

# Classification of Ballroom Dances

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## 1 Organisations Surveyed

This guide incorporates data from the web sites of the organisations listed below.

Name	Abbreviation	Web site
<b>DanceSport organisations</b>		
International DanceSport Federation	IDSF	<a href="http://www.idsf.net">www.idsf.net</a>
DanceSport Australia	DSA	<a href="http://www.dancesport.org.au">www.dancesport.org.au</a>
Canadian Amateur DanceSport Association	CADA	<a href="http://www.dancesport.ca">www.dancesport.ca</a>
DanceSport UK	DSUK	<a href="http://www.dancesport.uk.com">www.dancesport.uk.com</a>
United States Amateur Ballroom Dancers Association	USABDA	<a href="http://www.usabda.org">www.usabda.org</a>
<b>Australia</b>		
Federal Association of Teachers of Dancing Australia	FATD	<a href="http://www.fatd.com.au">www.fatd.com.au</a>
<b>United Kingdom</b>		
English Amateur Dancesport Association	EADA	<a href="http://www.eada.org.uk">www.eada.org.uk</a>
National Association of Teachers of Dancing	NATD	<a href="http://www.natd.org.uk">www.natd.org.uk</a>
The Imperial Society of Teachers of Dancing	ISTD	<a href="http://www.istd.org">www.istd.org</a>
<b>United States</b>		
United States Imperial Society of Teachers of Dancing	USISTD	<a href="http://www.usistd.org">www.usistd.org</a>

The DanceSport organisations have been grouped together since they usually adopt consistent classifications. In the remainder of this guide the National DanceSport Associations will only be mentioned where their practice differs from the IDSF practice.

It would be tedious to continually refer to these organisations by their full name, so the abbreviations shown above will be used in the remainder of this document.

There are also many amateur web sites containing information about the classification of ballroom dances, usually without stating sources. This guide will not consider such sites.

## 2 International Style & American Style

In North American there are two conflicting styles of ballroom dancing. There they are called International Style and American Style. The International Style is the style encountered in the rest of the English-speaking world. (This document only considers the English-speaking world, since I can only read web sites written in English.)

The American style is not usually encountered outside North America. This means that those of us outside North America don't call our style the International Style. We don't call it anything. It doesn't need a name since it's the only style we know about. The label 'International Style' is only encountered when there is a need to distinguish between the two styles, meaning that it is usually only used in North America. Having said that, the DSUK site does provide some information about some American Style dances, though it is presented in a style that suggests that UK readers would be unfamiliar with that style.

Even if you live outside North America you still need to be aware that the American Style exists and that many dances exist in both an International Style version and an American Style version. Here are some examples of situations where you need to ensure you are using International rather than American Style resources.

- Reading dance steps from a North American web site.
- Purchasing a ballroom dancing book published in North America. In Australia, where the American Style does not occur, I have even found beginners' dance books that teach American Style in public libraries. Don't assume that your library's book purchaser understands the difference between the two styles.
- Purchasing North American CDs of ballroom dance music. On these CDs each track is labelled to indicate which dance it is for, but the correct tempi (speeds) for the various dances differ between International and American Styles. (See the separate guide on Ballroom Dance Tempi.)
- Actually, in Australia, there are a couple of US-based ballroom franchises that teach American Style rather than International Style. If you decide to learn at one of these franchises, don't expect your skills to be useful in Australia anywhere other than at that franchise.

Sections 3 to 9 of this document are only concerned with the International Style. They are written from the point of view of the non-American reader, and so will not continually prefix terms by International. For example, they will just refer to Latin American, rather than International Latin American.

### **3 Overview of primary ballroom classifications**

Ballroom dance is divided into three categories, and perhaps one day there will be some sort of agreement as to what they are called. Currently the most common names seem to be Standard Style, Latin American Style and Sequence Dances.

#### **3.1 Standard Style**

Also known as 'modern' and 'modern ballroom'.

This style includes Waltz, Tango, Slow Foxtrot, Quickstep and Viennese Waltz

#### **3.2 Latin American Style**

Often abbreviated to 'Latin'.

This style includes Rumba, Cha Cha, Samba, Jive and Paso Doble.

#### **3.3 Sequence Dances**

Less frequently called Processional Dances. In Australia, sequence dances are often subdivided into New Vogue Sequence Dances and English Old Time Sequence Dances.

Since there are hundreds of these, this brief overview won't try to list them.

## 4 Non-Ballroom Dances

Ballroom dances are a subset of a much larger set of dances.

For example, the Latin American Style ballroom dances are part of a much larger set of dances labelled as Latin American. In the context of ballroom dancing exams, the recognised Latin American dances are Rumba, Cha Cha, Samba, Jive and Paso Doble.

At a strict *ballroom* dance, these are the only Latin American dances likely to be seen. But at a *Latin American* dance, where *only* Latin American dances occur, a much larger range of Latin American dances may be seen, including such dances as Lambada, Meringue, Rue(a)da, Argentine Tango and Salsa.

As another example, the Rock 'n' Roll family of dances includes a number of footwork variations, one of which is effectively Jive as listed in the Latin American category above, though the Rock 'n' Roll version of Jive seems to include far more moves than listed in the Ballroom Jive syllabus.

## 5 Distinguishing between the ballroom styles

The major distinguishing feature of sequence dances is that the couples are arranged in a circle and simultaneously perform the same set routine, which is usually a 16 or 32 bar sequence, repeated as many times as the music allows. By contrast, in Standard and Latin American dances, each man leads his partner in whatever sequence of moves he chooses.

Many web sites provide lists subdividing non-sequence dances into Standard and Latin American. I have yet to find a web site which clearly explains the criteria for the subdivision. It is as if they expect the reader to just memorise which dances belong in each category without any understanding.

I suggest the sole criterion for this subdivision is the hold.

In Standard Style, the hold the dance starts in is maintained for the entire dance. In most Standard dances it is the same hold, usually called 'normal hold'. The exception is tango, where the whole dance is performed in 'tango hold', a minor variation on normal hold.

By contrast, in the Latin American dances the hold will change frequently throughout the dance. 'Normal hold' may occur, as will various single hand holds that allow one or both the partners to turn. The hold may be completely dropped for a few steps.

While this classification works when looking at Standard and Latin American in isolation, sequence dances confound the situation. Sequence dances are usually based on one of the Standard or Latin American dances, and those based on the Standard dances usually break the above rule.

So for example Foxtrot always uses normal hold for the whole dance. But a sequence dance based on Foxtrot will be danced to Foxtrot music and will include several standard Foxtrot moves, but will usually also involve some moves which aren't from standard foxtrot and which involve some different hold.

The presence of multiple holds is not a *defining feature* of a sequence dance. The only essential criterion for a sequence dance is that all couples are performing the same routine. In theory it is possible to write a sequence dance which is entirely in normal hold. In practice I have yet to see a sequence dances that does not involve at least 2 changes of hold. Perhaps choreographers take the view that a dance that precisely repeats every 16 or 32 bars risks dullness unless it incorporates some changes of hold.

We now take a closer look at each of Standard Style, Latin American Style and Sequence Dances, summarising the conflicting labels used for the styles and the disagreements as to which dances appear in each style.

## 6 Standard Style

The following table summarises the names various organisations use for this style and the dances they include in it. Note that some organisations refer to Foxtrot while others refer to Slow Foxtrot. They do all mean the same dance – they just can't agree on what its name is. All organisations include Waltz, Tango and Quickstep in this style.

<b>Organisation</b>	<b>Style Name</b>	<b>Dances are Waltz, Tango, Quickstep and:</b>
IDSF	Standard	Slow Foxtrot, Viennese Waltz
FATD	Standard	Slow Foxtrot, Viennese Waltz
EADA	Modern*	Foxtrot, Viennese Waltz
NATD	Ballroom	Slow Foxtrot
ISTD	Modern Ballroom	Foxtrot, Viennese Waltz
USISTD	Standard	Slow Foxtrot, Viennese Waltz

\* EADA uses the name 'Modern' when writing for the UK context, but notes the use of the term 'Standard' internationally.

ISTD doesn't seem to clearly list the dances in this category in the information sections of their web site. Their entry in the above table is based on the contents of books in their online shop.

## 7 Latin American Style

The label Latin American is used consistently by all organisations surveyed. The abbreviation to 'Latin' is also commonly used.

All consistently list the five dances: Rumba, Samba, Paso Doble, Jive and Cha Cha.

There is some inconsistency in naming the last dance, which appears as Cha Cha (DSA, USABDA), Cha Cha Cha (FATD, ISTD, NATD, USISTD) and Cha-Cha-Cha (IDSF, EADA). CADA is internally inconsistent, referring to both Cha Cha Cha and Cha-Cha-Cha in their rules.

While Paso Doble is in the exams of the Australian associations, it is rarely seen at social dances.

## 8 Sequence Dances

Sequence Dances are seldom mentioned outside Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom. None of the North American organisations web sites mention Sequence Dances. The list of styles in the Application section of the IDSF competition rules does mention sequence dances, dividing them into 'Old Time and Modern and Latin Sequence', but give no more information.

Some competition dancers display animosity, bordering on snobbery, towards sequence dances. Some take the view that performing a pre-defined sequence doesn't constitute real dancing. Similarly, some dance organisations do not recognise sequence dances in their syllabus. However, at many social dances the sequence dances are more popular than the Standard and Latin American dances.

Unfortunately, there does not appear to be any officially sanctioned collective name for the non-Sequence dances. The phrase 'non-sequence dances' is clumsy. One unofficial name in use is 'freestyle', a name which does seem to nicely summarise the major difference between those dances and the prescribed routine of the sequence dances.

## 8.1 Australia

FATD uses the label 'sequence dances', and subdivides them into Australian New Vogue and English Old Time. ('English Old Time' is an Australianism – the English simply called it 'Old Time'.) That is, they have effectively split Sequence Dances into the local product and the imports. They seem to examine dances from both categories, though their web site is a little unclear on this point and does not list the dances.

DSA calls this category 'New Vogue' and examines the following 15 dances.

1 Parma Waltz	6 Evening Three Step	11 Barclay Blues
2 Swing Waltz	7 Gypsy Tap	12 La Bomba
3 Merrilyn	8 Tracie Leigh Waltz	13 Lucille
4 Charmaine	9 Twilight Waltz	14 Excelsior Schottische
5 Tangoette	10 Carousel	15 Tango Terrific

My understanding is that these 15 dances are all in the category which FATDA would call Australian New Vogue. (Can anyone confirm this?)

If attending social dances in Australia, the last 14 of these dances are frequently encountered, with Parma Waltz being consistently ignored, but several English Old Time dances are also encountered.

The 15 Australian championship sequence dances listed above are predominantly based on Standard style, containing:

Waltzes (Parma, Swing, Tracie Leigh, Twilight, Lucille)

Foxtrots (Merrilyn, Charmaine, Carousel, Barclay Blues, Excelsior Schottische)

Tangos (Tangoette, La Bomba, Tango Terrific).

The other two (Gypsy Tap and Evening Three Step) are classified as marches. However, amongst the social sequence dances there are also many quicksteps and many dances based on Latin American dances.

Two highly informative pages on Australian New Vogue Dancing and English Old Time Dancing are:

<http://www-staff.it.uts.edu.au/~don/pubs/vogue.html>

<http://www-staff.it.uts.edu.au/~don/pubs/oldtime.html>

## 8.2 United Kingdom

EADA does not recognise sequence dances.

NATD mentions Classical and Modern Sequence Dancing, noting that Classical Sequence Dancing is what used to be called Old Time, but does not elaborate on Modern Sequence Dancing.

ISTD uses the label 'sequence dances'. It notes a particular interest in authentic 'Old Time Dances', which it describes as those preceding the first world war, but also examines 'modern sequence dances'.

DSUK does not seem to mention sequence dances.

## 9 Progressive Dances and Spot Dances

**Progressive dances** are those where the couples generally progress around the room in an anticlockwise direction, and where even a very short foray in a clockwise direction carries a high risk of being knocked down and trampled under the oncoming traffic.

**Spot dances** are those where couples move wherever they please subject to available space, and on crowded dance floors this tends to mean they stay pretty much around the spot where they started.

All the Standard Style dances are progressive. Latin American dances contain both types. Rumba, Cha Cha and Jive are spot dances. Samba and Paso Doble are progressive dances.

Most sequence dances have sections which progress anticlockwise around the room, sections which progression clockwise around the room, and perhaps sections which are relatively stationary. The first type of move usually (always?) predominates, so on average the progression is anticlockwise around the room.

However, in one of those ludicrous twists of terminology that causes so much irritation for beginners, in the context of sequence dances the word ‘progressive’ has a completely different meaning. A progressive sequence dance is one in which partners are exchanged once in every repetition of the sequence. This is usually achieved by the ladies moving one man anticlockwise around the circle at some designated point in the pattern, commonly in the last bar of the pattern.

While not appearing in any official publications I could locate, the term “**travelling dances**” is commonly used as a synonym for progressive dances. This name has a lot of appeal, since:

- It allows us to split dances into travelling dances and spot dances, both self-explanatory terms.
- It allows us to reserve the label progressive for the meaning described above in the context of sequence dances.

The term “**moving dances**” is also in use. It sounds like it should be just another synonym for “progressive dances”, and there are many web pages that use it as such, but the theory books disagree. The second paragraph on page 98 of “The Ballroom Technique” implies that while Waltz, Foxtrot and Quickstep are moving dances, Tango isn’t. Boyd’s “New Vogue Sequence Dancing” section 1 p15, under “Closed hold (b)” confirms that tango isn’t a moving dance. Neither book explains why Tango isn’t a moving dance.

## 10 American Style

Section 2 noted the existence of two conflicting styles called International Style and American Style. Sections 3 to 9 dealt solely with International Style. This section provides further information about American Style.

Based on data from dance studio web sites concerning the dances they teach, it seems International Style and American style both have a strong foothold in USA, but in Canada the International Style predominates.

In International Style ballroom dances are primarily subdivided into Standard and Latin American. In American Style there is a corresponding subdivision into Smooth and Rhythm.

The dances most often placed in each category are as follows.

International Style	<b>Standard:</b> Waltz, Tango, Foxtrot, Viennese Waltz, Quickstep	<b>Latin American:</b> Cha Cha, Rumba, Jive, Samba, Paso Doble
American Style	<b>Smooth:</b> Waltz, Tango, Foxtrot, Viennese Waltz	<b>Rhythm:</b> Cha Cha, Rumba, Mambo, East Coast Swing

However, if you wish to look deeper, there is some disagreement as to precisely which dances fall into the American Styles. Here are opinions from four web sites, preserving the slight variations in

names of dances used by the organisations. It seems likely that the unspecified ‘swing’ mentioned by some sites is the ‘East Coast Swing’ mentioned by others.

Site	American Smooth	American Rhythm
USISTD	Waltz, Tango, Foxtrot, Viennese Waltz, Peabody	Cha Cha Cha, Rumba, Mambo, East Coast Swing, Bolero
USABDA	Waltz, Tango, Foxtrot, Viennese Waltz	Cha Cha, Rumba, Mambo, East Coast Swing, Bolero
DSUK	Waltz, Tango, Foxtrot, Viennese Waltz	Cha Cha, Rumba, Mambo, Swing
CADA	Waltz, Tango, Foxtrot, Viennese Waltz	Cha Cha Cha*, Rumba, Mambo, Swing

\* Sometimes hyphenated to Cha-Cha-Cha

Note that the dance names in American smooth are a subset of those in International Standard. However, where the identical names occur, the dances are not identical.

On this topic DSUK says:

American Smooth can be best described as a form of ballroom dancing with an enhanced repertoire of easy to perform, yet exciting steps.

All basic principles and the technique of ballroom dancing still apply, however partners are not required to maintain a continuous body contact. Lifting the body contact restriction allows the dancers to perform steps such as: lady under arm turns, spins, side by side positions, parallel turns, dips, drops and other variations that would never be allowed in the traditional ballroom dancing. Anyone who has ever learned ballroom dancing will find American Smooth very easy to learn, yet refreshing due to its interesting, rich syllabus.

The music used for American Smooth, Waltz, Tango, Viennese Waltz and Foxtrot is basically the same as that used for Ballroom as we know it in Europe, with the exception of quickstep, which is not danced in the American Smooth style. In other words you can surprise your friends by dancing a totally new choreography to almost any ballroom dance music.

(Source: <http://www.dancesport.uk.com/training/index.htm> 21-Mar-2004)

So, while the American Smooth Waltz has the same roots as the International Standard Waltz, the available moves are different.

This can also be seen at the USISTD site which lists the moves in the syllabus for both International Standard and American Smooth. ([http://www.usistd.org/syllabi\\_step\\_lists\\_&\\_tempi/](http://www.usistd.org/syllabi_step_lists_&_tempi/))

Cha Cha and Rumba appear in both International Latin American and American Rhythm styles so it is natural to wonder whether these two versions also differ.

BallroomDancers.com ([www.ballroomdancers.com](http://www.ballroomdancers.com)) contains descriptions of steps for several dances in both styles. (<http://www.ballroomdancers.com/Dances/Default.asp>). Reading the descriptions of the steps shows that, in respect of Rumba and Cha Cha, there are many different steps in the International Latin American and American Rhythm versions, though there are also cases where a particular moves appears in both versions but under different names.

Section 5 noted that in International Standard Style dances the same hold is used for the entire dance while in International Latin American dances the hold changes frequently during the dance. It was alleged that this is the sole criterion for distinguishing between these styles. However, while the American Smooth dances are based on International Standard dances, they do allow the hold to

change. It is natural to wonder how the Americans explain the subdivision into American Smooth and American Rhythm. While many web sites *list* the dances in each category group, I have not found any which explain the criteria for the subdivision.

The DSUK site indicated that the American Smooth dances are performed to ‘basically the same’ music as the corresponding International Standard Dances. However, according to the competition rules of most American dance organisations, the American Style dances are usually performed at different tempi to the corresponding International Style dances. However, the differences are not large, so perhaps it is possible to perform American Smooth moves at the tempo of the corresponding International Standard dance as DanceSport UK suggests.

## 11 History

Version 1.0	13 April 2004	Initial Release
Version 2.0	30 May 2004	Moved data on dance tempi to a separate guide. Major rewrite of remaining material. Added data from more organisations.
Version 2.1	14 Feb 2005	Updated source URL for this document.
Version 2.2	28 April 2005	Corrected typographical errors and made minor improvements to wording.
Version 2.3	13 Aug 2006	Minor wording improvement. Added mention of existence of American Style franchises operating in Australia.
Version 2.4	18 Feb 2007	Added discussion of travelling dances and moving dances.