

Dance Tips

Warm Up

Leave a few minutes early for your dance lessons and give yourself some time to warm up your body before class if its cold outside. Dance injuries happen usually due to the muscles not being warm before using them. It happens more easily then you think! Wear a sweater or light jacket to start the class off and take it off after you have warmed up.

Should you buy dance shoes?

If you are thinking about buying dance shoes, there are a couple of things you might want to consider first. Are you sure you are going to be taking lessons on a regular basis? If you are just starting lessons you might want to wait and make sure you like dancing first and then go out and buy a pair.

If you are already dancing regularly at lessons and socials, you may want purchase some. Depending on what dances you are taking, will determine what type of shoes you should buy. For instance, if you are thinking of competing in Country and Western or you mostly go to social country dances, you may want to get "dance boots". One brand is called "Evening Star". If you want dance shoes that are good for any kind of couples dancing, you may want to consider "ballroom practice shoes". Be careful though, there is a good \$20 dollar price difference between shops for the exact same shoes. You can't return or exchange any shoes after you have worn them. Some shops have no returns at all!

Social Dance Etiquette #1

Do not teach or criticize your social dance partners while you're out on the social dance floor. Remember, you are out there for fun and your partner is too. It is embarrassing for the person being told how to dance. It accomplishes nothing for anyone to go home at the end of an evening of dancing and feel bad about themselves and their dance technique. I don't criticize anyone about their dancing technique, even if they ask me to, on the social floor. Its inappropriate! Lighten up and have some fun! Let their teachers instruct them in group class or in a private lesson.

"Practice makes perfect"

Well, I don't know about perfect but it sure helps the memory out. Even going through what you learned in class for 5 minutes ago, when you get home makes a big difference in remembering for the following week's lesson or social. Several times I have heard "well we can't seem to find the time together to practice during the week with our busy schedules". My response is "practice yourself." It's amazing how going over pivot turns by yourself or thinking about where you prep to lead a turn really improves your own dancing. Then in class you can practice together. And secondly, attend some dances, if you don't already, that's where you can have fun socially with everyone from your group class plus get some floor time in. Who cares if you mess up, that's why everyone else is there too, for the practice!!

"Should I be warming up before my dance lesson?"

Yes of course you should stretch before any kind of dance class or social. Muscles can be cold and tight and injured easily if your not careful. Five minutes to stretch your body a little should do the trick for social dancing.

It is very easy to hurt shoulder joints for both the ladies and the gentlemen when leading turns and following them. Even knees and hip joints due to rotating incorrectly or the wrong kind of shoes that

stick to the floor.

Be careful with your body, it only takes leaving a few minutes earlier for class to give yourself enough time to stretch and warm up.

Ideas for stretching include: rolling your head around to loosen up neck joints, rolling shoulders in a backward and forward rotation as well as pushing them down and back for a feeling of proper dance posture, moving arms up above your head and behind you, circling ankles in and outwards so you don't twist them, moving legs from the hip joint forward and back to loosen those joints up as well.

Footwork

Footwork is one of the cornerstones of good ballroom dancing - but it doesn't mean only learning the steps, it's also where your feet go and in what manner. One of the coolest things appearance-wise to learn, is to dance with one's feet together instead of apart. Your feet should actually lightly brush against one another as they move. This means you have to develop a good sense of balance, because - let's face it - it's always easier to balance standing and moving with your feet apart. GFV

Kicksteps

Kicksteps - whatever dance you're doing, try not to kick with your toes up. This is good if you're doing Country Western dancing, but for Ballroom, try to point your toes down and to the outside. It looks better. GFV

Line dancing

"Line dancing" is a great way to work on body and foot technique. I still hear how many people can't stand line dancing and I think it is because they haven't tried it recently. No longer is it danced just to country music, line dancing is danced to every kind of music from swing to top 40 pop. Its fun and it teaches us coordination. This is how some dancers learn to syncopate for west coast swing or cha cha, its a chance to work on feet instead of lead and follow. Its great exercise and challenging to say the least. Line dancing has come a long way in the past 10 years or so. It may not be the greatest thing to sit and watch but it sure is fun to participate. Give it a try, work on foot positions, foot placements, arm styling, Cuban motion, etc. and you will find it improves your couples dancing as well.

Correct beat

Gentlemen: When starting a dance take your time finding the correct beat of music to begin on. Sometimes it helps to tap it out with your foot on the floor and start on the "1" count. It is usually the easiest beat to find in the music.

Break on 2,3

Make sure if you are dancing Cha Cha that you are breaking on the "2,3", it will feel better if you are dancing on the correct beat.

Ladies

Try to have patience and wait for the gentlemen to get the dance started, remember he is leading.

Grounding

The term "grounding" is used in dancing, but many dancers still have a hard time understanding this word. Basically if you can picture yourself walking across an ice rink, most people will try to walk across the ice so that they don't slip and fall. When dancing, you want to place your feet on the dance floor like you don't want to let them slip. Accomplishing this requires pressing your center into the ground over top your feet. Your feet must be placed in which ever position that is correct and no movement or adjustments after the placement. This grounding technique will make your footwork cleaner and your balance more solid.

Turning Tip

Try using the "cup and pin" technique for the connection of hands while spinning or turning. This is done by the leader making a pin with his third and fourth fingers (preferably) and connecting the pads of those fingers to the followers hand which is cupped slightly with the thumb tucked to her forefinger (out of the way of getting caught during the turns). It is important that the follower keep her palm and wrist facing away from her and to connect to the leaders hand gently. The leader can then easily rotate her because her fingers and palm (cup) will rotate with his fingers (pin) as she turns. In order for this to work, the follower has to have a soft tone in her arm, especially the shoulder and not push her hand above her head where she can't see it. If this happens, it is impossible for the leader to tell you how many spins he wants and makes it difficult to bring the followers hand down to stop the rotation. All of this is important for good lead and follow technique.

Proper dance technique

Lots of dancers say to me when taking lessons, both group and private, that they just want to be good social dancers and not competitors, so why do they have to learn proper dance technique. I reply with this explanation, "without using good dance technique you don't become a great social dancer". If your not using the correct foot positions, or the proper posture it causes balance problems and lead and follow problems as well. Usually when a move doesn't work, it is because of an incorrect body position or some other dance technique problem. I think that some people confuse technique with showmanship, that the competitors are trying to achieve. Learning proper technique makes you more enjoyable to dance with, whether you are a leader or a follower in couples' dance. Good technique makes a dancer look smoother and helps the general flow of the dance executed.

Ladies

While dancing West Coast Swing be careful not to coaster on your anchors, anchor in place and wait for the forward lead on the next pattern.

Gentlemen

While dancing West Coast Swing allow the ladies to finish their anchor before leading them into your next pattern.

Beginner Dancer's Tip

Try never to refuse a dance with someone who is asking you. It doesn't feel very good to be rejected. This tip is for the ladies and the gentlemen, and a reminder to the Intermediate/Advanced dancers as well. This is how we learn to be better dancers; by dancing with lots of different partners and dancers of all levels.

Ladies

Patience while learning moves in group class, the gentlemen have lots more to think about then the ladies, focus in on your following skills and most importantly the connection you are giving to your partner, rather then back leading the pattern for yourself.

Gentlemen

When taking a partner on the floor to dance, try warming her up by some nice easy basics first. Then gradually move up the level of patterns after determining whether your dance partner is ready to follow the more advanced moves. Remember your job is to make her look good and in return, you will look good as well.

Beginners

Make sure you have strong basics in any dance you are learning, before moving up a level or learning new patterns. It will make the next level a lot more frustrating if you don't know your basics well

enough. We all started at the beginning and repeated the first level a few times before moving up. Sometimes as intermediate or advanced dancers, its a good idea to refresh our memories by taking a basic class again, as a reminder of a few things we have forgotten about.

Swing Posture

If you want to be cool dancing the Swing, posture and attitude are important and go hand-in-hand (no pun intended). Whereas one's back is arched slightly backward in closed-position ballroom dances such as the Fox Trot, savvy Swing dancers are actually bent forward a little bit. This - along with slightly flexed knees - allows for quicker movements which is important since Swing features several reversal of directions moves. (Courtesy Fox Tales newsletter)

Courtesy of <<http://www.centralhome.com/>>