



*Eight
Count
Magic*

Excercises, Etiquette,
and
The Zen of Lindy Hop

Dance Etiquette

On your road to becoming a more accomplished dancer, you need to be aware of the dance etiquette used. Most of the points I bring up are common sense, but if you've never partner danced there might be a few not as obvious.

I want to touch on:

Etiquette while dancing

Asking someone to dance	After a dance
Turning down a dance	Apologizing
Dancing WITH your partner	Bumping into others
Dips	The dance floor

Etiquette to be aware of:

Lessons during a social dance	Hygiene
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Etiquette while dancing

Asking someone to dance

One of the fastest ways to becoming a better dancer is by dancing with people who are more experienced than you. You should make it a habit to dance with at least one person per night that you consider more experienced than you.

Experienced dancers take you out of your comfort-zone and will challenge your leading or following skills. I strongly suggest watching the crowd and identifying the dancers whose style(s) you like. Ask these people to dance and openly admit to being a learning dancer.

As a new dancer you're likely to notice people dancing with the same people time after time - looking very much like a clique. It's a human tendency to hang out with people you feel comfortable around. Lindy Hop is very social and you'll find that friendships form easily, so the more you dance, the more friends you'll make. Although you may feel intimidated, ask ANYONE to dance! If they don't want to dance, they will tell you.

Inevitably, you'll want to dance with someone involved in a conversation. These situations can be handled in a couple of ways: 1) You could find someone else to dance with and come back after the current song finishes; 2) you could nicely interrupt the conversation and mention that you would like to dance at the next opportunity; or 3) you could nicely interrupt the conversation and ask the person if they would like to dance.

If you choose to interrupt the conversation your intended partner will either accept or tell you they want to finish the conversation. Even if it's a song that you really enjoy, you MUST accept their answer and act accordingly. If they want to finish the conversation I suggest you ask for a dance later, at their first opportunity. Everyone wants to be wanted!

Dance Etiquette

Asking someone to dance cont.

Don't take any "dance rejections" personally. Sometimes it's that particular song or the person wants a break to rest – you'll never know, so don't take a "no" personally. In the case of experienced dancers saying no – you'll discover that a lot of them don't get out as often as they use to, so when they do go dancing they're looking to catch up and dance with their friends. Experienced dancers don't mind dancing with new dancers, because they remember being a beginner. As I said, everyone was a beginner dancer at some point.

Turning someone down or being turned down for a dance

No one HAS to dance with anyone. The simple bottom line is that every dancer is solely responsible for their own enjoyment. As you dance more frequently you'll develop favorites. It could be the way they interact with you, it could be because you're comfortable with their styling, you could enjoy the challenge, or that you enjoy the dances because they don't hurt you.

Personally, I DON'T enjoy dancing to fast tempos. I never ask if the music is too fast for me and I usually decline and ask for the next dance at a more comfortable tempo. As I mentioned, don't take "dance rejections" personally. It's better not to dwell on the reason, so if you're "rejected" ask for a dance later and find someone else to ask.

If you turn someone down, DO NOT dance at all during that song. It's RUDE, and you wouldn't want it done to you.

Dancing WITH your partner

You should focus on your partner, and never the floor or surroundings – after all you're dancing WITH someone. Your job is to make the person you are dancing with look good. For Leads this means being conscientious of your partner's skill and adjusting your lead to the situation. For Follows this means avoiding back-leading or other actions that make the Lead feel "unimportant." For both Leads and Follows, if you stay aware and adaptive of your partner's feelings, you will be a popular dancer.

Look at but don't stare at your partner – one trick some people use is looking at their partner's shoulder or their earlobe. This confirms that you are paying attention, yet you are not staring. Being aware of your partner's body language and your body's relationship to your partner's body helps create a fun, comfortable dance.

Lindy Hop dances "succeed" because you're "working" with your partner to create the dance. In my opinion, a dance should never feel one-sided, even with partners with differing skill levels. As a new dancer you may feel you aren't "bringing as much to the table" and that couldn't be farther from the truth.

Dance Etiquette

Dancing WITH your partner cont.

A simple smile goes a long way towards making both partners feel appreciated. New dancers often forget to smile because they're caught up concentrating on EVERY movement they make - hoping to not make a mistake. While that's understandable, smiling is something that will make every dance feel better! When you smile, your partner is likely to smile back. Try it!

You NEVER scout out your next partner during a dance.

Dips

There is no set rule about dipping at the end of a song. Some Leads like to dip, some don't. Some Follows liked to be dipped, some don't. Only lead a dip if you feel that you can execute it successfully. This is true for even the most basic dips. If you are going to lead more complex dips, please ask her first. This is especially true if it is somebody that you do not dance with regularly. Some Follows do not like dips of any sort, either for personal preference reasons or for health reasons (back issues, etc...). If a follow resists at the start of a dip, take that as a sign that she does not like to be dipped. Follows NEVER get to decide to be dipped - doing so puts them at risk of being dropped. A lead dip lets the Lead to prepare to support the Follow's weight.

After a dance

Thank your partner. There are conventions that say that the person who asked for the dance should initiate the "thanks" or that the gentleman is "responsible" for saying "thanks". Personally, I believe both partners should thank each other. Usually both partners enjoyed themselves and are both appreciative, so why shouldn't they both offer the thanks. When warranted, I sometimes embellish and tell my partners that "I had a lot of fun" or something else expressive of my appreciation. Unlike some other dance styles (e.g. Tango) there are no "rules" stating that you should or shouldn't dance with this partner again. If you want another dance, ask after you've thanked them for the one that just finished..

Unfortunately, you'll have times (few, hopefully) where you DON'T enjoy the dance. Nonetheless, you still offer your thanks. Numerous factors can come into play to "create" a bad dance. You would never want anyone to tell you "you sucked" or something similar, so don't do it to anyone else.

There is a split opinion regarding the practice of walking your partner off the floor. Some people believe that it is a very respectful thing to do. Others feel that is unnecessary and too formal. A good compromise is to understand that the best course of action will vary from situation to situation. If either person is immediately asked to dance, thank your former partner again and then go dance with your new partner.

Apologizing

When I started dancing I apologized incessantly. I felt guilty about every step I defined as "wrong". I didn't realize that my partner's didn't want to hear my

Dance Etiquette

Apologizing cont.

apologies. They wanted to enjoy the dance despite my little mishaps. By constantly apologizing for EVERY little thing I thought I'd done wrong, I was cutting into their fun!

I won't lie and say that your partners won't notice your missteps, but in the best case scenario they're more aware of what they're doing during the dance than what you are doing (or not doing as the case may be). Realize that any mishap is only one or two seconds of a 3-minute song. Continually stopping or drawing attention to the misstep is as bad as the lookey-loos who slow down to look at an accident that's been pulled off the highway. Don't waste any of your dance time, move right along.

Bumping into others

This doesn't mean that you shouldn't ever apologize. If you step on your partner or you inadvertently hit your partner's body then of course you should apologize, but then go on with the dance.

Special note needs to be taken in situations where you run into someone or they run into you. In either of these instances both parties apologize, not just the people at fault. It's difficult to place blame on a moving dance floor, so both parties should accept responsibility and apologize.

The dance floor

The dance floor got its name because it's where people dance or soon will be dancing. After you've finished a dance, thank your partner as you're leaving the floor, avoid standing there and carrying on a conversation. In most venues, there are usually a couple of seconds before the next song starts, but there will be people moving to the floor as a song ends. Give them the space you'd want.

Additionally, if you're not dancing avoid cutting through or crossing the dance floor - opt for walking around the edges. The dancers will love you for this, and as you dance more you'll understand what I mean.

Etiquette to be aware of

Teaching on the dance floor

As a new dancer you'll regularly criticize and evaluate your own dancing. Believe it or not, I doubt any of your partners are putting energy into evaluating your dancing while they're dancing - they're far more concerned with what they're doing. While (or after) dancing with someone more experienced than you, it's fine to nicely ask if they have suggestions to offer. Be aware that in a social dance situation addressing your question(s) cuts into their social dance time. They might not be inclined to go into as deep of detail as you might like (or need), they may not want to offer comments for fear that the criticism will be taken the wrong way or they may be happy to help you work through whatever you were trying to do. Please respect their time.

Dance Etiquette

Teaching on the dance floor cont.

Most dancers are willing to show you a movement you noticed they do. Again, be respectful of their time and the fact that they came to dance, not teach.

NEVER EVER, EVER give unsolicited criticism during a social dance. When someone asks your opinion, be as nice as you would want them to be to you. Period!

Hygiene

I strongly recommend that both Leads and Follows bring additional shirts to every dance, as well as a small towel for perspiration. The warmer it is outside, the more shirts you should bring and don't think you won't need extra shirts in the winter either. Dancing bodies generate a considerable amount of body heat summer or winter. Having an extra shirt (or three) makes you far more desirable/presentable to a potential partner.

Under most circumstances you'll only be about 3-4 feet away from your partner. They can easily smell your breath, so keep that in mind. Bring mint-flavored gum or mints.

Wash your hands. Nuff said?!

Special Advice for Leads

When starting a dance, especially with someone you don't know, take it slow. Everyone dances differently, so take your time and get to know the other person by starting off with less complex movements.

Do your best to avoid leading movements that might hurt your partner. Do not push or pull your partner too hard. If she is not following something, try leading other movements. Make sure you pay attention to where your partner is and where she is going. The social dance floor is like the ocean and can be choppy and rough by no fault of your own - make sure she is safe on the sea.

Blues dancing and other close dances have recently become popular. I'm not trying to discourage close dancing, however, as a Lead, be aware of whether or not your partner wants to dance close. If she pulls away or appears uncomfortable, give her more space. Just because the blues dancing workshops teach a snug closed dance position does not mean that every follow wants to dance that way. Additionally, not every lady has taken a blues workshop. As a rule of thumb, when dancing blues style with a new partner, ask her she minds dancing close.

Lindy Hop Exercises - Beginner

Dish Washing Exercise

Exercise Goal: "Burning" the Liquid Step into your muscle memory.

The Liquid Step (step-step-triple step) IS the rhythm of Lindy Hop. Maintaining a consistent Liquid Step rhythm ensures fluidity in your movements and keeps you in rhythm with your partner. To advance your dancing skills, it's crucial that you move beyond constantly thinking about what your feet doing.

- If you have an automatic dishwasher, don't use it for a couple of days and do your dishes in the sink.
- You can practice with or without music, but if you choose to use music pick songs that are close to the same tempo (note: the radio is unpredictable).
- While you're doing the dishes be mindful that you are maintaining the Liquid Step throughout the time you're washing the dishes - initially it takes effort to not stop your footwork or the dish washing.
- Alternate every five (5) minutes or so between doing the rhythm standing "in-place" with doing slight side-to-side and minor back-and-forth movements.
- Try to practice this several times between lessons, listening to different music tempos. This gives you practice maintaining a consistent rhythm at different speeds.

Spaghetti Arms Exercise

Exercise Goal: Maintaining proper frame and keeping your shoulders parallel to your partner's.

Controlling your arms/elbows so that they don't go behind your back or get extended out from your body is difficult for beginning dancers, and yet another thing you have to master to advance your skills. When your arm(s) extends away from your body, not only does it increase the distance you have to travel, it also creates an unnecessary "communication" delay.

There are subtle differences in what a Lead does to indicate if the Follow should move straight back or that he wants her hip to rotate out. In this exercise, the intent is to have the hips of the person who is following move in concert with their shoulders.

- You'll need a friend to help you with this exercise.
- You'll stand conversation distance apart and have your friend hold both your hands, at your waist level - creating a bend in your arms.
- The friend should move your hands back & forth and parallel to the floor, at different speeds (slow is best, at first).
- Don't let your elbows go behind your back — your hips should move at the same speed and same time.
- Don't use your biceps to control your motion. Be aware of where your elbows are (without looking at your arms) and let your torso (and hips) move as your friend moves you.
- To effectively do the exercise you have to move slightly slower than your friend is moving your hands.

Lindy Hop Exercises – Beginner – Week 2

The Blind Leading The Blind Exercise

Exercise Goal: To understand and appreciate the difficulties of the Lead & Follow roles and to better understand how moving your body rather than just your legs helps move your partner.

This exercise challenges you to work with your partner's momentum and weight to create movement and determine direction. The purpose is NOT to try and "trick" the person who is doing the following.

- You need a friend to help you with this exercise.
- Facing each other, both partners should stand conversation distance apart and bend their arms at their elbows.
- The person leading has their palms up and grasps the follower's elbows. The person following has their palms down and grasps the leader's forearms, near the elbows.
- The person following closes their eyes.
- The leader moves slowly, initially just backwards and forwards and avoids stopping abruptly. The idea is to lead your partner in a given direction and absorb their momentum when stopping and then smoothly change directions.
- As the follower becomes more adept with backwards and forwards movements, you can expand by slowly moving left and right.
- Reverse roles periodically.
- To do an advance version of this exercise: the leader cups/curly the fingers, on both hands, as if holding a glass. The person following cups their fingers over the other person's hands (don't grip). The leader and follower shouldn't let their arms get extended from their body.

Jedi Lindy Exercise

Exercise Goal: Get a better grasp of personal space and relation to your partner's body.

It takes time to feel comfortable moving around your partner — while moving around on a moving dance floor. Leads and Follows must be constantly aware of where they are in relation to their partner other dancers. This helps avoid interfering or having other dancers interfere with their dance. This exercise helps identify and gives better understanding on how to control your personal space.

- You need a friend to help you with this exercise.
- Stand conversation distance apart with your shoulders parallel to each other and don't touch your partner.
- One person should take on the Lead role, the other the Follow.
- The Lead makes slow, deliberate movements back & forth and side-to-side with the thought of keeping their partner with them and maintaining parallel shoulders.
- Reverse roles periodically.
- Work towards being able to move at moderate speed in all directions and keeping your partner with you.

The Zen of Lindy Hop

Simple to understand, challenging to master

- Most Leads, even experienced Leads, have no idea what they're going to lead until they lead it.
- Any unnecessary hand movements done by Leads confuses your Follow, leading to them anticipate moves.
- Anticipation is at the root of all "bad" dances.
- Leads anticipate too.
- When dancing you don't stop one move, and then start another. When you're dancing, you're ALWAYS moving!
- Triple-stepping is your key to fluidity.
- Leads are responsible for making sure their partners don't collide with other dancers.
- In learning how to Follow, Follows are really learning how to wait. Waiting for the Lead to lead something.
- Follows, if lead into a movement that isn't clear don't "try to guess what it is or figure it out" -- remember your job is to follow not figure out what the Lead wants you to do! You may feel "silly" for a moment, but your Lead will quickly learn that you didn't know what to do and adjust what he does to lead the movement the next time.
- Believe it or not, Leads become better Leads when they realize their leading movement doesn't communicate what they want the Follow to do.
- Follows create and help maintain the best possible connection by waiting for a directional lead from the Lead and by NEVER assuming that the Lead won't change his mind
- If your elbow collapses behind your back, your partner gets too close.
- If your arm extends out too far, you create a situation where you have further to travel.
- Follows and Leads should keep both of their hands on the "table top".
- If/when you do any stylizing, whatever you do should NEVER put your partner off balance. You are responsible for your own weight!

Creating and Maintaining Your Frame & Connection

- Leads and Follows share responsibility in creating a good Frame for their partner to work with.
- Look at your partner regularly (don't stare, it's not polite) to keep you aware of how parallel your shoulders are with your partner's shoulders.
- Respect each other's personal space. There should be enough space between you and your partner to fit a beach ball, even when in closed position.

FRAME

Follows: Brace the heel of the left palm on the front AND corner of the Lead's right shoulder and push firmly against the Lead's shoulder, as though he has bad body odor. Leads don't pull the Follow's shoulder blade to create this connection, the pressure the Follow puts by pushing against the Lead's right shoulder establishes it.

Leads: A Lead's right hand should be squarely on the Follow's shoulder blade, not in the middle of her back nor below the shoulder blade.

CONNECTION

Follows: Follows shouldn't grip the Lead's left hand. The Follow's right hand is cupped over the Lead's hand.

Leads: The Lead keeps his left hand at the Follow's waist unless a movement is being led. This minimizes confusion and provides clarity for when the Lead is actually leading a movement.



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