

Tips for Better Dancing - Adapted from documents by Ed Foote

The purpose of this article is to enhance your dancing pleasure. Dancers who follow these rules find they dance more, stand less, and in general have a more enjoyable dancing experience.

1. TAKE HANDS WITH THOSE STANDING BESIDE YOU

A. Hands should be joined within 1/2 second after the completion of any call. Failure to join hands after a call will often result in sloppy lines or waves, which will cause the square to break down trying to do the next call.

B. Elbows must be bent when hands are joined. If arms are outstretched when hands are touching, the set is much too large to operate smoothly.

2. HOW TO AVOID BREAKING DOWN

A. Believe the caller. Often dancers will stop cold if a caller tells them to do something and they do not understand why. Forget worrying about “why” and just do as the caller says. Refusing to execute a given command will cause the square to break down.

B. If the caller gives a call you have never heard, do not give up and quit. In the vast majority of cases the caller will tell you how to do the call after he has said the name, especially if it is not one of the “*usual*” calls. Even if you have never heard a call, if it is not complicated, there is no reason for inability to do the call if the caller talks you through it.

C. If you want to help someone who is lost, use hand signals. A very effective method is to point to the spot they should be occupying. If you talk, you could cause yourself and others in the square to miss hearing the caller give the next call.

D. If you are positive you have done a call correctly, do not let someone who is unsure of the call make you change your position. This will keep the square going.

E. Experienced couples should be across from each other when squared up, never adjacent, if a set consists of two experienced couples and two inexperienced couples. This will give each inexperienced dancer a strong corner, and will provide each side of the square with strong dancers when doing calls.

F. Keep your head raised. This lets you see what is going on. Many people dance looking down at the floor, and thus are out of touch with the set as a whole.

G. Keep the set small. Touching hands immediately after each call is one way to accomplish this. Large sets break down much more often than small ones.

H. Always have your set lined up with the walls. Often a set will become slightly offset from being lined up with the walls; now a Cast Off or other turning motion may cause some people to become disoriented. If the caller has the set Promenade and has the heads or sides Wheel Around, it is quite likely the set will not be lined up with the walls. Solution: Take it upon yourself to make slight adjustments on the next two or three calls to get the set aligned with the walls. One person can cause the whole set to adjust, so you be this person.

3. IF YOU BECOME COMPLETELY LOST

A. Do not turn around. This will make it difficult for someone behind you to help you recover. It is much easier to guide someone into place by guiding them from the back.

B. Turn your head in all directions to see where you should go. If someone says to turn around or you see that you should turn around, then do it. Otherwise, retain your facing direction and let someone guide you into place.

C. Do not wander around. Stay put until someone either guides you into place or directs you to go to a certain position. Do not be surprised to get this help - expect that you will get it and be ready to respond to it quickly.

4. IF YOUR SQUARE BREAKS DOWN, GET TO FACING LINES

Do this by squaring your set and then have the head couples slide to the right to form normal facing lines of four (each boy with a girl on his right). Now watch the other squares. Often the caller will get the squares back to facing lines several times before finally getting to a Left Allemande. When he does get them to facing lines, your square can now pick up the next call and you are dancing again. You may not wind up with your original partner or corner, but you are dancing and that is the name of the game.

5. HOW TO PASS PROPER SHOULDERS

Whenever you pass through with someone, always pass right shoulders, never pass left shoulders.

6. HOW TO LEARN PROPERLY

A. Try to understand the definition of the call rather than just memorizing a position. If you understand the definition, you will be able to do the call from any position, but if you have only memorized one position, you will be lost if the call is used from any other position.

When a call is presented, it is often taught by telling the boys to do something and the girls to do something else. However, the definition of a call almost never involves a person's sex, but rather is written for the outsides to do something and the insides to do something else, or the left-hand person does one thing and the right-hand person does something else, etc. The definition is what you want to remember, not the particular teaching set-up that was used.

If you are not sure of the correct definition after a call is taught, ask the caller to explain it without using the terms "boys" or "girls."

B. Please be quiet while the caller is explaining something. You may not need the help but others may.

C. If a caller is walking the floor through a call, don't get ahead of the caller's prompting even if you know what is going on. It isn't smart; rather it is inconsiderate of other dancers that may need this help.