

The Structure of Tango

Part I: Cross Steps and Open Steps

Introduction: At the end of this class, you will find that no matter which foot you are on or what system (Parallel or Cross) you are in that you will always have at least 8 steps that you can execute.

In Tango classes, teachers often teach figures or patterns. These can be fun and give students something to do when dancing. I think of figures as words or sentences and all the figures that we do during a song as paragraphs or chapters. In this class, we are taking a step back and looking at the alphabet or ABCs of Tango. Our goal is to look at the technique of every step and to make every step that we take in tango count.

In this class we look at the 5 basic steps of tango: Forward Open Step, Side Open Step, Back Open Step, Forward Cross Step and Back Cross Step. We explain that a Cross Step is a concept step and is defined by the orientation of the man and woman to each other. Whenever a couple takes a step, if they both stop in the middle of their step and turn (pivot) so that their torsos face one another and their legs are crossed (twisted) then they are taking a cross step. If their legs are not crossed then they are taking an open step.

See the table below for the 6 steps used in this class. The man and the woman both have 3 possible steps a Forward Cross, an Open Step (forward, side or back) or a Back Cross. When you combine these possibilities in both Parallel and Cross Systems you end up with 38 possible steps.

Steps used in this Class

Step Name	Abbreviation
Forward Open	FO
Back Open	BO
Side Open	SO
Forward Cross	FC
Back Cross	BC

Difficulty of Steps

Color	Meaning
	Easy Step

Color	Meaning
Red	Advanced Step

Possibilities in Parallel System (22 Steps)

Open Steps in Parallel System Starting on Leader's Left & Follower's Right (3 Steps)			
Man	SO	FO	BO
Woman	SO	BO	FO

Open Steps in Parallel System Starting on Leader's Right & Follower's Left (3 Steps)			
Man	SO	FO	BO
Woman	SO	BO	FO

Cross Steps in Parallel System Starting on Man's Left & Woman's Right (8 Steps)								
Man	FC	BC	FC	BC	FC	O	BC	O
Woman	BC	FC	FC	BC	O	FC	O	BC

Detailed Notes:

Important Starting Note: All of these steps are to be accomplished in 1 complete step. The man starts out with his weight on his left foot and the woman starts out with her weight on her right foot. Then they take 1 step, the man with his right foot and the woman with her left foot, and return to their neutral position. Some of these steps often require a pivot or a turn, so don't try to make them all move forward in a straight line.

MFC & WBC: The man would step forward with his right to the open side of the embrace and to the left of the woman's right leg. She would step back with her left leg. Both would rotate their upper bodies clockwise, in order to stay connected to one another.

MBC & WFC: The man would pivot clockwise and lead the woman to step forward to the left of his left leg. The man would step back with his right leg. Both would rotate their upper bodies clockwise, in order to stay connected to one another.

MFC & WFC: This step is often called Promenade or Salida Americana. Both the man and woman would pivot in order to be facing the same direction with the man's right hip and right shoulder touching the woman's left hip and left shoulder. The man's right arm would slide around the woman's waist and the woman's left arm would slide up and around the man's shoulder. The open side of the embrace would lower to just above their waists. Then they both step forward and return to neutral.

In a close embrace, this does require an opening of the chest and then coming back to close embrace at the end.

MBC & WBC: This would be the opposite of MFC & WFC above. This would be the most difficult of the eight steps because of the position of the open side of the embrace. It can be accomplished, but require a lot of upper body torsion. This also requires an embrace change to accomplish effectively.

MFC & WOS: There are two ways to accomplish this idea. Basic Solution: The man would lead the woman to take an Open Step around him while executing a Sacada to her Right foot with his Right foot. Advanced Solution: The man would rotate counter clockwise while pivoting the woman clockwise. He would then lead her to perform a side Sacada to his left leg.

MOS & WFC: Opposite of MFC & WOS from above.

MBC & WOS: There are two ways to accomplish this step. 1. The first is to have the leader pivot clockwise while pivoting the woman clockwise and then leading her to perform a side sacada to his left leg. Make sure that the man finishes by collecting rather than leaving his left leg sticking out. 2. The second would be much harder, again because of the embrace, the leader would need to make a huge clockwise pivot, while leading her to take a Side Open Step, and perform a Back Sacada to the woman's right leg with his right leg. This requires a great deal of torsion for the man.

MOS & WBC: Opposite of MBC & WOS from above.

Cross Steps in Parallel System Starting on Man's Right & Woman's Left (8 Steps)								
Man	FC	BC	FC	BC	O	FC	BC	O
Woman	BC	FC	FC	BC	FC	O	O	BC

Detailed Notes:

Important Starting Note: See the notes above, only this time we are starting every step with the weight on the Man's Right Foot and the weight on the Woman's Left foot. You will find that some moves are more easily accomplished when starting on this foot

and some harder to accomplish. For example, MFC & WFC was easy on the other foot, but will now be much harder.

Putting it all together:

Now let's look at how we can apply this in practical terms. Every step we take when in parallel system will be one of these steps. Let's take a typical teach step such as the 8 count basic.

First lets examine the man's steps, starting with weight on his left:

1. Back Open Step with Right
2. Side Open Step with Left
3. Forward Cross Step with Right
4. Forward Open Step with Left
5. Change Weight to Right
6. Forward Open Step with Left
7. Side Open Step with Right
8. Change Weight to Left

Now lets examine the woman's steps, start with weight on her right:

1. Forward Open Step with Left
2. Side Open Step with Right
3. Back Cross Step with Left
4. Back Open Step with Right
5. Forward Cross Step (The Cruzada) with Left
6. Back Open Step with Right
7. Side Open Step with Left
8. Change Weight to Right

You can use this structure to breakdown every combination or figure that you learn in any tango class.

Possibilities in Cross System (16 Steps)

Starting on Man's Left & Woman's Left								
Man	FC	FC	FC	BC	O	O	BC	BC
Woman	FC	BC	O	O	FC	BC	FC	BC

Detailed Notes:

Important Starting Note: All of these steps are accomplished in 1 step. The man starts out with his weight on his left foot and the woman starts out with her weight on her left foot (Cross System). Then they take 1 step, the man with his right foot and the woman with her right foot, and return to their neutral position. Some of these steps often require a pivot or a turn, so don't try to make them all move forward in a straight line.

MFC & WFC: There are three ways to accomplish this step. 1. The man can pivot the woman counter clockwise and lead her to step forward while he executes a Forward Sacada to her left leg. 2. The man can pivot counter clockwise and step forward while leading the woman to execute a Forward Sacada to his left leg. 3. The man could simply take a forward step with his right around the woman while leading her to take a forward step with her right around him.

MFC & WBC: This could be accomplished the man performing a Forward Sacada or the woman performing a Back Sacada.

MFC & WOS: The man would pivot counter clockwise 90 degrees and step forward with his right while leading the woman to take a side step with her right. Basically, the reverse of regular forward ochos.

MBC & WOS: The man would pivot clockwise and lead the woman to take an open side step with her right while he steps back with his right.

MOS & WFC: The man would lead the woman to pivot counter clockwise and take a forward step with her right while he takes an open side step with his right. This would be our basic forward ochos.

MOS & WBC: The man would lead the woman to pivot clockwise and step back with her right while he takes an open side step with his right. This would be our basic back ochos. **Second Option:** We could also accomplish this by moving forward as in the 3rd Step of the Cross Foot Basic, by leading her to take a Back Cross Step straight back while the man takes a Forward Open Step.

MBC & WFC: See MFC & WBC and do the opposite.

MBC & WBC: See MFC & WFC and do the opposite only with Back Sacadas instead of Forward Sacadas.

Starting on Man's Right & Woman's Right								
Man	FC	FC	FC	BC	O	O	BC	BC
Woman	FC	BC	O	O	FC	BC	FC	BC

Detailed Notes:

Important Starting Note: See the notes above, only this time we are starting every step with the weight on the Man's Right Foot and the weight on the Woman's Right foot. You will find that some moves are more easily accomplished when starting on this foot and some harder to accomplish.

Favorite Moves in Cross System:

MFC & WFC + MFC & WFC: This should be done with the leader or the follower doing Sacadas on every step.

MBC & WBC + MOS & WOS + MFC & WFC: This is one of our favorite moves in Vals. It is basically a dual molinete (Giro sequence, Grapevine). After leading a MOS & WBC in cross foot to the close side of the embrace (Man's right), the man pivots counter clockwise to get a MBC while leading the woman to do a WBC. Then they both take Open Steps and then both take Forward Crosses and repeat. All the steps are in cross system.

Favorite Moves in Combining Systems:

MFC & WBC in Parallel starting on Man's Left + MOS & WBC in Cross: This is very nice in Tango, Vals and Milonga. The man adds a weight change every time he steps with his right. So he is always stepping with his right foot, then changing weight to his left and stepping again with his right.

MBC & WBC in Parallel starting on Man's Right + MOS & WBC in Cross + To the Cruzada: In close embrace, we call this rolling off. This move requires the leader and follower to dynamically open their embrace to perform the MBC & WBC and then they come back together, the leader brings his feet together, changes weight to his right and then steps forward with his left, steps again with his right and leads the Cruzada.