

Polka Basics**Pre-requisite**

None

(These are basic patterns)

Introduction

The country and western Polka originated from the German polka of the old world. However, that has been influenced by the quick step from ballroom and the modern Polka dance is of a unique, progressive style. Whereas the German polka is bouncy with a lot of side motion and arm movement, the country and western polka is smooth, straight down the line with no pumping of the arms.

The basic footwork of Polka is two sets of triple steps – rather like a shuffle step pair followed by a compelling step on one side, and then a repeat of a shuffle step pair followed by a compelling step on the other. Although most of the leads are on the second set of triple steps and the spins are on the first, there are occasions when that is reversed. Polka is generally a fast paced dance.

While many of the Polka patterns are similar to or copies of two step patterns, you will find that the patterns for Polka are often unique to Polka just as some two step patterns are unique to two step.

In this segment, we are going to discuss:

- The music – how to step to the beat and how determine if it is a Polka.
- Contact – how to hold your partner.
- The basic foot work.

The Music

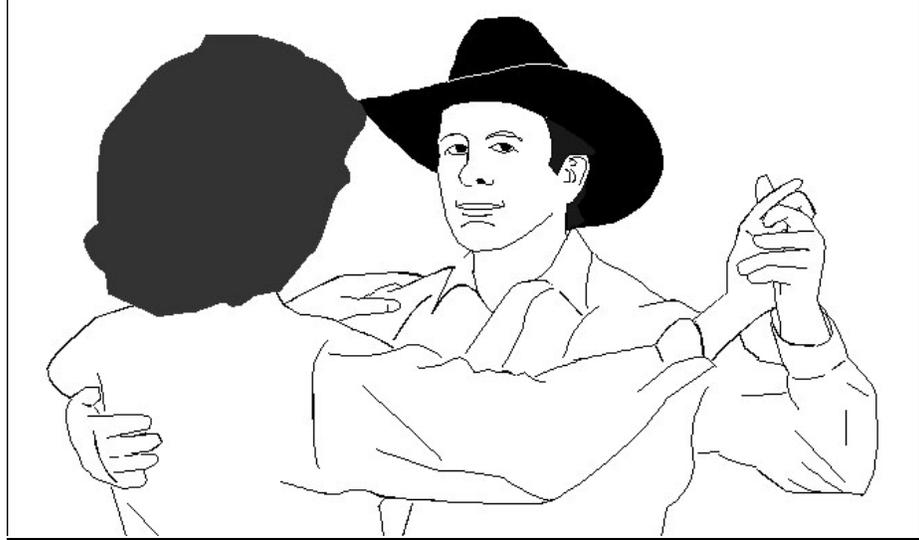
The music for Polka is played in either two-four or four-four (2/4 or 4/4) timing. It is not important for you to know music, just that if you count a steady cadence of one through four (1-4) as you are listening to the music, you will hear heavy beats on every count. Those are the quarter notes and often take a slower step.

If you listen carefully to the music, you will also hear lighter beats that are quicker between the heavy beats of music. What this works out to be is typically two eighth notes (for quick steps) followed by a quarter note (for a slow step). That is followed by a repeat of two eighth notes and a quarter note.

- The Count** The beats of the music create the traditional “quick, quick, slow, and quick, quick, slow”, or as commonly counted “one-and-two, (pause,) three-and-four, (pause).” Other acceptable counts are “triple step”, “triple step” or “shuffle step”, “shuffle step””. It is important that you count out loud until you have mastered the motor coordination of the dance. Most instructors will use the “one-and-two, three-and-four” count. You may use whatever works for you.
- What is a beat?** A beat in music is a heavy guitar strum, a drumbeat, or some other heavy sound in the music. It is the **natural** place you would snap your fingers or clap your hands if you were keeping time to the music.
- The important thing to remember here is that in dance, you put your foot on the floor on the beat as opposed to picking it up. To practice, you can snap your fingers and stamp your feet as you listen to the music (guys use the left foot and ladies use the right.)
- Is it a Polka** Listen to the music. The three most common country-and-western music beats are polka, two-step, and waltz. (At this point, disregard the waltz.) Try counting “one-and-two, three-and-four to the music and have the words of the phrase fall on the beats of music. If it fits comfortably into the music and sounds like you are keeping time, then you can probably dance a Polka to the music.
- An alternative is to watch what other dancers are doing before you go out onto the floor. If they are generally dancing around a circle as triple step, triple step, it is a Polka.
- If you still cannot determine what it is, ask someone nearby. Most dancers are friendly and they will be glad to tell you. If they say Polka, you are home free. If they say two-step and the beat is relatively fast, you can dance a Polka to it.

Contact

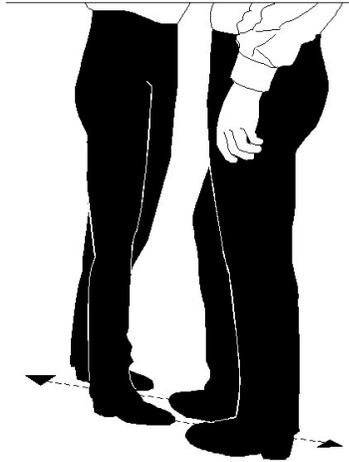
Face each other. Gentleman faces forward and lady faces backward. Be sure that you will be moving counter-clockwise around the floor.



Gentlemen – Put your right hand under the lady's left arm and place it gently on her left shoulder blade. Keep your fingers together and turn the tip of your hand down so that it raises your right elbow to create a shelf for the lady to rest her arm. Hold your left hand out to the side about level with her chin but below her eyes. Hold your palm forward and fingers pointing to the outside to create a fence for her right hand.

Ladies – Rest your left elbow on the gentleman's arm and cup your left hand on the ball of his right shoulder. Gently rest your right hand on top of the gentleman's left hand.

Finally, hold each other slightly offset so that your right foot is pointing between your partner's feet.



We do three things to prevent stepping on each other's toes:

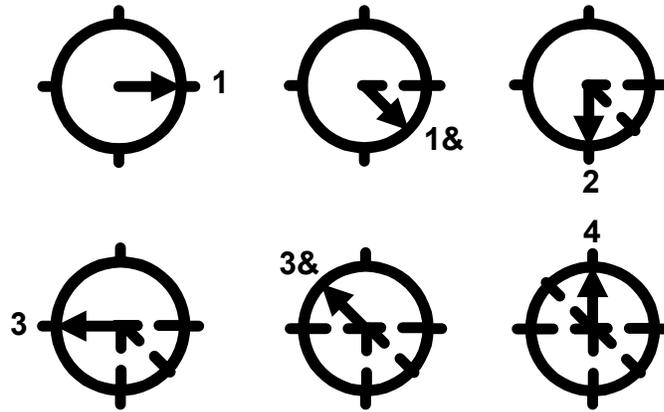
1. Ladies and gentlemen dance with opposite footwork – guys start with the left foot and ladies start with the right foot. Provided they are facing each other, as the gentleman steps forward with his left, the lady steps back with her right and there is always a place to put the foot.
2. Ladies and gentlemen dance parallel but offset to each other so that the right foot is lined up to always pass between the partner's feet. This prevents bumping knees and toes.
3. Ladies and gentlemen keep their feet fairly close to the floor when they step to prevent stepping on your partner if all else fails. Avoid dragging your feet – it is unsightly, it creates an irritating sound, and it will quickly wear out you shoes.

Connection and Frame

The connection and frame is created by leaning slightly in toward your partner and keeping a tension in your elbows. The gentleman should hold the clasped hands somewhere about the height of the lady's shoulders.

Try it out. If you would like to learn more of connection and frame, refer to the on-line segment entitled "connection and frame."

The Polka
dance clock



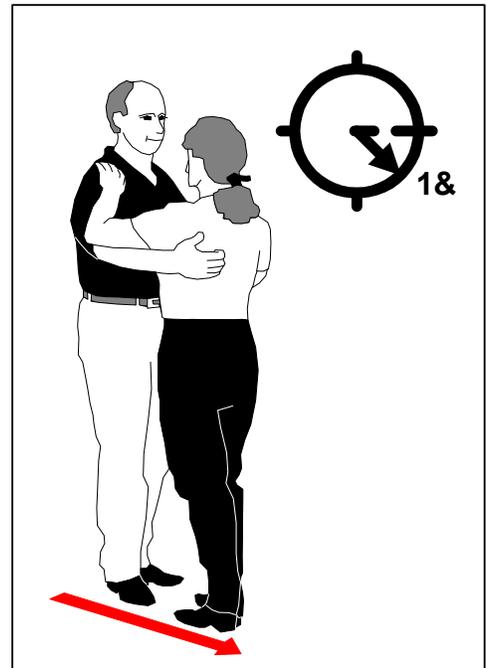
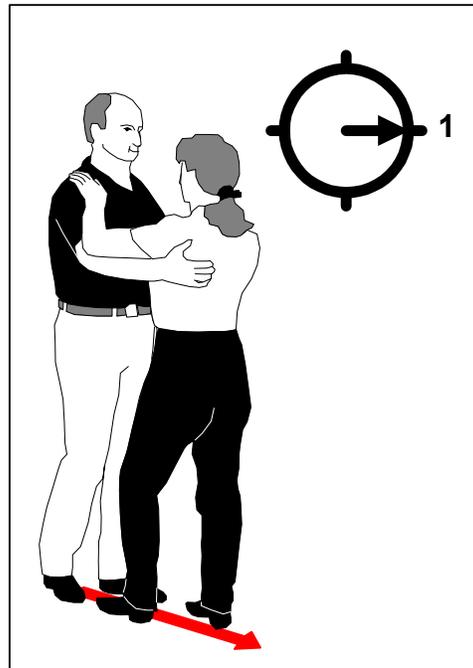
Unlike the regular clock, the Polka dance clock is divided into four segments to correspond to the beats of the basic music. Clocks for other dances will be different. The spaces between the markers along the outside of the clock represent full beats of music (quarter notes), and the arrow points to the beat representing the step being taken. When the arrow points between the markers, this represents a half beat (eighth notes) that occur in the quicker steps of the triple step set.

Steps number 1, &, 2 are the first triple step set as described above (counted as “one-and-two”). There is a pause between steps 2 and 3 amounting to a quarter note of music. Steps number 3, &, 4 are the second triple step set (counted as “three-and-four”). And, again, there is a pause between steps 4 and 1 amounting to a quarter note of music.

Timing of Steps

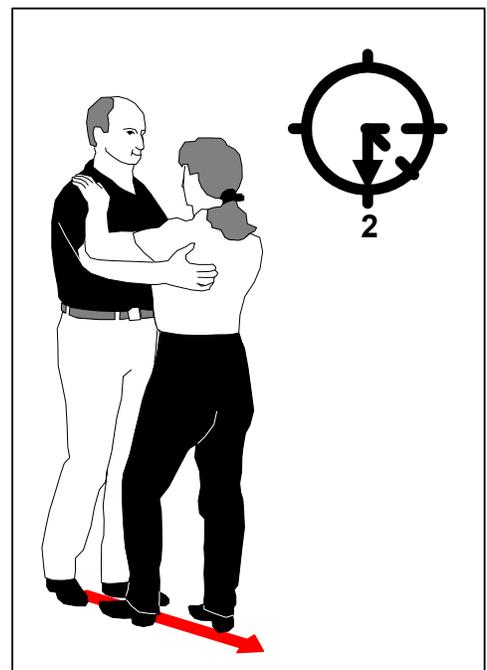
An important point to note is that the timing occurs after the step, not before it. Therefore, the timing for the first step occurs between point 1 and 1& in the diagram. The second step begins at point 1&, the third step begins at point 2, etc. The same applies for the second set of triple steps.

The Steps
(The First
Triple Set)

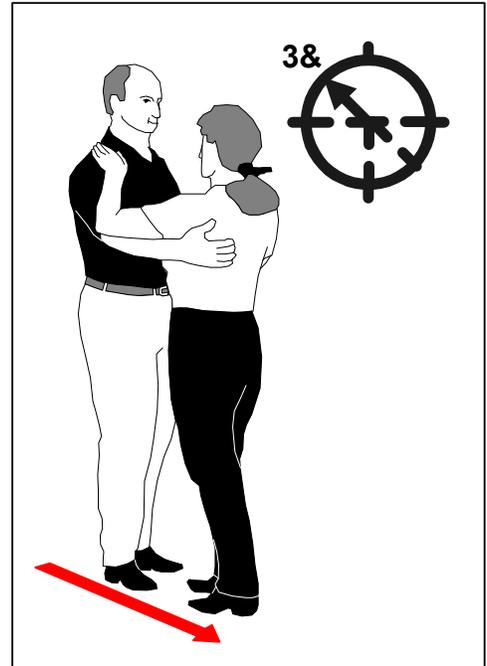
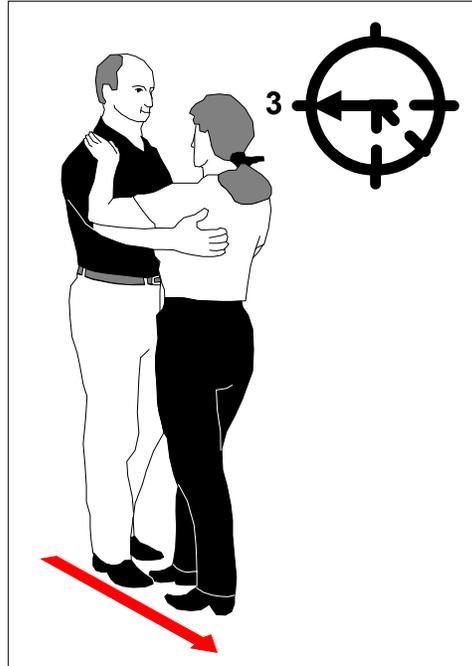


In the first triple step set, the gentleman steps forward with his left foot and the lady steps back with her right foot on count one. On the count of 1& they each bring their trailing free foot beside the other or even slightly past. On the count of two, the steps are identical to the count of one where the gentleman steps forward with his left foot and the lady steps back with her right.

Timing of these steps is everything. An easy way to think of it is “quick, quick, slow”.

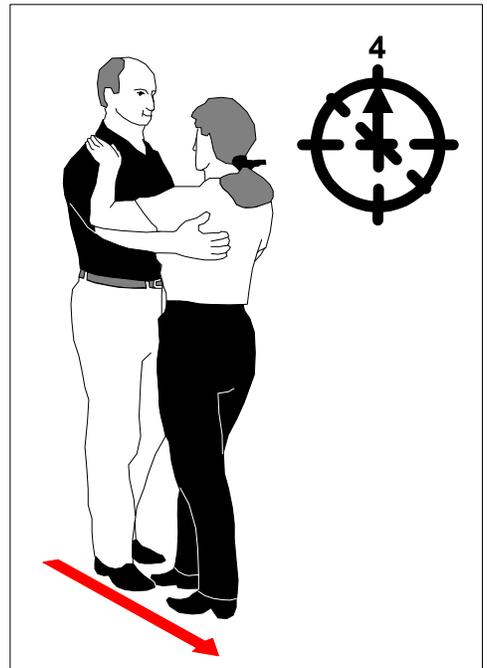


**The Steps
(The Second
Triple Set)**



The second triple step set is a mirror image of the first set. The gentleman steps forward with his right foot and the lady steps back with her left foot on count 3. On the count of 3& they each bring their trailing free foot beside the other. On the count of 4, the steps are identical to the count of 3 where the gentleman steps forward with his right foot and the lady steps back with her left.

Again, pay particular attention to the timing as illustrated in the respective dance clocks.



- Don't be Afraid** Every dancer out there has “paid their dues”. They have struggled just like you. However, they are concentrating on their own efforts and not upon you. They do not care if you make a mistake, so go ahead and make them. You have just as much right to be on the dance floor as they do, so get out there and dance. It may be a struggle, but that is ok. Dance as if no one is watching you.
- Protect your Lady** As you are dancing, check often around you to be aware of the traffic and patterns that are happening nearby. Look over your partners shoulder if you are moving forward, and use side glances and peripheral vision if you are moving backwards. Do not run your lady into another dancer and do not allow them to collide with her. Take smaller steps or maneuver her into an open spot if necessary. Avoid collisions with other dancers.
- Take the Blame** If a collision does occur, remember that it does no one any good to get upset – this is just recreation. The best policy is to apologize regardless if it is your fault or not.
- And last, but not least – if you do bump into someone and knock over their drink, offer to replace it, and try to be more careful.
- Conclusion** The material presented here is not all-inclusive, but only touches the high points. There are many other tips to help in your Polka technique. Some of these tips will be presented in the course of other dance segments, while others may have to be taught in conjunction with an instructor present. Please call to join a class.
- This concludes the segment on basic Polka.