

Partner Dancing

The following are the elements of dance that make partner dancing functional.

How to Step. Step Normally. Though many feel the need to modify their step when dancing, experienced dancers do not; they step forward, backward, and sideward on the dance floor in the same way they do when they walk. Until you are a comfortable and confident partner dancer, reserve bouncing, swaying, and abnormal steps for later, when you are confident that they contribute to both your dance style and your partner's enjoyment.

When to Step. The music and cadence determine when to step. The music sets a tempo, and the dance style has a cadence that should be followed by both partners so that they maintain synchrony. Though there are exceptions, until you can confidently lead or predictably follow, resist changing cadence during a song.

Where we step is determined by Line of Dance protocols and dancer discretion.

Line of Dance. In our culture, dance progresses in a counterclockwise direction around the dance floor, faster dancers on the outside lane, slower dancers on the inside lanes, and non-progressive dancers in the center of the floor. If you experience collision or grid lock on the dance floor, it is likely the result of disregarding these customs.

Where we step is also determined by the leader, with occasional discretionary options for the follower. While we associate steps with our feet, direction for lead and follow are determined by the **dance frame**, our upper body connection, primarily arms and hands. If these are not flexibly firm, we cannot communicate; thus, we can neither lead nor follow.

Frame. Keep **elbows** slightly in front of the shoulder line at all times. **Arms** should not be fully extended. **Hands** should not grip any part of your partner; connect *mechanically*, not *biologically* as in *pinch or hold*. **Torsos** should be parallel and shifted slightly left to preclude bumping toes.

Float rather than "fly." When arms are extended, elbows should remain in front of the shoulder line, and the hands in front of the elbow line. Arms should not flap like bird wings; rather, they should be flexibly firm like an airplane wings. When the hand moves, the torso should move, either forward, backward, sideways, or rotate proportionally. Except when in danger of hitting someone, such as your partner, free arms should be extended, with hands open and available.

Symmetry. Seek symmetry, that is, mirror your partner, and return to closed or open position following each digression. When facing each other in open position, torsos should be parallel, and the hand connections should be halfway between the torsos.

Summary.

- Step Normally
- Music and cadence determine when to step
- Line of Dance and lead determine where to step
- Dance frame enables communication
- Symmetry helps maintain orientation