

TEACHING SQUARE DANCING A BETTER WAY

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I. General tips that help people to learn

A. Proper hand use

Applies to all levels and figures in square dancing

1. Hand pull-by
2. Forearm turn
3. Side-by-side hand holding (facing same direction)
4. Stars (facing different directions); 2-people facing opposite directions have a 2-handed star (mini-wave)

Rule: **Take hands with person if side by side.**

B. Timing

Using the correct number of beats for a call

Use Circle Left as teaching tool for timing.

- 16 beats to circle once around = 4 beats per quarter of a circle
- teach how to circle: turn slightly in the direction you need to move, then walk around center of circle (don't move sideways)
- do same with girls facing out, boys facing in (or heads facing out, sides in)
- when circling, all dancers must adjust their steps to the average of all
- learn to move (and think) as a group, rather than individually
- learn to move smoothly
- learn to be smooth, move as a group—helps with more intricate calls later
- use the circle left exercise through all levels to keep things smooth (“oiled”)
- girls can still “swish” skirts by moving hips
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Grand Circle – nice way to sing a lot of lyrics with very little teach (circle L 16, then R 16 beats)

Move to the beat of the music

- say “step 2 3 4” as they circle; help them hear the beats and step on the beat

Promenades – also good to teach timing and moving as one unit/group (couples, single file)

C. Keep dancers in motion

Law of inertia: body in motion tends to stay in motion; at rest tends to stay at rest

- Less tiring to keep moving than it is to stand still.
- Dancers learn flow and smoothness
- Dancers learn to dance to the music

Keep dancers moving from first class. Examples:

- Promenade, don't stop, don't slow down
- Goal posting – all move at same time

D. Square “breathing” / counter dancing

- Part of “keep moving”
- When heads do a figure, sides move too (adjust out, in, etc.)
- Heads Do Sa Do – sides move out
- Heads Promenade outside – sides move in
- Goal post dancing
- If in place, tap toes to the music, which leads us to...

E. Teach dancers to dance/move to the music

- Circle left (mentioned above)
- Tap toes to music as soon as it starts and continue
- On Circle Left, reinforce beats by counting/cues
- Keep dancers aware of music; make it a part of your teaching/calling at all levels

F. Group calls

- Teach and repeat a sequence of calls – dancers learn the flow

Example:

Heads Lead Right, Veer Left

Couples Circulate, Bend the Line (means “couples face”)

G. Prepare the dancers to learn new things

- Practice the body flow using simpler calls
- Learn parts of a call before putting it together
- See below for specific tips on this

II. Tips for Specific Calls

A. U-turn Back

- Change hands first, then turn. Can't turn the wrong way.
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B. Walk and Dodge

- Teach from facing position first
- Solves problem of girls wanting to turn around (natural to want to face in / see what others are doing)
- Teach early in the order of figures
- Great way to introduce ocean waves

Examples:

Boys Walk, Girls Dodge, Right hand star Turn 1/2, Left hand star Turn 1/2
(= Swing Thru) *Uses the 2-handed star learned early on.*

Boys Walk, Girls Dodge, Right hand star Turn 3/4, Left hand star Turn 1/2

C. Square Thru

- First teach Square Thru One, then Two, Three, and Four hands
- Square Thru 1 hand and U-Turn Back; repeat
- When doing multiple hands, emphasize don't pull by then turn; should turn as they are passing by.
- Use with goal posting. **Example:**
Sides Square Thru 1 hand, Separate around 1 into the middle, Square Thru 2 hands
Separate around 1 into middle, Square Thru 3 hands, Split the two
Separate around 1 into middle, Square Thru 4 hands
Separate around 1, All Circle Left to get home
- Or, can start with Heads Promenade half way, so each time they end at home.
- Once with the heads and once with sides takes dancers to opposite side of square.
- Flows, they keep moving forward
- Uses all variations of Square Thru

D. Wheel & Deal

- First teach Couples Trade – uses correct flow and direction
- Then teach Couples Half Trade = Wheel & Deal

E. Flutter Wheel

- Practice to prep dancers: Ladies Right arm turn and return to start
Couples Circle 1/2 All Circle half with no hands Men Circle left
with no hands Ladies start arm turn, Boys then start circle after first
two steps

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F. Slide Thru

- Don't say "Star Thru with no hands," say, "Star Thru with no arch."
- Because it's important to join hands afterwards.

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G. Spin the Top

- Practice to prep dancers: Swing Thru, Ends Trade, Centers Trade Then,
teach 1/2 a Trade Spin the Top = Swing Thru, everybody 1/2 Trade

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H. Recycle

- Practice to prep dancers (so the pattern is comfortable and predictable)
Teach Long Recycle first (part of original Recycle) Very early prep:
Heads Rollaway, Pass Thru, both Turn Right, Single File Promenade
outside 1/4 (then repeat but Single File Promenade Inside 1/4)
- Heads Pass the Ocean, Centers Fold, Single File Promenade outside 1/4
(then same with the Promenade inside)

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I. Dixie Style

- Use a lot of Left Touch 1/4 first
Examples: Center Square Thru 3 hands, Left Touch 1/4 Half Sashay,
Girls Pull by, Left Touch 1/4