

## 1

## Dance Floor *Impressions*



**PICTURE YOURSELF** floating across the floor to an elegant waltz or spinning past your partner like a whirling dervish to the driving beat of a West coast swing. Visualize yourself maneuvering your partner around the dance floor to an upbeat two-step or sweeping your partner off her feet, figuratively, during a romantic slow dance. Hold onto these images of success in couples dancing as you dive into your introduction to couples social dancing.

If the first two sentences of this paragraph left you saying to yourself, “Wow, that sounds great, but what does a waltz look like?” or something similar, hang on—this chapter was written for you. For those readers who already have a smattering of dance experience (enough that you feel confident in your learning goals), do read on because this first chapter will provide invaluable groundwork for your dance education. In this chapter, we will explore the synergy of advanced learning techniques and dance floor basics that will jumpstart your dancing, and we will examine the world and etiquette of social couples dancing.

## Introduction to Social Dancing

**SOCIAL DANCING** encompasses a wide variety of couples dances, as well as various styles of dancing. In general terms, social dancing includes everything from the hot and spicy salsa to the top-notch two-step and all the classics in between, such as the foxtrot, swing, and waltz. Basically, social couples dances include all dances that are performed with a partner, in contrast to dances such as line dancing, which does not require a partner.

Another unique attribute of the social dance family is along the same vein as the first, but takes it a step further. Social dances are not just performed with a partner; the successful execution of the dance depends on the interpersonal communication between the partners during the dance, which is commonly referred to as the *lead-and-follow* aspect of the dance.

Other dance forms, such as ballet, modern, and jazz, can be performed as partner dances, but they are also perfectly acceptable and equally beautiful when performed solo. The artist's intrapersonal communication and interpretation of the music are the defining attributes of these dances.

In contrast, a solo foxtrot is merely a dancer progressing around a dance floor in a box-step pattern without a partner to initiate or complete the led patterns associated with the dance, leaving a relatively meaningless series of rhythmic steps taking the solo dancer around a circle. Hence the term *social dancing* because it is based on a temporary social relationship formed between two partners strictly for the purpose of completing the dance at hand.



If you do not currently have a dance partner, do not be dismayed; a high percentage of beginning social dancers start out in the same situation. The beauty of lead-and-follow social dancing is that the basics of each dance can be learned individually for application in a mixed social setting. Once you are properly armed with the basics of a particular dance, you should be ready to dance with a corresponding leader or follower who also knows the standardized basic steps of the same dance.

Many people learn to dance for the sole purpose of meeting people of the opposite sex. History has proven this to be a successful and palatable strategy because those individuals who can dance have a perceived "edge" on the competition due to their newly acquired musical sense and comfort on the dance floor, as well as a real advantage created by the confidence instilled by simply knowing how to dance and subsequently behave in a potentially awkward social occasion.



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As we will discuss later in this chapter and reinforce throughout the book, social dancing is a very large umbrella covering a wide variety of dances, music styles, and situations. Although appropriate at a black-tie event where the menu includes champagne and caviar, the waltz is also appropriate in a country-western nightclub where beer on tap is the beverage of choice.

As you learn the basics of the various dances, picture yourself practicing your newly acquired dance skills to different styles of music at venues across the globe. Keep in mind that the footwork and the lead-and-follow aspect of each dance are consistent in every situation in every corner of the world, despite music, surroundings, and attire.

Though there are rules of etiquette associated with social dancing, please do not be intimidated or fall victim to the misconception that social dancing is exclusive, elitist, unattainable, or stuffy. Once you understand these rules, which will be broken down later in this chapter and fleshed out through the rest of the book, you will leave the most pretentious in the dust as you step confidently onto the dance floor in any situation.

By the same token, as you pursue a social dance education, your journey may take you to several places and groups of people. Social dancing is practiced worldwide and can be learned through private lessons, group lessons, or self-instruction methods, such as this book and DVD combination, or simply by imitation if the individual is so inclined. Each method has its own unique advantages, and individual preferences and learning styles play critical roles. Whether your dance education takes you to the level of a competent social dancer or your desire to compete launches you into the realm of competition, performance, and DanceSport, a firm foundation in the essentials is critical. However, your dancing goals will determine your dance education.

The various types of dance education and their benefits and drawbacks will be discussed at further length later in this chapter, as well as criteria to look for when selecting the instruction method appropriate to your goals and budget, whether it be a self-instruction method, such as the book you are currently reading, or a highly specialized dance coach for learning acrobatic lifts and stunts for international competition.

## Rapid Learning Using the Book/DVD Combo (Visual, Audio, and Kinesthetic)

**I**F YOU'RE READY for a new, innovative, and exciting dance-training program that represents a dramatic departure from traditional dance instruction as it is currently known, then this book and DVD combo is perfect for you. Auditory (audio), visual, and kinesthetic (physical) learning styles are all combined in this package to give you the best possible dance instruction that will have you dancing in just a couple of short hours...and we're not talking about looking like you can dance, we're talking about real lead-and-follow dancing. Unique features of this dance-training program include:

- ▶ **A thorough step-by-step four-color visual introduction to nine different social dances**
- ▶ **Sections in each chapter that separate out leader's and follower's footwork**
- ▶ **A six-W approach to each dance that quickly delivers the who, what, where, when, why, and wear of each dance**
- ▶ **Full integration, including references, with a best-selling 75-minute beginner instructional DVD, from the Shawn Trautman *Learn to Dance* series**

This unique dance-training program narrows the scope down to what's essential for learning, starting with the incorporation of the three learning styles.

Speaking of the different learning styles, most people remember only about 20 percent of what they read, yet they remember closer to 60 percent of what they physically do. It's been said, however, that the average person remembers 90 percent of what they see, hear, say, and do. If you just read



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this book, chances are you would be cheating yourself out of most of its value. For this reason, the visual *Picture Yourself* series has taken this approach to learning. By introducing what learners need in an order that makes logical sense and by utilizing multi-sensory teaching techniques, this unique book and DVD combination enables learners who pace themselves and use the combo as instructed to achieve rapid results that won't quickly be forgotten. Each of the senses carries its own unique attributes for learning, and most people are inclined to use one more than the others.

Regardless, the easier information is to process and assimilate, the better it will stay in your long-term memory. Next, we'll look at each of the senses individually, as well as how they're portrayed in this dance-training program.

## Visual

This book is a visual experience by definition; however, there are a few signature components of this learning experience that can create an environment for success for a visual learner. Take note in the following sections of the tools included to enhance your visual learning experience.

## Written Word

This book incorporates a unique "six-W" approach to each dance that covers the who, what, where, when, why, and wear to quickly get you situated on the right foot. Look for the six Ws at the beginning of each dance, and you'll find out *who* dances the dance, *what* the dance is, *where* the dance is typically done, *when* is the right time to dance the dance, *why* the dance is danced, and what to *wear* when you go out to dance it.



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## Pictures

The pictures in *Picture Yourself Dancing* were specifically selected and staged to provide clear snapshot demonstrations of points emphasized in the text and highlighted in the DVD. Sometimes a still shot allows learners to hone in on one particular aspect of a lead or foot position that was otherwise escaping them. Sometimes that one individual detail makes the difference between complete success and frustration for a student. Another advantage of the pictures being integrated with the text is that for many visual learners, the learning process is more like a storyboard of sequential pictures when this teaching method is used.

## Step-by-Step Descriptions

For all of our learners out there who must have special requests or to-do lists written down for a visual record, or for whom the request or task is long forgotten minutes after it is mentioned, we have included step-by-step descriptions for each of the moves, positions, concepts, and so on throughout the book. This is for your reference reinforcement following DVD instruction and practice, as well as your initial learning process.



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### DVD: Watch Body Movements

Last but certainly not least, the *Picture Yourself Dancing* learning program includes a 75-minute instructional DVD. For all of you visual learners out there, make good use of your pause, rewind, and slow-motion features on your DVD player. The DVD is filmed with picture-in-picture from multiple camera angles to provide as complete a picture of the instructors and moves as possible.

### Auditory

Although this is a book, you can enhance your auditory learning experience by employing the learning practices in the following sections.

#### Memorize the Steps Aloud

For you auditory learners who are learning to dance from a book, stimulate your auditory learning processes by memorizing dance steps aloud. Repeating key steps or rhythms aloud while reading and then practicing will greatly expedite the learning process and cement key principles in your long-term muscle memory. By involving just one more of the five senses in the learning process, you will dramatically increase your information retention.

This advanced learning technique is probably as old as the hills, but it falls into the category of “tried and true.” Implementation of this technique is as simple as saying aloud to yourself and your partner rhythm patterns, such as “quick, quick, slow, slow” as you learn and practice the two-step, or “step, touch, step, touch, step, touch” as you practice your smooth slow dance. As you progress into more advanced dances and move sequences, you will find this technique very helpful as you seek ways to keep your place in the dance’s basic pattern.



#### Hear Instruction on the DVD

One of the major advantages of the combination of written and digital media in the *Picture Yourself Dancing* learning experience is the audiovisual aspect of the enclosed DVD. As you progress through the written instructions in this book, you will hear the instructors, Shawn and Joanna Trautman, breaking down the same moves on the DVD. For the auditory learning experience, this is a huge combination jump-start and reinforcement tool for the learning process. It will behoove some learners to watch the segment first on the DVD, then read and work through the written text, and then practice with the DVD. For others, the DVD will serve as a reinforcement tool only, following a visual and verbal analysis of the written textual instruction. You are the best person to determine the most powerful learning sequence as you work through *Picture Yourself Dancing*.

#### Dance to the Music on the DVD

Lest we forget one of the key components to a successful dance, this is a good place to remind ourselves about the music to which we are dancing. As you watch and practice with the DVD, listen to the music. The music used on the DVD has been carefully selected based on beat pattern, speed, style, and “danceability.” None of the songs on the DVD have lyrics, which reduces the distraction created when one or both of the dance partners

cannot resist the urge to sing along with the song. Remember, you should be using your voice to practice beat patterns, steps, and other key concepts aloud. As you practice with the DVD, try to allow the speed and style of the music to saturate your memory



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so you can recall the type of music that goes with a particular dance when you are out dancing at a ballroom, wedding, or nightclub.

## Kinesthetic

Learning to dance is a physical activity, but the kinesthetic aspects of this learning experience start before you get on the dance floor and expand beyond the studio.

### Write It Down

Kinesthetic learning is at the heart of dance instruction. This isn't a huge surprise because kinesthetic learning provides the umbrella for all "hands-on," activity-based educational experiences. What might surprise you as a learner is where and when the kinesthetic learning starts. Activate the kinesthetic portion of your brain and memory by engaging in the multi-sensory experience of taking notes as you read this book and watch the DVD. Not only will you be providing yourself with an additional written record or cue card to stimulate your visual learning, you will also be engaging the activity-hungry portion of your brain with the act of note-taking.

### Exercises

Several places beginning in Chapter 2 will highlight exercises to assist you in developing particular muscular traits or dance habits. Note these exercises and incorporate them into your routine at home.

For example, in Chapter 2, an abbreviated series of stretching exercises is outlined. These gentle exercises, if you are physically capable of performing them, are beneficial as you pursue your daily activities as well as learn to dance.

### Drills

Throughout the instructional chapters on each of the individual dances, as well as the introductory section on dance floor basics, you will see drills noted. Very simply put, *practice the drills*. The *Picture Yourself Dancing* book and the accompanying DVD are specifically designed to be cumulative learning experiences. Success in the major cumulative concepts taught in this book and DVD is achieved through mastering the individual components of couples social dancing and the individual dances.

### Dancing along with the DVD

As stressed in the visual and auditory learning sections, use the DVD. Dance along with the instructors as they go through the curriculum. You can watch the DVD first to take notes and absorb, but it is imperative that at some point in your learning experience you get up, get moving, and start dancing along with the DVD. This will stimulate the activity-based portions of your brain, much like note-taking, but on a more systemic level, and it will give you a chance to practice making your body do what the instructor's body is doing as he or she is doing it.

### Practice and Muscle Memory

Finally, practice, practice, practice. Practice, with and without the DVD, will begin to establish the necessary muscle memory to transfer the dancing basics learned from your short-term memory to your long-term memory. Practice in the comfort of your own home, practice tapping rhythms to various radio stations as you drive around, and practice your alignment and carriage as you stand, sit, and ambulate about your daily activities.

**Always check with your healthcare provider before starting this or any other fitness or physical activity program.**



**Each individual's ability to perform all activities presented in this or any other fitness program is best determined by that individual and his or her healthcare provider.**

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## Putting It All Together

Effective learning starts with a confident and motivated mindset toward the material at hand. If you're not relaxed and open to the material, the best teaching techniques in the world won't help you. Next, you'll want to absorb the dance training in the way that best suits your learning preference, whether it's visual, auditory, kinesthetic, or a combination of the three. After absorbing the material, you'll want to explore the material to the extent that you turn your newly learned skills into a deep understanding. You can do this by digging deeper into each subject area and by asking questions of those around you. Look up information online or go to local classes or dances and ask questions. The more your mind is involved, the easier it'll be for your body to pick the dances up. Memorizing key sequences, numbers, facts, or steps is another way to quickly turn this dance-training program into a long-term foundation. Most of all, you'll want to demonstrate that you know the material. Get out and dance. Practice, practice, practice, as they say, but do so only with the right information because muscle memory is hard to break. Dance with others and continue your learning. You're embarking upon a whole new world of opportunities, and you don't want to go into it the wrong way.

To make the most of your learning experience, you'll want to go through and read this chapter and the next at length to make sure you understand them. Combine your reading with the first lesson on the DVD and get your first taste of the visual, audio, and kinesthetic styles working together. From that point forward, it's best to just dive into each dance and spend time understanding it, watching it on the DVD, and then dancing it yourself. Celebrate your successes along the way, and you'll keep the momentum up until you get through the final dance. If you've never danced before, it'll definitely behoove you to start with the slow dance section after you've completed Chapters 1 and 2 and are comfortable with the dance floor basics. The basics that you'll learn in Chapter 2 are essential for all dances and will forever be in your arsenal as you move into the dance scene. If you bypass the fundamentals taught in Chapter 2 of this book and go directly into the dances, you'll dramatically increase the amount of time it'll take you to go from being someone who has never danced to being a socially adept dancer who's the life of the party.

## Formal versus Informal

**A**S WE HAVE ALREADY discussed, social dancing can be and is practiced in a broad spectrum of settings, ranging from the extremely formal ball or rigid competition to the impromptu slow dance on a beach during an inspiring sunset. Social dancing has made a place in myriad activities in contemporary Western culture.



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### Formal

The images that usually come to mind first when the term “ballroom dancing” is mentioned are couples swirling around the floor in bright and bejeweled costumes with rigid posture and regal carriage. This highly formal and stylized version of social dancing is usually reserved for ballroom competitions, performances, and the movies. This is the haute couture of the social dancing world.

The majority of the dancing that you see and practice in this realm is choreographed, as opposed to spontaneous lead-and-follow dancing, which will be discussed later in this chapter. This is the world in which the proverbial big bucks are spent in instruction, costuming, performance, and all-around lifestyle.

For some dancers, this enclave of the dancing world is a nirvana; however, for the majority of the dancing community and beginner dancers, this most formal end of the spectrum of social dancing is rather remote.

For some potential dancers, the image of the stylized formal ballroom circuit repels them and deters them from learning to dance at all, as the glittery and glamorous image becomes their only mental picture of social dance. For our purposes in this book, it is most important that you know that this end of the spectrum of formality exists, but it is not reality for most of the social dancers out there. If it is your personal dancing goal, budget accordingly, and this book will get you started with a firm foundation in the basics. If the glitz is not for you, keep reading, because there is much more to the world of dance.

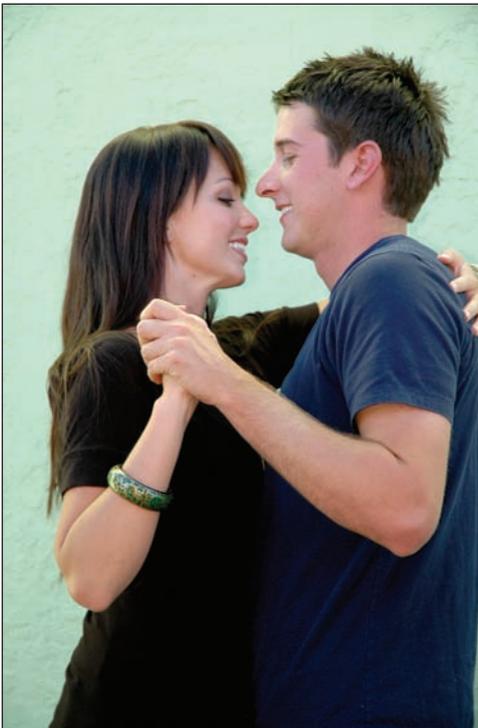
## 12 Picture Yourself Dancing

### Informal

At the opposite end of the spectrum from the glamorous world of ballroom competition and performance, you will find the informal venues for social dance. This is where the majority of people find enormous satisfaction from their acquired social dance skills. You do not need fancy costumes, expensive shoes, or even a hardwood floor to dance socially. All you need is some good music that gets you moving (or the ability to hum or whistle a tune) and a dance partner.

Many an evening in has been spent dancing in the living room or on the back patio to favorite songs. If you have the luxury and the energy to make an evening out, you can dance socially at many venues, from a restaurant with some tables pushed aside to a country-western nightclub where denim is the most prevalent fabric in the room.

Interestingly enough, you can see and practice several couples dances in either of these settings in casual attire and a relaxed atmosphere. Sometimes you don't even need music to practice your dancing; a beautiful sunset at a beach is inspiration enough. You and your partner can slow dance to the rhythm of the waves crashing on the shore and christen dusk with a final dip as the sun sets on the water.



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## Formal versus Informal

**S**OCIAL DANCING can be divided into four main subcultures, although other microcosms exist. The four main subcultures consist of ballroom, country, swing, and Latin, even though they're all still under the umbrella of social dancing. As you will see, there is overlap between the actual dances practiced in each category; for example, the cha-cha is done in ballroom, country-western, and Latin styles of couples dance, but the subculture, music, and the finer points of styling differ between each of the categories.



### Ballroom

Ballroom encompasses the traditional world of couples dance instruction and practice. Dance legends Arthur Murray and Fred Astaire are the champions and shapers of this subculture. "Traditional" is the word that defines ballroom subculture. The music is traditional, the dances are traditional, and the instruction is highly structured and standardized across the country and around the world. Money also comes to mind in the ballroom culture.

### Where to Learn and Attire for Learning

One goes to a ballroom or a dance studio to learn the ballroom style of couples dancing. At these studios you will find standardized curriculums published by centralized governing dance associations. The various teachers at each of the studios certify at different levels just like the students, so at a glance you should be able to see what a teacher is qualified to teach. Because the ballroom subculture is the most formal of the social dance styles, attire for lessons is slightly more formal than for the other styles. Although any studio or ballroom would recommend you be comfortable as you learn to dance, baggy sweatpants and grubby sneakers are not the most appropriate attire for a ballroom dance lesson. Business-casual clothing with comfortable close-heeled shoes (no flip-flops or sandals) is appropriate if you are just starting. If you decide that DanceSport is your passion, you can invest at a later date in specialized dance athletic apparel and ballroom shoes.

### Where to Dance and Attire for Going out Dancing

Believe it or not, a ballroom is one of the most common places to go out and practice your dancing. Ballrooms host various dances in the evening during the week and occasionally on the weekends. Different evenings have different themes, so most studios and ballrooms publish a monthly calendar that you can use to plan your social schedule accordingly. You can also dance to ballroom-style music at weddings and other formal special events.

## 14 Picture Yourself Dancing

It is completely appropriate and even recommended to dress to the nines to go to an evening dance at a ballroom. Ladies, pull out your sequined shirts, fancy skirts, hose, and fancy shoes if you don't have specialty suede or leather-soled ballroom dance shoes. Gentlemen, shirt-and-tie combinations or "going-out" shirts with slacks and polished shoes (again, ballroom dance shoes are recommended but not necessary) are within the dress code for a ballroom social dance event.

### Most Popular Dances

Ballroom is the most structured of the styles of social dancing, with regimented competitions and clear-cut syllabi for instruction. The dances that you would typically see and learn in a ballroom include the waltz, foxtrot, quickstep, swing, cha-cha, rumba, salsa, and tango.

### Of Special Note

As you decide which style of social dancing is right for you, please bear in mind budget and lesson schedules. Ballroom instruction is unique in that most of the lessons take place Monday through Friday during bankers' hours. Almost all ballrooms offer group classes and some private lessons in the evenings, but the majority of their instruction is during regular business hours.

### Country

Country is the all-American apple pie answer to ballroom dancing. The music is country-western, the feel is casual and the least stylized of the four subcultures, and denim is acceptable on almost every occasion. Cowboy hats and boots come to mind when country social dancing is mentioned; although they are not required for casual social dancing, they are prevalent and appropriate. Depending on what part of the country you are in, you might need to wear sunglasses to protect your eyes from the glare off of the well-polished belt buckles.



### Where to Learn and Attire for Learning

One can learn country dances at some of the local dance studios, but your best bet for getting started in your local area with country social dancing are your local country bars and nightclubs. Here you can learn the basics of the various country social dances and meet the instructors. Most of the instructors on the country circuit are freelance teachers who teach at the nightclubs in the early evenings and teach private lessons during the week and on weekends. Be comfortable and wear jeans when you go to learn country social dancing. You would most likely feel slightly overdressed if you wore the same outfit you selected for a ballroom lesson to a country bar for a beginner two-step lesson. If you have cowboy boots, wear them—they help you get into the feel of the music and culture. Ladies, close-heeled shoes are appropriate when learning social dancing in any of the subcultures. *Never wear flip-flops or open-heeled sandals or mules to a couples social dance lesson.* If you forget this rule, chances are you will only forget it once. Close-toed shoes are also recommended for ladies, especially while your dance partner gets the hang of the basic steps and leading.

### Where to Dance and Attire for Going out Dancing

Country nightclubs and bars are the best places to go out dancing in the country social dance subculture. Most large country nightclubs make it a point to have a large, well-maintained hardwood dance floor with convenient rails on which to set drinks and lean surrounding the floor. Ladies, if you want to wear a skirt or a dress you can, but chances are you will feel overdressed. A sparkly or fun top with jeans (at any age) and close-toed, close-heeled shoes are appropriate attire for a lady at a country nightclub. Likewise, gentlemen, don't even bother with anything dry-clean only. Jeans and a clean-colored shirt are appropriate, with either cowboy boots or non-sneaker shoes. Casual is key.



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### Most Popular Dances

You might be surprised at the variety of dances you will see in the country subculture. On any given evening in a country nightclub, you can see and dance with people doing the two-step, triple two-step, waltz, cha-cha, slow dance, swing, West coast swing, polka, and even occasionally the hustle. In addition to the couples dancing, there is also a lot of attention to line dancing, which is done by individuals. You might also want to give a few dances a try and head to a lesson to get your feet wet with it as well.

### Of Special Note

If you are budget-conscious with your entertainment discretionary spending, country might be the initial route for you to take. Group lessons are extremely inexpensive, private lessons are usually significantly less expensive than in a ballroom, the appropriate attire is most likely already hanging in your closet or sitting in your drawer, and cover charges at country nightclubs are usually negligible when compared to other dance venues. Also, if you are interested in learning to couples dance but you're afraid of looking or feeling frou-frou or effeminate, the country scene and the country style of social dancing are as no-frills as they come. For many people, the country subculture eases the transition into the world of couples dance, regardless of whether they are huge fans of country music.

### Swing

Swing encompasses the family of dances that were born from the jazz and big-band eras. Swing dance subculture is a movement in the dance community that has gained enormous popularity since the mid 1990s and has supported a resurgence of "retro" clothing, music, and dance.



### Where to Learn and Attire for Learning

You can learn some version of swing at any ballroom or dance studio. However, to find group lessons and get your foot in your local swing dance community, your best bet would probably be to go online. Many of the swing dance clubs around the country are created and populated by computer-savvy people in their twenties and thirties, although at a swing dance you will probably see all age groups, from high school up through senior citizens. Swing dancing in a ballroom and swing dancing at a swing dance have entirely different looks and feels. Swing dances are often held weekly and/or monthly, but swing nightclubs are not prevalent in all parts of the country—often the swing club or group will rent out a given facility for the lessons and event. Be comfortable if you are going to a swing dance lesson. You do not need to be as formal as you would be for a ballroom lesson, but denim is not recommended. Business-casual dress with comfortable close-heeled shoes is recommended for both ladies and gentlemen for a swing lesson.

### Where to Dance and Attire for Going out Dancing

As mentioned in the previous section, not every city or geographical area has a venue specifically dedicated to swing dancing like they do for the other three subcultures. A search for your local city and swing dance should reveal a local swing dance group or two. Because swing dances are not always held in nightclubs, it is unique to swing dance and ballroom dance that their events are often non-smoking. When dressing for an evening out swing dancing, you have a couple of options. You can go with business-casual attire for the ladies and gentlemen, and just look nice and clean-cut, or if you have them on hand, you can go all out and go vintage. Many swing dance aficionados have fairly elaborate vintage wardrobes to truly step back into the big-band era. As always, close-heeled shoes are a must.

### Most Popular Dances

The swing subculture includes the lindy hop, jitterbug, jive, East coast swing, balboa, and West coast swing. You will find, however, that most swing dancers only truly dance one or two of the swing dances and simply know what the others are.

### Of Special Note

Swing dance is probably the least intimidating form of social dancing to get your feet wet with. However, depending on your geographical area, it can be a little difficult to find swing dance venues. If you are interested in swing but you can't seem to get wind of your local swing events, try country. Many of the instructors cross over between the swing and country subcultures and can probably point you in the right direction.

### Latin

Latin couples dancing is the hot and spicy corner of the dance world. Just as the dances and subcultures vary in different parts of Latin America, so the Latin dances and related dance subcultures vary across the globe.



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Paul Piebinga

### Where to Learn and Attire for Learning

You can find Latin dance instruction at many ballrooms; however, once you have the hang of the basic timing and some of the foundational moves, you might want to broaden your horizons. If you want to learn the truly Latin versions of the dances and dance in the subculture, you might be better off seeking out a specialized dance studio or a freelance instructor who teaches salsa, meringue, bachata, or cha-cha at a local Latin nightclub or even restaurant. The dress code might be dictated by where you are learning to dance and whether you will be staying out dancing to practice following your lesson. That being said, you should strive to be comfortable when learning the Latin dances; you will be getting an aerobic workout, especially with salsa. When learning, wear as comfortable of shoes as possible. Save your feet for when you go out dancing.

### Where to Dance and Attire for Going out Dancing

Salsa clubs are the most popular place to go out Latin dancing. Prepare yourself for a high-energy evening followed by a day of very sore feet. When Latin dancers, particularly salsa dancers, show up to party, they get down to business and go until the wee hours of the morning. Be prepared to dress to the nines in your club wear—ladies, this is the only dance subculture where strappy sandals are not only acceptable, but the norm for footwear. A few words of caution for the ladies regarding footwear: Try not to twist or break your ankles, and try to protect your toes from errant feet of other dancers. Gentlemen, dress sharply and wear polished shoes. Your clothing will most likely be dictated by your local climate and the season for both ladies and gentlemen.



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### Most Popular Dances

The most popular Latin dance is the salsa. There are several types of salsa out there, some of them being “called” dances, similar to a square dance, except they are performed in a circle (no corners necessary). However, the rumba, tango, meringue, bachata, cha-cha, mambo, and samba also fall into the Latin dance category.

### Of Special Note

As you dive into the Latin dancing subculture, keep in mind two key descriptive terms: fun and sensual. The Latin dances are often described as the most fun and sensual of all four social dance subcultures. As with any of the dance subcultures, it is important to be sensitive to cultural differences as you get out and embark upon new communities of people—everyone is out dancing to have a good time. If you are not Latin American by birth or heritage, keep in mind that you are immersing yourself in a corner of someone else’s heritage for the evening, so be respectful of that.

## Dance Instruction Types

**B**EFORE JUMPING right in and taking dance lessons, you might want to consider taking a few minutes and reading this next section. Much like everything that's been talked about in the book so far, there are many different ways of learning and many different situations where it can take place. There are three main ways that people learn couples dancing:

- ▶ **Private lessons**
- ▶ **Group lessons**
- ▶ **DIY (Do It Yourself)**

Everyone is different, so it's hard to say that any one way is better than the others. With that in mind, we'll just break them down and talk a little bit about each one.

### Private Lessons

Private lessons usually consist of one or two students and one instructor. The private setting allows you to get tailored instruction to fit your dance styles, habits, or shortcomings. You can learn to dance in a relatively short period of time with private lessons if your budget will allow it. Private lessons are common in ballroom dance studios and normally run anywhere from about \$45 to \$150 per hour. You can also find freelance instructors in your area who often have an hourly rate that is less expensive than a local ballroom. Most people take private lessons so they can learn at their own pace and not have to worry about dancing in front of others. Some people take private lessons strictly

to have a partner to dance with in a social setting, while others do it for the health benefits, in the same way that people hire personal trainers at a gym to walk them through their daily workouts. Whatever the reason, private lessons can be extremely beneficial if you end up with the right instructor.

### Group Lessons

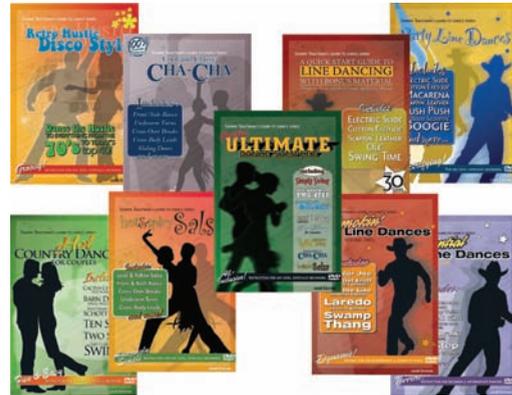
Group lessons usually consist of one or two instructors and anywhere from about six to a hundred people. In group dance lessons there is no standard for minimum or maximum class size. The group setting differs from the private setting in that the information is general and not specifically tailored to your dancing as an individual. Even if you're taking private lessons, group lessons can reinforce your learning without too much of a budget constraint. Group lessons are more affordable than private lessons and can run anywhere from about \$3 per class to \$25 per class, and usually there are no contracts involved. There are many social benefits of going to group classes, including meeting other people interested in social dancing, getting a chance to dance and practice with a number of partners throughout your evening, not being the center of attention or having an instructor watching every move you make, and having the ability to watch and learn from the others in the class. In addition to the social benefits, going to different group classes also gives you a chance to see, meet, and evaluate a few instructors in your area.



## DIY (Do It Yourself)

A third and increasingly more common approach to learning to dance is through self-teaching. Though some of the social benefits are not present with learning by a book, video, or DVD, there are many other benefits that can be derived. First and foremost, you'll get structure and documentation when you do it on your own. Second, you'll be able to learn on your own time and set your own schedule. Third, you'll be able to visualize and conceptualize the dancing as you go by looking at pictures or video of what you're learning. When you first start out in dancing, you'll be creating what's called *muscle memory*.

***Muscle memory* describes the process by which certain physical movements, such as dance steps, become automatic. Once you have established a step in your muscle memory, you no longer have to think about it while you execute it—it becomes natural to your body.**



For learning or reinforcing the basics the right way to pave a road for future learning, it's best to have some type of reference material to go back to that has the exact information you'll need on it. Learning on your own is much more affordable and less time-constrained than learning in either group lessons or private lessons, but it is best to use it as one type of instruction and not the only one. Supplement either private or group lessons with the book-and-DVD combination, and you'll be surprised at how quickly you feel confident in the dance world.

## Choosing Your Instructor

In the final chapter, "Picture Yourself Dancing for Life," you'll find detailed information on next steps for all your dances and for choosing an instructor to assist you with the more intermediate and advanced levels of dancing. There are specific qualities and attributes for several different situations that you should be aware of when seeking out further instruction. Once you're comfortable with the basics of each of the dances, or the ones that you really want to know, you'll feel much more confident in going out, watching, and talking with instructors in your area. When you're ready to progress past the basics, you'll find this section to be invaluable because it will help you determine what's best for you.

## Rhythm and Music for Beginning Dancers

**C**ONTRARY TO POPULAR BELIEF, you do not need to know much about music to be a great dancer. Assuming you know very little about music, we're going to get you started here with the essentials that will have you feeling like a pro in no time. We'll briefly describe what you need to know about each of the following terms, and then we'll talk about how to apply these concepts to dance.

- ▶ **Beat.** The heartbeat of the music. What you would tap your feet to. The recurring pulsation that is constant and regular. Watch a metronome or a second hand on a clock or a watch, and you'll understand what to relate the beat to.
- ▶ **Step/count.** The amount of time allocated to each step taken. For example, a "slow" step denotes a step requiring two beats of music, and a "quick" step denotes a step requiring only one beat of music.
- ▶ **Measure.** The number of beats grouped together according to the time signature (the top number). For example, in most songs you'll hear a series of eight beats that continue to repeat themselves through the entire song.
- ▶ **Downbeat.** The first beat of a given measure. This is your starting point. You first have to know when the measure is ready to repeat itself, and then you get ready and go so that your first step is actually down on the first beat, or downbeat. This is where the expression "5-6-7-8" becomes extremely useful, because it prepares you for the ending of a measure and gives you your starting point.
- ▶ **Upbeat.** The last beat of a given measure. This beat is often called an "and" count when starting to move with the music. Rather than the "5-6-7-8" mentioned in the previous bullet point, one might say "ready, and" and then start dancing. It would be the equivalent of the count 8 in the previous example.
- ▶ **Rhythm.** The arrangement of beats in a given song. Essentially, rhythm is symmetrical groupings formed by the regular recurrence of either heavy or light accents. In a regular rhythm, the dancer's movements should look natural and be even and symmetrical, and all walking steps should be the same length.
- ▶ **Tempo.** The rate of "speed" of the music, measured in BPM (*beats per minute*). This is how you determine whether the song is slow, medium, or fast, and it will give you an idea of what dance to dance.
- ▶ **Phrase.** Two or more measures grouped together. This is more important for advanced dancers in dealing with choreography or in social dancing when you are trying to align your dance with the structure of the song, but it's good to understand. It may or may not help you immediately, but it will one day prove its value.



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Kiss Botond

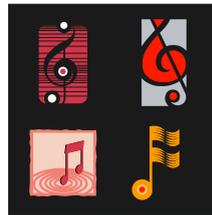
Practice what you just learned by trying the following steps. First set the stage by using either a metronome or some kind of device that keeps a steady beat aloud so you'll be able to follow along with it. Set the speed to go about one beat per second. This will give you approximately 60 BPM, or a tempo of 60 to start the following steps:

1. Count the beats aloud in a repeating eight-beat fashion. Start with one, go all the way through eight, and then start over with one, and so on. This will get you more familiar with what a measure is.
2. Clap your hands to the beat of the music, then snap your fingers to the beat of the music, and then tap either foot to the beat of the music. Do each one at least eight times to get a decent amount of practice.
3. Identify the upbeat and the downbeat and try to take a step each time the downbeat occurs. It doesn't matter which foot; you're simply trying to align your perception with your motor skills. The upbeat is where you'd start your motion, and the downbeat is where you'd come down to the floor with your foot.
4. Try walking with "slow" steps, which take up two beats. Start on the downbeat, or one, and walk on the numbers one, three, five, and seven, and then repeat it over and over. You can do this in place, in a small circle, or however it best fits in the room. The idea on this one is to take a step and then hold a beat, and then continue. Try not to completely stop while you're holding the beat, though—it will look choppy and unnatural.
5. Try walking with "quick" steps, which take up only one beat each. Start on the downbeat, or one, and walk on the numbers one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, and eight, and then repeat it over and over. Just like in Step 4, you can do it in whatever fashion best suits your surroundings.
6. Try walking with a combination of "slow" steps and "quick" steps. Start with doing eight slows and eight quicks, then try it with four slows and four quicks, and then try it by doing just two slows then two quicks, and repeat it over and over again.

The combination of the two slows and two quicks is very common in all types of social dancing and is something you really should spend some time working on before you get too far along. If you're able to transition between the two and feel as though you're doing so smoothly and evenly, then your rhythm is also being strengthened. If you don't feel natural yet, try to relax and take a deep breath. Dancing is nothing more than walking to different speeds, so if your walk is natural, it's just a matter of time until you can incorporate it into your dancing.



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## Leading and Following versus Choreography

“THEY’RE SO BEAUTIFUL together out on the dance floor. They must have had their dance choreographed!” Did they? Maybe. What exactly is choreography, and how is it different than lead-and-follow dancing? Well, each dance is a compilation of various moves that can be matched and mismatched throughout a song to produce the end-product dance. Choreography is when these moves are arranged in a predetermined pattern and are performed the same way with each repetition. Lead-and-follow dancing differs from choreography in the freedom of arrangement of the moves within a dance. A choreographed dance and a lead-and-follow dance can both have the same 15 moves used three times apiece. In the choreographed dance, you would end up with the same choreographed routine repeated three times, but in the lead-and-follow routine, you would see a dance with no discernable repetition.

Is it possible to have a beautiful, flowing dance without choreography? Absolutely. Lead-and-follow



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dancing can be just as elegant as choreographed dancing if both partners clearly understand the basic steps of the dance and their individual roles in their partnership on the dance floor.

Social dancing parallels other sports in more than just cardiovascular and physiological benefits for the participants. Lead-and-follow relationships exist in other corners of the sporting world in addition to the dance floor of a ballroom. For instance, imagine an all-American football game—the stands are packed with excited spectators, and the energy from the field is palpable. An intricate lead-and-follow plotline is about to unfold as the ball is kicked off.

Leading would be the equivalent of the quarterback calling each play at the line of scrimmage based on the situation (the players, the defense, the time clock, and so on). Following would be what the rest of the offense would do based on what the quarterback called. When the play is over, the quarterback reassesses the field and game situation and calls another play, and the game continues with the quarterback leading the offense through a selection of plays based on the score, field position, player composition, weather, and so on.

Choreography would be the equivalent of the entire offense putting a collection of plays together in a very specific order and calling it something like “First Quarter Plays.” With choreography, when the offense takes the field, they know exactly what they’re going to do on the first play, on the second play, on the third, and so on, regardless of the situation or who they’re playing. If someone is injured, the play continues on, just less that player and their role in the play sequence.



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Although both choreography and lead-and-follow dancing involve tremendous amounts of practice and commitment, there are definite differences between the two. The main difference between leading and following and choreography is that one is for dancing with others in social situations (leading and following) and the other is for dancing a routine with a specific individual, either for a special event, such as a wedding, or in a competition. Typically, a choreographed routine is useable only with a specific partner and only really looks good with the song for which the dance was choreographed. Understanding the fundamentals of social dancing, including footwork and floor position, as well as the basics of partner dancing is critical in both types of dancing.

Lead-and-follow dancing combines a number of skills that are tested on every dance outing and in every dance. The skills that must be mastered include the dance floor basics (covered in Chapter 2), a clear understanding of both the leaders' and the followers' responsibilities, the basics of whatever dance you're dancing, and a great deal of common courtesy and respect toward others. Though leading and following might appear a bit overwhelming, the pieces that make up the whole are not overly complicated by themselves and can be picked up with just a little practice.

Although good choreography and seamless lead-and-follow dancing are indistinguishable to the untrained observer, choreography often deviates from the basics of social dance because it is a learned pattern in which both parties know the entire sequence of movements in advance rather than depending on interpersonal communication on the dance floor to create the dance on the spot. In a choreographed dance, both partners are taught the exact steps and the order in which they'll dance them.

The advantages of this type of dancing are that both partners know what's coming up and know exactly where they need to be. Some people need and like this kind of structure, and it works great for them. People who are getting married often want a short choreographed routine to do to their first dance because neither partner wants to take a chance leading or following in front of others. The disadvantage of a choreographed dance is that it's usually a dance that can only be done with the partner you learned it with, and oftentimes it's to a specific song. There are typically very few lead-and-follow elements to a choreographed dance, yet they are made to look the part.