

Understanding Basic Rhythm Changes

Swing Dance Basics ♦ TC Swing

8-count Rhythm Notation

1 – 2	3 – a – 4	5 – 6	7 – a – 8
double	triple	double	triple

6-count Rhythm Notation

1 – 2	3 – a – 4	5 – a – 6
double	triple	triple

Every figure has a beginning, a middle and an end:

Beginning	Middle	End
Create Momentum <i>“get things going”</i>	STUFF HAPPENS <i>“do stuff”</i>	Conclusion / Extension <i>“finish things up”</i>

8- and 6-Count figures begin and end the same way:

Begin with a double step, starting with the #1 foot.

End with a triple step, ending on the #2 foot.

The difference is what happens in the middle:

8-count: More stuff happens – we need all 4 counts to get it done.

6-count: Less stuff happens – we only need 2 counts to get it done.

	Beginning	Middle	End
8-count	Momentum 1 – 2 	MORE STUFF HAPPENS 3 – a – 4 5 – 6 	Conclusion / Extension 7 – a – 8
LEAD'S feet	L – R	L – a – L R – L	R – a – R
FOLLOW'S feet	R – L	R – a – R L – R	L – a – L
6-count	Momentum 1 – 2 	LESS STUFF HAPPENS 3 – a – 4 	Conclusion / Extension 5 – a – 6
LEAD'S feet	L – R	L – a – L	R – a – R
FOLLOW'S feet	R – L	R – a – R	L – a – L

Which foot is #1 and which is #2?

- The #1 foot is the one you step with first in a figure, and the #2 foot is the one you step with last.
- For the LEAD: the LEFT foot is the #1 foot, and the RIGHT foot is the #2 foot.
- For the FOLLOW: the RIGHT foot is the #1 foot, and the LEFT foot is the #2 foot.
- Side note: For both LEADS and FOLLOWS, whenever you're hanging out and waiting for your partner, keep your weight on your #2 foot so you're ready to immediately step with your #1 foot.

How to LEAD and FOLLOW the correct 8- or 6-count footwork:

The goal is to keep momentum flowing throughout the dance. Each figure has a natural flow from the beginning to the end, and one figure flows right into the next. More complex figures take more time, requiring all 8 counts to complete. Simpler figures don't take as much time and can be completed in 6 counts.

The key is count 5. It's the LEAD'S responsibility on count 5 to make it clear to the FOLLOW that either you're still in the middle of the figure (more stuff is happening), or you're at the end (less stuff is happening). In a basic pass the FOLLOW takes the final triple step going to extension on 5-a-6.

How to indicate the end of the figure:

In Open Position: Lower the connected hand while allowing the FOLLOW to go to full extension.

In Closed Position: Travel back on the triple step with the weight strongly over the #2 foot, then continue to move smoothly into the rock-step of the new figure with no break in momentum.

Common traits and concepts of basic 8- and 6-count figures:

Swing-outs typically need 8 counts because catching the FOLLOW'S momentum, turning her around, and sending her back where she came from is more complex and takes more time. If you try to do a standard swing-out with 6-count footwork, you won't have enough time to get through the whole figure.

Basic passes typically take just 6 counts, as the FOLLOW'S travel from one end of her path to the other doesn't take as much time. If you try to do a basic pass with 8-count footwork, you'll end up stalling out the momentum at the end of the figure with all those extra counts to finish up.

In general, the Lead's rotation is 180 degrees for 6-count figures and 360 degrees for 8-count figures.

Circle To Closed

- In a 6-count circle to closed the LEAD typically rotates 180 degrees and the FOLLOW feels the final triple step moving backwards on 5-a-6.
- In an 8-count circle to closed the LEAD typically rotates 360 degrees and the FOLLOW feels the turning double step on 5-6 (more stuff) before moving backwards into the final triple step on 7-a-8.

Tuck Turn

- In a 6-count tuck turn, the LEAD lowers the hands on 5-a-6 to allow the FOLLOW'S extension at the end of the figure.
- In an 8-count tuck turn, the LEAD has time to give the FOLLOW a second rotation on 5-6 (more stuff) before lowering the hand into extension on 7-a-8.

When the LEAD adds "more stuff" to a 6-count pass (180 degree rotation) it becomes an 8-count figure.

Going into count 5 of a pass, the LEAD can add a second rotation to create an 8-count figure. When the FOLLOW feels the second rotation, she adds a second double step on 5-6 (the extra two beats) before going into extension on the final triple step (7-a-8).

Do a few basic inside passes, focusing on the natural flow from the beginning to the middle to the end of the figure. Notice that on count 4 the FOLLOW has almost but not quite completed rotation. This gives the LEAD the opportunity on count 5 to either lower the hand to allow the FOLLOW'S extension (6-count), or to bring the FOLLOW into an additional rotation before going to extension (8-count).