



Ballroom 101

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Introduction

This document is intended as a beginner's guide. It is not an in-and-of-itself complete source for ballroom information (by any means!).

Your place in the big picture...

	National Level	Local Level
Adult	USA Dance	USA Dance Chapter
College Student	College Network	College/University Dance Club

Definitions:

USA Dance is a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit, national organization committed to improving the quantity and quality of ballroom dance in the United States. USA Dance sanctions competitions and participants must be members of USA Dance to compete. USA Dance volunteers work educate the public about the physical, mental and social benefits of dance.

Local USA Dance Chapter - Your local chapter of USA Dance is open to all dancers. Students of the college/university's team may communicate with the local USA Dance chapter and participate in social dances and/or competitions they may sponsor. Many chapters provide discounted admission to college students. USA Dance membership is required to compete in official USA Dance competitions. The local chapter may (but is not required to) assist your club with fundraising and events.

K 12 and College Network - A part of USA Dance dedicated to guiding development of college and university dance clubs (**College Network**) as well as elementary and high school dance groups (**K12**). The College program provides information on how to set up a club at your college or university and works to develop an opportunity for the exchange of ideas between university groups (ideas for social activities, fundraising, etc.). To get full benefit and expand communications, you must register your college dance club with USA Dance - it's free and just takes a minute.

College/University Club - YOU! - Utilize USA Dance College Network for ideas to help get your club started. Contact the local USA Dance Chapter and let them know you are interested in their ideas and assistance for fundraising and social events. Attend chapter events for the added opportunity for your club members to practice what they learn. Work to provide lessons and social dance options for your members. Members interested in competing? Check out the DanceSport section of the USA Dance website at www.usadance.org.

Ballroom dance - In its most basic form, is any partnered dance where one partner is designated the lead and the other is designated the follow. The traditional ballroom dances include: Waltz, Foxtrot, Tango, Quickstep, Viennese Waltz, Rumba, Cha cha, Swing, Jive, Samba, Mambo, Bolero, and Paso Doble. Non-traditional dances also include: Country 2-Step, Night Club 2-Step, Argentine Tango, Merengue, Polka, West Coast Swing, Lindy, Salsa, and many, MANY more!

The Dance Styles - The traditional ballroom dances are broken into two major styles, American and International. American Style is mainly danced in the United States. In other parts of the world, International Style is much more popular. (They do not use the terms “American” and “International”.) They differ by 1) the steps allowed in each dance and 2) the styling (see styling below) employed in dancing the steps.

International Style - is separated into two divisions - Standard and Latin. Standard is also termed “Modern” and simply “Ballroom” by many. The dances included in each category are as follows:

INTERNATIONAL STYLE	
International Standard	International Latin
Waltz	Cha-Cha
Tango	Rumba
Foxtrot	Samba
Viennese Waltz	Paso Doble
QuickStep	Jive

In collegiate competition, generally the lower level events are offered "one dance at a time," while in the more advanced events the dances are generally clustered in twos, threes, or even fours and fives. Composite scoring is used -- the Skating System -- and after the judges have written down their scores, the results are calculated by a "Scrutineer." Latin and Standard dances are never combined into a single event - with the exception of the “Ten-Dance” - where, as the name implies, an event comprises all 10 dances.. “Ten-dance” events are not offered to beginners - although a beginner can certainly compete in each of the 10 dances if they are all offered, individually or in combinations, at a competition.

The quick and easy -

International Standard - the “smooth dances” of International style. International is distinctive in that it emphasizes remaining in a closed dance position.

International Latin - the “rhythm dances” of International style. International is distinctive in that the hip action is achieved after stepping onto a “straight leg.”

American Style - is broken into two types of dance: Smooth and Rhythm. Many mistakenly use the term “American Latin” to refer to the American Rhythm style.

AMERICAN STYLE	
American Smooth	American Rhythm
Waltz	Cha-Cha
Foxtrot	Rumba
Tango	Swing
Viennese Waltz	Mambo
	Bolero

In collegiate competition, generally the lower level events are offered “one dance at a time,” while in the more advanced events the dances are generally clustered in twos, threes, or even fours and fives. Composite scoring is used -- the Skating System -- and after the judges have written down their scores, the results are calculated by a “Scrutineer.” Rhythm and Smooth dances are never combined into a single event - with the exception of the “Nine-Dance” - where, as the name implies, an event comprises all 9 dances.. “Nine-dance” events are not offered to beginners - although a beginner can certainly compete in each of the 9 dances if they are all offered, individually or in combinations, at a competition.

The quick and easy -

American Smooth - the “standard dances” of American style. American is distinctive in that it is less strict and allows the partner ship to “open up” in several steps.

American Rhythm - the “latin dances” of American style. American is distinctive in that the Cuban motion (hip action) is achieved by flexing the knee after taking a step.

Syllabi:

Each dance has a list of recognized steps associated with it. This list of steps is known as the “Syllabus”. (and yes, International Waltz and American Waltz have two, separate, distinct syllabi). The syllabus for each dance is broken into three parts - **the bronze steps, the silver steps, and the gold steps**. In general, it is preferable for dancers to learn first bronze - then silver - then gold. But one does not need to know the entire bronze syllabus before progressing to silver (although it can’t hurt).

Generally, the steps of a given level are grouped together because of the level of difficulty. For example, the bronze level steps are fairly basic and provide a good grounding and understanding of the nature of each individual dance. The silver level comprises all of the bronze steps plus a few more, slightly more advanced steps. Predictably, the gold level incorporates all of the bronze and all of the silver steps, with the addition of more advanced steps. At all levels, attention to technique will always aid in the execution!

In competitions, events will be grouped by closed-syllabus level. For example, there will be a bronze international style waltz event. In this event, you may only dance those steps included on the bronze waltz syllabus. You are not required to dance ALL the steps on the syllabus, however. It is more important in competition to show mastery of a few steps than to fumble through several.

While the International Standard and Latin styles have relatively consistent syllabus lists throughout the world, the American Smooth and Rhythm syllabus lists can differ significantly depending on the organization which provides them. Because of the differences between various syllabi, syllabus events in the American styles at USA Dance competitions will require that the competitors stay within the technical difficulty of the proficiency level in which they are dancing (Bronze, Silver, Gold) but not necessarily within a specific set of steps. The American syllabi provided should be used as a measure of the difficulty of each proficiency level for the Rhythm and Smooth styles. See current syllabus lists in the USA Dance Rule Book available for review or download under forms and resources in the DanceSport section of our website at www.usadance.org.

Some helpful common terminology:

A (dance) Step (n.) One of the moves from the syllabus of steps. Each step has a distinct beginning and ending and a defined way to perform the step. Each step involves both the lead's part and the corresponding follow's part, and incorporates rather more than "where to put the feet." All steps can be classified as bronze, silver, gold, or open.

Step/Stepping (n./v.) To make contact between your foot and the floor. Each dance Step (above) generally consists of several steps.

Variation (n.) A "version" of a (dance) Step. Variations often include applying specific styling to a Step - but may also alter the basic foot position. Any "Step" not performed exactly as specified by the ISTD (those guys that make the syllabus) is a Variation and depending on how much it deviates from the syllabus - may not be allowed in "closed" competition. If you learn a variation, make sure you know what makes it a variation! If a competition is "invigilated" - which they all should be - they'll be checking!!

Open step (n.) Any step not included on the syllabus for a given dance. In other words, these steps are "not restricted to syllabus." However, this does not give license to "make up" steps -- you are expected to do recognized steps!

Closed competition (n.) a.k.a. Syllabus Competition. Competition event where you may only dance syllabus steps (no open steps). Again, they should be "invigilated" by invigilators [affectionately known as the "Syllabus Police"]. Closed competition can also mean a competition where you must be a citizen of, or live in, the country where it's danced.

Open competition (n.) Competition where you may dance any (recognized) steps, and are not restricted to syllabus steps. **Open competition** can also mean a competition where there are neither national nor geographic restrictions placed on the competitors.

ISTD (Imperial Society of Teachers of Dance) - Those guys that make the syllabus and write all the “rules” for how steps are to be performed. Called “Imperial” because they were established by the English Court.

Styling - Adding individual flair to a given step. This is where you are allowed some degree of freedom to make the strict steps fit the music. It is the difference between stepping with a short, quick staccato step, or a long, slow, smooth step. It is the difference between putting your arm up during a crossover break and out during a crossover break. Good styling is allowed (encouraged!!) in syllabus competition. However - if styling alters the actual mechanics of a step, it may be enough to term the step a variation...

Tempo - how fast the music goes. Measured in beats per minute (bpm) or measures per minute (mpm).

Strict Tempo - Dances at competition must be within a certain number of beats per minute for each individual dance. In other words, you will never have to dance a “swing that’s too fast” or a “foxtrot that’s too slow” because they are all in strict tempo. The USABDA Rule Books lists the tempo range for each dance.

Facing - The direction the partnership is pointing during a Standard or Smooth step. Given in terms of the man’s facing (opposite for the woman). Generally one of 8 compass directions (see facing charts).

Competitions:

Competitions are organized by the category of dance (American Rhythm, International Latin, American Smooth, International Standard), the level of the dance, and the individual dance. For example, the following would be typical events:

1. Bronze International Latin Rumba
2. Silver International Latin Samba/Jive

In event #1, competitors would compete against each other, using bronze steps only, in the International Style Rumba. They would be judged only on the basis of this event. In event #2, competitors can dance any steps from the bronze and silver syllabus (because bronze is lower than silver). They would dance both dances, and their final score would be tallied taking into consideration their performance in both of the dances (compared to all the other couples).

Levels:

Following are the levels of competition:

LEVELS	
Syllabus	Open
Bronze	Novice
Silver	Pre-Championship
Gold	Championship
Master of Syllabus	

When dancing in a level - you may dance only steps of that level or below. So in bronze level - only dance BRONZE steps. In Silver level, dance silver and bronze steps. Etc.

“Open” competition does not require you to dance steps from the syllabus. Do not be fooled, open competition is more difficult than syllabus competition and most open level competitors have mastered the entire bronze-gold syllabus.

Some competitors choose to remain in the syllabus categories until they have mastered the syllabus steps. Once these competitors have placed out of the gold category, they can enter “Masters of Syllabus,” where they will compete against other couples who concentrate on syllabus steps, as well as championship couples who are also dancing syllabus. It is not necessary to rush into the Open categories. Take your time.

Rounds and Heats:

The winners for each event are selected in the following way:

1. In the preliminary rounds, all the couples go out onto the floor together. If there are a lot of couples, the chairman of judges will decide to do multiple heats, where half the couples may dance first, then the other half, etc., but basically, everyone dances at the same time.
2. The judges are told how many couples they can “bring back” into the next round. They then select that number couples and write down their numbers. Couples with the highest number of marks (from the several judges) advance to the next round.
3. In the final round, which typically has 6 couples, but can have up to 8, judges rank each couple. A score keeper, called a “scrutineer,” tallies up the marks to determine the overall ranking.

Proficiency points:

USA Dance already operates under an established Proficiency Point System. You are awarded points based upon how well you place in each event. Once you have accumulated a specified number of points in any dance, you must move up to the next level. Accumulated proficiency points stay with each individual, so if you change partners and begin dancing with someone with more proficiency points than you, you may only compete in the event(s) for which he or she is eligible.

In addition, there may be other events offered which have special rules at a comp. Intercollegiate is a popular event where you are required to dance with someone from a different school than you that you have never danced with before! The Newcomer Category is generally for first-time competitors. Another popular category is Rookie/Vet. No Proficiency Points are applied to these events. See the individual competition for its rules and regulations regarding such events.

Before entering any competition, be SURE to check the rules for THAT competition. You should NEVER assume that the rules for the next competition will be the same as the last one [although they should be].