

Teaching New Dancers

One of the Most Important Tasks for the Caller

Growth in the Square Dance activity requires that clubs and callers work together to recruit new dancers. Once recruited, the focus becomes teaching these new dancers all of the moves in our CALLERLAB Basic and Mainstream dance program.

We want the new dancers to fully experience the joy in the activity while learning the calls necessary to be able to dance at a club level. This requires a series of instructional “lessons” over a period of time.

Each group of new dancers has different needs and different learning capabilities. This brochure presents ideas for organizing your lesson presentation in different ways.

Look inside for a discussion of the Traditional Method of teaching Square Dancing Calls and a few alternative ways to present your lessons to the new dancers. The focus is not on teaching techniques. Instead it is on the presentation of the material to the group.

The CALLERLAB Alternate Lesson Systems Committee is charged with gathering and reporting on the different variations of teaching Mainstream lessons to new dancers.

The Alternate Lessons System Committee and CALLERLAB are interested in any systems for teaching new dancers that YOU may have created, tested and found successful in your calling career.

We would like to document the ideas that you may be experimenting with and share them with other callers. Our Committee will collect these stories and publish them so that others may try them in their area.

Contact me to share your ideas or get more information:

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Alternate Lessons Systems Callerlab Mainstream Program



Alternate Systems for Teaching New Dancers

**Ideas to Help
You Think
Outside the Box**

Traditional Method

The Traditional System has been in use for many years. New dancers with no exposure to square dancing have come to learn all the calls necessary for the Basic and Mainstream Program levels. The new dancers are taught the calls in a thorough methodical process, usually on a weekly basis. The lessons begin in September and continue through April. Dancers are asked to meet each week for 2 hours. CALLERLAB described the calls, developed a recommended teaching order and, more importantly, a recommended teaching time (40-60 hours) to teach an entire set of lessons at the Mainstream level.

The caller states the name of the call, walks the dancers through it, and practices it with music until he/she is satisfied with their understanding. Usually, the call is taught and practiced from various formations to make more well-rounded dancers. Standard application positions are presented. This process continues until the dancers are able to execute all of the calls within the Program.

Clubs run one set of lessons each year. They recruit the students and then work with them for the entire lesson period. The students are then “graduated” into that Program level and encouraged to continue dancing in the square dance community with their club and/or other clubs.

The system is very effective for those willing to devote the time necessary to complete the lessons. They may even become better dancers because of the extended floor time in a learning environment. The downside is that if clubs put all their efforts into one prime recruiting month, they may lose the opportunity to add more dancers during other times of the year.

Multi-Cycle Method

Multi-cycle lessons divide the teaching into two 12+12 week sessions or 17+17 week sessions. New dancers are taught the first half of the moves in Phase I. Then, if they wish, they can continue to the completion of the lessons in Phase II. If they wish, they can retake Phase I before progressing to Phase II. The club will recruit and start-up a new “cycle” of lessons after Phase I.

Usually, a three hour evening of teaching is split into two 1.5 hour sessions. Phase I is for beginners. The Phase II session is for those continuing on to the full Mainstream. The Phase II dancers are encouraged to come early and “Angel” (assist) the new dancers who are just starting the Phase I cycle.

All dancers in Phase II are also invited to attend club dances where they are encouraged to dance every other tip. By doing so, they have received the benefit of socializing with the club members, learning the new moves in their Phase II Session, and reviewing what they learned in their Phase I session.

Currently, the Mainstream Program requires 34 weeks of instruction. However, the time required before starting a new class of dancers is cut down to 12 or 17 weeks. The club can be recruiting and starting new dancers in a shorter timeframe. They can also integrate them into the club quicker by adjusting their regular club dance schedule.

Accelerated Method

Lesson acceleration is possible if you have capable dancers. These are known as Accelerated, Blast or Fast-Track lessons. There are many variations of this teaching program. The concept is that teaching is compressed into three or four sessions. Typically, these are presented on consecutive Saturdays during a six hour timeframe. Club members usually provide a lunch break and, of course, help as “Angels”. This promotes the “fun and friendship” aspect of square dancing. The caller will work through the calls at an accelerated pace, teaching three hours before and after lunch.

Good workshop follow-up teaching is vital to the success of new dancers as they integrate into a club. The caller must reinforce what they have learned, and workshop as necessary to ensure their confidence. The club members must also encourage the new dancers as they complete their understanding of how to dance, and must work with them to reinforce what was presented in the accelerated sessions. In some cases, if there are enough new dancers in the area, dances can be held just for those new dancers. It is a very successful way to reinforce what they’ve learned.

Compression of the time spent on the lessons can be even more dramatic if you have dancers who can handle the intensity of the material presented, both physically and mentally. Clubs have compressed the Mainstream Program into a “Boot Camp” style weekend. The sessions begin on Friday for usually four hours, followed by a six or eight hour session on Saturday and Sunday. The entire set of Mainstream Program calls is presented. The new dancers are then invited into the club where workshop tips are held to strengthen areas that they feel are weak. Typically, this type of session works best on the college campus or in a teen youth group.

*** KNOW YOUR DANCERS - PUSH THEM TO THEIR LIMITS ***