

## Rock Step

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A rock step also known as a break step is a two-step movement in dance that describes a transfer of weight from one foot to the other with an associated rocking action. It can be danced as a 'back-rock', 'forward-rock' or 'side-rock'. This article will highlight various features of the rock step.

A rock step is characterized by two changes of weight in which a small step is taken followed by a transfer of weight back to the original foot. This action is normally expressed as 'step and replace weight'. A rock step can be danced in either a closed or open dance hold. It is most frequently danced in a closed hold; however, there are figures that require a rock step to be danced in an open hold. An open break is an example of this, in which both partners dance a back-rock in an open hold. This is commonly used to prepare the follower to dance an underarm turn. Rock steps are predominantly used in fast tempo syncopated rhythm dances such as East Coast Swing, Cha Cha, and Hustle; however, they are also used in some of the slower tempo dances such as West Coast Swing. Back-rockers are incorporated into the basic step patterns



of each of these dances. A variation of the rock step is used in tango to create a turning action while traveling. This is known as a turning or rotational rock step.

All rock steps should be danced with precise timing, proper footwork and correct feet positioning. Step width needs to be especially tailored to the rhythmic count and cadence of the music. East coast swing, cha cha and hustle have syncopated rhythms with an inherently fast tempo. As such, rock steps are best danced using small compact steps with limited body movement. The most common footwork for a rock step is ball-flat; however, a back-rock can also be danced as ball-heel. This is greatly influenced by the tempo of the music and left to the discretion of each partner. Rock steps are almost always danced with natural opposite feet positions, i.e., as the leader dances a back-rock, the follower complements with a forward-rock on the opposite foot and vice versa. Natural opposite feet positions are implemented in nearly all steps with the exception of those where partners are intentionally on the same foot while in side by side or shadow positions.

While a rock step may look like a simple change of weight, it can be quite challenging. Hustle, for example, which is a particularly fast moving dance, features a syncopated rock step that is danced on the '& 1' rhythm. In this dance, two changes of weight occur over one beat. Leaders sometimes point their foot outward and tap in place of the rock step. All rock steps have similarities; however, they are somewhat dance specific. Rock steps therefore need to be optimized for a given dance. One of the key functions of a rock step is that it serves to change the dancer's direction. In cha cha for example, as the leader dances a forward chasse, i.e., with feet positions forward-together-forward (right left right), he follows this with a forward-rock commencing with his left foot and then replaces weight back to his right foot. This action changes his direction of travel from forward to back. Therefore his next chasse feet positions will be back-together-back (left right left) as he travels backward. Hence, the rock step action creates a change of direction. The same principle holds for side chasse sequences in cha cha.

There are various levels at which rock steps are danced based on one's individual experience. Beginners generally dance a larger than necessary step with an exaggerated back and forth rock of the upper body. More experienced dancers exhibit a compact in-place rock step, with good adherence to the rhythm. This allows for more efficient and accurate management of fast syncopated rhythms. While developing the technique further, the rock step takes on the characteristics of an even more compact step action with a subtle thrust forward near the end of the step. Some common rock step errors include taking huge steps, sinking too much weight into the heel on a back-rock, not fully committing weight on the replace step, incomplete or faked weight changes and falling out of rhythmic count.

The most important part of a rock step is to create two distinct changes of weight that are synchronized to the rhythm. All other aspects will be further developed over time. Dancers can add their own style, making rock steps an even more unique experience.

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