

Jeanne's Top 10 West Coast Swing No-No's

by Jeanne DeGeyter

There are many varieties to the “style” of west coast swing, and an even wider variety in the area of “connection.” But no matter where I dance in the country, a few rules remain universal to an enjoyable dance for both the leader and follower. These are the “no-no’s” that should be learned at the beginning level and revisited frequently throughout your dancing life. All of the following simply serve to improve the connection (thus communication) between leader and follower on the dance floor....

1. **Don't take large steps.** Most steps should not exceed length of your own foot, or be any wider than your shoulders.
2. **Don't bounce.** Dance smoothly.
3. **Don't push or pull.** Leaders should lead by moving their bodies, not by pulling and pushing. Followers should follow by using their legs to move their body, not their arms.
4. **Don't break your frame.** Keep your chest up! Your posture should create a vertical line with the floor. Forearms should stay parallel to the floor in open position. Biceps should generally stay on the front-side of your body, unless doing a behind the back type of move.
5. **Don't “dance” with your arms.** Keep hands and arms “quiet.” Bouncing arms are distracting and misleading to a follower. “Wagging” your arms around creates a false sense of leading a turn.
6. **Don't let your hands rise above the elbow in open position.** Keep forearms, wrists, and hands parallel to the floor. If the hands rise above the elbow, this can result in connection moving from the core center into the biceps.
7. **Don't float or get too far away.** Post your weight and body (hands and feet) at the end of each set of movements. This will keep you closer to your partner and avoid overextension.
8. **Don't use your thumbs or squeeze.** Create a “C” connection with your partner, using the fingers only. Keep your thumbs clear, and never squeeze!
9. **Don't look at the floor.** Look up at your partner and smile. Keep an eye on the area just above the sternum—this is a quick indicator of where your partner will be moving. Looking at the floor drops your frame and increases distance between partners.
10. **Don't back lead.** Followers, focus on learning to follow, so the leaders can learn to lead. Wait for the leader to lead you forward or move you backward.

While these all sound so basic, they can take years to “unlearn” if you don't learn them during the early stages of your dancing.