

STEP IT UP

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Step dancing is steeped in the history of black [culture](#). Step dancing is a military style dance routine that integrates clapping, stomping and other various acrobatic techniques to create a visual and audio performance. Often music does not accompany step dancing as the dancers themselves create the rhythm and tempo. Follow these few steps to create and teach a step routine worthy of the tradition.

Stepping refers to a dance form where the entire body of the dancer is a tool for coming up with complex rhythms and sounds. This is done by a mixture of footsteps, chants and claps. It is normally performed by groups of 3 or more and mostly in arrangements which are akin to military formation. Step dancing has its roots in 'gumboot' dances of South Africa. In the USA, it became popular around the 1940's and then it gained in popularity. Now for those who are a part of a stepping or step dance team, they have step team routines. This article will deal with exactly that!

Learn Step Team Routines

To begin learning step team routines, two things are very important which should be kept in mind. They are rhythm and percussion. The moves though, vary as per the routine, but these 2 things are never compromised on. The most basic steps or moves are clapping, slapping the body in specific areas like chest, arms and thighs or even on the floor. In addition to that a number of persuasive sounds are made. What is amazing in this whole thing is that the boot-stomping on the floor works as a bass-drum like background and the chants work as a message or a bit of a melody to the musical composition. To learn step team routine, you of course need athleticism, but a sense of musical dynamics too is very important. Likewise, step team routines for beginners may include simple clapping or stomping movements and then graduate to complex movements or a combination of movements, or may be even props.

Normally these step team routines start with a sort of a call or indication which tells the participants to brace themselves as the routine is going to start. The new age stepping routines have videos, power point presentations and background props to enhance the story line the

team is trying to portray. In latter stages of learning, props like cane and crisp military style movements give the required zing to the performance. In addition to all this, this drill and dancing is also inspired from [hip hop dancing](#) as well as swing dance, so some movements in stepping may resemble ones in hip hop and swing dance. Read more on [how to learn hip hop dance moves](#).

The Basic Element and Chants

'Umoja', the Swahili word for unity is the underlying concept which is celebrated through this precise, close-order drill and dancing accompanied by chanting. Here are some types and styles of chants involved in step team routines.

- *Praise*: These chants are meant especially to portray the good qualities of those who are performing.
- *Oral Tradition*: Apart from the rhetoric on the current social scenario, chants also give a kind of an oral history of important people and events.
- *Insult*: As the name suggests, these chants are particularly meant for insulting the members of the other team, as a whole or an individual.
- *Structure with Rhythm*: Chants many a times comprise of poetic structures, rhymes and onomatopoeia for making the percussion and movements stronger simultaneously with chanting.

The key to having catchy chants and rhythms is to keep them short and crisp. For instance something like *Whatcha gotta say? (stomp) "Whatcha gotta say?" (stomp)* This can be included if you are learning those comparatively easy step team routines.

This may have a context of challenging the other team or perhaps telling them that this is what we do, what are you going to say about this and so on. Or may be you can have something on the lines of *"Say hey, hey, boom-a-shaka-boom-a-shaka, hey, hey, boom-a-shaka-boom-a-shaka* (stomp feet and clap thighs and hands on the boom-a-shaka phrases). You can find a lot of these online but it is good to come up with your own lines and give credit to the cultural influence behind this dance form. Finally, although it was initially done by [African Americans](#), now people from various backgrounds do this dance form.

All in all, step routines are a great way to be physically active and develop a sense of camaraderie and as the word umoja reflects unity amongst the group doing this. Inculcating this aspect in your personality can go a long way in making you a successful person in whatever you might do!

Instructions

Things You'll Need:

Music (if desired for routine)

Props for routine (canes, hats, etc.)

Choreographing the Routine

1. Decide on the difficulty level of your routine. If this is your first routine to choreograph, you should watch a good step team perform for ideas.

2. Begin choreographing your routine with simple clapping or stomping movements. Most routines begin with some sort of call or indication that you are about to begin your routine.
3. Choreograph one eight count and learn it expertly before continuing to the next eight count. Your eight counts should only be as difficult as your skill level will allow.
4. Be aware that most step routine choreographers have been in various step shows so they often borrow ideas from other routines they have enjoyed. This is okay, but make sure to change them to reflect your group's personality and style.
5. Continue adding eight counts until you have at least four eight counts minimum. Most step routines are longer, some reaching for ten to twenty eight counts depending upon the skill of the performers
6. Increase the difficulty and showmanship of your movements by the closing of your routine. If someone in your performance group is particularly acrobatic, then use this time to choreograph in their skills to showcase your talent.
7. End your routine with another verbal call, or definitive and distinctive ending. Many fraternities and sororities who perform step routines have a particular call or movement that is associated with their group, a trademark of sorts. A roll call of members is often used to introduce your performers to the audience.

Teaching the Routine

1. Gather your group members together. Show your group members your routine. Perform it for them once without them trying to mimic you. Members will be more **confident** knowing you have mastered the routine yourself.
2. Begin **teaching** the routine. The best way to do this is one eight count at a time, going slowly.
3. Repeat it two to three times after teaching one eight count. Allow them some time in between for questions, but don't go too slowly as to not bore the more experienced members of your group.
4. Teach another eight count, then return to the first. Do this until you complete all eight counts. Again, don't spend too long re-hashing old material. But make sure it stays fresh in their minds so they do not forget the old material.
5. Perform your whole routine all the way through with the group once with no stopping.
6. Have your group perform your routine while watching them. Make mental notes of the mistakes and parts that do not look as you wanted them to.
7. Repeat the performance over and over again until you and your group feel comfortable with the outcome. This process could take a few practices, so be patient and **have fun**.

Tips & Warnings

Be open to suggestions from other group members. Include them in the process as it makes it more fun and a more cooperative effort that the whole group can be proud of.

Back in Black

Choreographers: John Padua and Students from Lyme School, Lyme, NH

Formation: Circle with cups in hand (place cups in front of body)

To being: Every other person (palms up/palms down – not touching)

Standing:

4 cts Clap, Clap, Clap, Clap (Low Five partner on both sides)

2 cts Brush Right Foot stomp down

2 cts Brush Left Foot stomp down

4 cts Slap Hip, Clap hands, Cross arms (I Dream of Jeannie), Back Hand Clap

4 cts Knee Right, Put down over Left foot, Spin around 360 and squat to Ground

In Squatting position:

8 cts Pass Cups Right (4x),

8 cts Pass Cups Left (4x)

4 cts Clap, Clap, Clap, Clap (Low Five partner on both sides)

2 cts Brush Right Hand (on ground in front of knee forward and back)

2 cts Brush Left Hand,

4 cts Hips, Clap, Cross, Back Hand Clap

4 cts Brush both hands forward and back, up and jump on 4.

Repeat

Big Dance

Choreographed: Spring 2005 Methods and students from Lyme School, Lyme, NH

2 cts Lift Knee Left, Clap under leg – clap hands stomp down

2 cts Lift Knee Right, Clap under leg - clap hands stomp down

2 cts Slappin leather left (Left Leg back, Tap with Right Hand, Slap Hips)

2 cts Slappin leather right (Right Leg Back, Tap with Left Hand, Slap Hips)

4 cts Stomp Left, Right Knee Up, Slap inside Right Thigh with Left hand

Stomp Right, Left Knee Up, Slap inside Left Thigh with Right hand

4 ct Jump to touch ground, Slap Floor, Cross Arms, Back Hand Clap (Look Up) (on 3 stand up)

4 ct Stomp Left, Left Hand on left Thigh, Stomp Right, Right Hand, Right Thigh

4ct Jump, Jump, Jump, ¼ turn right. (Repeat)

Step It Up

Music: Real Love Cissy Houston (if want to use music). Dance taught at conference.

Left step - slap left - slap right (1 & 2)

Right step - slap left - slap right (3 & 4)

Stomp - Stomp (5, 6)

Left step - slap left - slap right (1 & 2)

Right step - slap left - slap right (3 & 4)

HOLD (2, 3, 4)

Slap right thigh, left knee, left ankle, hand at chin (1, 2, 3, 4)

Right hand down, left hand up (5, 6)

Right hand up feet on ground, left hand up (7, 8)

Step on Right foot Clap at forehead, clap under thigh, stomp (1, 2, 3, 4)

Clap up, clap under thigh, stomp, look left (5, 6, 7, 8)

March 4, clap behind back, In front, behind, in front (8 cts)
March 4, clap behind back, In front, behind, in front (8 cts)