

THE MULTI-CYCLE LESSON PLAN

Revised

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CALLERLAB

**The International Association
of Square Dance Callers**

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INTRODUCTION/BACKGROUND

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UPDATE/REVISION INFORMATION

This document was revised on February 12, 2004 to update the contact information for several of the listed contacts. Updated information is identified with a “change bar” to the right of the updated information.

THE MULTI-CYCLE LESSON PLAN

1. Introduction – Program name

The Multi-Cycle Lesson Plan is a method of conducting square dance lessons that start more than once a year. The additional designations of 10 + 10, 12 + 12, 13 + 13, and 17 + 17, indicates how many weeks each class is taught before proceeding to the next phase or list of calls. It also indicates how many weeks before class begins again. A Multi-Cycle class is one that is using any form of the Multi-Cycle Lesson Plan.

2. What are the advantages of multiple starts per year?

- A. By starting classes more than once a year, you make square dancing **more available** to potential dancers.
- B. Enthusiastic new dancers can recruit their non-dancing friends several times a year and **dance with them** immediately.
- C. Your new dancers become your primary recruiters.
- D. You ask new dancers for a shorter commitment (i.e., 2 to 4 months instead of 6 to 8 or more months).
- E. Having 2 or 3 class groups on the same night increases class revenue and makes more economic sense.
- F. Shorter class time each night allows brand new dancers time to increase their physical stamina and leaves them wanting more in the first part of the class. By the time they build that physical stamina later in class, they are able to dance more than one phase at a time.
- G. Those who miss class nights, or need additional class time, can repeat a phase and not be made to wait until the following year to join again.
- H. The fast learners and former dancers can move ahead without being held back by those needing more class time. Instead of dropping out due to slow pace of instruction, they stay in, move on, and become club members more quickly.
- I. While the more experienced new dancers are “angeling” the brand new dancers, they have an opportunity to review calls they have already been taught and reinforce their skills.

3. Why does this plan result in more dancers?

The Multi-Cycle Lesson Plan involves starting classes more than once a year, and it gives non-dancers the opportunity to join in at multiple times. More classes equals more dancers.

4. Does this plan produce better (i.e., more skilled) dancers?

The Multi-Cycle class does not guarantee better dancers. Many other factors are involved as with a traditional class. However, as mentioned above, new dancers have the opportunity to angel and receive instruction on calls they've already learned. This repetition reinforces previously learned material and allows them to be well grounded in the basics.

5. Should this plan be club-run or caller-run?

This plan can be run by clubs, individual callers, groups of clubs, or even run by associations. It is a plan that can be varied depending upon the situation and the area where the class is being held.

6. How can my club be convinced to support this new plan?

Any new method of running classes can sound difficult – change is difficult. Once the club makes the decision and finds the proper people (i.e., class coordinator, co-coordinators, people to work the front table, host dancers to greet people as they come in, and those in charge of refreshments), it is very simple to run. If your club wants to grow, then this is the way to do it. Focus the club activities and energy on new dancers and this plan can work for you.

7. What's the first step to getting started?

Making the decision, developing a plan to fit your situation, recruiting your workers, and publicizing your class is the first step. Evaluating and modifying as you go is very important. Use as many ideas as you can to bring new dancers to your class and encourage your new class members to bring their friends. This is a very important key. Personal contact is the best recruiting tool to actually bring new dancers to class.

Let's look at how this plan is being used in various localities.

In the 8 week version, a class starts every 8 weeks, yielding six class starts per year. In the 10 + 10 version, there are five starts per year. Others have reported good results with classes starting every 12, 13, or 17 weeks; meaning 4 starts a year at 12 or 13 weeks, or three starts per year every 17 weeks. Choose an option to fit your situation depending on your final destination program, (i.e., Mainstream, or Plus) and your hall or seasonal schedule. Divide your class night into separate time periods. For example, in a three hour class you can have either two groups or phases dancing 1 ½ hours each, or three phases dancing one hour each. You can alternate tips among the groups throughout the night, or you can divide the night into separate time periods for each phase. Both methods have been used with success.

Let's assume that you begin this plan in September, start a new class every ten weeks thereafter and have planned for three hours each class night. For your very first cycle you could hold a new dancer class from 7-8:30, and possibly a club funshop from 8:30-10. Some groups have held a line dance class the first half of the evening and then a square dance class the second half. Others have started with one group of new dancers for the entire evening and built up to two, and even three groups per evening during successive cycles. If your first class is small, you can start your second phase even before the 10 or 8 week plan is up. Get your advertising out with just as much vigor as before, and encourage your new dancers to bring their friends.

The most important element is to **get started** using this plan. The sooner you start, the sooner you'll be up and running. The other key to this plan is gaining momentum. You can get more and more new dancers as the class continues. Be patient and remember it takes time to build momentum.

8. Does the new dancer class have to be on a separate night from club night?

Due to the fact that a Multi-Cycle class involves using 2 or 3 hours of instruction time (ideally 3 hours), it is difficult to run it on the same night as the club dance, unless the facility has multiple halls and multiple callers. If the club desperately needs new dancers to remain active, the club can turn its entire club night into a class until such a time as the number of members in the club increase.

If your club has a facility only once a week, and you are forced to combine a class and club on the same evening, it will take a little more planning to make the Multi-Cycle class work. You may have to decrease your club dance time just as you would with a traditional class.

9. We can't even get a class together now, once a year! How can we find enough new people to run several classes a year?

If the methods previously used by your club have not yielded successful classes, then change those methods until you find the right combination. Targeting specific age groups with your new dancer information is another method of improving promotion. Also target church and service organizations in your area, as those can be an excellent source for new dancers.

There have been occasions, where a class has started without enough participants to financially continue the class. After a short period of advertising and promotion, start the class again, having all your newest dancers bring their friends, either by encouragement or some sort of incentive. It's possible to start a class each month until you get enough to proceed with your first phase. The key to any successful class program is to be persistent, be positive, and people will want to join.

Designate someone in your club to call class members that have missed a class night. Let them know they were missed. Encourage them to come early to the next class, so a review can be held just for them. Personalizing contacts with members of your class will let them know how important your club thinks they are.

10. Could several clubs cooperate with each other and agree to start 30-week lessons, two or three months apart? That way a new student could get into square dancing at any time.

This method of organizing classes has also been used successfully before. It takes cooperative planning, but makes lessons more available to potential dancers. Unless all classes promote each other, and encourage “new dancer angeling” of other classes with the new dancers they have introduced to square dancing, you will lose your most valuable recruiting tool. That tool again is, new dancers bringing **their** friends to **their** class, and dancing with them immediately which is a key advantage to a Multi-Cycle class.

11. What is the destination “program” for a typical Multi-Cycle class?

The destination program depends on the program the sponsoring club dances. The caller teaching the class must organize his or her lesson plan by taking into account the total number of calls to be taught, how long each phase will be, and how much time per night each phase dances.

12. We tried something like this before and it didn't work. Why should we try it again?

The key to success is perseverance. If at first you don't succeed, try, try again. Learn from previous failures and mistakes, change your recruiting techniques and change your methods. Vary your promotion and modify that way that your class is run until it works for you. The goal is to build momentum, and once you have it, don't rest on your laurels. Keep recruiting, encourage your new dancers to bring their friends and keep the momentum going.

QUESTIONS WHICH MAY ARISE BEFORE STARTING

1. **How do I finance the start up of this program?**

Financing a Multi-Cycle class is the same as financing a traditional one. The club, sponsoring organization, or caller needs to commit a certain amount of funds for promotion. A promotion **plan** should be developed. Usually a meeting of those involved can put the details together and determine what funds are needed, and what responsibilities have to be delegated. People are recruited then to handle each of those areas before the class begins.

2. **Are people supposed to wear square dance attire to class?**

This question should be decided by the club or sponsoring organization. Having a more relaxed attitude about square dance attire during class makes it easier for your new recruits to feel comfortable. The caller can always mention from the microphone, about comfortable shoes, long sleeves for men, dresses or skirts for women, and basic attire that is not constricting. By not being so hard-nosed about square dance attire, you will find that new dancers will gradually begin to adopt attire as the class progresses. One group actually has a couple that collects previously owned square dance attire, launders and mends them, and has them for sale (inexpensively) periodically throughout the class. This allows new dancers to casually pick up articles of clothing at the class.

3. **Is it better for the new dancers to pay each night, or to pay one fee in advance for the entire set of lessons?**

This again can be decided by the club or sponsoring organization. Paying each night can work very well. There are also groups that allow dancers to pay one fee in advance for the entire set of lessons in that particular phase. If a discount is given for payment in advance, this can serve as an incentive.

4. **Is it better to give new dancers a lot of instruction at first, or just a little bit?**

Another key to success of any class program is to make it fun. Make it a party, or a dance type atmosphere. The amount of instruction given each class is dependent upon multiple factors. Good caller/instructor judgement should always prevail as with any class or funshop.

5. **What is the exact list of calls to be taught during each session?**

There is no exact list of calls to be taught during each session. Pre-planning for each session is essential for the instructor. Whether the plan can be followed exactly or modified during the class depends on the class night and many, many other factors. This is the exact type of planning that is done in a traditional class.

6. **What's it like during the very first night?**

The first night should be exciting. There should be hosts and hostesses of the sponsoring club/organization that move around and introduce themselves to the new dancers. Distribute simple badges. Lettering should be big so names can be read very easily. This excitement is what new dancers come to enjoy about their square dance class. Every night should be made fun, positive and uplifting.

7. **Is the class always open, or does it close after a few weeks?**

The key to starting multiple times each year is to move the class along. It is important at the beginning of each phase to hold the class open at least two weeks. If it is held open for two weeks, you'll almost always get new recruits the third week. After that time it is important to close the class and move along through that phase. It is also advantageous for the instructor to come to class 15 to 20 minutes early to help brand new recruits catch up, or to help those who have missed the previous lesson.

8. What can we do to make each night fun or special?

Consider decorations that are in line with the holidays of that particular month. Consider having a 50/50 type drawing or square dancers lotto, if that is allowed in your area. Get the new dancers involved. If there is a philosophical difference with 50/50 type drawings, make it so that 100% goes back to the dancers, or a small amount goes into a fund for a special party for the class. Having refreshments, or something to nibble on, is important to the social aspect of the class. A key to keeping fun in your classes is to have special amenities for your new dancers. Try to remember birthdays and anniversaries of new class members so they can be recognized. If your club has a newsletter, consider giving each class member a copy. Include them in the section for Birthdays/Anniversaries. If your newsletter recognizes special events in the lives of club members, include the class members as well. Consider including your new dancers in social functions of the club. Theater nights, progressive dinners and other social events that your club sponsors can be very special for your new dancers and will also integrate them into the club prior to graduation. This will make retention of your new dancers much more successful.

9. What if someone shows up in Week 4 and wants to learn to square dance?

There comes a time when the class must close. Late recruits can be referred to the next available class. If there are several classes going in your area, the start times could be staggered, so there is always a class to join.

10. Is it better to have separate time periods for each group, or to call alternating tips during one long class session?

Both methods have been used with success. Some say it is better to have separate time periods for each group. If you call alternating tips for each group during one long class session, all your new dancers have to stay for the entire evening. If your class runs three hours, this can prove to be a problem for some of the new dancers or angels. We suggest making a decision to try it one way, and changing if it becomes necessary.

11. How exactly do you manage to teach two or three groups all on the same night?

The method you chose of alternating tips or having separate time periods for each group, will determine how you manage two or three groups. It makes it fun to have lots of things happening and can create an exciting atmosphere in the class. It can be hectic at times, but have fun and you'll find that managing two or three groups will be enjoyable.

QUESTIONS WHICH MAY ARISE SEVERAL WEEKS AFTER STARTING

1. **What happens if a new dancer has to miss several classes in a row or falls behind?**

This applies whether you run a traditional class or a Multi-Cycle class. These dancers can be helped at a separate session to cover the calls they missed, or they can come a half hour to 20 minutes before the class begins. The same is true if a dancer takes longer to learn. The beauty of the Multi-Cycle lesson plan is that if it is not possible to catch the new dancers up to the rest of the class, a new class will be starting very soon.

2. **What if a new dancers wants to move up to the next group and isn't ready?**

The caller or class coordinator should be very honest and straight forward with each new dancer in transition. If they are not ready to move to the next group of calls they should be encouraged to stay and repeat that phase. Those repeating a phase can help the newer dancers, get additional practice, and not feel rushed through class. Classes should be fun and putting too much pressure on new dancers will only cause them to drop out. Encourage fun and decrease the amount of pressure on your new dancers.

3. **How are dancers in each group identified?**

Each new dancer should have a simple name badge. Badges can be in different colors, and groups can be called the blue group, red group, or green group. It is also possible that dancers can be called the Phase I or Phase II group.

4. **Can fast learners move ahead faster than normal?**

It is possible, if the dancer has danced before, that simple review and observation of the next phase may allow them to recall those calls that they previously danced and move ahead faster than normal.

5. **Is it advisable to combine squares with lines, rounds, C & W, etc?**

The square dance activity includes all these dance forms. If the instructor, club or sponsoring organization enjoys the variety, and there is time to include these other dance forms, by all means, do so. It is always great fun to add a little variety to the class by teaching a line dance, a simple round, a mixer, a contra or a country dance. It is also fun to include these dance forms on party nights.

6. **How do you convince angles to participate? Do you really need angels anyway?**

If the club or sponsoring organization desires to retain these new dances, it is essential to meet and socially interact with them. Members should be strongly encouraged to participate and "angel" new class members. It is not essential to have angels to run a class. Having angels present will help the class move along at a slightly faster pace if the angels follow simple etiquette and common sense rules. There are documents available from CALLERLAB and USDA on how to be a successful angel. These documents should be distributed and discussed with club members prior to their participating with the class.

7. **How can new dancers be made to feel like they're part of the club?**

As we previously mentioned, make sure special events in new dancers lives are recognized at class and in the club newsletter. Make sure that each new dancer gets a copy of the club newsletter or information sheet. Include your new dancers in social events that the club sponsors like theater nights, holiday parties, picnics, campouts or any other extracurricular activities. You'll find that your new dancers can be some of your best participants.

8. **Should new dancers be encouraged to dance to other callers?**

Absolutely! The more dance time and practice a new dancer gets, the easier it will be to retain the knowledge they've learned. There should be a good communication between callers and clubs, so that new dancers can successfully dance to other callers. Attending more than one class at a time can also be extremely helpful.

9. Should new dancers be invited to club dances?

There are many clubs that invite class members to club dances. Some clubs hold special dances to include their new dancers, and other alternate tips using the class program and the club program. It is important that club members dance with the new dancers, include them in their squares, and social conversations during the evening. Special club party nights are ideal to introduce new dancers to club members.

10. What if I can't make it to a class? How can I insure that a substitute caller can work effectively with this new teaching plan?

Communication is the key, as with any class, workshop or dance. It is vitally important that the instructor of the class find the appropriate substitute to work the teaching plan. The class instructor should not only inform the substitute instructor of what has been previously taught, but what other things are done in class. It is important to let your substitute know what has been discussed in terms of styling and etiquette. The class instructor should also make suggestions on what should be taught by the substitute during that particular evening, but the substitute caller should use his or her own judgement on class night. The main thing is that the class should be fun and the class instructor should realize that his new dancers may need a little time to adjust to a substitute.

QUESTIONS WHICH MAY ARISE SEVERAL MONTHS AFTER STARTING

1. How do you get class members to join the club (especially if the club dances on a different night from lessons)?

New members should be included in social events of the club as early and as soon during class as possible. Developing relationships with club members is a key to encouraging class members to join and take part in the club. It is vitally important not to place undue responsibility on new dancers. If club members welcome new dancers, promote fun and fellowship that is so natural in square dancing, class members will surely join the club.

2. Do I have to do classes all year, or can we quit for the summer?

Although it is ideal to run a Multi-Cycle class the entire year, it is not absolutely essential. If you run the class throughout the year, it is much easier to keep the momentum going with your new dancers bringing their friends to the next class. Some groups that use the Multi-Cycle Lesson plan have to, for reasons of hall availability, or weather, quit during the summer time. If this is the case, we suggest that the club or sponsoring organization provide periodic events where the new dancers, who are not quite dancing the club program yet, can attend and maintain the skills they have learned thus far. A new phase can be started again, after the period of inactivity, and then the Multi-Cycle Lesson Plan can be continued.

3. Isn't it difficult to keep a class together during the winter holiday months (November/December) and during the summer?

Winter months and during the summer are always difficult times to **start** a new phase of dance lessons. You can capitalize on the holiday months and the summer months by choosing to have holiday parties or other fun activities take place at the class during this time. It's fun to have theme dances during the summer that involve a more casual, relaxed dress. If you celebrate the particular time of the year and address it directly, classes can be kept together during this time.

4. With this new approach to beginner lessons, do we still have to make efforts to recruit people into square dancing?

Yes, a thousand times yes! Continue your recruiting efforts all year long. Anytime an opportunity presents to do a demonstration, or to encourage new people to join the fun of square dancing, it should be seized. Recruiting is a year round project and can be fun.

GENERAL QUESTIONS, AND MORE REINFORCEMENT TO GET STARTED

1. **How do you know that this plan works? Can you prove it?**

Multi-Cycle type classes have been run successfully by square dance groups for many years. Clubs across the United States and foreign countries are finding that this method of organizing their classes does wonders to build the numbers in their clubs. Multi-Cycle classes have been run many different ways and by a variety of organizations and groups. It works, and once it gains momentum, you, too, can increase the size of your club and include more people in the fun of square dancing.

2. **What geographic areas are using Multi-Cycle Lesson Plans?**

Multi-Cycle classes are being used in many different geographic areas, where different conditions affect the way the plan is organized. Use your imagination, modify and change as necessary to make it work for your group.

3. **How long does it take to start a program like this and get it to where it is self-sufficient?**

This program can take off from the very first night, or it can take several class or phase starts in order to make it work and gain momentum. The key is to keep going, modify as necessary, be positive and make it fun. Be patient, because once you get that momentum, you'll be able to keep this plan going and make it work for you. It is vitally important to continue recruiting and promoting to keep it successful.

4. **What are some of the benefits of having classes available year-round?**

It allows people to join square dancing any time of the year, or at a time that is more convenient for them. If they have to dropout or discontinue for some reason, it allows them additional opportunities to join again in the fun. Having classes year-round allows you to keep the momentum going.

5. **Where are some good places to advertise classes?**

Many groups use the local newspaper, cable television shows, and local talk shows to advertise classes. Radio commercials have been used with a great deal of success. Clubs and organizations, in a particular area, raise funds and run radio advertisements about the fun of modern square dancing. If the group that sponsors the radio advertisements, (i.e., an association, a club, a square dance magazine), obtain an 800 number, people can call in, get information, leave their name, address and telephone number, and a master list can be assembled. This list can be distributed to those sponsoring classes for follow up phone calls and a personal invitation. When classes start again, invitations and information can again be extended to those on the master list. Use as many ways to advertise and promote your class as you can think of.

6. **Under this new plan we're asking new dancers to make a commitment of two or three months at a time. Under the old plan, we asked them to commit to six or eight months all at once. What's the difference?**

This can be a major factor in the retention of your new dancers when they begin lessons. Under the old plan we asked for a long commitment and many times did not tell them how long their commitment was. According to past surveys, we lose more dancers the longer the class goes on. With the Multi-Cycle Lesson Plan, it allows dancers to try square dancing for the limited time of the first phase. If we do the proper job of creating fun and including them in the social events of our dance groups, they will gladly continue.

7. **Is there anyone I can talk to who is successfully using this plan and who would be willing to help me get started?**

There are many presently using this plan. A list of contacts can be obtained from the CALLERLAB office. Please feel free to contact any of those on the list to get a deeper insight on how the plan works for them.

The following CALLERLAB callers can give you additional information and advice, based upon their knowledge and experience with Multi-Cycle Lesson Plans. Write or call one of them today.

If you are using some form of the Multi-Cycle Lesson Plan and would like to have your name added to this list, please contact the CALLERLAB Home Office.

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