

Harmonious Movement – Semi-Closed / Promenade

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 Semi-Closed is derived..

Understanding Semi-Closed Position (aka Promenade)

Round dancing calls this position “Semi-Closed” (abbreviated SCP). In ballroom the position is called “Promenade” to resemble a couple walking close together side-by-side along a promenade (a public avenue or deck of a ship designed for leisurely walking) which also describes the position.

Initially when dancers use this position, they are simply instructed to change the direction of their bodies so that both can walk forward in the same direction. Generally beginning dancers have space between themselves and their partner and they each rotate their body about the same degree so that an appearance from above would resemble a “V” shape. So if changing from Closed Position facing the Wall, they would end so that the **Lead’s** body slants on the diagonal between Line of Dance and the Center and the **Follow’s** body slants on the diagonal between Line of Dance and the Wall. Initially this position is acceptable because early 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, their initial position is entirely reasonable.

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 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 the upper body 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 Semi-Closed involves *how the body moves*.

Describing a Refined Semi-Closed Position

To experience the feel of **contra body** in Semi-Closed Position (twisting at the waist resulting in the shoulders and hips on different vertical planes), stand facing Line of Dance with both arms stretched straight out to the sides (toward Center and Wall). Without moving the feet, rotate the upper body **right-face** until the left *hand* is in front of the body (toward Line of Dance) and the right *hand* is behind the body (toward Reverse Line of Dance). Note that the lower body remains essentially forward while the upper body (shoulders) are slanted 1/8 of a turn from the hips. That is the **contra body** feeling for the **Lead** in Semi-Closed Position. From the original position, rotate the upper body **left-face** until the right *hand* is in front of the body and the left *hand* is behind the body. Again, the lower body remains forward and the shoulders are slanted 1/8 of a rotation from the hips. That is the feel of **contra body** for the **Follow** in Semi-Closed Position.

In Semi-Closed Position, there **IS** a V shape of their bodies, but the **Lead's** upper body (think: shoulders) is *aligned approximately with the direction of travel*, and the **Follow's** upper body is at approximately a *45-degree angle* (an eighth of a rotation) *away from his body* with the **Lead's** right side and the **Follow's** left side the point where the angle is measured. She remains back in his right arm, with her body further away from the line of dance progression (typically Line of Dance) than his. Some say, therefore, that she is “in the back seat.”

Both dancers attempt to have their *lower bodies* positioned so that they can walk forward as normally as possible. Most people will have their feet on a diagonal since most comfortably they are able to accomplish a maximum of an eighth of a rotation of the lower body away from the upper body. Additionally, since in Closed Position **Follower's** left leg is to the left of **Lead's** right leg, when they turn to Semi-Closed her leg is *behind* his, so dancers have *three* tracks for their feet (his right leg and her left leg use the same track).

When dancers adjust their bodies from Closed Position to Semi-Closed, the contact point for their bodies also changes. In Closed Position their “right sides” (that vertical line aligned with a man's suspenders and a lady's bra strap) are adjacent. When moving to Semi-Closed, the **Follow's** body actually *slides* right-face so that her “*left side*” is adjacent to the **Lead's** “*right side*.”

Both dancers look toward the direction they are moving. This is a natural feel for the **Follow** since her spine is oriented more toward the line of travel than the reverse. When her head is in this position it is said she has an **open** head. Actually, she does not move her head very much at all; rather her head ends that way *because her upper body (her spine)* has rotated. She adds a maximum 1/8 of a rotation of the head to her right.

The change of her head is facilitated because of the “banana shape” posture of her body that the **Follow** assumes in Closed Position. She has the same banana shape in Semi-Closed Position, so her head feels as far back as it can be; her head balances on the top of her spinal cord.

Because of the shape of her spine (created from her lower back muscles pressing forward which moves her lower ribcage forward) her head slants back somewhat (because her upper body is slanted). As her head changes from the Closed position to the Open position, her nose has a path like an arch, so some have described the change of her head like “going over a rainbow.” When the **Follow's** head changes in a way that the head's alignment *in relationship to her spine* is greater than an eighth of a turn, especially when it moves prior to her *body moving*, it is obvious that she has “moved her own head,” rather than allowing it to change as a *result* of a different body position. Because the **Lead** changes their dance orientation, which in turn causes a change in her head (so she can be comfortable!), some say that the **Lead** changes her head.

In addition to those changes, there are some modest changes in the angles of their elbows and shoulders. In other words, their **dance frame** *does change*, but the changes are minimal and dancers attempt to keep their dance frame as steady or toned as they possibly can from one elbow through the back and to the other elbow *in relationship to their own body*. These changes are best described in moving from Closed Position to Semi-Closed Position.

Moving from Closed Position to Semi-Closed

In the refined version of making this transition, depending on their starting position, the **Lead** either *does not change the position of his upper body* **or** he *rotates right-face*. This can be a very big change for **Leads** if they have become very accustomed to the initial method of making this transition is rotating his body to the *left*, essentially turning *away from his partner*.

The fastest and most direct change is from Closed Position to Semi-Closed Position, such as when starting facing the Wall and ending facing Line of Dance. The **Lead** moves his left hand slightly away from him toward Line of Dance (LOD) and a bit forward toward the **Follower** to indicate that they are changing direction of movement and will be taking steps toward LOD. He looks to the LOD as he steps forward in that direction with his left foot. His **hips** rotate *left-face* so he can walk that way the most comfortably, but he **keeps his shoulders**

unchanged; he continues to face his partner; his *upper body does not rotate*, so his body is in a **contra body** position.

Simultaneously his right hand *remains in place in space* as his body moves toward LOD which results in opening a space on his right side for the **Follower** to fill and creates the *illusion* that his right forearm moves to the right. Actually, his *body moves away from his right hand*, creating the appearance that the hand makes a clockwise path in space. But it is the **forearm** that moves. His right shoulder joint angle does increase, but *not so far* that his right upper arm and shoulders become a straight line, and definitely not to the degree that his right elbow extends behind his back (which has been described as a “chicken wing” position).

As the **Lead's** left hand extends toward LOD, the **Follower's** right hand goes with it, making her right arm nearly straight (the angle at her right elbow increases greatly). That, in turn, changes the **angle of her body**, allowing her body connection at their mutual “right sides” to *slide right-face* so that her “left side” connects with the **Lead's** “right side.” Her body *fills the space* the **Lead** vacated. The angle at her left elbow *decreases* in size (becomes sharper) and the angle at her left shoulder greatly *increases* (becoming nearly straight) as she steps forward with her right foot, and she also looks forward in the direction of their movement. She experiences great **contra body** (twisting at the waist) with her right shoulder remaining toward her partner as much as possible as her hips rotate right-face to step forward as normally as possible. Her shoulders end 1/8 of a turn from the **Lead's** shoulders. The **Lead's** upper body does NOT rotate away from her. Their *upper bodies* remain as close to Closed Position as possible.

Those described dynamics are used when moving from various positions to Semi-Closed, but often there is a preparatory step or two to make in order to be in position to make the changes. For example, if dancers are in Closed Position facing LOD in order to make a transition to Semi-Closed, the first step is with the **Lead's** right and **Follower's** left feet to turn to the right. He rotates his body *right-face*; she also rotates *right-face* since they move together as one unit. At that point they are in position to complete the transition as described above.

While the above is a sufficient description, it is by no means exhaustive. For example, sometimes dancers move through two positions (such as Banjo to Closed Position to Semi), and there are occasions when after two steps the **Follower** is in the appropriate directional position for the next figure so the **Lead** rotates his body away from the **Follower** to achieve Semi-Closed. It also can occur that the **Lead** initiates a turn, the **Follower** makes her complete turn, and then he finishes his turn (he follows her). Dividing his turn in this way allows the **Follower** to move to the new position readily while making the turn all at once could prevent her from achieving the desired facing direction. Knowing this prepares dancers for such variations in moving to Semi-Closed Position.

Positions often are dependent upon the body shapes of dancers. In the past dancers were often taught that the **Follower** stands more to the **Lead's** center in Closed Position than described on this website (so buttons in the middle of his shirt could not be seen by others). From such a position they were instructed to simply rotate their bodies to end in Semi-Closed (Promenade) Position so the **Follower** would be outside his right hip. These days that technique often does not allow the **Follower** to be “in the back seat” as is advocated today (her left leg is not as far behind his right leg). Additionally, when using that technique, often the **Lead's** right elbow extends behind his body (it distorts his frame) which is considered less desirable.

Some Cautions or Changes from Previous Habits

Another word about the **Follower's** head: When dancers have not been exposed to the dance posture which creates the “banana shape,” and the **Follower** knows that she should turn her head, often her timing does not match the change in their bodies. Also, without that shape she may attempt to manufacture a tilt or slant of her head rather than allowing *that change of her head to be caused* from their harmonious *body positions*.

A common cue in beginning dancing is “Walk and Pick Up” to make a change from Semi-Closed to Closed Position facing Line of Dance. Initially dancers may be taught that the **Lead** should take a short step forward to allow the **Follow** to get further down LOD and then on her second step pivot a half turn to end in Closed Position. When dancing with body contact, both dancers *continue to take their normal-size steps*. Secondly, since the **Follow's** left leg is *behind* the **Lead's** right leg, it is physically impossible for her to pivot a half turn since his leg blocks her from doing so. Additionally, in this situation since the **Lead** must have his body rotated toward his partner (and the Wall) in Semi-Closed on the first step, the greatest turn that can be made on the second step ends dancers in Closed Position facing Diagonal Line and Wall. If choreography calls for them to be facing Line of Dance, the additional rotation can be made by rotating more at the beginning of the next measure.