

## Harmonious Movement – General Principles

Both dancers in true partnership dancing have the responsibility of knowing their role for making the two operate as a single, harmonious unit in contrast to the idea that the Lead controls everything and the Follow doesn't have to know much. The latter paradigm might work when social dancing with an unskilled partner, but in round dancing both partners should strive for coordinated movement which both are responsible for creating. Such harmonious movement requires understanding the basic figures, timing, and movement of the particular rhythm being danced and involves the specific connections which create effective and gentle lead and follow.

When dancers implement the special, harmonious interaction of the two individuals there is the possibility of increased joy in the combined movement as well as the possibility for playful interaction between the pair. The overarching image is working toward a mutual goal with cooperation as the operative image. It is imperative that both partners take into account the partner's perspective and embrace his/her feedback.

In various guidelines, the Lead is considered the facilitator who *indicates* what he would like the Follow to do by signaling her, and he *supports* her choices by how he positions his body. The Follow *responds* which means that she must understand his signals and have the talent and knowledge needed to respond appropriately. If the signal is clear and on time, generally she responds positively. Often the Follow moves and then he follows her.

Their movement is *synchronized* (harmonious) *but not simultaneous*. There is a split second of difference in their timing. The Lead positions his body to limit choices for the Follow. Good connection and tone then create changes in her body which facilitate, and sometimes *cause*, her to do the desired movement. Such leading involves *whole bodies* which feels much more natural and desirable than a harsher style of leading using arms isolated from the rest of the body which has often been taught.

Some of the techniques described on this website are somewhat intricate, so dancers should be quite familiar with a routine first prior to adding the various nuances. Learning to dance is a “sculpting process” so that dancers begin with the basics (where the feet go and the timing) and add layers of additional technique if they choose to do so. Information included here represents *many years* of ballroom lessons. It is hoped that it can inform dance enthusiasts and teachers of helpful practices to shorten the time required to learn them. It takes much practice to incorporate new techniques and transfer the knowledge to various routines, so dancers should be patient with themselves and realize they can gradually replace beginning practices with more effective techniques as they concentrate on only a few changes at a time.

There are a number of principles promoting harmonious movement which apply to multiple rhythms:

- The Lead has the responsibility for facilitating the directional movement of his partner and to adjust his steps as needed. The Follow's responsibility is to step straight forward or straight back unless there is a clear indication for stepping in a different direction.
- In social dancing the Lead is the one who alters a figure to transition in and out of identical footwork (though in round dancing choreographers sometimes have the Follow make a transition, which is possible since the figures are cued).
- Dancers should make their footwork match as closely as possible, so when making a transition (such as in Cha Cha) there are choices for when the Lead takes weight.

- After a movement away from the partner, such as after a turn, dancers seek to face their partner to prepare for a subsequent figure.
- The feet should be together (such as “brushing,” or coming together without weight) after taking a side step and prior to a subsequent forward step to achieve the greatest comfort to move forward.
- While dance instruction often concentrates only on moving the *free foot*, some consider the foot with body weight the “dancing foot” because what it does is critical for effective dancing since the supporting (standing) side of the body begins movement.
- The Follow has the responsibility of keeping her hand against the Lead’s hand.
- The Lead must not hold his partner’s hand too tightly (a light contact, sufficient to hold a piece of paper between them, is enough).
- As dancers become comfortable dancing with someone very close to them in the Standard/Smooth dances, they find that more points of body contact increase their ability to generate harmonious movement. As a generalization, figure descriptions for dancers *with space between them* must be modified slightly when dancers achieve a *more connected* Closed Position (see **Harmonious Movement – Dance Positions** and **Harmonious Movement – Leading**).
- In order to be more accurate in moving between weight changes, it is helpful to count “ands” such as 1/&, 2/&, 3/& 4/& to be able to synchronize movement in the midst of a beat.
- In order for the two *bodies* to move their bodies “at the same time,” it is often necessary that there be *differentiated timing* which means that one person must delay taking weight until the other person is ready to move or has already moved. While there are some figures where this is very obvious, the phenomenon occurs very often!
- The Lead needs to be aware that he has a responsibility to accommodate appropriate ***action and timing***. If the Lead signals his intent before the Follow is ready (such as before she has full weight on the appropriate foot) or if the signal is too high in elevation in Latin/Rhythm dances, it can compromise “following.”
- Leading can be accomplished by moving the body and/or vacating space for the partner to fill. In Latin/Rhythm dances visual leads are also possible.
- Leads are possible when dancers face one another (e.g., in Butterfly position), and are generally limited when dancers face the same direction (such as Open Position).
- When a Lead uses short steps (rather than a more normal “walking” step, it means the body moves less so it is much more difficult for the Follow to read his movement.
- The Lead’s body action can either support or interfere with the Follow. For example, he must allow her time to complete her hip action (such as in Rock Back) and position himself so she can move forward to be on her foot to make a spin (such as in American Spin).
- The Lead signals a turn or change of direction, then supports what the Follow does since only *she* knows when she is in a position to move.

- Leading turns in Latin/Rhythm dances often combines both rotary *and* linear action. If the Lead considers leading to be only rotary or only linear, the lead can be misunderstood, putting the Follow in a position different from what is intended. To accomplish this combined directional change, as he rotates his body he extends his lead arm toward the direction he wishes that she move, meaning that his lower arm extends further away from his body.
- With good tone between partners in Latin/Rhythm dances, partners can achieve a “push/pull” sensation in their hands. In this action **both** push gently against each other or **both** pull slightly away from each other; their hands move **very little**. Definitely the Lead doesn’t actually push against the Follow or pull her. If their hands are positioned as described in the document **Harmonious Movement – Dance Positions**, their hand and wrist positions remain relatively stable.

Additionally, dancers must realize that learning to dance includes multiple **layers of understanding and practice**, so initial knowledge can be *continually refined* for increased harmony, efficiency, effectiveness, and satisfaction.