

Dancing with a Partner

There is the idea among some in the dance world that dancing requires a dominating leader and a passive follower, but truthfully, dancing is a *partnership* activity with both contributing as co-equal team members to enhance the dancing pleasure of both. In general, the **Lead** provides the frame and stability and the **Follow** has the more difficult part and is able to enhance the moves with greater flamboyance.

In Cha Cha that is most obvious in regard to hip motion, which is more apparent on women's bodies because of a typical greater difference in her waist and hip measurements than men generally exhibit. Additionally, on the social dance floor, men select the figures to do. Experimentation with men and women in the **Follower** role have demonstrated that as a generalization (of course, with exceptions) women tend to seek harmony so are more skilled than men in reading signals provided by the **Lead**.

Both dancers listen to the music and the beats reach their ears at the same time, so both should be "following the *music* as their mutual conductor" because dancing involves visually depicting the character of the music. Often, however, they are busy with left-brain thinking: the **Lead** deciding what to do next or interpreting a cue and planning ahead how to arrange his body in anticipation of what the **Follow** should do while she is interpreting the movements of his body.

In the round dance world that means that he might pay more attention to the *cues* than the music, which generally requires right-brain thinking. Within the partnership *someone* should pay attention to the music so their movements synchronize with it. Often that should be the **Follow**. Dancing requires agility in both left- and right-brained thinking simultaneously, and brain research has demonstrated that women are more adept than men in using both sides of the brain at the same time.

Also in round dancing, *everyone* occasionally misses a cue that the partner interprets correctly, so when that happens dancers can assist their partner. There is no shame in recognizing that *everyone* makes mistakes. An appropriate response is *gratitude* for the partnership and the ability to continue dancing in spite of a mishap.

Following are general terms associated with dancing with a partner, dance positions, and directions in a dance hall. While the information relates to Cha Cha and Rumba, much of the information applies to all partnership dancing.

General Terms

Adjust. In dancing the **Follow's** responsibility is to step straight forward or straight back with consistently-sized steps unless there is an indication to do otherwise, such as by the **Lead** moving his arm to indicate a change of direction, or moving his body to indicate a side step. There are times when the **Lead** must modify his foot placement to accommodate his partner (since he should know that her footwork must be consistent) by *adjusting* his foot placement or timing to account for her needs and to make their body movement as *harmonious* as possible. **Leads** are responsible for *adjusting* his footwork and/or timing; **Follows** must monitor changes.

Dance Frame. Some say that it is the **Lead's** responsibility to provide a good dance frame for the **Follow** to dance in. Actually, the **Follow** also has responsibilities in maintaining a good dance frame. The "frame" is not just the arms, but one continuous arc from each dancer's left elbow through the back and to the other elbow. The frame is maintained by keeping that entire part of the upper body relatively stable so that the *joints at the shoulders* do not change very much. Rather, in changing positions, the *whole upper body rotates as one unit*. Dancers maintain their own arms in position (e.g., the **Follow** does not "hang on" to the **Lead** in Closed

Position), and they maintain slight pressure at contact points so they can move together without a hand sliding out of position or inordinate pressure.

The placement for the handhold (as another part of the dance frame) is designed to assist in leading. When hands are high (especially in standard/smooth dances) the hands help direct the *shoulders*. When hands are low, which is especially helpful in Latin/Rhythm dances, they more readily influence the partner's *hips*.

Leading. Leading is done in a variety of ways, though in general the **Lead** must anticipate what the **Follow** is to do and move his body to facilitate her action with his *harmonious* and *timely* movement. What appears to be most important is that the **Lead** must think of what he *intends* for the **Follow** to do! So, it is critical that he considers what she will do and position his body accordingly (sometimes with no readily discernible outward signs). The observable indications are physical (with body position and/or changing arm position) and sometimes augmented in Latin/Rhythm dances by the **Lead** looking in a direction he wishes the **Follow** to go.

Leading and Following are skills which are developed over time. The clearer the **Lead** provides indications of what he would like the **Follow** to do, the easier it is for the **Follow** to interpret those invitations, and the more harmoniously the couple can dance together. Larger steps are easier to read than shorter ones. Both dancers listen to the music and attempt to depict it, so knowledge of timing is also critical in leading, for signals that are too early or too late greatly interfere with the **Follower's** ability to read the signals.

While some teach that leading is done by moving the arms to "push or pull" the Lady, often such motion is less than desirable since it is often perceived as too harsh because it can cause her to lose balance, it can compromise her dance position (such as, make her elbow stick out behind her body), prevent her from moving forward, and/or it represents a misunderstanding of the concept of *push-pull*. Leading is much more effective when accomplished by the *body as a whole* and maintaining a good dance frame.

To move sideways, after the hip movement the **Lead** moves his *ribcage* to the side in the direction the **Follow** should move, and, correspondingly, she moves her *ribcage* so she can move in that direction.

Leading turns and spins must also be led when the **Follow** has the appropriate foot available to perform the turn. It is helpful that the **Lead** allow the **Follow** to turn herself, since he does not know when she is in balance to make the turn comfortably.

Leading Turns. Facing partner in Low Butterfly is an essential starting position to lead turns in figures such as the New Yorker, Spot Turn, and Underarm Turns. The **Lead** moves one arm and drops the other handhold after assuming weight on the last step of the previous measure. Precise leads are specific to the figure (see Supplemental Notes for a specific cue sheet), and the **Follow** responds correspondingly because of good tone in their arms.

Underarm Turns. In order to signal an underarm turn, the **Lead** alters his body position to create a pathway for the **Follow** (their bodies slant in the same direction) and simultaneously flattens the fingers on his left hand and moves it slightly down to engage a push connection, then out to his left, and then up in a clockwise arc, as if his hand is on the outside of a large ball. This causes the **Follow's** fingers to flatten and rotate (she must keep her hand next to his), and her hand moves in a counterclockwise arc as if on the *inside* of a large ball. Whether the turn is RF or LF, the hands end so they are both flat and vertical with fingers at about face level at the right side of her face. In both figures, the **Lead** begins with a Rock Recover while the **Follow** does a Switch Turn, Recover. The Recover ends facing partner (**Follow** turns a great deal, and **Lead's** turns are modest) so they can Side Chassé harmoniously. See Supplemental Notes -4 for specific details for the Underarm Turn (right) and Reverse Turn (underarm turn left).

Opposite Footwork. Typically dancers face one another in dancing, so to synchronize their movement, they use opposite footwork, with the **Lead** beginning with the left foot and the **Follow** beginning with the right. So as not to step on their partner's feet as they dance, their bodies are offset so their *right foot is between* their partner's feet. That occurs in *facing positions* even when there is distance between their bodies, such as in Latin/rhythm dances as well as when in Closed Position. Foot positions *do change*, however, in positions such as Banjo and Sidecar (see below).

Push-Pull Connection. While it is important for dancers to understand the push-pull connection in Latin/Rhythm dances, it is a response to how the *whole body moves*. It needs to be experienced, and it takes partners working together to develop it. The **Lead** does not actually push (shove) or pull (yank) the **Follow**.

For example, in Cha Cha to move forward with his left foot (so the **Follow** would move back with her right foot), the **Lead** first moves his hip on his opposite side *back* by using muscles in the gluteus maximus (muscles in the front of the body cannot move the hip forward; muscles in *back* contract so the left hip would move forward). The **Follow** senses this movement in the *joined hands* and moves her right hip back, and as he moves his body forward toward her to take a step, *she moves her own body back*. The lead is apparent in their hand-hold, registered as a "push" with *pressure* from *both dancers toward each other* (the back of the **Follower's** fingers and the palm of the **Lead's** hand might touch), so the *hand position in space* does not change independently but *moves with the body*. She Rocks Back, her right shoulder rolls back, and her weight settles into her right hip. At that point the **Lead** stops, the palm-side of their three fingers and the good tone in their arms prevent her from moving back further and there is *pressure* from the palm side of fingers of *both partners' hands*. That is the "pull" connection which signals the end of movement in that direction. The hands have *little to no change of movement in relationship to their bodies*.

Actually pushing (shoving) the partner can put her off balance. Stopping the hand too soon can prevent her from completing the total body action in her back step. It takes practice to acquire the feeling as well as the timing.

A push connection is also necessary in leading turns. As described in the various Supplemental Notes, the **Lead** first moves his hand in such a way that he engages a push connection so that the **Follow** will keep her hand connected to the **Lead's** hand.

Same Footwork. In order to create some variety in dance figures, it is necessary for both the **Lead** and the **Follow** to use the same foot at the same time. While that often occurs when they are in close proximity and facing the same direction, some interesting variations of figures can occur when they use the same feet simultaneously when they face one another (generally when there is some distance between their bodies). To arrive at that position, or to return to opposite footwork, one dancer must make a transition.

Transition. This term refers to one dancer taking one more or one fewer weight changes than the partner. In social dancing, since the **Lead** decides which figure to do next, it is *always* the **Lead** who makes the transition. For example, in Cha Cha when the normal figures contain five changes of weight, the **Lead** takes only four so has changed *to be on the Follow's footwork*. He cannot expect the partner to read his mind to change which foot to use! In round dancing, however, sometimes choreographers do expect the **Follow** to make the transition. When they do, it is imperative that it is *cued* how the transition is made. The word "transition" alone is insufficient information.

Dance Positions

Aida Position. A Left-Open Position in which dancers have stepped back (such as with **Lead's** right and **Follow's** left feet, so those sides leading) which places them each diagonally back approximately 1/8 of a turn (so ¼ of a turn between them). The Aida Position can also occur in Open Position (with the **Follow** on the **Lead's** right side).

Banjo. The Closed Position is modified so that when moving forward dancers can step outside partner's right foot. It is called "outside partner" in ballroom. The body is in contra body; the dance frame changes very little so that the upper body continues to face partner.

Butterfly. Standing facing partner, offset so that the right foot points between partner's feet, the **Lead** holds hands outstretched between them with palms diagonally up at about bust height or if partner is very short, at the level of her eyes. The **Follow** places hands, palms down, in the **Lead's** hands. Both maintain their dance frame stable, even when changing to step "outside partner" (**Banjo position**) or "partner outside" (**Sidecar**). In those two positions, the upper body and the lower body are not on the same vertical plane (in other words, they are in "contra body") so that the upper body *continues to face partner*.

Closed Position (aka Dance Position). The **Lead** places his right cuff (wrist area where a long-sleeved shirt cuff would be) snugly beneath the **Follow's** left shoulder joint (armpit) and the **Follow** places her left hand on the **Lead's** upper arm with her thumb on the front of his arm and the middle finger behind his arm (to readily respond to body rotation). His left hand and her right hand are joined as normally done in the standard/smooth dances, but their elbows are pulled closer to their bodies so the forearms are approximately vertical.

Fan Position. This common position was named from visioning how the dancers' bodies move when changing the **Follow** from facing him on his right side (such as after a Natural Opening Out) to facing him at an angle on his left side (without an underarm turn). If he is the fulcrum for the fan, the **Follow's** path represents the opening of the Fan. Thus, Fan Position is how they end: they are apart from each other and they have his left and her right hands joined; the **Lead's** left foot points diagonally to his left (and his right foot points straight ahead) so that his body is at a slight angle toward his partner. The **Follow's** right foot points toward the **Lead** and her left foot points diagonally to her left, so that her body is also at an angle. Their *bodies* are at right angles to each other; if he faces Diagonal Line and Wall, she faces Diagonal Reverse Wall

Handshake. When in Handshake Position (right-hand to right-hand), the **Lead** moves his body slightly to the left so that their arms are on one vertical plane from his right shoulder through their arms and hands and to her right shoulder. When hands are joined at an angle *across* their bodies, the ability to lead straight forward is compromised as it influences her *shoulder*; *when in Latins the Lead intends to influence her hips*. Hands for both dancers are similar to that described for the **Lead** below in the Low Butterfly or Two-Handhold Position.

Left Open Position. Dancers face the same direction with **Follow** on the **Lead's** left side and his left/her right hands joined.

Low Butterfly (aka Two Handhold). In Cha Cha, "Butterfly" is nearly always "Two-Hand Hold" position or "Low Butterfly." Low Butterfly, then, in contrast to normal Butterfly where hands are joined above

bust height, allows dancers to retain a good dance frame with hands at waist or hip height of the **Follow** to obtain a strong feel for a change of direction.

When in the Low Butterfly Position, their arms (from the shoulder of the **Lead** through their arms and hands and to the shoulder of the **Follow**) should be on the same vertical plane, and there should be good tone from shoulder to shoulder (meaning their arms and hands remain relatively stable) so that as the **Lead** moves his body, the **Follow** readily senses the movement and moves her body to correspond with his.

Handhold. The **Lead's** hands are placed approximately at the hip level of the **Follow** with his palms slanted away from his body, ideally his index finger points straight ahead and his thumb is beside it and the other three other fingers are bent. The **Follow's** hands are palm down with her three comparable fingers bent down around his three fingers with a *straight line* from her finger joint next to the knuckles through the wrist and to her elbow (in other words, her knuckles are not prominent).

There is a very small space between the back of her fingers and the fleshy part (pad) of his thumb. The hands are placed this way so (1) there is NO tight grip of the **Follow's** hand and (2) the **Lead** can easily straighten his fingers, making his hand flat, lowering it slightly to engage a push connection, and rotating his hand slightly so the **Follow** can respond by straightening her fingers and rotating her hand so that he can move his hand to lead a turn beginning with their hands palm to palm, and (3) when in normal Butterfly Position the dance frame can easily be distorted, such as in the *contra body* position in Shoulder to Shoulder where one elbow is more difficult to remain in front of one's waist, so dancers can use Low Butterfly to keep the elbows in position.

Sidecar. Dancers modify their Position so the dancer moving forward can step Forward with the left foot outside partner's left foot while continuing to have the upper body toward partner. This position can be assumed from Closed Position (aka Dance Position), Butterfly, Semi-Closed (aka Promenade), and with a series of steps (momentarily moving through Closed or Butterfly Position) from Banjo Position. If dancers were in Low Butterfly, the resulting position would be **Low Butterfly-Sidecar**.

Very Low Butterfly. Dancers have their arms very low between their bodies, generally changing to this position from **Low Butterfly**. It is a means to keep *bodies* relatively in the same position in space and also brings the upper bodies closer together in a very playful manner.

Directions in the Hall

Generally partnership dancing is done in a group setting, so it is important to understand directions in the Hall. In round dancing and social dancing, Line of Dance is a somewhat circular pattern moving in a counter-clockwise direction with curves at corners. Competitive ballroom uses the same convention for Line of Dance, but the corners have 90-degree angles, so some ballroom patterns designed to negotiate corners (such as a Hover Cross) are modified in round dancing.

Further, in social dancing, since each couple dances unique choreography, generally when they are dancing a "spot dance" (one like Cha Cha or Rumba which do not move very much), they dance either in the middle of the floor or at corners. When they dance a progressive rhythm (such as Foxtrot or Waltz), they dance in Line of Dance.

Ballroom dance and social dance generally do not move in the opposite direction (clockwise, or toward Reverse Line of Dance), in order to avoid colliding with dancers moving toward Line of Dance. In round dancing, since everyone is doing the same routine to cues, there are times when the dance does move to Reverse Line of Dance.

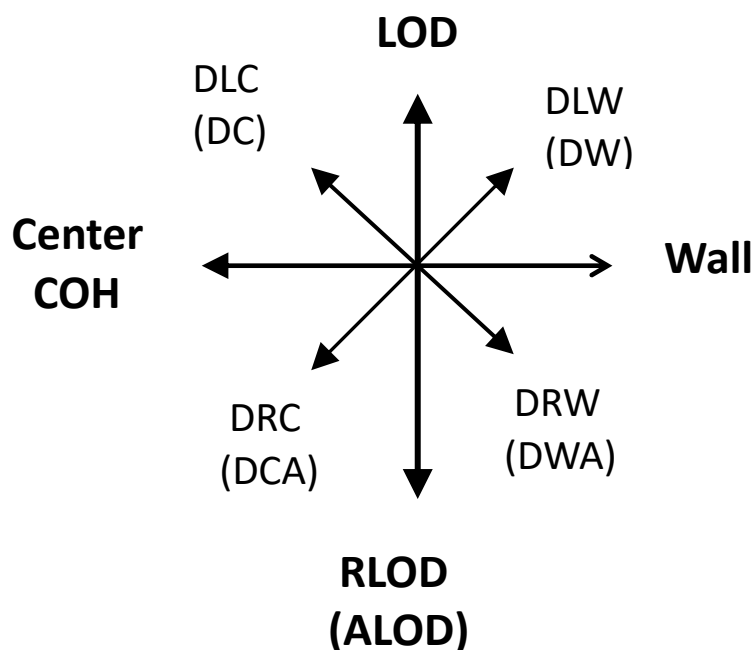
Directions that dancers may move or face are referenced to Line of Dance (**LOD**). If dancers think of that direction as “north” or in front of them when moving forward, the opposite direction is Reverse Line of Dance (**RLOD**) (“Against Line of Dance” or **ALOD** in ballroom).

Regardless of where they are in the hall, to one’s left (when facing Line of Dance) is known as the **Center or Center of Hall (COH)**; to one’s right is the **Wall**.

There are also names for the diagonals between the four major directions (often described by their abbreviation):

- Between Line of Dance and the Wall is Diagonal Line and Wall (**DLW**) or Diagonal Wall (**DW**) in ballroom.
- Between line of dance and the Center is Diagonal Line and Center (**DLC**) or Diagonal Center (**DC**) in ballroom.
- Between Reverse Line of Dance and the Wall is Diagonal Reverse Wall (**DRW**) or Diagonal Wall Against (**DWA**).
- Between Reverse Line of Dance and the Center is Diagonal Reverse Center (**DRC**) or Diagonal Center Against (**DCA**).

In ballroom, they also describe positions between those eight directions as “shallow” or “deep” such as when the feet face Diagonal Center and the body is “deeper” meaning that it turns more.



Further Information (about timing, walking, Cuban Motion, Harmonious Movement) is available on the Walk In, Dance Out main page under “Improving Dance Knowledge” and on the Cha Cha page regarding the Character of Cha Cha and how to implement it as well as Supplementary Notes for three versions of “Another Saturday Night.” Roundalab.org (under “Cue Sheets” has documents for Abbreviations and Cue Sheet Writing Guidelines (which also reveals how to read them!).