

## Connection-Frame

### Pre-requisite

None

### Connection and Frame

Connection and frame are some of the most basic and **most important** concepts in any form of dance. For example, suppose that suddenly you lost all ability to communicate in your common language. You could not speak, read, write, or understand anything in the language. Imagine the difficulties you would experience even on the most basic levels of existence. You could not work, drive, buy groceries or use any communication device like a computer, a telephone, a radio, a TV, etc. You would have a minimal existence.

Well, connection and frame are like that to dancing. It is the basic method of communication between dance partners.

### What is Connection?

Connection is a technique of forming a bridge or framework between the two dancers making the posture of the two locked together so they move as one. Connection is a form of communication – e.g. the gentleman decides to move, the lady detects the intended movement before he takes a step through the connection, and commits so that they take the step together.

In connection, we take advantage of something each of us has been doing since we learned to walk as toddlers. **We move our center of gravity before we take a step.** When you are walking (running, etc.), it is rather like you are constantly falling in the direction of movement and you are just as constantly bringing your feet under your center of gravity to catch yourself. Try it yourself and be conscious of your movement. You will find that your body moves, and then you step. Of course, you can step without moving first, but it is extremely awkward and takes on the appearance of a cartoon walk.

## Try This Exercise

The easiest way to grasp the concept of connection is to try it yourself in a little exercise. Stand facing your partner.

Ladies: Extend your right arm and place the palm of your hand (fingers pointing up) flat against the gentleman's chest. Have a little tension in your elbow and lean slightly toward your partner so that there is tension between the two of you.

We are going to have the gentleman move and the lady follow. However, before we start, there are a couple of rules we must follow:

- 1). Gentlemen must step left foot first and ladies must step right foot first.
- 2). Gentlemen may start backward, forward, or to the left only.

Here is how the exercise works: Without music, the gentleman can step any direction allowed at any time he likes. The lady must follow instantly by feeling the movement as his center of gravity changes and stepping likewise.

It really works, no experience necessary!

Go ahead and try it out.

You will find that the lady can easily detect when the gentleman is about to move and make her steps the same as his.

That is how connection works. The connection is between the centers-of-gravity of the partners. In this case, it is the lady's extended arm.

However, in most cases of dance, connection is created by what we call frame, which is a system of connecting arms and mild tension so that the partners can feel the movement of each other.



## Frame

Frame is the part of a structure that gives it strength. In housing, frame would be the structure before the wall sheeting, roof covering, or floor covering are applied. It is what gives a house its rigidity so that it can stand up to the forces that are applied. Frame in that case is what allows a house to be what it is and follow its design.

In dancing, the individuals already have a frame for themselves in their skeletal structure. Dancing frame is an extension of the personal frames with the judicious use of the hands, arms, body position, and tension to create a solid connection between the partners.

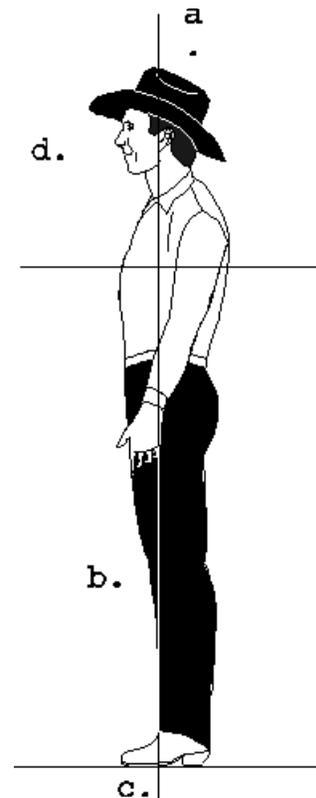
There are many positions and holds depending on what the partners are trying to accomplish, i.e. the closed dance frame, the open frame, conversation frame, promenade frame, wrap frame, etc. (ad infinitum). **ALL** are designed to provide connection and communicate the moves between the partners. Frame and connection permit ease of lead and follow.

We will touch on the two most common here. Others will be brought to light in the course of the instruction.

## Posture- Rule #1

Before we have frame, we must have good posture. Bad posture leads to a sloppy frame, poor connection, and therefore poor communication.

- a) Stand up straight. Hold yourself so that all the body parts are over each other.
- b) Slightly bend your knees as you stand and as you dance to keep your movement smooth and avoid bouncing.
- c) Balance over the balls of your feet.
- d) Look straight ahead or at your partner. **DO NOT** look down. If you do, you will be watching the wrong feet.



## Closed Dance Frame

The most common frame is the closed dance frame. This is made up of the most common starting position.

There are four contact points:

- Gentleman's right hand under lady's left arm and placed on her back (it helps the next point of contact if the gentleman will angle the fingers of his right hand down slightly),
- Lady resting her left elbow on the shelf of the gentleman's right arm,
- Lady cupping her left hand on the front of the gentleman's shoulder, and
- Gentleman holding lady's right hand with his left hand in a gentle package.

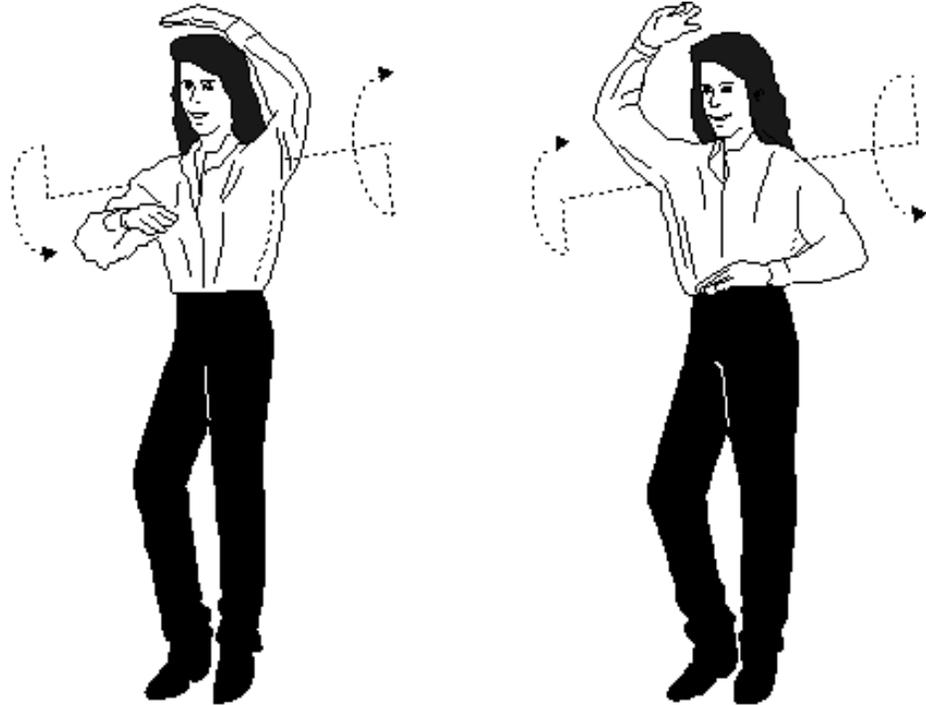
It is often said that there is a fifth contact point – the solar plexus of the partners, but this only occurs in ballroom dancing and in competition.



In order for the connection to work, each partner must maintain a slight tension in the elbows and the frame must be maintained parallel or divided evenly.

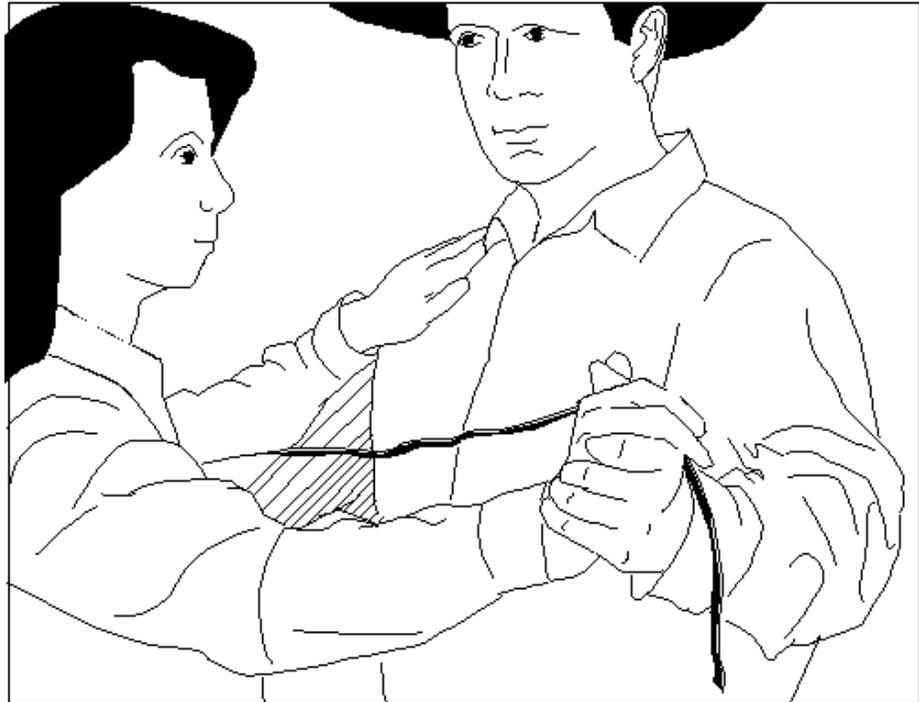
“Barbie and Ken”  
elbows

Let’s consider the required tension in the elbows. A visualization that will help you is to think of your elbows like the arms on the popular “Barbie and Ken” dolls. Their arms were fixed except for the balls in their shoulders. They could roll their arms in almost any direction, but the angle of their elbows remained the same. We don’t want you to have rigid elbows, because that will cause you to quickly tire. However, we do want you to have some tension in your elbows so that a connection is maintained between the partners. This applies to both ladies and gentlemen.



## Evenly Divided Frame

The second consideration for good connection is for the partners to usually remain parallel or a mirror image of each other. You can accomplish this in practice with an aide – a string. (If you do not want to use a string, you can imagine one and place yourselves accordingly.)



You should practice until this position becomes second nature and you go there with little thought.

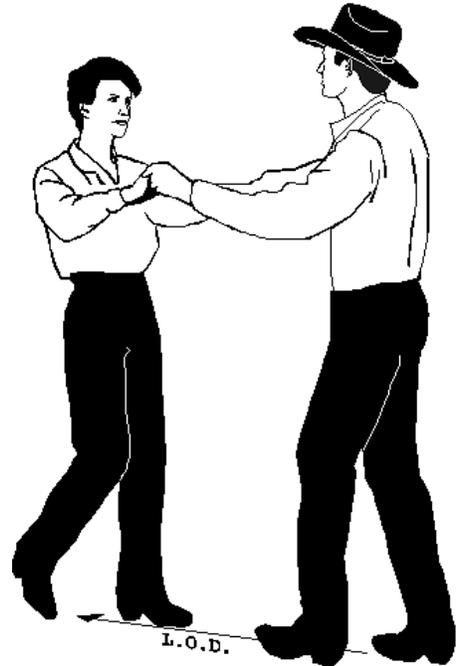
Remember – this is a general rule, and just like all general rules, there are exceptions.

## Open Dance Frame

The second most common dance frame is the open dance frame. This can occur with the gentleman facing forward, backward, or sideways in the line of dance.

Both partners must have “Barbie and Ken” elbows so that there is connection between the two. There should be a slight curve in your connected arms.

Gentlemen: Hold your hands to make the lady comfortable – regardless of height differences between the two of you.



## Conclusion

Dance frame and connection are very important. Master this and half the battle of dancing is won. The other half is learning the steps and lead-follow.