

Twenty Minutes on Modular Choreography

by
Calvin Campbell

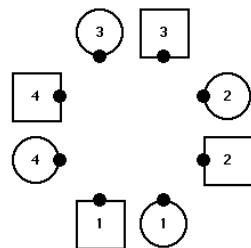
There are four popular techniques for calling square dances. Memory, modular, mental image, and sight. Modules can be used in combination with any of the other three.

The oldest method is memorizing entire square dance routines. Almost everyone who calls uses this method at least part of the time. Many callers rely on memorized figures for their entire program.

Modular choreography came next when callers started to recognize that certain recognizable setups seemed to occur time after time and that groups of calls making up these blocks could be combined in different combinations to produce an almost infinite variety of dances.

There are numerous setups (FASRs) that have been documented by Bill Peters and others, but the three setups (FASR) that are most commonly used in building modules are a **Zero (Static) Square (ZS)**, a **Zero Box (ZB)** and a **Zero Line (ZL)**. Notice that each of these are capitalized because each refers to a specific formation (F), arrangement (A), sequence (S), and rotation (R) or FASR

Using squares for men and circles for ladies and the caller standing at the bottom of the drawing, a **Zero Square** looks like the setup shown to the right. Everyone is in home position.



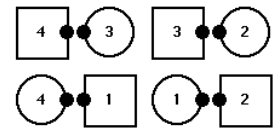
As a caller, you need to recognize that there are three other orientations of a **Zero Square** that are choreographically equal. In each case the setup (FASR) is the same, but the dancers are not at home position. To see these variations just rotate the page 1/4 turn at a time. It is very easy for the caller to recognize this, but the average dancer only recognizes when they are at home position. Figures called from this orientation will feel different than those called from home position.

Zero Square to Zero Box Modules

The second setup recognized by most callers is the **Zero Box (ZB)**. The most common way to

arrive at this setup (FASR) is to have either the head or the side couples Square Thru 4.

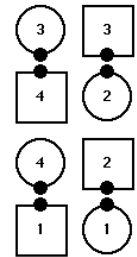
If the heads Square Thru 4 the result will look like the drawing to the right.



That's one way of getting there. Let's add a little interest to the trip. Try the following module of calls.

Head couples Promenade 1/2 ... Pass Thru ... Separate around one ... In the middle Pass Thru ...

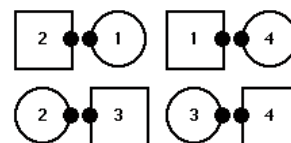
The dancers arrive at the same identical setup. The group of calls becomes a setup module that moves from a **Zero Square** to a **Zero Box** or a **ZS-ZB** module. Keep in mind that the sides can be substituted for the heads and the resulting setup would still be a **Zero Box (ZB)** as shown to the right.



Just as with a **Zero Square** the **Zero Box** can be rotated to four different positions with the head couples starting the sequence and four different positions if the side couples start the sequence. This gives a total of eight **Zero Box** setups where you, as the caller, know the set is resolved.

Modules can be as simple as the Heads Square Thru used in the first example to complex modules that move all four couples around the set such as the following **ZS-ZB** module. Notice that the module also flip flops the set.

Heads Star Thru ... Double Pass Thru ... Centers In ... Cast Off 3/4 ... Star Thru ... Zoom ... Centers Right & Left Thru ... Centers Pass Thru ...



Moving From A Zero Box To Another Zero Box

One of the most useful aspects of modular calling is amount of control you have over the choreography. You can plan a whole tip around an idea or theme. You can work in variations and build toward perhaps something really clever you plan on calling two or three tips down the line.

A good example can be found in a face to face Centers In. Many dancers are just not familiar with the concept and the rate of failure may be high. So you use a short **ZB-ZB** module that you know works to test the waters. This particular module brings the dancers right back to the same point on the floor.

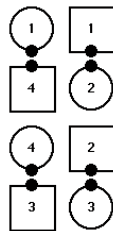
Centers In (Fc to Fc) ... Cast Off 3/4 ... Ends Run ... Right & Left Thru ... Star Thru

Once you have that module working well on one side of the set, move the head couples over to the other side of the set and call the same **ZB-ZB** module. Sight resolve the set if you wish. Now you are ready to move onto a more difficult sequence.

Centers In (Fc to Fc) ... Cast Off 3/4 ... Centers Right & Left Thru ... Pass Thru ... Centers In ... Cast Off 3/4 ... Slide Thru ... Double Pass Thru ... Lead couples Partner Trade ...

At the end of this module you have exchanged the inside and outside couples (a technical zero) and turned the Eight Chain Thru Formation one quarter. You have the comfortable knowledge that the square is still resolved and all eight dancers have been able to dance a very interesting and different pattern.

This particular module can be used effectively twice in a row because we've switched the inside and outside couples and each pair of dancers are dancing a very different feeling part. Two times through returns the set to a true zero and flip flops the set.



The Getout

We've now been through at least two points where the set was resolved. If things are not going well at these points you can bail out with just a Left Allemande. However let's assume the dancers have successfully completed your great choreography. Maybe now is the time for a surprise getout that is just a little different. If you choose to stay with the Centers In Cast Off theme try the following **ZB-AL** module.

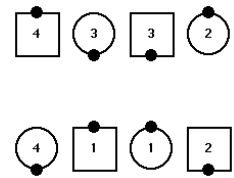
Turn Thru ... Turn 1/2 by the Left in the center... Pass Thru ... Centers in ... Cast off 3/4 ... Left Allemande

Constructing a Module

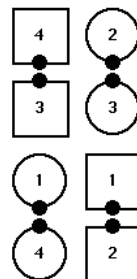
In the above examples, the theme was obviously Centers In followed by a Cast Off 3/4. The focus was a face to face Centers In instead of the usual couple behind a couple Centers In. Something different. How do you go about constructing such a module?

In my opinion, it is unwise to do this extemporaneously on the dance floor. I choose to do it at home with square dance checkers or a computer program

First you have to decide your starting point. In this case let's start from Zero Box. Once the dancers have completed the Centers In and Cast Off 3/4s you have to look at the resultant FASR and decide on your options.



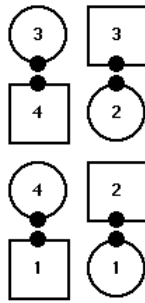
In this case, the motion of the Cast off 3/4 dictates that the ends either need to stand still or do something that continues the direction of their forward motion. We've looked at Ends Run and Ends stopping. A third option could be to have the Ends Fold while the centers Square Thru 3/4.



Now we've got the heads couples nicely paired with their partner. The sides are not paired and they are 1/2 Sashayed. Pass to the Center will get the heads out of the middle and Turn Thru in the center will nicely resolve the 1/2 Sashayed side couples. In the process you've have

exchanged the inside and outside couples so you've made up a technical zero. The total **ZB-ZB** module looks like:

- Centers In ... Cast Off 3/4 ...**
- Ends Fold ...**
- Centers Sq Thru 3/4 ...**
- Pass to the Center ...**
- Centers Turn Thru ...**



Some Ground Rules for Your Consideration

Most of us are not blessed with a photographic memory. We remember short blocks or sequences quite well, but as the string becomes longer we tend to fail in accurately remembering the sequence. I try and keep modules, that I construct, to less than ten calls. I really favor seven or fewer.

There is a second reason for limiting the modules to this length. I've found that once I've explored a particular theme or idea that it really sharpens my skills to see how few additional calls I need to get them back to a zero point.

Over the years I've pretty much settled on creating only six types of modules out of all the setups documented by the "real" experts in this field.

These are:

- Zero Square to Zero Box (ZS-ZB)**
- Zero Square to Zero Line (ZS-ZL)**
- Zero Box to Zero Box (ZB-ZB)**
- Zero Line to Zero Line (ZL-ZL)**
- Zero Box to an Allemande Left or RLG (ZB-AL or ZB-RLG)**
- Zero Line to and Allemande Left or RLG (ZL-AL or ZL-RLG)**

Why? It makes my notes easy to file and to find. I quickly figured out that any zero is really a combination of zeros for every formation within the zero. I won't explain that further because that is about a 1 hour seminar by itself.

A Few Words About Equivalents

You can move people around a set with very few calls. Right & Left Thru, 2 Ladies Chain, Star Thru, Pass Thru, Dive Thru/Pass to the Center, and Bend the Line will do a lot. There are modules that mimic each of these. For example Swing Thru ... Spin the Top ... Right & Left Thru = Star Thru. One time I

saw a book that had 1001 equivalents for Star Thru. Most of us recognize that Swing Thru Double is the equivalent of a Right & Left Thru and so on.

Square Dancing is a team effort. When you square up there are seven other people besides yourself on that team. The ideal would be to dance with each of the other seven people at some point during the tip. Sometimes we don't do that. We just keep people comfortably close to the original corner and square dance becomes more a two facing couples facing dance than a four couples dance. If you plan ahead you can give the dancers the pleasure of dancing with all the people in the set.

Let's start out with a simple pattern and see one example of how this could work. Here is a very straight forward setup to a **Zero Box**.

- Heads Star Thru ... Pass Thru ...**
- Right & Left Thru the outside two ...**
- Dive Thru (Pass to the Center) ...**
- Pass Thru ... (ZB)**

By substituting equivalent modules for Star Thru, Pass Thru, and Right & Left Thru and also using true zeros at the points where Eight Chain Thru formations occur you can easily track both the progress of the dancers and provide a lot of variety. Here are some examples:

- Star Thru Equivalents
- Swing Thru ... Centers Trade ...**
- Centers Run ... Bend the Line ...**

- Spin the Top ... Men Run ...**
- Wheel & Deal ... Pass Thru ...**
- Partner Trade ...**

- Right & Left Thru Equivalents
- Swing Thru ... Centers Trade ...**
- Turn Thru ... Partner Trade**

- Pass Thru ... Partner Trade**

- Pass Thru Equivalents
- Right & Left Thru with a full turn**

- Swing Thru ... Men Trade ...**
- Turn Thru ...**

Now start substituting in various equivalents at the appropriate places and plug in a couple of box zeros and you have more than enough material for a complete patter tip with lots of variety.

Each couple has danced with every other couple in the set. As a caller, you have been able to easily track the progress of the dancers through the routine because you have numerous visual check points where you can physically observe that the square is progressing as planned. You win and the dancers win.

Why Bother???

Why bother to go to this kind of effort when you can just do it extemporaneously on the spur of the moment. First, in going through the process you will learn a lot about square dance choreography that you will not learn on-the-fly. You can take a look at your options and the consequences of what you are calling. You will find that the more you do it the more options you will see.

Second, you will become a much more interesting caller if you take the time to do your homework at home and plan your dance. You can plan how to take an audience from the mundane to the fantastic instead of just hoping it will happen. The plan may not always work, but it's always worth the attempt.

Third and most important, writing modules is the only way you are going to permanently capture your flashes of brilliance and those of your peers. This is also important from a historical viewpoint. Up until about the last ten years most of the innovative choreography was being printed somewhere. They could be used as a reference and a study guide for new callers. Today, much of the innovative choreography is called once and then lost for all time.

The 20 Minute Time Bind

In 20 minutes I can only hope to convince you that modules may be interesting and perhaps worth looking into further. In this paper I've only scratched the surface of how modules work and really explored very little of the vast versatility of this method of calling. If you really want to explore the subject I need at least four hours of your time.

Acknowledgement of the Pioneers

I don't want to leave this subject without giving credit where credit is due. Ricky Holden and Lloyd Litman wrote a book named Instant Hash which introduced the concept of modules to many of us.

This is where we learned about a Box 1-4 and 1P2P lines. You can sometimes find this book in libraries. It's well worth reading.

Bill Peters greatly extended and refined the knowledge of modules in a book named the "Mighty Module." He was the one that first clearly defined the nomenclature for what became Setups, Zeros and Getouts that we still use today.

The rest of us have just tagged onto their genus. Lloyd is dead, but Bill lives on Maui in Hawaii. If you ever see him tell him "Thanks."

References of Interest

"The Mainstream Square Dance Caller's Note Book" by Calvin Campbell

"The Callers Text" Chapter 16. Published by the American Square Dance Society. Chapter by Calvin Campbell

American Square Dance Magazine July 1982 through February 1985. A monthly column named "Mostly Modules" by Calvin Campbell

"The Might Module" by Bill Peters

"Modules Galore" by Bill Peters