

Learning to Teach Step - Minding the 32 Count

There are several approaches to take in learning how to teach 32 count step and there's no one way to go about it - it's just a matter of what works in your mind. Gin's approach is slightly different from mine – she counts her patterns up to 16, then the second half up to 16 for a total of 32. I think more in terms of 4's and 8's, but both of us have a firm feel for the music.

Getting on the Music

Fitting the movement on the proper beat of the music is an absolute must.

Some participants may not be fully aware that movements are "off beat", but for those who are, nothing feels more "against the grain" than trying to follow an instructor who starts a grapevine on the wrong count. For those participants who know, it can be pure torture - how does one leave graciously after stumbling between following the music or following an instructor's errant cues?

If you are wondering why you have walkers from your class or your numbers have dipped below freezing, check to make sure you are teaching on the proper beat.

In the 8 count measure:

DOWN beats - ODD counts - counts 1, 3, 5, and 7
UP Beats - EVEN counts - 2, 4, 6, 8.

While I have been told by a long term 'off the music' instructor that "you can't teach an old dog new tricks", it doesn't require much more than a willingness to learn. Once attention is paid to listening and perhaps some counting as you learn, the discovery of instructing with the music can be quite exhilarating.

Musical Phrasing

Musical 32 count phrasing is a collection of 4 - eight count measures. Music prepared for group instruction will adhere to the 32 count - commonly referred to as "square". This means that with any 32 count combination and proper progression, the moves will fit within the phrasing of the music.

New instructors should spend time listening to their music to develop a feel first for the down beat, and then develop a feel for the musical phrase. A test would be to fast forward mid song and begin marching right foot, hopefully on the down beat.

As you listen to the music, start stepping when you hear the top of the next phrase. There are many signals common in a lot of 'produced for' aerobics music - a drum roll just before the next phrase - but in most songs it's the start of the verse or the chorus. (See sidebar below)

If you can start your movement on the proper beat at the right time without any cues, then you have a decent feel for the music. If you find that you are musically challenged, it may require you to do some serious counting.

Counting the Musical Phrase

Play your music and start counting on the first beat - **1** up to 8; then **2**, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8; **3**, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8; **4**, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 - that's your 4 counts of 8 to equal 32.

Use your fingers if you have to mark the 4 sets of 8, but know that both new dogs and old dogs can learn this trick!

Know that it is not half the crime to miss the top of the phrase as it is to be off the down beat, but when you finally get it, you will feel it - it's a rush, like a runner's high.

A good teacher starts with teaching on the down beat of the music - but to become a great instructor it is necessary to work toward the ultimate: teaching 32 count choreography *on the phrase* of the music - that's where the magic happens!

Adding it all up to 32

The trick in teaching any 32 count combination is learning how to progressively teach the elements. Lesson one is learning how the elements add up and how to combine "same lead" patterns and "self reversing" patterns together to keep everything square on the 32's. The plus with this method is that it allows patterns to smoothly transition to the other lead for an overall balanced workout, and once mastered, it will keep students coming back to your classes.

Side bar: Exceptions to the Verse/Chorus Rule

You can't always count on this rule. A good example of a cross-phrased chorus is Pink's "Get This Party Started".

If you listen to it carefully, the chorus actually starts before the top of the phrase.

A great song, but it's an example of one you would need to pay close attention to when teaching square 32's.

Some music companies make adjustments in the mix of a popular tune to square it out. That's why some favorites will have unfamiliar repeats or extras added to the song.

Next – the Odds & Evens Method

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It's a great way to learn and get new ideas and inspiration for your classes!