



### Finding a Good Dance Teacher

Anyone can be a dancer but not everyone has the skills and aptitude to be an effective dance instructor.

There is more to teaching than just choreographing a few dance moves and expecting students to blindly follow suit and, it takes a great deal of effort to train awkward beginners into skilled dancers that can proudly showcase their craft to the world.

Of course, people have differing opinions on what being a good dance teacher entails; some would prefer a teacher with more relaxed teaching methods; while others work best with a teacher that is strict and micromanaging...there is no one style of teaching to rule them all.

But, no matter your teaching methods, there are a few benchmark qualities that they should all possess in order to teach effectively so, here are some of the essential attributes that aspiring dancers should expect from their dance teachers.



#### Education, Experience

Some of the best dance instructors have trained extensively in their art and by the time they are in their 30's, most of them have already received an extensive education at dance schools, universities and through ongoing studies in related fields.

#### Patience

Teaching dance is an arduous task!

Students enrolled in a dance class have varying degrees of skill and as such, can absorb and learn material at different paces.

There will always be students who will learn more slowly than their peers and others that are quicker than the average...having to adjust the learning material to accommodate these students can be taxing for the teacher.

Patience is always a hallmark virtue of any good teacher and for the struggling student, a patient dance teacher can make or break his or her motivation to study the art.

#### Flexibility and Sensitivity

A good dance teacher is sensitive to the needs of his or her students.

He or she must be able to personalise their instruction and make changes and revisions at the drop of a hat, so as to ensure that each and every student is able to keep up with the lessons.

### Professionalism

Respect is given where respect is due; an effective and respectable teacher should always be at the pinnacle of professionalism.

No student would like to be taught by someone who does not take each lesson seriously, and for many, dancing is more than an art; it's a lifestyle and the teacher should be able to show this respect for dancing in the way he or she acts during the lesson...whether it's the way they speak, explain or interact with the student/s.

### Organization

A dance lesson does not merely involve going through a random set of choreographed dance moves.

Each lesson should be tailored to accommodate a progressive form of learning, where the student is first taught the fundamentals, which would then form the foundation for later lessons.

The teacher should put an emphasis on prioritizing the mastery of the building blocks of movement in the relevant style, instead of letting his or her students do complicated sets of dance moves all at once.

An effective teacher knows that the body (and mind) needs time to adapt gradually to new movements, techniques and choreography.

### Passion

A teacher is also a lifelong student.

This means that he or she must be willing to learn and try new things so that students will never have a dull moment.

Some of the most effective dance instructors do not focus on just one style alone; they are able to use and adapt different styles for their lessons.

The passion of the teacher must show through and rub off on his or her students and they must learn when to encourage, when to prod, when to adjust and when to correct a student. They must understand that dance students are people who are passionate to learn the intricacies of dance.

A memorable dance instructor is always one who has a solid sense of artistry for the craft and can inspire and move students for their future progress in dancing.

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## 2 Quick Tips to Improving your Balance



A key to dance is balance and a key to balance is placing your weight over your foot correctly.

To do this, you need to be able to feel weight movement within your feet to the smallest degree therefore, increasing this ability will make you a better dancer and...your feet are actually made to do this!

There are around 100,000 - 200,000 exteroceptors (nerves) in the sole of each foot. This makes the feet one of the most sensitive parts of the body...it's in the same category of sensitivity as the hands.

The feet are a primary connection with the environment; stopping us from stepping on dangerous items and, it's because of this sensitivity that we rely on our feet a lot to maintain balance.

However, as well as losing this sensitivity as we age, we can lose it from wearing shoes. The fact is; we do not need to consider the signals we get from our feet as much as we do when we are wearing shoes.

One of the major causes of falls as we age is our inability to sense with our feet so, imagine how detrimental this could be for your dancing?

As good as shoes are and as much as they are required for performance (dance) they can also have their downside.

Now, let's look at increasing the sensitivity of your feet.

### 1. No shoes

This is an easy one.

Simply take your shoes off and walk around on diverse surfaces - outside in a park is ideal (watch out for prickles and other items you may step in).

This will make your brain wake up to the signals from your feet so that they can be used to improve your balance.

### 2. Balance exercise

This one is a bit more involved.

Stand on one foot and close your eyes.

By closing your eyes, you need to focus more on the signals from your feet to maintain balance.

Focus on the shifts in pressure you feel in the sole of your foot.

By using the pressure shifts, you increase your brain's tendency to be aware of this information and use it.

Engage in either of the above and notice how much more grounded you are when you dance next time and...also be more aware of your feet when you dance for better balance.

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## **Spatial awareness as a Dancer**

When people first learn to dance, they are focused entirely on where to place the feet and what to do with the hands. It can be overwhelming at times. As they get more experienced, their focus moves beyond those basics to technique, musical timing, and leading or following. But one powerful aspect of dancing is often overlooked: the magic of spatial awareness.

Ballroom and Latin dances move around the floor, often in haphazard ways. Since the different couples on the floor are not doing identical step patterns at the same time, those movements can often conflict with other couples.

Collisions are fairly common in ballroom dancing, but usually they aren't a major concern. The goal is to minimize these occasions and that takes spatial, or situational, awareness.

Without awareness of the space around us, we can seem to others like a 'bull in a china shop'; they have to watch out for us, which elevates the difficulty and stress level of everyone else on the floor.

It's similar to the way you feel when you're driving and come across another driver who seems to be oblivious to the vehicles around him or her.

Spatial awareness is much more than just trying to avoid collisions.



It's an essential element in being able to apply floor craft; that ability to instantly move into a different step pattern than the one you initially planned, based entirely on the changing space around you.

Learning spatial awareness takes time and effort and like any skill, you have to apply yourself to this with deliberate effort and practice.

### How do you become spatially aware?

The first step is to use your head to actually see what's going on around you.

There's nothing wrong with looking around before starting a move that might cause problems behind you.

Some steps require a quick look before you lead the figure since you need to know that there's space behind your partner and yourself!

So, keep your head on a swivel, especially on a crowded floor...just don't compromise your posture in the process.

Next, start to become aware of how others on the floor are using their space.

You may find that some couples move more than others and if so, you may need to become more alert to where those fast-moving couples are.

If you can't see them anywhere in your line of sight, chances are they are behind you.

Eventually, with practice, you will begin to recognize how different step patterns fill up space and how much time you might have before an open space becomes a recipe for a collision.

Some patterns are danced frequently, so you can almost assume that if a couple is dancing a Fallaway Reverse Slip Pivot in Waltz, they are likely to continue with rotational figures like Double Reverse Spin and then possibly, an Oversway.

This gives you clues as to where the space will be a few seconds from the start of their sequence and where space is likely to be filled.

### The Partnership at work



One of the most important issues in managing spatial awareness is that of working together as a couple.

Followers, don't hold back the Lead when you notice a potential issue!

Many 'slam on the brakes' long before a potential collision because they didn't trust their partner to deal with what was/is happening behind them.

When you freeze up and stop your partner, you are not only showing a lack of trust but also making it impossible for them to do whatever they may have been planning in order to avoid the problem.

The best thing a Follow can do is to gently squeeze the arm or connecting hand to indicate a potential issue and let the Lead handle it.

If you're serious about developing your skills as a dancer, put some extra effort into developing your spatial awareness.

You'll find greater enjoyment in your dancing, as you become much more skilled at manoeuvring around the floor and best of all, others will love sharing the floor with you!

## Seeing Similarities or Differences in Dance Style and Movements

Sometimes people see similarities and, sometimes they see differences. We all have our tendencies and each has its advantages and disadvantages.

By understanding what your tendencies are you can better work out if they are helping you or working against you; then you can put effort into how you think about dance figures so that you can dance better.

### People who see similarities

Are you a person who always sees patterns and how things are related to each other?

If you are, then you will find that once you learn one dance learning another is easier.

This can make progress faster but, you will also sometimes find that when you're trying to do a figure you might do another similar one.

You might even find that you will do figures from another style; for example, you might find that you start doing a Salsa when you do Samba or you might also start doing Waltz when you should be doing the Foxtrot.



### People who see differences

Are you a person who finds that every time you are given a new piece of information it requires a new place for it to 'put' in your memory?

If that is the case, then you may sometimes feel that dance can be overwhelming. You might have chosen to learn only one style and other styles seem like a whole new world and while it might take a while to learn all the figures, you know them all perfectly and you do not mix them up.

If you decide which figure to do, then you know that is the one that you will do.

### People who see similarities, but note the differences

Does everything in the world seem basically the same only different?

If it does, then others reading this will assume that you have the best of both worlds. You can use the similarities to learn figures faster but, you note the differences so that you don't mix them up.

This is true at times, although, you may sometimes see too many similarities, so that you do mix them and still end up feeling overwhelmed at how much there is to learn.

What to do?

Fortunately, no matter your tendency the solution is the same:

- Understand the figure that you are doing.
- Break it down into its elements.
- Note the elements that you already know and the elements that are unique.  
*This is a bit like have a tendency to see the similarities and noticing the differences but, you are putting an effort into making sure you know what is similar and what is not.*



If you are person who sees the similarities, then put a little more effort into noting what is unique to each figure and style.

If you see differences, then try to find the similarities so that you can leverage them for faster learning and understanding of dance.

If you're in the middle then make sure that you do actually know what is similar and what is different.

### Working with your teacher

An experienced dance teacher will know what is similar and what is different so they can help you. Consider saying something like:

'I am mixing these two up: what should I know that is different between the two?'

'Is this completely new or is it like something else I have done?'

'It seems like the other figure is different in this way, is that right?'

This will get your teacher thinking more like the way you do and, they can then help you more.

Of course, teachers have their own tendencies too...

If they are the same, then it would make sense for them to know where you have been and they can help you find another way to digest what you need to learn.

If they are different, then asking questions like those above will help them work out what you need, so that you can move forward.

Letting your teacher know your tendency (if you are aware of it) can help too!

An experienced teacher should have developed an intuition for the different ways people see the world and can accommodate it, however there's nothing wrong with actually having the conversation to make it clear.

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