

# Standard Terminology

for use in the description of  
Scottish Country Dances

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## General

Dance is a physical art form which is notoriously difficult to put into words, particularly the written word. It is not an exact science and there is no absolutely correct way of recording movements in a dance. It is hoped, however, that this document, by giving examples of phrasing, will offer some guidance on how movement and formations might be described.

1. Arabic numerals are used only for persons or couples and for numbering bars of music and diagrams, e.g.  
1st couple, 4th couple, 1st man, 3rd woman, bars 25-32, Fig. 3.
2. All other numbers are written out as words, e.g.  
first place, third place, first corners, second corner positions, figure of eight, reel of three, four hands round, three quarters.
3. Diagrams are referred to as Fig., e.g.  
see Fig. (if only one), see Fig. 2 and so on.
4. An individual is referred to as a man or a woman. A couple is referred to in the plural i.e. 1st couple dance, cast, turn etc.
5. The dance description should state the number of bars for one turn of the dance, the number of couples required and the set shape, e.g.
  - a) 32-bar jig for three couples in a four-couple longwise set.
  - b) 40-bar strathspey for three couples in a three-couple longwise set.
  - c) 96-bar reel for four couples in a four-couple square set.
6. Couples or individuals retain their numbers from the start of the particular turn of the dance but are referred to in relation to their current position with those nearest to the top coming first, e.g.
  - a) 3rd and 1st couples dance rights and lefts;
  - b) 2nd, 1st and 3rd couples dance six hands round and back.
7. In diagrams, circles are used to represent men and squares to represent women. Each symbol contains a digit to show which man or woman is represented by the symbol. No digit is used if the diagram is to represent a general situation applicable to all relevant dancers.
8. Diagrams are drawn with the top of the set at the bottom of the diagram as this shows the set from the normal position of a teacher at the front of the class.
9. The terms up and down are used to indicate direction towards the top of the set (towards the music) and away from the top.
10. If a dancer is not dancing on his/her own side of the set it should be stated that the dancer is on the 'opposite' side.

11. Corners are people and positions.

In an individual dance description, where the corner persons are not in their places, the instructions should be clear as to whether they apply to the person or the position, e.g.

- a) 1st couple set to and turn first corners;
- b) 1st couple set to and turn the dancers in first corner positions;
- c) 1st man sets to and turns 3rd woman who is in 2nd man's place.

12. Use of hands should be given in the dance description where it differs from, or is not stated in, *The Manual of Scottish Country Dancing (3rd edition, 2013)*, e.g. left hand, right hand, both hands, without giving hands, taking hands, releasing hands.

As noted in *The Manual*, 'lead' signifies that the dancing couple have right hands joined whereas 'dance' means that nearer hands are joined. When setting or advancing and retiring in lines, the default position is to take hands and so it does not need to be stated.

13. 'Release hands' is preferable to 'drop hands'.

14. When the ending of a formation is modified to bring the dancers into a position other than as described in *The Manual of Scottish Country Dancing*, the variation should be made clear in the dance description.

15. In general, descriptions should follow the order of what happens in the dance, e.g. 'giving right hands' should come before 'cross over' or 'turn once round'.

16. The phrase 'ready for' is familiar to most dancers and while it is very useful when recapping a dance, fuller instructions, which provide information on the position of dancers at the end of a phrase, should be used, e.g. '1st couple finish back to back facing own sides' instead of 'to finish ready for double triangles'.

17. Reels of three and four

The general description of a reel, whether of three or four dancers, follows the same format. The first part of the description defines those taking part and the direction of the reel in relation to the set. The second part defines how the reel begins and, if appropriate, where the dancers finish the reel. The position of the dancers at the start of the reel should have been made clear as part of the description of the preceding movement in the dance.

Where a reel of three is completed in six bars this should be made clear in the bar numbering of the dance description. The other two bars of the musical phrase should be described in a separately numbered paragraph, e.g.

Bars 31-32        1st couple, giving right hands, cross to second place on own sides.

18. There is no hard and fast rule as to whether formations are preceded by a definite or indefinite article, e.g. 'the targe'; 'an allemande'. Convention and personal preference should indicate which to use, although the editing team will have the final decision.

## Standard Terminology

(numbers in brackets refer to the relevant chapter and paragraph in  
*The Manual of Scottish Country Dancing*, Third edition, 2013.)

### Advance and retire (6.1)

- a) 2nd, 1st and 3rd couples advance and retire.
- b) 1st and 2nd couples advance one step and retire one step.
- c) 2nd, 1st and 3rd couples advance one step and retire one step twice.

### Allemande (6.2)

- a) 1st and 2nd couples dance an allemande.
- b) 3rd, 1st and 2nd couples dance an allemande.
- c) 1st, 2nd and 3rd couples dance an allemande to the right.
- d) [in a square set] 1st and 3rd couples, taking allemande hold, dance anticlockwise round the set.
- e) 2nd, 1st and 3rd couples dance a circulating allemande.
- f) 1st and 2nd couples, 3rd and 4th couples dance interlocking allemandes.

### Allemande turn (6.2.8)

1st couple dance an allemande turn to the right.

### Back to back (6.3)

1st and 2nd couples dance back to back.

### Balance in line (6.4)

- a) 1st and 2nd couples balance in line.
- b) 1st couple and first corners balance in line.

### Bourrel (6.5)

- a) 1st and 2nd couples dance a bourrel.
- b) 1st, 2nd and 3rd couples dance a bourrel.

### Cast off/up (6.6)

- a) 1st couple cast off one place.
- b) 1st woman casts off two places *or* casts off to third place.
- c) 1st couple cast off, dance down behind own lines, turn towards/away from partner and dance up to original places.
- d) 1st man casts up to first place.
- e) 1st couple cast up one place.
- f) ...and cast up to original place(s).

### **Celtic reel**

- a) 1st and 2nd couples dance a Celtic reel.
- b) 1st and 2nd couples dance a half Celtic reel.

### **Chain and turn (6.7.9)**

1st and 2nd couples dance chain and turn.

### **Chain progression (6.7.10)**

- a) 1st and 2nd couples dance a chain progression.
- b) 2nd, 1st and 3rd couples dance a chain progression.

### **Change places**

- a) 1st couple, facing 2nd couple on the sides, giving ... hands, change places.
- b) 1st man and 3rd woman, giving ... hands, change places.

**Circle** - see Hands round (p8).

**Circulating allemande** – see Allemande (p5)

**Circulating knot** – see Knot (p8)

### **Corners (6.8)**

- a) 1st couple face first corners.
- b) 1st couple face the dancer in second corner position.

### **Corner chain (6.8.1 and 6.8.2)**

- a) 1st couple and first corners dance a corner chain.
- b) 1st couple and second corners dance a corner chain with setting.

### **Corners pass and turn (6.8.3)**

1st couple and first corners dance corners pass and turn.

### **Cross over (6.9)**

- a) 1st and 2nd couples, giving right hands, cross over and ...
- b) 1st couple, passing by the right, cross over and ...
- c) All four couples, giving left hands, cross over and ...

### **Crossing up/down**

- a) 2nd couple cross up to finish ...
- b) 1st couple, giving right hands, cross down one place and ...

### **Crown triangles (6.10)**

2nd, 1st and 3rd couples dance crown triangles.

### **Dance down (and up) (6.19)**

- a) 1st couple dance down two places.
- b) 3rd couple dance up one place.
- c) 1st man with 3rd couple dance down the middle and up.
- d) 1st and 2nd couples in a line across dance down the middle and, pulling back by the right, dance up to finish....

### **Dance to corners and set (6.8.4)**

1st couple, with 2nd and 3rd couples, dance to corners and set.

**Diagonal rights and lefts** – see Rights and lefts (p11)

**Double figure of eight** – see Figure of eight (p7)

### **Double triangles (6.11)**

2nd, 1st and 3rd couples dance double triangles.

### **En rond**

1st and 2nd couples dance an en rond.

### **Espagnole (6.12)**

1st and 2nd couples dance an espagnole.

### **Figure of eight (6.13)**

- a) 1st couple dance a figure of eight round 2nd couple.
- b) [In a square set] Women dance figures of eight round partners and corners, dancing in front of partner to begin.
- c) 1st couple dance a figure of eight on own sides, dancing in and down to begin.
- d) 1st couple dance a figure of eight on own sides, 1st man dancing in front of 2nd man to begin and 1st woman dancing behind 2nd woman to begin.
- e) 1st couple dance a half figure of eight round 2nd couple.
- f) 1st woman dances a half figure of eight round 2nd couple while 1st man dances a half figure of eight round 3rd couple.
- g) 1st and 2nd couples dance a double figure of eight. 1st couple begin by ... and 2nd couple by ...
- h) 1st and 3rd couples dance a double figure of eight round 2nd couple. To begin, 1st couple ...
- i) 1st and 2nd couples dance a half double figure of eight. 1st couple begin by ... and 2nd couple begin by ...

### **Follow**

- a) 1st couple followed by 2nd couple, who dance up the sides to begin, lead down ...
- b) 1st woman, followed by 2nd and 3rd women, dances across the set ...

### **Grand chain (6.7.1)**

- a) 2nd, 1st and 3rd couples dance a grand chain.
- b) All four couples dance a grand chain.
- c) 2nd, 1st and 3rd couples dance a half grand chain.
- d) [In a square set] All four couples dance a grand chain halfway round the set.

### **Hands across (6.14)**

- a) 1st and 3rd couples dance right hands across once round.
- b) 1st and 2nd couples dance left hands across halfway round.
- c) 1st woman with 2nd couple and 1st man with 3rd couple dance right hands across and left hands back ...
- d) 1st woman with 2nd couple and 1st man with 3rd couple dance right hands across once round, 1st couple passing by the right at the end. 1st man with 2nd couple and 1st woman with 3rd couple dance left hands across once round ...

### **Hands round (6.15 and 6.16)**

- a) 1st, 2nd and 3rd couples dance six hands round and back.
- b) 2nd and 1st couples dance four hands once round to the left.
- c) 2nd, 1st and 3rd couples dance six hands round to the right halfway.
- d) All three couples dance six hands round to the left to finish ...

**Hello/goodbye setting** - see Set to corners and partner (p12).

**Interlocking allemande** – see Allemande (p5)

**Inveran reels (6.25.4)** – see Reel of three (p11)

### **Knot (6.17)**

- a) 1st and 2nd couples dance the knot.
- b) 3rd, 1st and 2nd couples dance the knot.
- c) 1st and 2nd couples dance a slip knot.
- d) 3rd, 1st and 2nd couples dance a slip knot.
- e) 2nd, 1st and 3rd couples dance a circulating knot.

### **La baratte**

- a) 1st and 3rd couples dance la baratte.
- b) All four couples dance la baratte.

### **Ladies' chain (6.7.5 and 6.7.6)**

- a) 2nd and 1st couples dance a ladies' chain.
- b) 1st and 3rd couples dance a half ladies' chain.



### **Lead down and up (6.19)**

- a) 1st couple lead down the middle and up to finish ...
- b) 1st couple lead down the middle and up and cast off one place to ...
- c) 1st couple, followed by 2nd couple who dance up the sides to begin, lead down the middle and up to finish ...

### **Lead/dance out through the sides**

- a) 1st couple lead/dance between 2nd and 3rd women, 1st woman casts up and 1st man casts down. They meet in the middle of the set, lead/dance between 2nd and 3rd men and cast as before to finish ...
- b) 1st couple lead out between 2nd and 3rd men, cross over and 1st woman casts up/down while 1st man casts down/up.

### **Line of**

- a) Joining hands in a line of four, 1st and 2nd couples ...
- b) All set in lines of three and ...

### **Men's chain (6.7.7 and 6.7.8)**

- a) 1st and 3rd couples dance a men's chain.
- b) 2nd and 1st couples dance a half men's chain.

### **Petronella turn (6.20)**

2nd and 3rd couples dance a petronella turn ...

### **Petronella turn in tandem (6.20.1)**

1st and 2nd men and 1st and 2nd women dance a petronella turn in tandem.

### **Pick-up chain (6.7.12)**

3rd, 1st and 2nd couples dance a pick-up chain.

### **Pivot**

... cross right foot over left to pivot and face ...

### **Pivot turn (p85)**

1st and 4th couples, using right elbow grip, dance a pivot turn.

### **Place(s)**

- a) .... and, giving left hand to partner, cross over to second place on own sides.
- b) ... finishing in the middle of the set in second place, facing up.
- c) 1st couple, giving right hands, turn to original places.
- d) 1st woman and 2nd man, giving right hands, change places.

### **Poussette (6.21 and 6.22)**

- a) 1st and 2nd couples dance a poussette.
- b) 1st and 3rd couples dance a half poussette.
- c) 1st and 4th couples dance a Highland schottische poussette.
- d) 1st and 2nd couples dance a polka poussette.

### **Promenade (6.23)**

- a) 1st, 2nd and 3rd couples dance a promenade.
- b) 1st, 2nd and 3rd couples dance a promenade. On bars ... 1st couple cast off one place while 2nd couple dance up to first place.
- c) [in a square set] All four couples, taking promenade hold, dance anticlockwise round the set to finish ...

### **Reel of four (6.24)**

- a) All four couples dance reels of four on own sides of the set. To begin, 1st and 2nd couples and 3rd and 4th couples pass by the right.
- b) 1st and 3rd couples dance a reel of four up and down the middle of the set, passing partners by the right to begin.
- c) 1st couple dance a diagonal reel of four with first corners.
- d) All four couples dance a double reel of four.
- e) All three couples dance interlocking reels of four.
- f) 1st man, 2nd woman, 3rd man and 4th woman dance a half reel of four on the men's side. To begin ...
- g) 1st and 2nd couples dance a half reel of four across the set. To begin ...
- h) 1st couple dance a half diagonal reel of four with first corners.

### **Reel of four (progressive) (6.24.4)**

1st and 2nd couples dance a reel of four across the set, 1st woman and 2nd man passing by the left to begin. 1st couple finish in second place and 2nd couple in first place.

### **Reel of four in tandem with lead change (6.24.11)**

1st and 2nd women, in tandem and 1st and 3rd men, in tandem, dance a reel of four with 2nd man and 3rd woman, changing lead as they change direction.

### **Reel of three (6.25)**

- a) 1st, 2nd and 3rd couples dance reels of three on own sides. 1st and 2nd men and 1st and 2nd women pass by the right to begin.
- b) 1st, 2nd and 3rd couples dance reels of three on own sides, 1st couple dancing in and down to begin.
- c) 1st woman with 2nd couple and 1st man with 3rd couple dance reels of three across the set. 1st woman and 2nd man and 1st man and 3rd woman pass by the left to begin. 1st couple finish in second place ...

- d) 1st man and 2nd couple dance a reel of three across the set. 1st man and 2nd woman pass by the left to begin.
- e) 1st woman with 2nd and 3rd men and 1st man with 2nd and 3rd women dance reels of three on the sides. 1st couple pass first corners by the left to begin.
- f) 1st couple dance reels of three with their corners, passing second corners by the right to begin, *or*  
2nd, 1st and 3rd couples dance reels of three on the sides. 1st couple pass second corners by the right to begin.
- g) 1st couple with 2nd and 3rd couples dance reels of three on opposite sides of the set and then on own sides.
- h) 1st couple with 2nd and 3rd couples dance Inveran reels.
- i) 1st woman with 2nd couple and 1st man with 3rd couple dance half reels of three across the set. 1st woman passes 2nd woman by the right and 1st man passes 3rd man by the right to begin. They finish ...

#### **Reel of three in tandem (6.25.11)**

- a) 1st couple, in tandem, dance a reel of three with 3rd woman and 2nd man. 1st couple pass 3rd woman by the right to begin.
- b) 1st couple, in tandem, dance a half reel of three with 2nd woman and 3rd man. 1st couple pass 2nd woman by the right to begin.

#### **Reel of three in tandem with lead change (6.25.12)**

1st couple, in tandem, dance a reel of three with first corners, changing lead as they change direction. 1st couple pass 3rd woman by the right to begin.

#### **Repeat**

- a) Repeat, having passed a couple.
- b) Repeat with a new top couple.
- c) Repeat from new positions.
- d) 2nd and 4th couples repeat bars ...

#### **Rights and lefts (6.26)**

- a) 2nd and 1st couples dance rights and lefts.
- b) 1st and 2nd couples dance half rights and lefts.
- c) 1st, 2nd and 3rd couples dance rights and lefts for three couples.
- d) 1st couple with 3rd man and 2nd woman dance half rights and lefts on the diagonal.

#### **Rondel (6.27)**

1st and 2nd couples dance the rondel.

#### **Rose progression**

1st and 2nd couples dance the rose progression.

### **Schiehallion reel (6.24.10)**

- a) All four couples dance a Schiehallion reel.
- b) All four couples dance a half Schiehallion reel.

### **Set advancing**

1st couple set advancing and pass by the left ...

### **Set and cast off/up (6.6.7)**

1st couple set and cast off/up one place. 2nd couple step up/down on bars ...

### **Set and cross**

1st, 2nd and 3rd couples set and, giving right hands, cross over.

### **Set and link (6.28)**

- a) 1st and 2nd couples set and link.
- b) 3rd, 1st and 2nd couples set and link.

### **Set and rotate (6.30)**

- a) 1st and 2nd couples set and rotate.
- b) 1st, 2nd and 3rd couples set and rotate.

### **Set to and turn corners (6.8.8)**

- a) 1st couple set to and turn corners, finishing ...
- b) 1st couple set to and turn corners to finish between them ...

### **Set to corners (6.8.5)**

1st couple set to first corners and then to second corners, finishing ...

### **Set to corners and partner (6.8.6)**

- a) 1st couple set to corners and partner to finish...
- b) 2nd and 3rd couples dance double set to corners and partner to finish...

### **Setting in line (6.29)**

- a) 1st, 2nd and 3rd couples set on the sidelines.
- b) ... all set in lines of three across the set.

### **Slip down (and up)**

- a) 1st couple, with both hands joined, dance eight slip steps down the middle and eight slip steps back up to finish ...
- b) 1st couple, with both hands joined, dance four slip steps down the middle and ...

**Spiral (6.31)**

1st and 2nd couples dance the spiral.

**Spoke (6.32)**

1st couple, with 2nd and 3rd couples, dance the spoke.

**Spurtle (6.33)**

1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th couples dance the spurtle.

**Step up (down) (6.34)**

- a) 2nd couple step up on bars ...
- b) 1st couple step down on bars ...
- c) 2nd, 3rd and 4th couples step up on bars ...

**Swirl (6.35)**

1st and 3rd couples dance the swirl.

**Targe (6.36)**

1st and 2nd couples dance the targe.

**Tourbillon (6.37)**

1st and 2nd couples dance the tourbillon.

**Tournée (6.38)**

1st and 2nd couples dance the tournée.

**Turn (6.39.1, 6.39.3 and 6.39.4)**

- a) 1st couple turn with the right hand.
- b) 1st couple, giving left hands, turn once round.
- c) 1st and 2nd couples, giving left hands, turn halfway.
- d) 1st couple, giving both hands, turn one and a half times to finish ...
- e) 1st and 2nd couples, giving right hands, turn three quarters to finish ...
- f) 1st couple, giving both hands, turn twice round to finish ...

**Turn corners and partner (6.8.9)**

1st couple turn first corners with the right hand, partner with the left hand, second corners with the right hand and, giving left hand to partner, ...

**Turn right about**

- a) All dance down the middle, turning right about to face up.
- b) 1st couple set advancing and turn right about to finish back to back facing own sides.

**Turn to the right/left**

- a) 1st couple turn to the right into second place on own sides.
- b) 1st couple turn to the left to finish 1st woman between 2nd and 3rd men and 1st man between 2nd and 3rd women.

**Wheel** - see Hands across (p8)