

## DANCING TIPS FOR BEGINNERS

### Introduction

Couples dancing – they make it look so easy on television – but if you’ve never done it before it can present all kinds of problems. Not only can it feel awkward, but you are expected to remember so many things at once. When you first start, just getting the basic steps right is hard enough; let alone worry about what to do with the rest of your body!



**Learning to dance is like learning to drive:** difficult and clumsy when you start, but as you practise you’ll develop a feel for it, and before you know it the movement will become second nature. My suggestion is to not let the little things bug you; and to embrace the idea of looking silly for the first few lessons, instead of giving up, because you **WILL** eventually get better and if you stick with it you’ll be dancing like a pro. Well maybe not as good as the professionals, but hey; **dancing is a GREAT skill to have in life.** Girls love guys who can dance and guys love girls who can move – but more importantly dancing is fun! I know a lot of people who were pretty nervous and said they had two left feet when they started, but within a few lessons were already looking pretty damn good on the dance floor, and now have the confidence to get up and spin with the best of them.

Hi, my name is Andrew, and this is a little guide/document I’ve wanted to write for a while, and I plan on uploading it to both my own website ([www.andrewnoske.com](http://www.andrewnoske.com)) and also the uqdance website ([www.uqdance.net](http://www.uqdance.net)). UQDance is social dance club at the University of Queensland which I joined a year ago and has been **HEAPS** of fun for me. This year (2006) I am treasurer and we have lots of new members (a.k.a. “*newbies*”), and so I guess that’s what made me finally decide to write this!

I’d also like to thank some good friends of mine; **Michelle Kiob** (secretary of uqdance), **Nadim Cody** (president of uqdance) and **Mariah Andersson** (friendly blonde Swedish chick); for their suggestions and proof reading. Also I’d like to thank those people who left [online feedback for this article here](#) – especially **Jon Memmott**, the creator of Dance-Card ([www.dance-card.com](http://www.dance-card.com)), for uploading it (2008). I wanted this document to outline some of the common mistakes people make and list some important advice. For your first few lessons, you shouldn’t worry about these things too much; but at the same time you **DO** want to break bad habits as early as possible. It was Michelle’s idea to also add a section about dance etiquette, which we think is important for both girls and guys to understand. So have a read, see if you can take some pointers on board... I hope our advice/encouragement helps, and I hope you enjoy dancing as much as we do.

Dancing rules! ☺

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## **Disclaimer**

Yes, this document is pretty long! Sorry about that, I just didn't want to miss anything important. Fortunately it's written such that you can easily skip sections which are not relevant to you – for example, if you're already sold on the dancing you might want to skip the first section and just read the dance etiquette bit for your gender. ☺

I think one thing I should emphasise is that I'm not a professional dancer – not even close. I only really started dancing a year ago when I joined uqdance, but I like to think I'm good enough to hold my own and there are many little observations I've made, and pointers I've been given which are too useful not to share. If you want REAL advice I'd highly recommend going to professional lessons, but hey; this should be a good place to start.



### 2006 Uqdance Executive

*Michelle Kiob (Secretary), Nadim Cody (Treasurer) and me (treasurer). We're all friendly (plus Michelle's biting problem is now under control), so next time you see us say hello, or ask for a dance!*

*Don't forget dancing keeps going WELL after the lesson has finished and most have gone home... so if you're really keen that's absolutely the best time to ask someone more experienced to teach you new moves.*



## Why Learn to Dance

1. Dancing is FUN!
2. Dancing is a GREAT skill to have in life
3. Dancing is a GREAT way to make new friends
4. Dancing is a great way to meet members of the opposite sex
5. Dancing relieves stress
6. Dancing builds confidence
7. Dancing is great exercise
8. Dancing is universal
9. Dancing gets progressively easier
10. Dancing is forever



*In fact these are just a few of numerous reasons to dance, but certainly some of the best ones.*

### 1. Dancing is FUN!

- If you are the type of person who hears a song and suddenly wants to dance – almost as an involuntary reaction – then you’ll already know what I’m talking about. For some people, dancing is a way of life, and the idea of living without music almost inconceivable. But hey; it’s important to remember that these people were not born with dancing ability; it is something developed over time. The best dancers have been dancing for years – some of them since pre-school!
- I remember at my high school graduation you could pretty much determine who had a great time (and thought it was ordinary) based on who got up and danced, and who was either too shy or too macho to leave their seats. And hey, we all know how much it sucks to watch other people having fun and not being able to join in!
- The more you dance, and the better you get, the more you’ll enjoy it. As a young child I used to absolutely love watching Michael Jackson – and I’m sure he would have loved me too... although perhaps for different reasons (obligatory Michael Jackson joke there, I apologise). Although Michael is no longer much of a role model, the fact remains he motivated a lot of people to learn how to dance. I still have fun dancing alone, but now I’m well and truly past the “*girl germs*” stage of my life I’ve decided that dancing with a partner is definitely more fun. 😊

### 2. Dancing is a GREAT skill to have in life

- You’d be surprised that as you age, there are more and more opportunities to strut your stuff – not only at weddings, parties, clubs and supermarkets (*whoops, did I just say supermarkets*) – but there is a whole community of people out there who meet up and dance once a week (or more), and events you can go to if you are “*in the know*”.
- There is no doubt in my mind, girls prefer a guy who can dance (and has enough confidence to dance in the first place) over one who can’t, and vice versa!

### 3. Dancing is a GREAT way to make new friends

- For whatever reason almost every person I’ve ever met through learning to dance has been nice! Dancing just seems to attract nice people (*although yes, you will find exceptions at certain clubs and dance venues*). For the most part people who are passionate about dancing and music are some of the best in society – confident, outgoing, considerate and carefree. Better still they come from diverse backgrounds. I’ve made a lot of great friends through dancing. 😊



**4. Dancing is a great way to meet members of the opposite sex**

- It can be awkward to admit; but many of us don't often get the chance to meet and interact with new people; especially those of the opposite sex. In my case (*and this is not a normal case mind you*) during my ENTIRE undergrad I met almost no girls (*I did study I.T. mind you*) – I met very few through sport, and even fewer through my (all male) group of friends..... and those that I did meet I was far too shy to approach and talk to properly.
- We often don't talk about it, but an awful lot of us are single these days and we all want the same thing; we want to meet someone nice and find love.
- In couples dancing, the whole idea is to relax, have fun, and socialize in a mixed group. When you ask a girl to dance, you are not hitting on her; you just want to dance. Age, marital status, it doesn't matter, everyone just wants to dance.
- Once you've mastered talking and dancing at the same time, you can find out a lot about a person during a single song. If you go out a lot you'll probably meet lots of girls and boys and if you if you feel you are clicking with a person and you think there might be a spark there (maybe you have the same sense of humour), then after you've finished dancing it's a good time to tell a girl you enjoy dancing with her and ask her if she wants to meet up for coffee or another dance event. If you ask her this question while you are still on a high, then if she says "*no thanks*" you're more likely to stay smiling. Don't take it to heart; this isn't a rejection; she is probably busy, or else she has boyfriend or she already likes someone else.

**5. Dancing is great exercise**

- I use to play touch football, and do salsa lesson on the same day, and found the salsa lesson was just as physically demanding as football! We often don't think of professional dancers as athletes as such, but these people are among the fittest people in the world. Next time you see real dancers on television take notice of their waists, thighs and bum! These people not only look great, they are REALLY fit. I'm not suggesting doing social dancing once a week will give you a bum as great as that, but it can definitely help you work up a sweat, lose weight and feel great after your done. The benefits of exercise are tremendous – physically, mentally, and emotionally – and trust me... dancing to a few fast songs is a great work-out!
- Everyone needs a way to unwind sometimes. If you ask me, people who say they're too busy for a bit of exercise/relaxation/socializing each week have it all wrong... not only are they missing out on having fun, but also because they don't realize that a couple of hours of exercise and relaxation every day serves a very important purpose in clearing your head so you can come back refreshed and more productive. By taking enough time to keep healthy you can also become a better student.
- *NOTE: If you're not already an exercise buff you'll find a good list of reasons to exercise [here](#).*

**6. Dancing relieves stress**

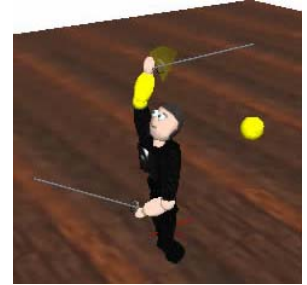
- Most of you are probably pretty young and perhaps in university or school, when the pressure of study can really get to you! And hey; those of you who work (i.e. earn money) can have lots of pressure on you too. In the first semester of my PhD I didn't even have a viable project, and that weighed down on my mind a LOT. Looking back I'm really lucky I joined ugdance... because after 2 hours of dancing, I felt great... I'd forgotten all my worried and pretty much whistled on my way back home.





## 7. Dancing builds confidence

- Once you've got rhythm, and know all the basics you're likely to get that wonderful thing we call confidence. This will help you relax, put your chin up (and shoulders back), be a stronger lead for the girl, improvise a little bit, try new moves, and hopefully get over any fear you might have which prevents you from asking someone who's a got more experience than you for a dance – because hey; they were once beginners too.
- The confidence you build in dancing, and looking good when you dance transfers to other aspects of your life. Most significantly, it should give you confidence around members of the opposite sex. Lots of girls and guys still have a strange fear of each other, and find the idea of “touching” intimidating, but couples dancing (whereby you are required to touch and talk to each other) can help break those barriers – soon you'll realise that members of the opposite sex are not that scary after all, and with any luck you'll be able to make friends with people of both sexes more easily.



## 8. Dancing is universal

- People dance all over the world, it's just on of those universal things – a language almost – and I think Australia is pretty slack in that so few of us know how!
- It's a horrible attitude many people have in this country, thanks mostly to night-clubs, that if a guy asks a girls to dance he ALMOST certainly has ulterior motives. In countries like South America, people get together in huge masses and dance the night away. A person might dance with over a dozen different people in one night – most of them complete strangers – but even around people they have never seen before they can all interact, have fun and smile together.

## 9. Dancing gets progressively easier

- On thing you'll notice about dancing is that, although you might forget a particular move, you won't forget the dance. Better yet, once you are good at one dance, it's amazing how much fast you will pick up another, and then another. A good idea is to start with something simple like *merengue*, then get good a popular social dance like *salsa*, and from there you can try any of the other latin dances: *rueda*, *cha-cha*, *rumba*, *jive*, or ballroom dances: *tango*, *waltz*, *foxtrot*, *quickstep*, or social/rhythm dances: *bolero*, *swing*... you name it, you will be able to dance it within a few lessons once you understand the fundamentals. ☺
- I've met a few girls who told me they had just started learning a dance, but were so good at it I didn't believed them! Turns out they might not have done that particular dance, but they may be really good at something else (say, ballet) and as a result of that experience they were able to pick up the new steps incredibly fast. So yes, it's difficult at first; you won't know where to put your feet, hands or eyes, but eventually it will come together, and you WILL improve. So patience young grasshopper!

## 10. Dancing is forever

- Just like riding a bike, dancing is something you never forget.
- Dancing is something you can and WILL want to teach your children when you are older.
- Dancing is forever. ☺

## **Ten Things to Remember when Dancing**

1. **Dancing is about fun; so don't take yourself too seriously!**
2. **Be confident!**
3. **The man leads**
4. **Be relaxed, be smooth**
5. **Eye contact – don't stare at your feet**
6. **Communicate**
7. **Help each other out**
8. **Experiment**
9. **Never dismay**
10. **Practice make perfect**

*These are the top ten dance principles I came up with, ranked in order of importance, and following is an explanation of what each point actually means!*

### **1. Dancing is about fun; so don't take yourself too seriously!**

There is a very good reason I put “*don't take yourself too seriously*” as number one on this list. **The whole idea of dancing is about having fun**, so if you start treating it like a competition or being hard on yourself every time you struggle with a move you have completely missed the point! If the guy next to you is a better dancer it is probably because he has been learning/practising much longer than you. Your reason for being here is to learn how to dance, and it isn't easy, it will probably take longer than you expect, so just take it slowly and **set your own pace**. I can almost guarantee you WILL get muddled up during your first few lessons and, you will forget moves you have learnt the week before unless you practise them; but that's all part of the fun. If you make a mistake, fall over, or step on a foot then you can just laugh it off. **Don't take yourself too seriously** is perhaps the most important piece of advice you'll ever get in life (it has been in mine), and it applies doubly so when you are dancing!

If you have a sense of humour show people! This might sound ridiculous but the best move I have on the dance floor is to open my mouth in feigned shock and say something lame like: “*I can't believe you just spun around; why would you DO something like that to me*”, “*you lifted your arm!*”, “*oh so it's MY fault*”. It wouldn't matter if I did the basic step to the whole song, if it gets her laughing (and it's amazing how often it does); I'm already regarded fun to dance with. It's my secret move and now you know; use this secret weapon carefully... I very nearly didn't tell you. ☺

### **2. Be confident!**

**Dancing is all about confidence**, so even if you are new to dancing, and a bit unsure of yourself, you should show that you are eager to learn. Don't be shy to grab a girl's hand and put it on your shoulder. The more you do it, the more comfortable you'll be, and the quicker your dancing will improve. **Smile, introduce yourself, and the rest should come naturally.**

### **3. The man leads**

In couples dancing, **it is always the man who leads**, NOT the woman. This rule is an artefact of a time not-so-long-ago when husband saw himself as in charge of the wife and

made all the decisions. Attitudes have certainly changed since then – and nowadays we all know women are the ones who wield the real power – but dancing remains unchanged. In dancing, the man is in charge.

In case you don't know, the idea of a lead is as follows. If you are doing a choreographed move, then it's pretty straight forward; you just follow the instructor, and you both know/remember what steps come when. However, in non-choreographed (i.e. social) couples dancing, the guys and girls know the basic steps and turns, but there is NO predefined order; thus one of the partners has to tell the other what to do and when. The guy does this by making fairly intuitive gestures with his arms and legs, and the girl picks up on these gestures and does what the guy wants. For instance, the guy can tell the girl to do a right (clockwise) turn by lifting her right hand/arm firmly (but gently) around the back of her head. The pressure he applies effectively pushes her and tells her to turn around.

For guys this means having enough confidence to say (typically though strong body language not words): *"Hey lady; I am in charge here... I know what I'm doing, I say when you turn"*. The idea of doing this is pretty scary if you've just started and, in fact, you do NOT know what you are doing! During your first few lessons it always pays to tell the girl *"I should warn you I'm new at this, so you'll have to help me"*, and she'll help you out. Don't worry about being the lead straight away – it's more of a joint effort at the start and most timing/moves you learn are dictated by the instructors – just know that you, as you build up your skill, you should build up your confidence and start calling the shots. Being a good lead is something that develops over time, and the first time a girl tell you *"you're a really good lead"*, is a special moment indeed.

For girls this means that, even if they know they are the better dancer, they should give the guy a **chance** to lead; let him know he's doing fine and talk gently when you give advice/make conversation. The most important thing here is **patience!** Don't get frustrated with him, take over the show, boss him around or start doing your own thing. It seems antiquated, but guys like to feel they are the ones *"looking after"* the girl, and if you start telling him what to do, what you are actually doing is threatening his masculinity/manliness. Same rules applies in relationship too – gessh, haven't any of you read *"Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus"*?! What are they teaching in high schools these days! There is a big difference from the bubbly girl who smiles and says *"hey; I'll show you something cool"*, and the grouch who says *"no you're definitely doing this wrong"*. No guy wants to feel like he is useless – in fact it's pretty much a guy's biggest fear in life – so it pays to keep him under the illusion that he's the one calling the shots. ☺

I've danced with at least one girl who held onto me like she was a grizzly bear, and Latin dancing just doesn't work like that! If you are a girl, then you should be gentle/feminine and not exert force on the guy's arms. At the same time though, don't do the floppy *"spaghetti arms"* thing – you have to have enough tension there that he can spin you!

If you are the guy, then you should remember this: be **gentle but FIRM**. When I started dancing, I had this misconception that all girls were delicate little flowers, so I was afraid to exert any force, but it turns out a most girls are tougher than you assume and they WANT you to be a strong lead. When you want her to turn to the left or spin into your arm, you can't use a wimpy little gesture, you have to give her some tension, and bit of a push and DRAW her around in a circle. In some dances, like the TANGO, and even swing, you have to keep a very solid almost statue-like frame, and move the girl around like you are carrying a crate – your arms always have to stay firm. In merengue and swing, the motions are much more fluid, but you still have to use enough force on her when you're telling her where to go. This can be intimidating at first, but you'll eventually pick it up.... and if you're still in doubt there is no reason why you can't ask



“*should I be more firm or less firm?*”. Asking for tips is how you become a better dancer.

This is already a long section, but I feel I should also add one more thing: it is significantly harder for guys to learn to dance than women. And this is not (only) because girls are better than guys (*Michelle wanted me to say that*), but also because leading is harder than following. If you are a girl, and you have a good lead, then he’ll know how to guide/swing you around and he can VERY quickly teach you new moves, and the two of you will look great together. If you are a guy, and have an experienced girl, it’s not really much of a help, because she’s relying on you to tell HER what to do! As a guy it’s intimidating starting out as a lead, because you’ll often stand there, stumped, thinking: “*uh-oh, I don’t know what move to do next!*”. And so you might be stuck doing about 20 basic steps (I’ve been there), and still not decide what you should do next and when! To get around this, you just need practise. Practise the most simple moves (like quarter turns etc) and move around the floor a bit – forget all the complicated spins; it’s better to master and repeat 3 different moves and keep repeating them, than standing there five minutes trying to remember a move you learnt several weeks ago. But most importantly, don’t stress about your lack of variety – your repertoire of movements will build up slowly – don’t rush it or be too jealous of the guy who seems like he was born on the dance floor! If you still need to count, don’t be too embarrassed about that either. I use to count, and I still do sometimes (except now it’s in my head). ☺

If you find a partner at about the same level as you (maybe he/she started on the same day), it’s a good idea to stick with them, because the two of you will be understanding of each other’s mistakes, and therefore you’ll be more comfortable making mistakes. That way you can rock up to that person each week and the two of you can help each other remember the move you did the week before.

#### **4. Be relaxed, be smooth**

The fact is a lot of people dance like stiff squeaky robots. I think there are two main causes for this and the first is that most Australians can’t dance! In many countries (especially Asian countries) learning to dance is part of growing up, but I’m guessing very few Australians are taught by their parents how to move on a dance floor. The upside of this is that if you do learn to dance, you’ve got something over 95% of the Aussie blokes in the room who can’t. The downside is that if you’ve never been taught how to dance and feel rhythm it can feel a bit awkward at first.

The second, even bigger, cause of the “*robot jitter*” is simply that beginners are not relaxed and their muscles are tense. Often they’ll feel like everyone is watching/judging them, and consequently they’ll be nervous and unsure of themselves – worried about screwing up.

Ever watched how a drunk person dances? I’m not saying drinking makes people dance well (usually the opposite), but I do think there is a certain smooth gracefulness about the way an inebriated person moves and/or stumbles around. Alcohol numbs the social inhibitions part of the brain and when you no longer care what people think, your muscles relax and you feel compelled to express yourself emotionally. What we aim for in dancing is to aim for that kind of beautiful smoothness, but without the falling over or vomiting on girls. I think it’s pretty sad the way modern society relies on alcohol to socialize. It doesn’t seem like a clever (or cheap) idea to become dependent on alcohol in life, and learning to dance is a good place to start learning to relax around other people, and feel comfortable in contact with the opposite sex WITHOUT resorting to a bottle of vodka and slurry speech. Very few of my dancing friends drink, and none of them are the type who smoke.



Anyhow, my point was: in dancing, most movements – even the fast movements – are supposed to be smooth. And **to get that smooth movement going the best place to practise is the comfort of home**. Put on a good CD and your best clothes and practise dancing in front of the mirror. If you look a little stiff, try releasing ALL the tension in your arms and legs; shake off the cobwebs and pretend you are the jelly man. Separate your feet a little bit more, allow your hips to rotate around slowly and keep doing the steps in front of the mirror until you can say: *“damn! I look pretty good!”*. Try drawing little circles with your hands as you step, add a little style, and experiment. A **bedroom mirror is a great place to practise**.

In Latin dancing (salsa, merengue, lambada etc) being smooth and letting your arms relax is CRITICAL. Even in dances like the Tango and Jive, where movements are jerky, the person doing the movement should have a relaxed, carefree (even arrogant) air about them, so lose the nerves – you are learning to dance for enjoyment; so relax man!

### 5. Eye contact – don’t stare at your feet

When you start out dancing with a partner, I can almost guarantee that you’ll start staring at your feet. At the time it feels like a sensible and safe place to look, because (1) you want to make sure you don’t step on your partner’s feet and (2) you’re afraid to look any higher. Lots of you guys might also be afraid to look higher because you are well aware that there are girly bits (otherwise known a boobies) in the way and you’re generally not allowed to stare at those!.... ☺

And \*gosh\* heaven forbid you might make EYE CONTACT!

Arrggh!



If you ever see another person doing it you’ll realize that **staring at your feet looks pretty silly** (see above). Fact is, once you are comfortable with the basic steps, you won’t need to look at your feet; because (1) it’s not as if you don’t know where your own feet are, and (2) your partner can take care of his/her own feet! It’s like learning to drive; hard at first, but with practise you’ll develop a feel for it. So now it’s time to lift that chin up young grasshopper!!!

If you introduce yourself and talk to the person, it’s immediately easy to look them in the eyes... after all, that’s what people do when they talk. However, even if you know each other you probably don’t feel comfortable staring into their eyes for TOO long, so most the best place to look is over their right shoulder.

I did Tango once, and I actually found that a bit uncomfortable/intense, because the instructor I danced with told me specifically to stare into her eyes the whole song! Tango is supposed to be romantic and serious (acting of course), and strong eye contact is part of the dance, but at the time I wasn't very comfortable with that, and I found looking at her forehead (just above the eyes) was a bit less scary. 😊

As you dance, feel free to look around and check out what the other couples are doing, and when you do this you'll think: "*hey I can do that move; I should do that one soon*". Also, don't forget you can change from **closed hold** (with man's right arm on her lower back, her left arm on his right shoulder) to **open hold**, where you are further apart and can move around a bit more independently. As you get better, and are able to throw in lots of turns eye contact becomes much less of an issue. I notice some of the really good dancers don't really look (or focus) anywhere in particular as they turn about – where they look is not something they even think about – they're eyes may as well be glazed over or closed – they are pretty much operating on autopilot, lost in the music and dancing by feel – they are CERTAINLY not staring down at their shoes!

## 6. Communicate

Communication is critical! First of all you, **if you are going to dance together you should introduce yourself** and once the channel is open you can start talking about what you are both doing. The only exception is if you are doing a progression and you find yourself changing partners faster than your dad changes TV channels. If you are learning a new move, and it's a bit complicated, the two of you should work it out together. The two of you are a team, and you are problem solving! And when you do get it figured out you can celebrate your little victory and keep repeating it until you have it down perfectly. In proper dancing, there is no verbal communication; every move is done signalled by gestures, but hey; this is social dance and we are just learners. It makes sense that if a girl has never done a right turn before you can't just lift your arm and expect her to execute one! Instead you can keep doing the basic and say: "*Okay, soon I'm going to lift my left hand (on the third beat), and that means you spin to the right under my arm*". If she doesn't get it in the first few goes (and if she's new she probably won't) then you can stop dancing and show her the steps, and then try again. But hey; most girls will pick things up pretty quickly.

I'm going to go all out here and claim that communication in dancing is almost as critical as communication in a relationship. If there is something you need, or want your partner to do differently you need to TELL THEM!!! You might think "*it's okay, he'll figure it out eventually*", but in fact, **if you don't tell a person it will never get fixed.....** like in relationships people! Geesshh... aren't you people paying attention?! So while you're dancing don't feel bad about making suggestions such as:

- "*Careful there; I'm wearing heels, so you better not swing me so fast or I'll fall over!*"
- "*I think you're suppose to turn me like this for this move*"
- "*I think your hand is supposed to be a little higher up my back*"
- "*Try relaxing your arms a little bit, and then we can move them around a bit more*"
- "*You don't need to stare at your feet; you can stare over my shoulder if you want.*"
- "*Could I make a little suggestion? Could you maybe try being a little bit firmer (or less firm) with your arms when you turn me?*"
- "*I've noticed something that works well is when the you do this ...*"

So long as you make suggestions in a friendly non-critical kind of way (and don't overload them with more than two at once) the person should appreciate your feedback!

- “Gee, you’re not very good at this ARE you?”
- “Don’t be so floppy with your arms, it’s like your wrists are made of jelly.”
- “Stop holding me like that; I feel like I’m dancing with a grizzly bear!”

Are examples of what NOT to say! Professional instructors will never hesitate to extend a piece of advice to you, but for the rest of us, we are usually afraid to offend someone; which is crazy, because it means the other person will never correct their mistake! I encourage you to occasionally ask your partner: “do you have any tips for me to improve?”; this will open the window and make them feel free to offer suggestions. And of course, when your partner is doing well you should compliment them! Contrary to popular belief it is not just girls that are suckers for compliments.

## 7. Help each other out

Dancing is very much a social thing, and as you get better, you should feel free to give tips and show your moves to others. The most obvious person to show a new move is the person you’re dancing with; whether you are the guy or the girl you can say: “I have a move I can teach you” or “have you tried this one”, and then show them how it works. It’s a good boost to your self-esteem if you successfully teach your partner something new... but don’t overload them in the one dance. Practise just a few moves at once and keep the other ones tucked away for another time.

However, it’s not just your own partner you can show a move. If you and your partner have just mastered a move, and another couple is struggling, you should approach them – maybe even swap partners briefly – and show them how it goes. Probably the best way to learn, and teach another couple a move is to **stand so the two couples are next to each other** (with the guys next to each – see below) and then step through the move SLOWLY. And when I say slowly, I mean slowly... start really slow, break it down and then repeat it a few times until you bring it up to normal speed. I’ve taught a couple of my friends (men) a few moves this way and it was heaps of fun.

Oh, and if you haven’t noticed already almost ALL guys (over the age of five) are uncomfortable touching each other (especially holding hands) so this is pretty much the **only** way for one guy to teach another! 😊



One couple teaching another a move



One person teaching a small group new steps

## 8. Never dismay

Learning to make mistakes gracefully, and smile/laugh about them is very important. A common mistake for a newbie is to get disheartened when they make mistakes – especially if he/she can't get new moves even though other people seem to be getting it right away. Mistakes are usually not noticeable in a large group, but it is noticeable when someone suddenly stops dead on the dance floor (meaning their partner has to stop too), frowns and droops their head. People are often their own worst critics, but mistakes ARE an integral part of learning to dance so you should never beat yourself up for making them – it makes you feel bad and it makes your partner feel bad too.



**When you make a mistake you don't have to stop and apologise.** As you attend more lessons, you should try to **recover from mistakes, rather than stopping**. Two of your most important lessons in dancing are to **keep smiling** and to **keep moving**. If you keep the feet moving (even if you are shuffling on the spot) the follower should soon get back into sync with your step, and you can try the move again. Keeping the beat isn't too hard once you know how – in Salsa you can keep counting in your head (I use: “*left*, <sup>2,3</sup>, *rest*, *right*, <sup>2,3</sup>, *rest*”) and you'll find that no matter where you go you'll still be in the correct pattern and on the correct foot. Remember that the guy is the lead, and that means that, even if he's the one who missed a step, it's the girl's job to correct her step to match his. Without this basic agreement you would have the problem where you both try to change your steps (to match your partner) at the same time.

Apologising once or twice is okay (sweet even), but beyond that it can get annoying. Unless you've actually physically hurt your partner – for example: if you've accidentally thrown your partner into a wall – you don't have just cause to keep apologising. ☺

## 9. Experiment and improvise

When you learn to play a musical instrument, you start off learning simple scales and songs, and then the harder ones... but for many players (not all), there comes a time when they have realize that they understand how music works, and they have a strong enough foundation to improvise – to add their own personal touches and play their own tunes without blindly following the notes on a page. Improvising/mucking around like this is fun! If you go to any kind of workshop they'll probably teach you a new routine each week, and you'll try your best to remember these, but hey unless you practise them three weeks in a row you'll forget most of them. However, if you keep practising, you'll eventually get to the stage when you see reoccurring patterns, and realize that, so long as you keep your feet moving in the right pattern, it doesn't matter WHERE you place your feet – you can turn her, turn yourself, both turn at the same time, dance to one side, bob down, face away from each other, and all kinds of crazy stuff! She'll quickly catch on, and copy what you are doing, and it is always cool when the two of you invent your very own move. Also try letting go of her hands and dancing around her, or put your left arm (her right hand) over your neck and see what happens, and it doesn't go anywhere you can just say “*okay, that didn't quite work*”, and try something else.

You can also watch other dancers, and try to copy some of their moves/techniques. Don't worry about trying something funny or different in the middle of the song; in social dancing no one deducts points for that kind of thing! Your partner will admire that you are taking initiative.

## 10. Practise makes perfect

Practise, practise, practise. You've heard it before, I know, but if you REALLY want to get good at something, you have to put in the time! This might mean dancing twice a week (instead of one) or maybe even writing down a few moves and practising the steps in front of reflective glass. Professional lessons are great, because the instructors will come up to you and tell you directly what you are doing wrong, and give you tips like *"your posture is slouched, stand up, even if your partner isn't as tall as you"* and *"you need to keep your shoulders still, if you move them it makes it harder for the girl to follow"*.

I have to emphasise that when you start from scratch you shouldn't cram in too much each session; just do as much as you can remember and then see how far you get the next week. Dancing is muscle memory, and once you're fairly good at a dance and the steps/patterns come naturally it's easy to forget how hard it was in the beginning when you had to count aloud to actually get anywhere! Whether you are learning to ride a bike, to drive, to swim, to play a musical instrument, or use workshop tools or learning a new dance – it's all about practise and muscle memory. It will come slowly at first, but if you treat it as a challenge and put the time into any of these it will become second nature to you! I must admit, I still forget the occasional move, but I know that I'll pick it up straight away the next time, just like riding a bike.

Unfortunately, in the case of dancing, there is only so much you can practise by yourself; what you really need is a partner! If you have a willing girlfriend/boyfriend, or even just a good friend then good for you! I've often wished I had a girlfriend to practise with, but even without one, the mirror helps, and I found coming along to a workshop each week, making new friends and having a great time was its own reward.



## **Dancing Tips and Etiquette**

For this section the rules for girls and guys is a bit different, so I thought it made sense to break the genders into separate sections (with ladies first of course) – but hey – if you are REALLY keen feel free to read both. ☺

### ***For the Girls***

It's not really easy for me to write this section – but I've already written the guys section, so I'll give it a shot and then let Michelle fix it up!



#### **Basic Etiquette**

**When a guy asks you to dance it's polite to smile and say yes** (and take his hand when he offers it). The simple fact is most guys will take it as a hit to their ego if they ask you to dance and you say “no”. Even though it's just a dance they will see it as a kind of rejection... and that's something you want to avoid.

All too often, when a guy asks a girl to dance, she'll shut him down... trust me, I've seen it many times, and it just looks rude! ☺

Often they'll give this cold reaction because they just assume he has ulterior motives, but hey; for all you know he could be a really nice guy and lots of fun to dance with.

Having said that, if you don't want to dance then that's okay – just make sure you decline nicely. Some good reason's why you might not want to dance include:

- You're **too tired** / worn out.
- You're **too shy** / **self-conscience**.
- You feel **uncomfortable dancing with strangers**.
- You're **unfamiliar with this style of dance**.
- You **don't like that type of dance** (or maybe you just don't like the song).
- You're **about to leave** / get a drink.
- You need to go to the **ladies room**.
- You've **promised someone else a dance**.
- You're just **not in the mood**.
- You're **in pain** for some reason (*maybe your shoes are killing you or your last partner threw you into a wall*). ☺

So make sure you do explain your reason to him briefly or he will probably take your refusal to heart. Just make sure you smile and give reassurance that you aren't turning him down because he isn't good enough! For example you might say: “*I'd love to, but I need to rest at the moment, so maybe later*”.

Or better yet: “*I'm not a fan of this kind of dance sorry, but my friend likes to dance, I'll introduce you to her*”.

Don't forget that; instead of dancing with him you might have a friend who wants to dance, or – if you're shy about dancing – you can sit the song out and talk to him. If you get along well, maybe you'll be ready to dance for the next song.

What ever you do I'm not a fan of dishonesty. If you lie to him he'll either know you are lying or... if you tell him *"I'm sorry I don't dance"* and he sees you a minute later executing a triple spin he's going to be pretty offended! If you are simply not comfortable dancing with guys/strangers then SAYS: *"I'm sorry, you seem very nice, but I'm not comfortable dancing with people I don't know"*. If, on the other hand, your only reason is because you don't think he is good and/or cute enough for you then you're missing the point of dancing... that's an exceedingly bad and superficial reason for turning a guy down.

On the other hand, if you do get a gut feeling that the guy asking you to dance is creepy (or you've been warned about him), then don't be afraid to say no. You should have an excuse on hand like: *"I'm sorry, I'm waiting for a friend"* or *"I think we might be leaving soon"* and if he keeps persisting or makes you feel uncomfortable then you might try something more assertive like *"No, I really am not in the mood for dancing sorry"* or *"I'm meeting my boyfriend soon, and I don't think he'd approve"*.... (in this case it's okay to lie a bit).

### **Safety**

There is no denying it: personal safety is a HUGE issue for women. There are a lot of bad men out there.

How safe you are all depends on your environment. If you are attending a dance lesson (or, say, a wedding) then you are probably pretty safe. However, if you are out for a night on the town (i.e. out clubbing or at an open dance venue like Café Denim) it can be a very different story, so **ALWAYS go with friends**. By yourself you are seen as vulnerable, so don't separate far and make sure at LEAST one of you stays sober (if not all). I know of at least two girls, both old friends of mine, who have had their drinks spiked and one went to hospital, so **always be careful of what you drink and keep your wits about you**.

I've had quite a big chat with Michelle and a few other girls about dance safety, and it's interesting the stories I've told – most girls I know have had at LEAST one major uncomfortable experience. At any public place where there are attractive girls around there are likely to be a few older, sleazy guys around too. Even at dancing venues (like Café Denims for example) there seem to be a small packs of guys that stand around looking for someone new who seems young and naive.

Café Denims to use as an example because a lot of Salsa dancing enthusiasts go there and it's a weekly event. Most of the time it's a pretty safe and friendly environment – especially if you know a few of the regular dancers there – but it does get crowded, and it IS next to a bar, so there is the occasional small fight bouncers have to break up. But more relevant to you is there is the occasional guy who might ask you for a dance with the objective of getting close to you, groping you or getting you-know-what.

Now if you get into a situation where you're dancing with a guy who's trying to get too close for comfort Michelle showed us a little trick. In the normal closed position hold your left arm will be on the outside of his arm, with your left hand resting on his right shoulder (see diagram). In this position of course he can easily press himself tight against you and make you feel uncomfortable. If however, you put your a left arm in front of you – on the INSIDE of his arm, with your hand on the front of his shoulder, your elbow and whole arm will suddenly be in his way, and that makes it very difficult for him to pull you close. And by the end of the song he will probably be pretty peeved and so he probably won't ask you for another dance. So yes, I thought that was a pretty cool trick, and something all girls should know – nice one Michelle. ☺



Normal closed position (ladies arm on outside)

Protective position (left arm on inside)

If that technique does not work for you, a better idea is to just tell him *“I feel uncomfortable being this close: could we please use an open hand position”* and he’ll probably respond to that. It’s good to give a guy the benefit of the doubt, because there is a good chance he is accustomed to dancing close with girls – in some styles (likelambada and bollero) you are supposed to, and in some countries getting close is just normal. If, however, he does not apologise; **if he’s still trying to get fresh then put your foot down!** In fact, stomp the front of your foot down on his it comes to that!

Too many girls are too scared to say anything; but hey – I have a lot of admiration for girls with enough self-confidence to get loud when they have to. If he is a sleazy guy who’s trying to touch what he shouldn’t then stop dancing and tell him to back off. Don’t feel powerless, because no matter how strong he is there is probably a much stronger bouncer nearby and many adults/guys/girls/friends ready to rally your cause. If you just tolerate it and don’t do anything he will do the same thing to the next girl.

And hey; if you dance with a guy who’s dodgy, make sure you warn other girls and even the guys you trust – that way he’s less likely to claim another victim. Next time the same guy comes around you can stick together like glue and repel him (or your male friends can beat him up). Strength in numbers. ☺

Don’t let me scare you away from leaving the house though!!! If you employ common sense you are pretty safe, and will probably not have any trouble. Provided you are a few other couples dancing (i.e. proper dancing as opposed to dirty dancing), and (most importantly) you have friends nearby... then if a stranger asks you to dance, and he seems both sober and genuine, then I think you are pretty safe, and there is no reason not to give him the benefit of the doubt. Just remember, you can specify that you stay near your friends and **it is only one song**..... after that song you can thank him and go back to your friends.

***NOTE:** I apologise if any of this stuff is pretty basic, because I’m sure all girls are already very careful, and I certainly don’t want to scare you away from dancing!*



### Things to Remember

- **Smiling is VERY, VERY IMPORTANT!**
  - If you are not smiling, and not happy, its unlikely guys will want to dance with you, so if you look miserable don't expect to get asked!
  
- **Practise asking guys to dance whenever you see the opportunity!** Guys may lead in couples dancing, but this IS the twenty first century! Many, MANY guys are nervous about asking girls to dance and so **there is no reason the women can't ask the men!** Most guys will appreciate that you took the initiative. I always am! Don't be offended if the guy says no – yes there is a good chance that he's exhausted/shy/gay/afraid/never-danced-before/terrified-of-his-bull-terror-wife/emotionally-damaged/a-jerk or in-need-of-a-rest, but this just gives you a better appreciation of when men often go through when they ask women to dance! If he doesn't respond well that's his problem, not yours, and you'll know not to ask him again... just ask the next guy instead – he's probably cuter anyway. Having the confidence to "*make the first move*" like this is a very valuable skill; not only are lots of men impressed by this and if there is a high girl to guy ratio it's probably only way to get a look in!
  
- When a guy asks you to dance.
  - Smile and take his hand.
  - If he looks nervous tell him there is no need to be.
  
- **If you feel uncomfortable with a guy dancing too close, tell him!** Tell him you prefer an open hold.
  
- **Always go dancing with friends** and watch out for each other – you never know when you might need to come to another girl's rescue.
  
- **Never look like you are bored** when you are dancing. If your partner is just a beginner and not very good, then it will make things worse if you look impatient or like you're **bored to tears**. If he's really struggling you can opt to talk to him instead (then he won't be as worried figuring out what moves/steps to execute next) or suggest what he can do.
  
- **Never laugh about a guys dancing behind his back**. Chances are someone will overhear, and not only might word travel back to him, but people will see you as a mean and/or critical person. Furthermore, guys don't like the idea that you are comparing them to other guys!
  
- **Don't hog the best male dancers** – especially if there are more females than men.
  
- If a guy is trying to spin you too fast tell him! It's not worth breaking an ankle just because you were trying to be polite. And for god's sake: if he's hurting you through bad technique help him correct his technique.



- **If the male to female ratio is low a few girls should assume a guy's role.** The nice thing to do in this situation is **take turns** and offer to relieve the girls who are being men ... and that way every girl gets to dance with a real man... and I hope that wasn't too confusing. ☺ It's actually really useful to be the guy sometimes, because you'll get a feel for what leading is – and if you can follow AND lead then you are set – most dancers only ever experience one. And hey; a couple of the girls in our club have become pretty good leads, and probably better at being a man than I am (\*cough\*Ana\*cough\*). ☺
- **Include others.** While you're not dancing you might notice a few of people who look like they're left out and/or dying to be invited to join in. Why not be the friendly Samaritan – go over to them, have a chat and maybe find them someone to dance with.
- **Some guys are very shy** and even scared when it comes to asking girls to dance; so if you see/know a guy matching this description it's a great opportunity to offer him encouragement or (if he doesn't get your subtle hints "*Gee, I wish SOMEONE would dance with me!*") just ask him outright.

## What to Wear

- Wow, definitely not my area. Don't get me wrong; I like wearing skirts as much as the next cross-dresser; I just don't feel qualified to give advice. ☺
- **Clothes.**
  - To get a good idea of what people wear I would firstly suggest look at photos on our uqdance website ([www.uqdance.net](http://www.uqdance.net)).
  - Probably the **safest thing** to wear is **jeans and a nice shirt** – casual but smart.
  - If you wear a **dress/skirt**, be aware that when you do a fast turn it can blow up (kaboom!), so maybe test it before you go dancing. If you've watched any professionals dancing on television you'll know that there are a lot of advanced moves and lifts where knickers will show. If you're not a professional you're probably safe, but (just in case) wearing your spice girls undies is probably not the best idea you've ever had.
  - Taking a change of clothes and towel to dance lessons is often a great idea. ☺
- **Footwear.**
  - **Having comfortable footwear is critical!** Never mind how good they look; if they are at ALL painful to walk in they are useless for dancing. I hate to break it to you, but very few straight men notice shoes, so it's not worth the torture. So don't say you weren't warned the next time you go home limping with foot blisters!
  - Girls seem to have a strange obsession with **high heels**, and admittedly most of the professionals on television wear them, but if you ask me, keeping your ankle un-sprained is more important than being an extra two centimetres tall! If you do insist on heels, then make sure they fit well and you can dance in them.
  - Never wear sandals or thongs. (*thongs = "flip-flops" for all you Yankees*). ☺
  - There is nothing wrong with a sturdy pair of **runners** on a girl! Not only can joggers be sexy (yeah, you heard me!), but they are the safest way to start learning to dance, and you can work your way to boots and then heels is you must. And yes; dancing on grass in heels is a bad idea... apparently\*.
  - *PS: If you REALLY want shoe advice or resident expert is Charissa.* ☺
- **Hair.**
  - A little tip about **long hair**. Yes, your hair looks beautiful when it's down, but I've danced with a few or girls who's long hair use to whip me in the face every time they spun. The easy solution to this is a hair tie I believe. Anyhow, just something you should be aware of: if you partner suddenly has hair in his mouth it's probably yours!
- **Jewellery.**
  - Jewellery isn't really my thing, but if you are a big fan (*i.e. if you have two Y chromosomes*) then make sure you don't wear anything too loose on your neck (beware of flailing necklaces) or anything on your hands that might scratch. As a guy I definitely find it harder to hold hands and dance with a girl who has multiple **rings**; they are distracting and they get in the way. **Earrings** are also a problem because they are easy to lose when you are dancing, and big ones can get tangled in your hair. In summary aiming for minimal or none at all is best.
- **Handbags.**
  - Handbags are a pretty neat concept actually – not only can you store lots of stuff in them but they are a fashion accessory too – no wonder women love them! Unfortunately it is REALLY hard for you and your partner to dance if you have a handbag falling off your arm – so find some way to lose it. If you're out on the city and you have a handbag with you, then try and palm it off to a friend before you follow a guy onto the dance floor. Girls will often leave their bags in a small pile (or a huge pile near the speaker in the case of Café Denim). There is always a small chance of theft, but so long as you use common sense and stay nearby you bags should be fairly safe.



### **Keeping Everybody Happy**

This next thing I'm going to tell you is a bit of an unknown secret about men. There are a lot of guys out there with a **debilitating fear of girls hating them**. I've spoken to a few friends about this – ALL of them really genuine guys – and not ONE of them hasn't at some stage felt like a girl (in my case an ex-housemate) has been extremely cold to him and treated him like he was a jerk without even knowing him. I guess it's usually a case of a misunderstanding or premature judgement. Guys DO tend to be crude and joke around a lot more, we do lots of stupid things without thinking and say a lot of stupid and sarcastic things like: "*hey Gary: you're a big fat idiot*". The thing is, very few of these things are done with bad intentions therefore we rarely take actions/comments like this to heart. Girls, however, tend to take things more literally. As a result of bad experiences, many guys are paranoid that if we make a single mistake you might suddenly hate us, which, in turn, can lead to the silent treatment, and that can be slow death to a man. **No-one wants to dance when they feel untrusted/unliked**. It's a vicious self-intensifying cycle too: if a guy feels/suspects you don't trust him, he is unable to be happy and be himself when you are around... and when he can't be himself he'll wonder who else hates him! In other words, by ignoring a guy and never smiling at him, you could be devastating his self esteem without even knowing it. I bet we've all probably done this to someone else in our lives and not even realized it. So don't frown or talk about guys behind their back if you don't know them.

I don't think it's fair for a guy to feel like he is a jerk (unless he is a jerk of course). In keeping with the idea of communication, if you do ever have a problem with a guy OR a girl (if they've upset you), just talk to them about it and resolve it! Wow... I should be a councillor or something. No more depressing stuff I promise. ☺

There are LOTS of nice guys out there learning to dance, and I can attest to the fact that many (if not MOST) of the nicest ones are single. So if you do meet a guy you like, ask his friends if he is single; there's a good chance he is. The other good news is that our little club and the dance scene in general is the type of environment where you can tell your friends, and they will talk to his friends... and maybe find out that he likes you too. It all sounds very high school, but hey; a LOT of our members are first years, fresh out of high school, so I guess it's fitting!

If you get into a relationship (or are already in one) that's great – you can go to dancing lessons and practise together. Make sure however you are not the jealous type – the two of you should still dance with other people, not ALWAYS with each other. Also, no relationship is perfect (read "*Men are from Mars*" and you'll understand) all the time. It's likely your relationship will end, so make sure that, if it does end, you can still be friends. A healthy relationship, the best relationships are built on friendship and trust. When the relationship ends, then ideally you can stay friends; be happy for each other and even still dance with each other on occasion. Well, that's the theory anyhow, and yes, it does happen; it just takes trust and maturity.

Not everyone is the hugging kind, but you'll probably notice in the dance crowd a lot of girls and boys hug each other when they say hello. For a guy, it's a wonderful thing indeed to have female friends who trust and even hugs him because it means he is trusted. Having friends of both genders is really healthy I think (especially having come from an undergrad of only guys); it helps you better understand the opposite sex and meet new people.



## ***For the Boys***

Before I start on the advice for guys, there is one thing I should clear up. I think a lot of guys will expect to be able to show off their new dance skills at a night club and impress girls. It's not impossible; but unless you bring along your partner/friend who you've practised with, expect to get a few funny stares and/or meet great resistance when you try teaching a girl some moves. A lot of you still might enjoy going out with friends to night clubs, but you've probably noticed that **dancing in night clubs is something entirely different to dancing at a place where people are just there to dance!** Almost all night clubs are smoky, dirty, dark, over-crowded, and sleazy and (as I mentioned before) there is usually an assumed ulterior motive when you try to dance with a girl. It would be nice if you could just say hello to a girl, and twirl her and just have fun, but I can count the number of times that's happened to me on one hand. It would be nice if you could just smile at a girl and offer to teach her, say, salsa; but rather than getting a smile back I think you are far more likely to get a snobby/nasty "*what-the-hell-are-you-doing*" type stare. I use to like to think it was possible to meet a nice girl in a club, but I've kind of given up on that idea. **You don't find nice girls in clubs.** Hey; I'm sure they exist, but in an environment where everyone smokes, and drinks, and the music is playing so loud you can't even make conversation I think you are wasting your time trying; although I guess it depends what you are after.



The dancing which typically takes place between couples here is pretty crude; people getting drunk and fumbling each other up; and most clubs seem to play pretty dodgy music (lots of bad R&B) – and that's why I don't really like clubs much... because very few of have what I call a friendly atmosphere (except maybe Chalk). If you want to dance in a friendly atmosphere ask the people you dance with about the dance scene – and check out the different places/events. Friday night at Café Denims (at Southbank in Brisbane) is a great place to go with a few friends, and hopefully see a few familiar faces, and eventually build the confidence to ask any girl to dance with you; especially the ones who look like they want to join in, but need someone to coax them out!



## Being a Gentleman

- Teaching a man to dance is one thing. Teaching a man to be a gentleman, is quite another. When I started writing this section it got quite long (in case you haven't noticed I have a talent for rambling) and I decided most of it didn't really belong here. I want to keep this document focussed on dancing, but if you want to read more about etiquette outside of dancing I'm going to upload something here:  
<http://www.andrewnoske.com/personal/misc.php>
- But just quickly: being a gentleman requires three things:
  - (1) First of all you obviously **need to know the basics**: politeness, etiquette, table manner, patience and selflessness. I call this the theory and hopefully most of you have been taught all the basics.
  - (2) More importantly (and this is the kicker) **you have to stay attentive!** Knowing theory is useless if you don't put it into practise. Knowing what to say/do and when is not easy, but every day there are new opportunities and half-chances to do nice things for people, to smile, to meet strangers and offer help – but you only if you are looking. Take your hands out of your pockets, stop thinking about assignments (and yourself), and start noticing what's going on around you; who's in a good mood, who needs cheering up and who might appreciate your assistance with something.
  - (3) And finally, to be a gentleman **you need to be confident and believe in chivalry**. Being a gentleman is very difficult if you don't believe in yourself, and don't stick to your principles. In today's modern world, where strangers rarely talk, it's easy to get into the mindset that gentlemen are a thing of the past, a dying breed... and nobody cares anymore. I use to think of gentlemen as the old stereotype: a breed of men who wore fancy clothes and lived a generation ago in a time before coloured media corrupted society. But hey; **people do notice**. Chivalry is not dead! So walk tall and aspire towards people like Antonio Banderas in Zorro (minus the sword fighting). I know a few people in our ugdance who I describe as gentlemen, and it's a wonderful thing when someone thinks that about you.
- Okay, so how does this relate to dancing? ☺
- What are you talking about?! Couples dancing is ENTIRELY about being a gentleman! This is a great chance to mix with people, to smile, to be polite, and include others. But of course as well as chatting you should also practise dance!
- When dancing with a girl, **the most important thing is to make sure the girl feels comfortable**. You might be the nicest guy in the world, but if she's just met you she won't know that... in fact, depending on the environment she might assume that your being friendly with her means you are sleazy. Sad but true. Men are not always good at reading facial expressions and body language, but hopefully it will be pretty obvious that if she smiles, she is comfortable with you, if not, she is probably new to dancing, shy, not comfortable with the idea of dancing with any guy, or she doesn't trust you yet... and with lots of girls it can take weeks of getting to know you before she does trust you!
- The first time you dance with a girl you don't know **the open hold is a great idea**. The open hold is much less confronting than the closed hold. Having said that; if you pick a girl who clearly has a lot of experience dancing (especially if she's an instructor!), then she might prefer to do it properly/by-the-book; and in professional dancing couples don't



use the open hold much. Try to read the signs; if she is clearly comfortable with you, closed hold shouldn't present a problem for her – if she looks nervous/uncomfortable, use the open hold and try some small talk.



**Closed hold**



**Open hold**

- It's always easier dancing with someone you know, or someone you know through a friend, than dancing with a stranger – and it also depends on what environment you're in (workshop/social event/night club) and her personality type. As a guy thought, it's polite not to hog all the best girls! And hey; it's also **great to help your friends out** – so if a male or female friend wants to dance with someone then offer to introduce them. The more different partners you dance with, the better you'll get.
- **Don't worry about skill level.** When you ask a girl to dance you probably won't know her skill level (unless you've watched/seen her on the dance floor) – she could be really good or really ordinary... but this isn't for the rest of the night; it's just one dance! I find it's fun dancing with novices because you have a chance to teach them, and if the girl you ask happens to be way better than you she will probably enjoy giving you some tips (if you ask for them). When you play a game like tennis, playing with better players is how you improve. Likewise in dancing, the best way to improve is to challenge yourself by dancing with girls who are really good – so don't be frightened of them!
- **If you see a girl who looks left out, ask her to dance!** No girl (or guy for that matter) likes to feel left out, so keep a look out for girls who are sitting back and looking shy and/or neglected. Approach them and say *“hello, I was wondering if you would like to dance”*. As soon as you ask she'll (probably) smile because she feels special that you asked. Nevertheless, even if she WANTS to dance she'll often tell you she is too shy or can't dance. This is your cue to persuade her – tell her that everyone else is dancing, and that there is no need to be shy and that you can teach her the steps. The more you practise asking girls to dance (and being a strong lead) the more confident you'll be to dance with girls who claim they can't dance.  
*“I don't know this dance sorry” “That's even better, because I can teach you”*
- **When you ask a girl to dance, your smile is very important.** But what I'm about to tell you now is a something I was almost too selfish to pass on and share. Well hey – I want to have SOME advantage over other guys! 😊  
In fact, I can't take credit because Nadim was the one who started this (so I'll have to get his permission)... if you want a girl to feel really special when you ask her to dance then

**it looks really good if you bow** – (just a little) – and put your right hand out ready to take hers when you ask her to dance. If you are feeling REALLY Sean Connery/James Bond/John Travolta then you might even try saying something really gentlemanly like “*may I have the honour of this dance*”. And as a little style tip, **it’s looks good when you put your left hand behind your back** when you spin a girl, and even better when you ask her to dance.

- Actually, I’ve just realized too that I’ve been using the words “*girls*” and “*boys*” a lot. In truth age doesn’t matter. If you see a happy looking forty year old or sixty year old who looks like she wants to dance, ask her – you’ll probably both get a kick out of it! And hey; who knows – she might have a daughter/grand-daughter nearby who will want to borrow you for the next dance! 😊
- The fact is, at dancing venues, and dancing lessons **most girls are just WAITING for you to ask them**. So be a gentleman and don’t keep the ladies waiting – because **if you hesitate to ask them to dance they will disappear**. If you are learning to dance, then asking girls to dance is virtually your OBLIGATION! So don’t use shyness as an excuse, and don’t be upset if they say no – its all practise. And hey; there are often more girls than guys in these situations. Don’t be intimidated by that; it just means there are even more girls who want you to ask them. Sometimes the ones that want to dance sit back, and will look shy and maybe even a little sad that no-one has asked... in other cases, the girl will be standing upright, almost on the dance floor – and these girls are practically begging you for a dance. They may as well have a sign that says “*dance with me*”, and if all the guys ignore their signs they will be pretty peeved off!
- And my final tips in being a gentleman. If someone is thirsty, offer to get them a drink (and I’m talking water here – don’t bring them anything else unless they ask for it). If a girl is cold, offer your jacket (massive brownie points for that). And, when a girl you know (and who trusts you) is leaving then it’s a good idea to walk to her car/bus/train. It’s not only a sweat gesture, but hey; it’s the safe thing too.
- **Disclaimer:** *At then end of this little section I should tell you that it would be extremely, extremely pretentious for me to claim that I am a gentleman. My late grandfather was a gentleman and I don’t even come halfway. It’s something I aspire to, but as a person who spends a lot of time in a dream world I find it’s VERY easy to forget the little things – like opening doors – until the moment has passed. So stay attentive! 😊*





### **Things to Remember**

- **Smiling is VERY, VERY IMPORTANT**
  - Girls respond to guys who seem happy and confident with themselves – and are always very wary of guys who seem down in the dumps. The bottom line is if you are not smiling, and not happy, girls will not want to dance with you.
  - So remember to enjoy yourself, perk yourself up. If you are down in the dumps for any reason (hopefully not because a girl said no to a dance – because that’s a VERY lame reason to get upset) it’s always good to have friends around – people who can help cheer you up.
  
- When asking a girl to dance:
  - **Wait for a new song to start** – make sure it is a good song for you to dance to (and you know what style to do) – you will feel pretty silly if you start dancing at the end of a song, only to find out the next song is a romantic piece.
  - If you don’t know the girl the safest line to use is always: *“Hi, my name is Bob, would you like to dance?”*... and if you already know them *“may I please have this dance”* is quite gentlemanly. *“Oi, bitch, you look mighty foxy tonight, how about it?”* is not a good idea... even if you know the girl REALLY well, I’d be pretty surprised if you don’t get slapped! ☺
  - **If the girl says no, you should NEVER feel offended!!!** Don’t be ridiculous! Too many guys take something like that to heart, but the simple fact is asking a girl to dance is NOT like asking a girl out. When a girl says no **she is not rejecting you** – she just doesn’t feel like dancing – and it could be because she is tired, or shy, or (often) uncomfortable with dancing – any number of reasons, but the reason is not important. When you get a no, just say something casual like *“okay, thanks anyway”*, smile, and look for someone else to ask. If she’s a nice girl chances are she’ll explain why she wants to sit out the dance, or suggest another girl you can ask. If she happens to say something mean, she’s definitely not the type of girl you want to dance with, but I have to say – I’ve not met a single girl at a dancing venue who has been nasty to me. Nightclubs however, there will be often lots of nasty/snobby girls around; don’t let them upset you!
  
- Always make a conscience effort to **remember girls’ names!** I for one am terrible with names, and have to force myself to pay attention or I forget straight away. The best good technique for remembering is to use her name is to use it/repeat it back immediately after she’s introduced herself (e.g. *“Nice to meet you Susan”* or *“Do you know the merengue Susan?”*). If she has an interesting/unusual name ask her where it comes from; anything to help you remember.
- **Conversation is a great thing**, so as some questions like *“how long have you been dancing Susan?”*, *“where did you learn to dance?”*, *“so what do you do/study Susan?”* and *“where are you from?”*... and keep using her name – but not every sentence; that just looks silly.
- Dance with everyone! Part of the fun of dancing is to **dance with lots of different girls**; you’ll soon notice each girl has a different style and unique personality. Don’t be the type of guy who only wants to dance with the girls he fancies; the most beautiful girl in the room; to me that just says you are pretty seedy. For those girls who are not as good as you, it can be great fun to teach them a new move, and tell them they are doing great; and for those girls who are obviously better than you, don’t be afraid to ask for a dance and ask them for a few pointers.
- Staring at your own feet a whole song does look silly, **HOWEVER it is a good idea to have a quick look at what shoes she is wearing** before you start dancing. If she is wearing high heels (which are very common), thongs, or clogs then the likelihood of her falling over if you try to spin her too fast is higher, and if you think her shoes look nice



(hard for men to judge since we never look, but try anyway), you should definitely comment *"I like your shoes"*.

- **Girls love compliments!** Even if you don't know her well, a comment like *"I like your shoes"* will probably earn you brownie points right away; meaning if you make errors **she'll be much more forgiving**. Comments like *"I love your hair"* or *"you look beautiful tonight"* are a lot riskier. ☺ Unless you know the girl really well, and know how she'll react I'd suggest say something about her shoes, dress, shirt, or earrings – those are all pretty safe; just make sure you do look first, and check that she IS wearing earrings. If you are insincere or blasé in your compliment then she will probably notice, so try picking something that she has probably put some thought into.
- **Girls will almost NEVER tell you what they don't like when their dancing with you.** It's a shame really, but EVEN if you are HURTING a girl by spinning her the wrong way, she STILL won't tell you. So how will you know?! Very, VERY good question – and I've concluded it's almost impossible UNLESS, you ask her *"do you have any tips for me"* or see a tiny, fleeting look of confusion when you do a particular move telling you that you could probably lead it better. Solution? Ask her how you could lead your moves better!
- If you are out and about and **a girl is treating you with suspicion** (because yes, girls are suspicious creatures, and usually with good reason) then it might help to **tell them that you're with a dance club** or doing dance lessons. By saying that they will be more convinced that your agenda is, in fact, dancing. If you have a girlfriend then dropping her into the conversation early on (eg: *"yeah, my girlfriend likes this song too"*) immediately lets her know that you're safe and unlike to try getting *"fresh"*!
- **Don't show off!** When you get a new partner its normal that you might want to impress them, but unless (a) you are a really good dancer, (b) she is a really good dancer and (c) she is keen for some serious twirling, this is a BAD idea. Showing off might appear in several forms:
  - #1) Is trying to dance above your partner's ability and/or endurance! It's a big mistake with a new dancer to immediately put her into a double spin and spent the whole song throwing her around. It's best to test the waters first to see where her ability is: start with a simple spin, see if she enjoyed it and work your way up. Don't leave woman feeling like she's a terrible dancer or her arms are about to fall off. This should be commonsense, but if she's not a confident dancer make sure you dance at her level, have some conversation and enjoy a nice relaxing dance.
  - #2) Trying to dance above your own ability. Rather than trying to cram as many moves as you can into five minutes (and yanking her arms off in the process) it's much better to focus on the basics. Despite what you might think most women prefer dancing with really good basic dancers than the guy who guys tries to cram in everything move he's got; in fact they learn much more from the basic dancer too.
  - #3) Trying to yourself some serious spins and fancy moves (generally admiring your own reflection) but not giving her a chance to shine. Most women love it when you stop still and let them execute a "shine" – it might be the only time ALL night when they actually get to chose what move to execute, rather than being told! Let her show off a little and then she'll probably be more than happy for you to show off as well. ☺
- **Don't get too sweaty!** I am a huge fan of energetic dancing, but I'm all also well aware that it makes me sweaty! Try not to let yourself get to the point where you are no longer pleasant to dance with or else seriously consider bringing a **change of clothes and a towel**.
- Never ask a girl for her phone number while you are dancing.
- Never have your hand lower than her lower back.
- Never ogle at other girls while you are dancing!
- **Never hold a girl too close.** Always keep some sunlight between you unless you're at a workshop and you've been told that this dance requires body contact. Lambada, for instance, is a fairly sexy, close dance, and not a very good one to do with a girl who doesn't know and trust you yet.



- **Never leave a girl during the middle of a song.** Unless it is a REALLY long song and you are exhausted/dehydrated/deceased/injured it is custom to wait until the end of the song to stop dancing.
- **Never look bored while you are dancing with a girl.** Even if you are tired, or dancing with a girl you don't gel with (and you feel awkward), try not to look bored or frown: she will notice! When you smile you are more attractive, and if she's a fun girl then she'll respond to that.
- When the song is over, you should thank the girl for the dance and **if you enjoyed dancing with her don't hesitate to tell her** "*you are lots of fun to dance with*" and she'll appreciate the compliment. If you are both having fun, and making progress you can ask her for another song, but two songs in a row is usually enough. At that stage you are probably pretty sweaty, so it makes sense to sit the next song out; have a talk with friends, drink plenty of water, and then ask a different girl to dance.
- **When girls are clustered together you should be particularly diplomatic in your approach.** Approaching a group of girls huddled together is a tough challenge for any man. One of the great mysteries of the universe. ☺
  - Let's say you want to ask a girl you don't know (girl A) to dance but she is with a friend (girl B). The problems are as follows:
    - (1) girl B will feel less attractive that you blatantly chose girl A
    - (2) girl A will feel awkward that you chose her over girl B, and
    - (3) girl A will feel awkward about leaving girl B by herself (especially if the two of them don't know anyone else there).
  - Tricky hey! Luckily there are a couple of solutions which should keep everyone happy and ensure no-one is left out.
    - Your first option is to show them that you would enjoy dancing with either of them and give them the option of who. The most important thing is to make eye contact with BOTH girls (instead of facing towards and staring at just one)...  
*"Excuse me; I was wondering if either of you ladies knows Salsa and would like to dance with me"*.  
 If they both look eager to dance with you, then you can say "*Okay, I'd love to dance with both of you, who want's to go first*"... but it's more likely one of them will elect to stay and the other will dance. When you dance make sure you don't go far (or the other girl might feel alone), and when the song has finished you should ask the other girl. Having said that, don't be surprised if they both say no – there is a good chance they want to stick together – don't push your luck just say: "*yep, no worries, thanks anyway*".
    - A better option is to have a good friend who can go along with you. In other words, if you see two girls, grab another male and say "*those two girls look like they might like to dance, are you with me?*", and then try and match yourselves up by height... "*Hello, my friend and I were wondering if you two girls would like to dance*". This can even work for larger groups of girls; just don't be surprised if some of them don't want to dance. Just remember: be friendly, be diplomatic and smile.
- You'll be surprised that, in today's day in age, after you've approached a few girls, and they decide you are a good guy then some of them will start approaching you and asking YOU to dance. And that's always pretty cool!
- If a girl does ask you to dance, never turn her down. It's a great thing that she has asked you, and it would be pretty horrible to make her feel rejected. If you are really tired you should say: "*I would love to dance with you, but I need a bit of a rest at the moment – how about I wait a few songs and then I'll come and get you*". ☺

## What to Wear

- I use to think that what a person wore didn't/shouldn't matter – "*clothes don't make the man*" – but after talking to a few female friends and reading material on the subject I decided that **how you present yourself is VERY important. First impressions count**, and the fact is girls appreciate a guy who always likes to look his best. I'm not saying you have to dress in a fancy suit for a lesson, or anything crazy – I'm just saying that a little effort goes a long way!
- **Clothes**
  - I don't know much about fashion (I have housemates who used to remind me of that every day), so if you want to know what guys wear to dancing have a look at the photos on our uqdance website ([www.uqdance.net/photos/](http://www.uqdance.net/photos/)).
  - Don't forget that **the best judge of what girls like is a girl**, so if you know some girls then ask them for advice. They might even be keen to take you shopping: but if they do this be VERY clear on what your budget is (trust me)!
  - When it comes to dancing lessons, the safest thing to wear is always a **good shirt and a pair of jeans**.
  - **Never wear shorts** dancing! I come from Cairns, so I use to love shorts, but when you're dancing they do look kind of dorky.
  - If you are going out on the town make sure you have a nice buttoned (and ironed) shirt, and long pants. Here in Brisbane lots of clubs have strict dress codes, and bouncers will often turn you away if you don't conform to policy (or if you are with a big group of guys with no girls).
  - If you know you sweat a lot then YES, people do notice unfortunately. Some sweat is expected, but ladies do find it unpleasant dancing with someone who dripping with sweat and starting to smell! If you start taking serious dance lessons taking a **change of clothes and a towel** is a great idea!
- **Footwear.**
  - Never wear thongs, sandals or naked feet.
  - At uqdance, everyone comes from uni and we don't dance on a proper dance floor, so there is nothing wrong with your average **cross-trainer** shoes.
  - Although runners are okay, if you are serious about dancing you should consider getting dancing shoes. Proper dance shoes have either leather soles (and the rest of them is usually leather too) which make them very easy to spin in. A good black leather dress shoe with hard leather sole is expensive (most of them over \$100), but should last a lifetime, so I think it's worth it. For that kind of money sure you test it out at the shop, dance on a hard surface and check it doesn't rub the back of your heel – shoes that are tight or rub will cause grief. My first pair of dancing shoes I got from a place which specialized in dance shoes in Cairns. The shoe itself was soft leather and was great to dance in (they slid/spun like a dream), but unfortunately the soft leather (suede) sole also meant it broke in less than a year.
  - **Suede soles** are best for proper polished dance floors; however if you use them on cement (like at Denims) they will start tearing apart. If you want something tougher get **hard leather soles**. At certain shoe stores you should be able to get a shoe re-soled with hard leather for under \$50.
  - *PS: At uqdance our expert in men's dancing shoes is definitely Jose. I'll have to ask him about it some time. ☺*
- **Looking good**
  - This advice I'm going to copy from a book. If you're going out, it's not enough to just have your clothes ironed and ready to wear. Before you go out you should be freshly showered and shaven. Then make sure you wash your face and cut your fingernails. Finally, put on deodorant and perhaps a little aftershave on your wrists

and behind your ears (but not too much) and gel in the hair – even if it's just a little bit. Now you are ready.

### **Keeping Everyone Happy**

And finally, a few tips about keeping people happy, and not upsetting anyone. If you haven't had much experience around women, you should know that **women are a LOT more easily upset** than most men. Using sarcasm and sexist jokes around a girl you don't know is a very, very bad idea – even if you think what you said was funny and innocent, she could easily take it to heart. So practise your diplomacy around girls. Don't say anything which might be taken literally, unless you know for sure that girl has a similar sense of humour. Common sense really, but hey; I've been caught out before, and girls are more emotional creatures, so once you've upset a girl, she's unlikely to forgive you straight away like your buddies do. Girls can hold grudges for AGES, so if you have offended a girl you have to apologise – the sooner the better. And hey; if you are too scared to apologise in person I'd strongly recommend writing and e-mail, text message or (if you don't have those options) a little letter – it's amazing how well it works when it's in writing. And not just to girls either; friends, relatives, who-ever – heartfelt letters can be pretty bloody powerful.

The other thing you have to be aware of about girls is trust. **Trust is a very important issue for girls.** They are naturally suspicious that guys have ulterior motives and/or can't be trusted. And hey; they often have good reason (bad experiences) causing them to be that way (read the girl's section about safety). If you're not open and comfortable around them then they will be less comfortable around you; making it even harder to become friends. So yes, it's a great idea to be friendly, but if you sense resistance don't be aggressively friendly – aim for polite. If she looks really uncomfortable dancing with you, dance a little further away.

*Storytime. I've always been a bit jealous of a friend and now housemate of mine called Alby. Alby he gets along great with most girls, but particularly our female housemates. Whenever one of them wanted to share a secret, or talk about guy problems, or even wanted a hug, or wanted a massage, they would ALWAYS ask him – never me. But then I realized; sure Alby is a champion, but he also had known these girls over YEARS, and built that trust over time. In a new environment you have to start from scratch.*

It's often pretty easy for two guys to get on mateship terms. Hell, if you support the same football team, and can remember each other's names you are ALREADY friends. If only becoming friends with girls was so easy. Sure, some girls will be friendly pretty quickly, but some girls are just nervous or shy and it takes YEARS of familiarity before they trust you! I for one love hugs... and hell; I'll even hug the odd guy (so long as it's in good spirits and less than three seconds – anything longer seems a bit gay). I think it's really wonderful to have close female friends who are on "hugging terms" – girls who you hug when you say hello – but it's not something that will happen overnight. Luckily dancing is a friendly environment, as you learn more about them, share stories, you'll develop a friendship. It won't always happen – maybe she's not very comfortable with contact, or maybe you aren't – but most adults appreciate a nice hug or (in the case of two guys) a solid handshake to say hello or goodbye.

Another tip (fairly obvious, but very important): if you're seen hanging out and dancing with other girls – then it's much easier for new girls to think: "*well those girls seem to trust him, he must be a good guy*" – and will be far more inclined to dance with you. If you are with a group of only guys it can look intimidating, and if you're by yourself it's bound to be awkward and difficult – very few people have the right personality to pull that off. For that reason, if you're investigating a new dance scene or even new lessons it's ideal if you drag a girl along! Even better, is if you go with a mixed group, because with more people comes



more chance that they know other people there. You can never have too many friends; say hello to everyone. 😊

***AFTER THOUGHT:** If I had to say one thing I didn't like about dancing (aside from sweat) it would be that it can be hard to talk (as in really talk) to people. I should justify that I think! Talking to people at dancing is easy – all of you are dancing, and through that shared interest you immediately have something to talk about – even with a complete stranger. HOWEVER, in a big group of people like this – all having fun and listening to music – people will rarely talk about anything in depth. I guess it's just not the time for deep emotional or intellectual conversation – more of a time to ask about the weekend – which is a shame in some respects, because to develop REALLY close friendships (or a relationship) I think you need a bit of the deeper stuff. That stuff can only really take place if you hang around until AFTER the music has stopped I think. 😊*

## Conclusion

Well that about does it for my advice – I hope you found it useful. I'd like to think I've made the benefits of dancing pretty obvious already, and hopefully convinced you that yes; even though it might be awkward at first, it is definitely worthwhile sticking with it! I've also outlined a few of the most common mistakes I've observed with beginner dancers, and hopefully by reading about these pitfalls you will be able to avoid most of them, and not only become a better dancer, but a more considerate dancer too.

It may seem like there are an awful lot of things you have to remember all at the same time, but hey; it's the same thing with learning to drive. With time and practise, the things which you struggle with become second nature to you. But best of all, dancing helps you become more confident, and that, in itself, is priceless.

I hope you've enjoyed reading this little document as much as I've enjoyed writing it, and best of luck in your dancing endeavours! If you're like me you'll look back two years from now and think "wow, I'm so glad I learnt to dance". So if you're one of those people who have always wished they could dance then get off your bum and do it! Join a club, take professional lessons, have fun and make lots of new friends!! And now, the rest is up to you.

Sincerely,

Andrew Noske. ☺



## Other Links:

- [www.ugdance.net](http://www.ugdance.net) – only the coolest club at UQ!
- [www.ballroomdancers.com/Dances/](http://www.ballroomdancers.com/Dances/) – has some good info about different dances & some free demonstration movies. (although their CG figures are obviously not as cool as mine ☺)
- <http://www.dance-card.com/> – a great independent site setup for all styles of dance (jive, swing, tap, salsa etc) featuring some interesting forums about etiquette and so on.
- [www.andrewnoske.com/](http://www.andrewnoske.com/) – download/play with “3D Dance factory” [here](#) (a program I made during undergrad)... sadly it doesn't have any dance steps, because creating all the key frames that would have taken me days. (maybe if you have that much spare time you could offer ☺)