

I want to be a better dancer!

When I say that I want to be a better dancer, I need to know what I mean by 'better' to have half a chance of finding it.

Here are some thoughts on what being a better dancer means. You might have other thoughts you want to add to this list.

Most of this applies to all ten dances, but some things differ (rise and fall is important in Waltz, bounce is important in Jive).

A better dancer ...	What does this mean?
Knows lots of content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I know lots of figures. • I can dance them accurately. • I can dance them fluently.
Has good choreography and floorcraft	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I can navigate around the floor. • I can avoid obstacles safely. • I can adapt to the conditions around me.
Feels the sprit and character of the dance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Cha Cha looks and feels like a Cha Cha, a Waltz looks and feels like a Waltz. • I have the right amount of: rise and fall; speed; sharpness; flow; bounce; drama; etc appropriate to the dance. • I have good timing.
Performs well	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I'm aware of the performance aspect of dance.
Has good quality of movement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I have good technique: foot pressure; leg speed; hip action; muscle tone; precision of movement; etc. • I have good arm styling and a good headline. • I have good balance and poise and a good frame.
Has good fitness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I have the physical endurance to dance for the session. • I have good aerobic fitness. • I have good core strength. • I have good muscle strength and flexibility.
Is a good leader	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I have a good frame with good physical connection. • I understand and use rotation, sway, shoulder leads, rise and fall, etc. • I have good timing. • I'm aware of what my partner needs and I can respond to them during the dance. • I lead (tone, arm movements, shaping, visual cues, etc).
And / or a good follower	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I have a good frame with good physical connection. • I respond to my partner. • I am responsible for my own weight, frame and movement. • I respond to the leads (tone, arm movements, shaping, visual cues, etc).

So how do I become a better dancer?

Take things at a pace that works for you, you don't have to improve everything and you don't have to improve instantly. Be kind to yourself and keep having fun!

Pick just one (or a few) of the above to focus on, if you try to do everything at once it can become overwhelming.

Things you should be doing as much as you can that will help with everything:

- Go to classes (make notes if you can or watch summary videos if available).
- If you can, go to different classes with different teachers – different voices can make a big difference.
- Practice on your own and with a partner if you can.
- Dance with others, especially others who you think are better than you are.
- Listen to dance music even when you are not dancing to get used to the timing, rhythms, feel of the music.
- Watch others dance, either in class, at social dances or online.
- Just being aware of something can really help. For example, in your next ballroom class, really think about rise and fall. Then, at social dancing, watch the rise and fall of other dancers (and the dancers who don't do much). At home, practice rise and fall in some basic figures so your muscle memory improves.

To improve your content as a leader:

- Make a note of the figures for each dance and maybe some notes on how to do the figure.
- When you have done a figure in class a few times then make a note of it and next time you do social dancing, or have practice time in class, try to do it with your partner. When you've consciously tried to do this a few times you'll feel more confident, and it'll soon become a part of your standard repertoire.

To improve your choreography as a leader:

- When I say choreography, I don't mean a complete, fixed routine, but I do mean planning your dancing as you dance.
- Be aware of different options you have.
- In the progressive dances (Ballroom plus Samba and Paso Doble), you might want to think about these things. How do you turn left? How do you turn right? What can you do in a corner? What can you do to travel straight ahead? How do you get into promenade position? What can you do to get out of promenade position? How do you change feet? How do you pause, or change direction, or wait.
- In the Latin dances, you might want to think about these things. How do you change hand hold? How do you change from open position to closed? How do you change from closed to open? How do you do a foot change if you need to? How do you get into shadow or side position? And how do you get out of those again?

To improve the **quality** of movement:

- Practice with awareness. Practice slowly before building up speed.
- Feel grounded into the floor from the hips down, but lift up through your waist and core.
- Work on your balance.
- Pay attention to some of the technique in class, about foot pressure, if legs are straight or bent, arm styling, head placement, using the standing leg, etc.

To improve your **fitness**:

- Dance more!
- Cross train – do aerobics, cardio, yoga, Pilates, jogging, cycling, swimming, etc.

To improve your **leading and following**:

- Work on your frame (in Ballroom and in Latin). You need tone (but not tension) in the arms. Be taller than you think you are.
- If you have a regular partner, try similar figures that have slightly different leads to see if you can lead the difference. Then try this with other dancers.
- Followers, try to pay attention when a leader leads you to do something and you miss the lead, what did they do, what didn't you do?
- Leaders, try to make sure you can do the figures sufficiently automatically so you can then devote brain space to navigating, chatting to your partner, etc.
- Leaders, focus on leading with your frame rather than your arms (you're not changing gears, or playing the trombone).
- Leaders, try to minimise noise and maximise signal – don't shout the lead, but make it clear and definite.