

Lesson 2: So You Want to Learn to Dance

By Kaye West and Larry Caves

Social Foxtrot, often the first dance rhythm taught, has steps on counts 1, 3, 5, 6 while counting 1-6 repeatedly for the Slow, Slow, Quick, Quick rhythm.

Practicing Timing Pattern and Substituting Descriptive Words

You can get valuable rhythm practice by visualizing walking and taking four weight changes while counting. Or you can clap your hands, tap your finger, or even practice while sitting. Lift your foot, or keep one part on the floor (e.g., the heel) and lift the other part, then tap it to represent taking a step. Then alternate feet at the next appropriate count.

Note that the foot (or hand, etc.) must elevate during the interval *prior* to tapping it and the foot **taps simultaneously with saying numeral 1, 3, 5, 6**. In other words, the tapping (or taking a step) is momentary and *movement* occurs in the intervals *between steps*. This is important to realize because “the beat and the feet” are typically used to describe how to dance. However, the *movement* (dancing) is actually *between those steps!!!* But first things first: learn where the feet are and when they arrive!

Besides numerals, other words might help make this rhythm pattern habitual, such as:

| Count | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
|---------------|---------|--------|---------|--------|-------|-------|
| Rhythm | SLOW | | SLOW | | QUICK | QUICK |
| | SLOW | (Then) | SLOW | (Then) | QUICK | QUICK |
| Lead's feet | LEFT | | RIGHT | | LEFT | RIGHT |
| Follow's feet | RIGHT | | LEFT | | RIGHT | LEFT |
| Movement | WALK | | WALK | | RUN | RUN |
| Direction | FORWARD | | FORWARD | | SIDE | CLOSE |

In the two patterns introduced in lesson 1 – which are described in the last two rows of the above chart -- the **Leads** move mostly forward and the **Follows** move mostly backwards in dance position which is also called “**Closed**” **position** (CP). When repeated the couple moves around the floor in a counterclockwise (CCW) direction called “**Line of Dance**” (LOD); their bodies are offset so that their *right* foot steps *between their partner's feet* (feet are on *four tracks* when walking forward or backwards – two tracks for each person) and the dancer moving backwards **clears space** for the one moving forward who **fills space**.

Three New Patterns

Here is a **new pattern** (using the SSQQ rhythm twice, stepping on counts 1, 3, 5, 6): Instead of beginning facing LOD, the **Lead** faces 90-degrees to his right (to face the “**Wall**”); the **Follow** faces the opposite direction (the “**Center**”). For convenience the abbreviations L (**left**) and R (**right**) are used. Written this way, a **comma** (,) identifies the end of a count and a **hyphen** (-) shows that the previous movement requires two counts:

- Lead:** Walk forward L, -, Walk forward R*, -, Side L, Close R,
Walk back L, -, Walk back R, -, Side L, Close R,
- Follow:** Walk back R, -, Walk back L, -, Side R, Close L,
Walk forward R, -, Walk forward L*, -, Side R, Close L,

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Recapping Five Patterns

Now you have five patterns. **Practice each pattern repeatedly** (that is, do one pattern again and again) **until it becomes familiar**. Then practice doing one pattern and follow it with a different pattern (you might need to change position or facing direction to begin the new pattern).

On the following chart the five patterns are abbreviated with directional words (which one could say internally while doing them until the pattern can be done by habit). Notice:

- The chart shows what movements are done during the six counts,
- Leads begin with the left foot; Follows begin with the right foot,
- Two of the patterns require two sequences of six counts,
- The Slow counts are always either forward or back and the Quick counts usually use Side-Close,
- A pattern has a starting direction (facing Line of Dance or the Wall),
- There are two different starting positions (Closed position or Semi-Closed position).
- Within a pattern it is possible to modify the facing direction (to be on the diagonal or square to the wall) or to change dance position (from Semi-Closed to Closed or from Closed to Semi).

| Starting Position | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
|-------------------|----------------|---|----------------|---|---------------|-----------|
| CP-LOD | Walk (forward) | | Walk (forward) | | Run (fwd)) | Run (fwd) |
| CP-LOD | Walk (forward) | | Walk (forward) | | Side | Close |
| CP-Wall | Forward | | Forward | | Side | Close |
| | Back | | Back | | Side | Close |
| CP-Wall | (Diag) Forward | | Forward | | (Square) Side | Close |
| | (Diag) Back | | Back | | (Square) Side | Close |
| Semi-LOD | Forward | | Face * (CP) | | Side | Close |

*Forward then turn to face partner

On the dance floor the Lead can randomly select which pattern to do and move his body to encourage his partner to move in a complementary fashion (he moves so that the Follow can move readily). The Follow can practice monitoring his body movements so that they move together as one unit. A key to moving as a unit is maintaining a good **dance frame**, meaning that the arm positions change as little as possible.

Move to the music and enjoy the learning and the companionship. You are *dancing* which exercises your mind and your body. The more you do it, the more fun you'll have, and the better it will be for you!

When you have mastered even part of this lesson, teach what you know to someone else!

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 . Kindly use the word **FEEDBACK** in the subject and be sure to indicate the location (e.g., Lesson 2) as well as what specific information needs further explanation.