

Anticipate the Check

by Harold & Meredith Sears



One cue that really has the potential to jerk us around if we don't prepare for it is "Check" (or Checking). To Check is to put on the brakes. We are being asked to stop our progression in one direction and, more or less suddenly, to continue to dance in some other direction. If we don't hear the cue and anticipate the Check, it can be like a child's ball rolling out into traffic. We stomp on the brakes; we're thrown forward. If we don't communicate with each other and dance the Check as a couple, then we might react independently — he'll stop and then she'll stop or vice-versa — it's like railroad cars coupling and uncoupling — crash, bang, jerk ...

There are three specific actions that we can use to help us anticipate the Check, prepare and ease into it, and communicate with each other so that we do this thing together. We can

- Rise a little higher during the step preceding the Check,
- Shorten the Checking step itself, and
- Momentarily firm our upper-body frame.

Let's think about a Curved Feather, Checking, in Foxtrot. This Check is relatively gentle. Perhaps in semi-closed position, we step thru with the trail foot. The man begins to turn to the right with good left side lead. He steps side and forward left, and the woman steps side and back right, continuing to turn. Here is where a little more *rise* than usual can signal the Checking action to come. It says we are not going to continue to rush on in this direction. On the third step, we continue to turn our bodies to a contra position and step through a *small* step to banjo position facing diagonal reverse and wall. A short step here makes it still clearer that a change is coming. And if we increase the tone in our upper-body frame, that firmness will provide a directly tactile signal that something different is coming, and we can then move backward into the next figure smoothly, comfortably, and together.

An example of a sequence that *demand*s this kind of anticipation is the Natural Weave Checking to a Top Spin. In any Foxtrot Weave, we are sailing along, flowing down line of dance, and suddenly we hear the cue "Check to a Topspin," asking us to stop abruptly and flow equally smoothly toward reverse. You just can't do it without anticipation.

The next-to-last step of the Natural Weave is side and forward left for the man and side right for the woman. He is facing the wall, and we are turning to the left. This is the step where we want to rise a little more to help absorb our momentum and slow the rush. The last step of the Weave is forward right outside partner toward diagonal line and wall (woman back left) in good contra-banjo position. Often in Foxtrot, this step is a reaching step—Foxtrot is a traveling, soaring, gliding kind of a rhythm. But here we know we need to Check, so this final step of the Weave needs to be shorter. We're coming up to the red light and easing on the brake over two full steps, rather than waiting to jam on the brake only after we get there.

Finally, by increasing the tone in our frame, we are communicating with each other and much more likely to do this thing together. I even go so far as to cup my right hand, focusing the pressure of my fingertips on Meredith's back. I don't grab or pull, but this little gesture at her back helps to stop our forward motion smoothly, and we flow right into that Top Spin with no jerk or stumble: a 1/8 spin to the left on my right and step back left, and then the three steps of a Feather Finish progressing toward reverse. If I'm daydreaming and I don't do this preparation, then we just keep progressing down line, and the Top Spin just doesn't happen.

We like to try to describe the ideas we run into in the classes and clinics we attend. If you have any comments or questions, do let us know.

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