

# Swing Essentials

## (How to Recognize Swing Content)

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By owning, teaching and choreographing for my ballroom studio, I learned that there is a dance for every season of life. I learned the intimate details that make a waltz a waltz, a salsa a salsa and a country two-step a country two-step. I learned that every partner dance has a character, a step pattern, a pulse and a particular floor craft. West Coast Swing is no different. It is a partner dance with steps, rhythms, rules and a floor craft.

So what are the “Essentials” that help us identify the dance? How do we know we’re watching a WCS dance and not a tango, rumba or foxtrot?

### THE FIVE WEST COAST SWING ESSENTIALS

- 1) **Defined Rectangle Slot-** Typically, a normal WCS slot is 2-3 floor squares long and one floor square wide. We can shift the Defined Slot’s location on the floor, but then we stay there or return back to our original slot. WCS is NOT a rounded or unconfined dance. The slot does not extend very far any one side.
- 2) **Two Beat Anchor-** WCS has an anchor at the end of all of its patterns, and that anchor takes a full two beats. Both the lead and follow may anchor in place while spinning, while doing footwork, and while doing arm styling... but it takes a full two beats. Anchoring is where we reconnect with our partner, get on the same page, make our point or get in the last word. It’s the start and stop of a pattern, the period at the end of a sentence. Anchoring allows both dancers the opportunity to regroup themselves, stay into the floor and prepare to ‘rubber band’ the “& a 1” of the next pattern.
- 3) **Man in the Middle-** In WCS, the man is in the center and patterns are used to move the woman up and down the slot. The man and woman do not stay at opposite ends of the slot and then switch, and the woman *does not* stay in the center while he moves around her unless it’s to let her pass him on her way down the slot. He stays in the middle, and makes magic moving her up, down, in and out of the slot. Some call the man’s actions to pin down the center of the slot ‘posting.’
- 4) **Pulses the Upbeat-** Every dance has a pulse. Without it, the dances mesh and meld together. The pulse of a dance gives it its character beyond footwork. Our true champions pulse the upbeat, some knowingly, some not. West Coast Swing pulses the upbeats in a song. It makes our timing tighter, and it determines a huge portion of how the dance actually appears on the floor.
- 5) **More Triple Rhythms-** If you count out all the basic WCS patterns, you will notice that for almost every Double Rhythm, there are TWO Triple Rhythms. Not only that, but there are no Single Rhythms at all. Triple Rhythms are much harder to do than Single or Double Rhythms, especially with good timing. Since the majority of other partner dances are made of Single and Double Rhythms, WCS really stands out with its exciting Triple Rhythm footwork.

### THE HIGHER ESSENTIALS

The “Higher Essentials,” as I like to call them, are the elements that are present when WCS is danced at its highest level. I’ve found that these are the elements that attract non-dancers WCS, besides the Three T’s.

- **Contrast-** Contrast is not speeding up and slowing down, then speeding up and slowing down. Contrast draws people in, it prevents them from looking away, it keeps their attention and makes them hit the rewind button. Contrast requires deft subtly combined with precise expansion. It allows for “story telling” though dance.
- **Musicality-** Musicality as a Higher Element is not staying on the beat. It means dancing to the major phrase, doing a large movement to a large piece of music and a small movement to a small ‘ting.’ It’s helping others hear things in the song they didn’t know were even there. It’s using the dance to paint a visual representation of the music. The more challenging the music, the more exciting the painting.
- **Individual Style-** True WCS requires a high level of leading and following because of how complex it is. However, it also gives both leaders and followers the freedom to add styling, footwork variations (syncopations), breaks and play (aka ‘conversation’). As a result, each true WCS dancer looks unique. I chose to study WCS instead of ballroom at an early age because the ballroom ladies looked very “cookie-cutter.” True WCS allows individuality to appear within its confines.

I hope you enjoy using these tools to help you identify and enjoy dancing True WCS on the dance floor! There is more to come to help understand what’s out there that is not West Coast Swing. In the meantime, have fun and KEEP DANCING!

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