

Ask Your Dance Instructor For Help

by Leon Raper

To really progress in your dance abilities you must ask for help. You may say, "Why doesn't the instructor just push me harder?" To understand, I will give you a little insight as to how and instructor of a dance class thinks. A dance instructor is normally faced with students having greatly varied levels of background and expertise in dance.

Some are quite experienced and others are struggling to survive at their current level of instruction. Some of the more experienced students have developed good basics and some have not. Students who have been in a dance class for a while do not like to be told that they need to put more effort into studying basics - they are always wanting new material. Most students think that basics are just a set of step patterns - once they learn the patterns they know their basics. Basics are much more than that. Basics include frame, movement, foot position, and many other elements that allow one person to lead and another to follow in a smooth fluid motion as though they were of one mind and one being. Patterns can be learned quickly, but a good understanding in all basic elements takes time and the desire to improve one's skills.

In addition to teaching material and technique, a good instructor must deal with the human relations aspect of teaching dancing. The instructor must have the best interest of each student in mind - and that goes way beyond just teaching material. Most new students feel shy and insecure. More experienced students who have not developed good basics also feel insecure and get easily frustrated trying to learn new material. All these students will need a lot T.L.C. The students not only need instruction in what to do, but the instructor must try to watch for improvements and breakthroughs and compliment them on their accomplishments. The T.L.C. gets even more critical when dealing with couples. The instructor must constantly be aware that improper communications could create problems between couples that did not exist before, or cause a new student to become more insecure than they were

before. It is a very critical balancing act for the instructor wanting to give more help, but knowing that too much help is not help at all - it can become abuse.

Therefore, when most students want to progress faster than the instructor pushes them, the students should ask for help. This will assure the instructor that it is OK to progress faster without causing problems. Also, ask the instructor to examine your basics to see if there are any potential problems that will occur when trying to learn more advanced material. Instructors really enjoy helping those who are trying hard to improve their dancing and will usually go way beyond what is expected of them to help the students. What do you have to lose? Just ask for help.

Ten Suggestions for First Lessons

from Kelly Gellette

1. First impressions are so important. First impressions last!
2. Keep students happy or they won't return.
3. Do it right the first time! It is not what you teach, but how you do it (presentation).
4. Patience. Don't rush 'em. Give students time to digest (new) material presented.
5. Be flexible. Be sensitive to students needs.
6. Laugh at yourself and WITH the students. Help them laugh at their mistakes.
7. Encourage students, give them self confidence. Do not make students afraid to fail.
8. Repetition. Repeat instructions over and over.
9. Demonstrate once or twice or a dozen times if needed but don't be a show off!
10. Give handouts (if possible) and homework.