

What Level Argentine Tango Dancer am I? (i.e., which level class should I go to?)

During tango festivals students often attend workshops more advanced than they are. Some of the basic reasons are:

1. Students overestimate their ability and mistakenly believe no one in class will notice.
2. Students mistakenly believe that they will learn faster.
3. Students think that more advanced dancers only need to learn advanced patterns.
4. Students want to only dance with “better” dancers.

The problem is, students who do this fail to realize that:

1. It hinders the instructors from completing their class objectives.
2. It frustrates and angers the students who have met the criteria and now have to struggle with students who have jumped their level of expertise.
3. It decreases the overall efficiency and effectiveness of the class.

What level tango dancer you are depends on many factors including:

1. Number of years you’ve been dancing tango.
2. Whether you are a leader or follower--learning to lead usually takes longer than learning to follow.
3. Quantity and quality of classes and workshops you’ve taken.
4. Quality and the focus of teachers you’ve studied with--e.g., learning and dancing “close embrace” is quite different than “open embrace”.
5. How long and how often you practice.
6. Who you dance and practice with.
7. Natural ability.
8. Other dance experience.

Thus it is difficult to write a precise guideline to determine each student’s exact level of tango expertise. However, with the intent of providing some guidance, and for the purpose of making each participant’s experience at my tango festival optimal, I offer the following broad guideline of minimum criteria.

Happy Tangoing,

Clay Nelson

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Beginning Argentine Tango Dancer:

- Has had zero or less than one year of experience in dancing Argentine tango. This includes advanced professional grand champion dancers who have not yet studied Argentine tango.

Minimum Criteria for Intermediate Argentine Tango Dancer:

- Has been dancing Argentine tango twice a week for at least one year.
- Can hear and stay on the beat of traditional Argentine tango as well as vals and milonga.
- Understands open and close embrace and can dance comfortably in both.
- Leaders maintain line of dance and wait for the follower to complete her step before leading another.
- Followers collect and wait for the lead.
- Understands the concept of parallel and crossed feet and can lead or follow from one to the other.
- Can correctly and consistently execute the following steps solo and with a partner in time to the music while maintaining their own axis and balance:
 - * marking time
 - * walking forward/backward
 - * side steps
 - * check left turn
 - * crusada
 - * back ocho
 - * forward ocho
 - * ocho cortado

Minimum Criteria for Advanced Argentine Tango Dancer:

- Has been dancing Argentine tango twice a week for at least two years.
- Has mastered all of the criteria listed above for intermediate tangueros.
- Has the ability to lead/follow from the chest only.
- Can interpret the musicality of tango, vals and milonga—dancing to the beat as well as the melody.
- Can comfortably walk in crossed feet on both left and right side of the follower.
- Can correctly and consistently execute the following steps solo and with a partner in time to the music while maintaining their own axis and balance:
 - * molinetes
 - * boleos
 - * gancho