

THE MODERN JIVE SKILLS TOOLKIT

V1.0

 Both roles  Leader specific  Follower specific

Timing & Rhythm

Moving with the music's beat and feel.

6 skills

On-beat movement

Making controlled contact with the floor as the body moves in time with the music's beat.

Up/downbeat movement

Using the lighter lift of the upbeat (the 2, 4, 6, and 8 of the musical count) and the stronger, grounded feel of the downbeat (the 1, 3, 5, and 7 of the musical count) to structure the movement of the dance. Movement and momentum commence on the upbeat and resolve on the downbeat. This is the signature rhythm of Modern Jive.

Timing ownership

Staying on time with the music as best you can, even when your partner's timing varies. Quickly and smoothly returns to the musical beat if going off time.

Syncopation

Using off-beat movements deliberately, then returning cleanly to standard on-beat timing.

Speed changes

Adjusting the speed of your movement and dynamics, not just your footwork, to match a slower or faster feel in the music, then returning cleanly to standard time.

Patient following

Ensuring movements are not rushed or made ahead of the leader's lead, filling the full duration of a beat with movement.

Technique

Applying efficient body mechanics for control and ease.

19 skills

Concertina action

Using movements away from and towards your partner to match the downbeat and upbeat of the music.

Posture

Holding an upright, balanced body line.

Balance & centring

Centering your weight over your own base, with awareness of where your centre is so you're never accidentally off-balance.

Relaxed, supportive frame

Holding the connected shape you and your partner form together with your arms and torso (ie. your 'frame') firm enough to lead or follow responsively, but not tense or rigid.

Intentional step size

Adjusting step size for song tempo, feel of music and partner, typically using smaller rather than larger steps.

Minimal arm extension

Keeping elbow of arm(s) that are connected to your partner low and relatively close to the body during concertina movements. Keeping the forearm as horizontal to the floor as possible.

Rolling footwork

Using the natural movement of your feet to roll through the floor (also called foot articulation) rather than marching, bouncing, or stomping.

Sending/receiving weight

Smoothly pushing your weight off one (sending) foot fully over your other (receiving) foot as you step.

Grounding

Engaging your core and posterior chain (legs, glutes, and lower back), and rotating your feet slightly outward (turning out the foot), to commit weight down into the floor, creating a stable connection with the ground beneath you.

Minimum force

Adjusting your lead or follow to use the minimum necessary force to move yourself and/or your partner. Uses judgement to determine what the minimum force necessary to comfortably and responsively lead or follow your partner.

Body flight

Managing your body's natural momentum (ie. inertia) smoothly through space. Especially when accelerating, decelerating, or maintaining constant motion.

Spin technique

Fixing your eyes on a point (ie. spotting) to avoid getting dizzy as you turn. Keeping your body upright and controlled as you turn, to avoid falling into or out of the spin.

Line of dance

Maintaining a line of dance suitable to the context of the surroundings, or intentionally breaking from it to create contrast or impact.

Turn height adjustment

Adjusting hand and arm height during assisted turns to suit both partners' comfort, height, and turning style.

Body articulation

Moving each part of your body through space with control and fluidity, rather than moving rigidly or all at once.

Body leading

Leading with the movement of your body weight and rotation, not by pulling or pushing with the arm. Influencing your partner's movement, rather than physically moving your partner into position.

Active/passive leading

Consciously choosing when to continuously guide a movement (active leading) or give an initial impulse and allow your partner's own momentum or interpretation to complete it (passive leading).

Direction before rotation

Initiate a direction for the follower to move in before initiating rotational motion.

Responsive following

Reacting to the leader's communication with minimal delay, typically from your center, without forcing or resisting.

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Connection & Teamwork

How you communicate and move together.
14 skills

Clear communication

Giving information about an intended direction (e.g., linear or rotational movement) that's readable and easy for your partner to interpret. Could be through subtle physical or visual cues, while minimizing unnecessary physical or visual noise that could create confusion.

Resistance in partnership

Matching your partner's level of physical connection (by matching resistance in compression and opposition), giving genuine weight they can lead or follow off rather than just touching hands.

Partner ability adjustment

Adjusting your dance in a variety of ways (e.g., complexity, energy, repertoire) to be suitable for your partner's ability and style.

Visual connection

Staying visually engaged with your partner and/or an audience if appropriate. Not staring at your feet, nor constantly staring at your partner.

Non-verbal check-ins

Offering small smiles, nods, or glances that maintain shared experience and reassures your partner mid-dance.

Partner trust

Establishing and embracing trust in your partner.

Graceful recovery

Re-establishing connection and rapport with your partner smoothly after a miscommunication or mistake, without a lasting impact on the dance.

Elastic connection

Absorbing momentum to create stretch in the connection, and letting it recoil to change momentum, rather than just abruptly pushing or pulling.

Counterbalance

Using opposing weight with your partner to create shapes or movements that neither of you could hold alone.

Conversational dynamic

Treating leading and following as a two-way exchange, not a one-way instruction.

Baton passing & sharing

Giving, taking, or sharing the lead in a moment, whether that means initiating an idea, building on your partner's idea, or executing on an idea together.

Synchronicity

Transferring weight in sync with your partner, with the leader slightly ahead to initiate movements on time. Matching your partner's rhythmic choices, such as accents and pulses, so you're moving as a synchronised partnership rather than independent individuals. Used once both of you are confidently holding your own timing.

Call and response

Replicating or building on your partner's movements (e.g., as a callback to an earlier moment) when musical cues provide the opportunity to do so.

Space creation

Creating physical or musical space for your partner to successfully execute intended movements and/or add their own styling.

Musicality & Interpretation

Reflecting the music's mood and structure.
15 skills

Mood expression

Dancing in a way that represents your interpretation of the emotional tone/feel of the song, not just its beat.

Groove

Moving your body continuously in a way that embodies the tempo and feeling of the music, beyond just landing on the beat. Can include using staccato and legato movements, continuous movement of the body through a beat, or using footwork to fill time between beats.

Staccato movement

Incorporating sharp, distinct movements in your dance, that match the feeling of the music.

Legato movement

Incorporating smooth, flowing movements in your dance, that match the feeling of the music

Energy matching

Adjusting your movements (e.g., big, small movements) to match the song's energy.

Contrast in movement

Using contrast in the size, tempo or feel of your movements to match changes in the music.

Accenting hits

Building up to and emphasising a strong accent in the music, through your movements and/or moves.

Using musical structure

Hearing and interpreting music in groups such as 8 and 32 beats, and recognising song sections such as the intro, verse, chorus, and bridge, and dancing in a way that reflects them.

Tension & release

Reflecting the building and release of tension in the song, including building up to key musical moments.

Musical pauses

Using stillness deliberately at a pause in the music, rather than filling every beat with movement.

Improvising surprises

Adjusting on the fly when the music does something unexpected.

Genre adaptation

Adapting the moves, movements, and/or timing of your dance to different music genres, and incorporating influence from other dance styles, while remaining authentically Modern Jive.

Lyrical interpretation

Incorporating movements that are relevant to the sound, melody, or literal meaning of the lyrics.

Narrative arc

Building a sense of story or journey with your partner across the song.

Variety of moves

Leading a variety of moves and patterns throughout the dance.

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Style & Spirit

Expressing your personal flair, presence, and fun.
12 skills

Personal styling

Adding your own individual flavour or flourishes to the dance, without being selfish or compromising the leader/follower dynamic. Includes adapting to different music genres and borrowing from other dance styles while remaining authentically Modern Jive.

Aesthetic lines

Creating aesthetically pleasing lines through your own body shape, and together with your partner, including using your arms and legs as a natural extension of the body to add to the feel and shape of the dance.

Body isolations

Moving one or multiple parts of your body (such as ribs, hips, or shoulders) independently of the rest, often used in a coordinated way such as a body roll or rhythmic walk.

Facial expression

Letting your face reflect enjoyment and engagement that matches the feeling of the music and the atmosphere. Not a blank or serious look.

Individuality

Expressing your own personality in a way that complements the partnership (ie. not in a selfish way).

Level variation

Varying the vertical height of your movement, such as going low or standing tall, to create visual interest and/or express feelings in the music.

Confidence & presence

Carrying yourself with a sense of humble self-assurance, even through a mistake.

Playfulness

Bringing a fun energy to the dance rather than over-seriousness.

Enjoying the moment

Showing that you are enjoying the dance and the partnership, rather than just executing moves.

Hairology

Using the movement of your hair to add to the feel and visual appeal of the dance.

Entertainment value

Being entertaining to your partner and/or an audience, such as through your energy, charisma, appropriate humour, eye contact, adopting a persona or character, and/or creating special moments.

Wardrobe choice

Choosing an outfit appropriate to the surroundings, that plays to your strengths, while allowing you to feel comfortable in yourself.

Floor craft & Safety

Navigating the floor safely and considerately.
6 skills

Surroundings awareness

Keeping a general sense of where other couples are around you as you dance. Adapting your dance to your surroundings when needed to maintain safety and/or enjoyment for you and your partner.

Space-scaled moves

Varying the physical space used in your moves or movements (typically minimizing space on a busy dance floor) to fit the amount of floor space available.

Collision prevention/recovery

Adjusting calmly and quickly if you or your partner nearly or actually collide with another couple or object, and offering a quick apology.

Respecting space

Not invading another couple's dancing area, even when the floor is crowded. Actively guiding your partner around obstacles or other couples on the floor to maintain safety and enjoyment.

Checking comfort

Checking and accommodating for what your partner is or isn't comfortable doing.

Respecting physical boundaries

Respecting your partner's personal space and physical boundaries, and never touching inappropriately.

Repertoire

Types of skill-based moves and tricks you can draw on.
8 skills

Turns

Safely using one or multiple turns, such as two-footed or one-footed turns, in time to the music, using good judgement based on your partner's comfort and ability. Leaders: Avoiding leading excessive consecutive turns, which can leave a follower dizzy if not broken up with non-turning movement.

Leans

Using core strength and connection points to safely support partner's weight off the vertical via a lean against the body, and only with appropriate training, consent, and safety awareness.

Dips

Using core strength and connection points to safely support your partner's weight off the vertical using body part(s) such as your hand, arm or leg. Safely helping return the follower to balance. Only used with appropriate training, consent, safety awareness, and good judgement based on your partner's comfort and ability. Following: Supporting as much of own weight as possible during a dip, waiting for a clear lead rather than anticipating the movement.

Ducks

Safely leading the follower to do a turn with their head ducked down under their partner's raised arm, in time to the music. Only used with appropriate training, safety awareness, and good judgement based on your partner's comfort and ability. Leading: Avoiding leading excessive consecutive ducks, which can leave a follower dizzy if not broken up with other movement.

Rides

Safely using partner's momentum and/or balance to support complementary motion, in a way that matches the music. Only used with appropriate training, safety awareness, and good judgement based on your partner's comfort and ability.

Floorials

Safely incorporating movements where a body part other than the feet touch the floor, in a way that matches the music. Only used with appropriate training, safety awareness, and good judgement based on your partner's comfort and ability.

Baby aerials

Safely lifting the majority of a partner's weight below a certain height threshold (often the waist, chest, or shoulders depending on the school or competition) in a way that matches the music. Returning your partner safely and smoothly to the floor. Only used with appropriate training, consent, safety awareness, and good judgement based on your partner's comfort and ability.

Aerials

Using core strength and strong connection points to safely lift and return a partner from/to the floor, in a way that matches the music, and only with appropriate training, consent, and safety awareness.