

# Lead and Follow in Partner Dancing

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Lead and follow enables good co-ordination between the leader and follower, whether or not a routine is being followed. It's a fallacy that just because you have a fixed routine, there is no need for proper lead and follow. Another fallacy is that Latin and Ballroom cannot be lead. It's just a matter of learning how to do it. Lead and follow is a critical skill that needs to be developed early. Lead and following enables the following to be indicated:

- **Direction.** Direction is about where you want the follower to move towards and is primarily to indicate what kind of variation to be executed.
- **Timing.** Timing is about when to start moving and when to continue to move.
- **Speed.** Speed is about how fast the movement should be. Movements can be slow, medium paced or fast. Sometimes there may be changes in speed.

In the Latin (Cha Cha, Rumba, Samba, Paso Doble and Jive) and Social (Salsa, Rock and roll, disco rock), there are the following kinds of leads:

- **Weight change.** The frame is kept more or less constant and lead is transmitted through the frame, feeling the changes in weight. This is used in some basic Latin movements and a lot in Ballroom.
- **Physical.** The connecting arms are extended / contracted, using a certain amount of physical force to push or pull to communicate the lead. This is used mainly for Latin.
- **Shaping.** By change the shape of the frame, lead can also be communicated. This is used mainly in Latin and some advanced Ballroom moves.
- **Visual.** The leader will 'challenge' the follower to follow the steps by visual example. This is not very effective for followers who don't know the steps.

In the Ballroom dances (Waltz, Quickstep, Slow foxtrot, Viennese Waltz and Tango), **leading is primarily through the centre of the two bodies and sometimes the man's right hand.** Hence for effective leading in Ballroom, a certain amount of body contact is necessary. If you have no body contact, then you need to rely on the body frame and right hand for lead, which is not as effective, but can still work at the earlier stages.

To be a good leader, the following qualities are required:

- **Timing.** Follow timing clearly.
- **Tone.** Giving a clear feel in terms of direction, timing and speed to the follower.
- **Sensitive.** Being sensitive to the balance and position of the follower and helping the follower to balance and move correctly to the next step.
- **Picture.** Providing the frame for the pretty picture (follower).
- **Steps.** Knowledge of the leader's steps. Knowledge of the follower's steps.
- **Protection.** Taking care of the follower is the leader's responsibility. He has to make sure that they do not hit other couples and get hurt.
- **Multitasking.** Being able to concentrate on leading the current variation and planning ahead the next few variations.

To be a good follower, the following qualities are required:

- **Timing.** Follow timing clearly.
- **Tone.** Being toned but still light.
- **Responsive.** Be responsive like a sensor touch remote control.
- **Picture.** Being the pretty picture in the frame.
- **Steps.** Knowledge of the followers' steps.

**A combination of a good leader and average follower will work quite well. However, the combination of an average leader and a good follower don't work as well.** Because a leader has more things to learn, a leader's skill generally takes more time and is more difficult to pick up initially compared to the followers. Hence, at the early stages, the leaders generally have a more difficult time than the followers. Some people call this phase "**Beginners' Hell**". However, once the leaders get the hang of leading, they may quickly surpass the followers unless the followers continue to improve.

Leaders should **seek feedback from the followers as to how they felt the lead and whether it was clear.** Through continuous feedback and refinement, the leaders can hone their skills and provide the followers a clear lead and thus an enjoyable dance experience. Leaders are advised to preserve and learn this important skill well.