

THE DANCE STEP IN SQUARE DANCING

In many of the definitions, the calls are described by stating that the dancers are to “walk” to get to the specified destination. Grand Square and Promenade are two examples, and there are many more. For everyone’s information, the terms “walk” and “dance” are to be considered synonymous or the same.

The dance step should be a smooth, effortless gliding step in which the ball of the foot touches and slides across the surface of the floor before the heel is gently lowered to the floor. The length of stride should be fairly short with the movement coming mostly from the knees down. The dance step must be coordinated with the beat of the music. In general terms, short gliding steps on the balls of the feet make a comfortable dance step.

If done correctly, the dancing will make a shuffling, sandpaper-like sound on the floor. This is music to a caller’s ears. Square dancers should dance smoothly and considerately, and not do anything that could cause another dancer to feel uncomfortable or confused. The light, sliding step is what should be used. A good square dancer’s feet should never be lifted from the floor. If the dancers “walk” to get from one point to another, it creates a “clomping” sound that is not only annoying, but is certainly not dancing. The heels of the dancer’s shoes or boots will create this sound. However, this same footwear can be used for dancing with great success.

When the music starts, good dancers are in a "ready" position and they are focused on the music and the caller. Let's describe this position.

A. Chin up!

By reminding yourself to keep your chin up every once in a while, you will give off the perception that you are confident and happy to be dancing. When dancers learn something new or lack confidence in what they are doing, the chin tends to go straight down subconsciously. An additional benefit is that keeping your chin up enables you to literally "look up" at your fellow dancers as you dance, which will be understood as a sign of respect.

B. Shoulders Back! Dance Tall!

With any of these tips, thinking of the opposite provides an instant reason for why the tip looks good. In this case, the opposite would be hunched shoulders. Since square dancing involves the hands in a lot of movements, the shoulders back in a confident, relaxed position will make it easier to react to calls. Turn at the shoulders as well as the hips to make hands available for calls. Keep your nose over your toes and your body under control and in balance at all times. Good posture is generally a good recipe for success.

C. Arm and Hand Style

When standing in the squared set, each couple should join hands in what is considered a "Couples Handhold".

Normal couples have the man on the left side of the lady. Their adjacent hands (man’s right hand, lady’s left hand) should be joined with the man's hand palm up and the lady’s hand palm down. The elbow should be bent and the hands held just above the height of the elbow. The other hand and arm should be relaxed by their side. When dance action begins, both hands should be in "ready dance position", which means that each dancer is ready to use either hand as required to execute the calls.

An unpleasant feature of bad handholds is roughness, which means that a dancer applies awkward or painful forces to another dancer. In most cases, you can't do this unless the hold is really a strong grip. And you can't take a strong grip except by clenching something between the fingers and opposed thumb. So, the way to prevent roughness is to teach the dancers to keep their thumbs out of the action when they take handholds (most of the time).

Touching hands provides instant feedback in formation awareness. Good dancers touch hands as quickly as possible providing an anchor for themselves and the others in the square. Dancers who simply do their part without touching hands negatively impact the square’s success and detract from the overall social experience. The best dancers are aware that hand-touching is more for the square than for the self.

D. Knees Flexed and on the Balls of Your Feet

Simply keeping your knees flexed and staying on the balls of your feet can completely change how you move and make your steps look smooth. Dancers who are flat footed and have their knees locked will usually move slower and be a step behind as they have to engage muscles to get out of that position before they can dance the next step.

E. Smile!

Remember: dancing is an artistic expression using the body, including expressions of the face. This may not be a skill that separates dancers of different proficiency levels, but it definitely separates dancers with different attitudes! Whether you messed up, your partner, or if it was someone else, brush it off with a smile. It makes the dancing more fun.

DANCE, DANCE, DANCE!