

## HOW TO READ A CUE SHEET

A well-written cue sheet should tell you everything you need to know to dance the choreography. It begins with the large print at the top, which gives you the name of the dance and information about the choreographer (including a phone number—in case all else fails), the phase rating and rhythm of the dance, and how to obtain the music. If the music is available on record, the suggested speed should also be noted.

As you read through a cue sheet, you will see it gets more and more technical, indicating the specific steps for both Man and Lady, alignment and timing for each figure.

Older cue sheets are less readable than more modern ones. Before the mid-1980s, many round dance figures did not have officially sanctioned names and therefore dances were step-cued.

### Phasing

Phase rating of figures came into being in the 1980s to indicate to dancers how difficult a dance is. Cuers who teach only at a certain level can rely on the phase rating to avoid dances considered too difficult (or too easy) for their clubs. Roundalab, the international organization of round dance teachers, publishes a teaching manual that groups figures by those phases. (The system is reviewed annually for modifications, so figures may be moved from one category to another over time.)

Suppose a cue sheet shows the phase as “II + 2 + 1.” Using the phase system, you can assume this dance contains mostly Phase II figures, except for two figures from Phase III and one unphased figure. A good cue sheet will also tell you what those additional figures are. For example: *Phase II + 2 (Cuban break, feather) + 1 (forward change)*.

### Head Cues

Most cue sheets break down a dance into sections (Intro, Parts A, B, C, interlude, bridge, tag, etc.) and usually further divide the sections into groups of measures. The more modern cue sheets also generally have the choreographer’s suggested *head cues* at the beginning of each grouping. For example:

#### PART A

##### 1 – 4    OUTSIDE SPIN; CHECK NATURAL AND SLIP; DOUBLE REVERSE SPIN; OPEN TELEMARK;

1 – Trng RF placing L toe to R instep, fwd R LOD trng RF, cont RF turn sd L in CP DLC (fwd R outside ptr RLOD in BJO trng RF, cl L to R pvting RF on toes, fwd R in CP);

This excerpt gives the *head cues* for the first four measures of Part A and, in the small print, detailed instructions for the *first* measure.

### Small Print Directions

The small print instructions will show footwork measure by measure. Man’s footwork is listed first, with either a notation that the woman’s footwork is the opposite or it is shown in

parentheses (see example above). To fit all of this information into a reasonable space, Roundalab has standardized the punctuation and abbreviations for cue sheets.

Once you understand the shorthand notations in cue sheets, you will be able to tell what figure you are to do, where it begins and ends, the number of steps in each measure (timing) and which steps go in which measure. Some of the standardized notations are:

;	The end of a measure of music	[ ]	Extra information
,	The end of one beat of music	{ }	Name of a figure
/	Two foot actions on one beat (1&, 2)	( )	Lady's footwork
a	¼ beat, as in jive	-	Hold
&	½ beat, as in a chasse		

A generally complete detail section of a cue sheet will look like this:

*1, -, - 4 – {Whiplash} Fwd R, trng body RF point L in CP, hold fcg DLC (fwd R, fwd L, trng LF to CP extending R bk & sd);*

You know this is the fourth measure of this part of the dance by the number “4”. You know the figure is a whiplash by the { }. Man's timing is given as 1, -, - at the beginning of the first line, meaning he has only one step in three beats of music. (You'd guess this was a waltz.) Lady's timing is given below that in parentheses: (123), indicating she has two steps and an action, one to each beat of the music. No syncopation is indicated. You know this is only one measure of music by the placement of the semi-colon (;) at the end of the sentence and by the timing given. Commas separate each beat of the measure.

If the figure were syncopated, the timing in the margin might be: 12&3. The fine print would describe the figure, perhaps a chasse, as: L,R/L,R; indicating two steps on the second beat of music.

### Abbreviations

Like any new language, you have to get used to cue sheeting writing. Once you learn the abbreviations, you should have no trouble determining what to do. Some common ones are:

L	Left foot	trng	Turning
R	Right foot	LF	Left-face
M	Man	RF	Right face
W	Lady	CBMP	Contra Body Movement
OP	Open position		Position
CP	Closed position	ccw	Counter-clockwise
SCP	Semi-closed position	bk	Back
COH	Center of hall	fwd	Forward
DLC or DC	Diagonal line & center	dwn	Down
DLW or DW	Diagonal line & wall	dir	Direction
RLOD	Reverse line of dance	ptr	Partner