

Spin Technique

Swing Dance Basics ♦ TC Swing

“Weebles wobble but they don’t fall down!” I know – I’m dating myself. In the early 1970s, Weebles were a flash-in-the-pan egg-shaped toy that lurched from side to side, looking for all the world like they would topple over, but somehow they never did. And that perfectly describes what I see way too often on the dance floor! Dancers set up for a really hot spin, but instead it tanks. Some dancers recover with a little paddle step to complete the pivot, others careen out of control and out of reach of their partner, and a few just stand there with a sheepish look on their face, hoping that no one noticed.

When well executed, great spins can add great fun to social dancing. But when a dancer isn’t confident about their personal spin-ability, it can be intimidating. Great spins come from a solid understanding and application of good technique.

POSTURE I frequently say, “Stand up straight, bend your knees, roll forward onto the balls of your feet.” Let’s break that down and analyze the concept.

- “Stand up straight” means straightening your back – the good posture you mom wants to see. Bring the shoulders back and down, pull the tummy in, and tuck the butt under. This requires activating the abs and back muscles to hold it all together, which will help everything about your dancing!
- “Bend your knees” means soften them just enough to lower your center of gravity and bring your body into a relaxed, bouncy posture.
- To “roll forward onto the balls of your feet,” shift your weight forward into an athletic “ready” position, like you’re getting ready to ski down the bunny hill. Your back should still be straight, but is now tilted diagonally forward with your shoulders over your knees and your hips over your heels. (Don’t just lift your heels keeping your back upright – that looks funny, feels funny, and makes dancing way too hard!) Now you’re in the posture of the African tribal dances that lay the foundation for Lindy Hop styling.

PIVOT ON AN AXIS The axis that you’re turning on starts at the top of your head and ends at the ball of the foot that you’re pivoting on. When you prep for a spin, shift your hips to the side so that your weight and balance is centered over the pivoting foot (don’t tilt it to the left or right). Keep your arms relaxed and rounded, elbows slightly out from your sides and in front of your body, and hands at hip level.

YOU’RE READY TO SPIN! Your body is in a low, athletic position, you’ve centered your balance on your turning axis, and your arms are rounded in an easy, relaxed frame. Keep your shoulders and hips in line with each other so the torso moves as one solid unit. Practice rotating your body back and forth, generating the motion from your hips, like the center post agitator in a washing machine. Once this feels comfortable, slightly wind up in the opposite direction of the pivot, then release and let the momentum carry you through the spin. As you spin, let your energy sink down to the floor (like a corkscrew going down into a cork). Keep your other foot right under your body, so that it doesn’t pull you off center. As you practice, self-check to make sure you’re using the techniques that make the spin flow easily. Let physics do the work so you don’t have to!

COMMON PROBLEMS WITH SPINS When first working on your spins, it’s typical to encounter some stumbling blocks. Here are some tips for avoiding common pitfalls.

- Don’t push off from one foot to pivot on the other. This causes a weight shift from the non-spinning foot to the spinning foot, effectively starting the rotation with a tilted axis. This will make you tilt off in another direction and lose your balance as you rotate. Instead, a slight wind-up from the hips generates a rotating action in your body instead of a traveling action.
- Don’t rise up as you pivot. This will take your posture out of the low, forward, grounded body position, changing your center of balance and your turning axis. As you begin to rise up in the turn, you’ll be pulled off balance.
- Don’t keep your arms glued to your sides. The rounded shape of your natural dance frame assists the good physics that help the turn work better!

Spinning & Balance Drills

These drills will help you isolate individual elements of spins to improve your technique.

BASIC SPINS – BOTH FEET IN BOTH DIRECTIONS

Practice spinning in both directions on both feet so that your body learns its center of balance in all situations. Don't worry about completing a full circle; instead focus on good technique to make spinning easier.

PIVOTING THROUGH STEPS

This drill helps to develop control of your pivots on both feet in both directions. As you move through the drill, you'll start by pivoting continuously in one direction, then you'll repeat the drill pivoting in the other direction.

Quarter Turns, Alternating Feet (also practice with Half and Full Turns)

- Take weight with your left foot, pivot to the left 1/4 turn and hold your balance.
- Shift your weight to your right foot, again pivot to the left 1/4 turn and hold your balance.
- Complete 6 full circles rotating to the left and alternating the feet: left-right-left-right. Use slow steps for the first 2 circles and quick steps for last 4 circles. Then repeat the drill rotating to the right.

NOTE It's okay to use the heel of your pivoting foot to help your balance, but don't "kick-stand" with your other foot. Also, don't turn your foot as you step, then rotate your body to catch up with your foot.

TRAVELING & PIVOTING THROUGH STEPS

For this drill, always begin with your knees pointed to the left corner (45 degrees from center) and your weight on your left foot. As you complete the drill, you'll pivot back and forth from one corner to other and back again.

Step – Collect – Pivot

- Move forward towards the left corner as you step onto your right foot. Collect your balance (bring the left foot under your body close to the right foot). Pivot 90 degrees to the right to face the right corner.
- Move forward towards the right corner as you step onto your left foot. Collect your balance (bring the right foot under your body close to the left foot). Pivot 90 degrees to the left to face the left corner.

Continue this pattern for eight steps moving forward, then eight steps moving backward. Do the pattern slowly and deliberately to control your balance, then repeat it quickly to smooth out the movement.

Pivot – Step – Collect

- Pivot 90 degrees to the right to face the right corner. Step forward towards the right corner onto your right foot. Collect your balance (bring the left foot under your body close to the right foot).
- Pivot 90 degrees to the left to face the left corner. Step forward towards the left corner onto your left foot. Collect your balance (bring the right foot under your body close to the left foot).

Continue the pattern as above, moving forward and backward, both slowly and quickly.

TRAVELING & PIVOTING THROUGH TRIPLE-STEPS

The triple-step's dominant foot is the one that you step with first and that travels, while the other one collects. "Step-collect-step."

Triple-Steps – Turning In Place

Very slightly and subtly opening and closing your knees as you turn through a triple step helps your momentum, so you can move more easily through rotating triple-steps.

- Start by practicing opening and closing the knees (heels together to open, toes together to close).
- Rotate LEFT with a Left Triple-Step: left step opens your knees, right closes, left opens (Left-a-Left = Open-a-Open). Then continue rotating LEFT with a Right Triple-Step: right step closes your knees, left opens, right closes (Right-a-Right = Close-a-Close).
- Repeat the exercise moving to the RIGHT, reversing the open-close motion.

Triple-Steps – Traveling in a Straight Line

Drill triple-steps moving forward and backward, traveling only with the dominant foot: "Step-Collect-Step." Alternate the dominant foot with each triple step, keeping movement evenly paced: Left-a-Left, Right-a-Right.

Triple-Steps – Traveling & Turning

Pointing your toes in the direction of travel, step towards your destination and pivot, collect your balance under your body with the other foot, then step towards your destination again to complete the triple-step. Remember to "travel first, pivot second" as you move your body towards your destination.