

Reaching Out

Now you will learn about the six root motions of the legs when dancing the tango. Don't forget to breathe normally while you do these exercises. Keep your arms in an embrace shape and assume the proper placement of the feet. See figures 3.3 and 3.4 for demonstrations of the steps.

Watch this
demonstrated
on the DVD

1. Stand on your right axis.
2. Bend the right knee slightly, and begin to extend the left foot to your left side from the hip. Keep contact with the floor with the base of the big toe until the leg is completely extended. This is called a lateral opening to the left.
3. Straighten the right knee and let the left leg close until the upper thighs are touching and your feet are in a V shape.
4. Change your axis to the left leg. Bend the left knee slightly, and extend the right foot to the side from the hip. Keep contact with the floor with the base of the big toe until the leg is completely extended. This is called a lateral opening to the right. Straighten the left knee and let the right leg close until the upper thighs are touching and your feet are in a V shape.
5. Change your axis to the right leg.
6. Bend the right knee slightly, and extend the left leg backward from the hip, keeping the foot pointing in the 10 o'clock position. Keep contact with the floor with the base of the big toe curled up until the leg is completely extended. This is called a backward opening on the left side.
7. Straighten the right knee and let the left leg close until the thighs are touching, keeping your feet in a V shape.
8. Change your axis to the left leg. Bend the left knee slightly, and extend the right leg backward from the hip, keeping the foot pointing in the 2 o'clock position. Keep contact with the floor with the base of the big toe curled up until the leg is completely extended. This is called a backward opening on the right side.
9. Straighten the left knee and let the right leg close until the upper thighs are touching, keeping your feet in a V shape.
10. Change your axis to the right leg.
11. Bend the right knee slightly, and extend the left leg forward from the hip. Keep contact with the floor with the base of the little toe pointing in the 10 o'clock position until the left leg is completely extended. This is called a forward opening on the left.
12. Straighten the right knee and let the left leg close until the upper thighs are touching and your feet are in a V shape.

13. Change your axis to the left leg. Bend the left knee slightly, and extend the right leg forward from the hip. Keep contact with the floor with the base of the little toe pointing in the 2 o'clock position until the leg is completely straight. This is called a forward opening on the right.
14. Straighten the left knee and let the right leg close until the upper thighs are touching and your feet are in a V shape.

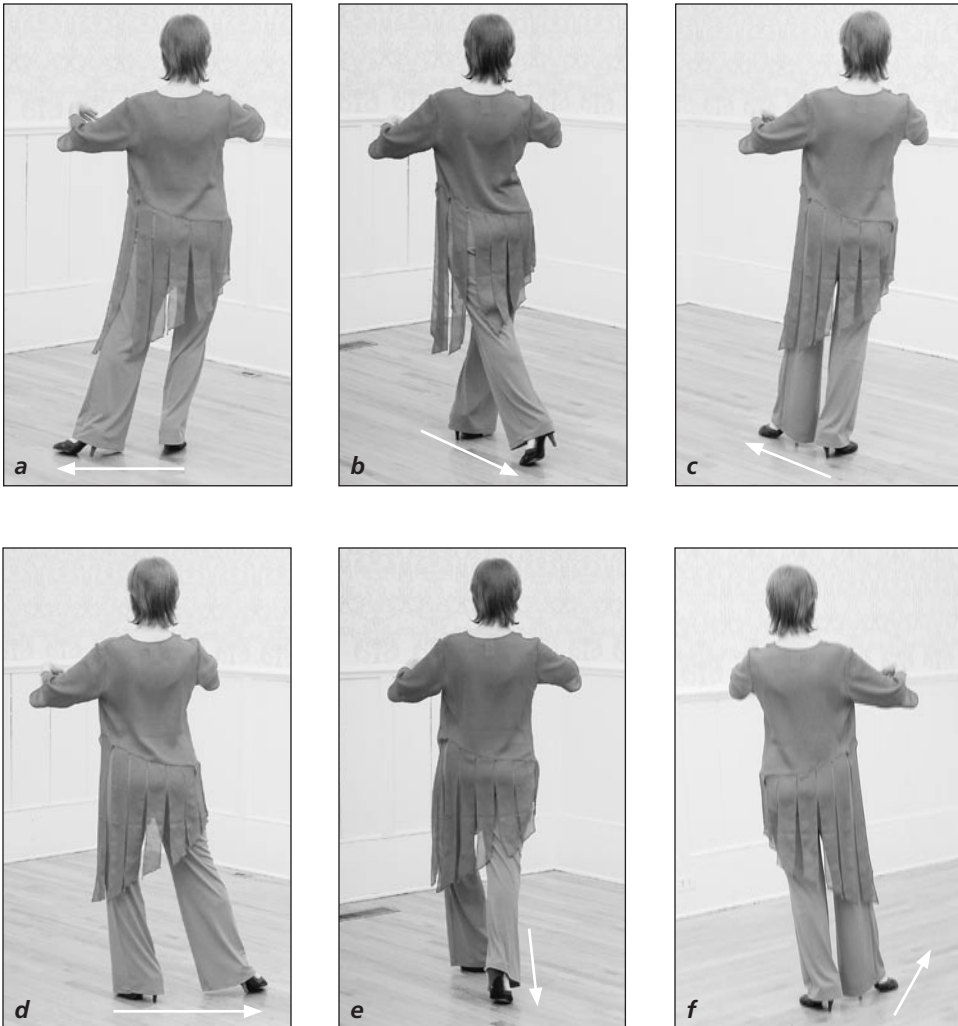


Figure 3.3 The six root motions of the leg from the woman's point of view: (a) lateral opening to the left, (b) back opening to the left, (c) forward opening to the left, (d) lateral opening to the right, (e) back opening to the right, and (f) forward opening to the right.



Figure 3.4 The six root motions of the leg from the man’s point of view: (a) lateral opening to the left, (b) back opening to the left, (c) forward opening to the left, (d) lateral opening to the right, (e) back opening to the right, and (f) forward opening to the right.

ANATOMY OF A STEP

You now know how to establish an axis and reach in the three main directions from the center of your domain. You will now learn how to change axis in six different ways, or how to “make steps.” The fundamental mechanics of moving by changing axis are the same regardless of direction, and they define what we call the anatomy of a step.

To begin a step, you’ll stand on axis, bearing the weight of your body on one leg so the other leg is free to reach into the direction of the step. To finish a step, you will change axis to the other leg.

Tips for Tango Technique

1. Bend the load-bearing knee, bringing your body downward.
2. Extend the free leg down to the floor, pushing it in such a way as to caress the floor with the base of the big toe (lateral or backward steps) or the base of the little toe (forward step).
3. For side and back steps, curl up your big toe so that the foot and ankle can bend. This creates a foot position that is called the "broken ankle."
4. Do not use the point of the toe, but rather the side, the edge of the entire base of the big toe, touching the floor with the entire side of the foot.
5. For forward steps, use the entire base of the little toe as the first contact with the floor. Do not point the toe. Again, curl up the big toe and keep your heel facing down to the floor.
6. Remember to turn your toes out. Do not dance with your feet straight together, or worse yet, turned in.
7. The more you bend the support knee, the farther the free leg will reach in full extension.
8. Elongate the calf of the free leg so that the ball of the foot presses against the floor.
9. Push gently with the support leg to transfer your body weight to the new axis. Elongate the calf to drop the heel of the free leg.
10. As the free leg becomes the support leg, let the knee bend naturally to receive the weight transfer. Straighten the knee to allow the other leg to come to the resting position with upper thighs touching and heels together.

In summary, there are three components to each tango step. The first one is the placement of the toe. The second involves rolling onto the ball of the foot. The third requires the dropping of the heel to the ground to receive the full weight of the body.

Steps are classified into three categories: openings, inside crosses, and outside crosses. They can be executed on a clockwise and counterclockwise trajectory for a total of six fundamental movements of the legs. Simply put, in tango we will always use one of these six fundamental movements to define, describe, and execute every pattern. So, it is important that you learn to identify each step as being one of these six fundamental movements. Remember that when you dance, your partner will be either to your left or to your right. When partners are to the right of each other, a forward motion of the right leg is considered an inside cross to the right because from the vantage point of your partner, your right leg seems to be crossed in front of or inside the left leg. Similarly, a back motion of the left leg is considered an outside cross to