

Controlling the Degree of Difficulty

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Introduction

To make Square Dance an enjoyable activity for our dancers, we need to work towards dancer success. For that, it is necessary to understand what factors make choreography difficult for the dancer and how to help them to successfully dance our choreography.

What makes Square Dance Choreography difficult

Ten factors have been identified by Bill Peters and John Sybalsky that affect the dancers' perception of choreographic difficulty:

1. **The use of unknown calls** - *If a given command is unknown to the dancers, there is no way to recover the square.*
2. **The use of a known call not frequently used** - *Seldom used calls, like Left Square Thru (or concepts like "on the 3rd Hand", 1+1/2), can be difficult for the average dancer.*
3. **The use of a known call from an unfamiliar formation** - *"Zoom from Columns", "Scoot Back from Left Handed Quarter Tag", "Lead Right from facing lines" are examples of starting formations, which are not used often and therefore difficult.*
4. **The use of a known call from an unfamiliar arrangement** - *Flutterwheel, Dixie Style to an Ocean Wave, Recycle and many more calls are more common from standard arrangement. If you change the arrangement, it is received as difficult.*
5. **Choreography requiring the dancers to remember too much** - *Stacking Calls, giving them the information the need too early, can be difficult and may force the dancers to not finish what they are doing and instead interrupt it with the following call.*
6. **Choreography requiring the dancers to keep track of too much** - *Calls or Combinations like (from Lines) everyone Flutter wheel, centers only Flutter wheel, everyone Flutter wheel, make it hard to see in which position a dancer is.*
7. **Choreography which thwarts the dancers' tendency to anticipate** - *Combinations like (from facing lines) "Pass Thru - Wheel Around" (instead Wheel and Deal) are more difficult for the dancers because the dancers expect a different call.*
8. **The lack of smoothness or comfortable flow** - *Using bad body flow feels for the dancer difficult.*
9. **Choreography that thwarts the dancers' sense of what is right** - *Leaving some dancers to long in the Half Sashayed Arrangement makes the dancer to "correct" to the more used normal arrangement*
10. **The compounding of these factors** - *Mixing those factors, like using Scoot Back from Left Handed Ocean Wave (3) and from mixed arrangement (4), makes the choreography for the dancer much more difficult.*

How can we help dancers

It is possible to put the dancers (sometimes even squares) in three main groups:

1. Those that survive without needing any help (often dancers from the plus/advanced programs)
2. Those that survive with our help (average dancers)
3. Those that do not survive, no matter how much help we give them (so called Left-Foot-Charlie's)

In every dance you call, the mix of these groups is different. As callers we need to decide on each sequence how much help we should give them.

Here are some ideas, how we as callers can help the dancers.

Short Sequences

In general, it helps to keep the **sequences short**. Give the dancers the reward of an Allemande Left / Right and Left Grand or "You're Home". Also, keep **each sequence to one single idea**.

Working from Easy to Difficult

Know for each call the easiest formation/arrangement and also how to gradually increase the difficulty. Also change one difficulty factor at a time. If you are going to use Scoot Back from Left Hand Waves, it is easier to use the arrangements with Girls or Boys facing in. If you are using “mixed sexes” going into the middle in a Scoot Back, use Right Handed Ocean Waves first.

Give dancers more Lead Time

When using choreography, which is unusual and goes „against“ Dancer Anticipation (like from facing lines: „Pass Thru – Wheel Around“) – say the call a little earlier as usual and give the dancers more lead time.

Using Helper Words

You can help the dancers when you give them a **clue**. Tell them the ending facing direction (“You are facing out”), the formation (“Make Lines”) or the arrangement (“all the Boys should be in the middle” / “Girls are the Leaders”). In a Flutter wheel from sashayed Arrangement you can help saying “Boys Lead – use your Right Hand”.

As a word of caution: you should **not cue** the call (telling them the parts of the call all the time), like in “*Spin Chain Thru - turn half by the Right – Boys turn Left $\frac{3}{4}$ - very two center Boys trade – Boys turn Left $\frac{3}{4}$* ”. Doing that can cause problems: Dancers who are used to that listen for the cues and cannot dance the call if you just say the call / Dancers who know the call may intercept the cue as a command if it is given to slowly.

Also keep in mind that we do not need helper words all the time or with every group. Use them “only” if necessary, if the dancers don’t need help – keep quiet.

Working with Formation and Arrangement

Working with “same sex couples” can increase dancer success. As example: doing Pass the Ocean from “boy-boy-girl-girl“-Lines means that for one boy (on the Left side) and for one girl (on the right side) it feels normal. The chances, that the dancers successful complete the call are so much higher

Encouraging Body flow

By using Body Flow, which encourages the dancer to go the correct way, it is possible to work for dancer success. Look at the following example (starting from Facing Lines): “*Lines Forward and Back – Dixie Style to an Ocean Wave*” In this example, the body flow is not bad, but the dancers have to decide themselves, which is the right hand dancer in the couple to start moving.

The following example is using encouraging flow: “*Pass Thru – Wheel Around – Dixie Style to an Ocean Wave*” In the second example the dancers are “lead” into the call – the right-handed dancer is already in move and the dancers do not have to make a decision of who has to go first.

Examples of encouraging body flow

Right Handed Two Faced Lines:	Bend the Line – Reverse Flutterwheel
Outfacing Lines:	Wheel and Deal – Centers Wheel Around
Parallel Right Handed Ocean Waves:	Outfacers Run – Reverse Flutterwheel
Normal Facing Couples:	Flutterwheel – Boys Walk - Girls Dodge

Using encouraging body flow, you can help for dancers success, because the body flow “dictates” the dancer to go the correct way. This can also be used to **introduce unfamiliar arrangements** of a call (and helping the dancers to get through it).

Summary

When we are able to control the degree of difficulty, we can work for dancer success and also provide them with interesting sequences (which they are able to complete successfully). And that way, we as callers will also be successful.