



**FIRST STEP  
DANCE**

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## **Trade Partners to Learn Faster**

Single people sometimes attend group dance classes, pay their admission fee like everyone else, and then spend the entire class without ever dancing with a partner. These people rarely return to class a second time. Why would someone not come back to dancing? Sometimes it is because the teacher never asked the students to trade partners, so those brave souls who got up the nerve to attend alone were never partnered and didn't get the chance to feel the joy of dancing with a partner.

It is understandable that some dancers might not be interested in trading partners. However, if the goal of learning to social dance is to learn to dance well with a variety of people what better situation is there to do that than in a group class? Certainly wedding couples who are only taking one lesson shouldn't be expected to trade partners, but perhaps they should take advantage of a private lesson to learn what they can in only one hour. Even beginning competitive couples could be well served by trading partners, although at higher levels trading partners might be counterproductive.

Trading partners in group classes helps people to learn to dance in a number of ways. Trading partners gives students the chance to dance with better dancers so that they can feel how the step or pattern should feel. If two people begin classes together and only dance with one another, they miss the opportunity to dance with more experienced dancers who might be able to help them learn. Students who refuse to trade partners often take longer to learn what the class is covering and require additional repetitions of the material which slows down the entire class, so overall it is better for a group class if everyone trades partners.

At the same time, trading partners gives students the chance to dance with less experienced dancers. It is while dancing with a less skilled dancer that a person learns (as a leader) what signals to give or (as a follower) what signals indicate a certain movement. Trading partners ensures that the woman gets to experience what different leads feel like, and that the man gets to experience the different responses the woman might have to the way he leads. In this way each person builds stronger lead or follow skills.

By trading partners it immediately becomes obvious if one half of a partnership is weaker than the other. If a leader is unable to lead a step with a succession of followers, it is clear that he is doing something wrong. If a follower is unable to follow that step with a succession of leaders, it is clear that the follower is doing something wrong. In a group class situation it is often challenging for the instructor to identify problems between



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partners. Instructor can fix problems more efficiently when the partners can identify the weak piece on their own

Trading partners is also a good way to ensure that people are more forgiving of their partners. It sometimes happens that people are more critical of their friends and acquaintances than they are of strangers. There is less chance that partners will be critical of one another while learning with strangers.

Trading partners lets students meet and interact with their classmates. This is beneficial because people tend to be more comfortable with a group of friends and acquaintances than they are with a group of strangers. Also, other students might become friends and this will build a group of people to interact with at dances and social events.

The final reason that trading partners is a good idea is that it limits the negative impact of lead/ follow unbalanced classes. It is common to have extra women (or sometimes men) in a class, and if the partners never change these people are left without a partner for the entire evening. Trading partners ensures that everyone, on average, dances with a partner most of the time.

Although trading partners is the best way to learn to dance well in a group class situation, couples have the right to stay together and shouldn't be made to dance with others if they don't want to do so. After all, they have paid for the class just like the unattached. However, part of the trade-off for inexpensive group classes is that students are part of a group, not just a couple. Some teachers and schools require that everyone trade partners and ask people who are not comfortable with trading partners to take private lessons.

Eventually, though, most people come to realize that social dancing is a lot more fun if you dance with other people, especially during dance class.