

Footwork

By Richard Fiore

(Licentiate, (LAB, LAR, T) Imperial Society of Teachers of Dancing)



Footwork describes the part of the foot that is in contact with the floor over each step. Using proper footwork and leg action is essential for achieving quality dancing. Footwork is sometimes mistaken for foot position which is yet another distinctive element of dance. Proper footwork ensures that each step will start and finish on the correct part of the foot.

Footwork technique for ballroom smooth dances differs from that of rhythm and Latin styles. For example, leads in waltz and foxtrot are initiated from the heel of the foot. In these dances, the leader takes a forward step with the heel initially in contact with the floor and finishes with pressure on the toe. This is known as heel-toe footwork. The follower simultaneously steps back with the toe initially in contact with the floor and finishes on the heel. This is known as toe-heel footwork. During this same step the follower also has to roll off the front foot so that the toe of this foot releases from the floor. This is all part of proper toe-heel footwork for a backward walking step. Footwork has a strong association with rise and fall in waltz. For example, the leader's forward step is taken as heel-toe. Both partners commence to rise at the end of this step. Since the follower finishes on the heel at the end of this step, there is no foot rise; however, there is a slight body rise. On the 2ND step, both partners continue to rise up on their toes over this step. They take the 3RD step on the toe and finish on the heel using toe-heel footwork. This is a descending step in which both partners lower to their heel at the end of this step. There are figures in waltz that require specific footwork to create various types of rise and fall. For example, an open impetus or heel turn used at the silver level involves the use of heels for the turn over the first two steps. The footwork for this movement is toe-heel, heel-toe, toe-heel, over the three steps respectively. This footwork has to create a delayed rise known as a 'late quick rise'. There are many other types of rise and fall that each requires very specific footwork. When the footwork is properly coordinated with the rhythm of the music over each of the steps, the rise and fall as well as the character of the music will be more elegantly expressed.

American tango is an exception in that there is no rise and fall. It is danced in a slightly lower body position at a fixed body height. For this reason, forward walks are taken with the heel in a lower stance. This footwork is denoted as heel; however, the foot finishes flat at the end of the step. In contrast, waltz and foxtrot are led with heel-toe footwork as previously mentioned.



The manner in which the feet move between steps is also an important aspect of footwork. For example, the moving foot in foxtrot and waltz skims the floor between steps whereas in tango the moving foot is lifted off the floor and then placed back down on the floor.

Latin and rhythm forward and back dance leads are taken from the front of the foot and are referred to as toe leads. In actual fact the corresponding footwork is initiated on the ball of the foot and then lowered to the flat part of the foot. For side steps in the same dances, this step is taken on the inside edge of the ball of the foot and then lowered to the flat part of the foot. This ball-flat footwork is predominately used in Latin and rhythm dance styles. Using the proper part of the foot helps to ensure balance over each step. Moreover, it provides an alignment cue to the rest of the body especially ankles, knees and hips. Being continuously aware of footwork along with the methodical transfer of weight between steps will go a long way in improving balance and posture. Ball-flat footwork is also essential for achieving proper hip motion in Latin and rhythm dance styles. If a step is not properly initiated on the ball of the foot, it can easily result in unattractive or no hip action. The hips respond directly to the footwork as well as the amount of bend in the moving leg. As weight is transferred onto the stepping foot, the associated hip will correspondingly rise. Correct footwork always helps to cultivate good hip action.

Using proper footwork and leg action will help to form a solid base on which the body's movement can be built upon. Quality dancing starts with a good connection between the feet and the floor. Correct footwork facilitates balance while adding stability over each step. It also adds an extra measure of precision that results in a more attractive and enjoyable dance experience.

Ballroom Dancing at Adelphi University

Professional Studio with wood floor & mirrors!



Refine your skills in the most popular ballroom dances! Best practice syllabus based techniques.

Join us at Adelphi University Garden City, NY Campus for an Amazing 11 week Dance Class

Spring semester classes will begin in January - Dates to be announced!

Description: This class offers an opportunity to gain experience in social / ballroom dancing. It is an excellent choice for those looking to develop fundamental dance skills as well as building on previous experience. The instructor will break down all dance figures and combine them to form amalgamated routines. Best practice syllabus-based techniques in timing, feet positions, alignment, footwork, and lead and follow will be demonstrated. This class is suitable for first time dancers as well as those with previous experience. It is designed to build confidence and enhance social enjoyment on the dance floor. Social dancing gives you a more positive outlook on life!

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

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