

## Moving up to Advanced or Challenge

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When should you learn a new dance level?

More specifically, when should you move up to Advanced or Challenge?

There's an old joke in L/G/B/T square dancing that goes something like this: "When you're able to dance a hard Plus tip as either gender, carry on a conversation with at least one other person in your square, anticipate each call correctly, and cruise the hot number across the room ... you're ready to dance Advanced."

This joke—and I admit, there's a very small kernel of truth to it—and the attitude that accompanies it often scare off many great dancers from trying Advanced.

That's not a good thing.

Note: Some clubs (especially in Canada) teach A1 & A2 as separate levels, while others teach them as a single level. For this article, I will refer to A1/A2 dancing in this article simply as "Advanced".

### IT'S ALL GOOD.

It's important to remember that nothing is wrong, bad, or boring about Plus, Mainstream, or Basic...when the level is called properly.

Experienced dancers will tell you that in the hands of an imaginative caller, "even Basic" can be fun and challenging. (You don't believe me? Try a "take no prisoners" Basic or Mainstream tip at Convention some time...or ask your local club caller for such a tip.)

Despite this, Advanced still seems to hold some mystical power to both entice and discourage Plus dancers at the same time. "Oh, I'm not GOOD enough to dance ADVANCED," can be heard nearly as often as "I can't WAIT to move up to Advanced!" Plus dancers may be comforted to know that this set of mixed attitudes also shows up in Advanced dancers considering taking a C1 class.

Let's cut through the fog of mystery surrounding Advanced & Challenge dancing, and talk about what's involved in moving up a dance level.

### PUTTING THE NUMBERS IN PERSPECTIVE.

Talking about levels in terms of numbers of calls often scares away potential Advanced dancers. By the time dancers graduate at Plus, they've learned approximately 100 calls and concepts.

A1 & A2 add roughly another 100 calls/concepts to the list inside the dancer's head.

The same goes for C1.

Now, that sounds like an awful lot to a typical Plus dancer, until you realize that *non*-dancers are *completely* in awe of Plus dancers, who have memorized over 100 different calls and concepts!

It's all relative.

When you started dancing, you were probably blown away by the expert moves of angels when you watched Mainstream or Plus level “star tips.” Be assured, the Advanced and Challenge dancers you know today, all started off as Mainstream and Plus dancers in the past. They did it, and so can you.

### **FROM PLUS TO ADVANCED: WHAT TO EXPECT.**

There are a few key differences to dancing Advanced versus Plus. Everything you already know about Plus dancing applies, with a few additional twists.

#### ***Twist #1: APD/DBD***

“APD” stands for “All Positions Dancing”. This means you’ve been trained to dance each call from all possible positions. Put a bit more simply...you’re an APD dancer if you can execute any call from any position, regardless of whether a boy or girl is “normally” in that position.

One example of an APD (or “nonstandard”) application would be girls on the end of a wave recycling boys.

“DBD” stands for “Dancing By Definition’ (or “Dance By Definition”). You are a DBD dancer if you can apply the CALLERLAB definition of a call to a sequence called from any (legal) position. DBD dancers memorize the definition of a call, and are able to apply it from any CALLERLAB-legal position.

One example of DBD would be to call “Crossfire” from outfacing lines of four ... which ends in a  $\frac{3}{4}$  tag (“Ping Pong Circulate”) formation. (Note: If you’re a Plus dancer and don’t know how to dance this, don’t worry ... this is an example of an Advanced or Challenge application of the call “Crossfire”.)

#### ***Twist #2: Bidansuality***

It helps in Advanced and Challenge dancing to be bidansual (able to dance either the boy’s or girl’s part), but it’s not strictly required. I happen to think it helps a lot to be bidansual, but that’s strictly a personal opinion.

I generally advise non-bidansual, dancers to attend a Basic/Mainstream class as the opposite gender before starting to learn Plus or Advanced, just to be aware of “how the other half dances”. There are only about a half-dozen calls that are gender-specific.

If you choose to take up Advanced and you only dance one gender role, *but* you’re a strong APD/DBD dancer, you should be OK. However, you should also be aware that Advanced and Challenge callers are known to often run dancers through “normal” calls in sashayed positions.

#### ***Twist #3: Compound calls.***

Plus has something that I term “compound” calls. Such calls usually have as many as four defined parts, each of which requires doing something very different from all of the other parts. One compound call may be comprised of several different sets of movements.

One example of a Plus-level compound call is the “Spin Chain” family – “Spin Chain Thru,” “Spin Chain The Gears,” and “Spin Chain And Exchange The Gears.”

When you think about it ... there are actually a generous handful of such calls in Plus. Aside from the "Spin Chain" family, there's also "Load The Boat," "Teacup Chain," "Coordinate," and "Relay The Deucey." Suddenly, Advanced doesn't seem all that different from Plus, does it?

Advanced introduces several more compound calls, such as Chain Reaction, Motivate, and Transfer The Column. The difference is, these calls can be longer and slightly more intricate than most Plus-level calls.

This doesn't mean that Advanced compound calls aren't fun, however. While some Advanced calls can take a bit longer to master than simpler Plus calls, many dancers find the slight additional complexity of these calls is offset by a substantially greater sense of accomplishment.

One important thing to be aware of: *Advanced and Challenge compound calls require a higher level of teamwork within the square than lower dance levels.* (This is a general rule for most Advanced and Challenge level dancing.) If you're not a good "team player" when square dancing, you won't enjoy Advanced or Challenge.

#### ***Twist #4: Concepts & Formations***

Advanced introduces the idea of concepts. A dance "concept" is a way of doing things applied to calls you already know from lower levels. One such example is the "As Couples" concept, where dancers are arranged in couples, and each couple acts like a single dancer.

Concepts aren't suddenly introduced at Advanced. Plus dancers already know two examples of concepts by the time they graduate: "[anything] And Roll" and "[anything] And Spread". Advanced just gives the caller a few more concepts to play with. (And each level from C1 on up introduces additional concepts.)

Plus dancers are familiar with many different dance formations, such as: static squares, columns,  $\frac{1}{4}$  tag,  $\frac{1}{2}$  tag,  $\frac{3}{4}$  tag, waves, two-faced lines, diamonds, lines of four, etcetera.

Advanced & Challenge introduce new formations at each level, such as Hourglasses, Butterflies, and Galaxies. Many of these formations are combinations of shapes you already know. (For example, an Hourglass is a diamond within a box, while a Galaxy is a box within a diamond.)

#### ***Twist #5: Extending Calls You Already Know***

Advanced often uses calls and formations you already know, but puts them together in different ways, or allows the caller to apply calls to formations in ways that aren't legal at Mainstream or Plus.

Extend, Hinge, and Tag the Line are some examples of calls that have extended applications at Advanced. (See the CALLERLAB definitions for A1 & A2 dancing at <http://www.callerlab.com> for more information on extended Advanced applications of Mainstream and Plus calls.)

C1 actually manages to extend "Recycle" - in reverse! - by breaking it down into thirds, and regurgitating the first two parts as a new call, "2/3<sup>ds</sup> Recycle". C2 takes the final part of "Spin Chain And Exchange The Gears", and presents it as a separate call entitled "Walk Out To A Wave".

## FROM ADVANCED TO CHALLENGE: WHAT TO EXPECT

Advanced-to-Challenge doesn't seem to me to be quite as traumatic as Plus-to-Advanced, but that may just be my own personal observation from angelling multiple A&C classes.

All five of the Plus-to-Advanced twists also apply to Advanced-to-Challenge. There's a special emphasis in C1 on compound calls, such as Scoot & Plenty, or Pass The Axle. The compound calls in C1 often seem longer or more complex than in Advanced.

Most new C1 dancers report being most disoriented by the number of "big" compound calls. Some of which sound alike, or sound like lower level calls. For example, "Linear Action" vs. "Linear Cycle".

At C1, new concepts such as Blocks, Concentric, Phantom, and Triangles are often applied to existing calls.

Challenge requires a slightly different learning approach than lower levels. Due to the higher number of variations, positions, concepts, and formations, relying on "muscle memory" to learn calls doesn't work at C1. *You really need to know the call definitions by heart.*

There's no magic secret to working past this, except to learn the definition of each new call until you can recite it from memory when needed. (Many experienced Challenge dancers can still be heard muttering definitions of some calls under their breath when dancing.)

## BUT IT ALL LOOKS \*SO\* SERIOUS!

Contrary to popular myths, you ARE allowed to have fun dancing Advanced or Challenge.

Why do people say that A&C dancing is so somber? The higher level of teamwork involved in Advanced & Challenge dancing means that squares sometimes appear to outside observers to be a bit quieter and more serious than Plus or Mainstream.

A&C dancers aren't quiet because they're not having fun; instead, they're quiet because they're concentrating on solving the problem as a group. The increased complexity of some of the calls means people have less time for fluff, which gives an impression of a more sober floor demeanor.

Inside the square, however, it's a different story.

Most Advanced and Challenge dancers I've talked with report a substantially greater feeling of accomplishment at the end of an Advanced or Challenge tip than when they dance Plus. This is because Advanced and Challenge both require a greater degree of interaction and cooperation than does Plus. This especially applies to C1 (and higher) dancing, which demands that the square work as a tightly knit group.

There are absolutely no rules banning A&C squares from having fun. Some of the rowdiest tips I've danced in have been A&C tips. As with lower levels of dancing ... everything depends upon the chemistry between each of the dancers in each square, and between the squares and the caller.

**BUT I'M NOT A PERFECT PLUS DANCER!**

You don't have to be a "perfect" Plus dancer to learn Advanced, because ... there is no such thing as a "perfect" Plus dancer.

Everyone makes dance mistakes once in a while. Even Advanced and Challenge level callers can make mistakes dancing at Plus or Mainstream. (There's a reason dancers are awarded a "Purple Heart" dangle when they dance in a square with three or more callers.)

Most people who are reasonably comfortable with APD/DBD Plus dancing do just fine at Advanced (and later, at Challenge).

**BUT IT TAKES SO LOOOONG!**

Many of the clubs I've worked with put new dancers through Basic, Mainstream and Plus within a year. Other clubs spend four to nine months learning each level.

The length of time required for learning Advanced or Challenge depends upon your local club and caller. I've seen A1 and A2 taught as separate levels requiring one year each in some clubs. Other clubs teach both together over a single year. C1 and higher levels are usually taught over the course of one year, though some clubs I've danced with prefer to spend two years.

As with anything worth doing well, Advanced and Challenge dancing requires an up-front investment of time, energy, and patience.

The payoffs of A&C dancing include more complex choreography and a substantially increased sense of personal accomplishment and pride at completing a complex sequence.

It's a somewhat more subtle "buzz" than Mainstream or Plus, but most A&C dancers report that the end result is worth the effort.

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