

The Circle in the Square

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This article highlights the physical layout of the ballroom dance floor and its relationship to the room. Various headings along the floor are specific pathways that are used to navigate through the dance. While most dancers are familiar with the overall concept, there are some nuances that need to be considered.

Let's start with a review of the major pathways along the dance floor. They are known as room alignments. Room alignments are also referred to as 'alignments' and are used to describe the position of the feet in relation to the room in the direction of travel. Alignments serve as headings that help dancers navigate smoothly and safely around the room. They only apply to smooth dances that travel counterclockwise (CCW) around the room such as waltz, foxtrot and tango. The most prominent alignment is for the forward flow of dance traffic and is known as the 'Line of Dance' (LOD). Alignments also provide a pattern of how dance figures are directionally positioned and joined together at the beginning and end of each figure. They define where figures start and end as well as where the next one begins relative to the room. Conversely, rhythm dances such as rumba, cha cha, and salsa are 'spot dances. As such they are danced in a more limited area or in one spot on the dance floor independent of room alignments.

Envision the dance floor as having four main corridors that are connected together in a row. After traveling to the end of one corridor it is necessary to curve or turn ¼ to the left in order to enter the next corridor and so on. The layout is similar to four one-way streets tied perpendicularly together in a manner that permits traffic to continuously flow in a forward CCW direction. Each corridor is a line of dance which is the pathway used for navigating around the dance floor. The major alignments used to describe the flow of normal dance traffic are stated as follows:

Line-of Dance (LOD): The space between the physical wall and the center of the room in the direction of forward CCW travel. There are two along the length and two along the width of the room for a total of four lines of dance.

Wall (W): The physical wall is to the leader's right while traveling along a given LOD. There is a wall associated with each LOD.

Diagonal Wall (DW): An alignment facing halfway between the wall and LOD. There is a DW alignment for each LOD.

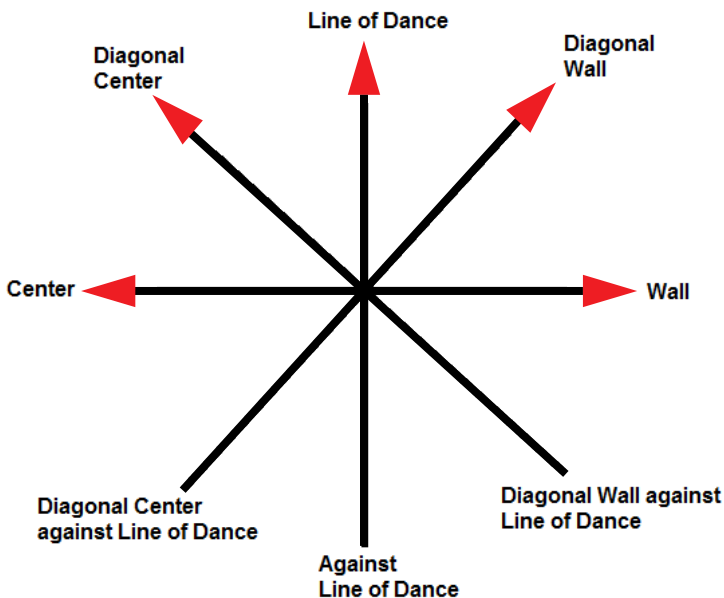
Center (C): An imaginary line that slices both the length and width of the dance floor in equal halves. This alignment is analogous to a double yellow line on a roadway used to separate car traffic in opposite directions. The center is opposite the wall for each LOD. There are two centers associated with the dance floor.

Diagonal Center (DC): An alignment facing halfway between the center and LOD. There is a DC alignment for each LOD.

For some, knowing exactly where one LOD ends and the next begins has proven to be one of the biggest perceptual stumbling blocks while navigating the dance floor. By definition, the line of dance is the entire space between the wall and the center line in the direction of forward CCW travel. This seems clear enough until you approach the end of a given LOD while facing a wall directly ahead. The nuance here is in how one perceives the room. Some conceptualize each LOD as literally running the entire length and width of the room. While this is theoretically correct, it does present a practical dilemma when reaching the extremities of a given LOD. Since the room has two center lines, a new line of dance can be established soon after the other center line in the room is passed. Therefore, it is very helpful to envision the room as being more circular than square. This allows for an earlier and more relaxed transition to a new LOD. It also serves to keep dancers away from the corner where they can easily get trapped. I have personally found this to be especially helpful while dancing ballroom routines on small dance floors.

Room alignments are good directional references that should be incorporated at all levels of ballroom dancing. When managed correctly they help to keep traffic along the dance floor flowing in a smooth and orderly fashion. Alignments also give a clear reference to the start and finish directions of all figures for any dance routine. It is most important to realize that one can enter a new LOD before running to the end of the existing one. In this manner there is an enormous advantage in seeing the 'circle in the square'.

Room Alignments



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

Candidate Dances: Foxtrot, Rumba, Waltz, Cha Cha, Swing, Salsa/Mambo, Bachata, Tango & Meringue

Class Dates (Fall 2022): Fridays - 9/16, 9/23, 9/30, 10/7, 10/14, 10/21, 10/28, 11/4, 11/11, 11/18 and 12/2

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

Location: Adelphi University, One South Ave., Garden City, NY 11530 - Woodruff Hall Dance Studio

To Register: \$125/person for general admission. **Registration with a partner is recommended.** Call Noreen DeNicola at (516) 877-4260 or email ndenicola@adelphi.edu