

note: This preliminary version [part of my submission for UW Mini Courses] that can be revised (but I won't do this now) by adding things, subtracting and revising, along with reorganization. But it (and other handouts) will show you the type of handouts I would give to students this summer.

[2012: Something like this “collection of ideas” will be useful. But now in 2012 you may know a web-page (or set of pages) that will be better, especially for parts of this. We can assemble a set of useful resources for students, then can refer to them “for more information” during lessons.] [If you have suggestions for revising what is below, please let me know, since these are a “preliminary version” written in 1994, and I haven’t revised them.] [and I’ve made only a few 2012-comments]

leaders: Try to develop skill early — for the benefit of yourself (so you can learn the principles and patterns) and for your partners (so they will have something worthwhile to "respond to" and can learn to follow skillfully). { Although men and women can play the temporary role of either leader or follower while dancing, for linguistic simplicity I will sometimes say “he” or “she” when referring to leaders or followers, respectively. }

timing: Let your partner know what you want to happen next, *soon enough that she can do it* — i.e., soon enough that she is not already physically committed (due to her momentum and direction-of-stepping) to doing what she would need to do if there was a continuation of the previous pattern.

clarity: Make "easily recognizable" differences between the leads for one pattern and another. The "strength" of a lead — whether it physically moves a partner in a certain direction, or merely "suggests" what to do so she can respond (either consciously or in muscle memory) and do it independently — will depend on the pattern, and on the skill and style of yourself and your partner.

frame: Why? A good frame defines and maintains a relationship between dancers, so the two of you can "move as a unit" for better technique and for instant communication of easy-to-feel cues for leading-and-following. Your motivation for frame improvement can be to improve how your dancing feels (for you and your partner) or how it looks (for those who may be watching). // How? Be solid but relaxed. Frame varies for different dances and patterns, but often there is "a pound of pressure" for the free hand(s), and consistent firm contact (yet relaxed) between hands and shoulders.

relaxation: With relaxation, only the muscles that need to be used are used — no more, no less. Because muscles are not constantly fighting each other (in an internal tug of war) there is more speed, strength, grace and endurance. Also, there is a better message of "body language and mental attitude" communicated to your partner, thus allowing your dancing to be more mutually enjoyable.

feedback: *communicate with your partner* about how the dancing feels and how to improve it (especially the timing, clarity and strength of leads; and also frame, style, rhythm, feet-technique,...). [2012: Asking for feedback can be more appropriate in practice than for social dancing; it depends...]

understanding, empathy and thoughtfulness: Get feedback by talking with your partner during practice and (sometimes, but often not) in a social situation. Leaders: for each pattern you lead, try to imagine what the follower will be doing, and how you can make this easier. Also, sometimes exchange the leader-follower roles, to develop mutual understanding and empathy.

Usually, dance-patterns are designed to take advantage of the principles of anatomy and physics. For example, how well "the next pattern" (including the transition to it) works will depend on: your current partner-relationship (are you moving together as a unit, or differently) and momentum (speed

and direction of motion and rotation); what foot each of you will be stepping out on and whether this step is in the forward, backward, sideways or diagonal direction; how agile you are individually and as a team; and the available time (this depends on music tempo) and space (the dance-floor situation).

There are also "shared conventions" — a culturally defined vocabulary and grammatical structure of dancing. These include frame and leading-cues, styling, and patterns. If you and a new partner both share a common knowledge base (or at least part of it) you can dance well even if it's the first time you have danced together. { But, just as there are many languages, and many dialects of the same language, there are many subcultures of dancing, plus personal variations. Therefore, some mutual adjustments will always be needed. As in other areas of life, give others freedom to be themselves, and don't expect (or demand) that dancing with one partner should be the same as dancing with another. }

repertoire

A leader's repertoire of patterns should be large enough to allow a "50-50 mix" of expectations and surprise. { This is adapted from musical composition and improvisation (which is "composition in real time"); these art forms are influenced by a principle that listeners* should have their expectations of "what is going to happen next" met sometimes (20%, 50%, 80% ?) but not all the time. If there is too much change, too quickly, with not enough repetition, it can produce a feeling of chaos and the listener will give up on trying to find any kind of pattern. But, at the other extreme, not enough change will cause boredom. } * listeners (for music) or followers (for dancing) This is discussed, in a little more detail, in a page about musical improvisation & theory, <http://www.asa3.org/education/teach/music.htm#meyer>

A follower's repertoire should be large enough to know "the main moves" so she can more easily follow the leads. [2012: For followers, thinking in terms of “experience” (with a wide variety of patterns) may be more appropriate than knowing a conscious repertoire.]

planning sequences: By mixing some choreography with real-time improvisation, try to find combinations of patterns that blend together smoothly *for a particular partner* (her skill level, whether she likes to spin a lot or not,...) *and dance-floor situation* (the space that is momentarily available,...) so your partner doesn't have to move in an unnatural way (with awkward changes of momentum,...) to go from one pattern to the next, so she can move in a graceful natural way, feeling and looking good.

learning new patterns: You can take lessons, ask other dancers to teach you what they know, or (especially during practice) try to invent new patterns: try to combine two moves; or use analogy (adapt moves from other dance forms); or simply try to reconstruct what you see other dancers do, in person or on videotape. {approaches/attitudes: brainstorm and edit, trial-and-error, successive approximation} [2012: Now the internet - youtube, etc - might be another source of new ideas.]

Whether you are working with already-known patterns or learning new ones, there is *creativity within the constraints of structure*. Structure can be provided by mutually understood conventions between partners, musical tempo, anatomy and physics (as discussed earlier), or the number of steps in a pattern (4 or 6). // Analogies: musical improvisation (jazz, 12 bar blues,...) or composition (classical music, rock music,...), dance improvisation or choreography, and conversation (with words, sentence structure, and content).

a principle: Anything is OK if it can be led and followed. { and maybe also "if it goes with the music, and it feels and looks good, and ..." }

floor use: Try to learn patterns (including transitions) in a way that will be useful for traveling in the line-of-dance, LOD. You can have "patterns for situations" — for moving smoothly in the LOD, or staying in place when the traffic isn't moving, for quick adaptive response when another couple does something unexpected, for turning corners or for moving around other dancers, and so on. Leaders should try to develop "spatial knowledge" — where each particular pattern will take you-and-her: near or far away? straight forward, to the left or right, diagonal, or backwards? And although followers should trust their partners, don't be foolish — if you are aware that someone (or something) will be in the way, do what is needed to avoid a collision.

TIMING OF PATTERNS — For example, under what circumstances is it OK to lead an outside turn or inside turn? and would one or the other work better if it is started on the first or the fourth step of a 6-step waltz or rumba pattern? And should a move be led relatively early (well before the 1-count, if the move will begin on the 1-count) or relatively late (just slightly before the 1-count)?

STRENGTH OF LEADING — And should the lead for a particular pattern be "strong" (so the partner is physically moved in the proper direction) or merely "suggestive" (so she can decide what to do, consciously and/or in muscle memory, and then do it independently)? { Of course, leading style will vary from one partner to another, depending on her sensitivity and skill in responding to the leader's cues. }

For certain patterns it would be useful to introduce the new pattern near the end of a period and give students some time to practice it in class (enough to get the basic idea), then tell them to practice it on their own until it is "automatic" by the next class-time. Then they can practice it with each other at the start of the next period, and instead of trying to simply "learn the step" (which often requires just repetition) they can focus on "how to make it work smoothly with a partner."

using the handouts

During class, maybe use overhead projector to show what is being learned: refer to page-number, point out what is on the sheet and how it relates to the "real time, live action" demonstrations (by the teacher) and practicing (by students). The diagrams-and-directions on my handouts are not intended to *teach* a dance-pattern; instead they can serve as a "reminder" to students, so they (especially leads) can do out-of-class practicing (solo, or with a partner, or mentally) to consolidate what they have learned.

For some patterns it would be useful to introduce the new pattern near the end of a period and give students a little time to practice it in class (enough to get the basic idea), then tell them to practice it on their own until it is "automatic" by the next class-time. Then they can practice it with each other at the start of the next period, and instead of trying to simply "learn the step" (which often requires just repetition) they can focus on "how to make it work smoothly with a partner."

The details of action and timing — what to do, and when — are important, but it is often difficult to remember these details, so my handouts (with diagrams and descriptions of dance-patterns) are intended to serve as "reminders."

pacing and sequencing

I have some ideas about this; but with the exception of the following paragraph, it would be easier to discuss these sequencing-ideas in person.

Sometimes it's useful to introduce the new pattern near the end of a period, as explained above { Especially in Ballroom II [at UW-Madison] I was often frustrated because most of the practice time for a pattern came

immediately after we first learned the new pattern, at a time when I (who am slow at learning new choreographed patterns) was still trying to learn the step, so I didn't get as much practice at doing the patterns "with quality" with a partner.
}

transfer-of-learning from one dance form to another

Many dance-moves can be organized into a limited number of basic patterns that can be learned by students. There are two basic types of patterns: those with 6 steps* (waltz, boxstep-foxtrot or rhumba, mambo and cha cha, samba and polka) and 4 steps (jitterbug and magic rhythm foxtrot; and maybe tango, although it's unique), and many 6-step patterns can be adapted, with suitable modifications, from one 6-step dance to another, and sometimes even to 4-step dances. // Some dances, such as tango, use "non weight-shifting" actions (a hold, draw, shuffle, scuff, hop, skip,...) in addition to steps.

My "rhythm pattern" diagrams (link is in home-page for dancing) show the rhythm/step patterns for common ballroom dances, and also (if for example, triple-steps are treated as a single step-unit, so mambo and cha cha are analogous, in the same way that "slow" and "triple step" make jitterbug swing and triple-step swing different yet similar/analogous) the categories of 6-step and 4-step dances.

In my diagrams, I've tried to keep the same "category of pattern" (sweetheart, cuddle, to-the-side,...) in similar places for different dances. For example, the sweetheart moves are always above-and-left from the basic pattern.

This organization need not lead to "hybridization" and mashing of dance styles. In fact, analogous movements can be used as a focal point for discussions and demonstrations that emphasize how one dance differs from another. For example, in juggling classes I show how the same move can be done with very different stylings (and, of course, different "feels and looks"). I've also heard this done with music; one "teaching record" plays the same melody in many different styles. Also, some dance-patterns just fit better with one dancing style than with another; for example, some swing patterns could be worked into a foxtrot (as in the country-western two-step, which incorporates a lot of swing-tricks done "on the move") or vice versa, while others would feel and look out of place.

my homepage for ballroom dancing: <https://mywebspace.wisc.edu/crusbult/web/ballroom/>

APPENDIX (with miscellaneous topics, and some duplication of earlier ideas)

FOUR-COUNT: A slow tempo jitterbug can be done using triple-steps (to replace the Slows) or by converting the 6-count pattern (S-S-QQ) into a 4-count pattern (QQQQ), which is easy to do with the slower music. This 4-count dance has a nice smooth feel, and it fits well with the 4-count music. Similarly, the 4-step, 6-count "magic rhythm foxtrot" can be danced to a 4-count (QQQQ) if the tempo is too slow (or too fast) for comfortable 6-count dancing, or just for a creative change of pace.

musical tempos and styles

To help students choose appropriate practice music, an accompanying page contains an estimate of

"comfortable tempo ranges" for various dances, and explains how to measure the tempo of a song.

[2012: But these tempos are my estimates, based on “what I’ve read” and personal taste, and if there is a consensus that any of these should be changed, I’ll probably change it.]

There could also be a demonstration/discussion of the relationship between musical styles and dancing styles. For example, what makes one type of 4-count music more suitable (according to the "standards of evaluation" that are accepted and used by a certain group of people) for a rumba (rather than for a foxtrot or cha cha or jitterbug) and when could a song be reasonably used for several different dances, as when UWMBDA used "Stray Cat Strut" for swing and tango during a homecoming parade. { Differences could be in TEMPO, MOOD (laid back or lively, latin or not,...), RHYTHM and whether ACCENTS (bass, drums, melody,...) are mainly on 1, or 1-and-3, or 2-and-4, or 4-and-1 cha cha, or... }

reviews

At the beginning of non-beginner classes, it can be useful to do a brief review of basic dancing fundamentals plus a variety of "basic patterns" that are fairly easy to learn because they're simple, or because they're similar to patterns from other dances and can be easily transferred.

memory helpers

These are especially useful for leaders, to help them remember (after class) how to do patterns that were taught in class, thus allowing the teaching of more patterns; memory helpers can provide information about the details of actions-and-timing (what to do, and when) plus reminders about the important technical points (as in the section below) that can make a pattern work smoothly, instead of awkwardly or not at all.

important details

For example, should a pattern begin on (or occur in) the first or second half of a box-step pattern, such as on the 123 or the 456 of the repeating "123456" rhythm of a waltz. There can be a big difference between these, because there will be different directions of momentum, and different feet (L vs R) are being used, and so on, and the principles of physics and anatomy will lead to the pattern working better in one of the box-half than in the other. To clarify whether an action should be done on 1 or 4, and remind students about the importance of 1 vs 4, a teacher can use a number-based system of "counting aloud during teaching" by saying "123456" instead of the ambiguous "quick quick slow, quick quick slow" where the two halves of the box-step sound the same. Also, the two basic variations of 6-step/8-count pattern (123-,456- and 1-23,4-56) can, with some patterns, be different, so in one variation a move should begin on "1" but in the other it should begin on "4".[or on 3 or 6 which can differ in “slow quick quick” versus “quick quick slow” -- finishing the sentence in 2012]

why I don't like long choreographed step-sequences

this is un-natural for ballroom, since leaders don't get to lead, and followers don't get to follow [2012: i.e. it's unnatural for social ballroom, instead is for competitions, but... it can be useful for learning combinations

instead, teaching "components and transitions" offer two main advantages:

1) it reduces the choreography-oriented artificial memory burden on leaders (to remember and do a

long, specific sequence) and encourages them to develop the "improvisation within a structure" memory (in the mind and muscles) that is most useful for social ballroom dancing;

2) when followers know what is going to happen next (because it is choreographed and is in a class) they don't learn how to respond to leading-cues or to give feedback about whether these cues are sufficient and how the leading-cues could be improved.

It can be useful to suggest sequences combining moves that flow together nicely, and that students, with less experience, might not discover for themselves.

And during a class — especially with "moving dances" like foxtrot — when a large number of dancers (in a small teaching area) are all doing the same thing (in a brief choreographed sequence) this can minimize collisions, and it's very helpful for a teacher in observing and giving feedback.

style — internal (for dancers) and external (for viewers)

It is always important that it feels good (for you and your partner); sometimes it is also important that it looks good (for whoever may be watching).

where students and teachers stand

in circle: all can see, but most are viewing from wrong directions so it's difficult to copy actions

leads & follows on different sides: all can see from proper direction, but this produces a scramble for partners every time, and requires lots of moving around

stay with partners (and move to position on same side of teachers): a medium amount of moving around, half can see from proper direction (let leaders see, followers usually do mirror image)

when to start a Cha Cha (on 1-count or 2-count)

I would begin teaching the cha cha (or mambo) starting on the 1-count (1 2 3&4 5 6 7&8, as on the "rhythm sheet"). Then, when students are comfortable with doing the 1234 step-patterns on the musical beats of 1234, make them shift to the 2341 musical beats for awhile (either by starting on the 2-count, or by using the "LRL,cha-cha-cha" start that is usually taught in Ballroom I). Encourage them to be able to dance on either 1234 or 2341, and then choose based on personal preference. Although I can do either, I strongly prefer beginning on the 1-count (it's better for transfer, feels better,...) but others like to begin on the 2-count.

psychology of beginners

anxiety/confidence, self-image, relaxation, how to pass through this stage into relative comfort

balance of leads and follows

Try to "recruit" those in minority, encourage minorities to always attend. Maybe find volunteers who can "fill in" as needed; it is best if they can do either role (to be either a lead or follow).

As a technique for learning, occasionally (for reasons that are explained) have leads & follows "exchange roles" so each gets the experience, for understanding-empathy-etc. WHY leads & follows (not leaders & followers)? due to feminism and PC?

staying healthy

helping others stay healthy by being thoughtful: if you're sick, don't attend class; or attend but don't dance, just listen & watch (do mental practice); or (not as good) you can attend and dance, but wash hands before class; and don't sneeze, cough, or touch your own nose

for your own protection, always wash hands after class; for strong immunity, sleep enough and eat nutritious health-promoting foods

- music: selection of dance (and patterns); styling; rhythmic accuracy (dance with the music).



leading and following

buildups, whole-part-whole,...

class attitude, relaxation & enthusiasm