

A Comprehensive Approach To Square Dance Programming

Hal Barnes

halbarnes32@gmail.com

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Introduction

This paper presents ideas about square dance programming. This means planning what you will call at an upcoming dance. I do not pretend to represent the community of callers, just my own practices. I have called for about 46 years. This approach is the result of many varied attempts at programming over the years. However, my current approach has been stable for a couple years. I am always looking for ways to improve.

Why should we plan dances? From experience, I know that when I plan a dance

- I go into the dance with more confidence.
- I have more time to visit with the dancers between tips.
- The dance has better variety.
- The dance holds together better thematically. That is, I present material early in the dance which I build on as the dance progresses.

When I fail to plan a dance, I spend all the time I am not calling trying to figure out what to call next. As a result I give little attention to the dancers between tips. I have called some dances where the plan had to be scrapped because I guessed wrong about the dance level. I have called some successful dances without a prior plan, but they left me feeling like I degenerated into generic “mush” all evening.

A plan helps me to be focused and disciplined. When I am not disciplined, I frequently yield to the temptation to call what I find interesting without enough regard for what the dancers can dance. I usually spend between 45 and 90 minutes planning each dance, which typically has six tips. I continue to plan my dances because I find the benefits are worth the time investment.

The initial impression of this approach may seem that it is too labor intensive to be practical, but I have found that after I have programmed a few dances, those programs become reusable for the next dance, thus greatly shortening the time. This does not imply that I am calling the same dance repeatedly but that reusability occurs at two levels:

- The template for the dance as a whole in terms of the tip personality, not the content
- A tip becomes reusable in another dance, perhaps with different packaging or different singing call figures.

These reusability concepts will be addressed more thoroughly later in the paper.

The Big Picture

A surprising amount of information goes into planning a dance. These include

- Generally accepted practices. For example, dances are structured into tips. Usually a tip consists of a patter call, then a singing call.
- The caller's philosophy of what makes a good dance. For example, do you prefer a "lay back and have fun" dance or a "show 'em your tricks" dance.
- Your strength areas as a caller which distinguish you from other callers. For example, if you have a great voice for singing calls, then you will want to feature that.
- What you know about the purpose of the dance. For example, is this a regular club dance or a special benefit dance with multiple callers? Are you the club caller or a guest caller? What is the advertised dance program (i.e. Mainstream, Plus).
- What you know about the dancers. For example, are most of the dancers competent at the advertised level or are they "soft Plus?" Is there a mix of experience levels at the dance? What is the average age of the dancers?

Fortunately, the first three areas listed here are independent of the particular dance we are planning. This allows us to come up with a generic outline for a dance which satisfies the first three areas. This is our dance template. When we plan a particular dance, we can start with the template and fill in the content in response to the final two areas which are specific to the particular dance. This provides a convenient organization for this paper. The first major section will discuss how to develop a dance template which is specific to your philosophy and strengths. The second major section will discuss how to fill in the template with specifics suited for the purpose of the dance and the ability of the dancers.

Dance Program Template

The Dance Template is a list of six or seven tips with a description of some important characteristics about each tip. These characteristics include

- The purpose of each tip
- The relative difficulty of each tip
- The personality of each tip in terms of type of music and calling style
- The structure of the tip in terms of patter and singing calls.

Please note that this template becomes the starting place for planning each dance. It keeps us from having to reinvent the wheel each time. It is the default, but anything about it can be changed to suit the needs of a particular dance.

Generally Accepted Practices

This section focuses on practices which help to guide and constrain the programs. These are not decisions that must be considered at each dance. They represent a default.

Most callers would agree to the following points about structure.

- The dance is composed of tips.
- The tip generally has a patter call first, then a singing call, but may have two singing calls. It never has two patter calls.
- Plan on about 20 minutes per tip in a 2x2 dance.
- A two and a half hour dance will contain six or seven tips, depending on length of the tips, announcements and refreshments.

The main objective is that the dancers have an enjoyable dancing experience which implies that they are successful at dancing. Dancers who are in broken down squares consistently are not having fun. However, note that many aspects of them having an enjoyable evening are beyond the control of the caller. Consider the follow list of things which contribute to dancer enjoyment and note the ones over which we callers have control:

- Friendly dancers who welcome others into their square and are not judgmental regarding mistakes.
- Good refreshments
- Good sound for both music and voice. This includes clarity and volume level.
- Dancers are not rough. They don't risk injuring others. They don't try to push others into the right spot.
- Dancers practice a styling which is compatible with each other (i.e. hands up, hands down, twirls).
- Dancers are successful at getting through the calls.
- The caller's choreography is interesting.
- The caller is patient regarding dancer mistakes.
- The caller is personable and friendly to the dancers.

The point is that we may be the quarterback of the team, handling the ball on every play, but it takes the rest of the team to make the best dances.

Most callers would agree to the following points about content.

- The first tip should be very low risk to give the dancers a chance to warm up and get into the dance groove. This is especially true if you are a guest caller and the dancers are not familiar with your voice and moves.
- The last tip should be very low risk to allow the dancers to leave with a feeling of success even if some of the earlier tips did not go as well.
- The patter call is generally regarded as the meat of the tip with the singing call being much less challenging. This lets the dancers finish each tip with a successful experience.
- The first sequence in each tip should be lower risk than the rest of the tip. It frequently will be a ring or star based figure as opposed to a “Heads Square Thru” figure to get everyone dancing immediately.
- The caller should usually call to the level of the floor. In other words, if the dance is advertised as Plus but many can do only “soft plus” then call what they can do. Dancer success is more important than the advertising. An exception to this is a multi-level dance such as a festival where dancers are trying a level about their capability even though a lower level hall is available. In this case, the integrity of the advertised level is a stronger factor in deference to those who expected the advertised level.
- The caller should not call above the advertised level. Even if you know the floor is mostly Plus dancers at a Mainstream dance, call Mainstream. Sometimes the dance organizers will request an announced higher level tip, but this should never be initiated by the caller. Announced higher level tips have the following negative impact:
 - o It automatically divides the floor by dance level which can never improve the atmosphere of your dance.
 - o Those who must sit out paid the same price to get in and deserve a full dance program.
 - o It kills any multi-tip choreographic development.
- A good way to promote variety in the choreography is to select a call or sequence for special emphasis each tip. This is the tip theme.

These guidelines allow us to get a first cut at a dance template. We will setup a six tip template. I show a risk level number from 1 (low risk) to 5 (high risk) to contrast content. Note the generic nature of the template. It contains no specific material but has guidelines or targets for each tip.

Generic Dance Template

Tip #	Purpose	Content
1	Start easy for dancer warm up	Start with a ring or star figure. Add slightly harder figures to get a feeling for level of the floor. Risk level: 1-2
2	Try something a little interesting and different.	Dancers are warmed up and still fresh. They can take a little challenge. Risk level: 3-4
3	Back off a bit after the challenge of the second tip.	Select a theme but don't over work the theme. This is not a class drill or workshop. Risk Level: 2-3
4	This is a good place for a change of pace.	Try some "gimmicky" material or something that is unusual but not high risk. Risk Level: 3
5	This looks a lot like tip #3.	Dancers may be getting tired. Don't push the level here. Risk Level: 2-3
6	Let the dancers finish successfully	Two Singing Calls. First one up tempo. Second one more relaxing. Low risk material. Risk Level: 2

This is a sample template which conforms to the guidelines, but is not the only one. Modify this first to your liking. Keep in mind that it is just the template or starting place which can be modified each time it is used. Consider making two templates: one for a laid-back dance and one for a more aggressive dance which may include a workshop. Which tip is the best one for a workshop of new or more difficult material? I'm sure every call has an opinion about this.

Some of the practices are applied at the tip level rather than the dance level. This gives rise to a small patter call template.

The Patter Call Template

Sequence#	Content
First	It is customary to begin with a circle or star figure which is low risk. All dancers participate equally.
Main Material (length)	There is a "just right" length for a sequence. Although I have never actually timed them, I would guess that 30-45 seconds is a good length. Shorter sequences make a patter seem choppy and lacking content. Longer sequences risk more breakdowns and lose the excitement of the resolution.
Main Material (resolution)	Are your getouts boring and predictable? Consider planning some interesting getouts. Consider resolving to a Right & Left Grand rather than an Allemande left. Consider resolving to home.
Breaks	Breaks are like the middle break of a singing call. They are optional circle or star figures done near the middle of the tip for formational variety.
Last	Use low risk material. We do not want a broken down square to end the tip. Consider a sequence which will automatically stir the bucket for the square.

The Singing Call Template

The singing call will be address in more detail in a later section, but we present here the customary practices.

Subject	Content
Structure	Opener, 2 Figures, Middle Break, 2 Figures, Closer
Number of Figures and Figure Sequence	It is your decision whether to have a single figure which is called four times or two figures which are called twice each. If you choose two different figures (A and B), you may sequence them A-A-B-B or A-B-B-A. The first sequence is somewhat less risky because the men are in the same position both times. The second gives more variety in that each dancer has a different position when the figure is repeated. If one figure has more risk, then it should be the B figure so that the first and last sequences are more likely to be successful.
Opener, Break, & Closer	These are always circle figures, star figures, or grand square in which all dancers participate equally. You may use the same figure for the opener, break and closer or you may vary the figure.

Easy Versus Low Risk

Note that I have characterized level of difficulty using the term “low risk” rather than the term “easy.” I have adopted this practice because the terms “easy” and “hard” have a connotation of an absolute scale whereas level of risk is relative to the ability of the floor. For example, SCOOT BACK where different genders are turning in the center has a lower success rate on floors with many inexperienced dancers than a SCOOT BACK with same genders turning in the center. In any absolute scale I would call either version of SCOOT BACK “easy” but recognize that for some floors one position is higher risk than the other.

Customizing the Template for Caller Preferences

This section tailors the template to fit caller preferences, strengths, and dance philosophy. I will use my own opinions as an example, but encourage each caller to consider his or her own feelings about the areas presented here. First I will discuss my dance philosophy and what I consider my strengths. Then I will show how these personal preferences influence the development of a customized Dance Template which will serve as the starting place for all my dance planning. Each caller must think about his or her own dance philosophy to develop a template which feel comfortable.

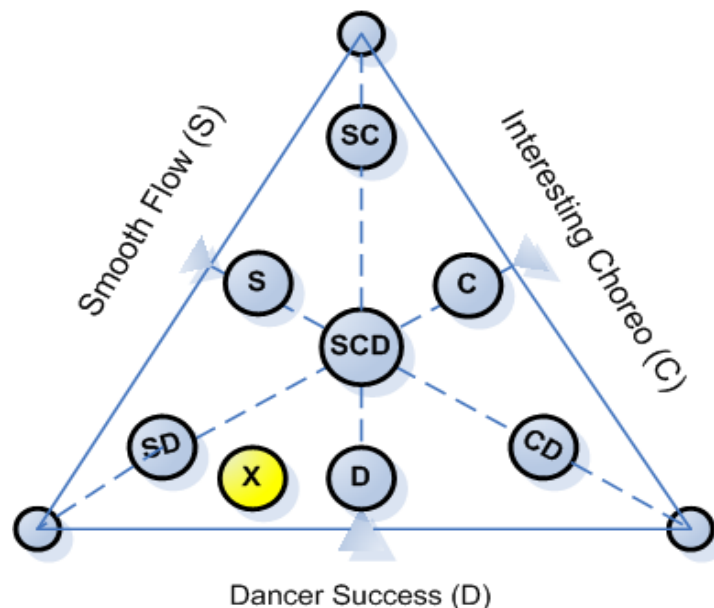
Dance Philosophy and Objectives

I have three objectives when I call: Dancer Success, Smooth, Flowing Dancing, Interesting Choreography.

I have always been fascinated by the interesting choreography and for many years this was my greatest weakness. I really wanted to show the dancers some great moves, but I did not have the skill to get the dancers through the material. This resulted in many broken down squares, unimpressed dancers, and a frustrated caller. One of my main influences when I began calling was Frank Lane from Estes Park, Colorado. He was smooth as glass and called really interesting material. Many years ago I attended his caller's college and began learning how to successfully get the dancers through the material. I believe I have progressed to the place where my choreography is a strength, but it has taken many, many years to turn the tide. For a comprehensive discussion of the techniques I discovered for choreography and dancer success, see another paper I have written: "Some Practical Ideas For More Interesting and Danceable Calling," Hal Barnes, December 2009.

The Objectives Triangle

The Objectives Triangle diagram below graphically shows the three basic objectives. However, these three objectives force trade-offs when we try to determine which is more important. For example, if I emphasize smooth dancing with few breaks in the action, then I must limit the risk of the choreography to achieve high dancer success. If I call choreography that is interesting and different and insist on flowing through it with few breaks, then I know more squares will be breaking down (low dancer success). From a programming perspective, these trade-offs are a benefit, because choosing different objectives for emphasis on each tip results in variety across the evening's program.



Each circle inside the triangle represents a choice of the objectives mix – the relative emphasis between the three objectives. The circles show different choices for the objectives mix. The closer the circle is to a side of the triangle, the stronger the emphasis on that objective. So circles **S**, **C**, and **D** represent primary emphasis on a single objective. In terms of percentage of attention we might say this is a 60%/20%/20% allocation. For example, circle **D** represents a willingness to interrupt smooth flow and keep choreography very simple to maximize dancer success.

Objective mixes with two letters (**SD**, **SC**, **CD**) represent an emphasis on two objectives equally at the expense of the third objective. For example, **CD** is a choice to call interesting material and ensure dancer success by a willingness to interrupt the flow as required to prevent a breakdown. In terms of allocation of attention I would call this 40%/40%/20%. The center point (**SCD**) is a choice to balance the three objectives equally. The allocation of attention is one third to each objective. This mix results in mediocrity in all areas: dancing is somewhat interesting, fairly smooth, and squares break down occasionally.

A perceptive reader may have noticed that I have equated interesting dancing with risky dancing. Certainly there are choreographic gems which are interesting and low risk, but in general “interesting” means “different” which means more risk even if we avoid complexity. My experience is that most interesting material that I really like requires careful treatment with the dancers and involves some risk. Techniques for overcoming risk to promote dance success is the principal topic of another paper I referenced above.

Where does a relatively new caller fit into this scheme? I believe the most appropriate objectives for a new caller are

- Dancer success. If I lose my pilot square, I’m dead.
- Caller consistency. I’m better off being consistently average than 50% great and 50% horrible.

After I had called about eight years, my biggest problem was consistency. Most tips would be fair to good but a few would be disasters. It doesn’t take too many disasters for dancers to lose interest and confidence in the caller. The yellow circle in the triangle above represents a good spot to achieve these objectives. I would characterize it as 60% focus on dancer success, 30% focus on keeping the dancers moving, and 10% on interesting choreography. As I recommend this position for new callers, I wish I had figured this out many years earlier when I was dropping squares and getting frustrated.

With this philosophical diversion I can now begin customizing the dance template. The first tip is definitely an **SD** on the chart which is consistent with the general template. The last tip is somewhere between **SD** and **SCD** depending on how the dance is going. Most other tips will be in the neighborhood of **SCD**.

I really want one tip where I focus on smooth dancing. I remember the first time I danced in a square that was as smooth as silk – no stopping, no hurrying. I was hooked and sought that

experience again. I want one tip each night to focus on giving this gift to the dancers. Mark this tip **S** on objectives mix.

I want the dancers to be better dancers when they leave my dance than when they came. I always have one “workshop” tip. In this case it means I might need to stop and walk thru a call, but only if they struggle. In this tip I pick an existing call in the advertised program that is weak. I generally come in with an idea of what this will be and may verify it in the first tip. Mark this tip **ID**. I am willing to give up smoothness, especially early in the tip. As the tip progresses I try to move to **SCD** by stopping less frequently.

The tailored dance template below reflects the generic one with my philosophy incorporated into the program.

The Tip Personality

The Tip Personality is the type of music and the calling style. These give variety to the tips. We all have a style of music we like best, but getting outside our comfort zone offers more variety to the dancers. My preferred music style is Country with a good backbeat. I also like bluesy music and I have learned to call to a couple of contemporary front beat “dance music” tunes. There are a few tunes that really promote smooth dancing and the distinction is in the rhythm. I like Latin rhythms or jigs for tips where smooth dancing is the objective.

I have three principal calling styles:

- “High energy” style works well with SD or SC objectives. This uses vocal techniques to add enthusiasm to the dance, but breaks in the flow break the mood. This style is ideal for adding colorful “Marshall Flippo” style hash.
- Smooth flow (**S**) and Workshop (**C** and **CD**) tips require a minimalistic style with little more than the calls and some helping phrases. This is a “minimal” delivery.
- SCD and D objectives allow some short periods of continuous calling and optional patter to add color broken by more choppy periods to support dancer success or unfamiliar choreography. I consider it the “normal” style which is between the other two.

Hal's Dance Template

Taken together, the objective mix and the tip personality allow for considerable flexibility across the program. The Generic Template is modified with these characteristics to produce Hal's Dance Template. Note that the Personality is constrained by the choice of Objective mix.

Tip #	Purpose	Tip Parameters
1	Warm-up Tip - Start easy for dancer warm up.	Risk level: 1-2 Objectives: SD Country Music; Normal Style
2	Workshop Tip - Try something a little interesting and different.	Risk level: 3-4 Objectives: ID -> SCD Country Music; Normal Style with additional helping words.
3	Theme-based Tip - Back off a bit after the challenge of the second tip.	Risk Level: 2-3 Objectives: SCD Front beat; Mix of High Energy & Normal Style
4	Smooth Tip - Focus on smooth dancing. Long calls lend themselves for smoother dancing than short calls.	Risk Level: 2-3 Objectives: S Latin or Jig Music; Minimal Style
5	Theme-based Tip with some gimmicks - This is a good place for a change of pace.	Risk Level: 3 Objectives: SCD Variety of Music with good energy. Normal Style
6	Hot Rod Tip - High energy patter with a moderate to laid back singing call.	Risk Level: 2 Objectives: SD High energy front beat music; High Energy Style

Singing Call Philosophy

I noted above that most callers use patter as the thinking part of tip and the singing call as the laid back part. However, my philosophy about singing calls is very different and, as far as I know, not widely held. When I focus on a particular theme in a patter call, I like to have the singing call figure use the same theme. I certainly agree that the singing call should have a high success rate so I use the patter call to setup the singing call. Since I am not that good at extemporaneously putting together singing call figures, I create them before the dance or use one from the hundreds that I have previously written. Of course this means I have the overhead of organizing and indexing all these singing calls. Over time, the practice has become the tail wagging the dog. In other words, I select a singing call figure for a tip and let that drive the theme for the patter. I generally use two singing call figures - one reflecting the tip theme

and the other being low risk. I begin and end with the low risk figure. Sometimes when the patter did not go so well, I bail out of the theme-based figure and use a second low risk figure. When the figure is particularly interesting or rewarding, I will use it four times. Bottom line is that I either memorize or read all but the most basic singing call figures. Callers without a lot of experience should do the same as the constraints of inventing singing call figures on the fly make that a more difficult game than doing the patter call.

The Dance Program for a Specific Dance

This section starts with the dance template and looks at the particular dance to fill in the template with specific content. My general approach includes the following steps:

- 1) Given the purpose of the dance and my knowledge of the dancers, identify the dance-related objectives and constraints in level and material.
- 2) Generate a list of material which could be appropriate. This list is organized into tip themes, openers/breaks, getouts, supporting ideas, and gimmicks or memorized routines.

For each tip

- 3) Populate the template with principle themes by drawing from the list, paying special attention to match the risk level of the tip to the selected theme.
- 4) Assign the “B” singing call figures to each tip which supports the principal theme. If I don’t have an appropriate singing call in my notebook, then write a new singing call figure for the tip which is appropriate for the dance level.
- 5) Select some easy singing call figure as the “A” figure for each tip. Make sure that the easy singing call is different from the “B” figure which was assigned above.
- 6) Look for any additional moves from the selected singing call which may need some dancer preparation and add it to the patter section.

After the principal themes and singing calls are resolved

- 7) Fill in each tip with choices from the additional lists: openers, getouts, supporting ideas, and so on. Pay particular attention to the packaging of the supporting ideas and the getouts to the principal theme. This will probably result in shifting some material around.
- 8) Add a couple of easy figures at the bottom in case a theme does not go well and I need to bail out in the singing call.
- 9) Review the whole program for continuity and make sure that the theme and related singing call match to the target risk level from the template. My tendency is to pick

material that is too challenging so I must be extremely careful in this assessment. I review the program with my wife and incorporate any of her suggestions on material.

I try to get this done no later than the morning of the dance so I can put it on the shelf. Then I come back and look at the whole program with fresh eyes to see if my assessment of it has changed. Now we will look at each of these steps in more detail.

Step 1: Identify the Dance-Related Objectives and Constraints

I will choose a recent dance for my club in Bowie, MD, as the example for this section. I do not consider this the “perfect dance” or myself the perfect caller. Rather I find instructional papers which never get past generalities to be superficial, no matter how valid the content. This plan is real, not contrived for this paper, and it prompts many topics that would not be found if we had stayed generic.

Although the Belair Square Cats club is a full plus club, they hold one dance a year for the square dance class students, the Half Way Dance, usually held the fourth Saturday of January. The level for this dance is the Callerlab Basic program, 51 calls ending with *ferris wheel*. For a list of all the calls in the Basic Program see the following Callerlab web site:

<http://www.callerlab.org/DancePrograms/AllProgramDocuments/tabid/610/Default.aspx>

Historically this is always one of our most popular dances. This year we had 13 squares dancing with some people on the sidelines. Our hall holds at most 10 square for comfortable dancing, so the floor was pretty tight. A really interesting note about this dance is the mix of dance experience. While you might expect class members to comprise a majority of dancers, this is never the case. This year about 15% were class members, about 35% were Mainstream dances, and 50% were experienced Plus dancers. There are no Mainstream tips or Plus tips during the evening. Even if no students attended the dance, the level would still be Basic the whole evening because that is the advertised level for the dance. Everyone who comes understands that.

This background material is very important for considering the dance-related objectives and constraints. My main objective and challenge is to keep the Plus dancers interested while not losing the class members. One factor that works in my favor is that the ratio of experienced dancers to students is so high I can get away with material that would not work for a room full of students. My main constraint is that I cannot call anything above the Basic program which leaves me without *fold*, *tag the line*, *centers in*, *cast off*, *clover leaf* and a host of other calls that roll off my tongue so easily. I know that the floor will probably be crowded which means that I should avoid formations which spread the square out like tidal waves or tidal two-faced lines. I know my caller friend Kenny Farris is coming with his club to the dance, so I will plan on one tip with two singing calls which we can share.

Other important considerations for this section:

- Are you the club caller or a guest caller?
- Does the club take a long break for refreshments? After the break, dancers will dance like they did in the first tip.
- Are you one of many callers? This is common for benefit dances. Your ability to put together a cohesive program is pretty limited if you are not the only caller for the evening.

Step 2: Generate Material List

This is the creative step of the process. My primary focus is developing principal themes for each tip, but I will also note breaks and supporting material. My list of themes come from the following sources:

- Previous singing calls. I thumb through my notebook of past singing call figures in which I have buried previous themes. This is the reason for my previous comment that I will frequently choose a singing call figure and let it drive the tip theme.
- I am constantly playing with ideas in my mind which sometimes develop into tip themes. One particularly creative period for me is my time in the shower where ideas abound. My clubs have come to call the more interesting material “shower calls.” These ideas will not yet have a related singing call.
- In the section below on Micro-Programming I recommend an exercise which will help callers develop their own creative ideas suitable for tip themes. It works for me.

I start each patter call with an “opener” which is a circle or star figure. I try to find some interesting figures for this so they don’t become boiler plate or dead space. I list some openers to help me remember my recent efforts here even though they are not particularly related to the tip theme. I have a few memorized figures which are interesting and special. I would stop short of calling them gimmicks, but I list a couple to put in each dance.

The last page of this paper is my program for the Half Way Dance. I will use that program to provide the examples for each of these sections. Check it now and refer back to each through this following discussion. I have come up with the following list of ideas and themes for this dance:

- Triple Allemande, Star Promenades (these are figures from the traditional square dancing)
- Circle Half, Veer Left to a 2-faced line; Circle right half, veer right to a 2-faced line
- Flutter wheels from stars
- Stars blending to waves
- Emphasizing stars. For example, Heads star left to corner

- Lines of 3
- Circle 4 Go 3/4
- Grand square with same sexes
- Wheel around

Steps 3-6: Populate the Template with Themes

I draw from the list and assign a principal theme to tips two thru five. The risk of the theme must match the target risk from the template. The first tip is the warm-up. It does not have a theme. Rather, I list calls that I want to see if the floor can easily handle. First, I identify the theme for the workshop tip, then do the first tip, followed by the third through the last.

Tip #2: Workshop

I decided to use *Circle right half, veer right to a 2-faced line* as the figure for the workshop tip. This is obviously aimed at the experienced dancers, but is manageable by the students. I also want to work on *split circulate* on the workshop tip for the students. On the Basic program *split circulate* is annotated that it could be postponed. Many new dancers get confused between *8 circulate* and *split circulate* so I want to work *8 circulate* the first tip and pick up *split circulate* on the workshop tip. On the program, I included *slide thru* with a question mark. This was based on the possibility of having young students where the height differences would make *star thru* uncomfortable. In that case, I would have picked up *slide thru* in the workshop, but it did not turn out to be a problem.

I had to write new singing call figures at the Basic Level for *circle right, veer right* and *split circulate*. The first is in position 2B on the program. The second is in position 3A. It originally started in 2A but was moved. The reason will be discussed in a later section.

Tip #1: Warm-up

The most common source of calls in the first tip is to check out the dance level of the floor. *Ferris Wheel* is the last call of the Basic program. If a class is behind, they may not know *Ferris Wheel* yet. *Half Sashay* is included to see if they know the difference between *Half Sashay* and *Rollaway*.

Another source of material in the first tip is to setup the workshop tip. I noted above that I need to hit *8 circulate* a few times. I also need to work *Heads lead right, circle half, veer left to a two-faced line* so they will be comfortable with the “normal” position before the workshop tip. As soon as I say “circle” at least half the floor with break to facing lines without listening. By including this I can get the attention of everyone and convince them that it is important to listen.

A third source of material for the first tip is unique to this type of dance. I need to find something that is unusual for the experienced dancers to convince them that this dance will not be simple and boring. I came up with three possibilities:

- I noted before that some experienced dancers will have trouble with *Heads lead right, circle half, veer left to a two-faced line* because it is not danced frequently.
- *Dive Thru* is virtually unknown at a Plus dance in favor of *Pass to the Center*, but it is needed here. Experienced dancers may find this different.
- *Wheel and Deal* from a two-faced line will cause great confusion among experienced dancers due to *ferris wheel* being used almost exclusively. At least 25% of the floor will *ferris wheel* the first time. Note that the students will be less likely to err than the seasoned dancers because most of their drill has been *wheel & deal* from two-faced lines. This is exactly the type of call I am looking for.

Using these calls in the first tip will put the experienced dancers a bit off balance which is good for a Basic level dance. It will get their attention. This is quite a bit to cover on the first tip. I may not get the time to cover it all, but I must cover *circulates* and the *veer left* figures for the workshop tip so they are underlined as priorities.

I picked out two low risk singing calls for the first tip. The second one has *double pass thru, leads partner trade* which may be a little unusual to the students, so I note to practice that in the patter call. (This is step #6 in the procedure outlined above.) I probably should have used an *8 circulate* in the “A” singing call figure to reinforce that call, but I opted for very high success in my selection.

Tip #3

I decided to modify the sequence from my template at this point by moving the smooth tip from #4 to #3. I did this because I am planning two singing calls with my friend Kenny in tip #5. So the fifth tip will be very easy and I wanted some stronger content between the smooth tip and the two singing calls. This demonstrates that the template is just the starting place and can be modified to suit the dance.

For the smooth tip I frequently don't have a specific choreographic theme because the dominate theme is smooth dancing. Note from the template and the objectives triangle that creativity and interesting dancing is the least important objective. I decided to feature stars predominately because they are smooth. So I am featuring stars blending to waves and all couples flutterwheel/reverse flutter. These both will need very careful treatment with helping words, especially for the guests and student dancers. However, these moves are standard fare for those who dance to me regularly.

I wrote both singing call figures at the Basic Level focusing on smooth flow specifically for this dance. The figure in position 2A was originally in 3A and flows very well, but had to be swapped. The figure now in 3A can be made to flow well, but is not quite as good.

Tip #4

I now go back to the list which was created in step 2 and pick *circle 4 go 3/4 round* as the theme. I decided to use this figure only with same sex partners to improve the dancer success. I spent a little time thinking of different ways at the Basic Level to setup same sex couples. Coming up with a singing call at the Basic Level which featured this theme took some time. For the “A” figure I put in the Gentle on My Mind figure. Don Franklin made a classic figure which is great at the Basic level. I don’t see another place to put it. However, this figure has the *men pass thru and go right single file* which must be setup in the patter.

Tip #5

I picked two low risk singing call figures. The “B” figure has *separate around 2* which is different enough to be interesting but not to add much risk.

Tip #6

This is the high energy tip (refer back to the template). I don’t pick a theme but like the first tip, I note a few figures to try. From the template note that the risk level is low and the objective is SD, smooth dancing with high dancer success. No tricks this tip.

Step 7: Fill In Supporting Material

Supporting material includes openers and special figures. I try to have a different opener for each tip. Note the opener on each tip. In tip #4 I have put in same sex *grand square* because it fits well with the *circle ¾* which will also be with same sex couples.

Step 8: Choose Some Extra Simple Singing Call Figures

I usually put some extra singing call figures in the last row (X). The figure in XA is an additional simple figure. The one in XB was the theme figure from tip #4.

Step 9: Review the Program

In the final step we review the program looking at a number of items.

First, check to see if the tips follow the model in the template, making sure deviations are on purpose.

Assess the risk level as compared with the template. My biggest weakness is planning a program which is too hard. Whereas each tip might be OK, as a whole I might have too many tips which are pushing the level.

Look at the singing call figures to see that they make sense and have variety. The two most frequent starts for singing call figures are *heads square thru* and *heads promenade half way*. Many of my figures start with *4 ladies chain*. I check each singing call to make sure that the start is different for the “A” and “B” calls and that they work well together. For example, the figure in 3A was original in 2A, the workshop tip. But I noticed that the “A” figure has *heads lead left* while the “B” figure has *heads lead right*. That will be confusing to the dancers so I swapped 2A and 3A.

Initially the figure in XB was in 4B. Then on review I decided to use the “A” figure four times. So I moved the “B” figure to the XB slot as an extra and plan to use the “A” figure four times.

During the dance I was able to follow this program pretty closely. I was pleased to see that the experienced dancers were sufficiently challenged by the workshop. One disappointment was that I did not use the singing call figure in 3B, but I will use it at the next dance. Overall the dance hit the right level. The floor was crowded but I didn’t see many breakdowns. The experienced dancers did not seem to think the dance was boring.

To recap, we started with the template, then developed a list of ideas which we used to populate the tips with themes. Then we added the singing call figures and the supporting material. A final review resulted in a couple of tweaks.

Reusability

Reusability occurs at two levels: the program level and the tip level. At the program level, I could start with this program for planning another Half Way dance since I generally do two or three a year. However, for a Plus dance I would choose a past Plus level program, not this program. I would change the aspects that make this program distinctive since it is likely that I will have some of the same dancers at multiple dances. The most distinctive tip in this program is the workshop tip (#2) so I would definitely change to different workshop material. However, some of the material in the first tip was chosen to setup the workshop, so it would change as well. Tip #5 would certainly change since it was included to work with a caller friend for that specific dance. Many callers like to end dances with two singing calls although that is unusual for me. But in planning the next dance, I might shift two singing calls to the last tip and do the Hot Rod in tip #5. These are just examples of the type of thinking which occurs in starting with a past program and modifying it rather than starting from scratch.

Tip reusability occurs when I have started with a different program as my basis and borrow a tip from this program to include. In such cases, I would likely use the singing call which corresponded to the tip theme (B call), but replaced the A singing call figure with something else. For example, I like the new singing call figure in 3B which I wrote for this dance. I might just pick up the third tip and put it into another dance, even a Plus dance.

Microprogramming

One of the most difficult skills to develop in calling is choosing the right call in the second by second decisions as we extemporaneously create the patter. Ideally, the call choice must

- work from the ending position of the current call which the dancers are currently doing,
- match the body flow from the current call which the dancers are currently doing,
- fit the right level of risk we have chosen for this tip given the ability of the dancers,
- be selected from the right Callerlab program (in this case the Basic Program),
- avoid the standard calling clichés that can make our calling boring, and
- move toward resolution if we are in that phase of the sequence.

Furthermore, this correct selection happens about every two seconds while we are calling, and we must be in the right ballpark a high percentage of the time. This is microprogramming and it takes years of experience or a great intuition to do it well.

Aside from pointing out the objectives above, I have only one exercise which promotes better microprogramming. Pick a particular formation and generate as many possibilities as you can for what the next call (or two calls) could be. Then rank these choices in terms of how interesting (high, medium, low) and how risky (ranked 1 – 5) they are for the average dancers. The real gems are those which are most interesting with medium to low risk. Take particular note of these gems. The real benefit is that these choices will be registered in your head and will show up when you are calling.

We will go through this exercise for the formation “completed double pass thru” and limit our choices to the Mainstream Program to keep the list shorter. The table below shows the results. First review the list of calls and visualize them or use square dance dolls to help picture the action. A thorough understanding of the choreography is important before ranking the attributes.

Call Brainstorming

Cool Choreo Ranking is Low (L), Medium (M), High (H)

Risk Ranking is 1 to 5 with 5 being highest risk. "Choice" is a sequential numbering just to identify the rows.

Risk	Cool Choreo	Choice	Mainstream Calls After Double Pass Thru
1	L	1	centers in cast off $\frac{3}{4}$
2	M	2	Centers in Cast Off $\frac{1}{2}$
1	L	3	Cloverleaf
1	L	4	First Couple Left, Next Go Right
1	M	5	Leads Partner Trade
3	H	6	Leads Wheel Around
2	M	7	Leads Cloverleaf, Others step forward & Partner Trade (Ends in a square)
5	H	8	zoom & new leads partner trade
3	H	9	Leads cloverleaf, Others partner trade and roll, centers pass thru
1	M	10	All face right [or left, in, out]
5	H	11	Centers in, just the men [or women] cast off $\frac{3}{4}$, couples circulate
3	M	12	Centers in, same sex partner trade
3	M	13	Centers in, centers run
3	H	14	Centers wheel around, all trade by
2	H	15	Leads cloverleaf while trailers half sashay & separate around one
2	H	16	All half sashay and cloverleaf
2	M	17	Leaders half sashay, all cloverleaf
4	H	18	First cpl go left, next cpl step forward and partner trade to offset lines.
1	M	19	Lead couple turn back, do sa do to a wave

If you don't like my rankings, then apply your own. This must be individualized to each caller's taste. Note that for some choices, the risk may be high initially but drops dramatically after the first use. The sequence *Centers in, centers run* falls into this category. Now we look for interesting calls with a low risk. Choices 5, 10, 15, and 16 show promise. I particularly like choices 15 and 16 for their potential flow once the dancers are comfortable with the idea. Choices 8 and 18 have potential as workshop material. This is a particularly good exercise for new callers. It is admittedly time consuming to do this exercise from the various possible formations, but it pays big dividends in terms of microprogramming and interesting dancing.

Wrap Up

We began by recognizing the value of planning a dance in advance. The first section introduced the idea of a personalized dance programming template to encompass those aspects of programming which are not specific to a particular dance. The template derives from generally accepted practices, personal dance philosophy, and personal strengths. Then the template was tailored based on specific caller preferences. An extended discussion of dance objectives and the relative emphasis in a given tip showed how varying that emphasis leads to variety across the program.

The second section focused on populating the template with material for a specific dance, taking into account the purpose of the dance and knowledge of the dancers. My particular philosophy about singing calls played a key role in how I populate the template. Using a recent dance as an example, we built a program for the dance, discussing the detail considerations which can only be appreciated in doing the work. We concluded with a short introduction to microprogramming and a simple, but beneficial exercise to improve microprogramming skills.

Hal Barnes, 2/27/2011

Updated 10/28/2012

Bowie Class Level Dance 2/12/2011

	Patter	Singing A	Singing B
1	Open: W Ctr, G Sashay <u>Circulates</u> , Ferris, Half Sashay Dbl Pst, Leads P Trade <u>Circle Half</u> , veer L to 2F Lines Wheel & Deal (2F=), Dive Thru	H PROM ½, LEAD R, CIRCLE =, FWD&BK, PST, BEND=, TOUCH1/4, CIRC, G RUN, SWING C	H SQ-4, DSD~, SWING T, G RUN, CPLS CIRC, FERRIS, DBL PST, LEADS P TRADE, SWING C
2	Open: Triple Allemande Split circulate, Slide Thru? Lead L, Circle Right, Veer Right	H PROM1/2 LEAD R, DSD~, SWING T, W CIRC, GT, G RUN, BEND=, REV FLUTTER INTO PROM C	H LEAD L, CIRCLE R ½, VEER R TO 2F=, CPLS CIRC, BEND=, FLUTTER,SWEEP, PST, TRADE BY, LA(NEW), PROM C
3	SMOOTH Open: Alamo Style, L Swing Thru Stars to Waves 4 Cpls Flutter	H LEAD R, TOUCH1/4, SPLIT CIRC, G RUN, REV FLUT &SWEEP, PST, TRADE BY, LA(NEW), PROM C	ALL CPLS FLUTTER, H SQ-4, RH-STAR TO ~, 8 CIRC, SWING C, PROM
4	Open: Lines of 3 Circle 3/4 G PST, Go R SF Same Sex Grand Square	Gentle on my Mind – 4W CHAIN, H R<, ROLL AWAY, CIRCLE LEFT, 4G PST, GO R SF, W PST, SWING C	
5	2 Singing Calls w/ Kenny	H SQ-4, S 1/2SAS, SWING-T, G RUN, REV FLUT, PS~, 8 CIRC, SWING C, PROM C	H PST, SEP@2=, FWD&BK, BX-GNAT, R<, TOUCH1/4, CIRC, G RUN, LA(NEW), PROM C
6	Hot Rod- Open: Backtrack Same Sex in center Cts arch ends duck thru,	4W CHAIN, H PROM ½, SQ-4, STEP~, SWING-T DBL, SWING C, PROM C	H SQ-4, RH STAR TO ~, WT, W RUN, FERRIS, CTS PST, SWING C, PROM C
X		H SQ-4, SPLIT 2@1 TO LINES, BX-GNAT, R<, FLUTTERWHEEL SWEEP1/4, SWING C, PROM C	H CTR W/DSD, STAR-T, DBL PST, ALL FACE R, CPLS CIRC, BEND=, FWD&BK, CIRCLE4 ¾, SWING C, PROM C