

From SSD to Plus – A Lesson Plan

- An article for the Call Sheet by Kurt Gollhardt

Post-lockdown, the main focus in several of my clubs, once we had gotten existing members reasonably back up to speed, was on bringing in new members via a series of SSD beginner classes (two a year, with SSD dancing in between). Recently, at Oaktown 8s, I completed my first SSD-to-Plus class. Here, I'll share my teaching order and preferred format for this class.

Consistent with the "SSD Approach" (as presented in ["SSD in a Nutshell"](#)), we offered the SSD-to-Plus class to those SSD dancers who were eager to learn more and we felt were ready. This class did not replace the ongoing SSD dancing. We ended up with a class of 8 students including a whole range of backgrounds: a couple of our new SSD dancers, some who had learned SSD or MS before the pandemic, or had gotten partway through a Plus class, Plus dancers who'd gotten rusty over lockdown, and some Plus dancers who wanted to work on their weak areas.

In order to continue to provide SSD dancing on club nights, we ran the SSD-to-Plus class as a weekend "mini-blast" format: 4 weeks of 3-hour afternoon class sessions, 2 weeks apart, with review and practice during club nights (alternating with the SSD tips). While this format may be a bit more intense than a traditional weekly class, I believe it's well suited to an SSD-to-Plus class, since such a class is targeted for people who are motivated learners. (People who prefer not to learn more have the opportunity to remain at SSD.)

Because this format puts a lot of material into each 3-hour session, it required a carefully and specifically constructed teaching order. However, I did refer to, and take some ideas from, the CALLERLAB Mainstream and Plus Suggested Teaching Orders (revised September 1, 2021), where appropriate.

Some of the techniques I used include:

- Balancing each session with a mix of easier and harder calls.
- Identifying 4-person calls, which can be taught in mini-squares. This allows students to focus on those formations with fewer distractions, and saves you time using extra "glue" calls moving dancers around a square to the desired formations & arrangements.
- Grouping related calls together (Thars, Diamonds, Circle Figures, Peel Family). In most cases, I feel the benefit of seeing the common underpinnings outweighs any potential confusion over similar call names. (For example, seeing that all of the Diamond calls are the same for the Centers.)
- I connected some of the hardest calls into a "Spin Chain Family", spreading them across the 4 days, with Spin The Top as the root, followed by Spin Chain The Gears, Spin Chain and Exchange The Gears, and Relay The Deucey (which starts and ends like a Spin Chain). I also emphasize that Spin The Top is also the root of the "Top" family (with Fan The Top and Peel The Top at Plus).

I very specifically did *not* put all of the MS calls before the Plus calls. Since the whole class only takes about 8 weeks, there's little advantage in having a partway-point where the students could dance at a strictly MS dance, especially in areas like California, where MS is less common.

Aside from the teaching order itself, I also hand out diagrams for the more complicated calls, explain what they mean, have angels demo them several times, put the students back into squares with the angels, and then walk through the calls with them. It helps them to experience the material in a number of different ways.

The first class using this teaching order completed on April 5, and I deem it a success. The planned material fit each day as expected: not much extra time at the end, but not rushed. I didn't get through all of the Extended Applications in Day 4, but that was expected. And now, with continued workshopping, as needed, on club night, the new Plus dancers are coming along nicely.