

# Partnering Tips for Swing Dancing

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Here is a big hint for all of swing:

In almost all swing moves, you move part of the way, and your partner moves part of the way.

Who moves more, the Lead or Follow?

**You** do, Lead or Follow. Aim for traveling 60% of the way through a swing figure, as your partner may move 40% of the way. Everything will feel easier and the figure will work out more successfully. Then when **both** partners aim for 60%, it works even better, more active, easier, and more alive.

## Timing

Leading a swing figure with perfect timing is based on the fact that after rocking back in the Rock Step, the second step of a is forward step. That's the moment when the Lead brings his partner forward into her next swing move -- when she's already coming forward anyway. Not a moment earlier; not a moment later.

It might seem more intuitive to lead the Follow forward on count 1 of the music, but no, the connecting tug that initiates the next swing move catches her as she rocks back. In six-count swing, that's count 5. Then he starts leading her forward as she's coming forward off her rock step, count 6. Then by the next count 1, she is already moving into the figure.

## The Three Ugly Myths of Swing

I only lightheartedly stigmatize these as "ugly." They actually appear to be common-sense to many Leads because that's what swing **looks** like, to the untrained eye. So they're not as much ugly as they are inexperienced. Regardless, any of these three can annoy your partner.

Myth # 1: Leads who think that leading their partner requires **force**. No, Follows are dancers, not puppets. Give a little pull to start your partner forward into a figure, but then stop pulling and let your partner drift through the rest of the figure. If it's a Follow's underarm turn, lightly trace your hand in the air circling over her head, without applying force or torque.

Avoid the extremes of too-little or too-much leading force (i.e., wimpy and painful), but the middle ranges of soft to firm leads are fine, just a part of one's personality.

Myth # 2: Leads who think leading swing is like fly-casting in fishing, staying anchored in one place while leading the Follow this way and that. No, it's much more comfortable for your partner if you both change places (more or less) during most figures.

Myth # 3: Leads who think swing is all about the swing moves, regardless of the music and timing. The smart Leads know that Follows want to have their rock step at the end of each figure. That rock step is her home place. Don't pull her out of that home place prematurely.

### The Follow's Default

When first beginning swing dancing, some Follows think their default move is to turn under her partner's arm. Like the Three Myths, this is because that's what swing looks like, to the untrained eye.

But generally in swing, the Follow's default is to simply walk forward, not trying to decide how to duck under the Lead's arm. Then when there's an exception (which is often), the Lead will make it clear that the Follow is turning under his arm. In the meantime, the default is to simply walk forward.

### Pre-Leading

What is our ideal partnering connection? We would say that one ideal is mind-reading, if that were possible. Wouldn't it be wonderful if the Follow could sense what the next figure will be before he leads it?

Pre-leading helps us approach this ideal. The lead itself is the gentle tug which brings the Follow forward into a swing figure. A pre-lead is some indication that the Lead gives immediately before that tug.

The most common pre-lead is the Lead moving himself out of the way of the upcoming swing move. He clears the path for her by backing out of her path. He may also start to raise his left elbow in an arch before giving the tug that draws her under that arch.

The Lead may also glance toward the direction that the Follow is about to travel, sometimes called an eye-lead.

The Follow sees the opening space, or raising arch, or glance, and has an instant pre-verbal feeling that, "I think it's going to go that way." And then it **does** go that way. "I get it with this guy!" "We think alike!"