



CONTRA DANCING TIPS FOR BEGINNERS

1. THE BASICS

Timing: Dance each figure within its musical phrase. Giving Weight: Keep arms firm to support each other through the figures. Eye contact: Eye contact is a traditional part of contra dancing. It can be fun and reduce dizziness. Smooth and Gentle: Move with an easy walking step.

2. MAKING MISTAKES

Mess up a figure? Don't worry about it! Even experienced dancers make mistakes. The important thing is getting back to place in time for the next figure.

3. GETTING DIZZY

Some beginners get dizzy while swinging. Try making eye contact with your partner - or, if you prefer, focus on a fixed point, like your partner's ear or shoulder. Most new dancers find that dizziness tends to go away with practice and experience.

4. CHOOSING PARTNERS

Dancers usually change partners after each dance. The best way to learn is to dance with a variety of experienced dancers, rather than with other beginners. And remember, anyone can ask anyone to dance, and you may decline a dance with no explanation.

5. FLOURISHES

Learn the basics before you try to add flourishes. When you're ready, feel free to ask an experienced dancer for advice on twirling and other advanced moves!

COMMON TERMS

FIGURES

The basic "moves" of a dance. Common figures include swing, do-si-do, allemande, and circle.

Dances include a sequence of figures repeated several times.

MUSICAL PHRASE

Figures are danced to the music; most figures last 8 beats. Paying attention to the musical phrase and walking to the beat is helpful in understanding when a given figure will end and when another will begin.

UP/DOWN THE HALL

"Up the hall" means facing or moving toward the band. "Down the hall" means facing or moving away from the band. During a dance, you and your partner will progress up and down the hall, interacting with new couples as you go.

HANDS FOUR

Callers typically begin a dance in "hands four," where a foursome of dancers, comprised of you, your partner, and another couple, hold hands in a circle. As you and your partner progress up and down the hall, you will encounter new couples, thus forming new foursomes.

NEIGHBOR

Within your foursome, your neighbor is the person in the other couple who is dancing the opposite gender role (e.g., the lady if you are dancing as the gent).

NUMBER ONES/NUMBER TWOS

Number ones ("active couple") in a foursome face down the hall and progress away from the band. Number twos ("inactive couple") face up the hall and progress toward the band.

LADIES AND GENTS

Each couple is comprised of a "lady" and a "gent." These terms reflect the dancers' roles, not their genders. Men may dance the lady's role, and women may dance the gent's.