

Harmonious Movement – Banjo / Outside Partner

Please see the document **Harmonious Movement – Closed Position** (at <https://home.csulb.edu/~kwest/wido/wi-do.html> > Improving Dance Knowledge) which is the basic dance position from which Banjo is a common variation.

Understanding Banjo (aka Outside Partner)

Round dancing calls this position “Banjo” (abbreviated BJO) as a visualization that something is going on at the right-front of their body, where a right-handed guitar player would strum his instrument. In ballroom the position is called “Outside Partner” or “O/P” which is also very descriptive of the position.

Instead of calling Banjo a separate position, some have suggested it is a “shaping” of Closed Position. Indeed, in ballroom, Outside Partner is considered still Closed Position.

Initially when dancers use this position, they are simply instructed to take steps in such a way that their feet land *outside their partner’s feet* (to the left of the partner’s right foot from the dancer’s perspective) instead of the right foot moving *between* partner’s feet as in normal Closed Position. This is entirely reasonable, because initial dance instruction must focus on “the beat and the feet.” One must know where the feet are to be, and dancing at the appropriate time (or moving the body in synchronization with the music) is what dancing is all about!

Since initial attention is on the feet, little attention is paid to what is going on with the rest of the body, but actually how the *body* moves is extremely critical for comfortable and effective dancing.

Often beginning dancers think of their body rather like a plank so that the upper body and lower body always face the same direction. Thus, from Closed Position when they “step outside their partner’s feet,” their arms move in such a way that the left elbow is *in front of their body* and their right elbow is *behind their body* with the true side of their body on the right side (that vertical plane that separates the front of the body from the back of the body) is adjacent to the comparable spot on their partner’s body since both partners turn about 1/8 of a rotation to step outside partner’s right foot.

While that is typical, and perhaps fine, especially when dancers have space between their bodies, it is helpful that dancers learn a very important concept as early as possible: in dancing *the body does NOT move as a solid plank*. Rather, the upper body and lower body VERY often *face different directions*! The concept describing this action is called “*contra body*” which simply means that the upper body and the lower body are “against” each other; simultaneously facing two different directions, approximately 1/8 of a rotation apart. There is a twisting, or *torsion*, at the waist. This is a “normal” body sensation, as when seated and turning to face the person seated in an adjacent chair.

Learning to dance is a “sculpting” or “refining” process. Attention to how the body moves is critical, especially to perform the more advanced figures. So, learning additional information about moving to Banjo involves how the body moves:

First of all, dancers **must maintain their dance frame** which means that there is little to no change from one’s left elbow through the back and to the right elbow, including *and most importantly* that the *joints (angles) at the shoulders and elbows remain largely UNCHANGED* in relationship to their **own body**. And both elbows remain *in front* of the upper body so that as the upper body rotates right-face this part of the body *continues to face their partner*. Secondly, their feet *point as much as comfortable toward their new direction of movement* which is 1/8 of a rotation left-face from their previous direction of movement. If the **Lead** was facing Line of Dance in Closed Position and moves forward in Banjo, the new direction is toward the Diagonal between the Center of the Hall and the Line of Dance.

To accomplish these seemingly contradictory actions, especially when dancers have body contact “right side” to “right side” (places aligned vertically with a man’s suspenders or a lady’s bra strap), beginning in Closed Position, dancers rotate their **upper body** (think: shoulders) slightly *right-face* in order to prepare “airspace” for their partner *and* maintain that dance frame while *simultaneously* rotating their **lower body** (think: hips) slightly *left-face* so that they can move in that new direction. There is a distinct *twisting* at the waist. These rotations must occur *prior* to taking a step. In other words, Banjo Position is achieved as dancers *move in between two changes of weight*.

When dancing the standard/smooth dances, the face points in the direction aligned with the forward or back movement (it faces in the same direction as the initial *lower body*). When dancing Latin/rhythm dances, the face moves with the *upper body* in order to achieve eye contact with the partner.

It is also interesting to note that in Banjo Position the shoulders are aligned with one’s direction of movement (*not the hips*), so that the left elbow seems to “point the way” when one moves forward and the right elbow “points the way” when one moves backwards.

Additionally, when in Closed Position and moving to Banjo while having contact with partner “right side” to “right side,” there continues to be contact “right side” to “right side.” However, the precise spot of contact and/or angle of the body *changes slightly*. Also in Banjo there is contact of the *outside* of both dancers’ right thighs.

Some instructors have introduced the phrase “contra Banjo” to remind dancers that their body must twist at the waist to achieve Banjo. When dancers understand how Banjo Position is attained, the additional modifier should be unnecessary.

It is also interesting to note that in the “early” position the *upper body* is at least an eighth of a rotation different from that which is desirable in achieving Banjo Position when twisting the body in two directions simultaneously, the arms are in uncomfortable positions (the elbow behind the body is sometimes likened to a chicken wing), and the bodies cannot connect at the appropriate “right side.” It should be readily apparent that such differences can create havoc when attempting to perform more advanced figures!

Following the Tracks in Banjo

In Closed Position there are four tracks for dancers’ feet, so there is never a worry that one would step on the partner’s toes. Tracks change in Banjo Position.

The first step taken when moving from Closed Position to Banjo requires that a dancer places the moving foot *on the same* track as their previous foot. So at that point there are **two tracks** the dancers are using in a position ballroom dancers call *CBMP or Contra Body Movement Position*.

In a subsequent step in the same direction dancers would place the foot on a track *parallel* with their previous one, again making **four tracks** at that point. With continued steps in the same direction dancers would alternate these two track patterns.

Also note that in these repeated steps in Banjo (typically in the standard/smooth rhythms) *the upper body remains the same and the hips change*. When stepping forward with the right leg the right hip moves forward; the left hip moves forward when stepping forward with the left leg. When moving backwards, the right hip is further in the direction of movement when the right leg moves; then the hips change when the left leg moves back so the degree of contra body changes with each step. In other words, the position of the hips changes with each step to accommodate the ease in moving the legs comfortably. Regardless, dancers maintain their “right side” to “right side” connection with their partner.