



## How do I select a qualified instructor?

Now that you've decided to learn to dance, you'll want to find the right instructor. People often form very close, and sometimes life-long, bonds with their teachers. Your exploration of the sport and art of dance can and should be a very enjoyable journey. The right instructor will help ensure a positive outcome and your experience with them should be challenging, exciting, and gratifying.

If you are brand new to dancing, you may have limited information on which to base your selection of an instructor. Even a person with a few months worth of lessons may look like a professional to you! Here are some questions to ask which will help you select a qualified instructor.

1. Is the instructor a full-time professional and do they have access to a studio or facility with a suitable atmosphere in which to learn to dance?

**Find an instructor who does nothing but eat, breathe, and sleep the art of dance.**

Experienced dance professionals know the importance of a large, smooth floor and make this available to their students whenever practical. Also, instructors for whom teaching dance is their source of livelihood generally create a better experience for their students than do instructors who rush from their day job to teach on nights and weekends. A professional will have adequate time for class preparation well before the start of class. Splitting attentions between various types of work puts one at a disadvantage.

2. Does the instructor currently perform either with a partner or with their students, or have they done so in the past?

**Find an instructor who loves to inspire through performance.**

Even if the thought of performing makes you ill, it is important that your instructor has done so. In addition to being a social activity and a sport, dance is also a performing art. An instructor with knowledge and experience in this area of dance is prepared to offer a student the full experience. You never know when you might "catch the bug" and an instructor with performance experience can easily take you to the next level. Performing gives an individual an added degree of attentiveness to their steps and helps develop a healthy sense of comfort in front of others. If you really dance like nobody is watching...they probably won't.

3. Does the instructor currently compete or have they ever competed at the national level in ballroom and/or Latin dance competitions?

**Find an instructor who is competing or has competed.**

Instructors who have competed, or are currently competing, have the ability to help their students reach this goal should they ever desire to do so. Don't become overly concerned with the level or placement of your instructor because everyone who gets out there is a winner. The point is that instructors who are actively involved in competitions are on the cutting edge of the sport and aware of small changes that are periodically made to figures. This will ensure that your dancing does not appear to be dated. Competing instructors are also knowledgeable about shoes, dancewear, and other elements related to dance.

4. Does the instructor receive on-going coaching for themselves?

**Find an instructor who still takes dance lessons!**

Our training never ends. The best dance instructors and coaches continue to educate themselves as dance is a dynamic endeavor. A dedicated instructor will continue to practice and study to improve their own skills while also working to learn new and better ways to educate their students. Unless your coach is already a Master or an older professional, perhaps one who has already become a judge or high-level coach, they should be receiving on-going training for themselves. In addition, instructors who still take lessons put themselves in your shoes and remain cognizant of how difficult it can be to learn new skills and improve upon old ones.

5. Does the instructor have a solid knowledge of both the lead and follow aspects of the dance? Are they able to display both parts of the figures?

**Find an instructor who knows both the parts of the dance.**

An experienced instructor is skilled in both parts of the dance partnership and is comfortable leading or following. He or she should be able to teach alone, and able to explain both parts with ease and clarity. This kind of knowledge and comfort can only come from years of experience. If your instructor is very young, they may be an excellent dancer, but may not have yet analyzed the information in a way which makes it possible for them to clearly teach someone else. This kind of analysis and understanding comes from spending a great deal of time dancing the figures in real-life situations.

6. How many years of experience in teaching does your instructor have?

**Find an instructor who has many years of teaching experience and one who is articulate and able to make the difficult things clear.**

There is no substitute for experience. No amount of classes, workshops, books, seminars, or DVD's, can take the place of hours of experience on the dance floor both dancing and teaching. The best instructors are able to make the most difficult points easy to understand. A capable instructor will get to know the goals of his/her students and be able to give them a quality experience at a level which is compatibly with those goals.

7. Does the instructor ascribe to healthy living habits and body awareness as would be expected of an athlete?

**Find an instructor who walks, talks, and looks like a dancer!**

This is a very important clue as to the level of dedication your instructor has to the art of dance. True dance professionals walk through life in a healthy manner, with proper posture and grace, both on and off the dance floor. A dedicated professional is an athlete and as such, they strive to take care of their mind and body every day.

8. Do you like the instructor and feel at ease with their personality?

**Find an instructor you genuinely like.**

Once you determine the technical qualifications of your prospective instructor you will want to take a few classes from them. During this time notice whether you are made to feel at ease or uncomfortable. Is the instructor respectful and diplomatic? Does she/he speak with clarity and is she/he easily heard? In a group setting, does she/he address the entire class? While technical knowledge and expertise are very important other details, such as the instructor's temperament, come into play.

Dancing is an art and likewise, so is teaching. Albert Einstein said, "It is the supreme art of the teacher to awaken joy in creative expression and knowledge." In order for your dance education to be the most satisfying experience possible, you'll need to find an individual who has the knowledge and experience necessary to help you learn....AND.....equally, if not of more importance, they must be able to awaken the joy of creative expression which is inside of you! A good instructor is more than a technician, more than a dancer, more than a competitor, more than a public speaker...a good instructor must be a teacher.

***Find a dance instructor who IS a teacher who will awaken the dancer in you.***