

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 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.

Stand up straight

Stand up straight when you dance. Either in Latin or in Ballroom. Be six inches taller than you are. Roll your shoulders back and down. This should open up your chest cavity allowing your lungs lots of room to expand. Breathing really is important!

When you stand up straight, engage your core, you should feel your torso lifting up off your hips, this will make it easier for your legs to move more freely, it will make you a lighter dancer.

Leading the Hockey Stick or Alemana from Fan (Rumba)

The steps on beats 2 and 3 are the same whether you are doing the Alemana or the Hockey Stick. On step 2, lead your partner to close their feet, by giving slight pressure with your left hand. Keep the joined hands at waist level.

On beat 3 you can start to raise your arm, it should be in the correct position on beat 4.

If you are leading the Hockey Stick then your forearm will be above your head and your fingers pointing to your right, your thumb will be on the back of your partner's hand.

If you are leading the Alemana then your left palm will be towards your partner, stopping them from continuing forward. If you're getting enough tension from your partner, you may find that they have turned very slightly towards you.

On beat 1, you wait in that position.

In the Hockey Stick, the follower will walk forward on beats 2 and 3, only turn them between beats 3 and 4. You do a normal back basic here, but make sure you are close enough to your partner.

In the Alemana, your hand will be slightly above your partner's head (they need to turn under their own arm without having to duck). Provide some responsive tension so that they can push off your left hand to help them with their turn, you can help this slightly, but please do not stir your partner.

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 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.

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When you stand up straight, engage your core, you should feel your torso lifting up off your hips, this will make it easier for your legs to move more freely, it will make you a lighter dancer.

Leading the Hockey Stick or Alemana from Fan (Rumba)

On beat 2 from the fan position you will close your feet. If you step back, the world won't end, but you shouldn't have enough space to step back, so the closing will be easier, plus the change of weight here can look quite good so it's worth practicing this.

Beats 3 and 4 are steps forward, don't go past your partner, because you don't yet know if it's a Hockey Stick or an Alemana.

If it's a Hockey Stick, your right arm will be in front of you (palm facing forward), you should be able to turn to your right and see your partner's face framed by their arm.

If it's an Alemana then they will have stopped you and your right arm will be just above your head. You may have turned very slightly to your right towards your partner at this point. Keep tone in your right arm, don't let it fall behind your body - that will hurt.

On beat 1 you will wait in that position.

On the Hockey Stick, your next two steps are forwards, make them small. You'll turn between beats 3 and 4 and beat 4 is a step backwards.

Keep tone in your right arm and keep it at waist level.

Making a swift Alemana Turn

Use your right hand to apply pressure to your partner's hand, this will help you get the momentum you need to make the turn. Stand up straight, you need a strong and engaged core. Move your left foot into position quickly and then transfer your weight. Make the turns sharp.

If you are taller than your leader, then you may need to let go of your right arm, never duck to get underneath it - that will cause your core to collapse which will make the turn much harder.