Training candidates for a professional examination is to some extent a specialized business. The teacher who excels with beginners or with competition dancers may be comparatively weak in training students for examinations.

Fortunately much of the preparatory work can be done by the candidate, if he or she knows the correct way of presenting the work in the examination room.

The method of approach is similar for all examinations, and both students and teachers should find these notes of inestimable value.

To Start: It is most important that the candidate achieve a reasonably good standard of dancing before worrying about the technical side of the examination. Students and even established teachers who spend much of their time teaching beginners are often poor dancers.

To start your training take a partner and dance groups of Basic and Standard figures. Study your dancing with great care. Now get an examination syllabus, and dance solo every Basic figure in the Waltz, as Man and Lady. If possible dance in front of a mirror, and keep practicing until you feel you have a correct and confident interpretation of each figure. Continue in the same way with the other dances until you are reasonably sure that your solo demonstrations are smart and correct.

You are now ready to commence the technical side of your training, and this is what you should do:

Technical Training: Read the first few pages of ‘The Ballroom Technique’, and make sure you understand how to read and study the charts.

Headings: There are 7 important headings in the charts. They are:

- Positions of Feet
- Alignment
- Amount of Turn
- Rise and Fall
- Footwork
- Sway
- CBM

Candidates may also be asked to “Describe” a figure. This is dealt with later in these notes. Before explaining how these 7 points should be studied and presented I will give a few general hints of great importance. Study them now and remember to refer to them again and again during the period of training.

1. Examining can be a nerve-racking business for the Examiner, as well as for the candidate, and you will please your Examiner more if you are not garrulous. Under ‘Positions of Feet’ the chart gives the first
step of the Natural Turn (Waltz) as “1. RF forward”, and that is what you should say. It is not more polite or more explicit to say “On Step 1 you step forward with the Right Foot”. The additional words are superfluous, and are more likely to irritate than to please. The words given in the book are clear and sufficient. You are not expected to be “word perfect” and you may express points in your own way. But be brief – and correct. Words are far less important than the correct placing of the feet and the body. Correct Foot Positions will speak louder and more clearly than words.

2. Modulate your voice and give emphasis to certain points. Candidates for the Licentiate and Fellow examinations should speak authoritatively but not dictatorially. Do not turn your head or body out of position to speak to the Examiner, while demonstrating a figure. It may cause you to use a bad alignment. Just speak firmer. Your Examiner will reposition him or herself, when necessary, in order to hear your presentation more clearly.

3. Do not recite the technique like a parrot. Nothing sounds worse, and is completely unconvincing. Speak first, then move – and think before you speak!

4. In all forward steps take the weight immediately forward on to the moving foot. The front foot will end flat, with the heel of the back foot raised from the floor. On backward steps, step onto the Ball of the back foot, with the weight central or forward. Never lower the back heel until the front foot is passing for the next step.

5. During a solo demonstration raise the Left arm to the Man’s normal dance position, and raise the Right arm to a similar position. It is much better to hold the arms in this way than to assume the normal dance position with the Right arm. The suggested hold will assist the balance and improve the appearance. Only in the Tango should the position of the Right arm be lowered and used to indicate the Right Side Lead.

6. When you have danced or described a figure always hold the position of the last step before moving away. It suggests loss of balance or uncertainty when the candidate moves away too quickly. Acquire the habit of pausing for a moment, to think what could follow.

7. When a figure ends on the Toes (such as the Natural Turn – Waltz) always take one more step and pause for a moment. This is a definite rule, as candidates cannot be expected to hold a position on the Toes for any length of time. The extra step enables your Examiner to observe whether the correct footwork is used as the next step is taken.
8. When about to dance or describe a figure, always stand in the correct position in relation to the room before you start. Many candidates have a bad habit of facing the LOD and then turning to face DW as the first step is taken. When a figure may be commenced from several positions always show it from the normal position, which is the position given in the charts. It is also a good habit to select one wall for examination purposes, and use that wall for the entire theoretical portion of your exam.

9. Take normal length steps during solo work. You will possibly lose your balance if the steps are too long, and short steps seldom give a true picture of the position being shown.

10. The importance of correct Footwork and Alignment when dancing or describing a figure cannot be over-estimated. The majority of awkward questions are prompted by the careless mistakes made by candidates during their solo demonstrations. Candidates are often “word perfect” but when showing Foot Positions they may make careless mistakes in Rise and Fall or Footwork. Try to make perfect solo demonstrations a habit from the beginning of your training. Careless or slovenly demonstrations will always lose valuable marks.

11. It is much better and easier to work with someone else when possible. It is so easy to see other people’s mistakes, and so easy to overlook your own. Half-an-hour’s work a day, every day, is invaluable, and much better than “cramming”. Take it in turns to hold the book, listen and watch.

12. The ISTD ‘Questions and Answers’ Books prepare the mind for the difficult and unusual questions you may encounter. However it is of little value to study these books until a fairly sound knowledge of the technique has been acquired. Later in your training these books can be of great assistance.

13. Once you are well versed in all of the figures in your syllabus, it is advisable to create an amalgamation in each of the required dances which incorporates all or most of the figures, using the listed Precedes and Follows as a guide. The routines should fit comfortably in the Examination Room you will be using.

When you have studied all of the suggestions in these notes you should be ready to commence the solo demonstrations of the seven technical points given in the charts of each figure in ‘The Ballroom Technique’ book. The correct way to show these is:
Positions of Feet: You must be able to dance each figure confidently – solo before worrying about the theory. If you can, then ‘Positions of Feet’ will be quite easy to remember. The most common mistakes are those of omission, such as forgetting to add “in CBMP”, “Outside Partner”, “Left Side Leading”, etc. Terms such as “Small Step”, etc. are also overlooked by candidates. Taking the Progressive Chasse (Quickstep) as an example, the best method of presenting the Positions of Feet is to say:

1. RF back  
2. LF to side  
3. RF closes to LF  
4. LF to side and slightly forward  
5. RF forward in CBMP, OP

The best method is to speak first, and then move the foot as you finish speaking. When a foot is in position keep quite still for a moment. Do not keep talking and moving from the start to finish of a figure. Don’t gabbles – and don’t be painfully slow.

Examiners do not like the use of abbreviations. They prefer “Promenade Position” – not “PP”, and “Outside Partner” – not “OP”. Always say “Left Foot and Right Foot” – not “LF and RF”. However, since “Contrary Body Movement” and “Contrary Body Movement Position” are so unwieldy, it is preferable to use “CBM.” and “CBMP”.

Alignment: Study the rules governing Alignment in the preliminary pages of ‘The Ballroom Technique’, particularly in relation to the term “Pointing”. A few unusual terms are included in Alignment, such as “Body turning to L”, on Foxtrot Heel Pull Steps, and “Toe turned in” on a few figures. They are important, as they convey something unusual on a step. They are quite easy to remember.

When giving the Alignment of a figure, commence by saying: “Commence facing…..”. Then continue with “1….., 2…..”, etc., giving the Alignment as in the book. Do not use abbreviations such as “DW, DC, or LOD”. Remember to move as you finish speaking, and to present it in such a way that the Examiner can see the position you are describing.

Amount of Turn: Study the preliminary notes on this subject at the beginning of the book. Make sure you understand the rule that the turn is continued over 3 steps on the Outside of Turns, and completed in 2 steps on Inside turns. Learn the exceptions. When giving the Amount of Turn in the Natural Turn in Waltz use the words given below, but remember to stop for a moment as each part of the turn is completed. Say:

Commence to turn to the Right on 1. 1/4 between 1 and 2. 1/8 between 2 and 3

Commence to turn to the Right on 4. 3/8 between 4 and 5, body turns less

Body completes the turn on 6
When you say “Body completes the turn” be careful not to over-turn the body, a common fault. The closing of the foot will cause the body to complete the turn without making any conscious effort to turn the body. Remember that “Slight body turn” has a different meaning from “Body completes the turn”.

One of the worst faults is to turn on a leading step when showing the Amount of Turn, e.g. After taking Step 1 (RF) of the Natural Turn in Waltz, candidates often turn on the RF, using a distinct foot swivel on RF as the LF moves to the side for 2. They then look as if they are “lifting” the LF into its position to the side.

Avoid this by taking the first step normally and then stop. Now let the LF move first in a forward direction, without turning on the RF, but allow the L side of the body to move forward with it. The LF will end in a “diagonally forward” position. Now allow both feet to swivel casually to the right until the body is backing DC and the feet will be in the correct position with no obvious effort.

Only in Pivots and similar movements is turn made on the supporting foot. Solo demonstrations should endeavour to portray what happens when actually dancing.

Rise and Fall: Rise and Fall is not difficult to remember if you learn the “basic” rise of each type of turn, and then the exceptions. There is a basic Waltz rise – “Commence to rise at the end of 1, Continue to rise on 2 and 3, Lower at the end of 3”; a basic Quickstep rise – “Rise at the end of 1, up on 2 and 3, Lower at the end of 3”; a basic Open Turn rise and a basic Heel Turn rise. Learn these first and you will know 75 per cent of the rises in the complete syllabus. It is ridiculous to have to pause and think of the Rise and Fall used for a Lady’s Natural Turn in Foxtrot, when the same rise is used in all Heel Turns. When demonstrating the rise remember to show “No Foot Rise” where it occurs, and to soften the knee of the supporting leg before a rise is taken. Incidentally, when giving the Lady’s Rise and Fall on the Feather or Three Step, it is perfectly acceptable to state “There is no Foot Rise throughout”, then continue on with the rest of it.

Here is an example of showing Rise and Fall in the Waltz Natural Turn, as Man:

Say: Commence to Rise at the end of 1 (Now step forward on the Right Foot)

Say: Continue to Rise on 2 and 3 (Now take the 2nd and 3rd steps, making sure to show the gradual rise very clearly)

Say: Lower at the end of 3 (Now lower the Right Heel ). Note that the Left Heel is not yet touching the floor

Say: Commence to Rise at the end of 4, No Foot Rise (Now take Step 4 back on the Left Toe, releasing the Right Toe from the floor)
Say: Continue to Rise on 5 and 6 (Now lower the Left Heel, which stays in
place until Step 5 is in place, and then show the gradual rise as you
complete Step 6)

Say: Lower at the end of 6. (Now lower the Left Heel, and release it again as
you step forward on the Right Heel)

There are other methods of showing the Rise and Fall, but the example given is
very sound. Show the positions clearly. Do not move and talk all the time.

Footwork: This is a clear way of showing Footwork in the Foxtrot Natural Turn
as Man:

Say: 1. HT (Take the first step forward with the Right Foot, but do not rise
immediately to the Right Toe)

Say: 2. T (Take the 2nd step. Now on Toes of both feet)

Say: 3. TH (Take the 3rd step, but keep up. The Right Heel must not lower
until the Left Foot moves towards it for the 4th step)

Say: 4. TH (Take the 4th step. Lower the Right Heel but not the Left Heel)

Say: 5. H (Draw the Right Foot towards the Left Foot, with the Heel only on
the floor, and begin to lower the Left Heel). Say: “Heel, inside edge of foot, whole foot”, then turn to the Right on the Left heel
as the Right Foot Draws back and to the side of the Left Foot,
showing correct Footwork. Say “then inside edge of Left Foot”
and show Left Foot brushing past the Right Foot, with the inside
edge of the Left Foot Firmly on the floor

Say: 6. H (Take the 6th step, Heel, flat, releasing the heel of the Right Foot

When the feet are closed (as on Step 3 of the Natural Turn in Waltz and
Quickstep), you should say “TH” on Step 3, but do not immediately lower the
Right Heel. It must lower as the Left Foot moves back for Step 4.

CBM: When asked to show the CBM on a figure, dance the figure, and say
rhythmically “CBM on 1, and CBM on 4”, etc. as you dance the relevant step.

Sway: Dance the figure, saying the sway to synchronize with the step on which
the Sway is used. For the Natural Turn in Waltz, as Man, you would say:

“Straight, Right, Right; Straight, Left, Left”, as you dance
The Examiner may ask you to give the CBM and the Sway at the same time. On the Waltz Natural Turn, as Man, you would say:

“CBM, Right, Right; CBM, Left, Left”, as you demonstrate

Generally speaking, if CBM is used on the Right Foot on step 1, Sway will be to the Right for the next 2 steps. There are a few exceptional sways on 1 step only. These must be memorized. Remember that most side traveling figures, such as Progressive Chasse, Chasse from Promenade Position, have no Sway. Spins also have no Sway.

**Counting in Beats:** The Natural Turn (Foxtrot) would be counted:

RF 1.2. LF 3. RF 4. LF 1.2. RF 3.4. LF 1.2.

**Counting in Beats and Bars:** Count as above, but state the number of each Bar on the first count of each Bar. Thus: 1.2. 3.4. 2.2. 3.4. 3.2. Accent the first count to denote the Bar. If the count ends with 3.2, it means that the third bar has not been completed, so the figure will have taken only 2 1/2 bars. The count of 3.2.3.4. would be 3 bars.

When counting in Beats or in Beats and Bars remember to “dance to your own music”. Also, once you have commenced the count and the movement, **Do Not Stop**.

**Descriptions:** In addition to questions on the technique given in ‘The Ballroom Technique' book', candidates may be asked to “Describe” a figure. A Description should include the following:

1. Foot Position  
2. Alignment or Direction  
3. Turn (if any)  
4. Anything unusual that happens on the step, such as “Outside Partner”, “Promenade Position”, “Left Side Lead”, CBMP, etc.  
5. The Rhythm

If you wish to add anything else, by all means do so if you think it will make the Description clearer. By all means use your hands to indicate when you turn the Lady to Promenade, or when turning her square. Hands may be used to show that the Lady is moving outside. Use your hands, your feet and your voice as if you were teaching the step to a class.
Precedes and Follows: These often pay an important part in an examination and they have been included in detail in ‘The Ballroom Technique’. It is advisable to know all of the accepted Precedes and Follows, because, even though a Student-Teacher candidate need know only 1 of each, an Associate 2, and a Licentiate 3, you are less likely to have a lapse of memory than if you know only the required number. Furthermore, some Examiners have their own “favourites” and are not satisfied until they are shown!

When asked to demonstrate Precedes and/or Follows, always start with the easy, “normal” ones, then work your way up from there. Remember that a good solo demonstration when dancing entries and exits as Man and Lady is of the utmost importance. Be sure that Alignments and Footwork are neat and correct.

Amalgamations: A favourite question of some Examiners is to ask you to dance an amalgamation of Basic figures in the Waltz (or other dance). This is most generally asked whilst the “D.J.” is still in the room, so that you can dance the groupings to music. You will probably be asked to give the count as you dance or to start a class in time to the music being used. It is advisable to keep several good amalgamations in your mind, in each dance, and to be able to dance each of them with ease (as Man and Lady), so that you are prepared for this type of question.

Mistakes: Very few candidates go through an examination without making an occasional mistake. Some candidates allow a mistake to upset their concentration. A stupid mistake, such as saying “Left Foot”, when moving the Right Foot will have absolutely no effect on an experienced Examiner, unless it is done persistently. Stop and correct such an error immediately. Even if a figure has been danced incorrectly or a wrong answer given, if it is put right immediately, without any prompting by the Examiner, the correction should be accepted without penalisation.

If you think you have answered a question incorrectly and the Examiner moves on to another question without comment, do not allow this to upset your concentration.

Your solo demonstrations, your manner, your diction and your attitude towards your Examiner can, quite rightly, outweigh a few technical errors.

N.B. The above notes were originally penned in 1969 by Mr. Alex Moore, author of the very first Ballroom Technique Book. I took the liberty of re-typing (and editing) them in April, 2003, as an indispensable aid in the study of Ballroom Dancing Technique.

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N.B. Even though these notes were originally intended for Ballroom Dancing most of the above guidelines apply to the Latin exams as well. The main differences are:

1. There are now 5 main headings, instead of 7, for the Man. The Lady has 4 headings, because she does not need a “Lead” column. The 3 that are omitted are: Rise and Fall, Sway and CBM.

2. Footwork in 3 of the dances, namely Rumba, Cha-Cha and Jive is almost all BF. In these dances you will be asked for the exceptions in Footwork.

   Samba and Paso Doble have much more specific Footwork, so you will be asked for more detail here. These two dances also have Alignments.

3. Leads will be asked, but may be given in your own words, as long as they describe the action correctly. It is not necessary to memorize all of the leads as they are written (a long and very tedious task).

4. Hip Action is used in all dances, except Paso Doble. You will be asked for a simple description, and possibly a more detailed description of the hip action, as described in the first few pages of each book.

5. You will be asked to describe the various Dance Positions (Holds) for each Rhythm.

6. Samba is the only dance which uses “Bounce”. You will be asked to describe this, either simply, or in detail.

7. You will be asked to describe a few of the technical terms explained in the front of the books, i.e. Pressed Forward Walk, The term “Replace” vs. “Transfer”, etc.

8. You are more likely to be asked for “Descriptions” in the Latin than you are in the Ballroom Exam Room. A Description outline is as follows:

   1. The Commencing Alignment (Samba and Paso Doble only)
   2. The Foot Position
   3. Turn (if any)
   4. Lead (if any)
   5. Take the Step and say the Count
   6. The Finishing Alignment (Samba and Paso Doble only)