

## How To Find Your Corners – A Beginner’s Guide to Set Geography

Understanding the basics of set geography is important for a variety of figures, none more so than the concept of “corners”, since many dances rely on this knowledge. Since this is an introductory guide, I start by going back to the very basics – the geography of the set itself, and build from there. For those who are a little more advanced, consider this a quick reminder.

There are two primary types of set orientation: “Longwise” (or Lengthways), and “Square”. Other types of set exist (Triangular, Domino5, Circle, Round the Room, etc.), but we are not concerned with those here since they either do not have “corners”, or they are so rarely used for dances that they tend to exist solely in the repertoire of the advanced dancer, and not the beginner.

### Longwise Sets – Basic Notation

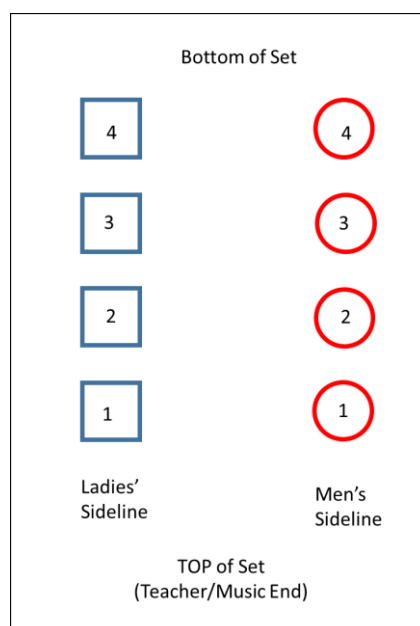
A Longwise Set consists of either 2, 3, 4 or sometimes 5 or more couples in a line down the hall. Couples are facing their partner, normally about 1.5 to 2 metres apart (depending on the age & ability of the group a narrower set may be preferred, whilst for experienced or more agile dancers, a larger width set is preferred). Adjacent couples are normally separated by between 0.5 to 1m.

The couples are numbered off from the “Top” of the room – defined as the end of the room where the music/MC/Teacher are based. The dance will specify how many couples join in the first turn of the dance, and whether the dance is repeated with the next group of couples down (e.g. “3 in 4” or “8x32” means “3 couples are required for the dance, but the dance is repeated twice for each “dancing couple”, so a 4<sup>th</sup> couple is needed. The 32 refers to the number of bars of music for once through the dance).

By extrapolation, the “Bottom” of the set is the end of the set furthest from the music/MC/Teacher (noting that the teacher will, of course, move around the room to demonstrate figures but the “top” and “bottom” of the set doesn’t change).

The “Sidelines” are the two lines of dancers. Conventionally, these are defined as “Men’s” and “Ladies” due to the notation having been derived in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries and it’s now too confusing to change for most people. Note that it is now quite common to have females partnered with females, and males partnered with males in a dance without any concern. It is noted that some groups are trying to transition to “Larks” and “Magpies” or “Wall” and “Windows” side – as appropriate to the setting, although the official written dance notation still uses “Men’s” and “Ladies”.

In “official” RSCDS Notation, the “Top” of the set is drawn at the bottom of the page, i.e. the diagram is seen from the teacher’s/musician’s perspective (See Figure 1). In Pilling and other diagrammatic cribs, the top of the set is often at the left hand side of the page for compactness.



**Figure 1: Longwise Set Orientation & Notation**

### Corners in Longwise Sets

To Identify the “Corners” in a Longwise Set, we must first manoeuvre the 1<sup>st</sup> couple into 2<sup>nd</sup> place, in a set with at least 3 couples involved in the dance. This is commonly done using a figure called “Casting” (See the “how-to” guide on casting for details), however other methods are available. However we have achieved 1<sup>st</sup> couple in 2<sup>nd</sup> place, the corners are identified as follows:

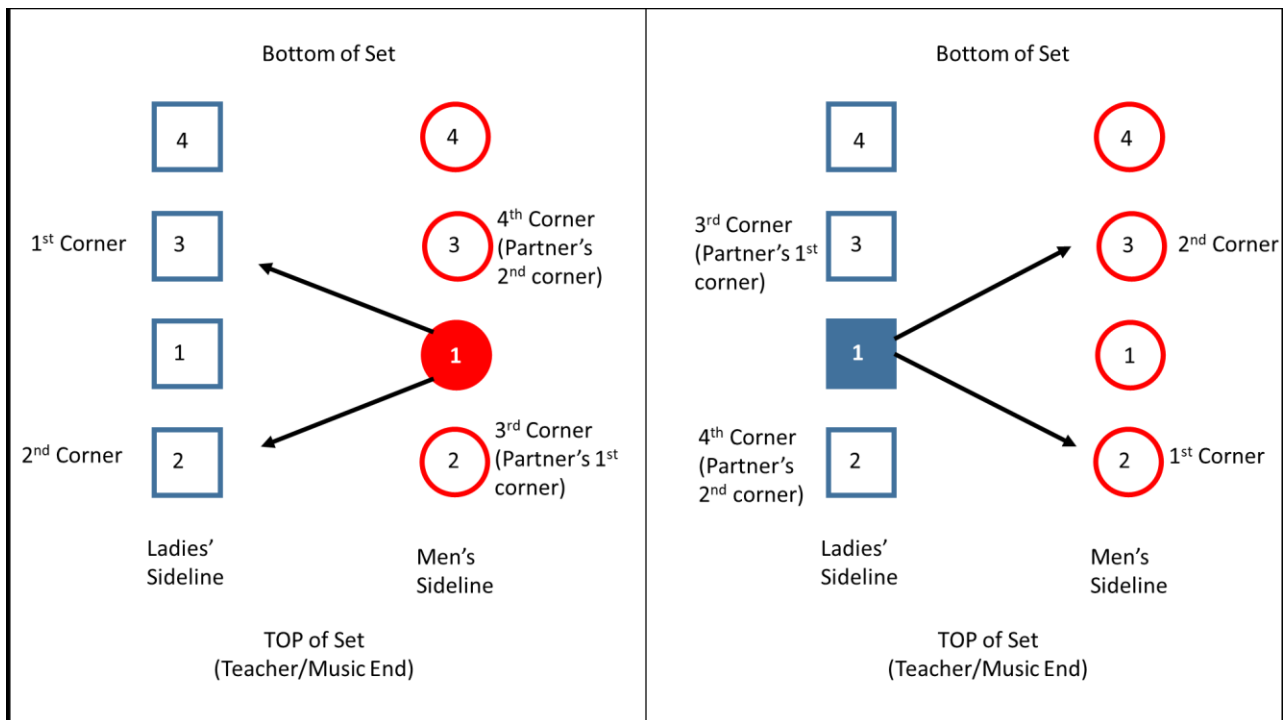
Facing the side-line of the opposite “Gender”, point diagonally to your right, with your right arm. The person standing there is your “First Corner”. Similarly, point diagonally to your left, with your left arm. The person standing there is your “Second Corner”

The person standing to your left (i.e. of the same “Gender” as you), is your “Third Corner”, or your “Partner’s First Corner” - both notations are used, somewhat confusingly. Logically, the person standing to your right is thus your “Fourth Corner”, or your “Partner’s Second Corner”.

Now, if you are “1<sup>st</sup> Man”, your first corner is 3<sup>rd</sup> Lady, your second corner is 2<sup>nd</sup> Lady (standing in 1<sup>st</sup> Lady’s place), your third corner is 2<sup>nd</sup> Man (standing in your original place) and your fourth corner is 3<sup>rd</sup> Man.

Similarly if you are “1<sup>st</sup> Lady” your first corner is 2<sup>nd</sup> Man (standing in 1<sup>st</sup> Man’s place), your second corner is 3<sup>rd</sup> Man, your third corner is 3<sup>rd</sup> Lady and your fourth corner is 3<sup>rd</sup> Lady (standing in your original place).

Are you confused yet? See Figure 2 below for an illustration. I recommend getting some substitute dancers (chess pieces, sofa cushions or coloured clothes pegs work well for this) and working out who your corners are in a physical space in your own time without having to remember an unfamiliar dance at the same time! If you need to associate it with a figure, simply consider having to turn them with the right hand.



**Figure 2: Illustration of Corner Positions in a Longwise Set for 1<sup>st</sup> Man (Left) and 1<sup>st</sup> Lady (Right)**

### Square Sets

In a Square Set, the four couples are arranged in a square, the “Man” with his partner on his right. The couple with their back to the music/Teacher/MC are the 1s, or “Top Couple”. Couples are numbered clockwise around the square, as illustrated in Figure 3.

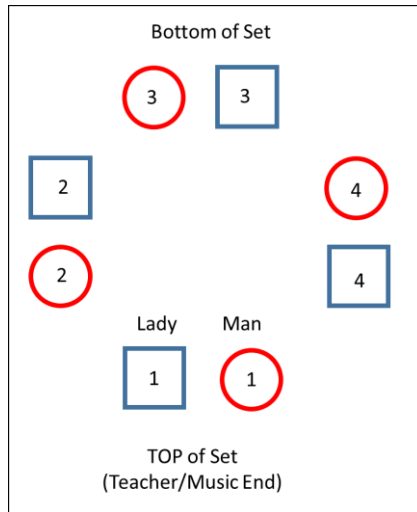


Figure 3: Square Set Orientation and Notation

In a Square Set, the person who is standing next to you, but who is not your partner, is your “corner”. The person standing opposite you is your “opposite”, and the person standing the other side of your partner is your “partner’s corner”.

This is illustrated for first couple in Figure 4. Again, try it out with those clothes pegs or chess pieces for yourself.

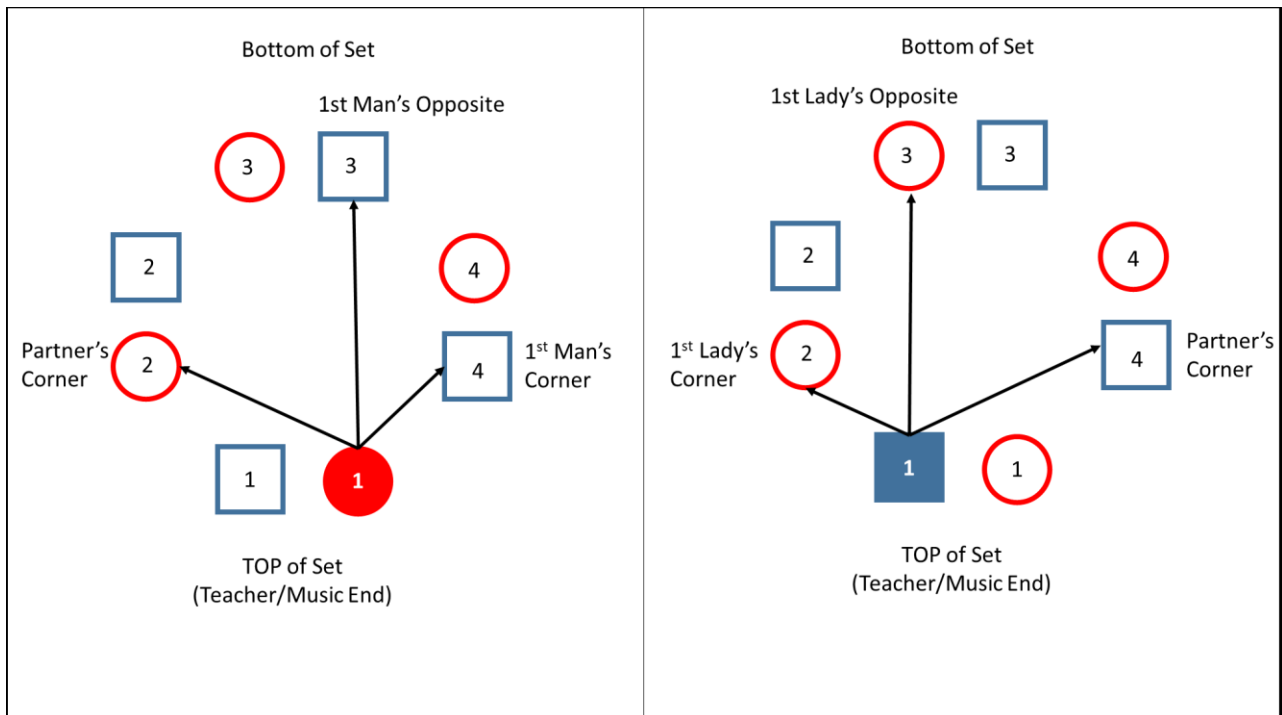


Figure 4: Illustration of 1<sup>st</sup> Man's Corners (Left) and 1<sup>st</sup> Lady's Corners (Right)

### **Figures Where “Corners” Are Required**

Knowledge of corners is required for the following common figures danced in a “longwise” set (note: not a complete list of figures):

- Corners Pass and Turn
- Crown Triangles
- Diagonal Rights and Lefts
- Diagonal Reels of 4
- Diagonal Tandem Reels of 3
- Diagonal Promenade Reels of 3
- Diagonal Change-Lead Reels of 3 (i.e. “Dolphin Reels”)
- Double Triangles
- Half Figure of 8 around specified corner
- Reels of 3 with 1s starting in the centre of the dance and “passing 4<sup>th</sup> corner by the right” (e.g. Reels of 3 on the sidelines following on from Hello Goodbye Setting).
- Reels of 3 with the 1s starting on partner’s side of the dance in 2<sup>nd</sup> place and passing 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> corner by the indicated shoulder
- Set-advancing to face 1<sup>st</sup> corner (or specified corner)
- Set to and turn 1<sup>st</sup> Corner and then set to and turn 2<sup>nd</sup> Corner (“Set to and Turn Corners”)
- Set to Corners and Partner (“Hello-Goodbye” Setting)
- Turn 1<sup>st</sup> Corner and then 2<sup>nd</sup> Corner (Right or Left Hand, or “Both Hands”)
- Turn 1<sup>st</sup> Corner – Partner – 2<sup>nd</sup> Corner – Partner (“Corner-Partner”)
- Turn to face specified corner (ready for a following figure involving the corners)

Knowledge of corners is also required for the following 8-bar phrases (8-bars of combined figures):

- Turn Right Hand once round, cast off and turn left hand  $1\frac{1}{4}$  to finish facing first corners
- Cross, cast and turn left hand  $1\frac{3}{4}$  to finish facing first corners
- Cross, cast and turn right hand  $1\frac{1}{4}$  to finish facing first corners
- “Lead down below the 3s, cross and cast up around 3s to finish back to back in the centre facing 1<sup>st</sup> corner”
- Lead/Dance down for 4 bars and back for 4 bars crossing the lady over in front to finish facing 1<sup>st</sup> corners

Knowledge of corners is required for the following common figures danced in a Square set (note: not a complete list of figures):

- Advance with Partner, Retire with Corner
- Highland Schottische Setting to Corner
- Turn Corner Left/Right/Both Hands
- Figure of 8 beginning by passing Corner by the indicated shoulder
- Right/Left hands across followed by dancing out around corner person