

Lesson 1: Want to Learn to Dance?

By Kaye West and Larry Caves

Most people these days recognize that maintaining some kind of exercise program is essential for good health. Partnership dancing has been cited as one of the best ways to obtain that exercise! Not only is it beneficial to one's body, it has additional [benefits](#) of stimulating the mind (including both left- and right-brained functions) and providing positive social interactions which are also invaluable for healthful living. Besides, it's fun!

Those who believe they "can't dance" simply have never been taught! Everyone who really wants to learn can do so!

When one has not had the benefit of prior dance experience, how does one go about getting it? One can attend a 45-minute session at a ballroom studio (approximately \$10), take private ballroom lessons (\$75-\$100-plus per hour), or attend round dance / ballroom group classes (less than \$10 per person for two hours). New classes typically begin each fall and spring. The latter provides a consistent program which sequentially builds skills while also being the most economical so is strongly recommended.

Slow Slow Quick Quick (SSQQ) Rhythm & First Dance Pattern

There are also things which folks can do to teach themselves! They must realize that beginning dancing is like walking to a particular rhythm, so they must be able to keep that rhythm and eventually change rhythm patterns as needed. It is recommended to begin with Social Foxtrot with a pattern of **two Slow steps followed by two Quick steps** which can be danced to most dance music (the other common pattern is Waltz). Since by definition a Slow takes two beats and a Quick takes one beat, dancers simply need to be able to count to six to become accustomed to the Social Foxtrot pattern!

There are a few "in-between" steps in learning this rhythm and the first pattern:

Step 1: Count repeatedly: 1-2-3-4-5-6-1-2-3-4-5-6, etc. The pace of counting can vary; the important thing is to have an equivalent amount of time between each count. It is even a good idea to practice counting with a slow pace and then a more rapid one.

Step 2: When comfortable with counting, begin walking while counting those repeating six counts. **Leads** (or leader, typically men) begin with their left foot; **Follows** (followers, typically women) begin with their right foot. When walking, actually take STEPS (change weight) when one counts the four bold numerals (one could alternately become comfortable marching in place while counting, and *then* take moving steps):

1 – 2 – **3** – 4 – **5** – **6** – **1** – 2 – **3** – 4 – **5** – **6** etc.

Note that in each six counts there are *four changes of weight*. The foot that takes weight on count 1 is the same foot that takes weight on count 5; the foot that takes weight on count 3 is

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the same foot used on count 6, so **Leads** can alternately chant Left , - , Right, - , Left, Right (and **Follows** can chant Right, - , Left, - , Right, Left). Note that the commas indicate the end of a beat, and the hyphen (-) indicates that the previous step requires two beats.

Walking with this pattern repeatedly thousands of times eventually transfers this rhythm to one's long-term (automatic) memory. Practice it when walking the dog, pushing a shopping cart, strolling from room to room, and walking virtually anywhere.

Dance Position and Dancing with a Partner

Step 3: The third essential ingredient is moving to this pattern when in dance position: Facing partner with **Lead's** right arm around **Follow** with his wrist at the joint where her arm attaches to her body and her left hand on his bicep; his left hand (palm up) holding her right hand (palm down) about at eye level.

Also, bodies are offset from each other so one's right foot can step between partner's feet so neither need worry about stepping on partner's toes! **Leads** have it easy here since they walk forward as practiced in the previous step. **Follows**, on the other hand, like Ginger Rogers dancing with Fred Astaire, walk backwards when in dance position, though they don't have to wear high heels!

Partner's toes are also avoided because the one moving backwards *vacates space* for the partner moving forward to fill. Keeping the arms in a stable position (referred to as ***maintaining a good dance frame***) creates an impulse for the body (and hence the leg) to move.

Two Dance Patterns

Step 4: When a couple can move comfortably together in this rhythm (Walking **Slow, Slow, Quick, Quick**), they are ready to do the same with real music on the dance floor. They can dance most of the night in this manner: they **Walk In** to the dance event and **Dance Out** following a night of dancing! This first pattern creates a path continually moving in the same direction. Customarily they move in a **counter-clockwise circle** around the floor (and observe others when Waltz music plays until they understand some basic patterns in that rhythm).

They can dance the same pattern repeatedly. When comfortable the **Lead** can change the pattern on the quick counts. On step five, step to the **Side** and on count six bring the other foot next to it and take weight (called **Close** or **Together**). He would step to his left; the Follower would step to her right. With a good dance frame as described above, when he moves to the side (since he does not change the posture of his arms) she will likewise move to the side). **Followers** traditionally have been ladies who are quite responsive to the movements the partner makes. Try it: **Walk, Walk, Side-Close**. Then he can choose the two patterns at random. Or, he could march in place as needed or take small steps to avoid bumping into another couple.

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The patterns are very similar to walking in that feet alternate (left, right, etc., or right, left, etc.) and remain alternating for each dancer. The two differences are that (1) there is a particular rhythm (two Slows followed by two Quicks) and (2) they move in close proximity to another person.

A dance couple could also experiment with exchanging roles to better understand what the partner is expected to do!!

Master the ideas in this lesson yourself and then teach someone else! Subsequent lessons introduce more patterns as well as other rhythms to bring more variety, hence more enjoyment, to one's dancing pleasure!

These lessons were created from content in the **Walk In, Dance Out** classes Larry and Kaye taught.

Send feedback, especially for further clarity, to kaye.west@csulb.edu . Kindy use the word **FEEDBACK** in the subject and be sure to indicate the location (e.g., Lesson 1) as well as what specific information needs further explanation.