

## Partnering Skills Part 1 - The Mechanics

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Dance partnering encompasses a range of skills that serve to enable both partners to achieve and maintain smooth and coordinated travel with each other along the dance floor. Partnering skills can be broken down into two major categories, i.e., mechanical and interactive. This article presents the basic mechanics of partnering such as the dance hold, physical connection between partners and dance frame.

Establishing and maintaining a proper closed dance hold is a good place to start as it is one of the most fundamental aspects of partner dancing. A correct dance hold enables partners to make dancing more efficient and effortless. This is dependent on factors such as good posture, a toned upper body and a solid connection between partners. All of these elements help to make the lead and follow process possible. A proper dance hold is established by holding the arms at approximately shoulder height with the shoulders relaxed and down. A straight horizontal line is formed along the arms and shoulders from elbow to elbow. This is an ideal upper body line for partner dancing. The arms may be more relaxed and held slightly lower for rhythm and Latin dance styles. In either case a toned connection between partners needs to be maintained

through the dance hold. Dancers should never slouch or lean into their partner but rather be mindful of maintaining good posture throughout the dance.

Both partners should look slightly left and directly over their partner's right shoulder. Partners need to establish a body offset such that the right front side of their bodies are aligned and in light contact at the hips. This enables each individual to have separate tracks that serve to open up the required space in which to travel. The body offset will align the lady's right hip in proximity to the man's right hip. This connection helps partners to move more easily along the dance floor as one unit. Moreover, the connection at the hips greatly facilitates turning patterns such as pivoting actions. Turns are further assisted as partners maintain space between their heads. This has the added benefit of providing a degree of spatial volume and circularity to the top of the body and is known as keeping 'a big top'.

The physical connection points of a closed ballroom dance hold provides the primary mechanical means by which dancers communicate with each other on the dance floor. Shifts of weight, change of direction and travel speed are all conveyed and sensed through the dance hold. It works best when each point of physical connection between partners remains intact throughout the dance. Partners' hands should be lightly clasped with adequate contact. The palm of the man's left hand is placed in the palm of the lady's right hand. The man's fingers are lightly clasped over the side of the lady's right hand. A tightly clasped handhold is a common error that is sometimes mistakenly used in an attempt to achieve connection. This greatly hinders one's ability to establish a good connection with their partner. The man's right hand is placed comfortably on the lower portion of the lady's left shoulder blade with his fingers and thumb together. The lady's left arm rests comfortably on the man's right arm with her left hand placed just below his shoulder. From this perspective we see that there are four physical connection points in the standard closed ballroom hold. All of these points of connection help to create a physically linked structure through each partner's upper body.

Proper connection through the topline of the body enhances stability and also provides the essential lead and follow feedback mechanism for both partners. It enables the man to better convey the lead while giving the lady a greater ability to follow the lead more precisely. It is important to stay aware of the fact that the upper body does not lead but rather reacts to movement initiated by the lower body. Therefore, the body's topline or frame can be thought of as a stationary structure that supports and transfers forces from the lower body. A good hold serves to make dancing more efficient and effortless. It helps to ensure that even subtle leads can be easily conveyed by the leader and recognized by the follower. This practice will always provide a considerable degree of stability, balance and elegance to the dance.

Dance hold, points of contact between partners and frame integrity represent the fundamental mechanical aspects of partnering. All of these attributes need to be in place in order to achieve stable and attractive ballroom dancing.



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