

West Coast Swing

Balance, Connections, Syncopations, Variations

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(Technique & styling are always evolving and may differ from what you have been taught depending on many factors. The information below is based on information we have gleaned from a variety of sources. Your experience may differ.)

West Coast Swing (WCS) is a laidback, improvisational, smooth, funky, flirtatious, sultry and sometimes even down & dirty member of the swing family. Music styles that suit WCS vary widely in tempo. Some of the music styles that lend themselves best for WCS include, but are not limited to, blues, country, disco, jazz, pop, rhythm & blues, and swing.

WCS is a dance of the man trying to make a pass at a woman, but the woman is resisting his advances by moving back and forth in the slot between each close encounter.

BALANCE AND CONNECTION

As with all types of dancing, balance is essential both as an individual and as a couple. Start individually by placing your supporting leg knee & foot under your center of gravity (center). Men your center is approximately your belly button for Latin/American (slightly higher for smooth dancing due to the change in poise). A woman's center is slightly lower, in the hips. It is a good idea to double check your balance at the end of each figure so the next figure can be done without any carry over issues from the figure before.



To obtain that nice looking and great feeling WCS couple balance lower slightly into your knees and pull your centers slightly away from each other until you find a comfortable counter-balance point.

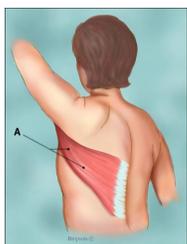


Movement begins by moving your body's center forward or backward pushing off with your weighted/supporting leg. Men, leading therefore becomes much easier as you are indicating to your partner which direction to go with the initial movement of your body by using your center to lead (talk to) the woman's center.

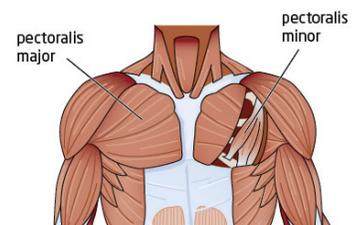
There are three types of connections in dancing: with the floor, with the music, and with your partner. The connection with the floor occurs when you are well balanced. The connection with the music is different for each person and is developed over time with increased exposure to the music. The connection with your partner is achieved via a variety of actions and reactions. He does something that indicates (action) to the woman for her to do something (reaction). A good connection allows both people to be sensitive and play off each others movement.



The main connection point may be your hands but the power behind the hands should flow from your center through your arm and elbow to the hand. Your goal is to direct/lead her center. Also consider what part of her body you wish to lead with your center-hand connection. If you hold your hand too high the woman will feel like you are trying to push or pull her shoulders & head (and possibly knocking her off balance) as opposed to her center. Elbows play an important roll in the connection principle. Keep your elbows close to your side and very slightly in front of your body.



Slight pressure/resistance should be maintained at all times to keep the connection active. A person's first impulse to gain the needed arm tension is to tighten the biceps and triceps muscles, the muscles that bend and straighten the elbow. Instead, try to lightly tighten the Lattisimus Dorsi muscles (picture on the left) that lifts and lowers the arm, and the Upper Pectoral muscles (picture on the right), that move the arms/shoulders forward and backward. Keep the rest of the arm, forearm, and hand muscles relaxed, pliable, and responsive (toned).



A good connection will feel more like a spring or a rubber band, expanding or contracting when needed and then snapping back into the starting arm & body poise position. The stretching, spring or rubber band-like movement allows for greater energy for spins and adds to the sensuality of the rhythm.

ADVANCED WCS:

Once the basics of balance and the basic figures are well within your body memory it is time to spice things up by adding to the basics at the beginning, middle or end of the figure. Then to further spice things up, syncopations can be added by the man, lady or both. Below are a few examples of ways to spice up the basic Sugar Push.

Variations to the middle triple or touch step:

- **Sugar Tuck & Spin:** A sugar push, with a tuck. Man assists woman to swivel slightly LF on count 3. He then invites her to spin a full turn RF on count &4.
- **Face Loop Sugar Push (aka Hip Push):** Man brings his left & her right arms over his head at end of count 2. As she rotates up to ¼th RF the arms also loop over her head. The man places his right hand on her left hip to stop her momentum and assist in her reversing direction.
- **Handshake Face Loop Sugar Push:** Begin in a handshake (right hands). Man brings the arms over his head at end of count 2. She can rotate slightly LF. He places his left hand on her right hip to stop her momentum and assist in her reversing direction.
- **Double Face Loop Sugar Push:** Begin with a double crossed handhold with right-right on top. Man brings their right-right arms up over his head for a face loop at the end of count 2. She rotates slightly RF on count 3& and he brings their left-left arms up over his head and down to his shoulder as she moves away on count 4.
- **Body Wave (or Ripple) Sugar Push:** Replace with a body wave or body ripple. WAVE Down: Start by moving your head forward, then shoulders forward, then chest, stomach, hips, and knees. OR RIPPLE Up: Begin by moving the knees forward, then hips, stomach, chest, shoulders, and head. Ripple up. You may finish the figure with a very quick step back and anchor step or take more time and end with the wave or ripple.
- **Sugar Push Kick:** On count 4 both kick to the side (he left – her right) and hold for the remainder of the figure.
- **Sugar Push Extensions:** A sugar push is usually a 6-count figure. A wide variety of things can be added in the middle to extend the figure to eight or more counts. For example, after doing 3&4 add two lock steps [fwd L/XRIB of L, fwd L (W bk R/XLIF of R, bk R)] before completing the figure with an anchor step.

Syncopation: Syncopations can be done at any time by either person as long as they do not interfere with what your partner is doing. They can occur on any part of the figure, the beginning, middle, or the end and include changes in rhythm, footwork, and/or bodywork. Triple steps are not considered to be syncopations unless you vary the timing from the standard 1&2. The timing [] for the examples below includes the actions as well as the actual weight changes.

Beginning: Replace the walk 2 with

- Kick Ball Change [&12 or 1&2]
- Heel Ball Change [&12 or 1&2]
- Point Ball Change [&12 or 1&2]

Middle: Replace the triple or touch step

- **Hesitate** before taking the first step for an “&” count [&34 or &3-&]
- **Flick Step:** Flick left foot in front of R, step side & back L (W: rotate one-quarter right face, flick R foot behind trail foot no weight, step side R & rotate to face man) [34]
- **Kick & Triple:** Kick to the side (he left – her right), triple diagonally forward (her back), anchor step [&3&4]

Ending: Replace or modify the anchor step

- **Overturn the Anchor:** Overturn the first step of the anchor step to face away from your partner on the first step and turn to face your partner at the end of the third step [&1&2&]
- **Kick to the 4 & Step:** Kick your trail foot in front of your lead foot, place the ankle of your trail foot on your lead foot’s knee, step side with your trail foot [1&2 or &12]
- **Point, Step, Point:** Point trail foot (M: right – W: left), step on trail foot, point lead foot [1&2]
- **Step, Point, Step, Point, Step:** Step in place trail foot, point lead, step in place lead, point trail, step in place lead [&1&2&]
- **Cross, Cross, Step:** XRIF of L (W: XLIF of R), XLIF of R (W: XRIF of L), step in place trail foot [1&2]
- **Out, Out, In, In, Step:** Step out to the side with your trail foot, sd lead, step in trail, step in lead, step in place & take weight on trail foot [&1&2&]

