

## The beginners workshop

By Seth Tepfer

Does the dance series have one? Should you do one? If dance is more than 1/3 beginners, the evening will be geared towards them anyway. In 90% of all dance situations, first 2-3 dances should be geared towards new dancers. This is a good way of not only teaching the new dancers, but demonstrating that the dance series is welcoming to them. You want your dance to be inviting to new dancers!

***The beginners workshop is great*** – it shows to the public that your dance is welcoming to newcomers. It gives those who are nervous a place to go to feel more comfortable. It is a safe space to learn simple figures, concepts and jargon.

***The beginners workshop is deceptive*** – the workshop environment is nothing like the dance. A large amount of dance jargon and dance figures in a small amount of time quickly overwhelm new dancers, they are unable to integrate very much. Most beginners show up at the tail end of the workshop, and miss the majority of information. Beginners present for the entire workshop retain 30% of what is taught – at most.

New dancers do not learn how to dance in the beginners workshop. Even if a figure or concept is taught in the workshop, assume it needs to be said again during the dance. The primary benefit of the new dancers workshop is providing a safe space and a familiarity with listening to the caller.

In reality, new dancers learn how to dance from the experienced dancers. They take their cues from the other dancers. This is how they learn etiquette, the local morays, styling, and figures. This is how local series have institutional memory, as older dancers move on.

The workshop gives you 15 to 30 minutes of time. The time is best spent covering a few important, basic topics: moving to the phrase of the music, giving weight, the swing, and perhaps the ladies chain.

My assumptions are that they know how to circle left and right, that they can quickly learn long lines and that do si do and allemande is in cultural memory thanks to square dancing. All other figures must be taught. However, do not spend your time teaching many figures. Of the figures, Right and Left through is hardest for beginners.

New dancers are nervous, scared, overwhelmed before they start dancing.

- **Do not** overload with figures (especially hey, probably not ladies chain or right and left thru).
- **Do** spend lots of time on the basics, dancing the same few moves over and over. (Circle, DSD, Swing). It gives a sense of familiarity and comfort.
- **Do not** spend the entire time lecturing – they came to dance, they learn by dancing.

- **Do** mix and match – dance for a bit, talk for a bit, dance for a bit. Don't overwhelm them with information or moves – give them enough to feel confident.
- **Do not** tell people they are doing something wrong.
- **Do** be enthusiastic, supportive, always encouraging. Point out what they are doing correctly, and how to improve.

### **An outline of a workshop:**

1. Form a circle, holding hands. Have everyone paired up, leads on left, followers on right. Make standard joke about women always being right. Introduce to “partner” and “corner” (other person holding hands with).
2. Walk to the left. As walking, talk about walking step, not skipping or jumping. Stop walking, talk about ‘weight’, and using forearms, not thumbs or tight grips.
3. In dance tempo and calling voice, circle left, right, into center and back. They are dancing!
4. Teach DSD. Practice DSD partner, corner. Dance Circle Left, into center, circle right, into center, DSD partner, DSD corner. “Give yourselves a hand! Great job!” Have them give themselves a hand. They are dancing!
5. Teach Allemande. Talk about weight again. Practice with partner (R, L, R) and Corner (L). Hash call circle, dsd, allemande. Get them used to changing calls, listening to caller, moving in beats of eight.
6. Demonstrate swing, emphasis on ending. Have them practice with partner. Have them swing corner. Introduce to new partner and corner. Ah ha! Dance (circles, into center, dsd, allemande, sing CORNER) progress several times.
7. Remind of weight, in a swing. Practice with partner. Talk about where to put hands on

follower's back. Practice. Demonstrate a ‘bad’ swing (lady walking backwards, gent putting arm in wrong place). Have them swing corner.

8. In a circle, introduce balance. Practice. Have them balance and swing corner. Dance hash sequence several times with balance – don't forget allemande!

Upon completing the above steps, the following concepts have been taught:

- Moving in time to groups of eight
- Giving weight
- Circle
- Do si do
- allemande
- Swing
- Balance

Everything else is bonus. Depending upon time, I will teach courtesy turn and promenade position (effectively the same position). Then promenade up to a contra line. Introduce the idea of 1's and 2's and proper and improper. Spend time on progression. Possibly demonstrate a right and left through and a ladies chain.

Can you teach them the first dance in the workshop? They will have a head start on the evening – tell them this!