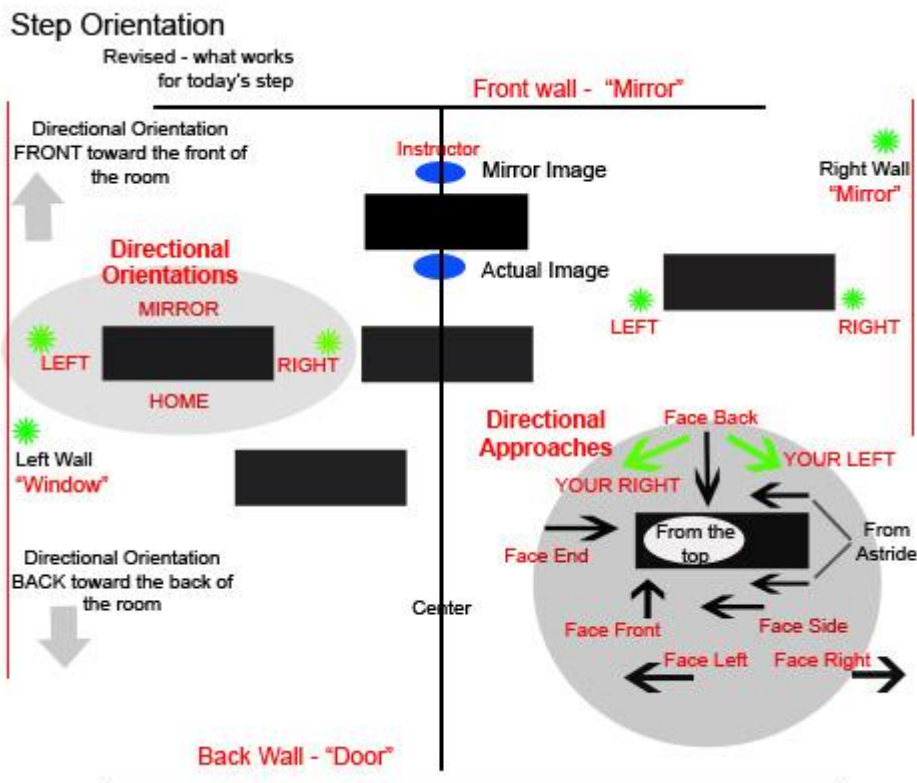


Teaching Mirror Image and Actual Image

In the revised version of the step orientation, 2 were added for the instructor:

Mirror Image - facing the participants direct, where they "mirror" your movements.

Actual Image - facing the same way as the participants, where they follow your "actual" movements.



Some certifications and clubs suggest and/or require instructors to face their participants in Mirror Image. In practice, there are several factors that should be taken into consideration and which direction is best can be dependant on situational variables.

Mirror Image Pros

Direct eye contact with participants is perhaps the biggest reason given for teaching mirror image, suggesting that looking via the mirror is not quite the same as a direct visual connect.

Some instructors who face the mirror may unknowingly appear to be watching themselves. I will be the first to admit to such. Honestly I've decided it's a habit that stems from my initial self monitoring when I first started in group fitness as a participant.

I don't always realize it because my viewing tends to be peripheral to take in the entire group. I generally watch everyone to see if someone is not getting something or is going the wrong way - at which point I will direct my view and cues to assist the individual.

While it looks as if I am watching my own movements, I seldom really see myself, as I am more focused on the overall success of the group and concentrating on what should come next.

It is without a doubt a good thing to look directly at individuals - both new participants and regulars. Facing the group forces you to make direct eye contact with your students, so that's a big plus for teaching mirror image.

A large studio utilizing an elevated stage for the instructor offers reason number 2. Not only does it allow you direct eye contact with people in the back row, it just feels rude to have your students looking eye level at your rear end for an hour. So, particularly with an elevated teaching platform, that's the second plus for teaching mirror image.

Actual Image Pros

In a small studio setting at floor level, space may make it a bit uncomfortable to face participants. I equate it to what it feels like getting on a crowded elevator – most people will turn and face the same way to look at the door or the floor indicator lights. If you face them, it's hard to know who feels more uncomfortable, you or the person you are facing!

It depends on how much room exists between the instructor and the participants. Very small rooms may force participants all the way up level with the instructor, so it can make it difficult for them to follow mirror image from a side perspective. In this instance, facing the same way in a small group setting is a plus for actual image.

The second plus for teaching actual image is that, no matter the pattern, the instructor is always traveling in the SAME direction as the participants.

Mirror Image Cons

The minus for teaching mirror image is the change in YOUR orientation to the room. It takes a lot of initial concentration to reverse left and right - if this is the directional and lead convention that you are utilizing in cuing.

If patterns are all from the front or off the ends with a front facing approach, following can be easy enough in mirror image. The second downside with this teaching approach is the confusion that can occur when going over the platform beyond the "fourth wall" - or to the "front of the step".

Even seasoned participants can show signs of disorientation when you are moving toward them in simple movements like "over the top". Some patterns that face the sides of the room on the ends of the platform can also be tricky as it may be difficult to visually ascertain the lead foot.

Teach Both Ways

The best approach may be one that is a blend of both mirror and actual images. Teach as many possible combos facing the participants, but transition to actual image to teach where they can better follow your direction and leads off the ends or over the top to the front of the step.

If you have never taught mirror image, you will surely mess up in the beginning but don't be overly apologetic. Laugh it off the best you can with "I meant your other right" or something else lighthearted. Most will understand and be forgiving if you remain positive.

Making the transition between Mirror and Actual Image

The previous section mentioned the use of the term "away". In my early attempts to teach mirror image over the tops, I would cue "come to me" and then "go away". That's why I generally don't

use the term "away" for the front of the step with a back facing approach. If you teach mirror on over the tops, they are moving toward you, when going to the "away" side, then moving "away" from you returning back to the "home" side.

I later discovered that it was just best to change to go with them in actual image on over the tops. To transition with "over the tops", you can cue them to "come to me" as you stay where you are (with a march or tap up tap down), then join them back over the top - with "now I am with you".

The best technique, used by the majority of instructors, is a quick hop turn on a single lift step for a smooth transition to the other side of the step: you cue the knee or any lift step, but DO the hop turn over to the other side.

Pure visual learners, even some experienced students, may try to follow. If you sense that might be the case, it can be helpful to advise that you're changing sides.

Again, switching between mirror and actual image requires you to transition your lefts and rights, but with practice, it can become second nature just like any other aspect of teaching.

Next: Step Terminology

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