

**News From Washington DC Area**  
**ALPS - Accelerated Learning Program For Squares**

**By: Virgil Forbes**  
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The ALPS program that I have been using for the last several years is not original to me. It is an adaptation of a number of different concepts such as “Blast”, “Blitz” and “Crash Course” that have been talked about at Callerlab and other caller gatherings, in recent years.

The concept: Quick equip new dancers with enough square dance vocabulary and dance skill so that they can quickly join regular club dances.

The process: A concentrated weekend (Friday/Saturday) that teaches the major elements of the Basic program, followed by club dances that include a workshop tip to add to their choreographic vocabulary. It doesn't really get them to mainstream (or plus) all that much faster. It just gets them there in the format of regular Friday night dancing, where they learn a little bit each night. In order to have time enough for this we've added an extra forty five minutes to our normal two hour dance evening, giving us eight tips rather than six.

Supporting ideas: This process allows our new dancers to think of themselves as club members sooner, improving overall retention. Our new members bring new excitement to our dances. Our special dances like the Halloween costume dance the last two years have been special fun, with innovative costumes, especially due to the new members.

Most importantly, ALPS allows us to bring into square dancing new dancers who have been unable or unwilling to commit to the traditional weeknight classes. We dance in a community where commutes to work are routinely over an hour each way, and where most families have two careers to cater to. These families simply can't get home from work after 6PM, have dinner, get to a class at 7:30, dance for two hours, go home, sleep, and get up at 5AM the next morning to commute to work. I think this may be the most important impact of ALPS, and its strongest selling point. We are giving our newer dancers recreation on the nights that they have available for recreation – Friday or Saturday.

The choreographic program that I am using this year is attached. In teaching three different ALPS classes I have varied this program quite a bit. If dancers aren't getting a given move I drop it and move on to something else, and come back to the problem move the following week. The exact choreographic sequence is far less important than the process of keeping the learning ongoing and fun.

Requirements: The club as a group and the vast majority of its members must agree to actively support the program, at least for two successive years. It means that they are not going to get much plus dancing in – at most two or three tips out of eight called. It also means that they must all work to support the weekend program.

Advertising is a key. The first night of the class is the only night to start – if you don't have them there for the first session, you can't add them in later. Unlike traditionally formatted classes, you simply cannot keep the class open and extra week or two to pick up a few more students.

At my club we have been blessed by a hard working publicity chairman. She has arranged, in two consecutive years, to get journalists from the local weekly papers (four different papers, two publishers) to attend a dance, take pictures, and talk to the dancers, with the articles to run in the two weeks immediately prior to our ALPS weekend. In every article we try to emphasize the 'modern' nature of the dance, acknowledging our traditional roots, but talking about how modern square dance contains enough variety to engage the interest of dancers for years to come. All the dancers in the pictures have to be smiling. We use a mixture of dress, from neat but casual attire to understated traditional attire. Since many of our dancing ladies favor prairie skirts as their most common attires, this is not a major change. We try to ensure that at least a few pictures taken include some of the younger members of the club.

We have used lawn and road side signs, similar to those used by politicians and real estate agents. They measure approximately 20" x 30", bright yellow (black lettering), and say "Learn Modern Square Dance" and two phone numbers to call for information. Depending on quantities ordered the cost is in the \$8-10 range per sign. There may be local ordinances that place restrictions on how they can be placed. We primarily placed them at intersections where roads from subdivisions and communities come to major commuting routes. This year we're going to try to get approval to place them at subway and commuter rail stations, and in the commuter "Park & Ride" lots.

As far as flyers go, one design does not fit all. We have tailored our flyers to each audience. At fitness centers and recreation centers we advertise the healthy and gentle exercise of square dancing. For church groups we emphasize the wholesome aspects of no smoking, no drinking, no blue jokes. For general public distribution (like grocery stores and community bulletin boards, and for the homeschooling community) we emphasize the multi-generational family dancing.

To be successful each club member must help. We ask each club member to place flyers in at least two public locations. We also ask them to place one either at their work location, church, or other place where they are known. On these flyers we leave the 'For information' block blank and ask that they write in their own name and phone as the source for further information.

The weekend:

Friday evening: Try to get all of the club members there. Ask them to wear a variety of square dance apparel, but leaning toward the less spectacular. Use two registration tables to collect names, phone numbers, and money, and prepare name badges. Hope you'll have enough new dancers to keep both busy. Don't start dancing immediately. Have the coffee pot and punch bowl set up. Encourage the club members to introduce themselves to the new dancers and mix for a bit before we start dancing.

I start the first tip just like I would a normal first nighter, but I have to keep in mind the fact that we are aiming for learning as well as entertainment. I use just enough repetition of each move to smooth out the majority of the new dancers, and then I move on. I do singing calls every tip, based on the choreography taught during that tip. The first two tips I don't change partners in the singing calls, thereafter I do. The list of choreography listed below for the first session is about double what I would try for in a traditional first nighter. I have been pleasantly surprised at the ability of most of the new dancers handle this much material.

Saturday morning: Have the coffee pot on, as well as the water jug and a cooler of juice and soft drinks. I've found it useful to do advance scheduling for the angels, trying to get about one third of the club at each of the three daytime sessions. In line with our 'we need every member to support the program' concept, try to get each club member to attend one session, although some members will end up attending more than one.

The largest logistical problem is feeding everyone on Saturday, first at lunch and then supper, especially since you won't be sure how many you're going to feed until Friday evening. Lunch tends to be cold cut platters from Safeway and sandwiches from Subway. Supper is pot luck, with all the club members contributing. Advance coordination on who brings what is necessary. The dancers who angel the morning session tend to do the majority of the heavy cooking for the pot luck.

During the Friday night sessions I've found it important to be honest with our new dancers. The physical endurance necessary for this program should not be downplayed. Nine hours of dancing on Saturday is a lot of physical activity. For our primary target population (single adults, young families, empty nesters) this is not usually a problem, but it can be for older dancers. My phraseology for this is an announcement to the effect of, "We're not suggesting anyone not participate with us in this learning experience, but please be honest with yourselves: square dancing is a physical activity, and we're going to be trying to cover a great deal of material in a relatively short time. You can't learn to square dance by watching, you have to be on the floor doing it. If you find yourself not able to keep up physically it will not only frustrate you, but also the other seven people dancing is your square. If this happens to you, but you still want to learn to dance, I'll return your tuition from this class and try to help you find a traditionally formatted square dance class where you can more fully enjoy learning to dance."

Students who are younger than adults present their own challenges and must be considered on a case by case basis. Our policy has been that children under sixteen may only participate as part of a family group (at least one parent or grandparent must participate in the class, either as student or angel). When asked ahead of time I generally ask that children be at least ten, or entering fourth grade. (In traditional classes I use eight/second grade as the criterion). Teenagers sixteen and older may register independent of a family group, although even there it is helpful to have a recognized family authority figure around. I've found that children younger than ten usually do not maintain their concentration and learning urge throughout the day, although there are exceptions. We know from experience that teenagers learn square dance skills far more quickly than adults – keeping them interested throughout the day is a considerable challenge.

I consider that the programs I have conducted at Aqua Square to have been a significant success. To put the numbers into context, we are doing this in the Washington DC metro area. From our area's high point, sometime in the late 1970's or early 1980's, more than half of our clubs have folded, and the remaining clubs are much smaller. Less than a third of our remaining clubs have had a beginner's class in the last three years, and a class of eight new dancers is considered to be a large one. Against this context, here are some of the numbers from the first two years of ALPS classes at Aqua Squares:

2006-2007 Season:

31 attended the Friday evening session  
24 attended all of the Saturday sessions  
17 graduated as Mainstream dancers in January  
15 are club members a year later

2007-2008 Season

43 attended the Friday evening session  
29 attended all of the Saturday sessions  
23 completed Mainstream in December

I don't want anyone to think that ALPS is a cure for all of our problems – it is not. But in certain circumstances, and with the right combination of caller and club leadership, I believe that ALPS, or other programs like it, can help in beginning the rebuilding of our great activity.

Aqua Squares  
ALPS Curriculum 2007-2008 (Tentative)

<p><u>Friday Session 1 (7:30-10PM)</u> Square Identification Hand Holds Circle Up &amp; Back Do Sa Do Prom Single File Swing Promenade Prom Inside Allemande Right &amp; Left Grand Pass Thru Courtesy Turn Lead Right Veer Left Bend the Line Right &amp; Left Thru Promenade ½ Circle ½, ¾ Ladies Chain (2 &amp; 4) Arm Turns Star – Static Square Star Promenade Couples Circulate B/G Circ (TFL) E/C Circ (TFL) Grand Square Ladies Chain ¾ Weave Backtrack</p>	<p><u>Saturday Session 3 (1-3PM)</u> Flutter Wheel Reverse Flutter Sweep ¼ Veer Right Ocean Wave Swing Thru Boys run B/G Trade (Wv) E/C Trade (Wv) Circle to a Line Touch ¼ Column Circ B/G Run E/C Run Circulate (Wv) Chain Down the Line Pass the Ocean</p> <p><u>Saturday Session 4 (3-5PM)</u> Alamo Style Alamo Swing Thru Alamo Left SwTh Wheel &amp; Deal (TFL) Wheel &amp; Deal (OFL) Double Pass Thru 1<sup>st</sup> Left/Next Right Extend Zoom Ferris Wheel</p>	<p><u>Friday Oct 5</u> Shoot the Thar Wheel Around Partner Trade Trade By Hinge Centers In Cast Off (OFL) Pass to the Center</p> <p><u>Friday Oct 12</u> Separate Around 1 Separate Around 2 Into/Down Middle Squeeze into Line</p> <p><u>Friday Oct 19</u> Gents In Ladies Sashay Half Sashay</p> <p><u>Friday Oct 26</u> Halloween Dance Facing Couple Rule Ocean Wave Rule</p>
<p><u>Saturday Session2 (10AM-Noon)</u> Star Thru California Twirl Rollaway Ladies in Gents Sashay Square Thru (2-5) Do Paso Allemande Thar Slip the Clutch Dive Thru U Turn Back Eight Chain Thru</p>	<p><u>Saturday Session 5 (Evening)</u> Stars (Box) Single Circle</p> <p><u>Friday Sep 21</u> Dance &amp; Review</p> <p><u>Friday Sep 28</u> Walk Around See Saw Box Gant Wrong Way Grand</p>	<p><u>Friday Nov 2</u> Spin the Top Grand Swing Thru Slide Thru Turn Thru Walk &amp; Dodge Fold Cast Off (Wv)</p> <p><u>Friday Nov 9</u> Turn Thru Cast Off (Wv) Cloverleaf</p> <p><u>Friday Nov 16</u> Bill Harrison Dance</p>

<p><u>Friday Nov 23</u> No Dance – Thanksgiving</p> <p><u>Friday Nov 30</u> Dixie Style Cross Run Cross Fold Left Hand Wave Left Swing Thru Split/Box Circulate</p> <p><u>Friday Dec 7</u> Tag the Line Half Tag Scootback Recycle Wrong Way Thar Shoot the Thar Full</p> <p><u>Friday Dec 14</u> Dance Mainstream</p> <p><u>Friday Dec 21</u> Christmas Dance</p> <p><u>Friday Dec 28</u> No Dance</p> <p><u>Friday Jan 4</u> Review/Dance MS</p> <p><u>Friday Jan 11</u> Guest Caller Dance Mainstream</p> <p><u>Friday Jan 18</u> Guest Caller Dance Mainstream</p> <p><u>Friday Jan 25</u> Anniversary Dance</p>	<p><u>February 1 &amp; 8</u> Dances cancelled due to Hall availability</p> <p><u>Friday Feb 15</u> Graduation</p> <p>Begin Plus <u>Friday Feb 22</u> Single Circle Grand Swing Thru Acey Deucey Teacup Chain Load the Boat Extend</p> <p><u>Friday Feb 29</u> Spin Chain Thru Peel Off Ping Pong Circulate</p> <p><u>Friday Mar 7</u> Linear Cycle Coordinate Anything &amp; Spread Anything &amp; Roll</p> <p><u>Friday Mar 14</u> Spin Chain Gears Track Two</p> <p><u>Friday Mar 14</u> WASCA Weekend</p> <p><u>Friday Mar 21</u> No Dance – Good Friday</p> <p><u>Friday Mar 28</u> Review plus to date Follow Your Neighbor FYNAS Fan the Top</p> <p><u>Friday Apr 4</u> Explode the Wave Explode &amp; Anything Relay the Deucey</p>	<p><u>Friday Apr 11</u> Peel the Top Trade the Wave Diamond Circulate Flip the Diamond</p> <p><u>Friday Apr 18</u> Crossfire All 8 Spin the Top Cut the Diamond</p> <p><u>Friday Apr 25</u> Chase Right Dixie Grand ¾ Tag</p> <p><u>Friday May 2</u> SpChExG</p> <p><u>Friday May 9</u></p> <p><u>Friday May 16</u></p> <p><u>Friday May 23</u> No Dance – Memorial Day</p> <p><u>Friday May 30</u></p> <p><u>Friday Jun 6</u> Last Regular Dance</p>
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