

Set Dances

- ✘ NEVER, ever, drop out of a set dance
(You had better be dead, because if you are not, the other dancers in the set will kill you.)
- ✘ At the beginning of a dance or at rest during a dance, a woman always stands to the right of her partner.

Terminology

Head of the Hall An agreed upon spot which establishes the relation of the set to the hall, and the dancers to the set. Think of the dance floor as a compass and the *Head of the Hall* as being a dancer's north; once one knows where north is one may describe one's position relative to north.

Up Towards the direction of the Head of the Hall (therefore away from the Foot of the Hall).

Down Away from the Head of the Hall (therefore towards the Foot of the Hall).

In Towards the center of the set.

Out Away from the center of the set.

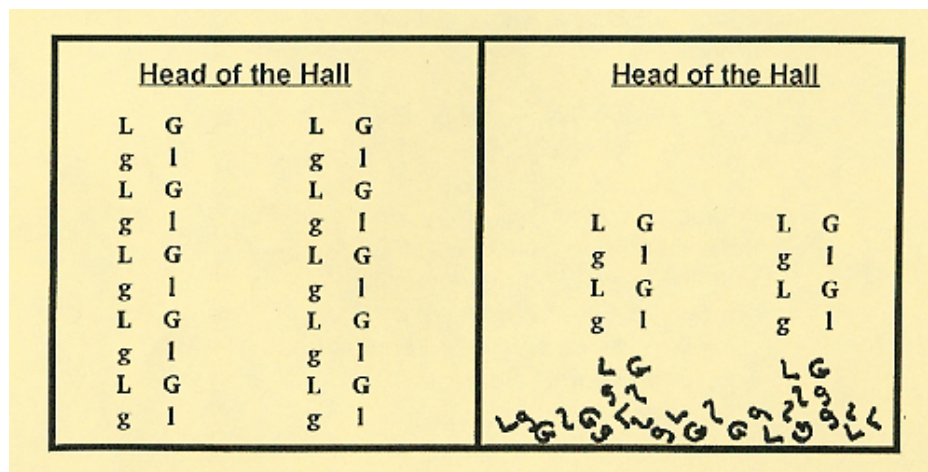
Vis a vis French, "face to face"; sometimes used instead of "corner" or "opposite".

Convention An arbitrary decision made to maintain the structure of the dance; often based on historical precedence or movement kinetics. No one convention is "right", though some might work or feel better than others. Always confirm your understanding of the conventions being used at a workshop or dance.

Company All the dancers in the set. The term is often used when calling a quadrille, e.g., "The Company advance and retire". This exhorts all eight dancers to walk forward into the center of the set and backwards out to their positions.

Progress To move from your position into the next couples' position. After every repetition of a 64-count dance all the couples have progressed, the Actives moving down the hall and the Inactives moving up the hall. The dance sequence is then repeated with the next couple. This enables all the couples to dance from both the Active and Inactive positions. In a progressive figure Active dancers should always move into the next Active couples' position while Inactive dancers move into the Inactive couples' position until they reach the *Head or Foot of the hall*.

AVOID SET CREEP! The hall for a proper longways contra dance which progresses should look like this:



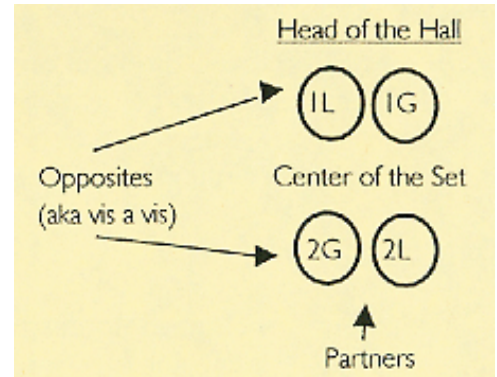
Formations

Note: G = gentleman L = lady

Two Couple Set The building block of a contra set. Also known as a sub-set.

Partners 1G & 1L ; 2G & 2L
 Opposites 1G & 2L ; 2G & 1L

(In a two couple set your opposite may be referred to as your vis a vis.)

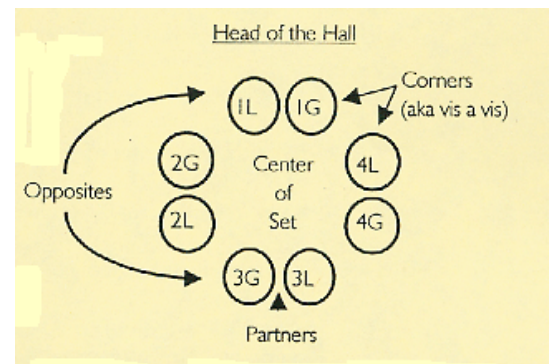


Quadrille A dance for 4 couples in a square (couples face into the set to start).

Partners 1G & 1L ; 2G & 2L ; 3G & 3L ; 4G & 4L
 Opposites 1G & 3L ; 2G & 4L ; 3G & 1L ; 4G & 2L
 Corners 1G & 4L ; 2G & 1L ; 3G & 2L ; 4G & 3L
 Contraries 1G & 2L ; 2G & 3L ; 3G & 4L ; 4G & 1L

(In a four couple set your corner may be referred to as your vis a vis.)

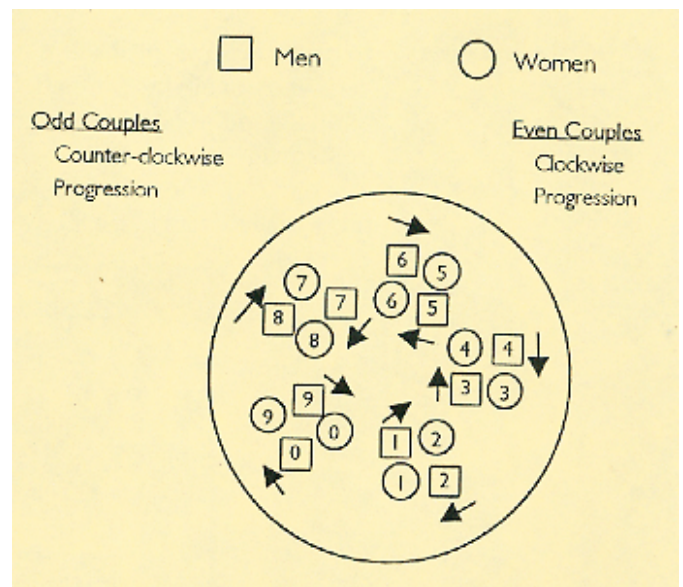
Head Couples: 1 & 3 Side Couples: 2 & 4



Note: Some dance masters refer to the Head couples as 1 & 2 and the Side couples as 3 & 4. Remember that the Heads and Sides retain their relative positions; it is only the numeric designation which has changed (see *Convention*).

Circles A dance for as many as will in a large circle. In a contra circle couples will dance with another couple and then progress onto the next couple. The dancers arrange themselves in two-couple squares, and these squares then form the circle. One-half of the couples move clockwise and the other half move counter-clockwise when the figure progresses.

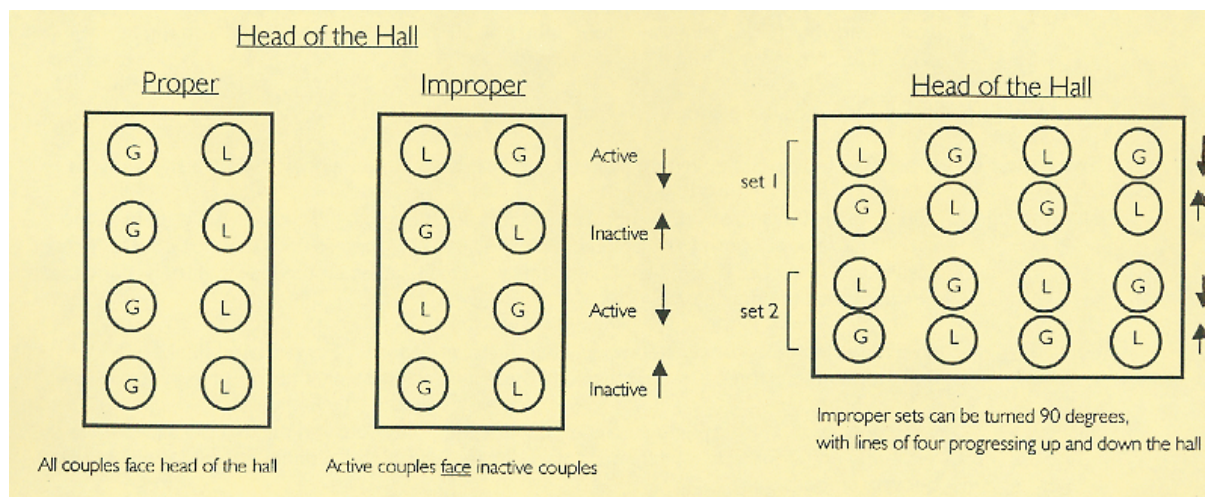
Couples 1-3-5-7-9 always progress counter-clockwise. Couples 0-2-4-6-8 always progress clockwise. The odd numbered couples will always dance with the even numbered couples and never with another odd number couple. Similarly, the even numbered couples will always dance with the odd numbered couples and never with another even numbered couple.



Longways A contra dance in long lines for as few as three couples, or as many as will. In a *Proper* longways set gentlemen stand on one side and ladies on the other side, each partner across from one another. In an *Improper* longways set every other couple alternates so that gentlemen and ladies stand between each other on both sides across from their partner.

(continued)

Formations (cont.)



Although the illustrations only show four couples in the *Proper* and *Improper* sets and four lines of two couples each in the turned *Improper* four-couple set, please remember that a contra dance is for “as many as will”, and that the length of the line is determined by the number of dancers and the size of the hall. Also observe that in all cases the sets are composed of two-couple sub-sets.

In an *Improper* dance when a couple reaches either the *Head of the Hall* or the *Foot of the Hall* and there is no couple with whom to dance, this couple must:

- 1) turn to face into the line (at the *Head of the Hall* face down; at the *Foot of the Hall* face up);
- 2) reposition themselves so that the lady is standing on the gentleman's right side (i.e., next to this right hand); and,
- 3) wait out one figure of the dance.

The couple will start the figure again with the next couple that approaches them in the line. At this point if the couple was *Active* they are now *Inactive* and moving up the set; conversely, if *Inactive*, they are now *Active* and moving down the set.

Steps

Salute An acknowledgment of another dancer; suggested methods:

Ladies: keeping perfectly straight, place your toes slightly outwards and bend your knees, inclining your head slightly and lowering your eyes (1st position ballet).

Gentlemen: a slight bend at the waist with an inclination of the head.
No butts in the air! No groveling!

Balance Three steps in a waltz rhythm. May be started on the right (step on right—rock-step on left—rock-step on right) or the left (step on left—rock-step on right—rock-step on left). Direction of travel may be forward, forward on a diagonal, backward, backward on a diagonal. Balances often come in pairs, but not necessarily.

Right-hand turn Grasp right hands and walk around in a clockwise direction (imagine a pole between the two of you where your hands join; walk around the pole.) Elbows should be raised and the two arms should form a gentle S-curve.

Left-hand turn Grasp left hands, ditto above.

Two-hand turn Grasp hands across, gentlemen palms up, ladies palms down, elbows raised, arms rounded.

(continued)

Steps (cont.)

Pass through Couples walk forward past their opposites. If the set is a *quadrille*, couples will then face into the set. If the set is a *longways* or *circle*, couples will usually progress onto the next couple. The *convention* is to pass by right shoulders (this places the ladies on the inside of the set and the gentlemen on the outside).

Forward A walking step. Step once, step twice, step thrice, and close. “Forward and back” (advance and retire) means three forward steps and three backwards steps, thus returning you to place.

Sashay A slipping step. This traveling step is executed either to the left or right. To the left: step to the left, bring right foot to meet left and replace left foot with right. Continue this motion. Lively, but very smooth.

Ladies Chain Ladies pull across set by right hands, extend left hands to the opposite gentlemen and execute a left hand turn half-way; finish facing into the set on his right. Usually if a lady chains across the set she will then chain back to her partner.

Promenade Walking in a skater’s position. Couples join left hands to left hands and right hands to right hands in front of them, lady’s left arm underneath gentleman’s right. In a set, the *convention* is for gentlemen to pass left shoulders (this places the gentlemen on the inside of the set, ladies on the outside).

Do-si-doe

(dos-à-dos) Executed between two dancers. Step towards the other dancer, pass right shoulders. Step towards the right, passing back to back. Step backwards, passing left shoulders to place. When a do-si-doe right is called, the dancers start by passing right shoulders; when a d-si-doe left is called, the dancers start by passing left shoulders.

Star Dancers stand opposite one another; each dancer grasps same hand with the dancer across from him/her. Walking forward, rotate the set one revolution. If the dancers grasp right hands they will rotate to the left (clockwise). If the dancers grasp left hands they will rotate to the right (counter-clockwise). *Convention* is to have the gentlemen’s hands above the ladies’ hands.

Rights and Lefts (also known as “hey” or “square through”)

The essence of *Rights and Lefts* is the weaving movement between the dancers; they pass alternating shoulders until returning to place. In a circular “hey” half of the dancers move clockwise (usually the ladies), the other half move counter-clockwise (usually the gentlemen). When two couples “square through” the pattern is right hand to your opposite, left hand to your partner. *Pass though* taking right hands with your opposite; *left-hand turn* your partner halfway and end facing into the set; *pass through* taking right hands with your opposite; *left-hand turn* your partner halfway and end facing into the set in your home position.

Cast off (a very common pattern that causes the couples to *progress* in a set)

Active couples walk down the center of the set. As instructed in the dance, either turn by yourself halfway to face up the set or, turn as a couple to face up the set (when switching places gentlemen walk backwards, ladies walk forwards). *Active* couples walk up the set, stopping in between the *Inactives* in their sub-set. At this point all four dances are facing the *Head of the Hall*. Partners grasp the hand of the *Inactive* next to them; partners drop each others’ hand. *Actives* walk forward in a tiny circle three-quarters of the way around the *Inactives* while the *Inactives* pivot in place. End in long lines on either side of the set. *Actives* should be below the *Inactives* in their sub-set, both *Actives* and *Inactives* should be standing across from their partners.

From this position dances may do a ladies chain across the set, promenade across the set, rights and lefts across the set, long lines forward and back, etc.