

Ten Ballroom & Latin American Dancing Qualities

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To improve your Ballroom and Latin dancing there are various stages and things you need to take care of. Listed below are some things to help you in the development of your dancing. The priorities and quality requirements will differ in sequence depending on whether you are a **social dancer**, **examination dancer**, **beginner competitor** or **seasoned competitor**.

1. **Timing.** This is about **moving to music, following the correct beat**. This is a fundamental that must be achieved by all dancers. To be able to dance to timing, one must first be able to identify the various beats in the music. For those who have difficulty, the best way to improve this aspect is to listen to more music and consciously count the beats in your mind. A very important point to note is the **timing occurs when the foot touches the ground**, e.g. one hearing count 1, the a part of the foot must have touched the ground; if you wait till you hear count 1 and then start to move your feet to the final destination, you will be late.
2. **Footwork.** The various heel, toe action must be achieved. Initially, just memorize it. Later as you get more familiar, try to understand why it is so. At a slightly higher level, you will notice that **correct movement results in correct footwork, but correct foot work may not necessarily lead to correct movement**. But incorrect footwork is definitely the result of incorrect movement or lack of knowledge.
3. **Posture.** Posture is what gives the initial impression and is essential to improve the look of one's dancing. Common problems include **slouching, heading being too close together, chicken wings, losing the right side position (for ballroom)**. A common fallacy for ballroom is that ladies need to bend from their waist to get the big shape look. This is not only incorrect but may lead to injuries.
4. **Movement.** For the swing ballroom dances, good movement is about having **good swing action and correct rise and fall**. For the tango, it's about **moving sharply from foot to foot and having that characteristic staccato action**. For Latin dances like rumba and cha cha, it's about getting the **hip action**. For samba, it's having the **bounce and pelvic action**.
5. **Lead and follow.** Leading provides 3 elements: **Direction, timing and speed**. Direction means to tell the follower where to go. Timing means to tell the follower when to do the movement. Speed tells the follower how fast to do the movement (sharp or gradual action). The leader has to deliver clear indication to the follower and the follower needs to be sensitive and reactive to the indication.
6. **Floor craft.** This is about good traffic navigation. Floor craft can be achieved by **changing alignment, changing variations or having checking action**. Good lead and follow is an essential pre-requisite to floor craft. The leader has to be aware of the surroundings and constantly plan pre-emptive actions. This is a skill that takes time to master. Floor craft is probably more important in the moving dances (waltz, tango, foxtrot, quickstep, samba, Paso Doble) as there would be a need to avoid other couples on the floor while they are moving around. See article on "Floor craft" for more information.
7. **Rhythm.** Timing is about being on time to the beats. Having rhythm is about **musical interpretation**. This is achieved by **good movement and controlled actions** according to different rhythms of music. One must be able to feel the music, rather than just listening to beats in a straight manner. **Certain movements may be delayed while some may be speeded up**.
8. **Character.** Each of the dances in ballroom and Latin has different characteristics. It's important to **understand the differences** so that each dance looks like what it is and not all look alike.
9. **Choreography.** At the lower level, most routines are fairly similar, it's only as you move up the ladder that choreography begin to matter more. However, it's more important to be able to execute your choreography well than to have fantastic choreography that is not danced well. Hence, it's only until you can achieve the above that imaginative choreography becomes important. **With good fundamentals, routines can easily be picked up, but the reverse is not true**.
10. **Performance.** For examinations purposes, the emphasis is on technically correct dancing. For competitors (especially at the higher level), the emphasis is on performance. **Facial expression** is also crucial. Performance is about **entertaining** the crowd (which includes the judges). It's about the **chemistry** between the man and lady on the floor.

Happy dancing!