

***The Engineer's
Guide to
Hustle Dancing***

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THE ENGINEER'S GUIDE TO HUSTLE DANCING

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**To Emily Finnegan, who first inspired me
to learn Hustle.
To Paul Hart, who gave me my foundation in Hustle.**

And

**In loving memory of my parents,
Harry and Esther Yusim, who encouraged a love of
learning and were dancers at heart.**

Michael Yusim

To my son, Joseph Hagen, whose understanding and sense of humor helped me through the years that I was teaching Hustle and who continues to be a joy in my life.

And

To Renee Consolino, a true friend since the early years of Hustle Dancing.

Mariann Cataletto

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1 The Groundwork

Introduction

The first question that you are probably asking is: “Why an *Engineer’s* guide to dancing?” What could an engineer offer as a guide to dancing the Hustle? We tend to think of dancing as a creative art form that is free and flowing. This seems to be the complete opposite of the structure and precision required for engineering. What could the two possibly have in common?

While it is true that dancing appears to be free and flowing as we watch a couple performing on stage, the reality is that dancing has a definite structure. Most dances can be broken down into components, which can be combined together in different ways to form patterns. These patterns result in the choreography that we see performed. It doesn’t matter whether we are watching Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers performing in one of their hit movies or Joe and Mary dancing at the Friday night social. Both couples are executing dance patterns derived from the basic components of that particular dance.

If you have ever tried to pick up a dance step that you have seen, you are well aware of the multiple components that each “step” can have. If you have taken dance lessons, you may have noticed that each dance is taught as a series of basic steps in the beginner classes. These are later combined in the advanced classes to form patterns. Once you have mastered the basics, you can then move on to form your own combinations and develop your own style. However, it is very difficult to arrive at this point of mastery because of our human nature and the resulting limitations.

Some people just find it difficult to retain the things that they have learned. There are also many life events that can take us away from dancing for a long period of time. The lack of practice can cause us to forget the things that once came so easily to us when we were dancing regularly. If dancing were like other school subjects, we could be back at peak performance after a quick review of our class notes. Seeing the information again would quickly refresh our memories and we would again be able to use the dance steps that we once struggled to learn.

However, since dancing involves the entire body and not just the mind, it takes more than words on paper in most cases to effectively refresh our memory. I know that I have personally written down many dance steps in a text format which made perfect sense to me at the time of writing. I would be very disappointed upon returning to these notes a few weeks later and discovering that I didn't have a clue to what they meant. Has this ever happened to you?

I have also seen other forms of dance notes that make use of foot patterns using **L** and **R** to indicate the left or right foot. They will also use arrows or other letters to indicate the direction these **L**'s and **R**'s should have or the feet will be pictured travelling across the page in various directions. I usually end up totally lost and feeling like I am playing a game of "Twister" when I attempt to follow this style of note writing. The very nature of dancing makes it extremely difficult to devise an effective method of notation that can be made available to and understood by everyone. This is where the engineering comes in.

Engineers have a way of thinking that is peculiar to them. They are quite disciplined and seek to find a structure in everything that is around them. If they cannot find a structure, they will create one. They are also well skilled in the use of symbols and diagrams.

My co-author, Michael Yusim, has a degree in engineering. When he decided to study hustle and ballroom

dancing as a hobby, it didn't take him long to discover the problems I previously mentioned. He would tend to forget the steps that he learned in class along with the other dance students. Once they were forgotten, there was no way to retrieve them short of taking another class that repeated the instruction. That could become a very costly habit and it still wouldn't solve the problem because the repeated lesson would also be forgotten at some point.

Having a background in engineering, he was able to discern the structure of the dances and devise a system of dance notation that would allow him to remember the steps that were demonstrated in class. He has used this system exclusively for two years and I have been amazed to watch him execute a complicated dance sequence after spending just a few seconds reviewing his notation. If you have visited our web site at <http://www.dancestudent.com>, the graphics presented there are an example of this notation. The web site has the added advantage of having the dance graphics linked to the patterns that they represent. In this way, you can instantly see the connection between the two and it will give you a much better feel for how the system works.

Many people have inquired about this notation system but they were not able to acquire the skill after a brief explanation. It became clear that a book was needed to present the system in greater detail and to provide a resource that the dance student could return to time and time again. This book combined with the graphics and movie clips available on our web site offer a wealth of information to the dance student seeking to obtain and retain greater skills.

About the Authors

When you picked up this book you may have noticed that there are two names listed as its authors. You already know a little bit about my co-author, Michael Yusim. He is

responsible for providing the *engineer's* point of view. He created this notation system in response to the need of remembering the steps that were taught in his dance classes. He is also a professional computer programmer, another discipline that requires an aptitude similar to that of engineering.

Someone with this background has a large propensity towards abstract thought. This is fine for writing computer code but it can be a hindrance when trying to explain something to the average person who doesn't deal with abstracts on a daily basis. My name is Mariann Cataletto and I will be responsible for most of the text that you are reading. My job as co-author is to take the abstracts involved in this notation system and to make them understandable to the average person.

I started out as a dance teacher for several years with my primary focus being on the hustle during that time. I later moved on to a career involving the management of a small computer network and I am currently studying programming languages. It is my hope that this combination of experiences will afford me the skills to be a liaison between the abstract world of this notation system and the real world of dancing.

Even if I were the best teacher in the world, it is not possible for me to learn this subject matter for you. You must be willing to apply yourself just as much as if you were learning a new foreign language because that is exactly what this system is. It is a language that communicates movements rather than ideas. There are some features that make it easier than a foreign language and we will discuss these in the next chapter. However, it will still require the continual application of what you have learned until you reach a point where it feels comfortable to you and you can translate these graphics with ease. Be patient and persistent and you will succeed at mastering this system. At that point you will have a valuable tool for archiving the dance lessons that you have put so much time and effort into learning.

This tool will remain with you always because it is like other school subjects that can be refreshed in your mind by simply reviewing this book. Even if you have stayed away from dancing for years, you can return to this book. Once your notation skills are back you can then review your dance notes and start remembering all those old dance steps that you used to love doing. Without this method of remembering, chances are that those steps would be lost forever in their original form. The best that you would probably do is to sporadically remember bits and pieces only to quickly forget them again.

How to Use This Book

This book was written with the established Hustle dancer in mind. (Beginners, don't lose heart. There will be a section for you a bit further down and in the following chapter you will learn how your beginner's status can actually be an asset!) It was assumed that the reader already has knowledge of the footwork, timing, and lead and/or follow involved in the dance. This material is not designed to teach someone how to dance. Rather, it is intended as a tool for dancers.

Since the notation does not dictate timing, it can be applied to all Hustle variations. You can use this notation whether your Hustle step count is:

1, 2-3-4

1, 2 and 3

And 1, 2, 3

Or with any other variation that exists now or is to come. The advanced dancer can easily take the notes from one dance, modify them and apply them to other dances since the main difference among many ballroom dances is timing and these notes span the timing barrier.

Once you have studied the following chapter and become familiar with the notational elements and the overall structure, go through the step by step analysis of the sample graphics. Next review the tips for reading the graphics and begin to interpret the graphics presented at the end of the book. It would be helpful if you have a partner who can work through these graphics with you but it is not necessary. The graphics depict static positions that you can place yourself into without the help of a partner. You can also practice both the lead and follow positions in this fashion.

When you are comfortable with the interpretation process, go on to read the tips for writing notation and begin to analyze the dance steps you currently use and put them into the notation format. Begin with the steps that you have the most experience with and then start experimenting with the new steps that you are learning in class or that you see performed when you are out dancing. Use a small wire bound notebook that can easily fit into your pocket. You will then be able to record new steps on the spot and eliminate any chance of forgetting the move later on. Also use a pencil at first to allow for easy corrections. You can always transfer the moves to a comprehensive notebook in ink once you are satisfied that the notation is correct and conveys the actual step that you learned.

A Note for Beginners

Before you can write music you must know the melody, timing and tempo of the song it is you want to write. The same is true for dancing. Before I can write a dance step using any notation system, I must become familiar with the dance that I want to record. You should at least be able to execute the basic step of the dance (in this case it is the Hustle) in time with the music. Once you have a good feel for the timing of the Hustle, you should be able to learn this

notation. Keep in mind that it will be more difficult for you because you are learning two new things at once. You will benefit in the long run; however, because you will be able to record all the steps that you learn right from the beginning and you will not run the risk of forgetting them.

Should you run into trouble trying to learn both, simply put the notation aside for one or two weeks and then return to it. If you still have not progressed enough with the Hustle at that point to pick up the notation, put it aside for another week or two and repeat the process until you feel ready to handle both.

Although it may be difficult to imagine now, there will come a time when you can dance the Hustle with ease, read and write dance notes fluently and actually enjoy the process. Hold on to that thought of the future while you are struggling through the present.

Points to Remember

- Learning this notation system requires as much time and effort as learning a new language.
- Do not expect to have an immediate understanding of the graphics.
- Frequently review at least one graphic daily even if you cannot comprehend what it signifies. Eventually your brain will associate the graphics with their intended movements.
- Be consistent and persistent in your study. Practice, practice, practice.
- Stay motivated. Keep the benefits that you will gain by mastering this system in mind to get you through the difficult times.
- Stay focused. Keep your goals in mind. Remember that success lies just beyond the frustration that you may be experiencing.

- Be patient and allow yourself time to assimilate the new information especially if you are a beginning dance student.

Summation

Now that you know who we are and what we have to offer, you should now be ready to begin learning this system. In the following chapters we will go into a detailed explanation of the notational elements and do a step by step translation of some of the graphics. These illustrations will serve as a guide to the following chapters, which will offer tips on reading and writing your own notation. The remainder of the book will present a series of graphics illustrating hustle dance steps. You will find many new steps and ideas for step creations of your own by translating these graphics into dance moves. They will also provide a way of sharpening your translation skills.

When you have completed this book, we would be very interested in hearing your responses. Tell us how you are applying what you have learned. If you have any questions or suggestions, feel free to include those as well.

**You can contact us via our web site at
<http://www.dancestudent.com>.**

2 The Frame of Reference

Notational Elements

Figure one will make much more sense once you understand exactly what you are looking at and what your perspective is. This is called your frame of reference. Imagine that there is a beautiful ballroom with a glass ceiling. You are seated directly above this ceiling and are able to look down at one couple that is dancing directly underneath you. Because you are looking directly down at them, your view is primarily of the shoulders and arms. Can you see how your view of this couple could look somewhat similar to what is in the drawing? The *engineer's* description of this is **top down view** and I had that repeated to me countless times while learning this system. Memorize that phrase because it is easy to become confused when looking at some of these graphics. Returning to basic reminders of what your frame of reference is will help you to get your bearings.

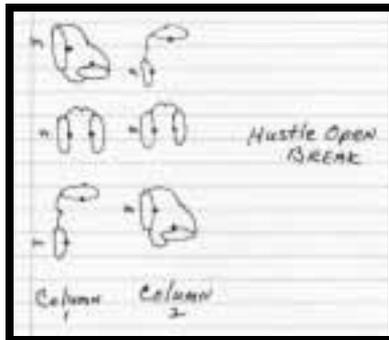


Figure 1

As I mentioned in chapter one, there are some advantages that make learning this system much easier than learning to speak a new language. For one thing you don't have to speak it. It is a read and write only language. Secondly, there are only five basic elements in its vocabulary instead of the thousands of words that you would have to memorize to use another language effectively. These elements are columns, ovals, lead indicator, directional indicators, and arm lines. We will use figure 1 to discuss each element in detail.

Figure 1 demonstrates a basic open break in the Hustle. Notice that the graphics are divided into two *columns*. Each column represents one measure of the dance. In the case of Hustle, a column is what happens during the four steps of 1, 2 and 3 or 1, 2-3-4 etc. Your eye should travel from the top of column 1, down column 1, then to the top of column 2 and down column 2. Notice that the figure at the top of column 2 is identical to the figure at the bottom of column 1. This is because you are always starting the current measure of a dance pattern at the point where you finished the previous measure.

While learning this system, it helped me to put each picture of a column into its own imaginary frame as a reminder of its static nature. I had a tendency to rush through each column in an attempt to create an immediate fluid movement and as a result I couldn't understand anything that I was seeing. Mentally placing each position in its own frame slowed me down and allowed me to focus on one item at a time. It is very important to stop and examine each frame by itself **before** you establish continuity among the frames. Be certain of what each frame is showing before creating a fluid movement with the entire column.

Framing each position also provides a way for me to quickly reference the positions that I want to discuss.

For example, it is much easier for me to say “frame 2, column 2” than “the second picture of the second column”. Only the graphics in chapters two and three will have the frame numbers listed on the left-hand side of each figure as a way of helping you to train your eye for proper reading and referencing. The Graphics Library will not have these “training” numbers.

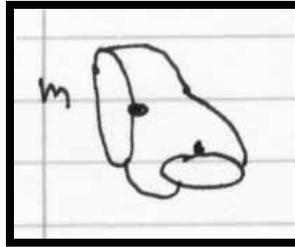
The second element is the oval which represents primarily the shoulders of each person dancing (remember, it is a top down view). That *m* that you see next to one of the ovals is the lead indicator. It indicates who is doing the leading and also means that the remaining oval is the follower. Because this system began as a personal notebook, the *m* was used because it is the initial of the originator's first name. Coincidentally, it works for me as well.

The directional indicators are the short lines in the center of each oval. In some of the graphics they will appear as bold dots instead of short lines. This is only because the notes are handwritten and as such they will vary. (The look of the lead indicator also varies for this reason.) There is no special significance to it. I think of the directional indicators as “noses” because they indicate which way each person is facing. Another point to memorize is that each frame depicts a **quarter turn position** meaning that there is never movement beyond a quarter turn for each oval in either direction when going from one frame to the next.

The last elements we see are the arm lines and they are fairly self-explanatory. These are the lines that you see extending from the ovals. The left arm extends from the left side of the oval (or shoulder) and the right arm extends from the right side of the oval. When arms are not involved in a step, they are omitted as you can see in several of the frames in figure 1. We will cover some special arm placements in the next chapter.

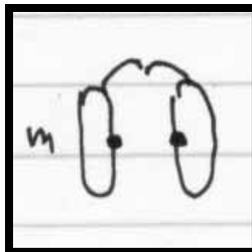
The Notational Elements in Action

Let's take the first column of Figure 1 and examine each frame to see how these elements interact to express the execution of the basic open break in the Hustle.



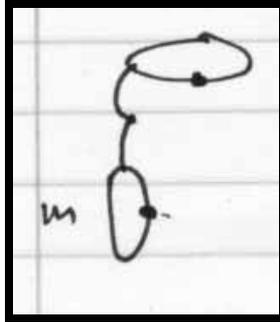
Frame 1

Frame 1 is the starting position. The lead indicator puts the leader on the left with the follower to his right. Note that their positions form a right angle. The arm lines indicate that the leader's right arm is behind the follower's back and the leader's left hand is joined with the follower's right hand. This is a typical starting position in Hustle.



Frame 2

In Frame 2 the leader has released his arm from the follower's back and remains in position. The follower has done a quarter turn to the left. The leader's left hand remains joined to the follower's right hand.



Frame 3

The leader again stays in position for Frame 3 while the follower does another quarter turn to the left. Hand positions remain the same. This completes the first measure.

I have presented each position of the first column in its own frame to help you to keep in mind that each picture presents a **static position**. It is as though a series of three snapshots were taken as the couple danced this first measure freezing them in each of these three positions.

Study each frame of the measure and be sure of each static position. Then try to go from frame to frame and create a fluid movement. The process is very similar to the way a cartoon is created. The artist draws a series of static pictures which, when presented in rapid succession, create the illusion of movement.

Figure 2 represents the second measure of the basic open break. The position that ended the first column is carried over to begin the second column and becomes the starting position for the second measure. In the next frame the follower does one-quarter turn to the right while the leader remains in position and the hands also remain the same. For the last frame the follower does another quarter turn to the right while the leader remains in position and places his right arm on the follower's back and his left hand is still holding the follower's right hand.

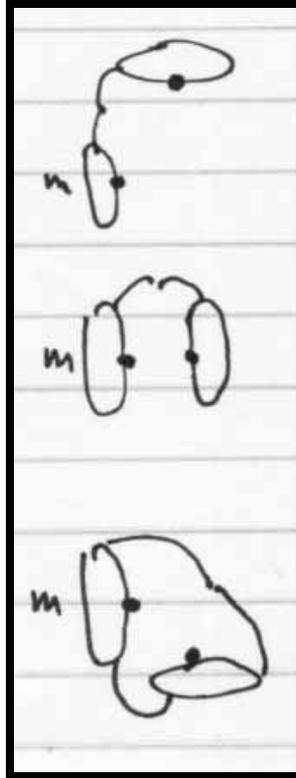


Figure 2

In this case the final frame of column 2 is identical to the first frame of column 1, that is, the pattern begins and ends with the basic Hustle dance position. Furthermore, column 2 is the exact reverse of column 1 so if you can understand and execute the first column, the second one will follow naturally. Leaders should have no problem because they essentially remain in place throughout the sequence.

While dancing, it is very difficult to have a broad perspective of what is actually going on during the execution of all these patterns. This is especially true of followers because they do not have to think about the choreography.

That is the leader's responsibility. Putting a dance pattern into a series of graphic representations allows you to study the positional relationships of the leader and follower throughout each measure. It will help you to become aware of how each dance pattern is constructed. This understanding will provide the basis for refining your footwork, lead and/or follow. It will also facilitate the creation of many innovative dance combinations.

The Hustle Basic Open Break that we have just walked through, is normally one of the first steps that is taught to beginners. In the next chapter, we will walk you through several more basic steps to help you to become familiar with the way these notational elements function and to improve your reading comprehension. Novice Hustle dancers have an advantage here because this material will be fairly new and it will hold your interest. The more advanced dancer might tend to disregard these basic Hustle steps because they seem so simple. Yet, these are the moves that you will see repeated very often throughout the graphics library because they are woven into the fabric of the dance. Strive to perfect them because they are the components of what appear to be very complicated dance patterns. You can give the impression of being quite an accomplished dancer by executing different combinations of the basic steps that follow with precision and style.

3

The Application

Interpreting the Basics

Most of the dances that are taught in studios have a formal syllabus that lists *official* names for the steps of each dance. These lists are further divided into the equally recognized dance levels of bronze, silver, and gold. Bronze is the beginning dance level followed by the intermediate level of silver and finally the advanced level of gold. Although the Hustle has been around for decades, it has remained on the outskirts of traditional ballroom dance for the most part. There has been no formal categorization for Hustle steps as there has been for the other dances.

We will be using the names for the basic Hustle steps that we are familiar with. You may know these same steps by different names. Each studio has its own nomenclature. Feel free to substitute the names that you are familiar with if it makes you more comfortable. In this chapter we will cover the graphic interpretation of four more basic steps: the cross body lead, the wheel, the cross body lead with a reverse turn, and the step out. These steps would normally be introduced at the beginner or “bronze” level so most of you should be familiar with them and that will make the reading process easier.

Keep in mind that we will be treating Hustle as a “slot” or “track” dance. If you are the leader imagine that there is a straight track on the floor in front of you. The follower will usually travel from one end of the track to the other. The leader can be on either side of the track or on the track. We will be referring the leader's position in reference to the track when we discuss each diagram in detail. The

follower will remain on the track in most cases. Although Hustle is not limited to being danced in a slot or on a track, you can understand why an engineer would find this to be the most appealing style because of the need for structure.

! Attention Engineers and Other Abstract Thinkers

The purpose of the remainder of this chapter is to walk the reader through the interpretation of four additional Hustle steps so that even the average person like myself can develop the proper reading and writing techniques. Since everyone learns at a different rate, I have taken the time to cover each pattern in great detail so that everyone can benefit from this system. Great minds like yours will probably be bored with the discussion that follows because you are very familiar with diagrams and you have already grasped the concepts involved.

If that is the case, then just scan the diagrams in the remainder of the chapter and save the reading for when you need something to put you to sleep. You may proceed directly to the Graphics Library and start dancing while the rest of us continue in our struggle to develop this skill.

! Attention All Others

I definitely did not fall into the abstract thinker category while I was learning to read and write this notation. I would look at a graphic and see a meaningless blur. It took a lot of time and patience from my teacher and co-author before I was able to use this notation effectively. Yet, whenever I would ask him for a teaching method I would get the following response: "Top down view, quarter turn positions, one column per measure. That's it." That is his standard response to anyone asking about his notation and I suspect that may be why no one to my knowledge has had

the ability or desire to use it. Most people just need a little more information and motivation.

As a result, the interpretations that follow are mine. Relax, Mr. Yusim has checked them for accuracy and they meet with his approval. I have tried to supply as much detail as possible and to include the learning process that I experienced in an attempt to reach everyone, even the novice Hustle dancer.

We all have different learning styles and abilities. Some of you will feel competent after the first interpretation. If so, just scan the rest and join the engineers in the Graphics Library. Others will have to go through each description several times and pour over every word before feeling competent. Use the material that follows in the way that your personal learning curve dictates.

Cross Body Lead

Frame Numbers ↘

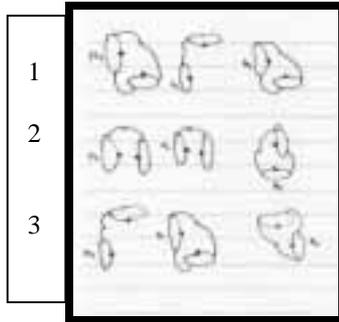


Figure 3

Quick Quiz

Study the first two columns of Figure 3. Do they look familiar?

I hope so because they represent the Open Break Step that we just completed in chapter two. Refer to Figure 1 on page 13 and review the description if you were unable to recognize it. The actual cross body lead does not begin until the third column. Because it starts and ends in the third column, we know that the entire move takes place within one measure of the dance.

In Figure 3 we see a basic Hustle starting position at the top of the third column. This is the same position used to start dancing the Open Break at the top of column one and it is likely to be the first frame of many graphics because it is a *starting* position. All the action for the cross body lead takes place in the last two frames of the graphic. Compare the first two frames of column 3. What changes? The leader does a quarter turn to the left and is on the track (the follower's normal path of movement in the dance) and the follower also does a quarter turn to the left. The arms indicate that they have remained in dance position. In the final frame they each do another quarter turn to the left with the leader ending up on the opposite side of the track and the follower ending up on the track but at the opposite side. They again have remained in dance position.

Once you have gone through a frame by frame analysis you can scan down the entire column to get the overall impression of what the move looks like. You see that the cross body lead is a figure that is done entirely in the dance position. Each partner does a half turn to the left, which allows the leader to cross the track and the follower to travel to the opposite end of the track. This step can be repeated several times either in place or in a travelling version to create a very different effect. Let your eyes scan down column 3 several times and picture the movement in your mind each time you do this. Now look at Figure 3 again in its entirety and picture the entire pattern as you scan down each column.