

Tips for New Dancers (9 Calls) by Ed Foote

The information given here, while sometimes mentioned in beginners class, is often forgotten by new dancers. Yet this information can be the difference between succeeding or breaking down on a call.

1. Allemande Thar: The center four dancers should hold the wrists of the person ahead - this will keep the set together. Do not just put your hand into the center of the set and hold it upright - new dancers sometimes do this. Also, the dancers on the inside should move very slowly so the outsides don't have to run to keep up.

2. Extend (from 1/4 tag): The handedness of the center wave determines the handedness of the resulting parallel waves. For example, if the starting center wave is right-handed, after the call "Extend," the ending position will be parallel right-hand waves; if the starting center wave is left-handed, the ending position will be parallel left-hand waves.

3. Grand Square: Use four counts for each four steps of the Grand Square. Don't rush the call. If you see dancers swinging their partner halfway through or at the end of the call, this means they have not danced the call correctly - they have rushed through with no thought for timing. Then they have to make up the lost timing by doing a swing. If Grand Square is done correctly, there is no time to swing in the middle or at the end.

4. Right and Left Grand: New dancers tend to hold on too long to each person when pulling by. This is annoying to other dancers and makes for jerky execution of the call. A quick snappy pull by is the correct method.

5. Square Thru: New dancers sometimes turn away from their group of four while doing a Square Thru, which causes an instant breakdown of the set. Solution: Tilt your head slightly toward the center of your group of four while doing the call. This will keep you moving in the correct direction.

6. Star Thru: Girls, do not raise your left hand up too high; bring it straight out from the side of your head. Also, offer some resistance with your arm - stiffen it a little. These things will enable you to do a much smoother and more precise Star Thru.

7. Swing Your Partner: There are two keys to doing this call smoothly. (1) Both dancers should lean back from the waist. This makes the pair a stable unit and keeps them in balance. (2) Look at your partner's eyes or forehead. This will prevent you from getting dizzy and will also aid in maintaining balance.

8. Turn Thru: After the turn half, make a good distinct pull by using a full step. There is a tendency to want to retain your hold with the person you have turned, as though this person were a security blanket; without a good firm pull by there is a good chance this square will break down on the next call, because it will be difficult for dancers to see their position.

9. Wheel Around: This will almost always be called during a Promenade, where the caller will say "heads (or sides) Wheel Around." New dancers often break down here, because they forget whether they are heads or sides, and by the time they remember, it is too late. Solution: Anytime the caller says "Promenade don't slow down," it is almost guaranteed that his next command will be for someone to wheel around. Therefore when you hear "Promenade don't slow down," start saying to yourself what you are ("I am a head," or, "I am a side"). Now you will be able to react quickly if you are the couple told to Wheel Around.

Remember: Wheel Around involves a couple, working as a unit, turning around 180° to the left to face the opposite direction. It is important to remember this, because Wheel Around can be called from positions other than a Promenade.