

Swing Figures

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These figures work equally well for all three kinds of swing previously described.

Basic Step in Closed Position

Before launching into swing figures, most dancers prefer to do a few basic steps in closed dance position. This lets you establish the timing more securely than if you were only holding your partner by a single hand. And it's always nice to begin a dance in someone's arms.

Follow's Outside Underarm Turn

From closed dance position, the Lead raises his left hand and he leads the Follow to turn clockwise under his arm with two walking steps. Lower the arm, face your partner and both of you do your rock step.

Hints and notes:

As you go through any swing figure, hold your partner's hand very lightly, with swiveling fingertips, rather than a firm grasp.

He leads her under with a comfortable body-lead from his right hand to her left shoulder, not cranking her right hand with his left hand.

His left hand takes the path of a circular halo over her head.

His left hand is upside-down when finished with this figure, but it's not a problem.

Inside Turn (Loop Turn)

From this swing-out position, he "rewinds" the circular path of his left hand and she turns counterclockwise under his arm. At the same time, he walks backward into her place (where she was standing at the end of the Outside Turn), for two steps. Lower the arms, face your partner and do the rock step.

Hints and notes:

Follows, this works much better if you put your right shoulder under first and almost back up under his arm. This feels like a side step to your right side.

Both travel toward your partner's place, somewhat exchanging places during the figure. Note the word "somewhat." You head in that direction, but you don't have to reach the exact spot where your partner was.

Again, the path of his hand traces a circular halo over her head, but this time circling counterclockwise instead of clockwise, hence the term "rewind."

You end up in Swing-Out Position, with the Leads left palm up, or palm facing his body.

Swing-Out Position

After the Inside Turn, you are holding hands fairly low, and standing close enough to your partner for your elbows to be bent.

In swing-out position, the Lead's left hand is usually held horizontally, thumb up, palm facing his belt. The Follow usually folds the fingers of her right hand over his index finger. Some Leads cup their palm upward, until they dance with a partner with long fingernails. Then they quickly switch to the horizontal version.

Leads, never press your left thumb onto the back of her hand. In fact, your partner may worry about being pinched if your thumb even touches the back of her hand, so it's best to play it safe and keep your thumb a bit in the air.

Follows, maintain a fairly firm right arm, ready to pull yourself into a figure, not 'spaghetti arms'.

Waist Slide

From Swing-Out Position, the Leads sweeps his low left hand across in front of himself toward his right side. This leads the Follow to walk straight forward (i.e., not turning under an arm) past his right side.

At the same time he raises his right elbow a few inches, bringing that elbow **over** the held hands, and turns himself counterclockwise, to his left. The Follow is now behind his back.

Temporarily release the handhold, allowing the Lead to break through and turn halfway counterclockwise. Then face your partner and re-take the same hand. As above, do your rock step at the end of the figure.

Even though this figure is called Waist Slide, her right hand sliding along his waist is entirely optional.

Hints:

Leads, as you raise your right elbow, put your right shoulder forward and **back** in front of her. Note that this is what she did during the Inside Turn.

He reaches for her hand with his left thumb **downward**. This facilitates catching her hand. If the Lead's thumb is up, the Follow's fingers will slip by his knuckles because her right thumb is up.

Follows, instead of reaching for his hand, reach for his elbow. Your fingers will slide down his forearm and catch his hand much easier.

Follow's Outside Turn (Arch Turn)

The Lead raises his left elbow and leads her to walk forward past his left side, under his raised left arm, turning halfway clockwise. At the same time he walks over her head toward her starting place.

Follows are more accustomed to turning to her left when she goes under his arm, so Leads should be extra clear, leading a split-second earlier, to let her know that she will be going in this unexpected direction.

Lead's Underarm Turn

The Lead guides her to walk straight forward past his right side, with a low hand, as at the beginning of the Waist Slide. Then after she has taken her first step forward, he raises his left arm and turns himself toward his left, counterclockwise, under his left arm.

Hint: Follows often go under the man's raised arm in swing dancing, so if he raises his hand too soon, she will think she's supposed to walk under it. Therefore bring her straight forward with a low hand, so she knows she can't go under that arm. Then once she has started walking forward, he quickly raises his hand and ducks under it himself.

This figure sometimes leads to the accidental discovery of moves that weren't intended. They're not mistakes or "misfollows," but rather new figures. Our life lesson in swing dancing is that if things don't work out one way, they'll work out another way.

Behind-The Back Hand Change

Part 1 - Waist Slide, except when finishing the figure, the Lead offers his right hand to his partner, instead of his left.

Part 2 - Follow's Inside Loop Turn past his right side. This is similar to the basic version, except he is holding her with his right hand, and he doesn't face her at the end of the figure. Instead he walks straight forward past her, until she is behind his back. Then during the rock step, he lowers his right hand and changes her right hand into his left hand behind his back.

Part 3 -- He leads her into a second Inside Loop Turn, with his left hand. She turns counterclockwise past his left side.

Hints:

Follows, when you're behind his back, your experience will tell you that the usual alternation of clockwise and counterclockwise turns won't happen this time, so get ready to turn counterclockwise a second time in a row.

Leads, when your partner is behind your back, let her have her rock step, even though you can't see her. Some Leads forget this—out of sight, out of mind.

Leads, after Part 2, move toward your right to get out of her way, so she can come through easier. That movement around your partner feels like a do-si-do past the right shoulder.

Double Face Loop

Give your partner both hands then raise your right hand up in front of your partner's face, back over her head, then drop this hand down behind your partner's neck. At the same time raise your left hand up in front of your own face, back over your head, then drop this hand down behind your own neck.

Slide your right hand down your partner's right arm and catch right-to-right hands. This happens during the time of one swing move.

Since you end with right-to-right hands, you can continue with the next figure.

Right-To-Right Hand Inside Turn

This is the same as the basic Loop Turn except he begins holding her right hand with his right hand. It works a little easier because there is more room at his right side. Then at the end of the turn he places her right hand back into his left hand.

Or you can follow the Double Face Loop with the Behind-The Back Hand Change, because it ends with the same right-to-right handhold.

Butterfly

Give open two-hands and do the Basic Step, while rotating clockwise as a couple.

- 1) He steps around her with his left foot, like stepping around a lamp post. She steps forward right, aiming somewhat between his feet.
- 2) He pulls his right foot and shoulder back away from her a little, to let her dance through. She steps side left.
- 3) Rock step as usual, facing your partner.

Unlike the previous swing figures, Butterfly is often repeated several times in a row.

Hint: Face your partner squarely (your heart aims toward their heart) on count 2.

Turning Basic

This is the same footwork as the Butterfly except you stay in closed dance position.

Hints:

From the semi-open position of the rock step (standing almost side-by-side), he turns clockwise to step across in front of her and face her squarely, with parallel shoulders, on the first two steps. Then she falls away to the semi-open position during the rock step.

This step works better if he pulls back away from her during the first two steps. She also hangs back away from him a little bit, rather than rushing forward into him.

The Turning Basic works even better if you roll your momentum forward over the first two steps, rolling like a wheel into the next step, as opposed to stopping momentum on the first step then pushing back onto the second step.

This is one of the favorite swing steps for several reasons:

Most importantly, the Follow gets to travel forward through this figure, instead of being pushed back to place. It feels more active. Leads, this is a better first impression, and you only have one chance to make a good first impression, so we recommend choosing a Turning Basic instead of a straight basic as your very first figure.

Then it's fun to rotate, as you may have already discovered.

And the Turning Basic can be repeated a few times, like the Butterfly. It's a nice change of pace to do a repeating figure once in a while.

Cradle (Cuddle, Sweetheart)

From open two-hand hold, the Lead raises his left hand while lowering his right arm, then he sweeps his left hand *into* the space between partners, toward his right, looping his left hand (her right hand) across in front of her face. The Follow turns counterclockwise halfway, backing into his lowered right arm. He lowers his left arm down in front of her when she is at his right side, ending in Cradle Position.

To get out of Cradle, simply unwind the path of his left arm, back to swing-out position.

Hints:

It's better if he walks forward around her a little, to make it easier for her, rather than anchoring himself in place and making her do all of the traveling.

As he brings his left hand inward, he keeps that hand fairly low, at about her chin or eye level, not lifted up. His left elbow is raised of course, for her to turn inward under his arm, but the hands are not raised.

Chained Inside Turns (Loop-de-Loops)

Lead's Two-Hand Inside Turn:

From an open two-hand hold, he raises his right hand while lowering his left hand, then sweeps his right elbow *into* the space between partners, toward his left, as he puts his right shoulder forward in toward her. At the same time his right hand pulls past his right ear, to lead her to walk straight forward past his right side. Then he backs in front of her. Let go of the low hand when you need to, as in the Waist Slide, then retake two hands when you're done.

Follow's Two-Hand Inside Turn:

He raises his left hand while lowering his right hand, then he sweeps her right hand (in his left hand) *into* the space between partners, as in the basic Follow's Inside Turn. Then she backs in front of him. Let go of the low hand when you need to, then retake two hands when you're done. As usual, you travel into your partner's place during each figure.

You can repeat both.

These are essentially two-handed versions of the Waist Slide and Follow's Inside Turn, chained together.

Dishrag

This is simply a two-hand Underarm Turn, which can turn her in place either clockwise or counterclockwise. Close the hands together, then the path of both hands circle her head like a halo. It's different from the other figures because she doesn't travel quite as much into his place.

Hint: Don't let your wrists cross, or else the figure may lock up. Keep all fingertips closed to a single point.

Binary Choices

Leads, when first learning swing dance, it's tempting to remember these figures like a shopping list, perhaps even giving them numbers. But your partner can see your eyes rolling up as you're trying to recall the figures. And you may torture yourself when the music is almost finished and you still haven't remembered figure 32b.

Here is a better suggestion.

Swing figures can be seen as binary choices.

The Follow either goes past the Lead's left side or right side.

She either turns clockwise or counterclockwise.

Either she goes under his arm or he does.

The hand is either held high or low.

Give your partner one hand or two hands.

Then play with the permutations of these options.

When you think in terms of binary choices, you are free to pay more attention to where your partner is heading, instead of searching your memory banks. All of the swing figures will occur to you as you go through these binary options. And you may invent a new figure yourself, as you get to the next permutation.

Practice Patterns

Beginning Leads often find it hard to remember these swing moves in time, as they quickly come one after another. A good way to fix this problem is by arranging a sequence of swing moves that works well, memorizing it, and practicing it. Your partner won't know it's a memorized sequence if you focus on leading her clearly. This way you can relax and go on autopilot for a few moves, then return to improvised dancing. After a while you will move on to full improvisation, but a practice pattern can help you through the early stages.