

Leader

Have a plan

Leaders, it sounds obvious, but it is important (in Ballroom and in Latin) to have a plan. This means knowing what figure you'd like to do next, how to transition into that figure and how to lead the follower to complete the figure that you're currently dancing. Don't worry, this does get easier with practice!

Ballroom frame

Stand up nice and straight, shoulders back and down, lift your arms as if you're holding the world's biggest beach ball - there'll be a nice slope from your shoulders down to your elbows. You can now bend your arms at your elbows to take hold. If you're dancing with someone much shorter than you, don't bend forward or let your frame sag.

Ballroom turns

According to the technique books, the Natural Turn in the ballroom dances starts with the leader facing diagonal to wall, the couple turns three quarters of a turn to the right and the turn ends with the leader facing diagonal to centre. (The Reverse Turn is three quarters of a turn to the left.) It is useful to know this. However, there may be times when you want to change this. You should know before you start turning how much turn you want to make. You will need to rotate your upper body to lead your follower to turn. You can't just take your first step forward and then try to leap sideways around your follower, start to rotate as you're taking the first step and continue the rotation on the following steps.

Open hold leading in Latin

Your centre of mass is roughly around the height of your belly button, the same is true for your follower. When leading in left-to-right hand hold, make sure that your arm is describing a line from the height of your belly button to the height of your partner's belly button. Keep your elbow quite close to your body (not stuck to your waist but quite close). Using this line will help you to transfer signals to your partner with much less effort and much more clarity.

Signal and noise

Leading is a combination of a lot of physical signals and visual cues. Raising your arm will usually result in the follower turning under it. Leading can be very slight and very subtle. It is easier to make it clear if you are not doing lots of extra movements (don't bounce your arms up and down while you're dancing as your follower won't know which bit is bounce and which bit is a signal to turn). You want lots of signal and not a lot of noise! This doesn't, however, mean you should be rigid and sterile while dancing.

Latin posture

Stand upright (pretend you are 6 inches taller than you are). Keep your heels together and turn your toes out so there is an angle of about 45 degrees between your feet. Lean slightly forward, your weight should be over the balls of your feet. It should be possible to slide a single sheet of A4 paper underneath your heels.

Follower

Being a light follower

In both Latin and Ballroom, being a light follower makes things easier for the leader. Being light has nothing to do with body weight, it's about how easy it is for the leader to lead the follower. One way to be lighter on your feet is to make sure you're standing up nice and tall, lift your upper body off your waist and engage your core.

Ballroom frame

Stand up nice and straight, shoulders back and down, lift your arms as if you're holding the world's biggest beach ball - there'll be a nice slope from your shoulders down to your elbows. You can now bend your arms at your elbows to take hold. Make sure your right elbow doesn't get pushed back behind your rib cage. Keep some tension in your right arm to keep the frame.

Ballroom turns

According to the technique books, the Natural Turn in the ballroom dances starts with the follower backing diagonal to wall, the couple turns three quarters of a turn to the right and the turn ends with the follower backing diagonal to centre. (The Reverse Turn is three quarters of a turn to the left.) It is useful to know this. However, sometimes the leader may want to turn more or less, so don't force the leader to turn the amount you think they want to turn, let them lead you.

Open hold leading in Latin

A lot of leading in Rumba and Cha Cha is in open hold with the leader's left hand and your right hand. Keep your elbow in close to your body (not stuck to your waist), that will make it easier for your partner to lead you. Try not to lift the joined hands up.

Signal and noise

Leading is a combination of a lot of physical signals and visual cues. When the leader raises their arm it is usually because they want you to turn under it. Leading can be very slight and very subtle. It is easier to notice these movements if you are not doing lots of extra movements (don't bounce your arms up and down while you're dancing as you may not notice when they are trying to lead you to turn). This doesn't, however, mean you should be rigid and sterile while dancing.

Latin posture

Stand upright (pretend you are 6 inches taller than you are). Keep your heels together and turn your toes out so there is an angle of about 45 degrees between your feet. Lean slightly forward, your weight should be over the balls of your feet. It should be possible to slide a single sheet of A4 paper underneath your heels.