

ROUND DANCE PHASE RATING SYSTEM

ROUNDALAB is the International Association of Round Dance Teachers, Inc. They have set up the Phase Rating System of round dancing to provide a vehicle for rating the round dance figures according to degree of complexity. Each phase has a specific syllabus of basics - steps, movements and actions.

The concept works as follows:

If all figures in a dance are from the same phase, the dance will be phased at that phase. A dance cannot have more than 2 figures from the next higher phase and remain at the lower phase. A dance cannot be rated any lower than one phase below the highest figure used.

Examples:


If a dance has lots of phase II figures, and two phase III figure, it will be rated as Phase II+2. But if the dance has three phase III figures, the whole dance is rated as phase III.

Or even more complicated:

If a dance has lots of figures phase II and one of phase IV, than the dance is rated as III+1. Some figure are not represented in the phase rating system yet. They are called unphased figures. If you have a phase II dance with two phase III figures and one unphased figure the dance will be rated as II+2+1.

<p>The six phases of difficulty in Round Dancing from ROUNDALAB</p>	<p>Coincidentally, whitewater river canoeing and rafting recognize six classes of difficulty, so for comparison I offer the six difficulty classes for river whitewater from American Whitewater. If you have absolutely no interest in whitewater, you can safely ignore this entire column, but I think there are some parallels to be noted.</p> <p>😊</p>
<p>Phase I is the beginner level, mainly seen in two-step and waltz. For instance, a simple forward or back step is considered phase I, as is the side, close, rock, and recover. Many of these single-step, single-beat dance moves are described on the "basic steps" page. However, phase I also includes some simple figures of</p>	<p>Class I: easy; fast moving water with riffles and small waves; few obstructions; all obvious and easily missed with little training. Risk to swimmers is slight; self-rescue is easy.</p>

<p>more than one step, such as the waltz box and the balance.</p>	
<p>Phase II is the easy level. It includes many figures that take a full measure of music or even more. Where the simple box was phase I, the progressive box (two measures) and the left turning box (four measures) are phase II.</p>	<p>Class II: novice; straightforward rapids with wide, clear channels which are evident without scouting. Occasional maneuvering may be required, but rocks and medium sized waves are easily missed by trained paddlers. Swimmers are seldom injured and group assistance, while helpful, is seldom needed. Rapids that are at the upper end of this difficulty range are designated "class ii+".</p>
<p>Phase III is essentially a transition level, used to introduce additional rhythms beyond the two-step and waltz, and of course to introduce new steps and figures. At phase III, you can begin to dance fox-trot, cha-cha, rumba, and most of the other rhythms listed in the navigation bar to the left. It is unexpected to see that the fox-trot box is phase III figure, where the waltz box was a phase I figure, even though the two figures have the same footwork. Roundalab is telling us that the fox-trot is the more difficult rhythm (done correctly, anyway).</p>	<p>Class III: intermediate; rapids with moderate, irregular waves which may be difficult to avoid and which can swamp an open canoe. Complex maneuvers in fast current and good boat control in tight passages or around ledges are often required; large waves or strainers may be present but are easily avoided. Strong eddies and powerful current effects can be found, particularly on large-volume rivers. Scouting is advisable for inexperienced parties. Injuries while swimming are rare; self-rescue is usually easy but group assistance may be required to avoid long swims. Rapids that are at the lower or upper end of this difficulty range are designated "class iii-" or "class iii+" respectively.</p>
<p>Phase IV, the intermediate level, builds on the transition to the advanced level. New rhythms are introduced, such as samba and paso doble, another 20 or 30 figures (varies with each rhythm) are added to our growing repertoire, and the use of the entire body becomes more and more important. Many figures at this level simply cannot be performed without the use of stretch, sway, rotation, and rise and fall. So body mechanics becomes just as important as footwork in the overall flow of the dance.</p>	<p>Class IV: advanced; intense, powerful but predictable rapids requiring precise boat handling in turbulent water. Depending on the character of the river, it may feature large, unavoidable waves and holes or constricted passages demanding fast maneuvers under pressure. A fast, reliable eddy turn may be needed to initiate maneuvers, scout rapids, or rest. Rapids may require "must" moves above dangerous hazards. Scouting may be necessary the first time down. Risk of injury to swimmers is moderate to high, and water conditions may make self-rescue difficult. Group assistance</p>

	<p>for rescue is often essential but requires practiced skills. a strong eskimo roll is highly recommended. Rapids that are at the upper end of this difficulty range are designated "class iv-" or "class iv+" respectively.</p>
<p>Phase V takes us into the advanced level where we continue to add sophisticated steps, step combinations, and body movements. Some of these new figures are modifications or extensions of lower level figures. For instance, the waltz weave is a phase IV figure; the natural weave is phase V. The open natural turn is phase IV; the running open natural is syncopated and phase V.</p>	<p>Class V: expert; extremely long, obstructed, or very violent rapids which expose a paddler to added risk. Drops may contain large, unavoidable waves and holes or steep, congested chutes with complex, demanding routes. Rapids may continue for long distances between pools, demanding a high level of fitness. What eddies exist may be small, turbulent, or difficult to reach. At the high end of the scale, several of these factors may be combined; scouting is recommended but may be difficult. Swims are dangerous, and rescue is often difficult even for experts. A very reliable eskimo roll, proper equipment, extensive experience, and practiced rescue skills are essential. Because of the large range of difficulty that exists beyond class iv, class 5 is an open ended, multiple level scale designated by class 5.0, 5.1, 5.2, etc... each of these levels is an order of magnitude more difficult than the last. Example: increasing difficulty from class 5.0 to class 5.1 is a similar order of magnitude as increasing from class IV to class 5.0.</p>
 <p>Phase VI is the highest level within round dancing, and it is the level with the greatest breadth. That is, if you compare learning round dancing to climbing a ladder, and phase I is the first rung on that ladder, phase II is the second rung, and so on, then phase VI simply begins with the sixth rung and continues on to the top (only there is no top, because <i>they</i> keep writing new material). Of course, I say this with no suggestion of criticism, because it</p>	<p>Class VI: extreme and exploratory; these runs have almost never been attempted and often exemplify the extremes of difficulty, unpredictability and danger. The consequences of errors are very severe and rescue may be impossible; for teams of experts only, at favorable water levels, after close personal inspection and taking all precautions. After a class VI rapids has been run many times, it's rating may be changed to an appropriate class 5.</p>

is precisely this continued opportunity for growth that draws us on and makes round dancing endlessly fascinating.

As you would expect, phase VI figures are complex and sophisticated. We have been working on paso doble lately, and were introduced to two unusually extended figures, the fregolina, which is seven measures and 28 steps long, and the chasse cape, which can run for eight measures and 36 steps (including some syncopation).

Phase VI dances are also known for their "modified" figures and "unphased" figures. That is not to say that these do not turn up in intermediate and even "easy" dances, but phase VI choreographers often seem to delight in creating clever or innovative challenges for the dancer to overcome or master. A modified figure is a figure that is recognized by Roundalab but that has been changed in some way for a particular dance. It might be longer or shorter, have extra or fewer steps, be performed more quickly or more slowly, or start from or end in an unusual position on the floor. Needless to say, you can know all the standard figures published in the Roundalab manual, and you won't know this modified figure. You'll have to learn it for this dance and then remember it for next time. An unphased figure is a new figure created by the choreographer, perhaps never used in a round dance before. I was just looking at a phase VI quickstep, *Five Guys Named Moe*, by Bill and Carol Goss, and introduced at the URDC convention, this year (2004). In part D, they have a two-measure figure called "Hopscotch." It suggests some of the moves in the child's game, and I sure don't see it in my manual. I think they made it up. But I also think it is going to be neat, if I can learn it.

Finally, let me say that the phase rating

system only begins to give you an idea of the difficulty of a dance. (In this respect, the American Whitewater scale is more objective and informative. 😊) But there are phase VI dances that can be done to cues, with no prior practice, and there are certainly phase II dances that must be studied and practiced, if you want to dance them, and then reviewed and practiced some more, if you want to keep dancing them. The considerate cuer will tell you that, "this is a phase II dance, but it dances like a VI." Often, at the phase II or III level, the tough ones turn out to be full of step cues, instead of standard figures, and the cues just come at you too fast. I can mentally process a cue every couple of measures or even every measure, but if I get a new cue with every beat of music, I lose track and fall behind:

"Forward, side, cross behind, unwind, dip . . ."

"Wait a minute! Which way am I facing?
What foot is free?"

And so we come full circle, back to the "easy" level again. The dance phases give us some indication of the difficulty of the dance, and some indication of the specific figures to expect in the choreography, but choreographers may ask us to perform those figures a little differently than usual or facing a different direction, and step cues can be used to take us through a unique and totally unexpected sequence, all without raising the phase level at all. It is indeed a rich and interesting game.