



5 Ways to Communicate Better in Partnered Dancing

Dancing is a conversation made entirely through the body and, as with any conversation, there are some who 'speak' better than others.

This metaphor is useful because it puts the focus of dance on understanding your partner better and helping them do likewise.

Do you know someone who you tend to avoid talking to?

Maybe they talk quietly or slur their words or maybe, they always want to talk about themselves while never asking about you.

We tend to avoid these people like mosquitos, yet we often convey ourselves like this when we dance.



Let me explain how thinking of how you communicate can go a long way towards improving the dance conversation.

1. Proper enunciation

There's a lot to be said for clarity...

Clarity of movement means complete weight changes, strong leads and responsive follows. For leaders, it also means committing to whatever pattern you start - nothing frustrates a follower more than a lead for one pattern that morphs into another without warning.

2. 'Speaking' confidently vs hesitantly

A colleague once said 'Even if you're wrong, be really insistent about it' so, if you're going to mess up a step, do it with confidence!

Your partner needs to know you trust both of you enough to move with everything you have. You can't do that with partial weight changes, tentative connection and collapsing your frame to protect yourself.

3. Sometimes you talk, sometimes you listen

Even if you're the leader, every dance should give your partner some room to add their own styling and expression therefore, forcing your partner to follow your rigid plan without deviation is going to lead to an angry follower.

4. Don't just talk about yourself

If you aren't sensitive to your partner, you might as well be dancing alone.

Ask yourself, what is their ability level?

Do they like a lot of spins or dips?

Do they like faster or slower movement?

Do they sometimes hijack your movement?

Recognizing and adjusting to your partner's needs shows them you aren't just here to show off...you're also here to show them off!

5. Cover up each other's 'mistakes'

Slip-ups in any conversation are inevitable but a perceptive person can smooth things over quickly.

In dancing, it helps to think of each 'mistake' as an unintended variation...work it into the dance as best you can because, the best dancers aren't perfect, but they are the best at covering each other's mistakes!

Footwork in Latin Dancing



Whether you're a boxer, an ice skater, a soccer player or James Brown, "good footwork" is critical.

It's the same for us as dancers, since one of the most common terms we hear in technique is *Footwork*.

Judges scrutinize the footwork, coaches correct the footwork and dancers...well, depending on your personality, you either obsess over it or, hope nobody will notice yours!

Footwork in dancing isn't about where your feet go (the patterns) but the part of the foot you use for a movement or step and by using the proper part of the foot for a respective step, correct technique and balance will come about naturally.

Starting with a solid base of proper footwork ensures building on top of it will make dancing more stable and secure.

If you're a Latin dancer and have been working to perfect your hip action, it's a good idea to take a look at your footwork first...it all starts from the floor up!

Correct your footwork and you'll see a great improvement in your hip action.

Ball of the Foot: In Latin and Rhythm dancing, many steps are taken using 'ball, flat' footwork. Unlike Standard Ballroom and Smooth dances, using heel leads is relatively rare and when they do appear, are mainly in the dances that travel around the floor (e.g., Paso Doble and Samba).

By using the ball of the foot properly as a step is taken, it aligns the rest of the body (ankles, knees, hips) to ultimately produce proper hip action.

Some footwork calls for use squarely of the ball of the foot (e.g.: sur place in Paso Doble) but more often, the use of the inside edge of the ball of the foot is common.

Practice the feeling in these two exercises:

1. Stand with feet apart and shift your weight to one leg.
With the free leg (while keeping your foot in contact with the floor), roll your foot and ankle inward till only the inside edge of the ball is in contact with the floor.
If you bend the knee of this same leg, you should feel a strong pressure on the inside edge of your foot against the floor.
Now shift your weight to the other to practice with the other side.
2. Stand with your feet together and parallel.
Shifting your weight slightly towards your heels, move your big toes apart while keeping your heels in contact.
Your feet should make a “V” shape.
Transfer your weight more strongly to one leg.
Bend the knee of the free leg and relax your ankle; your heel with lift from the floor.
The bend knee should “drape” across the straight leg.
Your free foot will now have rolled in (but keep toes turned out) and the contact point of your foot on the floor will be with the inside edge of your foot.
Practice on the other side as well.



Check your shoes:

Want to know if you're using your feet properly? Do a little forensic work by checking out the wear pattern on your shoes.

It's a good insight into how you're using your feet.

Just like checking your car tyres if you are having steering/veering or braking issues...take a look at your Latin dance shoes and note if the inside edge of the ball is more worn down.

On the other hand, if the outer edges appear more worn or if there is no sign of greater use on the inside, chances are you need to re-evaluate how you are using your feet.

Latin dance shoes themselves provide some assistance in putting your weight in the proper place to facilitate the use of the inside edge of the ball.

Even for the men, having that Cuban heel naturally shifts your weight towards the ball of the foot. That is why it is critical to use the proper footwear for each dance style.

Once you've got the right “tool” for the job, it's time to sharpen your skills with practicing the footwork conscientiously.

Building strength:

It takes time to build up enough strength in the ball of the foot to receive the power and speed that you'll need to execute steps.

Take time prior to your practice or lesson to properly warm up your feet (use the above exercises and then continue with some basic patterns in the dance you're working on) so you build both dexterity and awareness.

By building upon a solid foundation of good footwork, you'll find improved balance and those other areas of technique fall into place more easily.

The 3 Types of Rises



Dancers are introduced to Rise and Fall from their very first Waltz lesson and it is an integral concept in Standard Ballroom for only on correct Rise and Fall can Swing be built and only with correct Swing can Sway occur...and so on and so forth.

One thing that is not always mentioned however, is that there are different types of Rises and Fall that occur at different times during our dancing.

A solid understanding of these three types can help you feel more connected to your partner and help your partnership look more beautiful and in harmony.

Foot Rise

Foot Rise relates entirely to the flexing and extending ankle joint; by bringing your toes closer or farther away from your knee and decreasing or increasing the angle between your shin and the sole of your foot.

As you rise onto the balls of your feet, you are using foot rise and Foot Rise is described mostly by the footwork, where HT, T, and THT indicate the usage of Foot Rise; whereas TH or Flat indicate sending without Foot Rise.

For example: there is foot rise on step1 of a Waltz Natural Turn for the Man; which is to say he rises onto the Ball before placing his second step however, there is No Foot Rise (NFR)for the Lady on step 1 because although she does eventually lift the Heel off the floor, that doesn't happen until after step 2 is placed...by which time step 1 has already finished.

NFR is an important concept and is used in most figures by the person going backward on the inside of the turn.

By not using Foot Rise, the dancer allows his partner to swing past him freely.

NFR is also used by the Lady during the Feather Step and Three Step in Foxtrot, which is why her footwork is always TH even though the Man rises onto the T on step 2 of the Feather Step.

When your partner uses Foot Rise but you do not, that is when the other forms of Rise need to be used more in order to compensate.

Leg Rise

Leg Rise relates to two separate joints; the knees and the hips.

As the knees flex and extend, the angle between your shin and your thigh decreases and increases and when your hips flex and extend the angle between your thigh and your torso decreases and increases (assuming you don't start tilting the pelvis).

Because of this, both of these joints need to be used in unison to achieve Leg Rise since, if you were crouching and straightened only the knees you would end up bent over forward, as if to touch your toes and, if you straightened only your hips you would look as if you were dancing the limbo.

Leg Rise is where most of the Rise and Fall in our dancing comes from and while Foot Rise can change your height by only a few inches, Leg Rise can change your height dramatically.

It is extremely important to release the knees in order to drop your weight to initiate a driving motion in times like step 1 of the Natural Turn; discussed above.

During steps that have NFR, it is Leg Rise that primarily takes over and allows you to stay with your partner, even though you do not have the ability to use your ankles to rise.

Body Rise

Body Rise is sometimes grouped together with Leg Rise because the two always work together but, it is possible to have Body Rise without Leg Rise.

Consider; your spine is made of a series of curves:(from top to bottom) the Cervical Spine which runs through your neck; your Thoracic Spine which runs through the back of your rib cage; your Lumbar Spine which runs from around your lowest rib to your pelvis and your Sacral Spine which is joined to the pelvis.

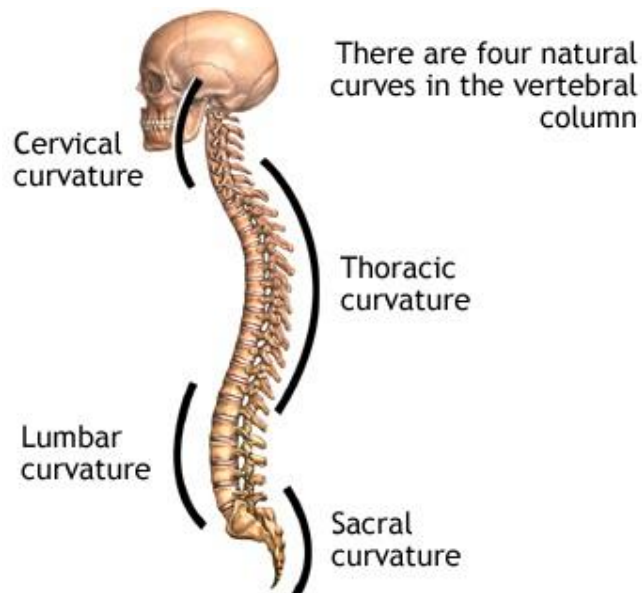
While the Sacral Spine cannot move because the vertebrae are fused, all the other vertebrae are able to flex and extend; for that reason, the entire Spine can be lengthened by pulling the two ends apart and elongating the curves or contracted by squashing the two ends together and exaggerating the curves.

Body Rise is the elongation of your spine.

To feel it, imagine you are standing in a pool of water up to your chin and you need to keep your head above water to breath (obviously this example will require you tilt your head upward, which is not a part of spinal extension but is a good idea if you want to avoid drowning!).

Have you ever noticed how good dancers seem to hang in the air and then blossom apart from each other?

This is Body Rise; which is being used to create extra shape and to make their dancing float. In addition, the use of Body Rise correctly also gives your dancing the look that it is 'breathing' as you take certain steps.



Look at this video of Arunas Bizokas and Katusha Demidova dancing a Waltz and if you are not too distracted by their dancing, examine just one figure at a time and see if you can notice when they use each type of Rise: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bzvi1vLptqg&feature=emb_logo

The 'Levels' of a Dancer 😊

If you're like many, you love seeing those tangible indications that your dancing is noticeably better than it was before.

The concept of improving or advancing your dance skills is satisfying, shows how far you've come, and gives you something to brag about but, what criteria might we use to separate the different 'levels' of a dancer?

What makes you a dancer?

1. *What you do:* You enjoy music and moving to it. That's it! Don't listen to those cynics that say you need to take lessons to be a 'real' dancer.

Of course, you may want to refine your abilities if you want others to dance anywhere near you...

2. *How it shows in your dancing:* It might be messy on the outside but you don't care, because it just feels good to move and groove to what you hear.

You leave silly things like 'structure' and 'cohesion' to the pros on *Dancing with the Stars!*



What makes you a DECENT dancer?

1. *What you do:* You've decided to take some group lessons from a dance professional...maybe you practice sometimes or social dance once and a while but, it's all pretty relaxed and just for fun.

You know you'd like to get better but so far, it's not as important as other life priorities.

2. *How it shows in your dancing:* You know the basics...well enough so that people watching can actually tell what dance you're doing.

You can connect with your partner and, more or less push each other across the floor.

You're still a novice in the eyes of the wider dance community but at least you score some points for trying.

What makes you a GOOD dancer?

1. *What you do:* You've recognized that you have a long way to go to really stand out and now you want it bad enough to start pulling for it.

You've moved from group classes increasingly into private lessons and pay much more attention to those boring technical tips than you did in previous levels.

If you go out social dancing, you are now considered a 'regular' and you may have started to dabble in the competitive scene.

2. *How it shows in your dancing:* You've started to catch the eye of other dancers.

Your movements feel a lot more fluid and controlled, balance is no longer a problem and maintaining connection is second-nature.

You've probably started to play with arm styling and other embellishments.

It's increasingly fun to dance with you and you start to receive smiles and compliments from your partners.

What makes you a GREAT dancer?

1. *What you do:* You might not be the best but, you're good and you know it.

How many steps you know is now less important than how you dance them.

You may be in the competitive circuit by now...not because you can't be a better dancer without it but simply because it's the only place you can dance full-out anymore.

You are king or queen of the social dance floor and may find yourself looking around for partners talented enough to challenge you.

2. *How it shows in your dancing:* You are what lower-level dancers look at when they say to themselves 'I want to move like that.'

Guiding/responding to different combinations is so easy now that you start to improvise some movements...like you used to, only now you know how much you can get away with! You don't lack dance partners at a social but are happiest when dancing with your regular partner; because they can connect with you on a whole new level.

On every level there are many who decided they are satisfied where they are so, if you decide to move past that, remember not to look down on them.

Each level requires sacrificing time and money to move forward...the only difference between you and them is that for you, it's worth it!