

Beginning Jitterbug-ECS: Segment 1**Introduction**

Jitterbug and East Coast Swing are cousins. Each is based upon dancing three different sets of steps named for the gentleman's point of view. There is the left set (where the partners move generally to the gentleman's left), the right set (where the partners move generally to the gentleman's right, and the rock set (where the partners move away from each other and then return.) Both Jitterbug and East Coast Swing use these same sets, but the Jitterbug is based on taking one step (in single time) or two steps (in double time) on the first two sets. East Coast Swing is based on taking three steps (triple time) on the first two sets. Both Jitterbug and East Coast Swing take only two steps for the rock set.

In reality, Jitterbug is a sub-set of East Coast Swing. However, when people talk of dancing, generally when they say East Coast Swing, they are talking about triple time. When they say Jitterbug, they are talking about single time or double time. Single time Jitterbug and triple time East Coast Swing are the most popular.

In this segment, we are going to discuss:

- The music – how to step to the beat and how determine if it is a Jitterbug or East Coast Swing.
- Contact – how to hold your partner.
- The basic foot work for single time Jitterbug
- The basic foot work for triple time East Coast Swing

The Music

The most oft asked question we get from beginners at dances is "What kind of dance is this?" The variety of music played at dances is often overwhelming to those not familiar with the rhythm and beat of the various styles. Although it is not important to know, Jitterbug and East Coast Swing are played to 4/4 timing. Each basic covers three bars, or twelve beats of music.

What is a beat?

A beat in music is a heavy guitar strum, a drumbeat, or some other heavy sound in the music. It is the **natural** place you would snap your fingers or clap your hands if you were keeping time to the music.

The important thing to remember here is that in dance, you put your foot on the floor on the beat as opposed to picking it up. To practice, you can snap your fingers and stamp your feet as you listen to the music (guys use the left foot and ladies use the right.)

Is it a Jitterbug or East Coast Swing?

Before you can determine what the dance is, you must know how the Jitterbug/ECS dance works to the music. The music for both Jitterbug and East Coast Swing is same except that Jitterbug music is much faster. Some people dance East Coast Swing to Jitterbug music, but they are dancing at break-neck speed. Long ago, the problem of tiring on the floor when the music got faster was solved by taking fewer steps – single time Jitterbug.

If you listen to the music, you will hear a heavy beat followed quickly by two lighter beats and a lighter still beat or a slight pause. The timing and word count for East Coast Swing is “quick, quick, slow, (pause) quick, quick, slow, (pause) rock, step.” The first quick, quick, slow makes up the left set. The second quick, quick, slow makes up the right set, and the rock, step make up the rock set.

The timing and word count for single time Jitterbug is “slow, slow, rock, step”. The first slow step makes up the left set, the second slow step makes up the right set, and the rock, step make up the rock set.

Another way to determine the dance is to count the beats of music. If you can easily say while keeping time to the music, “one and two, three and four, rock, step”, that music is probably an East Coast Swing. If the music tempo is fast and you can say, “one, two, rock, step”, that music is probably a Jitterbug.

Note that the Polka has this same beat. The difference is that the swing music has a kind of bounce in it. If you cannot tell the difference, that is ok. You can dance a swing to a Polka song, and you can dance a Polka to a swing song. It is just entertainment and you do not have to be perfect.

First Things First

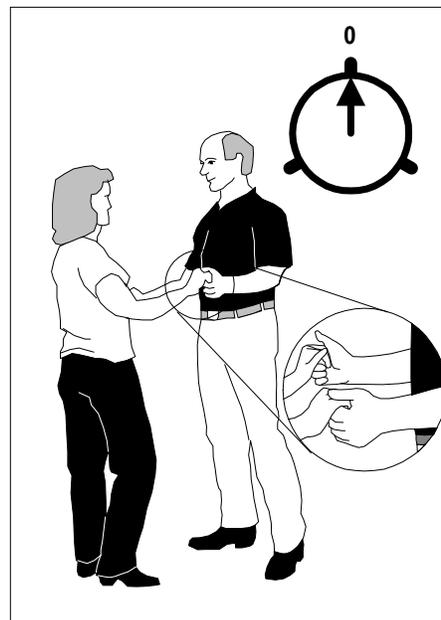
Some people find it easier to learn Jitterbug before going to triple time East Coast Swing. Therefore, we are going to start our discussion with Jitterbug and follow with East Coast Swing.

The basic starting position is the same for both, so we will only discuss it for Jitterbug. Also, note that there are two basic holds that apply to both dances – the open position and the closed position. The footwork is slightly different for the two positions, so we will discuss each position for each dance.

Contact – Open Position

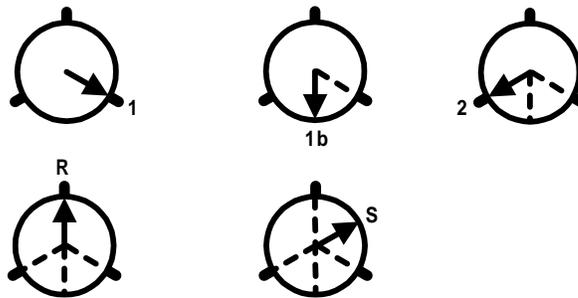
Face each other. Hold your hands in front of you about the height of the bottom of the lady's rib cage. Gentleman has his thumbs up and curves his fingers to form a fence. The lady lightly drapes her hands over the gentleman's fingers.

It is important to note that you not grip with your thumbs. That hurts your partner's hands. There should be no contact with the thumbs.

**Connection and Frame**

Connection and frame are very important in all styles of dancing. Connection is what allows the lady to follow the gentleman's movements and allows him to direct her. This connection forms a tension between the partners that is necessary for them to dance as if of one mind.

If you are not familiar with the concept of connection and frame, refer to the dance segment on the 2Step2.net web site entitled, "Connection and Frame."

The Jitterbug
Dance Clock

Unlike the regular clock, the Jitterbug dance clock is divided into only three segments to correspond to the beats of the dance sets. (a.) Clocks for other dances will be different. Step number 1 is the first slow step. The gentleman steps to his left and the lady steps to her right so the couple moves the same direction to the side.

At this point, we have added an artificial step (a crutch, if you will) to force the dancers to shift their weight. This is a brush step (1b) where the gentleman lifts his right foot, brushes it against his left, and returns it to the original position in step number 2. Once the dancers have become used to shifting their weight, they need not use the brush step any more. It is not part of the dance.

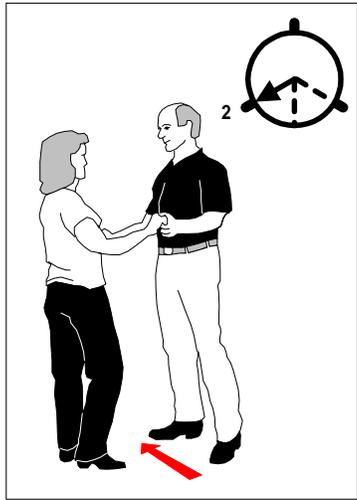
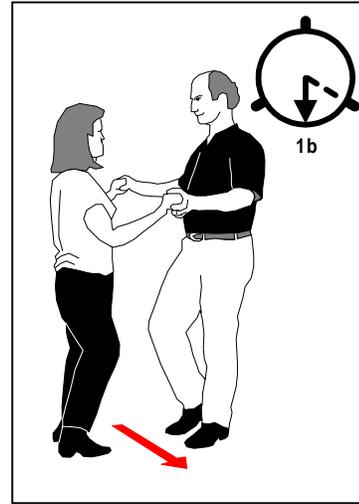
The gentleman steps the second slow step (2) by stepping to his right and the lady steps to her left. You will notice that there is a dashed line to remind you of the steps you have already taken.

The final rock set is completed by the partners moving directly away from each other and then returning. It is important to remember that you not take your hands with you as you rock back, or you will be pulling your partner when he/she should be going the other direction. Straighten your arms slightly and leave your hands between the two of you.

An important point to note is that the timing occurs after the step, not before it. Therefore, the timing for the first slow step occurs between point 1 and 2 in the diagram. The second slow step begins at point 2, the rock step begins at point 3, and the return step begins half way through the third set.

The significance of this is that it almost feels like 2 slow steps followed by 2 quick steps. If you talk it out, it is “slow (pause) slow (pause) rock, step”.

The OPEN
Jitterbug steps



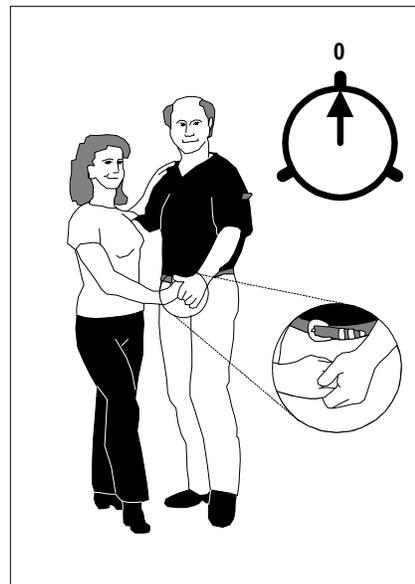
Note that your steps form a triangle. You DO NOT brush from the second step going to the rock step, but instead move your foot diagonally from position 2 directly to the rock step.

When the rock step is complete, the gentleman's weight should be on his right foot – the lady's weight on her left foot, and the two ready to begin step number 1 again.



**Contact – Closed
Position**

Face each other. Gentlemen - place your right hand on the lady's shoulder blade and turn your fingers down slightly so that your elbow forms a shelf upon which she can rest her arm. Ladies – place your left hand cupped on the front of the ball of the gentleman's shoulder. **DO NOT** put your hand over the shoulder. That is a bad habit. Later, you will be required to spin from this position and you could get your arm trapped and be injured.



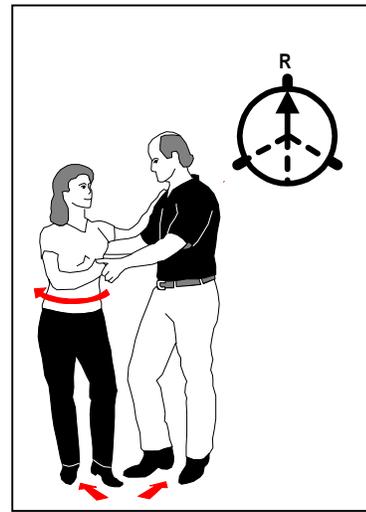
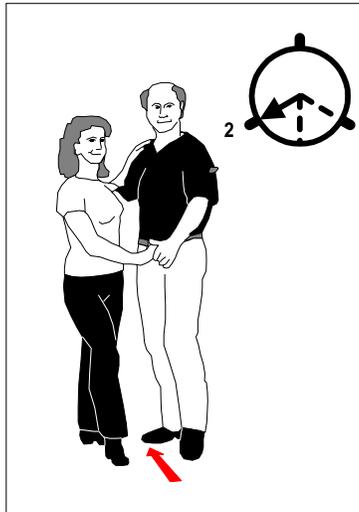
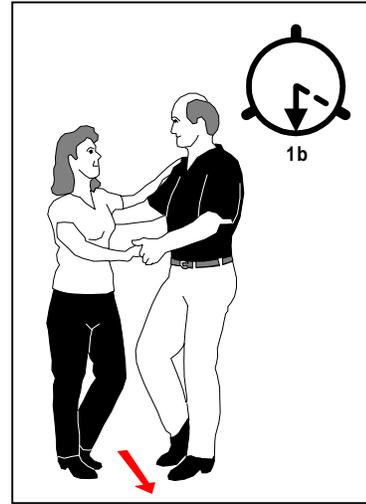
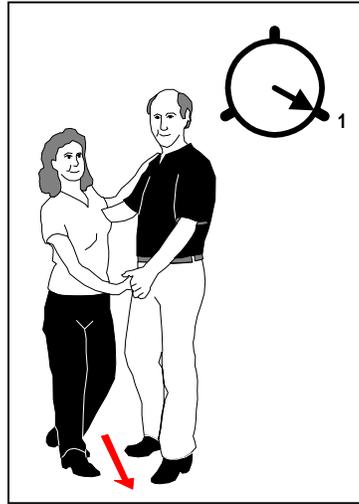
Ladies – place your right palm facing down near your waist. Gentlemen – also place your left palm facing down and over the top of the lady's fingers. This will hold the two of you in about a 45° angle.

It is important to note that you not grip with your thumbs. That hurts your partner's hands. There should be no contact with the thumbs.

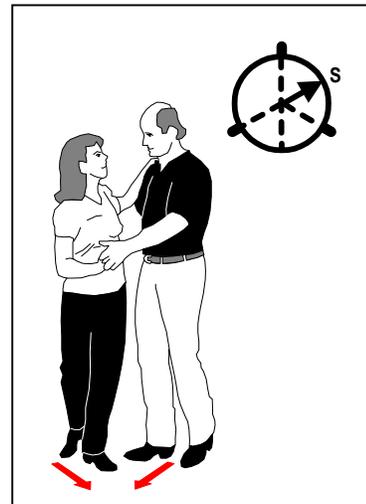
Partners – place your feet in what is known in dance as a fifth position. That is the gentlemen point their left foot straight ahead and the ladies point their right foot straight ahead. Bring the trailing foot at a diagonal so that the heel of the forward foot is near the instep of the trailing foot. If you look down, your feet should form a “check mark” (NOT AN “L” like Charlie Chaplin.)

Your direction of movement should be along the line of the forward foot, stepping forward and bring your trailing foot forward at that diagonal.

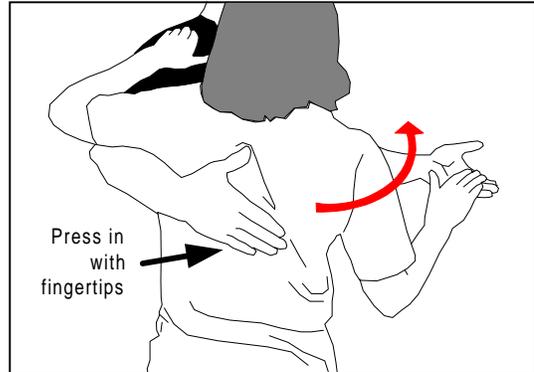
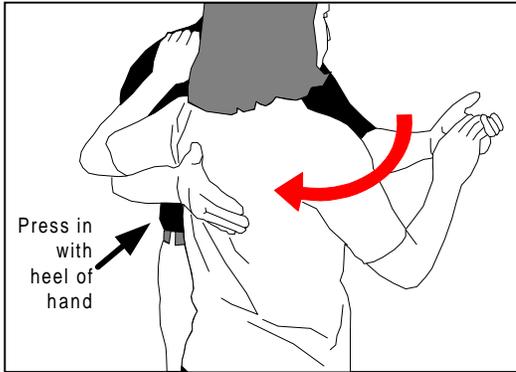
The Closed
Jitterbug Steps



When the rock step is complete, the gentleman's weight should be on his right foot – the lady's weight on her left foot, and the two ready to begin step number 1 again.

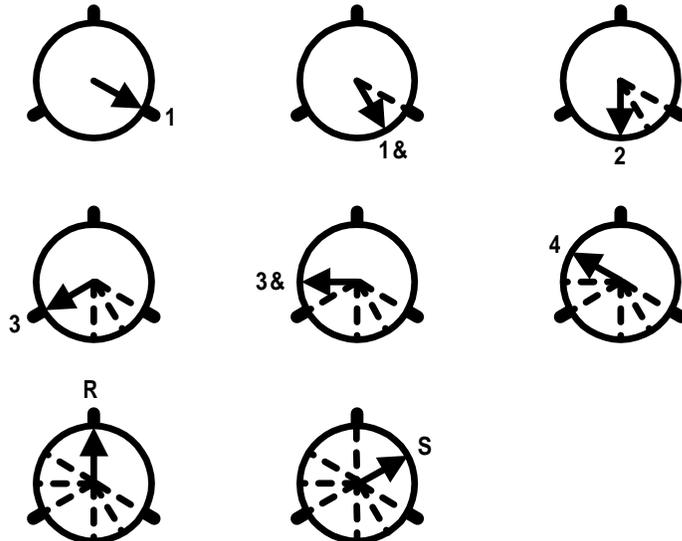


An important concept to master is that in the closed rock step, most of the lead is with the gentleman's hand on the lady's back. He uses it like a rudder to tell her which direction she should turn. When they are doing the first step of the rock, the gentleman uses the heel of his hand to direct the lady to rock back but roll away from him. When they are doing the return step, he uses his fingertips to tell her to return to diagonal closed position.



East Coast Swing Dance Clock

The East Coast Swing Dance Clock is slightly different from the Jitterbug dance clock. The ECS clock must take into account four extra steps. As you will recall, we described the count as "quick, quick, slow, (pause) quick, quick, slow, (pause) rock, step." That is eight steps where the single count Jitterbug has only four.



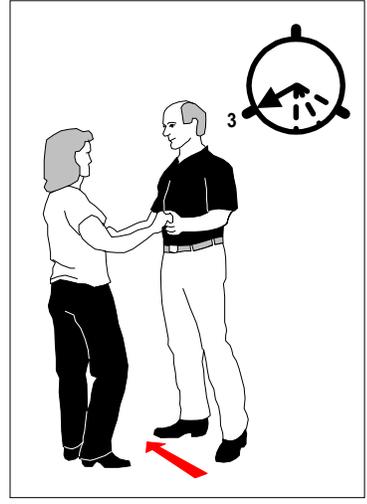
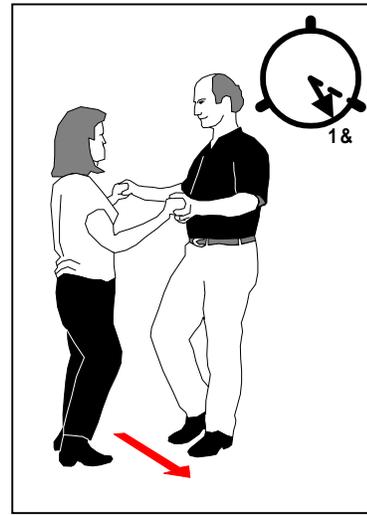
Steps 1 and 2 are exactly the same. The & is a weight change so the gentleman steps to his left, brings his right foot near his left foot, and then steps left again for the left set. The lady does just the opposite.

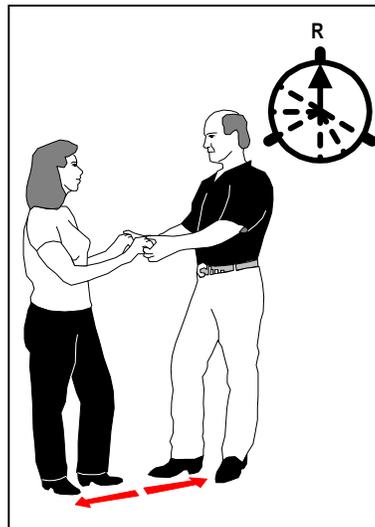
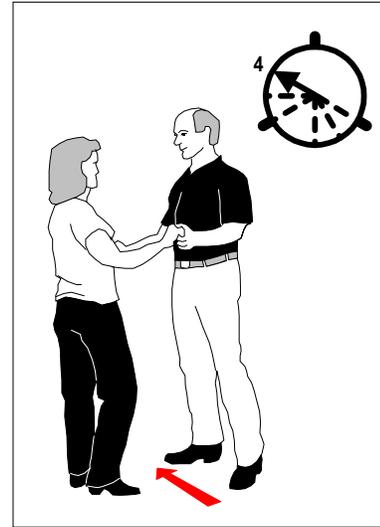
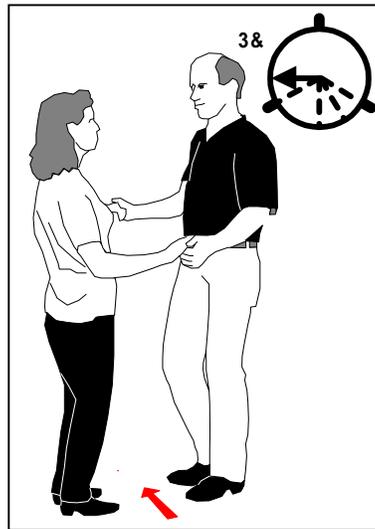
Steps 3 and 4 are exactly the same. The & is a weight change so the gentleman steps to his right, brings his left foot near his right foot, and then steps right again for the right set. The lady does just the opposite.

The rock set is the same as in Jitterbug.

The most important thing to remember here is a timing concept. The count is, “quick, quick slow” on both sides. Also, remember that the timing occurs after you place your foot on the floor.

**Open East Coast
Swing Steps**

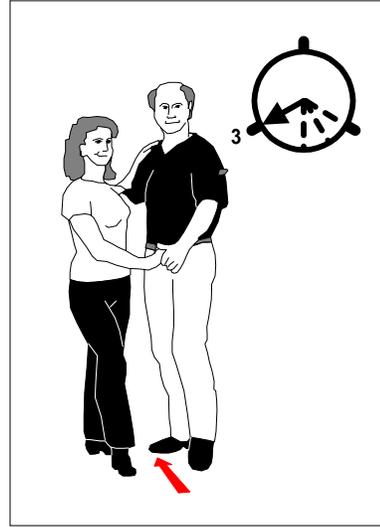
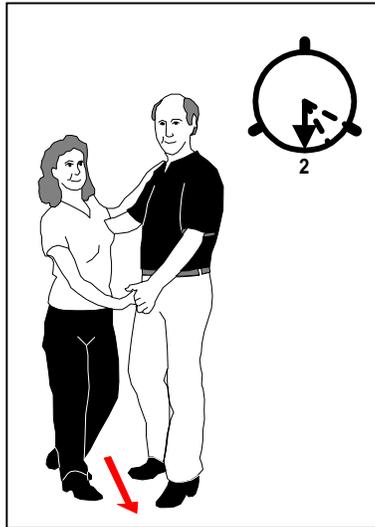
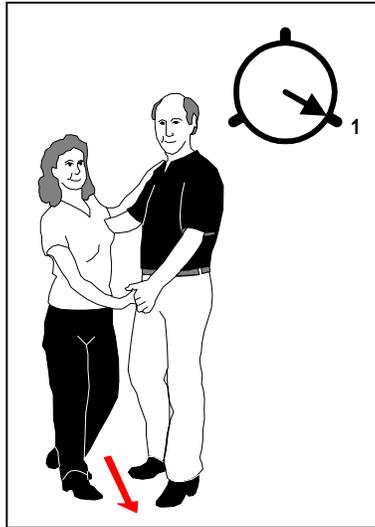


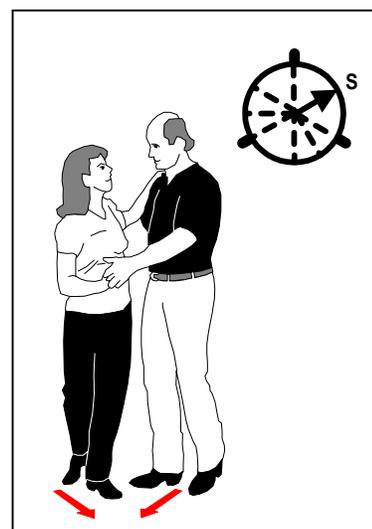
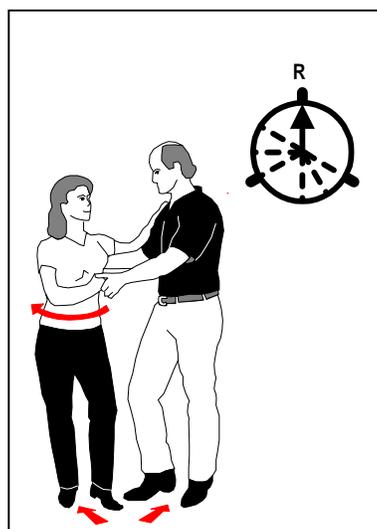
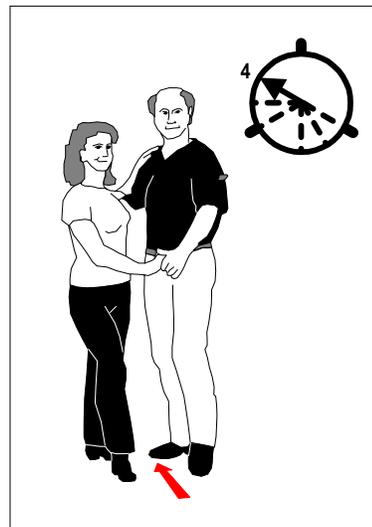
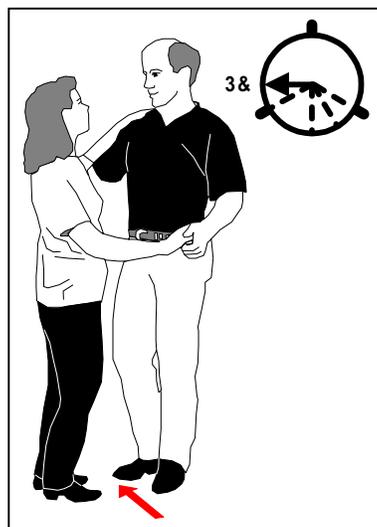


The same hand holds apply here as in Jitterbug. Remember that as you rock back, you extend your arms slightly so that your hands remain between the two of you and you do not pull your partner with you.

A general rule of connection is that you not allow your elbows to go back past the center line of your rib cage or you will lose connection. A way to prevent losing connection when you rock step is to not get too far away from your partner during the first two sets, and keep your elbows near your side. Then, when you rock back, your arms do not become straight and you still have spring left in your arms.

Closed East Coast
Swing Steps





At the completion of these steps, the gentleman should have his weight on his right foot and the lady should have her weight on her left foot, each ready to begin a new first set.

Remember, gentlemen – most of the lead for the rock step occurs with your hand on the lady's back.

Dance Etiquette

Jitterbug and East Coast Swing do not have a set direction. In fact, they tend to move all around a circular area.

The center of the floor is reserved for those dancers doing stationary dancing like East Coast Swing, West Coast Swing, Jitterbug, Cha-Cha, and Salsa. Please, obey that rule and stay away from the edge of the dance floor where you might impede other couples dancing other types of dances.

- Don't be Afraid** Every dancer out there has "paid their dues". They have struggled just like you. However, they are concentrating on their own efforts and not upon you. They do not care if you make a mistake, so go ahead and make them. You have just as much right to be on the dance floor as they do, so get out there and dance. It may be a struggle, but that is ok. No one is watching you.
- Protect your Lady** As you are dancing, watch around you and check often over your shoulder to be aware of potential collisions. Do not bump your lady into another dancer.
- Take the Blame** If a collision does occur, remember that it does no one any good to get upset – this is just recreation. The best policy is to apologize regardless if it is your fault or not.
- And last, but not least – if you do bump into someone and knock over their drink, offer to replace it, and try to be more careful.
- Conclusion** This concludes the segment on beginning Jitterbug and East Coast Swing. The next segment following this will be OPEN rotations followed by under arm turns.