

# Improve Dancing by Learning the “Box”

By Kaye West

One of the first figures dancers learn is the **Box**, which is an essential **component** by itself and which is the basis for simple modifications to create many additional figures. Thus, mastering the **Box** and realizing *how it can be **modified*** can reduce the seeming complexity of dancing!

In Round Dancing (which is the very best way to learn dancing since it is conducted in an organized, sequential fashion), the **Box** is a figure in the **Waltz, Two-Step, Foxtrot**, and even **Samba** Rhythms and is sometimes danced in **Rumba**! Additionally, with simple changes it is the basis for most of the Phase I figures in both **Waltz** and **Two-Step** which are the two Rhythms with Phase I figures standardized by Roundalab (the organization of Round Dance teachers) on behalf of the choreographed (or cued) ballroom dance movement.

Therefore, understanding the **Box** and a few modifications allows dancers to master those Phase I figures. Adding that knowledge to the introductory **free written lessons** for **Social Foxtrot, Single Swing, Waltz, Rumba**, and **Cha Cha** (available at <https://home.csulb.edu/~kwest/wido/dance.html>) prepares folks for exceptional success in beginning dance lessons (though no previous experience is necessary in Round Dance classes).

## Understanding the Box Figure or Component

A figure called a **Box** is one where the feet make the path of a square/rectangle by taking weight (stepping) at the *four corners* of a **Box** on the floor. Each **Box** takes *two measures of time* and there are *three changes of weight* in each measure, so *six changes of weight* for the full **Box**. And regardless of their differences, when a *forward* or *back* step is taken, it is made in relationship to the *direction one is facing*; when a *side* step is taken, it is always done in relationship to *one’s left or right side*. All those ideas are in line with peoples’ understanding of the concepts so should sound very logical.

### Two Differences in the Box Figure

One difference in various **Box** figures is how the **component “Box”** is danced: In some Rhythms it is danced *Forward, Side-Close; Back, Side-Close*. In other Rhythms it is danced *Side-Close, Forward; Side-Close, Back*. *Forward* and *Side* are self-explanatory. *Close* means place the foot next to the standing foot and take weight. Those directions in the “generic” pattern are stated for the **Lead**; the **Follow** does the natural opposite since she is facing her partner. But what the **Lead** does in the first measure, the **Follow** does in the next, and vice versa. Note that the **Side-Close component** is simply *first* in a measure in one version and *last* in the other.

A second difference is the timing pattern. While there are additional differences in how the *body moves* in the respective Rhythms (other “characteristics”), the first one to learn is the timing pattern. Other characteristics are learned later as dancers refine their dancing.

**Waltz** music has *three counts per measure* (thus two measures has six counts, and there is one change of weight or “step” on each on the six counts). In contrast, the **Two-Step, Rumba**, and **Foxtrot** music has *four counts per measure* but still just *three* changes of weight in each measure, so six steps in the full **Box** in those Rhythms also. Instead of one beat on each count, in each measure there is *one change of weight* which takes *two counts* (called a “Slow” or “S”) while the other two counts each have one change of weight (called a “Quick” or “Q”), so again there are *three changes of weight in each measure* and a total of six steps for the **Box**.

The different Rhythms can be compared readily with the following charts. Each column represents one count (listed consecutively to complete the full **Box**). “L” means Left Foot; “R” means Right Foot (notice that

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the feet alternate like regular walking so just the *direction* or *placement* is different). Both the **Lead’s** part and the **Follow’s** part are included so they can be compared easily. In the first two charts the count could be made with either *numerals* (use them first) or with *Slows* and *Quicks* (use after familiarity with the rhythm).

Two-Step Box and Rumba Box								
Count	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
	Q	Q	S		Q	Q	S	
<b>Lead</b>	Side (L)	Close (R)	Forward (L)		Side (R)	Close (L)	Back (R)	
<b>Follow</b>	Side (R)	Close (L)	Back (R)		Side (L)	Close (R)	Forward (L)	

Foxtrot Box								
Count	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
	S		Q	Q	S		Q	Q
<b>Lead</b>	Forward (L)		Side (R)	Close (L)	Back (R)		Side (L)	Close (R)
<b>Follow</b>	Back (R)		Side (L)	Close (R)	Forward (L)		Side (R)	Close (L)

Waltz Box						
Count	1	2	3	4	5	6
<b>Lead</b>	Forward (L)	Side (R)	Close (L)	Back (R)	Side (L)	Close (R)
<b>Follow</b>	Back (R)	Side (L)	Close (R)	Forward (L)	Side (R)	Close (L)

Notice all the similarities in the three charts! Especially notice that the first three *steps* (the first measure) for the **Lead** is identical to the **Follow’s** last three *steps* (the second measure) and vice versa.

## Using the Charts to Learn to Dance the Box

Select the role you will dance, either the **Lead** or the **Follow**, in the Rhythm of your choice and read the chart across horizontally for directions of how to move the feet in the shape of a **Box** in that Rhythm. Notice that in taking either a *Forward* or *Back* step the opposite leg wants to veer toward the standing leg to keep the body somewhat in balance, but it doesn’t take weight. That normal action is called a “Brush.” The Brush is especially noticeable on a Slow count so occurs on counts 4 and 8 in **Two-Step** and counts 2 and 6 in **Foxtrot** (and on the second half of counts 1 and 4 in **Waltz**).

Repeat the six changes of weight a sufficient number of times that your body knows how the feet move to create the **Box** path. The direction of the *path* dancers make as they take steps in all three charts is the same (“clockwise”).

When the path seems rather automatic, whether it takes twenty or a hundred repetitions, take the steps in the same way but do so *while counting the numbers*. You should step precisely *as you say the*

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*numeral*, and chant them in sequence repeatedly with the same amount of “space” between each one (“at the same tempo”). Take care to have the foot reach the floor for that step *as you say the associated numeral*.

Do that repeatedly for the Rhythm selected. When you feel ready, join with a partner (gender doesn’t matter) and dance your parts together. Either one partner can count aloud or both can do so simultaneously. Chanting the counts in this fashion accustoms dancers to step in time with musical *sounds*.

In order not to step on the partner’s toes while stepping forward, each dancer should have the *right foot pointed between the partner’s feet*. That is the normal “offset” position used in dancing. The space between the partner’s legs should be a clear path for your own right leg since both dancers move their leg at the same time; the *left leg* has a clear path on the “outside” of the partner’s leg.

Then work through the process in a different rhythm. Getting used to *timing changes*, moving in *close proximity with someone* else, and *walking backwards* are likely the three most challenging parts of beginning dancing. Using these three charts and the process described above for each one can help dancers conquer these challenges!

## Modifying the Box Component to Make New Figures

The **Box**, as the charts demonstrate, is modified by varying the *timing* in accordance with different Rhythm patterns. So working through the process for each above chart allows dancers to become skilled in dancing the **Box** in three Rhythms. Three variations!!!

Notice that in each of the above charts when stepping *forward*, the *left* foot moves; when stepping *back*, it is done with the *right* foot. Another simple change, then, is to begin the **Box** by the **Lead** stepping *back* in the first measure with the *left* foot and *forward* in the second measure with the *right* foot resulting in *Back, Side-Close; Forward, Side-Close; or Side-Close, Back; Side-Close, Forward;* (the **Follow** would do the natural opposite). This new figure is called a Reverse Box and is a standard figure in Phase I **Two-Step** and **Waltz**. Notice that in doing this figure, not only does the *direction* begin “in reverse,” but also the *path the Box makes* moves *counterclockwise!* Trying out the Reverse Box in those two Rhythm patterns yields the ability to master five variations of the **Box**. Used as a **component** there are many, many more figures which can be created. Dancers can even have fun experimenting to create some!

