

Course Content and Lesson Plan (submitted to Wisconsin Union Mini Courses, March 1994, as part of a proposal for a "Ballroom I" mini-course)

I've taken ballroom courses from twenty different teachers in a variety of settings (in extended courses, in mini-lessons before and during dances, and on videotapes or TV,...) and I have a good idea of how to "structure" a course, especially since what seems to work best is similar to what I've done in the past when I taught juggling. I will, similar to other teachers of dancing and juggling, ask students to "watch me" (as I and a partner demonstrate, and briefly call attention to the essentials), followed by "now you do it" while we check their dancing and provide feedback as needed.

The main difference between my course and those of other teachers is that I plan to teach a larger repertoire of dancing patterns. I think this can be done effectively, because:

1) these patterns will be carefully selected and sequenced to take advantage of "buildup and transfer",
 2) there will be extensive use of take-home diagrams (and other written material) closely coordinated with the in-person part of the class. [2012: diagrams will be "reminders" of what they already know from class; I'll strongly encourage using the 30 minutes before & after class, when I'll be available.]

Another difference is that I'll begin by teaching the waltz rather than foxtrot (as is typical in UW's "Ballroom I" courses; I don't know the order used by current MiniCourse teachers) because most students find the waltz easier — and more fun — than foxtrot (and success plus enjoyment will, of course, help students cultivate a better attitude toward dancing) and also because there can be a more effective transfer-of-learning from waltz to other dances, including foxtrot. For purposes of this outline, I'm assuming the "third dance" will be jitterbug, since it is usually the most popular dance among Ballroom I students, and is also what I want to teach. [2012: here, jitterbug = east coast swing; and in 2012 this might not be part of a "crash course" in patterns, whose 'selection of what to teach' is flexible. I have a "core" selected (but this is negotiable) and I'm open to what should be included.]

Here are the principles and patterns (for waltz) that will be taught during the first week:

- After basic introductions, we'll begin by listening to waltz music; I will count the musical beats for the 3-count measures ("123,123,...") and then for 6-count phrases ("123456,123456,..."), and will make a few brief comments about music awareness and appreciation, and how knowing "what to listen for" can help you stay "in-step and tuned in" with your partner.

- Then we'll learn some patterns, beginning with the basic 6-step box step (plus basic technique, including footwork and the upper-body "frame"). Other easy-to-learn, first-week patterns include: [2012: I've totally re-thought the early-class patterns before I re-looked at this, and patterns taught might include some of my 2012 patterns, some of what's below, and some suggested by others. In 2012 I've been thinking more about "combinations" of basic rotation-patterns, and transfers.]

- the inside turn and closely related cuddle,
- side-swings and their mirror image, open breaks,
- box-rotations (leftward and rightward, as shown on Page II),
- forward movement and rotations-while-moving (two easy and useful patterns are the 3-count W and 6-count Forward Rotations shown on Page III), and

- a moving cuddle that is a variation of the basic cuddle, and (later in the course) will be used as a transition to walk-arounds (these are alternating rotation-spins by one partner and then the other).

- Finally, during the last few minutes of class I will introduce the 6-step box-step in 8 counts that is used for foxtrot (and for rumba). This is the same 6-step pattern that is used for the waltz, except that the first step takes two counts (in order to synchronize with conventional "4 counts per measure" music), so "123,456" [for waltz] becomes "1-23,4-56" [for foxtrot and rumba], so most of what is being learned for the waltz can be transferred to the foxtrot [moving] or rumba [stationary].

[2012: I've been thinking about transfers-of-learning from 6-step waltzes to 4-count foxtrots, re: basic rotations.

I don't expect students to master these twelve patterns *during the first lesson*, but I do think that by the end of this lesson they will know — by combining their own in-person observing and dancing with my take-home pictures and descriptions — enough about "what to do and when" that they can practice between lessons and learn these patterns fairly well *before the second lesson*.

Rather than using a large chunk of *class time* to master the footwork of new patterns — which often requires just simple repetition — I will encourage students to practice the footwork, individually and with partners, *between lessons* in order to "automate" the footwork so they can ignore it and focus on "how to make it work smoothly with a partner" during class time. Suggested "homework" will be 5 to 20 minutes a day of practice alone, and/or one or two hours of practice with a partner. [2012: it's not 1-2 hours per day, is 1-2 hours during the week! plus 30 minutes after class, and 30 before next class.]

{ Some students will come to class with a dancing partner; and I will try to help the others establish contact with each other. I've considered several ways to do this, and will ask for advice on what types of help would and would not be considered appropriate by "W.U. Mini Courses." } // The page on "finding tempos" will help students find 4-count music with a tempo that is comfortable for dancing. But appropriate waltz music is tough to find, so I'll have to figure out a strategy for doing this. Or maybe I'll spend a little more time on converting "6-step, 6-count waltz patterns" into "6-step, 8-count foxtrot/rumba patterns." [2012: I've written a page about "running tempos and music tempos"]

My written handouts are intended to be used along with the regular in-person part of the course. Although the written "discussions" should make sense as-is (so students can just read them between classes), during the first class I will explain the symbol system that is used in the diagrams. How? After students learn a pattern by the "watch me, now you do it" method, I'll refer to the corresponding diagrams (these will be either an enlarged photocopy, or an image on the wall made by an overhead projector) and will show how the already-learned pattern is described in the diagrams. Thus, initially the students' knowledge of patterns will be used to help them learn how to interpret the diagrams. Later, they can use the diagrams as a reminder of the "actions and timing" (what to do, and when) that they have learned during the lesson, to help them remember what to practice between classes.

This preliminary outline of the first lesson (and other lessons) will continue to be developed and revised between now and the first class, and will be adjusted as necessary during each class and when preparing for the next class. For classes #2 to #5, on the next page I will give only a brief outline.

If you want, we can talk more about these plans during the interview. [2012: The “plans” below are not what I would want for a class in Fall 2012, where there would be (as just one example) less time invested in swing. We could just show some cool things and let students “figure it out” (as with “inner game” approaches - and I’m talking about Tim Gallwey, not Clint Steele. Class #1 is similar to what I would want (but I’m open to change), and after that there are big differences in classes.]

Class #1 [this is described above]: • some basics of music and dancing; • box-step and other patterns for the **waltz**; • introduction to the "slow quick quick" 4-count rhythm for the **foxtrot**, and how most of the six-step patterns can be used for both waltz and foxtrot.

Class #2: • some practice with the patterns learned in Class #1, using two rhythms: 3-count waltz and 4-count foxtrot, and answering students' questions about them; • suggestions for improving style and technique; • a few more waltz moves (these will be closely related to the moves taught in #1); • introduction of the "slow slow quick quick" foxtrot rhythm, using the "W" as a major point of transfer from the waltz; • the "hesitation" pattern, and making transitions between the two foxtrot rhythms (slow-quick-quick in 4 counts, and slow-slow-quick-quick in 6 counts), just so they'll know it's possible, even though I'm not a fan of changing rhythm-patterns within a dance, unless dancing with a familiar partner and you know that she knows how to cope with the changing rhythms.

Class #3: • review of #1 and #2, discussion of questions; • introduction to **jitterbug** (East Coast Swing), beginning with a new "upper-body frame" and (just as in the foxtrot) a rhythm of slow-slow-quick-quick; • a few jitterbug patterns (enough so students will have something to use while trying to learn how to make the dance "swing"); • introduction of two alternative rhythms (triple-step triple-step quick quick; and quick quick quick quick) that can be used with the same 4-step patterns.

Class #4: • review and discussion; • more jitterbug moves; • a brief introduction (15 minutes) to **rumba** and **cha cha**, focusing on transfer (with rhythm changes, as with the "slow" in foxtrot and the "triple-steps" of jitterbug) of six-step patterns, to show how many waltz patterns can be converted into patterns for rumba or cha cha, and vice versa.

Class #5: • review, plus question-answers and discussion. • more patterns (fairly quickly, with references to diagrams); • how to learn more (options for learning, what to do after the class is over).

Beginning at the start of the course I'll invite detailed feedback — first by informal conversation, and then by an evaluation form I'll make up and will pass out during Lesson #4 — about the teaching methods I'm using, with the goal (as described in my “primary reason for wanting to teach” paragraph [it was in another form I submitted]) of improving these teaching methods.

Course Times and Dates

I want to teach two sessions, back to back, such as 7:00 and 8:00 on the same night. I would prefer to have classes last slightly longer — maybe 75 minutes, so starting times might be 7:00 and 8:15, or 7:00 and 8:30 — but if this cannot be arranged the current hour-long classes would be satisfactory.

If my courses last five weeks and begin during the week of June 19-23 (on Su, M, T, W, or R) and there is a week off for July 4th, they would finish the week of July 24-28.

[2012: As explained above, please don't take anything too literally in this proposal. I changed views about some things between March 1994 and August 1994, and between then and July 2012. All details (and "big picture" ideas) are flexible and negotiable. One thing I don't want, however, is a watered-down, dumbed-down approach based on pessimistically thinking "they could never learn this much in one class, or in a 4-class series. Instead, let's "go for it" and see what happens. But, again, details of "how much" and "how" are open to discussion and compromises.]

leftovers

I may offer between-class practice sessions (room across from my office, semi-department, available — check with Jose — plus hallways // totally unofficial; I'll be there, door will be open, optional, not a part of the course,...)

music tapes, with different tempo ranges on different tapes, carefully selected tempos appropriate for learning each type of dance

technique: frame & footwork (functional — do, then refine) // demonstrate the most important principles of frame and footwork, and let students practice them, leave details to written "take-home" handouts // leaders (%%) // leading: clarity & timing

tentative outline; after a decision is made about whether I'll be teaching, I'll work out the final details

minimal choreography: three "focus patterns", leaders choose what to do and when (order) encourage them to go to dances (to dance and to watch)

The details of action and timing — what to do, and when — are important, but it is often difficult to remember these details, so the following handouts are intended to serve as "reminders."