

Spin-Spin-Spin

Pre-requisite

Completed Basic instruction

(These are intermediate patterns)

Country Western Dancing and Spinning

At one time, country-and-western dancing involved nothing more than straight forward and straight back dancing with simple turns to get there. Spins in our dancing came about as inspired by the movie “Urban Cowboy” with the dawning of western swing where dancers mixed spinning into assorted 2 step, polka, and waltz patterns. Competitive dancers in various organizations took it to a new level devising and developing many new concepts, and today you can see literally thousands of patterns. In fact, there are so many patterns that the casual social dancer can learn patterns to liven up their dancing for the rest of their lives if they choose.

Concept of Spinning

The concept of spinning involves taking rapid, small steps, with your weight shifting from foot to foot while your body is making $\frac{1}{4}$, $\frac{1}{2}$, $\frac{3}{4}$, and full turns in time to the beats of the music. These can either be free spins or lead through connection to your partner.

There are three basic types of spins that are common to all forms of dance in one way or the other. These are:

- Pivot Spins
- Chaîné Spins (pronounced sha-nā)
- Pencil Spins

For ease of discussion, I choose to describe the spins in relation to one dance (the 2 Step) and to one pattern (Square off – free spin to promenade). However, the concepts apply to many other dances as well, including polka, Waltz, East Coast Swing, West Coast Swing, cha-cha, salsa, etc.

Rules of Spinning

There are several rules to spinning that will make your spins easier to complete. Note that this is not an all-encompassing list, but merely some the things that were taught to me that happen to work for me and hopefully you as well.

- Always spin with soft knees. This means do not lock your knees but keep them slightly bent. This will cause you to balance on the balls of your feet rather than the entire foot. The less of your surface in hard contact with the floor, the less drag or friction, the easier and faster you will spin.
- Keep your weight over the foot where the spinning occurs. As you execute the spin, this will require a certain rocking motion with your body so that the body weight is transferred to the next foot to support the spin.
- Keep your feet as close together as possible. This means less distance to move your feet taking less time. Also, this helps in keeping your feet under the weight of your body.
- Keep your arms close to your body. Remember the pictures of ice skaters who start a spin with their arms extended spinning slowly, and as they pull their arms in spin faster. Keeping your arms close to your body allows you to spin faster.
- Do not look down – keep your eyes level with the floor. Your head is similar to a 10-pound bowling ball. If you look down, that weight hanging over the side can cause you to wobble and lose your balance as you spin. Besides, it does not look good if you dance with your head down.

Starting Place

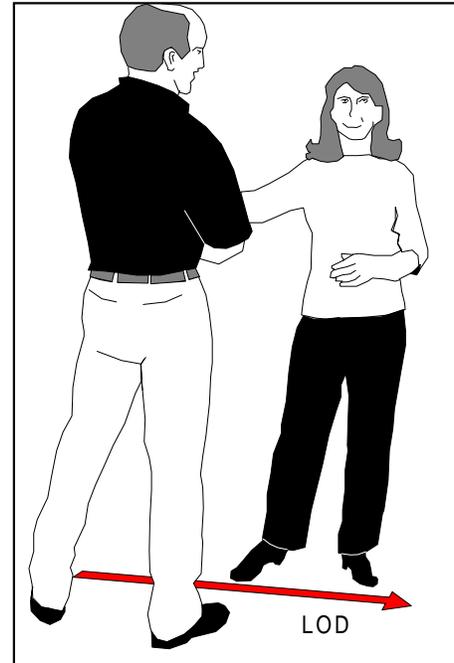
A good starting place to talk about spins is to pick a pattern where we can use all three forms. I elect to use the 2 step pattern known as the “square off with free spin to backward promenade.” In this case, the lady is doing all the spinning and there is not connection between the partners during the spin. I chose this, because it is easier to illustrate one dancer, and illustrating two could lead to confusion.

The dancers begin in a squared off position with the gentleman on the outside track facing in and the lady on the inside track facing out. He free spins her to his track, he crosses behind her to her track, and the couple end in a presentation position in backward promenade. (Don't worry about the details here as they will become clear with the three sets of illustrations.)

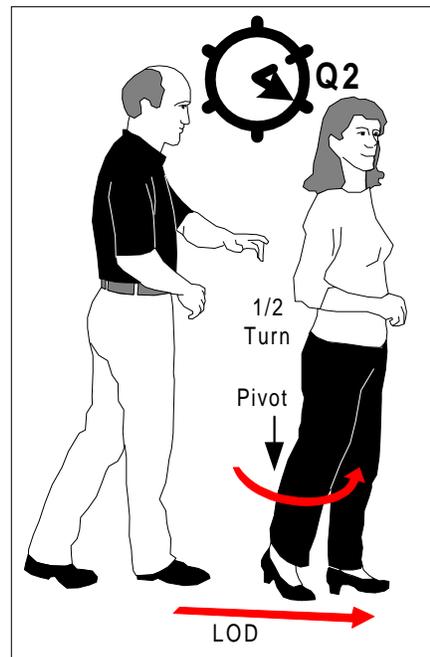
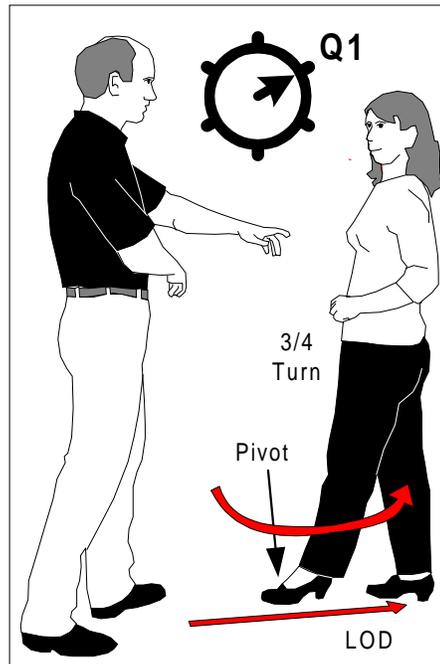
Pivot Spins

Pivot spins have rather gone out of favor since the late 1970's and 80's. However, they are still used to supplement other spins and they are still used to a minor extent in many patterns.

Like both the other sets of illustrations, the dancers begin in a squared off position. The gentleman is holding the lady's right hand in his left hand, and they both have slight tension in their elbows to create the connection between them. The gentleman is prepared to cast the lady's hand (starting her spin) between the two of them and following through to point her spin so she ends on his track.



Quick Steps



In the first quick step, the lady makes a $\frac{3}{4}$ turn and ends facing backward in the line of dance. She makes a $\frac{1}{2}$ turn on the next quick so that she is now facing forward.

Ladies (and gentlemen): It helps when you are doing the turns to turn your toes out such that your weight on the floor has a broader base and is more stable.

NOTE: There is no passing of the feet.

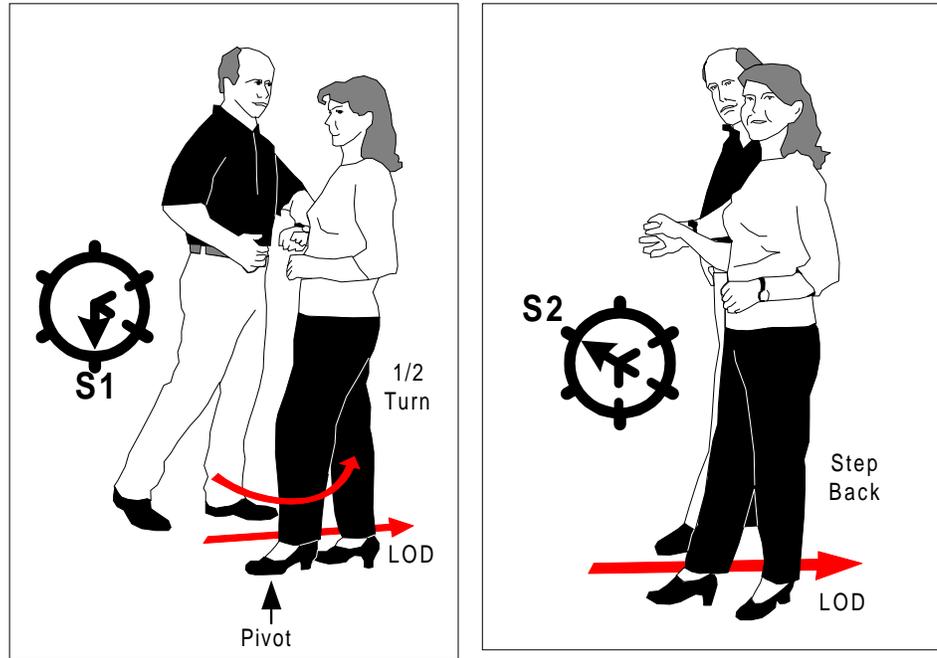
Pivot Spin General Rules

The general rules for completing pivot spins are as follows:

- You do not pass your feet in this spin. The foot sticking out in front is called the “buckle” foot, because it is on the same side of the body as your belt buckle. The foot sticking out in back is called the “tush” foot for the same reason but in the opposite direction. Your legs are locked at an angle that does not change. There is a rocking motion back and forth between the feet. As you rock forward on your buckle foot, your free foot leads your body around so that you are now facing backward. You rock back on your tush foot and your free foot leads your body around so that you are now facing forward.
- Your toes follow your nose. You do not want to be turning such that your feet are pointing odd angles as compared to each other (e.g. NO Charlie Chaplain feet). As you turn, keep your nose pointed the same direction as your chest and keep your toes pointing the same direction as your nose.
- As a general rule, when you step forward, the foot in front is the SAME direction you turn. i.e. If you step forward with your right foot, turn to the right. If you step forward with your left foot, turn to the left. Also, as a general rule, when you step backward, the foot in back is OPPOSITE direction you turn. i.e. If you step back with the right foot, you turn to the left. If you step back with the left foot, you turn to the right.

NOTE: This last is a general rule. Often you use the pivot turns in conjunction with the pencil spin and the turn is backward to what I have stated here.

Slow Steps



In the first slow step, the lady makes a 1/2 turn and ends facing backward in the line of dance. She steps back with her right foot on the last slow step, taking the gentleman's offered hand and striking a presentation position in backward promenade.

Although you do not have to go by the following guide, we have found it to be a help.

Quick-1	Quick-2	Slow-1	Slow-2
3/4 Turn	1/2 Turn	1/2 Turn	Step Back
Apart	Together	Together	Apart

The "apart" on the first quick allows the lady to move onto the gentleman's track. The "together", "together" in the second quick and the first slow allow the lady to move a shorter distance so that the gentleman can pass her up. The "apart" step on the second slow allows the lady to step back in unison with the gentleman.

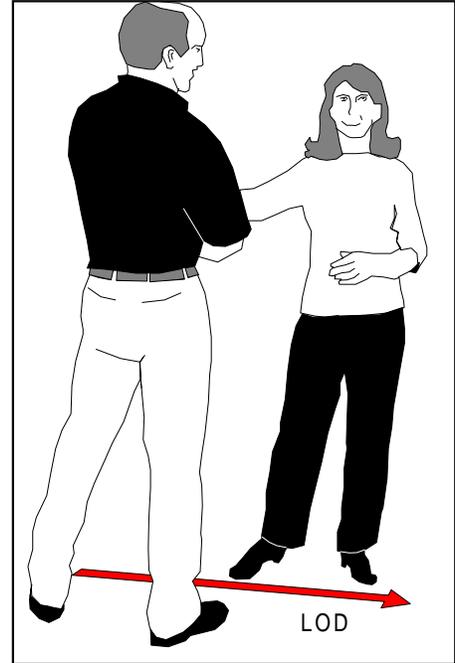
Timing

Timing is imperative. Otherwise, you will end up out of step with the music at the end of the spin. You must think of speeding up during the quick steps and slowing down during the slow steps.

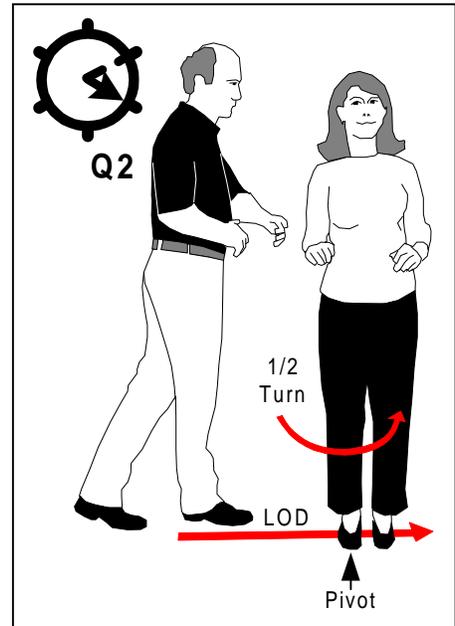
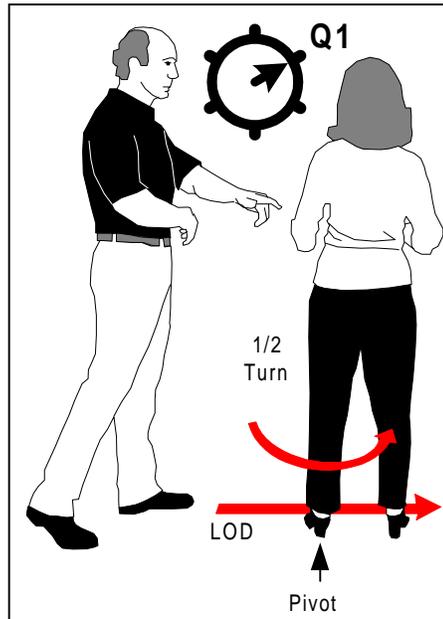
Chaîné Spins

The term chaîné (pronounced “sha-ná”) comes from ballroom and ballet dancing. It is French and originates from the past participle of the verb chaîner, meaning, “to chain together”. It is used to describe a chain of steps for spinning across the floor.

The pattern in this description begins the same as the pivot spins in a squared off position with the gentleman on the outside track looking in and the lady on the inside track looking out. The gentleman is holding the lady’s right hand in his left hand and is preparing to cast her hand between the two of them down the line of dance.

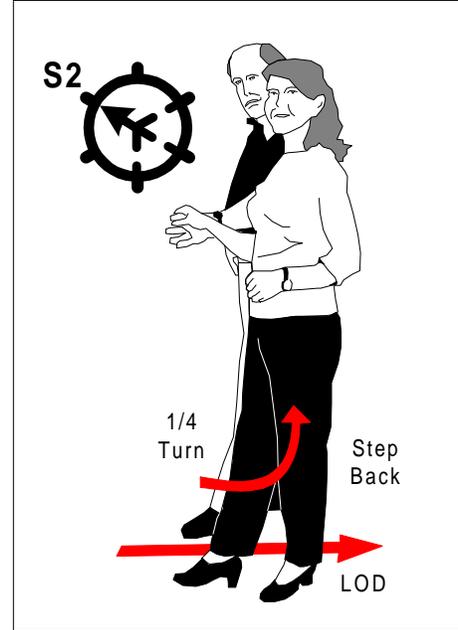
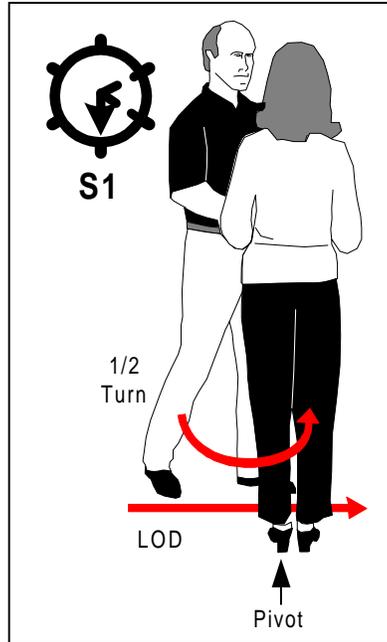


Quick Steps



In the first quick step, the lady pivots on her left foot and makes a ½ turn. She is facing inside line of dance (sideways to the line of dance). In the second quick step, the lady is pivoting on her right foot and ends facing outside line of dance.

Slow Steps



In the first slow step, the lady pivots on her left foot and ends facing inside line of dance. At this point she can see (and takes) the gentleman's offered left hand. In the second slow, the lady pivots on her right foot, turns a ¼ turn and steps back with her left foot striking a presentation position in backward promenade.

Although you do not have to go by the following guide, we have found it to be a help.

Quick-1	Quick-2	Slow-1	Slow-2
½ Turn	½ Turn	½ Turn	¼ Turn, Step Back
Apart	Together	Together	Apart

The “apart” on the first quick allows the lady to move onto the gentleman's track. The “together”, “together” in the second quick and the first slow allow the lady to move a shorter distance so that the gentleman can pass her up. The “apart” step on the second slow allows the lady to step back in unison with the gentleman.

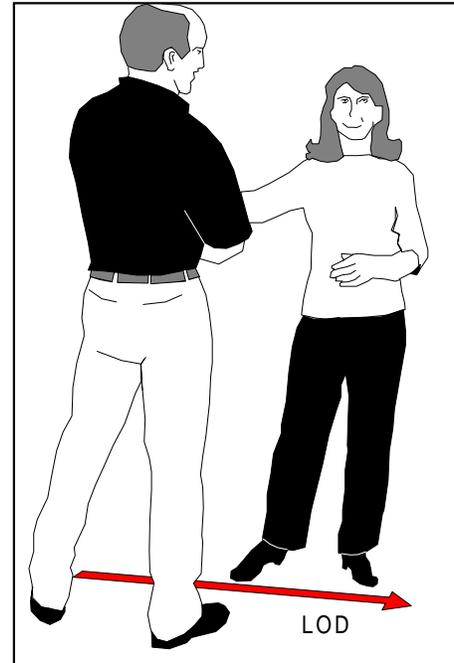
Timing

Again, timing is everything. Speed your steps up on the quick and slow them down on the slows to stay in time with the music.

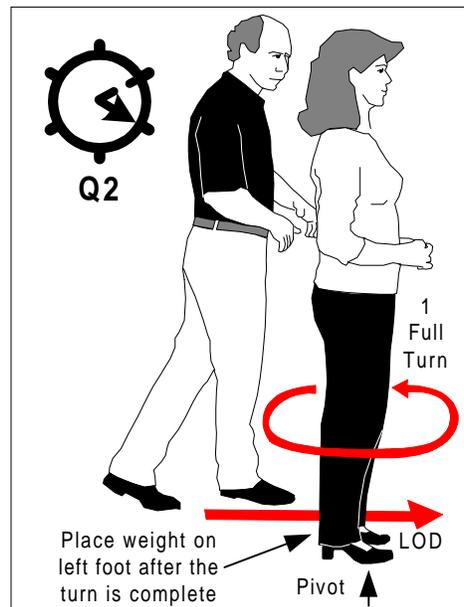
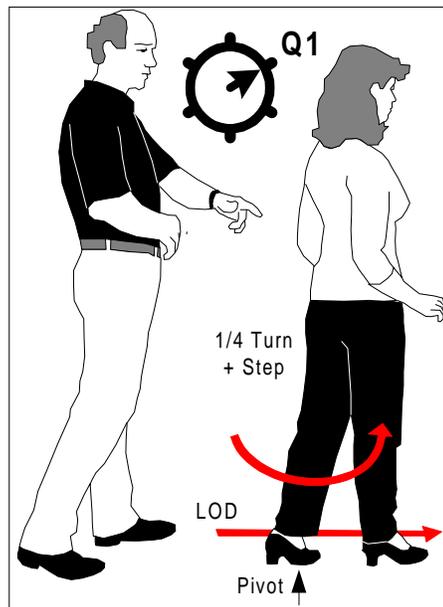
Pencil Spin

The pencil spin, in reality is only one step of this pattern. It is a technique of spinning on one foot (generally a full circle). It is a very snappy move and is quiet popular with swing dancers. It works quiet well as a free spin, but if lead improperly as a connected spin, the gentleman can throw the lady off her count.

The pattern begins the same as the others with the couple in squared off position. The gentleman is holding the lady's right hand in his left hand and is preparing to cast her hand across the line of dance and down line.

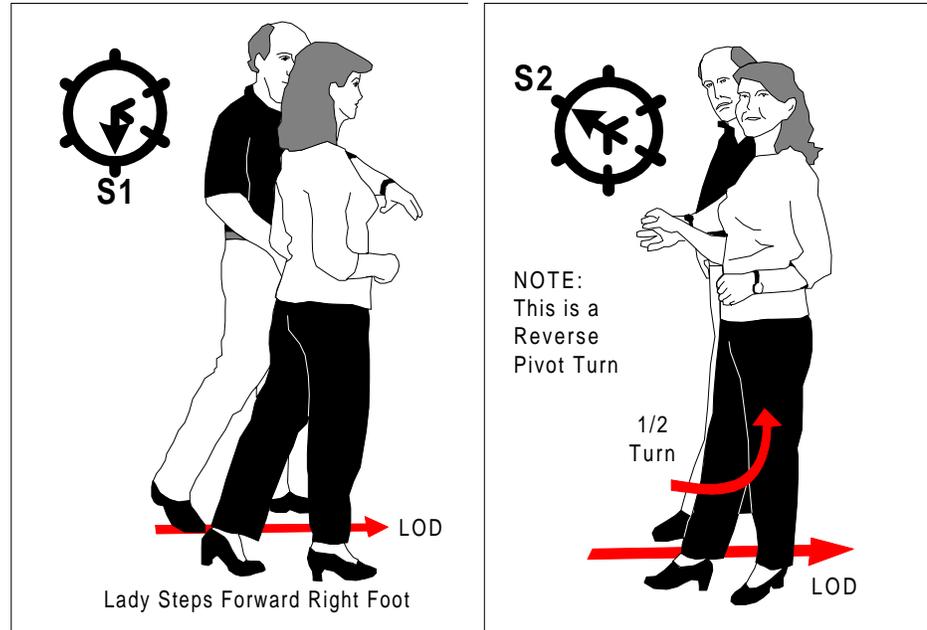


Quick Steps



In the first quick step, the lady merely turns ¼ turn to her left on her left foot and takes a step down the line of dance with her right foot. In the second quick step, she transfers her weight over the right foot and quickly spins a full circle on the ball of that foot. At the end of the second quick, she places her left foot on the floor beside her right and transfers her weight to the left foot.

Slow Steps



In the first slow, the lady merely steps forward in the line of dance with her right foot. She sees the gentleman offering to take her right hand with his extended left. In the second slow, both partners execute a pivot turn and step back. The gentleman causes this by sweeping their connected hands between the two of them.

NOTE: This pivot turn is a reverse pivot turn. It breaks the rule of direction of turn. i.e. The lady's right foot is forward (meaning she should turn to the right, but she turns to the left instead. The same applies to the gentleman but on the opposite foot.

Although you do not have to go by the following guide, we have found it to be a help.

Quick-1	Quick-2	Slow-1	Slow-2
¼ Turn, Step Forward with the Right Foot	Spin 1 full circle on the Right Foot, then change weight to Left Foot	Take one step forward with the Right Foot	½ Turn Pivot Step Back with the Left Foot

**Spin
Characteristics**

Each of these spins has its own unique characteristics and is popular for a specific reason.

- Pivot spins tend to move rapidly down the line of dance. They are used to cover a large distance quickly. They were popular with dancers in the 1970's and 1980's. They are still used somewhat in conjunction with other spin techniques. If used exclusively, they tend to look "mechanical".
- Chaîné spins are used to cover a short distance and are used when area is at a premium. They are more compact and elegant. They are easy to learn and are popular with beginners.
- The pencil spin is a stationary spin. Although it tends to be a traffic stopper, if used in conjunction with other spin techniques, it can be an extremely snappy and elegant move. However, it is a challenge to learn. The pencil spin is very popular with West Coast Swing, Whip, East Coast Swing, Jitterbug, and salsa.

Conclusion

The material presented here is not all-inclusive, but only touches the high points. There are many other tips to help in your spin technique. Some of these tips will be presented in the course of other dance segments, while others may have to be taught in conjunction with an instructor present.

This concludes the segment on spins.