

Center of Balance Part 1: The Basics

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Balance is one of the most essential elements of all partner and solo dance styles. The various aspects of balance all point to an object's state

of equilibrium, whether stationary or moving. This article will highlight the concept of 'center of balance' (COB) and its significance to dance.

There are various factors to consider regarding how an object maintains its balance. You may have encountered terms such as 'center of gravity', 'center of mass' and 'center of balance'. They all describe aspects of where and how an object balances. The concept of balance in the broadest sense can be viewed as an even distribution of weight around some central point that enables an object to remain in a state of equilibrium. The center of gravity and center of mass are essentially at the same point, assuming that gravity is acting uniformly on the object of interest. Both can be thought of collectively as a central point where the total mass of an object is concentrated. Therefore, the center of gravity and center of mass describe a central point within an object where balance naturally occurs. It is generally assumed that the area around the solar plexus is the central balance point



for a man and the area around the naval is the central balance point for a woman. This is only a general guideline since everyone's body shape and weight distribution differs.

In contrast the center of balance is somewhat different. While the center of gravity and center of mass are essentially at a fixed point, the center of balance can be easily influenced by how an object is positioned. Visualize an imaginary vertical line that starts from ground level and extends directly upward through the center of the object. The object in this case is the dancer's body. This means that the center of balance can be easily influenced by a shift of any part of the body along this vertical line. Postural characteristics such as head position, neck tilt, as well as forward, backward and sideways body pitch angles are prominent factors that will influence one's center of balance. The ideal center of balance line for ballroom dancing needs to be held precisely vertical. This will help to ensure an upright, steady and stable body dynamic while dancing. For most dance styles, this line is established by keeping the body vertical with the weight slightly forward and centered over the balls of the feet. For this reason, special attention has to be given to all postural factors that can affect the ideal center line of balance. If one pitches their body forward for example, it will move their center of balance line forward. This in turn will create a tendency for the body to move inappropriately forward due to the skewed COB line. In this example, the dancer has moved their equilibrium point forward and therefore past the ideal vertical line that would have otherwise been established and maintained by correct posture and body carriage.

Developing awareness of the ideal center of balance or equilibrium position is essential for quality dancing. Correct body alignment needs to be maintained throughout the dance. This involves a level of whole body awareness from head to

toe. It needs to be looked at as a dynamic process that requires constant monitoring of head, neck, torso, hips, legs and feet in relationship to the imaginary vertical reference line. As one moves in the dance, their body shapes in many different ways, making the center of balance a unique challenge on the dance floor.

It is not uncommon for one or both partners to be off their ideal COB line while in the dance hold. For example, if the man pitches his weight too far forward the lady will be driven backward and past her natural COB line. Conversely, if the lady shifts her weight too far back to settle into her heels, the man will have a sense of being pulled forward. If one or both partners have an incorrect COB line, it will affect their partner accordingly. This can lead to the use of excessive counterbalancing forces in an attempt to re-establish a balanced state between partners.

Good posture and body alignment is essential for all dance styles. It greatly helps to enhance balance by keeping the body's center of balance vertical and central throughout the dance. This enhances stability and also gives a more elegant and confident appearance on the dance floor.

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