

Underarm Turns Part 1 Basic Guidelines

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Underarm Turns are undoubtedly the most frequently danced turns on the dance floor. They are also known as switch turns or walk around turns and can be danced either to the right or left. Underarm turns are danced in virtually all rhythm dance styles as well as many American ballroom traveling dances. This article highlights the basic elements for dancing efficient and attractive underarm turns.

While underarm turns appear straightforward, they do require special attention to various details. Adhering to proper techniques will always make an underarm turn easier to achieve. The following example gives a basic sequence of actions for an underarm turn in rumba. The same principles also apply to other dances. In this instance the man leads the lady to dance the first half of a rumba box step (quick quick slow) followed by a chasse sequence with feet stepping side, together, side (quick quick slow). The closed dance hold is released over the chasse and both partners end in an open facing dance position with the man's left hand to lady's right handhold. The man then leads the lady to an open break where both partners rock back and then transfer their weight forward. He raises her right arm as he steps to the side to initiate the lead for the turn. She places her right foot to the side and slightly forward as she enters the turn. As the man continues to lead the lady through the turn under the raised arms, he rocks back on his right foot as she steps forward, placing her left foot in line with her right foot turning $\frac{1}{8}$ to her right followed by an additional $\frac{1}{2}$ switch turn. She finishes by replacing her weight to her right foot and then closes left foot to right foot without weight continuing to turn by swiveling $\frac{1}{4}$ right to face her partner. The man re-establishes the closed dance hold as he leads the lady to dance the 2ND half of the rumba box (quick quick slow) to finish the figure.

Here are some useful suggestions for dancing a clean underarm turn. First, it is important for the follower to fully understand the role of her entry step into this figure as she steps side and slightly forward. On this step she places her right foot to the side with the front of the foot pointed out $\frac{1}{8}$ to the right with both insteps remaining aligned to each other. Once this foot position is assumed, she is technically already $\frac{1}{8}$ into the turn as referenced



between her feet. In the next part of the turn, the follower positions her left foot forward and directly in front of or slightly across the mid-line of the standing foot. Both feet need to be in-line and on the same track during this part of the turn. If the feet are not aligned in this manner, the legs will get crossed at the end of the turn, making it more difficult to finish the turn and prepare for the next step.

There are four distinct parts that contribute to each amount of turn. First, the follower's entry step side and slightly forward accounts for $\frac{1}{8}$ turn. Second, her left foot is placed in line with her right foot for another $\frac{1}{8}$ turn followed by an additional $\frac{1}{2}$ switch turn. At this point she has turned a total of $\frac{3}{4}$ to her right. Lastly, her weight is replaced back to her right foot and an additional $\frac{1}{4}$ swivel on the ball of the right foot is taken to realign back to the leader. A total of one full turn has been completed over these steps.

Here are some additional considerations for underarm turns. The arm connection has to remain toned throughout the turn. This is especially important in a single handhold. Any vagueness in this connection will degrade the potential to lead and follow properly. It is also necessary to fully shift and commit weight to each step throughout the turn. Incomplete shifts of weight are likely to hinder the turning action. Additionally, it is important to maintain good timing throughout. Rushed or delayed turning action will make the turn look unattractive and unfitting to the music. This can also disrupt the timing of subsequent steps.

The foot work is another important aspect of the turn. The rotation of the switch turn should be danced on the ball of the foot. This allows for the most effortless turning action. Good techniques will always serve to improve the look and feel of an underarm turn. It enables both partners to move through the turn confidently and with style.

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Enrollment with a partner is recommended. Participants should wear comfortable clothes and leather bottom shoes or dance shoes. Sneakers or rubber bottom shoes are not recommended.

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Instructor: Richard Fiore — Dual Licentiate, Imperial Society of Teachers of Dancing

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