) other figures that they already know. It is best to create amalgamations that are repeatable so that students do not have to stop and re-start. Have couples dance the amalgamation several times without music. When they seem ready, have couples dance with music.

After teaching the last figure of that day's class, lead couples in dancing an amalgamation that includes all the figures taught in that class (and if time permits, incorporate material from previous classes). Once they are comfortable, encourage Leaders to dance improvisationally, so that students practice their leading and following skills.

### *Followers' Catch-22*



Being a Follower involves a bit of a catch 22, or paradox. On the one hand, Followers must know and practice their part accurately. However, it is equally important that they be able to completely let go of their part and of knowing what will be danced. Since true following is never making a movement before being led—Followers must develop the ability to wait until being invited to move. Once invited, their previous practice allows them to execute the movement well.

Explain this paradox to your student Followers and remind them as necessary so that they do not develop bad habits like anticipating or back-leading. Tell Followers that although they know their part, they should not dance it automatically or simultaneously with Leaders. Instead, they must “listen” for the lead using their points of contact with Leaders (i.e., frame, handhold, etc.).

# Reviewing Figures

Students usually need a thorough review of the new figures you taught in the previous class. The following is a structured way to review figures and may be applied to any group class or private lesson. It is especially good for reviewing complex figures and those in which the Leader's and Follower's parts are not the natural opposite.

While this format is extremely effective, it is just one of several possible methods. Depending on the figure and on students' skill level, you may prefer to review with students dancing in couples.

**Demonstrate the Figure:** First, demonstrate the figure with a partner in order to refresh students' memories. When teaching a group class, you might alternatively ask for student volunteers to demonstrate the figure. This is a way to build students' confidence and help them overcome stage fright. Be sure to invite the class to give them a round of applause afterward for their bravery and a job well done.

## Review the Leader's Part

*Walk Through Figure:* Have Leaders stand behind you (facing the appropriate direction for the figure) and take them through the figure. Using figure summaries (e.g., half a box) is often a great way to do this. Review any important technique.

*Correct Errors:* Locate and correct any major weak points or errors students are making as they practice the Leader's part.

*Practice:* Lead Leaders in practicing their part several times, incorporating the pointers you have given. Cue and remind Leaders of these as appropriate.

**Review the Follower's Part:** Have Followers start facing the direction in which they will start dancing when with their partners. Lead Followers through their part in the same manner as you did the Leader's part.

## Dance with Partners

*Dance Figure:* Have students take partners and dance the figure. If necessary, walk through difficult areas before dancing the figure all the way through. Alternatively, use the Watch-and-Go method (see *Teaching Figures*). Have students rotate partners and continue to dance the figure.

**Make Corrections:** Correct any errors. If necessary, stop and do an exercise to improve connection, technique or other aspects of the figure that need work.

**Add Music:** Put on a song and count students in to the music.

**Dance an Amalgamation:** If time permits, give students a repeatable amalgamation that includes this figure and one or more others that students already know. Dance the amalgamation a few times without music first. When you feel students are ready, put on a song and have them dance the amalgamation a few times.

## Using Figure Summaries



**Summary:** *A synopsis of a figure either measure by measure or in a group of steps.*

Summaries are a quick and effective way for teachers to present and review figures. Once students are familiar with basic figure components (e.g., a crossover break or twinkle), use summaries as a short hand. Not going through the foot position of each and every step saves time, allowing students to learn and dance more!

**Example—Half a Box:** Once students know a box, use a summary when teaching other figures that start and/or end with parts of a box (e.g., an open break and underarm turn in Rumba). Say, “Leaders dance the forward half of a box and Followers dance the back half of a box” or even more simply, “Dance half a box.”

# Choreographing Amalgamations and Routines



**Amalgamation:** *A combination of two or more figures or movements.*

While the terms *amalgamation* and *routine* are sometimes used synonymously, the former is usually used when referring to shorter combinations (e.g., two to five figures, or one or two walls in a traveling dance) and the latter to longer combinations (e.g., that last an entire song or make a full trip around the dance floor).

Giving students an amalgamation after teaching a new figure is essential, otherwise students are left not knowing how to integrate it with the other figures they know. Dancing amalgamations also builds students' competency with and retention of the new figure, and gives them a good understanding of how and when to use the figure in their dancing. In dances that travel around the floor, amalgamations deepen students' knowledge of alignments.

Routines can also be a welcome support for Leaders who might otherwise repeatedly dance the same simple figures because they cannot remember, or are uncertain how to begin other figures. Developing the ability to memorize choreography is also excellent preparation for medal tests, competitions and performances. Therefore, being able to choreograph, teach and call out amalgamations and routines are essential teaching skills to master.

## CHOREOGRAPHING TIPS

- ★ **Keep It Simple:** It is important to keep amalgamations and routines for your students simple. After you have danced these class after class, year after year, you may think they are too easy or boring. Resist the temptation to choreograph something fancier. While a more complex amalgamation or routine might be appropriate for advanced students, remember that beginning students will find the simple ones novel and challenging.
- ★ **Repeat Figures:** To give students ample practice with each figure, as well as time to think about what comes next, make sure to repeat figures in amalgamations and routines. Here are some examples using American Foxtrot.

*Example—Good Repetition:* 3 basics, 1 right rock turn, 3 sway steps, 1 left rock turn. The repetition of basics and sway steps are beneficial for students.

*Example—No Repetition:* 1 basic, 1 right rock turn, 1 sway step, 1 left rock turn. The transitions between figures are too quick.

- ★ **Make Repeatable:** It is best to create amalgamations and routines that are repeatable—that is, the amalgamation ends in the same alignment and/or dance position as it began. This way, students can dance continuously.
- ★ **More Consideration in Traveling Dances:** In the Smooth and Standard dances, as well as Samba and Paso Doble, most figures travel around the room and have specific starting and ending alignments. Therefore, creating amalgamations and routines in these dances requires more consideration than in the other Rhythm, Latin and Nightclub dances.

*Match Alignments:* For one figure to follow another, the first figure's ending alignment must be the same as the second figure's starting alignment (see *Precedes and Follows*). Some figures may be started in various alignments and/or be danced with different amounts of turn (which may change the figure's ending alignment), both of which provide you with greater flexibility when choreographing.

*Alternate Easy and Difficult Figures:* For beginners, it is best to alternate difficult figures with easy ones that allow students to recover and prepare for the next difficult figure. However, as students develop their dancing skills, too many easy figures in a row tends to become boring.

*Alternate Progressive and Stationary Figures:* Alternate figures that travel and figures that stay on the spot. This gives students a break from floorcraft and a chance to think.

## PRECEDES AND FOLLOWS



**Precede:** The particular figure (or figures) that can logically be danced *before* a given figure.

**Follow:** The particular figure (or figures) that can logically be danced *after* a given figure.

**Dances That Travel:** Knowing precedes and follows is essential when choreographing for dances that travel along the line of dance (e.g., Smooth and Standard dances, Samba and Paso Doble) since figures need to be strung together in ways that facilitate progression along the line of dance. Alignment,

dance position, and which foot is free, determine what figures can precede or follow each other.

**Example—American Waltz:** After dancing change steps (progressive) in American Waltz (which ends facing line of dance), it is not possible to dance a twinkle that starts facing diagonal wall. However, a left turning box may *follow* the change steps. If 1/4 turn left is made on each of the first three measures and then 1/8 turn left is made on the fourth measure, the dancer ends facing diagonal wall. Now a twinkle may be danced (i.e., the twinkle may *follow* the left turning box).

**Example—International Tango:** After dancing a closed promenade in International Tango (which ends facing diagonal wall with the Leader's left foot free), it is not possible to dance a rock turn. While the alignment is correct (facing diagonal wall), the rock turn starts with the Leader's right foot. Therefore, the Leader must dance a left foot walk (which *follows* the closed promenade and *precedes* the rock turn). Now a rock turn can be danced (i.e., the rock turn *follows* the left foot walk).

Most dance manuals list precedes and follows for each figure, either under the figure's chart or in a separate section of the book.

**Spot Dances:** Precedes and follows are also important in spot dances such as East Coast Swing, Lindy Hop, Hustle, Nightclub Two Step and to a lesser extent Merengue, West Coast Swing and Salsa. In these dances, dance position is the key element that determines what figures can precede or follow each other, because some figures end in closed positions and others end in open positions.

**Example—East Coast Swing:** In East Coast Swing, a Follower's right underarm turn from Closed Position cannot precede a throwout from Closed Position because partners are in open position at the end of the Follower's turn. Instead, a basic (danced in Closed Position) may precede a throwout.

### How to Determine Precedes

To ascertain which figures can precede a particular figure (called Figure X below) use these simple steps.

1. Determine Figure X's *starting* alignment and dance position.
2. Find figures with *ending* alignment and dance position matching Figure X's.
3. For International Standard and Latin dances (and sometimes in other syllabi), double check that Figure X's *starting* foot is the same foot that is free at the end of the figures you have chosen.

Of course, there are no starting or ending alignments that need to be considered in the spot dances. For most American style figures, you do not have to check which foot is free—the majority of the time, figures start on the left foot for the

Leader and on the right foot for the Follower. However, this is not the case in International style, where figures may start on either foot for Leader and Follower.

## How to Determine Follows

Determining which figures can follow another (called Figure Y below) is just like ascertaining the precedes for Figure X. The difference is that now you will look at how Figure Y *ends* and how other figures *begin*. Use these simple steps.

1. Determine Figure Y's *ending* alignment and dance position.
2. Find figures with *starting* alignment and dance position matching Figure Y's.
3. For International Standard and Latin dances (and sometimes in other syllabi), double check that the foot that is free at the end of Figure Y is the same as the *starting* foot of the figures you have chosen.

Just as in determining precedes, starting and ending alignments are not relevant for spot dances.

## TEACHING AMALGAMATIONS AND ROUTINES

**Demonstrate:** With a partner, demonstrate the routine (or amalgamation) for students. Say the figures out loud as you dance them.

**Teach:** Lead couples through the routine, figure by figure. As appropriate, specify the number of measures to dance each figure.

**Separate Leaders and Followers:** If an amalgamation or routine is long or challenging, consider separating Leaders and Followers. Have the two groups face each other. Then lead students through their part of the routine, figure by figure. When students are ready, have them take partners. Lead couples through the routine slowly.

**Practice Without Music:** Once you have gone through the whole routine, lead students in practicing it one or more times) *without* music. Cue each figure, as well as any important transitions.

**Focus on Transitions:** The transitions between figures are usually the most difficult part of dancing routines. Take time to focus on how the figures connect together. Give students tips on how to dance the transitions smoothly and successfully.

**Practice With Music:** When students are ready, put on a song. Start couples dancing to the music, and cue each figure in the routine. Allow students to practice dancing the routine to music at least three or four times before moving

to another figure or topic. Repetition is the key to happiness—it is what gives students the satisfaction of “getting it.”

### *Limitations of Routines*



Dancing routines exclusively tends to limit students' growth as dancers and may result in dancing which seems rote and mechanical.

**For Leaders:** Dancing figures only in a memorized order leaves little opportunity for Leaders to develop their leading skills or to cultivate skills such as improvisation, musicality and floorcraft (i.e., navigating around dancers or other obstacles on the dance floor).

**For Followers:** Routines do not allow Followers to really practice following and may even encourage the bad habit of “back leading” or anticipating.

**Balance Routines with Improvisational Dancing:** Support your students in becoming well-rounded dancers by balancing having them dance routines by having them practice “lead and follow” social dancing. Spend time developing Leaders' ability to dance figures improvisationally and Followers' ability to successfully follow whatever a Leader leads.

## CUING FIGURES



**Cuing:** *Calling out the next figure to be danced (or other instructions) so that students are prepared and able to dance fluidly without hesitation.*

Often it is best to count an amalgamation in measures, replacing parts of the count with verbal cues for transitioning to the next figure. To develop your skill, practice on your own (i.e., when not with students). Cue simple amalgamations in various dances, with and without music. When cuing without music, remember to use your voice to keep tempo and express the arc of the music's phrases.

### Example—Cuing a Waltz Amalgamation

In the following sample American Waltz amalgamation, the first three measures of each figure are cued using the basic count, and the last measure is used to cue



the next figure. Whenever using words instead of numbers, make sure to keep a 1-2-3 rhythm with your voice (indicated in the chart by “–”).

The sample Waltz amalgamation to cue is:

- 4 measures of change steps (progressive)
- 4 measures of a left turning box
- 4 measures of balance steps (hesitations)

Here is how to cue the amalgamation, allowing a four-measure introduction:

What You Do	What You Say
Intro, then cue starting change steps.	“1-2-3, 2-2-3, 3-2-3, Change–Steps–Now.”
Count change steps, then cue dancing a box.	“1-2-3, 2-2-3, 3-2-3, Box–Step–Now.”
Count box, then cue dancing balance steps.	“1-2-3, 2-2-3, 3-2-3, Bal–ance–Now.”

Alternatively, count 1 of the first three measures may be used for additional cuing. For example, an alternative count during the balance steps might be “Forward-2-3, Back-2-3, Side-2-3, Change-Steps-Now.”

### Example—Cuing a Rumba Amalgamation

The following American Rumba amalgamation employs the same principle as the previous Waltz example—saying the basic count on the first three measures and using the last measure of each phrase to cue the next figure. Remember to keep the Slow-Quick-Quick rhythm in your voice when cuing with words (i.e., use two beats to say, “open” and one beat each to say, “break” and “turn”).

The sample Rumba amalgamation to cue is:

- 4 measures of a turning box
- 4 measures of open break and underarm turn
- 4 measures of fifth position breaks

Here is how to cue the amalgamation, allowing a four-measure introduction:

What You Do	What You Say
Intro, then cue starting a box.	— — Five, Six, Box–Turn
Count box, then cue dancing an open break and underarm turn (UAT).	S-Q-Q, S-Q-Q, S-Q-Q, Open–Break–Turn
Count open break and UAT, then cue dancing fifth position breaks.	S-Q-Q, S-Q-Q, S-Q-Q, Fifth–Posi–tion

# Giving Feedback

## General Guidelines

Feedback is most effective when it is positive and constructive. While the specifics of how you give feedback will vary depending on the individual student and what you are teaching, here are some general guidelines to keep in mind.

- ★ **Demonstrate:** A demonstration is like a picture that says a thousand words.  
  
*You Dance Alone:* Demonstrate by yourself, modeling what you want the student to do or change (e.g., demonstrating the correct Follower’s part to your student Follower).  
  
*Dance with Student:* Dance with students to help them experience what it is you want them to do. One effective strategy is to have students dance the opposite role (e.g., if you are giving feedback to a Leader, you would dance as Leader and have the student dance as Follower). Be aware of your student’s ability to do this easily and receptively. If it is too difficult or embarrassing for a particular student, it is best not to do it.
- ★ **Be Neutral and Patient:** Maintain a sense of neutrality and non-judgment, not only in what you say, but how you say it (e.g., your tone of voice, pacing and body language). Make feedback as matter of fact as possible, keeping it light and fun.
- ★ **Be Specific and Concise:** Be as clear and precise as possible so that students truly understand your feedback (e.g., remember to specify right or left when talking about feet, arms or turns). Keep feedback short and simple so students are able to practice and integrate your comments into their dancing.
- ★ **Phrase Feedback in the Positive:** Phrasing feedback in the positive means saying what you want the student to do (rather than what you don’t want). For example:

<i>Say This...</i>	<i>Instead of This</i>
“This time, take smaller steps.”	“Your steps are too big.”
“Let the lead come from your center.”	“Don’t arm-lead.”
“Step directly forward, as if walking right through your partner.”	“Don’t step around your partner.”

- ★ **One Thing at a Time:** Give feedback about one thing at a time. It is difficult, especially for beginning students, to act on feedback about more than one aspect of their dancing at a time.
- ★ **Use Imagery and Analogy:** Simple images and analogies are helpful when giving students technical feedback. For example, “Use your foot and ankle like a shock absorber” might make more sense to some Waltz students than “Lower slowly and with control.”
- ★ **Appropriate Level of Challenge:** Give feedback appropriate for the student’s skill level. That is, don’t ask a beginning student to do something that only an advanced student is capable of doing. Asking students to do something too far beyond their capacity may create feelings of incompetence or failure.
- ★ **Praise is Feedback Too!** Praise students for their efforts and point out the ways their dancing is improving.
- ★ **Feedback Sandwich:** One fun way to give feedback is to use a “feedback sandwich”—a piece of constructive feedback between two compliments. For example, “Your movement is very strong. If you focus on finding balance during your rise, your natural charisma will really shine.”

## Examples of Feedback

The following are statements a teacher might make when giving feedback for things done well or that need improvement. Use these to spur your own ideas for increasing the clarity and positivity of your communication with students.

### *Positive Feedback*

- \* “Your Latin hip action was very consistent.”
- \* “You used your arms elegantly.”
- \* “Nice articulation of your feet.”
- \* “Your amounts of turn were just right.”
- \* “Your head was turned the correct direction for each dance position.”
- \* “You were on time for the entire song.”
- \* “You moved so gracefully.”
- \* “The eye contact with your partner made you look very confident.”
- \* “You are clearly very well-prepared for your medal test.”
- \* “Great job continuing to dance after making a mistake.”

### *Feedback for Improvement*

- \* For Slumped Posture: “Think of lengthening your spine and opening your chest and shoulders to their full width.”
- \* For High Shoulders: “Imagine your neck growing taller as your shoulders move downward.”
- \* For Looking Down: “Keep your eyes on the horizon.”
- \* For Stern or Fixed Facial Expression: Say jokingly, “Is the grimace on your face helping you dance?”
- \* For Inconsistent Hip Action: “Use more Latin hip action, especially on the back breaks.”
- \* For Footwork that is Too Flat: “Use more ball-flat action, really working the floor with your feet.”
- \* For Omitting Part of a Figure: “You skipped the third measure of the figure. Count the measures out loud as I demonstrate the figure again.”
- \* For Rushing: “You occasionally got ahead of the music. As we dance it again, let’s count aloud together.”

## *Imparting Dance Etiquette*

Dancing is a social activity which requires interpersonal as well as physical grace. Being a considerate and thoughtful dance partner helps ensure a wonderful experience and is even more important for a social dancer than dance technique. Therefore it is important to educate your students about dance etiquette.

This section covers how to talk to your students about six aspects of social dance etiquette.

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Asking for a dance | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Partner’s ability |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Saying “no”        | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Floorcraft        |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Personal hygiene   | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Group classes     |

### **May I Have This Dance?**

In a social dance situation it is customary to dance with a variety of people. (This is also a great way to improve one’s dance skills). Therefore, tell your students:

*When YOU ask someone to dance*, be sure to make eye contact with your prospective partner, offer your hand and ask directly, “Would you like to dance?” If the person says yes, then smile, offer your hand and walk with him or her onto the dance floor and into dance position. This helps a partner feel supported and at ease.

*When someone asks YOU to dance*, your response should nearly always be, “Yes, I would love to!” It is not acceptable to say no because you do not think a partner is good enough for you or because you are hoping someone “better” will ask you. It is important that all dancers are supportive and kind to each other at all skill levels.

*During the dance*, be sure to be aware of your partner, including your partner’s comfort and skill level. Smile and make eye contact, but do not stare. Be gracious and appreciative. At the end of the dance, always thank your partner and walk with him or her off the dance floor.

### **When It Is Appropriate To Say No?**

Let your students know that when a person asks for a dance, it is appropriate to say no under a few circumstances:

*If you are really tired* when someone asks you to dance, say that you are taking a rest now and would be happy to dance later. Then be sure to keep this commitment.

*If you come to the dance to watch* and someone asks you to dance, it is fine to say, “Thank you, but I’m just watching tonight.”

*If the same person asks you to dance repeatedly*, it is acceptable to tell him or her that you would like to dance with others right now and would enjoy another dance later.

*If the person has been physically or verbally abusive* to you on a previous occasion, it is of course appropriate to say “no!” It is also appropriate to say “no” if the person is obviously drunk or threatening in some way. If you feel that a dancer at the party is physically dangerous to the other dancers, report the situation immediately to the person in charge (e.g., the teacher, front desk or management).

### **Cleanliness is Heaven**

Social dancing is an intimate activity in that it requires a certain degree of physical closeness. Good hygiene before and during a dance party shows respect and consideration for the other dancers. Considerations include:

*Bathe or take a shower*, use deodorant and wear clean clothes.

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*Brush your teeth* before going to a dance. Use breath mints or gum at the dance if necessary.

*Bring a towel and/or a change of clothes* if you tend to sweat a great deal. If you get excessively sweaty on the dance floor, stop, dry off and cool down for a few minutes.

*Use a light touch applying perfume or cologne*, or avoid wearing it altogether, as many people are sensitive or allergic to fragrances.

### Partner's Ability

Teach your students how to get along with partners of varying ability levels. For example:

*Compliment rather than correct your partner.* Unless someone asks you directly to make a correction, never volunteer criticisms of your dance partner's abilities. Know that your dance partner is doing the best that he or she is able.

*If your partner is dancing off time*, consider ways to make it fun for yourself. For example, you might view the situation as a challenge to dance to the same internal rhythm as your partner, an opportunity to have fun dancing slightly off the music or simply a chance to appreciate the experience of moving with another person.

*If your partner is physically hurting you*, it is probably inadvertent. Stop dancing for a moment and say something like this, "I'm sorry, but you're holding my hand a little tightly. Could we do it again?" If you receive an inconsiderate response or your partner seems unwilling to modify his or her behavior, it is then appropriate for you to say, "Thank you, but I'd like to stop now." Social dancing should not be physically painful or dangerous.

### Floorcraft and the Line of Dance

In order for a social dance to be enjoyable for all the participants, it is crucial to be considerate and aware of floorcraft. No matter how inspired you might be to let go and express yourself, have respect for the other couples on the floor. Careful observation of the traffic lanes in a ballroom helps prevent mishaps. Give students the following guidelines:

*In dances that travel* (i.e., Waltz, Foxtrot, Tango, Viennese Waltz, Quickstep, Peabody, Samba and Argentine Tango), dancers move in a counter-clockwise circle known as the *line of dance*. The line of dance has lanes, similar to those on a highway.

- \* *Fast Lane:* The very outside lane of the line of dance is the “fast lane.” This lane is generally used by very experienced dancers who cover a lot of ground.
- \* *Slow Lane:* The middle and inside lanes are for beginners and less experienced dancers who are not traveling as much as those in the fast lane. Beginners dancing basic steps and not traveling as much should stay on the very inside lane.
- \* *Center of the Floor:* When repeatedly practicing a figure that does not travel (e.g., the Waltz Box with Underarm Turn), use the center of the dance floor.

*If there is a collision,* stop and apologize, regardless of who is responsible. If someone has been stepped on or hurt, make sure that person is okay before you resume dancing. In the case of severe injury, escort the person off the floor to a chair and see if he or she needs ice, a drink of water or medical assistance. Report any injury immediately to the management and stay with the injured person until help arrives.

### Group Class Etiquette

Teach students how to get along with each other as they rotate partners.

*Say hello and introduce yourself* to each new partner.

*If you only want to dance with the same partner* for personal reasons, you may do so by stepping out of the circle when it is time to rotate. This way, it is clear that you are not part of the rotation. To help avoid confusion when rotating, direct fellow students to rotate past you.

*If you're having real difficulty with the figure,* it is perfectly acceptable to tell your partner that you need to step out of the rotation for a minute to practice the steps on your own. If you want help, feel free to ask the teacher.

*It is not acceptable to refuse to dance with someone in a group class simply because you are of the same gender.* There are many reasons why dancers choose to learn the non-traditional role (i.e., women dancing as Leaders and men dancing as Followers). Reasons range from being teachers in training who need to know both roles, to wanting to learn the other role to improve their dancing, to simply preferring the non-traditional role. If you are a male Leader or female Follower, you may not be accustomed to dancing with someone of your same gender. Nevertheless, etiquette requires that you respect other dancers' choices, regardless of their reasons for choosing the non-traditional role.

# Teaching Group Classes

After a great group class, students walk away with the following kinds of thoughts.

- \* “That was fun and easy!” (if they are beginning students), or “That was a fun challenge!” (for more advanced students).
- \* “I sure learned a lot!”
- \* “I can dance that [i.e., what was taught during class] at the holiday party.”
- \* “I met lots of new people.”
- \* “That teacher was really prepared and clear.”
- \* “That teacher is so positive and energetic.”
- \* “I can’t wait for next week’s class.”

This section walks you through the key components of great group classes. You will learn how to prepare and structure classes, how to rotate partners, how to command attention through professional poise and voice projection, and how to work with an assistant.

## PREPARING BEFORE THE FIRST CLASS

Group classes are most successful when you use clear and constructive communication. You will communicate best if you prepare before class begins.

*Create a Lesson Plan:* Know exactly what material you are going to teach each class meeting—including figures, exercises and technique—and in what order. It is best to put this in writing for yourself.



## Elements of a Lesson Plan

- ★ Student's name or class name.
- ★ Dance(s) and figures to be taught.
- ★ Technique and/or exercises to be taught.
- ★ Order in which to present the material.
- ★ Approximate amount of time to spend on each aspect.
- ★ The music/songs to play.
- ★ Ways to make the lesson/class fun.

**Create a Step List:** Step lists are important because they give students a big picture perspective on the class, help students keep track of their learning, and are something tangible that students can take home and make notes on. Based on your lesson plan, prepare a step list of the figures students will learn during the class or series and the count for each figure. Make enough copies to give students as they enter the class. (Alternatively, post a step list on line or email it to students). A step list for a beginning class should also include a brief history of and musical information for the dance. For Standard and intermediate Smooth, include beginning and ending alignments for each figure.

**Choose Music:** Make sure you know exactly what music you will be using in the class. Make sure the music is the correct tempo. Usually slower tempos are better when learning new figures (with the exception of very slow dances such as Bolero and Nightclub Two Step, for which their normal range is better). Have your music cued up and ready to go. If possible, play a few warm-up songs before each class starts.

**Get Centered:** Spend a few minutes getting centered before each class. Clear your mind of any distractions. This means putting aside all other concerns and focusing on your purpose and goals for the class.



### *Mission Statement*

Writing a personal mission statement about your purpose as a dance teacher helps clarify the direction and intent of your teaching. You might write one statement that applies to all your teaching or write several, each specific to a class, a student or a particular aspect of your teaching. Here is an example mission statement:

*My purpose in teaching dance is to teach in a way that is clear, fun and results in students feeling confident and excited.*

You can review your statement prior to teaching each day to help set the tone of your teaching before you even come in contact with your students. You can also communicate your mission statement directly to your students. Doing so tends to bring out the best in you and your students.

## STRUCTURING CLASSES

### Every Class

***Be Friendly and Attentive:*** Remember that you are being observed from the moment you walk into the room. Smile and make eye contact with each and every student in the class. You do not want to be perceived as aloof or distant. Remain professional, friendly, approachable and warm the entire time you are in students' presence.

***Use Name Tags:*** Give each student a name tag and wear one yourself. Ballroom dance classes are meant to be fun and social. The sooner everyone gets to know each others' names, the more of a community you create in your class and at your studio. Also, it is so much nicer for you as the teacher to be able to address your students by name.

***Watch and Listen to Your Students:*** After a class or series, how will you know if you were successful in teaching a great group class?

- \* ***Look for Signs:*** Observe your students. If they are enjoying themselves, they will be laughing, talking, dancing and staying to ask questions after class.

- \* *Solicit Feedback:* Alternatively, ask your students for feedback directly. Use open-ended questions (rather than yes-no questions). For example, ask *how* they enjoyed the class (not *whether* they enjoyed it) or what they thought of the pace.

## The First Class of a Series

A great class series is well-managed from the very first class. There are five things you need to do to ensure the first class runs well.

1. Get the class started with a great introduction.
2. Teach the first figure in an organized manner.
3. Teach a second figure and perhaps a third, following the same format.
4. Teach an amalgamation using the figures you taught.
5. Close the class on a positive note.

The following sections explain each of these five steps in detail.

### 1. *Get the Class Started with a Great Introduction*

Call students out onto the dance floor. Introduce yourself and your assistant (if you have one). Also, introduce the students to the dance studio, pointing out the restrooms, water fountains, front desk, refreshments, etc.

**Introduce the Dance(s):** Tell the class what dance(s) they will be learning. Briefly give the history of the dance, explain its character and relay any other fun facts about it. Give a short demonstration of the dance to music, including figures students will be learning.

**Introduce the Music:** Briefly explain the characteristics of the music for the dance. Also explain how you will be counting and define words such as “Slow” and “Quick.”

**Play the Music:** Count the music and point out count 1. Have students count out loud with you to the music.

### 2. *Teach First Figure*

Demonstrate the first figure to music with your assistant (if you have one).

**Teach Leaders and Followers Their Foot Positions:** Separate Leaders and Followers and teach each role their foot positions. Have students practice the figure solo a minimum of three times without music, and then with music.

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**Bring Leaders and Followers Together:** Ask couples to form a circle around you and your assistant. Teach the dance frame, demonstrating a connected frame and a weak frame. Then teach anything else students need to know at this point.(e.g., tracks of the feet, line of dance).

**Have Partners Dance Without Music:** Have partners dance the figure together a few times.

**Rotate Partners:** Explain the process for rotating partners (see *Partner Rotation*), and then ask students to rotate partners. Have the new couples dance the figure again.

**Monitor Students' Dancing:** It is important to pay attention, especially when teaching more difficult figures, to whether the class is “getting” the figure (i.e., understanding and successfully dancing it). If students are faltering after several attempts, it is usually best to re-teach the figure, clarifying the aspects that are unclear to students and using a different method, if necessary.

**Help Students Having Difficulties:** Keep your eye out for anyone who is particularly frustrated or sits down. Some students may feel shy, discouraged or embarrassed. It is often useful for you or your assistant to dance with the individual and give any assistance needed to increase the student's confidence to return to dancing with a fellow student.

**Add Music:** When students seem ready, play music for couples to practice dancing the figure. Continue rotating partners and dancing to music.

**Answer Questions and Give Tips:** Ask if there are any questions and answer any that are posed. Give helpful tips or corrections based on what you observed when partners were dancing. Remember to give only one tip to each role at a time so that students are able to absorb it.

**Have Students Rotate and Dance Again:** Rotate partners. Have the new partners dance the figure again, integrating your tips and corrections. Go around the room, giving individual feedback and correction. When appropriate, use the problems you observed to benefit the whole class' learning—that is, stop the class and teach or demonstrate the problems you have observed and how to correct them. Make sure not to embarrass anyone by singling them out as having made a mistake.

**Praise and Transition:** Praise students for doing a great job and tell them it is time to learn the next figure.

### 3. Teach Another Figure

Teach one (or more figures) using the same format as for the first figure. Omit any information that does not need to be repeated (e.g., demonstrating the frame).

#### 4. *Teach Amalgamation*

Teach an amalgamation of the figures you have just taught. Make sure the amalgamation is choreographed so that it repeats smoothly and, if appropriate, continues to move around the room along line of dance.

**Spacing and Floorcraft:** It is your job to help couples space themselves evenly so that everyone has room to move. You may need to readjust students' spacing several times during class to remedy bunching up or being too close to walls. Make sure to start everyone dancing at the same time to help maintain sufficient spacing and the flow of traffic.

**Dance and Rotate:** Allow couples to dance together with music for approximately 30 seconds to 1 minute before rotating partners. This gives students a chance to dance with everyone in the class.

**Fill In as Leader or Follower:** It is best when every student has a partner, so as to maximize the time dancing and learning. Therefore, if there is an imbalance of Leaders or Followers, it is best for you and/or your assistant to fill in and dance with students.

**Let Students Dance without You Counting:** While students are dancing to music and you feel they are comfortable with the timing, say, "Okay. I'm going to stop counting now and let you enjoy dancing to the music." This weans students from the need to have you count all the time.

**Compliment Rather than Correct:** At this point in the class, you want your students to have fun. Go around the room, offering compliments and encouragement to students—there is no need to correct errors. You might say things like "good timing on your leads," "nice sway in that Waltz" or "you're dance position looks great." However, if a couple is having difficulty and wants help, it is appropriate to give them tips and suggestions.

**Applaud:** At the end of the music say something like, "Excellent! Give yourselves and your partners a hand! That was wonderful!"

#### 5. *Close Class*

Ask if there are any questions and answer any that are posed. Congratulate the students on a great job. Then end the class meeting on a positive note.

**Generate Excitement for the Next Class:** Show students what they will learn in the next class.

**Make Announcements:** Make any announcements about other classes, private lessons, parties, special events, etc.

**Appreciate Students:** Thank students and let them know you look forward to seeing them at the next class.

### Remaining Classes of a Series

**Play Music:** Before class starts or at the beginning of class, put on some music. Encourage everyone to take a partner and warm up.

**Review:** Always review the figures (and any other material) you taught in the previous class.

**Teach New Figures and Amalgamation:** Using the same format for teaching that you used in the first class, teach new figures and put them together in an amalgamation.

## USING PARTNER ROTATION

Partner rotation is a systematic way to change partners in a group class, so that every Leader has the opportunity to dance with every Follower. Orderly, frequent partner rotation is an essential part of conducting an outstanding group class. No teacher is exempt—even champion dancers are likely to have students in their classes feel frustrated unless there is regular partner rotation.

Rotating partners helps a group class run smoothly for several reasons:

- \* Students improve their leading and following skills when they dance with more than one partner.
- \* Less experienced students learn from dancing with more experienced students.
- \* Students get less frustrated with one partner when they know they will soon be dancing with someone else.
- \* Students make friends with whom they can go social dancing.
- \* Students can sign up for your class without needing to bring a significant other.
- \* When the number of Leaders is not equal to the number of Followers, no one student is without a partner for the whole class.

***Decide Which Role Rotates:*** You can choose to have either the Followers or the Leaders rotate. If the class is not balanced in terms of Leaders and Followers, it works well to have the smaller group do the rotating. This way those rotating always move to the next partner. In contrast, if the larger group rotates, there are times when there is no partner to which to rotate, which tends to cause confusion.

**Decide the Direction of Rotation:** If the couples in your class are arranged in a circle, choose whether to have students rotate clockwise or counter-clockwise. Rotating counter-clockwise is more common, as it is along the line of dance. If couples are arranged in a line (e.g., when teaching a dance such as West Coast Swing or Hustle), decide the direction of rotation down the line. The rotating student at the end of the line will then walk to the beginning of the line to dance with the student standing there.

**Tell Students What to Expect:** Tell students that rotating partners is expected in a class and then explain how partner rotation works. For example: “In this class we rotate partners because your dancing will improve faster when you practice with different partners. When I say, ‘Followers rotate,’ the Followers will move counter-clockwise around the circle to the next Leader.”

**Rotate Regularly:** Rotate partners regularly. For beginners, or when having students practice a new figure, it is appropriate to rotate partners frequently, as often as every two or three repetitions of the figure. For more advanced students, or when students are dancing to music, it is appropriate to allow partners to dance together one or more minutes before rotating.

**Project Your Voice:** When cuing the class to rotate partners, project your voice so that students can hear the cue (see *Voice Projection*). If necessary, lower the volume of the music in order to get students’ attention.

**Indicate Direction:** The first few times a group class rotates partners, walk counter-clockwise around the room making large arm movements to point the rotating students in the correct direction for them to go.

**Accommodate Non-Rotating Students:** Sometimes a couple wants to dance only with each other. As a teacher, be sensitive to this request. That said, take a moment to explain how rotating will benefit the couple and encourage them to try it. If the couple does not want to rotate, to keep class rotation running smoothly, ask the non-rotating couple to either step out of the circle or actively direct rotating students around them and to the next partner.

**For Imbalanced Classes:** When the role balance of a class is not balanced, make sure to separate students without partners from one another so that anyone without a partner on one rotation will always get a partner on the next. For example, if there are three extra Leaders, intersperse them equally throughout the circle (or line) of couples (i.e., do not let two Leaders without partners stand next to each other). It is best if you or your teaching assistant join in the rotation to help balance the class so that as many students as possible have partners.

If a class is highly imbalanced (e.g., two Followers for every Leader) —ask students to form small groups of two Followers and one Leader. Have the role with the *fewest* students rotate. Continuing the example, the Leaders would rotate to the next “group” of two Followers.

## WORKING WITH AN ASSISTANT

The teacher's assistant plays a vital role in the success of a group class. Therefore, it is worth the effort to apply the following suggestions when choosing, preparing and working with an assistant.

### Benefits of Having an Assistant

In an ideal world, every group class would have both a teacher and an assistant. It could be argued that with only one teacher in the room, students get only half the value they would receive if there were two people presenting the material. That is, their role's part will not be demonstrated as frequently, and they will spend time waiting when the instructor teaches the other role their part.

***Increased Efficiency:*** An assistant speeds the process of teaching new figures, allowing both the Leader's and Follower's parts to be taught simultaneously.

***Clear Demonstrations:*** The teacher and assistant can demonstrate figures and technique correctly to students—a big learning advantage for students compared to a teacher demonstrating with a beginning student.

***Better Teacher-Student Ratio:*** There are two teachers available to help students. It is especially helpful to have an assistant do tasks like running the music so the teacher can remain available to students.

***Ability to Balance Class:*** If a class has an unequal number of Leaders and Followers, an assistant is able to fill in as needed, minimizing the number of students without partners.

### Choosing and Preparing an Assistant

There are three main categories of people from whom you might select an assistant—a fellow teacher, a teacher trainee and an advanced student.

**Fellow Teacher—Paid:** A fellow teacher who is trained and is knowledgeable about the dance figures and technique taught in the class. Since this assistant is a professional, he or she will need to be compensated. Because they have less responsibility than the teacher, professional assistants are usually paid less than the lead teacher (unless the arrangement is that the two teachers are equal co-teachers for the class).

To prepare a fellow teacher, the main teacher usually needs only to give the assistant guidelines on what is expected of him or her, and do a quick practice of figures to guarantee a successful demonstration.



**Teacher Trainee—Volunteer:** A teacher who is still in training who has already been trained in the dances and figures to be taught. This person would be volunteering to assist (perhaps as a requirement of their training) to gain experience.

It is generally a good idea for the main teacher to spend more time preparing a teacher trainee. Preparations might include reviewing the figures to be taught and making any necessary refinements, as well as making sure the teacher trainee understands the responsibilities of being an assistant.

**Advanced Student—Volunteer:** Consider inviting one of your advanced students to be your assistant, on a volunteer basis. Many students enjoy the challenge and opportunity to be center stage. Keep in mind that students are not typically familiar with both roles and therefore may not be able to perform as many functions as would be ideal.

The amount of preparation necessary with a student assistant will vary depending on the student's skill level, personality and relationship with you. Being students, these assistants are not used to thinking like a dance teacher. Therefore, it is a good idea for you to educate the student assistant about basic teaching etiquette and to give clear guidelines for the expected speech and behavior as the assistant (e.g., asking the assistant to give only positive feedback to students and not give corrections, not to sit down, not to eat, etc.).

### Defining the Assistant's Responsibilities

As with any job or position, it is best for group class assistants to have a written job description. Typical responsibilities of an assistant include:

- ⊙ Be on time to class and adhere to the studio's dress code.
- ⊙ Support the teacher in creating a positive, friendly environment by smiling, being upbeat and engaging with the students.
- ⊙ Demonstrate figures with the teacher as needed. Teach or demonstrate in front of the Leaders or Followers when the class is separated.
- ⊙ Dance either role with students who do not have partners (this requirement may be waived for student assistants). This means assistants are comfortable dancing with partners of the same gender.
- ⊙ Inform the instructor of any problems they notice (e.g., a student without a partner for a long time or having difficulty with a figure, someone entering the class late, etc.). Also, if the teacher forgets or overlooks something, the assistant *discreetly* reminds the teacher (e.g., a figure taught in the last class, an announcement to make, to rotate partners, etc.).

- ⦿ Run the music.
- ⦿ Be aware of their own posture and physical presentation, dancing at their highest level and representing the studio in a professional manner.

### Rapport and Feedback with Assistant

It is extremely important that the teacher does everything possible to maintain good rapport with the assistant. For example, always introduce the assistant to the class, treat the assistant with respect and consideration and, in general, be a role model to students in how to have good relations with dance partners.

Remember to publicly thank your assistant at the end of each class. After class, you might want to give the assistant brief feedback so as to continually improve the assistant's performance, as well as build the teacher-assistant relationship.

## Commanding Attention

To teach effectively, teachers must get and keep their students' attention. A dance teacher's professional poise, which students see all the time, and voice projection, which students hear in class are two tools used to command attention.

### PROFESSIONAL POISE



**Professional Poise:** *The way professional dancers and dance teachers present themselves to the world, when they are dancing, teaching or simply moving around the studio.*

In ballroom dancing, *poise* is generally used to refer to the positioning of body weight in relation to the feet (e.g., if the weight is forward toward the ball of the foot, it is called *forward poise*). However, *poise* can also mean the general appearance of a person as a whole. For example, how a person stands, moves, talks and dresses, the attitude that comes from the face, are other ways in which a person presents him- or herself to the world.

Great teachers practice professional poise even when they are not dancing or teaching. Examples of professional poise include:

- \* Wearing appropriate and attractive clothing for dancing and teaching.
- \* Using correct and upright posture.

- \* Moving with awareness so you “move like a dancer” even when merely walking.
- \* Radiating qualities like respect and attentiveness to students.
- \* Using your best technique when dancing with and demonstrating for students.

## VOICE PROJECTION



**Voice Projection:** *Directing one’s voice so as to be heard clearly at a distance.*

Voice projection is a critical teaching skill. It is important for a dance teacher’s voice to be able to project over music, the sound of moving feet and talking students. Good voice projection depends on correct breathing, which is a skill that can be learned and improved over time.

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### Voice Projection Exercise



1. **Breathe In:** Put your hands on the lower belly (between the bellybutton and pubic bone). Inhale, directing the air into your belly so that it expands, not only forward, but also around the sides and even the lower back.
2. **Breath Out:** Exhale slowly, making a hissing sound and contracting the belly. Completely exhale all the air, and then exhale a little bit more air.
3. **Repeat:** Continue, pausing as needed to take a few normal breaths.
4. **Use Voice:** When speaking, the voice can be focused inward into the back of the throat or projected outward toward the front of the face. Inhale, expanding the belly, and then speak your name, address and phone number while projecting your voice forward. Imagine projecting your voice through a megaphone. Repeat a few times.
5. **Reach Farthest Student:** When teaching, always speak loudly enough to be heard by the student farthest from you.

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# Professional Certification

The professional certification process has been designed to enrich a dance teacher's knowledge of all aspects of dancing and teaching. Going through the certification training and completing the exams takes both your dancing and your teaching to a higher level. Dance teachers who become certified unanimously agree it is the single best thing they have done for themselves in their dance career.

- ★ **Become a Better Teacher:** The process of preparing for your certification exam will teach you dance concepts you may not have fully understood before. You will improve both your verbal and presentation skills, and will learn the precise vocabulary for describing the technical elements of dance figures. This will help your explanations to students become clear, succinct and consistent. Your knowledge of the precise alignments will improve your ability to choreograph routines for your students. You will expand your knowledge of musical terms and concepts, and you will understand how dancing and music relate. Finally, the process of technical mastery will improve your eye, so you will know instantly what to correct in your students.
- ★ **Become a Better Dancer:** You may be able to dance a lovely left turning box, but are you able to articulate the sway on every step for both Leader and Follower? The technical expertise required to pass your certification exam will catapult your dancing to an entirely new level. The preparation will fill in any gaps in your own learning. You will learn a series of technique rules that will make your dancing consistent and will help you to master new, advanced figures. You will develop a language that will help you work more effectively in your dance partnerships. Above all, you will achieve a true mastery of dance technique that will stay with you for the rest of your career.
- ★ **Achieve an Objective Standard of Professional Excellence:** Once you successfully pass your certification exam, you will have a certificate that you can display to the world declaring your expertise. You will be able to attract serious students and charge more for your services. You will be a desirable employee in dance studios around the country and the world. After passing a certain level of certification, you will meet the criteria for judging and can officially register as a judge with the National Dance Council of America (or the governing body for dancesport in your country). Your certification is the first step to being recognized as a national expert, and your confidence will soar for having met and mastered this challenge!



*See Get Certified:* Everything you need to know to prepare for professional certification exams, can be found in Diane Jarmolow's *Get Certified!* DVD and guidebook. See *Additional Resources* for more information.

## Dance Teaching No No's

- \* Being late or unprepared for a lesson (including not having your music prepared and not having your dance shoes).
- \* Being poorly groomed (e.g., dirty hands or fingernails, disheveled clothing, food breath, etc.).
- \* Wearing clothes that hide your feet (i.e., students cannot see your feet).
- \* Sitting down, eating, being on the phone or texting during a lesson.
- \* Interrupting a lesson to talk with other teachers or people at the studio.
- \* Looking at yourself in mirror, watching other dancers on the floor or otherwise getting distracted (instead of paying attention to your students).
- \* Asking students what you did on their last lesson (i.e., not remembering).
- \* Teaching what you want to practice for yourself instead of what is best for or most important to your student.
- \* Promising to do something and then not doing it.
- \* Talking to students about your personal problems, complaining, making excuses or blaming.
- \* Gossiping about other teachers, students, studio staff and studio owners.

# Checklist for ☆ Outstanding Dance Teaching

- ☑ **Dress Professionally:** Dress professionally and wear the appropriate dance shoes. You want to look so good that it is clear *you* are the teacher.
- ☑ **Be Warm and Welcoming:** Create good rapport from the very beginning by sincerely introducing yourself, and being friendly thereafter. Show new students around the studio and introduce them to other teachers and students.
- ☑ **Be on Time:** Start and end each lesson or class on time.
- ☑ **Create Safe, Supportive Learning Environment:** Keep lessons light and fun—it is more important that students feel comfortable and have a good time, than it is for them to completely master the material at this moment.
- ☑ **Create and Use a Lesson Plan:** Prepare a coherent lesson plan and then use it. This helps organize your class or private lesson.
- ☑ **Teach Clearly:** Start by giving students an overview of what they will learn. Then teach figures and technique in a clear, understandable way.
- ☑ **Give Amalgamations:** Put figures together into short routines so students experience continuous dancing. This helps them understand what can be danced before and after a figure and builds skill with transitions.
- ☑ **Less Talk, More Action:** In general, have students spend more time dancing than listening to you talk. Give students enough repetition to feel confident and successful.
- ☑ **Adjust Pace:** Strike a good balance between challenging and easy figures and technique—neither overwhelm nor bore your students. Pay attention to how students are doing and adjust your pace to reduce student frustration.
- ☑ **Play the Right Music:** Select appropriate music—that is, music with a good tempo, a clear beat and which has the correct flavor of the dance.
- ☑ **Play Plenty of Music:** Play a sufficient amount of music—a good guideline is playing a minimum of five minutes of music for each new figure that you teach.

- ☑ **Help Students Feel Each Dance:** In addition to developing posture and technique, help students dance the *feel* and personality of each dance (e.g., fun and upbeat versus dramatic and passionate).
- ☑ **Give Constructive Feedback and Encouragement:** Give specific, concrete instructions and feedback balanced with lots of praise and encouragement throughout the lesson.
- ☑ **Invite Feedback:** Ask open-ended questions such as “What did you like most about class tonight?” Based on their feedback, adjust your teaching or the material to increase their satisfaction.
- ☑ **Acknowledge Progress:** Appreciate students’ hard work and acknowledge their achievements. From time to time, have students reflect on how far they have come. Encourage them to take pride in their growth as dancers.
- ☑ **Envision Future:** Talk with students about their goals for the future and offer suggestions and encouragement tailored to their future.
- ☑ **Get Certified!** Continually improve your dancing and teaching by taking professional certification exams.

# About the Authors

## DIANE JARMOLOW



Diane Jarmolow is an innovator in the field of ballroom dancing. She founded the first ever vocational school for training ballroom dance teachers, the Ballroom Dance Teachers College. Her program, the *Ballroom Dance Teachers College-in-a-Box* is being presented in over 60 studios and universities throughout the United States, Canada, India, the Caribbean and Argentina. She is the co-creator of *Move Like a Champion*<sup>®</sup>, a training for professionals and avid ballroom dancers that provides a new language and method for understanding dance movement based on functional anatomy. She is the creator of the remarkable *Salesfree Sales* workshops designed to foster outstanding communication among teachers and students. Diane is a National Examiner with DVIDA<sup>®</sup>, and created

their innovative system of professional certification. She authors the DVIDA<sup>®</sup> manuals, constantly improving the written language for ballroom dance. She also founded and operated San Francisco's enormously successful Metronome Ballroom. Diane's passion is helping people have the resources they need to become outstanding professionals and dance studio owners.



## BRANDEE SELCK



A graduate of the Ballroom Dance Teachers College, Brandee Selck has been teaching ballroom dance for over 12 years. Brandee is also a certified practitioner in the *Feldenkrais Method*®, somatic education that utilizes the nervous system's ability to learn and change in order to improve movement and overall functioning. She brings her knowledge of *Feldenkrais*® into her dance teaching, as well as into developing educational materials and training curricula for the Ballroom Dance Teachers College, including *Ballroom Dance Teachers College-in-a-Box*, *Salesfree Sales* and *Move Like a Champion*®. Brandee has also edited DVIDA® manuals and holds USISTD and DVIDA® certifications in American Smooth and a DVIDA®

certification in American Rhythm.

## MELISSA SAPHIR – EDITOR



Melissa Saphir is a highly certified ballroom dance instructor who enjoys performing on stage with her students, competing with her friends in the same-sex dance community, and Lindy Hopping with her husband Bill. As a Master Teacher for the Ballroom Dance Teachers College, Melissa has trained aspiring dance teachers since 2006. She is a co-author of *Ballroom Dance Teachers College-in-a-Box*, *Salesfree Sales*, which are detailed curricula for training dance professionals, and is a Regional Examiner for DVIDA®.

# Resources

## FROM BALLROOM DANCE TEACHERS COLLEGE

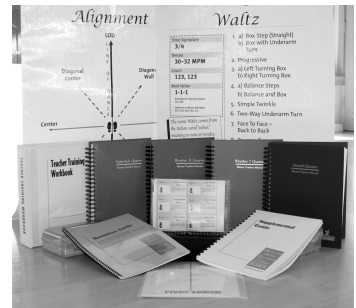
Ballroom Dance Teachers College (BDTC) is the creator of the nation's premier vocational dance teacher training program, as well as a wide variety of resources for dancers, teachers and studio owners, including:

### ★ **BDTC Teacher Training Courses** (for people who want to be teachers)

Ongoing teacher training courses in the San Francisco Bay Area.

### ★ **BDTC-in-a-Box** (for studio owners)

A professional dance teacher training program that you can run at your own studio! Enrollees pay for the course, making the program both a profit center and a source of highly trained instructors for your studio. For a list of studios offering the BDTC-in-a-Box curriculum, visit our website.

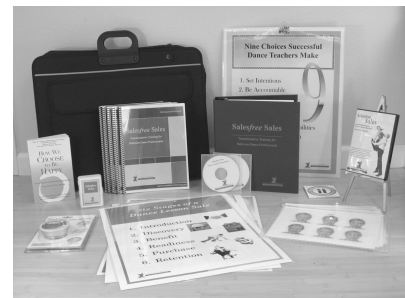


### ★ **Salesfree Sales** (for teachers, staff and studios)

Transformational sales training for ballroom dance teachers and staff.

**Salesfree Sales Trainings:** For teachers and ballroom staff, these two-day intensive trainings are taught by Diane Jarmolow a few times a year in various cities—or at your studio!

**Sales Box:** Everything you as a studio owner need to run Salesfree Sales trainings for your teachers, staff and teacher trainees.



### ★ **Certification Intensives** (for teachers)

Offered a few times a year, in American and International styles, these week-long intensives help you prepare to take your DVIDA® exams.

**TeachBallroomDancing.com**

**LearnMore@TeachBallroomDancing.com (510) 336-942**

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

### ***Move Like a Champion®* Book, DVD and Workshops**



Created by Diane Jarmolow and Kasia Kozak, Move Like a Champion® is a revolutionary training for ballroom and Latin dancers who want to better understand how the human body moves to produce beautiful and efficient dancing. Dance instructors may become DVIDA® certified in the Move Like a Champion® principles.

To purchase the book or DVD set, or to register for a workshop, please visit:

[MoveLikeaChampion.com](http://MoveLikeaChampion.com)

### **Get Certified! DVD and Guidebook**

This DVD and guidebook featuring Diane Jarmolow demonstrating everything you need to know to pass your DVIDA® certification exams.

Available through [DanceVision.com](http://DanceVision.com)

### **Dance Vision**

The premiere source for instructional DVDs, syllabus manuals, teaching and practice music, dance camps and competitions.

[DanceVision.com](http://DanceVision.com) (800) 851-2813

### **DVIDA® Dance Vision International Dance Association**

Professional teacher organization that provides tools, training and certification for dance teachers.

[ProDvida.com](http://ProDvida.com) (800) 851-2813

### **Ultimate Center Belt**

A dance training tool created by Tomas Atkocevicus and Aira Bubnelyte (two of the photo models featured in this book) for Smooth and Standard dancers. The Ultimate Center Belt connects you and your partner in *exactly* the correct position!

[UltimateCenterBelt.com](http://UltimateCenterBelt.com) (800) 851-2813

