

Basic Level Square Dancing Calls

Brief Definitions

Dancers Naming

From a Squared Set of Normal Couples, each dancer's **Partner** is the adjacent dancer, and each dancer's **Corner** is the next dancer "around the nearest corner of the square" from them. **Heads** are the two opposing couples who are facing toward or away from the caller. The **Sides** are the two opposing couples who are standing perpendicular to the caller.

Circle Left

Dancers join hands to form a circle, face slightly left or right as directed and move forward around the circle the distance directed. When left or right is not specified for circle, it is circle to the left.

Forward and Back

Each dancer steps forward 3 steps and pauses while bringing the free foot forward and touching it to the floor without transferring weight. Each steps back 3 steps beginning with the free foot and pauses while touching the free foot beside the weight-bearing foot.

Do sa do

Dancers advance and pass right shoulders. Without turning, each dancer moves to the right passing in back of the other dancer. Then moving backwards, each passes left shoulders returning to starting position.

Swing

Dancers step forward ending right side to right side and move around each other turning in a clockwise direction four or more counts. Dancers break out of the swing. The lady continues turning to her right until facing the same direction as the man, they form a couple.

Promenade family

As a unit the couple walks forward around the circle counterclockwise. Unless otherwise specified, they promenade until reaching the man's home position. At the end of the promenade the couple turns, as a unit, to face the center of the set.

Allemande Left

Dancers face their corners and turn by the left forearm. Releasing arm holds and stepping forward, each dancer ends facing his partner.

Arm turns

From facing dancers. Join left or right forearms and walk forward and around each other the distance specified. 1/2, 3/4, full.

Right & Left Grand family

Dancers to face opposite sex (men counterclockwise, ladies clockwise) join right hands, if not already joined, and pull by. Each moves ahead, around the circle, and each gives the left hand to the next, a right to the next and a left to the next until each dancer meets the person with whom he or she started.

Star family

The directed dancers step forward and extend left or right hands to form a left or right hand star. Dancers turn the star by walking forward in a circle around the center of the star. Turning distance of the star may be specified in fractions of one quarter, one half, three quarters, or a complete revolution.

Star promenade

Directed dancers form a star and place the other arm around the waist of another directed dancer. Turn the star and promenade the distance specified.

Pass thru

Dancers move forward, passing right shoulders with each other. Each ends in the other's starting position but neither dancer changes facing direction.

Split the outside couple

The active or directed couple moves forward between the outside couple who sidesteps slightly to let them through, then sidesteps back together again.

Half sashay family

Partners exchange places without changing facing directions. Dancer on the right side steps to the left, while the dancer on the left steps back, side steps to the right, then steps forward to rejoin partner.

Turn back family (U-Turn back)

The dancer does an in place about-face turn, turning toward partner.

Separate

The dancers in the couple turn back to back with each other and walk forward around the outside of the square. The distance traveled is determined by the next call.

Courtesy turn

The man (left hand dancer) takes the lady's (right hand dancer) left hand (palm down) in his left (palm up) and places his right hand in the small of the lady's back. Working as a unit, the couple turns around with the left hand dancer backing up and the right hand dancer walking forward.

Do paso

Each dancer faces partner and does a left arm turn half way to face his or her corner, Releasing arm holds and moving forward, each dancer goes to the corner for a right arm turn half way. Each returns to the starting partner to courtesy turn to face the center of the set or to follow the next call.

Lead right

Directed couple(s) take a step forward and as a unit turn to the right 90' and move forward, usually to face another couple.

Right and left thru

Dancers step forward, join right hands with the dancer directly ahead and pull by. Each couple then does a courtesy turn to face the other couple.

Grand square

Directed couple (usually sides) face partner. All dancers individually walk 3 steps and then turn one-quarter turn to face in toward the center of the set. Dancers repeat this four times, but on the fourth time, they do not turn, but reverse direction, and then complete four more repetitions of 3 steps and turn one-quarter in, finishing in their original position.

Star thru

Man's raised right hand is placed against the lady's left, palm to palm with fingers up, to make an arch. As the dancers move forward, the lady does a one quarter left face turn under the arch, while the man does a one quarter turn to the right moving behind the lady. They end side by side with the lady on the man's right.

Circle to a line

Couples join hands and circle left one half. The lead dancer in the couple who started on the inside (man's position) releases the left handhold, but retains the handhold of the dancer on his right to become the left end dancer of the line.

Bend the line

The center dancers in the line drop hands with each other. With each half of the line working as a unit, the ends move forward while the centers back up until both halves of the line are facing.

Walk around your corner

All dancers face their corners. Walking forward and around each other while keeping right shoulders adjacent, dancers return to face their partner.

See saw

When combined with walk around your corner, each dancer walks forward and around the partner keeping left shoulders adjacent, then steps forward to face the corner.

Square thru family

Facing dancers join right hands and pull by. Turn in one quarter, join left hands and pull by. Turn in one quarter and join right hands with facing dancer and pull by. Turn in one quarter, join left hands and pull by but do not turn. Variations on square thru may be specified by fractions or by the number of hands, e.g., square thru three quarters is the same as square thru three hands, etc.

California twirl

Partners join hands (man's right with lady's left) and raise them to form an arch. The lady walks forward and under their joined hands making a one half left-faced turn while the man walks around the lady in a clockwise direction on half. Dancers have exchanged places and are both facing in the opposite direction from which they started.

Dive Thru

The couple whose back is to the center of the square (unless a specific couple is directed) makes an arch by raising their joined inside hands. The other couple ducks under the arch and moves forward. The couple making the arch moves forward and does a california twirl. If neither couple has its back to the center of the set, then one couple must be directed to dive thru the other couple.

Wheel around

The couple, working as a unit, turns around to the left (180 degrees). The left-side dancer backs up while the right-side dancer moves forward. The pivot point is the handhold between the two dancers.

Thar family

From a Circle, center dancers hold a Star (if men, palms down and take the wrist of the man ahead and link up to form a box) and walk backward, and each center dancer maintains a forearm grip with the adjacent outside dancer, who walks forward. Most common usage is “Allemande Left To An Allemande Thar, Go Forward Two, Men Swing In To A Backup Star” which means Allemande Left; Right Pull By; Left Arm Turn to make a Thar with the men in the center.

Shoot the star

From a Thar in motion, Centers dancers drop the inside handholds forming the star as each center dancer and the adjacent outside dancer Arm Turn 1/2 and Step Thru. If Full Around is directed, the Arm Turn is a full turn (360 degrees).

Slip the clutch

From a Thar in motion, any backward motion is stopped as outside dancers release armholds with the adjacent centers. All dancers move forward around the center of the set to the next dancer. On the command to Skip (or Pass) one or more dancers, everyone walks forward within their circle, passing the indicated number of dancers.

Box the Gnat

Facing dancers join and raise their right hands to make an arch; these hands remain connected throughout the call. In one smooth motion dancers Pass Thru and turn around, with the woman turning left and going under the arch and the man turning right and walking forward around the woman. At the end of the call, each dancer will be standing in the other’s original position and facing each other.

Ocean wave family

Ocean wave is a formation of three or more dancers holding adjacent hands and with each dancer facing in an opposite direction to that of the adjoining dancer(s). An ocean wave with an even number of dancers is a right hand wave if the end dancers and the dancers adjacent to them have right hands joined.

Alamo ring

Alamo style is a formation of an even number of dancers in a circle holding adjacent hands and with each dancer facing in an opposite direction to that of the adjoining dancers.

Pass the ocean

Dancers pass thru, turn in to face their partners and step into a right hand ocean wave.

Extend

Dancers who can step forward and join with facing dancers into a new formation. For example, Heads Pass the Ocean, Extend will end in two parallel ocean waves.

Swing thru family

From Ocean Waves, those who can, turn by the right one half, then those who can, turn by the left one half.

Run family

The directed (active) dancers (boys, girls, ends, centers) run around the inactive dancers by moving forward in a semi-circle (180°) around an adjacent (inactive) dancer to end in the adjacent dancer's starting position. Meanwhile, the inactive dancer, who may be facing in any direction, adjusts by stepping (without changing facing direction) into the vacated starting position of the active dancer. The active dancer doing the run has reversed his original facing direction.

Trade family

Directed dancers (boys, girls, ends, centers) exchange places, changing facing directions by walking forward in a semi-circle ending in the other dancer's starting position. Each trading dancer has reversed his original facing direction. If the trading dancers start while facing in the same direction, they pass right shoulders.

Wheel and deal family

(From Lines of Four) The left hand couple only takes a step forward. The couples wheel (180°) toward the center of the line with the center dancer of each couple acting as the pivot point about which the couples turn. The couple that started on the right half of the line wheels in front of the other couple. Both couples end facing the same direction with the original left hand couple standing behind the original right hand couple.

(From Two-faced Line) Each couple steps straight ahead one step. Each couple then wheels (180°) toward the center of the line with the center dancer of each couple acting as the pivot point about which the couples turn. Couples end facing each other.

Double pass thru

Dancers move forward, passing right shoulders with two other dancers to finish facing away from the center of the set in a completed double pass thru formation.

1st couple go left next couple go right

Dancers, with each couple working as a unit, walk forward in an arc in the indicated direction. The center couple walks forward before taking the second direction given.

Zoom

From one couple following another, each dancer in the lead couple separates away from his partner and walks around a full circle to end in the position of the dancer who was directly behind him. Meanwhile each trailing dancer steps directly forward into the vacated position of the lead dancer. Each dancer ends facing in the same direction he started.

Flutterwheel family

The right hand dancers (normally girls) go into the center and turn by the right forearm. As they move adjacent to the opposite dancer, they reach out with the free (left) hand and, taking the opposite dancer, each continues on around to the original right hand dancer's starting position, releasing arms in the center and turning as a couple to face the center.

Sweep a quarter

Dancers continue the circling movement one quarter in the direction of their body flow.

Veer family

Two facing couples working as a unit or two facing dancers move to the left (or right, as directed) and forward to end in a two-faced line or mini wave respectively.

Trade by

The couples facing each other pass thru, the couples facing out do a partner trade to face in.

Touch a quarter

Dancers touch right hands and without stopping turn one quarter by the right.

Circulate family

Directed dancers (boys, girls, ends, centers) circulate by rotating in circular fashion moving forward one position within the formation, taking the spot previously occupied by the dancer ahead in the given formation.

Ferris wheel

The couples facing out wheel and deal to become the outside couples in a double pass thru formation. Meanwhile, the couples facing in step straight ahead to momentarily form a two faced line in the center. Without stopping they wheel and deal in that line to end as the center couples in a double pass thru formation.