

DEGREE OF DIFFICULTY

(Compiled by Dottie Welch, August 2005)

In pursuing the goal of interesting and successful choreography it is necessary to understand how to control the degree of difficulty. This table lists many of the factors that affect difficulty or reduce dancer success. Some of the suggestions point out things to avoid, others describe ways to help the dancers succeed.

POTENTIAL DIFFICULTY

SUGGESTED SOLUTION

HEARING PROBLEMS	
Hall Sound Problems Volume wrong Music/Voice Mix wrong Sound Quality poor	Check the overall volume. Raise the speakers and tilt to improve the front to back balance. Increase the voice volume. Increase the treble in your voice. Rethink the speaker arrangement. Find ways to muffle bounce.
Dancer's Own Hearing Problems	Provide an external hearing assist and be aware of the problem.
Caller's Clarity and Enunciation Caller's Unfamiliar Accent	Practice clear enunciation. Avoid clutter words. Be aware of possible confusions due to accent differences.
DANCER BAD HABITS	
Sloppy Formations	Encourage dancers to take hands and clearly establish the formation after each move.
Sloppy Positioning	Encourage dancers to clearly establish their facing direction after each call. Make sure they understand the definitions.
INTERPRETATION PROBLEMS	
Slow Recall Time	Allow for chunking – as calls become familiar they are chunked into a single smooth action. New calls are not yet chunked.
Anticipation	Certain combinations of calls are expected and tend to be danced as a chunk. Deviate from the combination with caution. Make sure you give the command that is unexpected far enough in advance for them to comprehend the change and adjust.
Focus in the Wrong Direction	Be aware that dancers need time to change focus from one formation to another, such as moves in boxes to moves in waves. Use a common application to change the focus before using a more difficult move.
Tendency to "Make It Right"	Counteract the tendency of dancers to "fix" something that feels wrong by cueing them that it will feel odd. Return to normal couples frequently enough to keep the dancers feeling comfortable and confident that they are correct. Exploit the "make it right" tendency by beginning an unusual call in a position that will end with a comfortable set up.
Uncommon Call – Call in the program but seldom used.	Prepare your dancers for other callers by regularly using all the moves in the program. Be aware of moves other callers tend to avoid and be ready to help dancers when you use them.
Simplified Definition Recall	Brains tend to keep in quick recall only the information needed often. Infrequent call applications require more time to process and may need a definition reminder.
Obscure Usage of a Call	Be aware when you are stretching the definition, give cues and clues.
Standard 4-dancer formation but unusual orientation in the 8-dancer formation	Be prepared to give clues if you use a 4-dancer move that is turned 90 degrees from the usual usage. Also be aware that 4-dancer moves done in the center often cause disorientation.
Non-Standard Starting Arrangement	Read and pay attention to the CALLERLAB Standard Applications Documents.
Left-Handed Applications	Be aware that some dancers rarely encounter left-handed formations and will need a significant amount of help.
Response Limits	Allow for slower response time when dancers are warming up, tired, distracted, or aging.

POTENTIAL DIFFICULTY	SUGGESTED SOLUTION
<i>BRAIN OVERLOAD PROBLEMS</i>	
Stacking Calls – Making the dancers remember 2 or 3 calls ahead.	Aim to provide the dancers with one call at a time and just when they are finishing the previous one.
Overloading the Brain	When dancers are thinking hard about the current move, they won't hear complex instructions for the next move so separate with a simple move.
Long Sequences	Long sequences mean more chance for a mistake to be made before the resolution is reached. Remember that every resolution is a reward moment for successful dancers.
Excessive Cueing	Sometimes attempting to cue for weak dancers causes confusion for those who know the move.
Calls with Similar Names	Misunderstanding and confusion is increased when using several calls with similar names. Try to give enough clues to help the dancers differentiate.
High concentration of movements at the upper limit of the dancers' ability.	Consider the number of hard moves in sequence when planning your choreography.
Falling Behind	Help dancers struggling to complete difficult calls by keeping the hard section short and then giving them an obvious call to allow recovery.
Sorting of Directions Required	Dealing with instructions that must be sorted into "mine" and "not-mine" increases the difficulty significantly. Don't over do it.
<i>BODY MOVEMENT PROBLEMS</i>	
Abrupt Body Motion Changes	Aim for Smooth Body Flow. In addition to the increased comfort factor, this will help dancers succeed where they otherwise might not. Remember that a body in motion tends to stay in motion.
Over Turning with consequent dizziness or disorientation.	Be aware that dancers begin to lose track of the correct facing direction if they must turn 3/4 or more. Avoid choreography that has too many turns in one direction because dancers will get dizzy.
Hand Freedom	Pay attention to hand availability – a hand held behind the back at the end of the last move isn't available for the next move.
Insufficient Space inside the Square	Avoid calling 4-dancer moves from a formation where there will be insufficient space or dancer collisions.
Insufficient Hall Space	Crowded floors will sometimes require an adjustment in choreography to avoid formations that fit too tightly.
Slippery Floors due to waxing or moisture	Encourage dancers to keep their nose over their toes. Soap rubbed on the bottom of shoes will reduce slip.
Physical Problems	Insert moves that allow dancers with physical problems to catch up. Have just the boys, girls, centers or ends do something.
<i>FLOOR CONTROL & PLANNING</i>	
Cutting the Timing	Aim to keep the dancers moving smoothly without rushing. Use the timing charts and your own dance experience to help you sense when the dancers are ready to hear the next call.
Stop and Go Dancing	Some stop and go action is necessary during workshop time. It does lower the difficulty, but it increases body fatigue.
Poor Preparation for the Singer	Patter is the place to practice anything unusual in your singing call. Be prepared with simpler choreography if success is unlikely.
Abrupt Changes in Difficulty	When developing a complex sequence, gradually increase the difficulty so that the dancers have a chance to think about the unexpected in small pieces.
Poorly Analyzed Workshop Choice	In choosing to workshop an unfamiliar starting arrangement of a move, attempt to change only one factor at a time.
Letting Minor Mistakes become Major disasters	Give the dancers clues to help them sort out incorrect facing directions or call a move that will make it obvious they should turn around.

DEGREE OF DIFFICULTY APPLIED TO ADVANCED CHOREOGRAPHY

(Appendix to Degree of Difficulty sheet compiled by Dottie Welch)

All of the Degree of Difficulty issues that apply to Mainstream choreography also apply to Plus, Advanced and Challenge choreography. In addition there are some degree of difficulty issues that are unique to Advanced and Challenge.

POTENTIAL DIFFICULTY	SUGGESTED SOLUTION
INHERENTLY MORE DIFFICULT CHOREO	(This is why it is called Advanced or Challenge.)
Precise Execution Required	Allow more time and give clues for a series of moves that all require precise execution. After two or three moves the dancers may become disoriented and not recognize the formation.
Adding "and Roll" at Plus or above	Dancers must be competent with the move and understand how to Roll in order to succeed with anything tricky. Help them with clues about the direction to Roll and the resulting formation.
Applying the Facing Couple or Ocean Wave Rules	Make sure your application is correct and be aware that some situations are very uncommon and will need significant help from the caller.
Applying any of the Concepts	Dancers must be competent with the move, and understand how to apply the concept in order to succeed. Think about how to reduce the complexity. When using As Couples begin with girl pairs doing the usual girl's part and boy pairs doing the usual boy's part.
Sorting of Directions Required	Dancers must be taught how to cope with instructions that must be sorted into "mine" and "not-mine". Also this kind of filtering requires practice and not too much sorting required at once. Don't over do it.
Fractions	Don't assume dancers know the fractional parts of a call. Provide clues about the various parts when first using a fractional part of a move.
Modifying Calls	Asking dancers to modify a call by making it "left", changing some part, or interrupting to do something else increases the difficulty. Initially be very generous with your clues.
Hinge, Trade and Cast Off Variations	Calls that include Hinge, Trade or Cast Off are significantly harder when the application requires a Partner Hinge, a Partner Trade, or a Push Cast instead of an arm turn. Be aware and give clues about the action.
Formations in the Mind's Eye or dancing with Phantoms	Any application which requires the dancers to imagine a phantom dancer has potential for confusion. Explain carefully about "doing your part" or using phantoms. Be aware of the difficulty involved and give extra clues as needed.
T-bone Applications	T-bone applications are a C1 concept and they must be taught to the dancers, they are not inherently obvious. Do not use these applications until the dancers understand the concept.