

# Hexagon Dancing

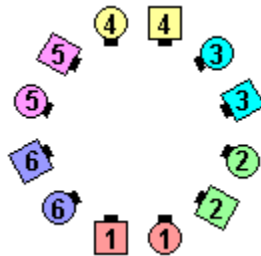
## Something Different for the Sight Caller

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### What it is

- Hexagons are a method of having six couples dance from a six-sided “at home” formation. What it is NOT is a Rectangle. (*some diagrams courtesy of Clark Baker*)



Pic 1 Standard Hexagon “at home”

### Evolution of my use of Hexagons

- In 1986, I was scouring square dance periodicals for various ways to expand the repertoire for our club exhibition group. We had already learned a great many traditional/flying squares routines, many derived from the type of dancing that Lloyd Shaw’s Cheyenne Mountain Dancers had perfected in the 1930s and 1940s. In my reading, I came across a short article called “Triangle Squares” by Ross Crispino in the July 1986 American Square Dance magazine. The article was geared toward exhibition style dancing with six couples in a six-sided arrangement.
- With great success, we added this six-couple method of dancing to our popular repertoire. This enhancement was met with enthusiastic response from both the dancers and the audiences. We continued incorporating

Triangles, Hexagons and Flying Squares into our routines for a number of years.

- By 1989, I realized as I was calling for festivals around the country that I could add the Hexagons as a “Bill Eyer” on-the-fly gimmick. I had seen no other callers doing this variation at other club dances or festivals. Very often, introducing Hexagons met with good responses from the dancers as “something surprisingly different.” Generally, at every festival I present this at least once during the program, and use it at club level dances when I can.
- Many callers use six-couple, four-sided Rectangles on a regular basis with their clubs (commonly, but incorrectly called Hexagons). I felt that adding true Hexagons in a club dance program would aid dancers in expanding their own feeling of accomplishment at even the Basic level of dancing, and add to variety. Often, we only have six or seven couples at our dances. By giving the dancers the opportunity to experience in Rectangles or Hexagons, we are able to add dimension to our programs without teaching an entirely new dance form.
- Several years ago, Clark Baker independently found that it was possible to have a Hexagon dancing in the back of the hall while the caller was calling to standard squares. There are several key differences in Clark’s method versus my method. Because of that, I’ve started calling his version “East Coast” and this method “West Coast.”

### How to Set up a Hexagon for an easy teach

Hexagons can be set up by the caller easily, using these steps:

- Ask the dancers to form circles of six couples. Sometimes, unfamiliar dancers will automatically try to set up rectangles with four head couples, but you have to convince them to be in a good ROUND circle to start.
- Have one couple line up with their back to the caller as a standard couple number 1.
- Have the dancers count off which couple they are: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6
- Have 1, 3, and 5 step into the middle and back. Have 2, 4, and 6 step in the middle and back.
- If dancers are still trying to adjust to a rectangle, ask couple 1 to point directly at couple 4, couple 2 with couple 5 and couple 3 with couple 6.
- For ease in memory tools, I ask the odd numbered couples to be HEADS and the even numbered couples to be SIDES. Since this arrangement isn’t technically accurate for the reality of the setup, I had tried to use “odds” and “evens” as the position definer, but found that the dancers responded to “heads” very easily even if they were dancers 3 and 5 in the

setup, and that couple 4 doesn't identify as a Head, even while facing the caller in the traditional couple 3 position. I do briefly explain that for the sake of ease, I still used Heads and Sides.

## Conceptual Formations Available

When we're dancing Hexagons, we have an added dimension of starting positions we can do with the dancers:

- Six Couple Circle (very easy)
- Three Couples working together (new!)
- Three Sets of Two couple groups (still easy)

### Six Couple Circles

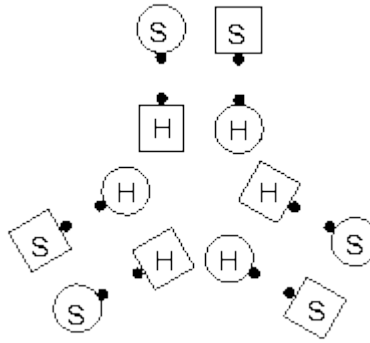
With very easy six-couple calls, you can give the dancers initial confidence dancing such familiar calls as Circle Left or Right, Single File Promenades, Backtrack, Six Ladies Chain 3 (see extended applications), Right and Left Grand.

Successfully dancing a few of these basics, you would have no problem calling Allemande Thar and its getouts, as well as All Eight Spin the Top. As long as the dancers know that they move up to the same person in All Eight Spin the Top, dancer success is insured.

### Three Couples working together

This is where the dancing in Hexagon gains a VERY different look and feel. At this point, I will ask the three head couples to move into the middle. I explain that many standard calls can be done with very little variation, but since they aren't facing someone directly to start the call, the dancer has to turn slightly away from his or her partner to face someone nose-to-nose to start the call. This is the key difference in the successful dancing of Hexagons.

From here, I will initiate something simple, such as a Star Thru, which will leave the three couples still facing in the middle. From here, I may call a Right and Left Thru. Notice that the dancers will NOT end up with their same partner as in Right and Left Thru from Squares. The same applies to Star Thru: In a standard set, if the dancers do two Star Thrus in a row, they will end up with their original partner, but 1/2 way across the set. But as centers of a Hexagon, it would take three iterations to end up with the same partner at home; after each call, you would end up 1/3 rotated around the center of the Hexagon.



Pic 2

Example: After Heads Star Thru, California Twirl, or after Heads Square Thru (2,4,6 hands)

After working the dancers through this as the center six until they get to their corner, I will have them Allemande Left, then “Hex Your Set,” always getting a chuckle right at first.

I’ll run this same bit through with the sides, until there is a very solid comfort zone established. Later, I may add some of the oddly executed calls like Flutter Wheel and Pass the Ocean [see “Extended Applications,”] but my object at this point is to create an easy dance form.

Once I have the very short calls down so that the dancers get the feel of dancing “slaunchwise” in the center, I’ll do an easy resolve to get everyone back home.

Three Sets of Two couple groups

At home again, I’ll start this time having the Heads Star Thru and California Twirl so they are facing the sides and their corner. Here is where I would tell them that whenever they do a call which will leave them facing out, they will either be facing another couple, or will be facing the “hole” just like they would in any standard square (i.e., Static Square, Heads Pass Thru, will leave the heads facing the “hole”).

From here, the dancers can do unlimited two couple dancing. The only difference is there are three sets of them, and that two of the couples will likely be dancing at an angle to the center of the set they aren’t used to and will need to maintain this “slaunch” position. Adjusting to a parallel or perpendicular arrangement may cause the group to break down.

I have retained some of the traditional terms in regular squares, simply since they are familiar with the dancers. I still use Square Thru (with the default being 6 hands, rather than 4), although the term “Hex Thru” may be more accurate for this dance form.

From home, if I want the heads to play with the sides, I may call a Square Thru (six). I've found that at first the dancers don't want to go all the way through on the last hand to face their original corner, so you have to stress that they need to go all the way through AND couple up with someone next to them as they finish the call, so they have the centers facing the outsides directly.

Calls such as Pass thru and Double Pass Thru from a beginning Double Pass Thru position REALLY have to be worked with the dancers, since they have to veer off one direction or another to complete the call. I've considered changing any Pass Thru in which the dancers have to be veering away (rather than from regular two facing couples) to another more descriptive name such as Veer Thru and Double Veer Thru. This would make it clear to the dancers that the call is different in that they would not have their back to the dancer they have passed through with. So far I haven't tried this creation of new call names to describe Hexagon movement, since I didn't want to stray from standard call names.

### Easy level calling routines

For the caller new to this, the best thing to do is to work standard modules, both to get your own confidence up and for dancer success. Here are a few sequences you can use to get the dancers comfortable with the skewed feeling of dancing:

Heads Star Thru  
Heads California Twirl  
Left Allemande

Sides Square Thru Six  
Allemande Left  
(even experienced dances sometimes don't want to end up facing their corner and partner up with someone beside them to complete the Square Thru)

Heads Square Thru 6  
Right and Left Thru  
Swing thru  
Boys run  
Bend the line  
Pass Thru  
MOVE ON (rather than bend the line, this will get them to move up and around to the next couple in the progression)  
Right and Left Thru  
Swing thru, Boys Run  
Bend the Line,  
Star thru, Dive Thru  
Zoom, (carry through to resolve).....

Notice this sequence plays almost entirely with more familiar two couples sets, very similar to our Chicken Plucker routines.

## Singing Calls

Easy! You can use 75% of your standard Basic repertoire, if you study where you are going with it. Timing is critical, since Promenade and full Square Thru take about 4 beats longer to complete than in Squares.

Also, unless your singing call figure uses something other than Right Hand Lady Progression, you must have six figures and only one break, due to the 7 x 64 beat phrases of our singing call recordings.

Sample Singing Calls:

Heads Square Thru 6  
Right and Left Thru  
Dive thru  
Centers Partner Trade  
Swing and Promenade

Heads Square Thru 6  
Swing Thru  
Boys Run  
Bend the Line  
Right and Left Thru  
Flutterwheel  
Slide Thru  
Swing and Promenade

## Extended Applications

### **1. Fractions for all-six calls**

Since we've added a couple of fractions to the dance formation, we have to clarify some of our calls we consider Basic.

*Six Ladies Chain*: You must give the desired number of gents involved. Six Ladies Chain 2 would move them up two positions. Six Ladies Chain 3 moves them  $\frac{1}{2}$  across, to their opposites, but I wouldn't use Six Ladies Chain as IMPLYING this, without saying "3."

*Grand Square (or Grand Triangle)*: The dancers move along a pie slice, rather than their normal box. Since the dancer has only three sides to move along, the first 4-count and the fourth 4-count are along the same slice line of the pie.

- Heads move in, turn 30 degrees (I wouldn't SAY that to them, but indicate how they need to do this by being on the floor) with a new partner, move backward along that slice line, then face them and moves along the rim, face in again and moves along the original slice. From here, it is reversed after 16 beats.
- Sides back away 4, move up the slice line with someone different in 4, backs down the other slice line in 4 with original partner, then faces them and backs away in 4. From here, it is reversed after 16 beats.
- Some callers may argue that for purity, the call should be modified to Grand Triangle, by dropping the number of beats to 24 for the call, rather than 32 by dropping the 4<sup>th</sup> part of of each start and reverse section of the sequence.

Although I agree that this is reasonable, since the dancers only have 3 different sides to walk through, I still like the Grand Square (32 beats) as part of singing calls for Hexagons.

*Teacup Chain:* All the rules apply as in Squares. The difference is that the turns that take the ladies to the next gent in the sequence are 5/6 and 7/6, instead of 3/4 and 5/4. You'll notice that the Heads end the call 4 beats faster than the Sides.

## 2. Any call with a required $\frac{1}{2}$ movement in a forward direction for three couples

Until recently, I had avoided calls such as Three Couple Flutterwheel and Three Couple Ladies Chain, since there isn't a real  $\frac{1}{2}$  movement in the call, and the dancers wouldn't automatically know where to go. I submit that using a "short" and "long" modifier as a call preface opens up an excellent choreographic tool. "Short" would be used for moving to the next position in your threesome, or  $\frac{1}{3}$ . "Long" would be used for moving to the second position in your threesome

Examples:

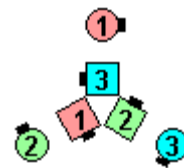
*Short Flutterwheel:* The 3 ladies pick up their right hand gent take them to starting footprints

*Ladies Long Chain:* All three ladies move to the second head gent in the progression for the courtesy turn.

*Short Swing Thru:* All Dancers swing  $\frac{1}{2}$  by the right, then only enough by the left to move to the next dancer who has stopped.



before short swing thru



after short swing thru

*Long Swing Thru:* All Dancers swing  $\frac{1}{2}$  the right, then by the left to pass the static dancer, moving to end with the next.

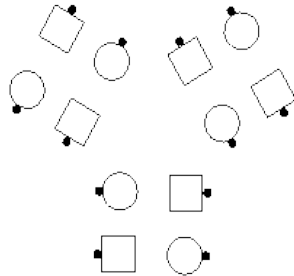
*Pass the Ocean* would be modified so that the dancers would pass through in their triplet to the exact opposite of where they started, holding right hands with that same partner as in a normal two-couple Pass the Ocean

This concept would extend to VERY experienced dancers to expand into calls such as Relay the Deucey and Spin Chain and Exchange the Gears, where the center triangulated movement requires either a "short" or "long" modifier. The standard or default might be defined as "short" unless modified by the word "long"

## 3. Calls without needing modifying, but which requires reorientation

*Bend the Line v. Move On:*

Move On is appropriate where you have three sets of 2 couple foursomes on the periphery of the Hexagon. However, Bend the Line IS appropriate in this instance: Heads Lead Right, Circle to a Line, Bend the Line (or any exterior triangle with 3 sets of 4 in a line on the periphery of the Hexagon)



Pic 3 Before Move On (instead of Bend the Line)

### *Eight Chain 6*

The setup is as in "Pic 2" above. The dancers have to feel the Courtesy Turn on the outside actually has to end with them slightly facing away from each other. The dancers will have to do this to find the next person to do the pull by with.

### *Track 2*

I've had to use the 'cheap and easy' method of re-teaching Track 2. From DPT, leaders partner trade, all pass thru, trade by and step to a wave.

### *Load the Boat*

The execution of this call is the same as the definition. Outsides Circulate 3 "shoulder passes" and then Quarter In with another person to face in. The centers Pass Thru, Quarter Out, Partner Trade, Pass Thru to partner up and face an outside couple. The feel is different for the centers since they have to use the "Slaunchwise" movements and be sure to partner up at the end.

## Sight Calling

Over time, I have found that sight calling to Hexagons is about the same as resolving standard squares. Noting couples 6, 1, and 2 for resolving are my standards. While I'm calling away and find I'm ready to resolve, I'll most often have the 3 sets of 2 couple situation and can match up at least one of the couples with circulates, move ons, or slide thrus. From there, I'll put that couple on the outside, and work the center six until I have the proper sequences of gents, then resolve from there to an allemande left either in a six-couple circle or an 8 Chain Thru in which all are facing their corner and have the right partner in sequence.

Thanks to Clark Baker for his comments on this method of using Hexagons and for his diagrams. Hexagons can bring a completely different feel for an tip or an evening to your dancers, without having to reach for the moon for new ideas! Send feedback on your own experiences to [bill@billeyler.com](mailto:bill@billeyler.com) and I'll share them with others through my website.