

TAP DANCE ESSENTIALS

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History

Any teaching of Tap Dance should include an acknowledgement and teaching of its history and development as an African-American art form. Enslaved peoples, taken from West Africa to the Americas to work on plantations, brought with them their rich heritage of music and dance. Plantation owners quickly recognized the power of this music to strengthen community and build resistance, so drums and musical gatherings were outlawed. These rhythms could not be suppressed and were transferred from traditional instruments, to found instruments then onto the body and into the feet. After emancipation, former enslaved workers and their families moved to urban centres such as New York and Chicago. There they interacted with immigrant groups who had brought their cultures with them. Irish step-dancers mingled with Black American hoofers inspiring dancers to add metal to the bottom of their shoes to clarify and amplify the rhythms.

Short film narrated by Dulé Hill on the history of Tap Dance:

<https://youtu.be/5Zd6GnFCfck?si=5YEKoJxVo18OmX9Z>

Essentials of Tap Dance

Weight transfer, rhythm, articulation & improvisation

Teaching:

Step 1. mechanics (parts of the whole)

Step 2. rhythm (clap, scat, say the step)

Step 3. step (put mechanics and rhythm together)

Warm up

Simple and rhythmic. Make sound with one part of the foot at a time then combine sounds. Create space for improv right from the beginning. Set strict limits. (EG. Toes only or step heel only)

1. Weight on toes – *Can't Get Out of This Mood* – Samara Joy
Walk on balls, touch step, step heel, step (heels 3x) – slow, faster, repeat, improv
2. Weight on heels – *Block Rockin' Beats* – The Chemical Brothers
Heel drops, dig step, heel toe drop, heel (toe drop 3x) – slow, faster, improv
3. Brushing up & down – *Espresso* – Sabrina Carpenter

Shuffle 3x step) reverse Flap 3x, flap change feet) reverse, repeat but drop heel.
Shuffle 3x, flap change feet) fwd & side, tempo change – shuffle 2x, flap heel) 3x,
flap heel changing feet – slow, faster, improv

4. Hips – *God Gave Me Feet For Dancing* – Ezra Collective

Twisting heels together, toes together. Twisting single heel drops/toe drops. Twisting crawl out & in – same foot, changing feet – slow, faster, improv

5. Body warm up/ easy stretch – *Fever* – Peggy Lee

Head rolls, add shoulders, add upper body and drop over. Side stretch, flat back, wide knees, calves, etc. Own stretch

Body

Musical Theatre steps

1. New Yorker – travels side to side: flap heel, heel changing weight, back brush, heel drop, toe in back, heel drop (flap heel heel, brush heel toe heel)

2. Maxie Ford – 3 beats

Step, shuffle, jump, toe in back (step shuffle jump toe)

3. Irish – changing feet

Shuffle, hop, step

4. Soft Shoe – moves side to side

Side step, X foot in front ball change) reverse, repeat, ball change in back, ball change in front (step ball change, step ball change, step ball change, ball change, ball change)

Can add flaps and brushes everywhere!

Paddle turn – side step, repeating ball change to pivot in circle

Anything Goes combo- Sutton Foster “New Broadway Company Orchestra” (begins at :25 seconds)

1. Irish 3x step step hl) rev.

2. New Yorker) rev, rep, rev

3. R step Maxie Ford step] rev., rep. Step L to L slide R in and shimmy

4. Soft Shoe combo R, Paddle turn L (ball change 6x) ending POSE!

Rhythmic focus

Trendsetter Connor Price and Haviiah Mighty (3 & a break pattern)

1. L (hl drop) 2x slap R] 3x (L heel drop) 2x R heel drop (transfer weight)] rev.

2. Travel fwd: hl step) R, L, (dig R) 3x] rep 2x, dig R hl fwd and slide circle back, toe drop (x’d back)

We only got this far in the combo but here’s the rest!

3. Travel side to side: R step hl, L cross step hl, R step hl, L Toe back) rev., repeat with turn, L Stomp, rest, stomp) 2x clap.
4. Half group Step 1, half group step 3 – all break: stamp L, R slap L, R, stamp L double stomp R

More

Tap classes for adults – many dance studios offer Adult classes. Here's a small list but check studios that are local to you

The Rhythm Room - 8713 Cambie St., Vancouver – the ONLY dance studio in the province dedicated to Adult Tap dance. Classes run all year long. Get here if you can!

Harbour Dance Centre – Granville St., Vancouver - offers drop-in and sequential tap dance classes for adults. <https://www.harbourdance.com>

Place des Arts – Brunette Ave., Coquitlam – offers beginner and intermediate, sequential lessons <https://placedesarts.ca/2025-2026-program-guide/>

Driftwood Dance – North Van – offers a weekly adult tap class on Saturdays
<https://www.driftwooddance.com/adult-classes>

Bez Arts Hub – 64th Ave., Langley – offers 2 weekly adult tap classes
<https://www.bezartshub.com/weekly-schedule>

Legacy Dance Productions – Abbotsford – 3 levels of Adult tap classes with an excellent instructor! <https://www.legacydanceproductions.ca/adult-classes>

West Coast Tap Dance Collective – a non-profit dance organization that produces an annual weekend of tap dance festivities in the lower mainland every May. (National Tap Dance Day is May 25th. Join in a weekend of workshops plus a tap dance show. The show features professional and amateur dancers. School dance clubs/classes are welcome to submit a piece for performance. <https://www.westcoasttapdance.com> / @westcoasttap

Instructional Videos:

United Taps – YouTube playlist with dozens of beginner-friendly combinations to learn, teach or use as a jumping off point for a performance routine.

Performance videos:

Anything Goes – Sutton Foster https://youtu.be/UKBW_SF5-7M?si=brjpUJnxVnfJEyBz

Syncopated Ladies - <https://youtu.be/WFSZfBREmdQ?si=AFkQw--Sz7UYRzeI>

Jabu Graybeal with Postmodern Jukebox -
https://youtu.be/c4IG73_6erk?si=vBs791101sZn0bRd

Tri-Tone Ensemble – youth rhythm tap group from Calgary
<https://youtu.be/S72K7EdSeng?feature=shared>

Challenge Scene from *Tap* – features many of the masters of modern tap dance
<https://youtu.be/5Zd6GnFCfck?si=RhthftXwjaUuvxRK>