

## **Sample of Coaching Tips**

### ***Cleaning, Perfecting, and Polishing Your Routine***

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## Instructions

### How to Use Your Guide to Cleaning, Perfecting, and Polishing Your Routine

For any dance group to achieve success, it is important to select a quality team, secure a dedicated and knowledgeable coach, gain access to valuable dance technique instruction and other resources, and learn innovative and fun choreography. However, the “formula” doesn’t end there... every dance organization must learn how to take all of these elements and see them from start to finish, the last step being cleaning, perfecting, and polishing the routine.

This guide is divided into sections so that you can quickly and easily pinpoint ideas for how to clean various aspects of your routine. These methods are “tried and true” – used often by the BPDS staff when coaching teams and working with dance groups across the nation!

It is always a challenge to clean any routine for two main reasons:

- By the time the choreography has been thoroughly taught and rehearsed, the dancers may be experiencing the “burnout effect.”
- Often times, there is a large number of dancers involved with a single group. Therefore, the objective to get all dancers cleaned, perfected, and polished can seem like a daunting challenge.

The solution to these two main hurdles consists of two things:

- Creativity
- Variety

All dancers and coaches, regardless of how passionate they are about their choreography get uninspired from drilling the 8 counts over and over and over again...

Here, BPDS offers you a variety of creative ways to approach the cleaning of the same 8 counts your dancers have been working on for months – in a way that won’t bore them but inspire them, causing a rebirth of the original excitement they felt for their team, and their choreography!

# Section One: Synchronization, Unison, and Precision

## Build Count by Count

### **When to use:**

Use this exercise when you are faced with a particularly complex set of choreography (1-4 8 counts). This exercise will get to the “nitty gritty” of all choreography but is very time consuming.

### **Description:**

Building count by count is a slow, yet effective way to clean a routine. Appoint a “leader” – perhaps the coach, captain, or choreographer to lead the team through this exercise. This leader should watch the team (not dance with them). The team should begin by merely showing the leader Count One. The leader makes all executive decisions regarding cleaning the one count based upon the positions displayed by all the dancers.

Then, move to Count Two. Again, the leader makes the executive decision of how the cleaned version of Count Two should look. Corrections are made and absorbed by the team.

Next, bridge the two counts together.

Continue by repeating the same process for Count Three; ask the dancers to show Count Three. The leader makes the official declaration of exactly how Count Three should be and the dancers absorb the corrections.

Continue the process by bridging Count One through Count Three together.

This process should be continued until the particularly complex piece of choreography has been worked through completely.

### **Please note:**

Some synchronization, unison, and precision problems stem from factors that are correlated to performing the choreography up to tempo, in formations, and “full out.” Therefore, make sure that when you bridge the counts together that the dancers are executing the bridged counts exactly as they would be executed in a real performance.

## Section Two: Technique

### Incorporate Into Warm-Up

#### **When to use:**

This method should be used 100% of the time. Regardless of the style of dance your team performs, technique exercises incorporated into the warm-up at the beginning of each rehearsal is critical for two reasons:

- It helps the dancers to transition into a state of being aware of their body placement and alignment (a state of mind that most people are not in during the course of a normal day).
- It guarantees that your dancers will have an opportunity to focus solely on technique at every rehearsal, not just on the choreography – regardless of any performance deadlines.

#### **Description:**

Incorporating a well choreographed warm-up that is aligned with your team's goals and choreography into every practice is essential for the growth of your team.

Warm-ups serve a primary purpose of bringing your dancers together at the beginning of a practice to focus. It provides a time for them to mentally transition from individuals in their daily life to a team ready for a productive practice. Giving them this time allows them to be “ready to go” when warm-up is over and it is time to rehearse.

Basic technical elements are incorporated into well choreographed warm-ups. Items such as pliés, relevés, tendus, dégagés, passés, and balances are all essential parts of a warm-up that prepare the dancer for turns, leaps, kicks, and other technical skills throughout their practice and rehearsal time.

#### **Please note:**

It is a good idea to have a choreographed warm-up, not just an “open warm-up time.” Select a captain or senior member to choreograph a warm-up routine, incorporating plié, relevé, tendu, dégagé, rond de jambe, and passé exercises taught on the BPDS Instructional Technique Video.

## Section Three: Spacing in Formations

### Formation Illustrations

#### **When to use:**

Use this exercise when the dancers are working in a unique formation that is hard for them to visualize on their own. For example, if the formation calls for two lines with the back line standing in the “windows,” chances are, the dancers will easily understand. If the formation “picture” is more complex, such as “an inner triangle surrounded by a square,” the dancers will have a hard time understanding how to create that “picture,” what their role is in making that “picture” for the audience.

#### **Description:**

Using one of BPDS’s Formation Cards supplied to you with BPDS choreography, or, using one of your own illustrations of the formation, show your dancers the formation picture. Illustrate the formation by drawing the shape, using an “x” to signify the placeholder for each dancer. When the dancers see the shape (picture) that the formation creates for the audience’s point of view, they will better understand how to align themselves with their teammates.

#### **Please note:**

If you have an easel, dry erase board, chalkboard, poster board etc., the larger the illustration you can provide to the dancers, the better they understand!

## Section Four: Formation Changes and Transitions

### Formation Insurance

**When to use:**

You should use this exercise with every routine, with every formation.

**Description:**

Part of making a formation change look clean is for all dancers to arrive to the new formation on time, before the next section of choreography starts, instead of “cheating” their way into the formation. In order to guarantee that dancers arrive on time, direct them to be in their formation one count early. For example, if the choreography allows counts 1-4 for a formation change, coach all dancers to arrive to their spot by count 3. This leaves a count as “insurance” for all dancers to arrive on time.

**Please note:**

The quicker the transition is to the next formation, the better it is for the overall piece of choreography. The key to successful transitions is for them to happen without the audience thinking, “Hmmm... they’re in the process of changing formations.” The formation changes should happen quickly – the dancers being in one formation and then, “all of a sudden,” the dancers being in the next formation.

Therefore, if you already have quick formation changes, using this insurance exercise can be a real challenge. However, the payoff from ensuring that your dancers will be in the correct space on time is well worth the time spent on this “Formation Insurance” exercise.

## Section Five: Showmanship and Performance Quality

### “Miss Showmanship”

#### **When to use:**

This is a good exercise to use when your team is having a hard time transitioning their mental energy from focusing on the choreography to *performing* the choreography – making it entertaining for the audience to watch.

#### **Description:**

Use positive reinforcement! Make a friendly competition out of dancers competing for the title of “Miss Showmanship.”

Divide your team into three groups. Have each group perform the routine for the other two groups. The other two groups act as the audience and vote on a finalist for “Miss Showmanship” from the group. Once all three groups have performed, and all three finalists are selected, the three finalists perform for the rest of the team; the rest of the team will vote on the final winner.

The criteria for “Miss Showmanship” should be the following:

- The dancer does not have “fake” facials; they are genuine
- The dancer sustains energy, not just in his/her face, but in his/her entire body for the entire duration of the choreography
- The dancer doesn’t just “smile,” but communicates a genuine feeling of “I *love* to dance.”
- The dancer should be so captivating, that it is hard for audience members to watch someone else!

#### **Please note:**

This should be a fun exercise for the dancers. It is a good way to end a hard practice... the dancers get to transition from thinking about the counts and movements to simply having a blast dancing, which is why they should dance in the first place!

## Section Six: Stamina

### Cardio Training

**When to use:**

Cardio Training should be incorporated into your team schedule from the first practice of the season to the last.

**Description:**

A quality routine is only achieved when dancers can stay at a high energy level until the last beat. A common problem is that dancers do not have the stamina to maintain the necessary energy level throughout all of the choreography. To build stamina, incorporate cardio training into every practice. This can be in the form of running, aerobic exercise, or any other sustained activity that keeps the heart rate in the appropriate cardio zone.

If your practice schedule does not allow time for cardio training, mandate that all team members partake in cardio training on their own time throughout the season. Issue the dancers a log sheet that they can complete that provides a record of their work outside of practice. Collect these intermittently to check to see that all dancers are keeping up with the requirement set by the team rules.

**Please note:**

If it is a team rule for the dancers to partake in cardio training on their own time, be sure to advise the dancers' parents of this commitment. Getting the parents onboard with the idea will help to ensure that the dancer completes the required training.