

About Quickstep

Quickstep is a fast and lively dance invented in the 1920s when the Foxtrot was showing a tendency to become ever faster. It also absorbed a lot of influence from the Charleston, and when it was first presented in competition it was known as the Quick Time Foxtrot and Charleston (QTFT & C)! It is played in 4/4 time (four beats per measure) and the official competition speed is 50-52 measures per minute. All of the steps we will take in this class will either last two beats (slow) or one beat (quick). More advanced dancers often take steps on the half beat. There are also some very difficult hopping and skipping steps in advanced levels.

Quickstep has an evolved technique and is challenging to master. The dance differs from many you may have learned in that not any figure can follow any other. Some figures end up with the leader moving backwards, or facing in a certain direction and thus can only be followed by a limited set of other figures. Another challenge is that the timing is not the same from figure to figure, thereby making leading and following more difficult.

Leading and Following

Both leading and following present great challenges in Quickstep and both are rewarding to learn. Although historically men have led and women followed, there are hints of change in the dance world. It is no longer uncommon at university competitions to see same sex couples or couples with the traditional gender roles exchanged. Whichever part you choose to concentrate on, it is still important to know the other part as best you can manage. This is especially true of leaders, since ideally, every step the follower takes is led and it therefore helps to know what those steps are! For followers, learning the leader's part makes the dance a lot less mysterious; knowing the leads for things makes them easier to recognize as well.

Leading can be very subtle in Quickstep. Advanced dancers learn to dance with body contact and you will eventually be expected to learn that style. Without body contact, the importance of a good frame (see below) becomes paramount. Leading is accomplished through the shape of the body (especially CBM, and to some extent sway) and its direction of motion.

Frame

Frame refers to the carriage of the upper body and arms in ballroom dancing. The arms should remain firm but not locked into place. Each partner should carry his or her own body and should not lean on the other partner.

Leaders stand up very straight and tall. The neck is long and straight and the back of the head should be aligned with the spine, not tilted forwards; the chin is tucked in. The shoulders are held back and down. The head should be turned slightly to the left of center.

Followers are similarly poised, but in addition to all of the above, they have "left poise." This is initiated *through the knees* and gives the body a gentle curve to the left. Also, the follower's gaze is directed more to the left and sometimes slightly upwards.

The dancers are to each other's right side, with the right foot pointing between the partner's feet.

The arms are held up, with the elbows slightly lower than the shoulder line. The elbows should be stretched away from the body (the idea is to be BIG on top) and each other, with the left elbow in line with the back and the right elbow slightly forward. The leader's right hand is cupped around the follower's shoulder blade. The follower's left hand rests gently on the leader's right arm, on or near the biceps. The leader's left arm and the follower's right are bent almost 90° at the elbow and the hands are clasped. The hands should be roughly between the eye levels of the dancers. The follower should endeavor to keep her or his shoulder blade into the leader's cupped hand. However, it is important not to lean backwards or to place any weight on the leader's arm.

The general shape of the partnership is like an ice-cream cone: compact on the bottom and big on the top. Many dancers will fall into an inverted ice cream cone shape by leaning into their partners. This makes it difficult lead! Don't do it!

Starting the Dance

Quickstep is generally commenced with a preparatory step ("prep step") danced on the 4th beat of a measure (some start it on the 3rd). The step is small, and without power, but is used to fully lower into the foot and knees in preparation for the first dancing step. Many dancers will begin with the right side forward and then swing through neutral on the prep step to the left side leading position of whatever figure comes next. The step is forward on the LF for the leader and back on the RF for the follower. After the prep step you may dance a quarter turn or any natural turning figure.

Glossary of terms and abbreviations

The following will help you interpret the charts:

Timing: S = slow = 2 beats. Q = quick = 1 beat.

Feet positions: Mostly self-explanatory. OP = Outside Partner. CBMP: see below.

CBM: “Contrary Body Movement.” This means that the side of the body opposite the leading foot (i.e. the foot that is moving, whether forward or backward) is rotated towards that foot. For example, if one stepped forward on the RF with CBM, the left side of the body would move more forward than the right side, causing the left side to be toward the RF. Stepping back on the LF in CBM would involve taking the right side of the body back further than the left, hence the right side of the body would be toward the RF. It is important to note that when stepping forward (backward) in CBM, both sides of the body move forward (backward), it’s just that one does so more than the other. CMB is generally used to initiate turn.

CBMP: “Contrary Body Movement Position.” This is when the leading foot taken along or across the line of the other foot (usually the feet dance in separate tracks). Sometimes you will use both CBM and CBMP on the same step.

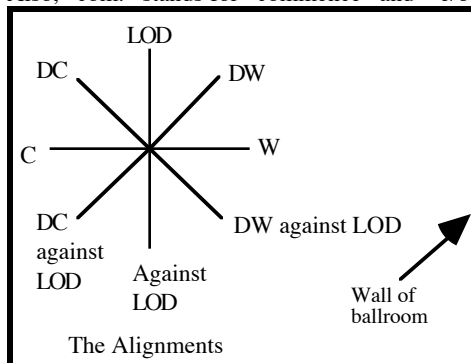
Alignment: (see figure). Alignment generally refers to the direction of the foot. In general “facing” means the body points in the same direction while the term “pointing” implies the body has not turned as much as the foot. “Backing” means the direction of motion more backwards than forwards. W = wall, DW = diagonal wall, LOD = line of dance, DC = diagonal center, C = center.

Footwork: H = heel, T = toe (actually ball of foot). HT means step forward onto the heel, then roll through the flat of the foot onto the ball. TH means the toe is the first part of the foot that contacts the ground, with the heel then lowering. On a forward step, a TH is always a lowering action. On a backward step, it can rise, lower, or stay neutral (depending on the knee and body action used).

Rise and Fall: Specifies the height of the head. It is obtained through a combination of footwork, knee action and body rise. NFR means “No Foot Rise.” It usually occurs when there are two backward steps in a row and the rise is gradual. The first step will be TH with a push off the heel; the toe of the other foot generally releases. The rise occurs through the knees and is slight.

Sway: Sway is initiated *through the knees*, lending the entire body a continuous curve. Sway generated by bending at the waist is known as “broken sway” and is rarely used (never in the basic figures we will be learning). S = straight, L = left, R = right.

Also, “com.” stands for “commence” and “e/o” is for “end of.”



Common Amalgamations

An *amalgamation* is a sequence of figures that follow one another. [FYI: A *figure* is a sequence of steps; figures are the building blocks of ballroom dancing. Colloquially they are called “moves” or “steps” but technically... A *step* is a movement of one foot, generally involving a change of weight (just like a step in walking).]

A common amalgamation for going down a wall is quarter turn, followed by chassé, followed usually by a lock step, then repeat.

Alternatively, after a chassé or lock step, you can do a natural turn with hesitation (along the wall) followed by the chassé reverse turn then the progressive chassé.

At a corner there are several options. The most common is an underturned natural spin turn, followed by a progressive chassé. Next most common is 1-3 of a natural turn followed by a tipple chassé. The natural turn with hesitation is rarely used, but is simple. The natural spin turn takes up the least room, the tipple takes the most.