

How to Find a Good Social Dance Teacher

From Rhode Island Dancesport

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People all across the country are learning how to dance socially - salsa, swing, and ballroom dance classes are quite popular these days in many cities! Dance lessons can be a creative outlet, a fun date night, an enjoyable social activity, and a fun workout! And for many students, dance lessons also represent an investment of both time and money.

So how does a social dancer (or a wanna-be social dancer) make sure he or she is maximizing the time and money spent? By carefully choosing a swing, salsa, or ballroom dance instructor. The right dance teacher can make your social dance experience a great one, ensuring that you not only leave your lessons with at least a basic understanding of the dances, but that you have a fun time learning. The wrong dance teacher can leave you frustrated, either during class or when you're out on the social dance floor, with incomplete information or just simply an unexciting experience.

It can be fairly easy to spot a good or not-so-good social dance teacher once the class is over. A good teacher has fun teaching, makes sure that students are generally enjoying themselves, gives personal attention when warranted, provides plenty of practice time and repetition, and makes her students' learning her top priority. Students leave class not only knowing how to dance proficiently, but having had a fun time, as well. A not-so-good teacher can take one of two forms - or a combination!

- She might not enjoy teaching, and students likewise do not enjoy classes, which come to feel like a chore. Students learn how to dance, but they have not enjoyed themselves.
- On the other hand, the instructor may enjoy herself quite a bit, and her students may have quite a lot of fun, but she proves to be incompetent. Students leave class uncertain of the material taught, with questions unanswered, or answered incorrectly. This may not be apparent until the students take a class from another instructor, or find out from others that they have been taught incorrectly.

Being able to determine whether your instructor was good or was somewhat lacking after a class is completed can be useful, but wouldn't you rather know how to identify a good teacher before you've spent money and time on dance lessons? It's not as hard as it might seem!

First, check out the instructor's reputation in the community - not just your local community, but in the dance community in general. Many cities have online message boards about social dancing (salsa, swing, or ballroom-specific boards), and there are also numerous national message boards dedicated to these dances, as well. Search the archives or post a new message checking out the reputation of the instructor(s).

Second, learn as much as you can about the instructors. How long have they been teaching? Instructors who have been teaching for a number of years usually have a wealth of experience from which to draw when helping to troubleshoot. They also have a good sense of what teaching methods work and what doesn't work. Newer instructors are usually enthusiastic, but have a smaller pool of experience.

How much education do they have? Most social dance instructors won't have degrees in dance or education, but they will have taken numerous dance lessons along the way. Ask them who they have taken lessons from, what they learned, and how recently they learned it. Ask where they do most of their learning. Good teachers take the time to continually learn new things from other good instructors, and they also usually try to learn more about the teaching process itself, as well. Bad teachers tend to

feel as though they don't need to learn, or they are too insecure to admit that they are still learning. Some instructors even do all of their learning via videotape - this is a very bad sign!

Third, talk to current or former students. Get references from the instructor or, better yet, ask around among dancers in the local community. Finding out what past students have to say about the classes they took can be quite helpful!

Last, proceed with extreme caution if the instructor wants you to sign a contract or agree to any long-term arrangements, such as paying up front for several months' worth of lessons, or being asked to join their "performance group" in exchange for agreeing to continue to take - and pay for - dance lessons. Check their refund or cancellation policy, as well. Contracts or difficult cancellation policies can sometimes be a warning sign.

Finding a good social dance teacher is just like hiring any other professional - it usually pays to do a bit of research in advance to make sure you're getting the most from your time and money.