

Leader

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.

Tango Walks

In Tango, our feet are twisted slightly to the left so that the ball of your right foot nestles into the arch of your left foot. The forward walk with your left foot will go almost in line with your right. Your right walk forward will not be in line but will be to the right of your left foot.

Forward ballroom walks

Stand up straight and tall with the legs straight (but the knees are slightly soft and not locked). Bend the standing leg as you swing your leg forward from the hip. Use a heel lead when stepping forward, don't push the toe along the floor. The heel stays in contact with the floor as you move. Take a nice big long stride forward. But do make sure you are leading your partner with your chest, shoulders and frame, rather than just sticking your foot forward - this will help the follower to take a long stride backwards. Remember that striding backwards is harder and stride lengths tend to be shorter for all of us when we go backwards. So be aware of your follower and be considerate - encourage them to take nice big steps, but don't push them over or tread on them.

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.

Progressive Link in Tango

Both steps are quick steps. Please move on to the slow step that comes next (the first step of the next figure) straight away rather than hanging about. Both steps are quite small. The first step is forward in line with your left foot, the second step is on the inside edge of the foot.

On the second step you're going to move your partner into Promenade Position. Raise your right elbow by about a centimeter. Apply a little pressure to your partner's back with the heel of your right hand. It's a subtle, but definite movement.

Natural Top in Rumba

The timing in the Natural Top is the same as in the basic. We don't move our feet on beat 1. You don't do it in basics, so don't do it in the Natural Top. Your follower might try to move on that beat, try to hold them steady so that they don't.

You can do one bar or three bars (or five, or seven, etc) of turning. You'll finish turning by closing your right foot to your left (instead of crossing your right behind your left). This will stop the rotation and your partner will know you've stopped moving. As usual, your partner is connected to your frame, not your feet, so it's actually more about your shoulders moving (or stopping) than your feet.

Your step behind should be as close to toe-to-heel as you can manage (your feet will be at right angles). Your side step is almost no step at all, it's mostly just unwinding your feet. Keep your steps small and you'll keep the rotation tight (which will be more comfortable for your partner as well as looking much neater).

Keep your shoulders parallel to your partner's. Don't let them dance in your armpit.

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.

Tango Walks

In Tango, our feet are twisted slightly to the left so that the ball of your right foot nestles into the arch of your left foot. The forward backward with your right foot will go almost in line with your left. Your left foot walk backwards will not be in line but will be to the left of your right foot.

Backward ballroom walks

Bend your standing leg and swing your other leg from the hip, the toe stays in contact with the floor as you swing it backwards. Really stretch it out behind you and take the biggest stride you feel comfortable taking. Release the toe of the front foot from the floor as you drag that foot backwards. The toe release will keep your knee nicely out of your partner's way and will help you keep the speed of the movement (dragging the toe along the floor acts like a brake and really slows you down).

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.

Natural Top in Rumba

The timing in the Natural Top is the same as in the basic. We don't move our feet on beat 1. You don't do it in basics, so don't do it in the Natural Top. Your leader might try to move on that beat, try to hold them steady so that they don't (not that I'm encouraging back leading).

The leader can do one bar or three (or five, or seven, etc) of turning in the Natural Top. You won't know how many they'll do. They will close their feet at the end which will stop their shoulders from rotating, so you should also feel that the rotation has stopped. Don't force it to continue and don't automatically stop after one bar in case they want you to do more.

Your crossing step should be heel-to-toe and the toe of your right foot won't move very much when that foot crosses. Your toe will be between your partner's feet. Your side step will be quite small. This will help you and your partner to keep a really tight circle of rotation which will make the Natural Top really neat.

Keep your shoulders parallel to your partner's. Don't dance in their armpit. Don't let your right elbow collapse.