

Everything you need to know about dancing, but were afraid to ask...

1. **Jewelry:** The dance floor is not the place to show off your bling. It can be dangerous to you and your partner. Watches, bracelets, rings and even excessive size earrings can be a real hazard.
2. **Shoes:** Like any activity you have to invest a little money in equipment. Shoes can be purchased for \$50 to \$200 or more. Proper dance shoes have a suede sole. If you're just getting started and have a pair of closed shoes with leather bottoms use them until you feel comfortable making an investment in dance shoes.
3. **Private Lessons:** You can only make so much technical progress taking group lessons. You should take as many group lessons as possible, but private lessons with a professional west coast instructor can make a world of difference. In a group setting, it's impossible for you to get the individual attention you need. Private dance lessons run about \$40 to \$60 per hour, with top national instructors charging more. Just like therapists, some instructors consider 50 minutes to be an hour. Often you have to pay a floor fee in addition to that. Most instructors will allow you to bring someone with you. It can be two males, two females or a male and female. It's a great way to share costs and learn together. Most instructors will allow you to make a video recap of the lesson during the last five minutes; although some will charge to do that. Some instructors allow you to video a review of a group lesson as well.
4. **Practice:** You will be amazed at how much you will improve if you practice for at least 10 minutes every day, even by yourself. Always work on your basics. Once you learn the basics, patterns will become much easier to understand and learn. If you try to learn a pattern and you don't have the basics built into muscle memory you will never be able to duplicate the pattern.
5. **Hand it:** Write on your hand. Every time you go out social dancing, write 3 items on your hand that you want to work on. Each time you get up to dance look at your hand and focus on one of those during that individual dance. You will be amazed at how the items you work on start to become part of good muscle memory. If you don't want to write on your hand, use a 3 x 5 index card.
6. **Be Polite:** When taking a group lesson you are there to learn, not teach. Far too often people in class are trying to "teach" others while the instructor is covering a key point. You, the group and for sure the person you think you are helping are far better off if you pay attention to the instructor. You may have good intentions, but it is better for every student to hear what the instructor is saying. And it's especially disrespectful to the instructor if you are talking while he/she is.
7. **Line of Dance:** Line of dance is generally referred to as going counter clockwise. In west coast swing we dance in a slot. We all need to dance in the same direction. Think of it as dancing north and south. You cannot have someone on the dance floor dancing east and west when everyone else is dancing north and south. It is permissible to dance on the ends of the dance floor opposite from the flow of north-south, but in all cases you have to pay attention. It is both partners responsibility to avoid wrecks with other dancers. Did you ever wonder why some of the better dancers like dancing on the sides or end of the dance floor? There are two major reasons: A. They like to show off and B. To protect themselves. Better dancers like to sometimes work on "tricks and multiple turns." By being on the outside they only have to worry about dancers on one side. Thus it gives them a little more space to work with making it safer for all.
8. **Look both ways:** Would you cross a street without looking both ways? If you are entering the dance floor it is your responsibility to make sure the coast is clear of people already on the floor. You create a dangerous situation when you walk blindly on the floor. Pay attention. Use common sense. It's your responsibility when coming on the dance floor to avoid creating a wreck.
9. **No:** No is not an answer if someone asks you to dance. You should give a reason and follow up with "please ask me again later" or "I promise I will come get you for the next one." Generally speaking when someone asks you to dance and you accept say something like "I would love to."
10. **Thank you:** Always thank your partner even if it was the most horrible dance you have ever had. Encourage people. We all start as beginners.

11. **Correcting people:** Never, ever correct your dance partner on the social dance floor. Even if they ask, make sure you think before you speak. Never make anyone feel bad. And if someone corrects you on the floor just say thanks and then check with someone you trust to see if the advice was good...preferably your instructor.
12. **Move off the floor:** Never stand on the floor and carry on a conversation. Again, it is dangerous and inconsiderate to others.
13. **Trash:** Always be alert for trash and wet spots on the dance floor. These are dangerous to all.
14. **Competitions:** There are three main types of competitions:
 - Jack and Jill – you are randomly paired up with a partner and dance to random songs.
 - Strictly Swing – you pick your partner and dance to a random song.
 - Routine – you pick your partner, choreograph a routine to a song of your choice, and wear a costume.
15. **Levels:** There are age and ability divisions in a competition.
 - Age: Open is for anyone, Sophisticated is over 35 and Masters is over 50. Your ability has nothing to do with this. For example, in Masters you can have a beginner dancing against a pro as long as they are both over 50.
 - Level: Novice is for beginners and that is where everyone starts. You then get points every time you make finals and/or place. You need 20 points to move up to Intermediate, and then 25 points to move up to Advanced. There are levels above that also.
16. **Ability:** Seek out the better dancers. Don't be scared. It's normal to be scared, but go for it. It's not that the better dancers are necessarily snotty, but they naturally are going to dance with those who are at their level. They generally are not going to ask you to dance. They will always give you one dance, but don't be greedy and ask for more than that.
17. **Dance events:** There is no better way to learn and improve than by attending an event. It is great fun and a wonderful learning experience. Don't be misled in thinking that you have to compete. There are lots of great group classes, you can take a private lesson from a top pro, watch lots of great competitions and enjoy a ton of social dancing.
18. **Local vs. non-local:** You can dance with the locals at home every week. At an event you should expand your experience by dancing with people you don't know. If you have a favorite local dancer of course you will dance with them, but dancing with people you don't know is half the fun. If you want some good dances, stand close to the floor, watch someone dance, then go ask them as soon as the song is over. There will often be a waiting line for a top pro.
19. **Hygiene:** Wear something appropriate. Notice what other dancers wear. If you sweat profusely, bring a towel to dry yourself with. Even a change of shirt is thoughtful. If you are very sweaty, generally speaking, a member of the opposite sex does not want to put their hand on you. Exposed skin can be very sweaty and slippery on both men and women.
20. **Gum:** If you must chew gum (and you shouldn't) please chew politely.
21. **Eye contact:** Look at your partner and smile. Do not look at the floor or your feet.
22. **Compliments:** If your partner does something really cool, say so.
23. **And finally...enjoy yourself!**

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