



Dance Etiquette

Asking For A Dance

Would you like to dance? This describes the conventions for inviting someone onto the dance floor. Includes a helpful tip for ensuring that you don't inadvertently direct your invitation to the wrong person!

Getting Asked To Dance

Many women are still reluctant to ask men to dance, though I encourage women to do so. For those who wish to be asked to dance more often, I offer a few insights into the minds of leaders (primarily men), and some possibly helpful advice.

First, the insights, which are somewhat obvious.

- Leaders don't want to get turned down, so they'll pick followers whom they think will say yes.
- Experienced leaders often seek experienced partners.
- Leaders, particularly men, seek attractive partners.

Now, some practical advice on how to get asked to dance.

- Sitting or standing near the dance floor with a look of interest works a lot better than hiding behind a table or otherwise removing yourself from the dance floor. Leaders may equate distance with disinterest. Also, since it's somewhat embarrassing to be turned down by someone whom you have obviously sought out, some leaders will avoid this extra risk by choosing more casually accessible partners--i.e., those near the floor.
- Shoes do not make the dancer, but experienced dancers tend to wear ballroom dance shoes. Thus leaders seeking experienced partners may look for followers wearing ballroom shoes. Dancers wearing sneakers or clunky shoes are generally beginners. There will be exceptions, of course, but it's a pretty good guideline.
- Taking lessons is as much the follower's responsibility as that of the leader. I've met many followers who've ended a dance by mentioning--often with a bit of pride--that they've never taken a class in that particular dance, but just follow it. Well, I could usually tell.
- It will surprise no one that men tend to ask pretty women to dance. For what it's worth, I also frequently see women clustering around handsome men. But a pleasant, positive personality goes a long way towards repeat business for both leaders and followers. Don't assume--or worse, announce--that mistakes are your partner's fault. Show enthusiasm, and thank your partner for each dance. Smile more. (The last one really works!)
- A practical tip: yes, a short skirt will draw men :-). But make sure that it doesn't bind



Pragmatic Dance Etiquette Tips

(Primarily for Swing Dancers)

Practical Partner-changing & Related Advice

Swing folks are friendly around here, and typically change partners almost every song -- although you certainly don't have to! We have put together a few practical tips, mostly related to partner-changing, based on what we've observed of area customs.

(1) Who may ask for a dance?

Both men and women may ask someone for a dance. The classical phrasing is "May I have this dance?" The contemporary wording is usually "Would you like to dance?" but anything even remotely resembling it will do.

Note: People have a mild natural tendency to dance with people they already know, just because it's easier. This gives an initial appearance of cliquishness at the local dances - but in almost all cases it's a false impression, and the dancers are happy to dance with anyone who knows even slightly how to dance. So just ask for a dance!

(2) Timing: when EXACTLY to ask someone to dance -- a pragmatic tip for novice gentlemen dancers.

Normally, one asks at the beginning of a song. However, when we Gentlemen are brand new at Swing and don't have a very big repertoire, we often get dismayed by the prospect of leading our 5 or 6 moves for an entire three-minute song -- we feel that the fascination is gone (for her) long before the end of the song. So here's a secret tip: wait on the sidelines until halfway through a song and then ask her to dance. Ingenious, yes? (Also, during the song, switch back to Closed Position from time to time.)

(3) Be specific!

Always ask one particular person to dance. Do not go up to 2 people standing together and ask, "Would either of you care to dance?" What will happen is each of them will hesitate and defer politely to the other, but you'll see it as total rejection. (This is the Voice of Bitter Experience talking at ya -- from both ends of the experience.)

Reverse advice: Sometimes the only reasonable option is to go up to 2 or more people standing together and ask "Would any of you like to dance?" If you do this, be prepared for an embarrassingly long period (it's only a few seconds, but it feels like forever) while the people hem and haw, checking politely and nonverbally with each other to see if anyone has a strong preference one way or the other. At some point, each and every one of them will defer to the others, and you'll feel like an idiot the entire time this is happening. Just stand there and keep smiling, and eventually someone will say yes. Probably.

(4) When to say yes.

If someone asks you to dance, dance with 'em -- unless you don't want to. On the one hand, it's friendlier to say yes, and the dance is only 3 minutes, so it won't kill you. On the other hand, it's the 21st century and you are no one's slave. Etiquette strongly supports you in saying no if the person is dangerous or offensive (physically, morally or olfactorily), or if you've promised the dance to someone else already, or if you are resting or heading for the water trough.

(5) How to say no.

If you want to say no to someone who asks you to dance, do so. It's your life and limbs. Etiquette explicitly says that you do not have to give reasons, despite the strong American predilection for doing so. Something like, "No thank you, not just now; perhaps later" works fine. (You can keep saying it all night if you have to.) Add a smile to cushion the blow. Then wait out the whole song (gracious classical approach) -- or at least 20 seconds (modern approach) -- before you dash onto the dance floor with someone else.

6) When someone says no.

If someone declines to dance with you, accept it graciously. If he or she offers an excuse, pretend to believe it. Let's face it: either the excuse is true or it's because of you personally. If it's personal, you probably don't want to know about it, so just assume that the excuse is true. Around here, you'll almost certainly be right -- the local Swing dancers are remarkably nice in general. For example, if you get rejected right after a fast song, chances are the person is genuinely fatigued. Wait about two songs and then ask again. When to give up and assume it's personal? You might want to use the Rule that someone once told us was standard amongst the Country Club set in which he grew up: if someone declines 3 times without offering a compensating alternative (such as "next song, okay?"), forget it.

(7) Danger!

Physical danger. If you are being maimed during a song, **stop dancing** and head for the sidelines -- even if it's the middle of a song. Say something along the lines of, "Gee, my shoulder suddenly seems to be hurting" if you are timid, or, if you are more straightforward, "Excuse me, but you've hurt my arm. I'm going to stop now." And then walk away -- it's not a discussion; it's not a negotiation; and you do not need permission or approval from the maimer to stop dancing with him/her.

TIP: If it happens once, it might just be a random accident. But if it happens twice, it will happen a dozen times -- your partner just doesn't know what's going wrong nor how to fix it. End it! For your shoulders' sake!

WARNING: You will probably feel completely weird the first 2 or 3 times you do this, and the look of stunned surprise and hurt on the maimer's face will make you feel even weirder. In our dance classes, we actually practice this business 3 or 4 times, to get those weird initial repetitions out of the way -- it should be a part of your natural behavioral repertoire, not some theoretical construct that you have never used. If it helps steel you for the effort, we'll mention that one of our favorite female dancers was out of commission for over 2 weeks once because a guy repeatedly hurt her shoulders while she was being too "polite" to end the dance early.

DIAGNOSIS: Most casual injuries in Swing happen at two points: (a) Yanking-jerking. Some men -- and far too many women! -- will yank during the Rock-Step. Disaster. (b) Outside Turns. These include the Arch Turns and even the standard exit from the Sweetheart / Cuddle / Wrap / Basket. Many guys will pull the Lady's hand down towards the end of an Outside Turn move -- very bad for the Lady's shoulder. Worse, many Ladies were never taught good arm skills (super-short summary: elbows down, elbows in!), compounding the disaster.

Fondling and groping. Same principle applies if you are being fondled in ways you dislike: stop dancing, say something to the creep, and head for the sidelines. How can you know if the groping was intended or accidental? Trust your feelings, Luke -- you will be correct 99.99 percent of the time. Yes, there are one or two groppers on the local dance scene, all male at the moment -- the most common local technique is that he switches to a swoopy ballroom-ish style and pulls the woman's upper body so close that her breasts are pressed against his chest, while he pretends that he doesn't notice. (In case you are wondering, this was NEVER correct for ballroom styles, and every guy on the planet knows this. If it happens, you are being groped.)

We strongly encourage the victims of groppers to **say something**: to the creep, to the managers of the dance, and to your dance teacher past or present -- your dance teacher can direct the information quietly to the right people, if you want it handled quietly and anonymously. And to everyone else you know. If you don't, a lot of other people are going to get victimized. And you could have prevented it.

Gentlemen Moving/Kicking Backwards: Gents, never move or kick backwards until you check that the area there is unoccupied! Usually, it happens halfway through a move that started out forward, so you are not as attentive to danger as usual -- get attentive! *Note to others:* If you see a guy moving or kicking backwards towards you, assume that he does NOT know what he's doing and, for your and your partner's safety, get out of the way.

(8) When the song ends.

When finished a dance, (i) **APPLAUD THE BAND EVERY TIME** (many people rudely forget), then (ii) thank your partner with something like, "Thanks for the dance!" Traditionally,

one added a third step: (iii) walk your partner back to the sidelines. However, the time for finding a new partner between songs is so short these days, that most partners prefer that you skip this bit.

(9) How many songs in a row?

Dance one song with someone, then change partners. Maybe two in a row, but not more than that. (We have no idea why, but this seems to be the way it works around here.)

(10) Dance with partners of all skill levels.

Overcome your shyness and do it. It's good for you. And it makes everyone a better dancer sooner, which means more fun the next time out.

Dancing with someone **LESS** skilled than you. Be gracious -- stick to stuff she or he can handle, and then, when you are comfortable with each other's dancing, slip in something one degree harder, and then (maybe) two degrees harder. Come back to those one or two things until your partner is comfortable with them. Never over-dance your partner's capabilities. Always try to make your partner look and feel like a terrific dancer. And for heaven's sake, **NEVER** criticize or offer instruction, unless your partner explicitly and repeatedly demands that you do so. (Do all instructing on the sidelines, by the way, never on the dance floor.)

Dancing with someone **MORE** skilled than you. Concentrate! Smile! Do your best! Suppress the urge to apologize, except maybe once per song just to get it out of your system. Don't worry if you flub things -- the second or third time they happen you'll get the hang of 'em.

See you on the dance floor!

A Guide for Women

19 easy ways to attract more men to dance with you.

What men look for when inviting women to dance.

At dances, men gravitate to women who are easily approachable. A woman doesn't have to be the best dancer, or the best looking, or the youngest and prettiest. Any woman can attract more invitations to dance merely by making herself more approachable. Here are 19 easy ways to do that.

I'm a man who dances often. Many of my regular dance partners tell me they want to dance more, but men don't ask them enough. I know these women are good dancers and attractive to men. So I've started talking with them about how men select women at dances. Here you will find the best of the techniques I have discovered.

A few weeks ago I attended a large dance of about 300 people. One woman started the familiar lament about not getting enough dance invitations. So I briefly explained just three of the 19 techniques below. She didn't believe they would work. I told her, "Go try it. I'll sit here and time you."

She did. I timed her on my watch: 22 seconds later a handsome man asked her to dance.

When the song ended, she rushed over to me, almost breathless with excitement, saying she'd wanted to dance with that particular man, but was too shy to ask him.

Your mileage will vary - I make no guarantees of 22 seconds every time. But from experience with many of my dance partners, I know that these methods are certain to attract more dance invitations for any woman.

I'll start with how to dress for the dance. Your purpose is to be more attractive to men who dance, not just men in general. There's a huge difference: If you want just any male attention, simply wear something that displays your belly button or your cleavage or your legs - and you won't need to read any more of this. On the other hand, if you want men to invite you to dance, then you need to know what men who dance are looking for. Here are my four recommendations for what you should wear:

#1: Wear a single layer top.

Two layers of clothing slip and slide under a man's hand on your back. That makes it difficult to lead you. A man with dance training will know this consciously. Other men won't be able to say so, but they'll have a 'gut feel' about it. So do not wear a vest or jacket or an over-blouse. You will carry a sweater, because dance rooms are usually very cool, but you won't wear that while you dance.

#2: Avoid bare shoulders or back.

Yes, bare skin attracts attention from men. But after you've danced a little while, bare skin can feel damp and clammy to the man. Men who enjoy dancing prefer the feel of silk, rayon or cotton. Sleeveless is fine - and cool for you - but avoid dresses with open shoulders or back. (Unless at a very formal dance - where your purpose is to be seen more than to dance.)

#3: Keep jewelry to a minimum.

Long necklaces and big bracelets catch in clothing. Dangling earrings are distracting. Large rings can scratch a man's hand. Men are aware of this. Wearing loads of jewelry is like a sign saying, "Stay Away." So keep all your jewelry small and simple.

#4: Shoes are your most important accessory for attracting men who dance.

Men who dance will avoid women with the wrong shoes. Don't wear sandals of any kind, or any rubber-sole walking shoes. Don't wear ultra-high heels that have you teetering instead of dancing. Suitable shoes for dancing are flats, pumps or medium heels. They can be fancy - sparkles are fine. Just be certain that shoes are secure on your feet - not lose or floppy.

Now you're dressed for dancing and you're on the way to the party. Even as you arrive, there are ways to immediately make yourself more approachable to men. Here are four easy things you can do.

#5: On your way in, say "Hi" to many men you pass.

That's all, just "Hi" - as you walk in from the parking lot, as you stand in line to pay, as you walk to a table to put down your purse and sweater, as you get a drink from the bar, as you walk to the restroom and back. Just a "Hi", with a smile, to many men. Even other men - to whom you didn't say "Hi" - will notice you doing that. That's often all it takes for you to appear easily approachable to men, and for you to get lots of invitations to dance.

If you just say "hi", you will be highly unusual among women today - in a positive way. At public dances and parties the vast majority of women avoid looking directly at men. If you simply say, "Hi", and smile, you set yourself apart as a woman who is friendly to men. That's rare in today's social climate.

#6: Circulate (walk slowly) around the edge of the dance area.

Men who want to dance will stand near the dance floor. Simply say "Hi" to some of them, smile, and keep walking and circulating. The men who don't or won't dance will stay far from the floor, sitting at the sides, or congregating around the bar. Don't waste time circulating there.

#7: Discover the 'traffic lanes'.

As you circulate, look for where most dancers walk onto the dance floor. When the music changes, look for congestion, a 'traffic jam' of people in one or two areas. When you are ready to dance, you will come back to this area. Usually these traffic areas are the two front corners of the dance floor, but not always. Sometimes near the lobby or entrance doors. Sometimes next to the bar. When the song changes, determine the location for these entrance/exit 'lanes'. They won't be marked in any way - you must watch the flow of people between songs.

#8. Stand apart from other women.

A woman standing alone is - by far - most comfortable for men to approach. The quickest way to get more offers to dance is simply stand alone. Yes, I know, it is politically incorrect to ignore your 'sistahs', but you must decide if you are there to socialize with other women, or to dance with men. Your choice. When two women stand together, men are reluctant to ask one of them to dance. If three or more women are standing together - very few men will approach. If a group of women is sitting down, then men conclude they prefer to be with other women, not to dance with men. Women sitting in groups get few invitations to dance. Men call groups of women "hen houses". We avoid going into hen houses - unless we already know you or find you extremely appealing. So, circulate by yourself, go to the bar by yourself, go to the restroom by yourself - and you will easily make yourself more approachable than most other women at the dance.

So, now you've circulated and said "hi" to a variety of men. You've already made yourself easily approachable. I bet that by now you've already had more invitations to dance than most other women at the party.

Still, there is more you can do to make yourself highly approachable. If you love to dance, then I want you to have lots of invitations from lots of men! So, here are six additional ways get many more invitations to dance.

#9. Stand in the traffic lane area that you observed earlier.

As the music changes, go stand right in this area. People will have to walk around you to get on or off the dance floor. That is exactly what you want to happen. Of course, you are standing alone. Men will see you as a woman who is in exactly the right place for an invitation to dance.

Few women know about this traffic lane area. Fewer have courage to stand there as people are moving on and off the floor. But this is exactly where men who are dancing will be. Those are the desirable men for you: They are far more likely to invite you to dance than any of the guys leaning against the bar.

#10. Stand so your toes touch the edge of the dance floor.

At most dances, there is a proper wood dance floor, surrounded by a carpeted area with the tables and chairs. If so, stand on edge of the carpet, with your toes touching the side of the wood dance floor. Literally, have your toes touching the edge of the wood. Not one foot away, not six inches away - but toes touching wood. This sends a non-verbal message to men that you are available to dance right now. That makes you easily approachable. However, don't stand on the wood floor. That signals you are waiting for a specific partner; that you reserved the next dance, and are waiting for him at that spot. So stay off the wood floor until you've actually been offered a dance.

#11. Hold your arms at waist level.

Keep your elbows bent so forearms are at your waistline - standard dancers' ready position. Gives body language signal that you are ready to dance.

Do not hold a drink or anything else in your hands. Do not fold your arms. Do not let your arms hang down at your sides. Never cross your palms in front of your skirt. Just hold your arms at waist level with hands relaxed, perhaps fingertips touching.

#12. Sway gently to the music.

Move your body slightly, but noticeably, to the feeling of the music. Not full dance movements, just enough to indicate you are ready to dance. Moving to the music is one of the easiest, non-verbal signals any woman can use to effortlessly attract more invitations to dance.

#13. Look only at the dancers out on the floor.

Look as if the dancers are the most wonderful sight you have ever seen. Let your eyes shine with delight and excitement - even if your stomach is in knots from feeling exposed and nervous. Look as if you love dancing and everything about it.

#14. Do not, DO NOT, look at any men while you standing ready to dance.

Looking around makes you appear overly eager and desperate. Men tend to avoid such women. Instead, simply look out at the dancers already on the floor.

At this time, do not say "hi" to any passing men. Just stand patiently, and continue looking out at the dancers. Don't look around at the band, or at the decorations, or at your women friends at a table behind you. Just look out at the dancers and let your expression show you are enjoying what you see. This gives men a chance to look you over. And that will make it easier for men to approach you.

#15. If a man approaches from the side, don't turn to look at him.

A man with dance training will approach in front of a woman so she can see him coming. But not all men know this, and at a crowded party it often isn't possible. So expect some men to approach from the side. When that happens, DO NOT look at him. Turning to look sideways makes you appear desperate. Just keep looking ahead at the dancers on the floor. You want to give a man the chance to look you over. Only when he touches your arm or verbally asks, "Do you want to dance?", only then look, smile, and nod or say "Sure".

If you use even just a few of these 15 methods, you will attract more men to dance with you. In fact, you'll probably attract so many men that your women friends may not be so friendly after that

evening. You're on your own to handle that situation.

What if you want to dance even more? Is it okay for a woman to ask men to dance? Yes, in these liberated times, that's perfectly fine. Almost any man will be delighted and complimented by any woman who asks him to dance. Men have been doing the asking all our lives. When a woman takes the risk of asking us, she immediately gets our respect and admiration.

If you ask men to dance, I recommend four ways to make it easier and more relaxed for you to do that. But first, you know that men sometimes get turned down when they ask a woman to dance. Men are used to being turned down by women. But women are not so comfortable being turned down by men: big fear of rejection. It happens. You need to be prepared for this fact. So, if you want to do the asking, here's how to make it much more relaxed and far less threatening for you:

#16. Never ask a man to dance.

That's right - never say to a man, "Would you like to dance?" or "May I have this dance?" If you ask, it puts him on the spot to answer instantly. He may be surprised that a woman asks, and may stumble and get embarrassed. No woman wants to risk causing that at a dance party. Plus asking is difficult for the woman, because there is that chance of being rejected. So never ask a man to dance! Instead...

#17. Tell the man you want to dance with him.

Simply say, "I want to dance with you." Just that, in exactly those words. Most women have a lot of experience telling men what they want. And men are used to hearing what women want. So when you tell a man what you want, both of you are in socially familiar territory.

Plus, in the right circumstances, many men enjoy providing for a "wanting woman". So to make yourself more attractive to men, simply tell them what you want.

Then it is up to the man to take action. The man might walk you out onto the dance floor right then. Or he might say, "Sure, later", and find you later on. Or he might say, "Maybe later", and not find you later, or ever. If that happens, you won't be terribly embarrassed and neither will he.

If you are still not getting enough invitations to dance, you can...

#18. Tell several men at the same time.

Do you want to instantly make yourself highly attractive to lots of men at any dance. It's this easy: Walk up to any small group of men you find attractive and say, "I want to dance with you ... and you ... and you, too!" Then prepare yourself for lots of fun. And be sure you are wearing comfortable shoes because you are going to be dancing non-stop!

Now, what if you really, really, want to dance with one certain man. Okay, here's the method to use that he won't be able to resist...

#19. Add a touch to your words.

Always use exactly the words, "I want to dance with you." Then - as you say that - touch the man you desire.

Your touch can be to place your hand gently on his arm, or use one finger tip to caress the top button of his shirt - as you look at him and smile and say, "I want to dance with you." I guarantee you will get a lot attention from that man!

So, now you know 19 easy ways to attract more men to dance with you. I've observed that a woman who is dancing is a happy woman. I'm certain that these suggestions will increase your dancing happiness.

If you use these ideas, I hope you'll send email and let me know about your experiences.

By Dave Weston
Los Altos, California

Why won't men ask me to dance?

by: Tibor Kaldor

This is the foremost question many women ponder sitting bored at a dance event.

"Why do I have to wait for someone to ask me to dance?"

You don't! Get up out of your chair, cruise the floor, make yourself visible, walk over to a likely man and ask, "May I have a dance." Admittedly, for a woman, or even a man, this takes a bit of courage. The fact is every person at this event has come to dance. The likelihood is strong that that you won't be refused. This is the rule: you **must** dance with someone who requests. You **must** dance at least one dance; it is simply polite.

However, there are a few polite excuses. Like "I am so sorry, I just refused that other person, and immediately I cannot accept from you. Anyways, I just danced 19 songs in a row, and I have to sit down for a second. Please ask me again later."

When you receive a "yes, I would love to," it's an idea to introduce yourself. You could say "I'm just a beginner, so please be gentle." Most men are flattered to be asked, and are pleased as punch to give the ladies a hand. On the other hand, most women are flattered to be asked, and are pleased as pansies to give the man a hand.

When you're done, say thank you, and drag (escort) the lady back to her seat, unless she is grabbed en-route by some other eager man. If your dance with this person was not a particularly satisfying experience, resist offering advice, or if you really want to help, be brief. Try to be pleasant and even upbeat; recall your learning period. Avoid saying "Don't ask me again, especially until you've learned how to step on the floor, not my feet".

Beginner dancers are shy and embarrassed and therefore deterred from freely asking a stranger for a dance. It may feel comfortable and secure to always dance with your regular partner, but it's like the blind leading the blind. As with any new experience, beginners *must persevere to climb this platform and reach a higher level*. Beginners should ask more experienced dancers because here they will find consideration and guidance. More experienced dancers should offer dances to starters in a spirit of mentorship. It builds confidence on both sides.

A dance is a social event. Make new friends, get acquainted, and arrange a rendez-vous. That's a fancy word for dance practice. You're not yet being invited to meet the parents. You're being invited to assist the other person to facilitate the learning process at a workshop or an evening of dance. You will both benefit by being more competent and confident. This applies strongly to couples as well; when you meet another couple, dance with them.

If you are going to ask the other person on a dance "date", advice for that is whole other subject. Dance patterns for a date event are the same, however tread carefully with the emotion patterns.

See you on the parquet. That's a fancy word for "Enjoy dancing".



We all get heavier as we get older because there's a lot more information in our heads. So I'm not fat, I'm just really intelligent and my head couldn't hold any more so it started filling up the rest of me!

That's my story and I'm sticking to it!