

Critical Accents - Acknowledging the 1

WCS patterns don't neatly fit into musical phrases. We dance six and eight count patterns, yet our songs have accents on the first beat of each eight beat phrase. Being able to acknowledge those accents when they occur in the middle of a pattern is thus an important skill to develop. This drill is the first step in acknowledging those accents; you will learn to dance your basic patterns while recognizing the start of each phrase.

The Drill: Put on a WCS song with clear phrases and that doesn't have tag-on beats (e.g., Craig David's Fill Me In or I Got the Blues by Brother Yusef, and dance push breaks. Every time the 1 of the phrase occurs, simply point your finger in the air. The timing of the point will move as you continue this drill: if you start the first push break at the start of the phrase, your finger will point on count 1 of the first push break, count 3 of the second push break, and count 5 of the third push break, before returning to count 1 of the next push break. Don't try to actually count how many push breaks you've done; simply use the 1 of the phrase as your guide.

Accenting the 1 for Followers

For followers, accenting the 1 of the musical phrase is more challenging than for the leaders because you don't get to pick the pattern that is being led. As a result, you need to have options to accent the 1 at any point within a pattern. The good news is that you don't have to do any math while you're dancing to figure out how long you have until the accent occurs; as long as you can identify the 1 of the music, you don't need to calculate how many beats away you are like the leaders do.

The Drill: With or without a partner, practice dancing side passes to a song that has a clear accent on the 1, like Fill Me In, Pt. 2 by Craig David. Begin by dancing the side pass starting with the 7 of the phrase, and note where you are in the side pass (it should be count 3). Pick some styling option that you like in order to accent that count.

As a "starter kit" for follower accents, try out the following options:

- Tilt your head
- Drop a shoulder
- Do a chest pop
- Isolate your ribcage to the side
- Push the free arm out
- Throw a hip to the side
- Syncopate your footwork to accent the downbeat
- Add a level change

After you dance the accent, reset for the next 7 of the music. If you miss the 7 because you or your partner aren't in position, wait until the next 7 rather than rushing to catch up. The point of

this drill is to teach your subconscious how to style a side pass when you start on beat 7; practicing a different timing will negate the value of the exercise.

Once you find an option that is comfortable, watch in a mirror or video tape yourself to make sure that the movement looks good. Keep practicing that movement until it becomes second nature when you are led in a side pass beginning on count 7.

Bonus Variations: Repeat this exercise but start the side pass on beats 1, 3, or 5 of the phrase. The “start on 1” option is especially important because at that point your leader has missed the accent and can’t set you up. If you can create something out of that situation, it will dramatically improve the musicality of your partnership.

Once you are comfortable with all the times that you could start a side pass, extend the drill to your other basics. Your eventual goal is to have the ability to accent any downbeat within any pattern.

Accenting the 1 for Leaders

Once you’ve learned to hear musical phrases, the next step is to start matching those phrases with the patterns you lead. This drill is designed to ingrain some simple accents into your dance memory.

The Drill: Put on a song with a clear, repetitive accent on the 1 of each musical phrase. Fill Me In, Pt. 2 by Craig David works well for this exercise. With or without a partner, stand in an anchored position and count until beat 6 of the phrase. On beat 7, begin leading a sugar tuck; the accent on the 1 should naturally fall onto the compression of the tuck.

Immediately after leading the tuck, reset into an anchor position for the next beat 7. If you or your partner don’t get into position in time, skip that phrase and wait until the next beat 7. The goal of this exercise is to teach your subconscious to select a tuck if you are starting a new pattern on a 7; the exercise loses its value if you don’t start on the correct beat.

Bonus Variations: The tuck has a natural accent on the 3 of the pattern. Practice doing the same thing with patterns that have natural accents on the 5 or 7 of the pattern. Barrel rolls or inside rolls have natural accents on the 5, so you would start those patterns on the 5 of the previous phrase. A side pass with the guy spinning on the anchor into a throwout works well to accent the 7, so you could practice leading those two moves beginning on the 3 of the music.

Eventually you will want to go through all of your patterns and identify where the natural accents are so you have multiple options, from different starting hand connections, that orient towards the audience depending on what side you are. Whew! For now, drill yourself to have at least one option when you start the pattern on the 3, 5, or 7 of the music.