

## Argentine Tango Essentials



Argentine tango has a rich tradition of culture and etiquette that has evolved to produce harmony at dance events and promote the greatest enjoyment for all. Here are the essential elements of tango etiquette that are necessary to know when attending tango dance events.

### Milongas

- A milonga is a formal tango dance. Although some milongas vary in formality, it is best to dress up, especially if you are attending a milonga for the first time. Excellent hygiene is also essential.
- There should be no teaching on the dance floor during a milonga. Dancers do the best they can to dance well with their partners and simply enjoy the experience. Leaders should dance figures that they are comfortable with and can lead well with many partners.

### Tandas

- Music at a milonga is played in sets of 3 or 4 songs called tandas separated by cortinas (literally, curtain), or short interludes of non-tango music
- Generally, dancers ask for dances at the beginning of the tanda and dance the entire tanda with one partner. It is an insult to stop dancing with someone before the end of the tanda. The words “thank you” indicate that you have finished dancing with your partner, so avoid saying “thank you” until the tanda has ended.

- If you would like to dance with someone for less than three or four songs, it is fine to ask after the first or second song of a tanda and then end when the tanda ends.
- Tango dancers stop dancing on the last beat of the song without moving even a beat longer. Release the embrace between songs and talk briefly. Do not talk while dancing.

### Tango, Vals, and Milonga

- There are three types of traditional tango music: tango, vals (Argentine waltz), and milonga
- Milongas have a tanda structure that is repeated throughout the night. A typical structure is two tandas of tango followed by vals, then two tandas of tango followed by milonga. Since the structure is repeated, it is possible to know what type of tanda is next and choose a dance partner accordingly.

### The Cabaceo

- The *cabaceo* is a way of asking for a dance in which dancers try to meet each other’s gaze. If this happens, a nod from both dancers signals an agreement to dance, and then the leader asks the follower to dance and escorts her onto the floor. The *cabaceo* is used to a varying extent at milongas in the United States. If you are new to a milonga, try to observe the etiquette concerning whether the *cabaceo* is used frequently.
- Men traditionally ask for dances, but it is acceptable for the woman to ask. It is also common for men to dance with men and women to dance with women.
- If you would like to dance, try to be near the dance floor and not engaged in conversation during cortinas.
- Women often remove their shoes toward the end of the night and men should avoid asking them to dance.
- If you decline a dance, avoid dancing with someone else for the rest of the tanda.

## Floorcraft

- In addition to creating harmony with your partner, it is important to create harmony with everyone else on the dance floor so that all dancers move as one.
- Dancers dance counterclockwise around the room in *line of dance*.
- There are discrete lanes. Many milongas have two lanes that move around a center where more dancers are more stationary.
- Choose a lane and stay in it. Avoid passing or changing lanes unless someone in front of you is blocking movement significantly.
- Keep progressing and take up the space in front of you. On a crowded floor, you should avoid allowing more than about three steps to open in front of you.
- Followers keep boleos on the ground unless you are certain that there is no one behind you. Leaders, avoid leading boleos if the follower does high boleos indiscriminately.
- Avoid traveling opposite line of dance. Some dancers feel that even one step backward is too much, whereas some leaders will take a small step back if they are aware that there is no one there. Two steps backward is too much on a crowded floor. Also, avoid tailgating the couple in front of you to provide room for them to turn.
- If you would like to dance in place or do a dance that is not tango such as swing or latin dancing to non-traditional tango music, then you should dance in the center and avoid affecting the lanes.
- Dancers have the right of way. Avoid interrupting dancers if you are entering the dance floor. Also, avoid standing on the dance floor to talk after most couples have begun to dance.
- Most importantly, just be considerate and try to move in harmony with everyone else.

## Practicass

- A practica is an event where people practice.
- The dress is often casual and comfortable.
- Although the rules of floorcraft are generally followed at a practica, it is acceptable to deviate from the rules in the interested of learning new figures as long as there is adequate space and other dancers are not interrupted.
- Music is often not played in tandas and there is often no requirement to dance with a particular partner for a certain number of songs. Partners generally dance together for more than one song.
- It is considerate to ask a partner at a practica what they are working on, especially so a leader can lead figures that would be helpful for a follower.
- It is common for dancers to work on new figures at a practica and share figures with others.
- Giving feedback on technique should be handled with care. If you would like feedback from a dancer, it is fine to ask. Dancers should be hesitant to give technical feedback unless it is very clear that they much more advanced than the recipient and have a clear understanding of technique.

Finally, enjoy the dance! Remember that these guidelines are meant to promote harmony. Just keep them in mind, be considerate, do your best, and have fun.

