

## Crash Course on Ballroom Dance Competitions

OK, so you're going to attend a ballroom competition and you want to understand what's going on... Here's a quick run-down on what the different categories are, the different styles, and the different levels of participants...

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### Categories and Styles

There are three areas that the dances are broken into:

- Traditional Ballroom - Waltz, Tango, Viennese Waltz, Foxtrot, Quickstep
- Latin - Cha Cha, Rumba, Samba, Paso Doble, Jive, Mambo, Bolero
- Nightclub - Swing, West Coast Swing, 2-Step (not the western style), Hustle (the surviving form of Disco dancing), Salsa (Latin, but not in competitions)

Ballroom competitions normally focus on the traditional and Latin dances, sometimes offering a west coast swing competition at one or two levels - the nightclub dances are considered more of a social outlet. *(Some nightclub dances are starting to have their own followings, such as the U.S. National Swing competition held in Anaheim each year, which focuses entirely on swing and west coast swing.)*

In America we add another layer to this. Unlike the rest of the world, we have our own form of Traditional and Latin dancing. "American style" is often easier to learn, and this is what most American beginners are taught (in fact many American ballroom dancers don't know about the other layer known in America as "International Style" dancing, which is what the rest of the world dances!). So, if you go dancing in Europe or Japan, they won't know the "American" style or the nightclub dances.

The styles are often differentiated by the category name. The traditional International ballroom used to be called Modern, more recently, with the plan to move International style dancing into the Olympics, it is now called "Standard". International Latin is called "Latin". The traditional American ballroom style is called "Smooth" and the American style Latin is called Rhythm.

The American and International styles use different dances, with some dances moving between Latin and Nightclub, depending on the person you talk with... In competition, the dances are normally presented in a standard order. The following table summarizes the dances and order for each category:

<b>STANDARD</b> <i>International</i>	<b>SMOOTH</b> <i>American</i>	<b>LATIN</b> <i>International</i>	<b>RHYTHM</b> <i>American</i>
Waltz	Waltz	Samba	Cha Cha
Tango	Tango	Cha Cha	Rumba
Viennese Waltz	Viennese Waltz	Rumba	Mambo
Foxtrot	Foxtrot	Paso Doble	Bolero
Quickstep		Jive	Swing

International style is far more popular for competitions since it lends itself to competition type judging more readily. *When someone competes in Standard (5 dances) and in Latin (5 dances) they are often referred to as a "10 dancer".*

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### **American vs. International**

American Smooth is often characterized by flowing movements and underarm turns, much like watching an old Fred Astair movie. Except for intros and exits, International Standard is danced entirely in closed position with man and woman in the same basic body positions. This may sound boring, but the advantage is that all steps are leadable and the power of the dance can be much greater.

Beginning American Smooth is often taught with a lead through the arms, although top Smooth dancers are migrating to more International form nowadays. Generally, International Standard requires more knowledge and skill to start. The lead always come from the body, the arms just hold the "frame".

In the slow dances (Waltz, Foxtrot, Rumba) it takes more skill to dance to slower music, so International style usually is slower. Slower music allows more time for "interpretation". Vice versa, fast music can become more difficult in the fast dances - International style Jive is a fast version of the American style Swing.

All Latin dancing originally came from the Latin American influenced dances of central and south America - Cha Cha, Rumba, Samba, Mambo, Salsa... Although often considered a nightclub dance, Swing (called Jive in International style) also has a latin influence. International Latin seems to be further away from the original influences than American Rhythm. It includes the Paso Doble - the dance of the bull fight, which is fairly removed from today's latin influences - and virtually never danced in a social setting - but is still fun to watch...

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### **Levels**

There are two major levels for dancers: Professionals are employed part time or full time by dancing. They earn money for their dancing. Amateurs are strictly in it for the fun, and cannot earn money (top amateurs in Europe often earn some money with shows, teaching and judging, but the pros in the US, stemming from the Arthur Murray/Fred Astair type monopolies, currently have too much control over amateur status...)

Since International style is more popular for competition, there are more rankings within each major category. The professional competition may include a lower level called Rising Star for new teachers, or newly formed partnerships (a good couple, Pro or Amateur, may have been dancing together for 5-10 years). The Amateur level is broken into Novice, Pre-Champ and Amateur. Sometimes a level called Pre-Novice is offered, usually danced without tails or gowns. The lower amateur competition levels also do not include all of the dances. The chart below will summarize the dances for each level.

Dancers over certain age breaks, (I think 35 and 50 years old) can move into the B and C categories. Most competitions in the US revolve around the A category.

Lower level students dance with their teacher during the days. These are known as student-teacher categories. In America, top amateurs sometimes compete with their teachers in another category known as Pro-Am. These events are normally held in the evening.

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The following table summarizes the International skill levels:

		<b>STANDARD</b>	<b>LATIN</b>
Professional:	Professional	<i>all 5 dances</i>	<i>all 5 dances</i>
	Rising Star	<i>all 5 dances</i>	<i>all 5 dances</i>
Amateur:	Amateur	<i>all 5 dances</i>	<i>all 5 dances</i>
	Pre-Champ	all but Viennese	all but Paso Doble
	Novice	Waltz, Foxtrot, Quickstep (Tango)	Cha Cha, Rumba
	Pre-Novice (optional)	Waltz, Foxtrot, Quickstep	Cha Cha, Rumba
Professional & Amateur:	Pro-Am	<i>any or all 5 dances</i>	<i>any or all 5 dances</i>
	Student Teacher	<i>any of the 5 dances</i>	<i>any of the 5 dances</i>

### **Finals**

When there are more than roughly 7 couples in a competition category (same style and level), there are 2 or more rounds of dancing. The last round, known as the finals will have 6 couples on the floor. The previous round, the semi-finals will have two "heats" with up to 6 couples each. 6 couples will be selected from the semi-finals for the finals. The round before the semi finals is called the quarter finals with 3-4 heats of up to 6 couples, and so on... Most US competitions do not have enough competitors for more than quarter finals (British world class finals can have >300 rounds!)

Usually the top performances are reserved for the evenings of a competition. All student-teacher material and sometimes quarter finals, Pre-Novice competitions, etc., are placed in the daytime...