

**Choreography is the art of designing sequences of movements in which motion, form (or both) are specified; the gathering and organization of movement into order and pattern. It literally means “dance-writing”.*

**Score Sheet Definition: Creative use of individual body (and/or props/sets) using rhythm, line, and space in conjunction with variety, complexity and style.*

I. BUILDING A SHOW – It’s so overwhelming, where do I start?

a. Identify Your Role on the Design Team (if more than one person is involved)

i. Identify who is the “Head Choreographer/Show Designer”

1. **Visionary:** This person should have an overall vision for the entire show design, while taking “input” and delegating design elements to others on the design team, as needed. “Big Picture”
2. **Decision Maker:** Makes the final design decisions as to what design ideas will make it into the final production.

ii. Identify who is an “Assistant” on the Design Team

1. **Contributor:** Assistants can contribute ideas to the design of the show, but must keep in mind that the “visionary” cannot put everything into the show.
2. **Specialist:** Often assistants are very good at specific elements of design and do very well when delegated tasks (individual choreography, designing forms, splicing music, designing costuming, etc).

iii. When splitting up design tasks, good communication is ESSENTIAL!

1. Elements designed by different individuals need to be HIGHLY INTEGRATED. Make sure your styles of design match and correlate to your overall theme, style and motif.
2. *In order to succeed in your design, everyone needs to understand their roles & respect the decisions of the Show Designer. If there’s no one to make the final say, you’ll never have a finished product! Remember, we all have different personality types and each person’s creative process is different; but conflict only creates chaos-so try to have patience and respect each other’s “processes”.*

b. As a Choreographer, start thinking of yourself as a “Show Designer”

- i. Choreography is often misunderstood. It is NOT just the individual movements of a dancer. In reality, choreography encompasses the entirety of design.
- ii. As a Show Designer, you need to address the entire work. Successful choreographers DESIGN an entire piece, not just the individual choreography the dancers will learn. The dance steps are just one part of the puzzle!
- iii. *When your routine is judged, we pick apart every piece of your work and break it down into tiny parts. As a choreographer and a designer – you cannot get stuck on the tiny parts. You must always be thinking about the “Big Picture” – ALL the elements that go into design (yes, that includes Overall Effect).*
 1. You cannot just do the “choreography” and then later worry about the forms, staging, music, costuming, and all the other pieces that go into designing a show.
 2. If you only do the “individual choreography” separately from the other design elements, you’ll have what I call the “Camp Routine Syndrome”. There’s little interest in a routine with only one level of choreography. *(Unison choreography can be powerful in the right place of a show, but it’s not a good idea for an entire routine!)*

II. IDENTIFY THE STRENGTHS OF YOUR TEAM

- a. Identify what your team is good at and play to their strengths**
 - i. Is your team good at technique, gymnastics, stunting, or tricks? Are they well-trained, theatrical, athletic, flexible, hard working, emotionally invested? Do you have great parental support?
 - ii. Learn the style your in which your team is most proficient (Jazz, Hip-Hop, Lyrical, Modern, Novelty/Theatrical/Show, etc). [Don't try to build a show that isn't suited for your team!!! Chances are your team's strengths will change year to year.](#)
- b. Identify their weakness and make them stronger!**
 - i. Expand Your Team's Dance “Skills” and “Vocabulary”**
 1. The more skills and vocabulary your team can perform, the more freedom you will have in your choreography
 2. If you don't have a “trained” dance team, then start teaching them how to dance! Technique is a learned skill. Bring in outside help if teaching techniques is not your strength.
- c. Find Your Team's Identity, Define Your STYLE & Stand Out from the Crowd!!**
 - i. Don't try to be someone else – be yourself! Identify your team's strengths, style, and “soul”, then work on creating an identity all your own!
 - ii. Don't chase the tails of the team ahead of you. If you do, you can at best only be their twin. Instead, find what makes your team great. You may find your weaknesses are your greatest strengths!
- d. Identify Your Design Strengths**
 - i. To help identify your role and divide the workload, think about what you are good at. For example, are you generally better at “upstairs” or “downstairs” choreography?
 1. **Upstairs Choreography:** Ensemble effects, Formations, Staging, Visual Effects (Visual Repertoire), etc. “Big picture” design elements – most often worked on from “up” in the bleachers.
 2. **Downstairs Choreography:** Individual, Ensemble & Maneuvering Choreography; **Leveling, Texturing & Layering**, etc. These are all detailed design elements – most often worked on and taught “down” on the floor.
 - ii. **Music, Theme & Costume Design** – Perhaps one of these is your strength! These are all design elements judged in Overall Effect, but they are all part of the Show Design and elements of Choreography!!

III. FIND YOUR INSPIRATION – “Downstairs Choreography”

- a. Get Your Body Moving!!**
 - i. Attend local dance camps, workshops, conventions, and classes
 - ii. Take Dance Classes: Universities and Community Colleges, Dance Studios; Recreation Clubs, Local Gyms
- b. Expand your Horizons and your “Choreographic Vocabulary”!!**
 - i. Go outside your training and learn NEW disciplines & styles of dance (Ballroom, Latin, Modern, Jazz, Tap, Ballet, Hip-hop, Martial Arts).
 - ii. Attend dance camps, conventions, workshops, & seminars OUTSIDE OF OREGON whenever you can!
 1. How to make it happen
 - a. Choose where to go carefully – do your homework!
 - b. Go as an individual or as a coaching staff; take your team or just your captains.

2. How to afford it
 - a. Fundraise, factor it into your team’s budget for the year, write-off your out-of-pocket expenses on your personal taxes.
 - b. Carpool, find cheap airfare, use mileage points – whatever it takes! It’s worth the sacrifice!!!

IV. FIND YOUR INSPIRATION – “Upstairs Choreography”

- a. **BE ORIGINAL!! Be creative, be inspired, and design your own piece of artwork!**
There’s no need to re-create someone else’s work.
 - i. Look to outside influences for inspiration, not eight-counts!
 1. Attend Performances for Inspiration: Broadway Shows, Concerts, Dances, Art Shows, Band Shows, Winter guard, Drum Corps, Drama Shows, Choir, Costume, Fashion & Makeup shows, etc.
 2. If you’re “rewinding” a DVD too often to help you with your choreography, chances are you’re in danger of plagiarizing someone else’s work.
- b. **Create your own “Book of Inspiration” and refer to it often.**
 - i. Collect magazine clip outs, action shots, and any dance pictures that inspire you - to help create your own unique choreography
 1. Dance moves, poses, forms, leveling, layering
 2. Colors, moods, facial expressions, costumes
 - ii. **MUSIC** – create lists of music ideas and CDs of anything that inspires you or you might want to use someday!

V. DISCOVER YOUR MUSICALITY

- a. **Choose great music!!!!!!!**
 - i. **MUSIC** is the framework of your routine and the foundation of your show!! It will either enhance or limit your choreographic possibilities.
 1. Use music that is **LAYERED**: Is there just a vocalist with a guitar & drums? - OR- does it have an entire orchestra of instruments and levels to play with?
 - ii. **Great music inspires great choreography. Think outside the box – don’t use typical or expected music choices.**
 1. Don’t just go with what’s popular, what your dancers like, or what you hear on the radio
 2. Don’t rely on the lyrics! If they mean something to you and your team, that’s great. But don’t expect the lyrics to do the work for you. The audience and judges probably can’t understand them. Instead, choose music to build your show based on the feeling, mood, and style of your music.
- b. **Utilize Your Music!!!!!!!!!!**
 - i. **Know Your Music - Learn the Language of Your dance**
 1. Map Your Music
 - a. Identify and map the **COUNTS** and **PHRASES** in your music... from the very beginning to the very end!!
 - b. Note the major musical accents (highs & lows), tempo changes, and plan appropriate ensemble effects, transitions, and choreography to match what the music calls for.
 - c. Be careful not to break the phrases when you splice your music!

2. Know the Beats of the Music (examples are in an 8 beat mini-phrase)
 - a. Primary Beats: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8
 - b. Downbeats: 1, 3, 5, 7
 - c. Upbeats: 2, 4, 6, 8
- ii. **Utilize Your Music - ANIMATE the Music with Your Choreography**
 1. Phrasing: Choreograph your routine to compliment the phrasing of the music
 2. When choreographing the individual movements, **utilize the music in between the beats to maximize your musicality** (not just the primary beat or melody.)
 3. Advanced Musicality:
 - a. Magic happens when you “pulse” or accent the upbeat of the music in your choreography. Try it!! It adds the magic WOW factor.
 - b. Rolling Count: To achieve an advanced level of musicality and a rhythmic feeling of the dance, use the “rolling count”: “& a **1** & a **2** & a **3** & a **4**...” The movements should START before the count, on the “& a”. This creates measured movement and body flight... basically, it helps you stay exactly on time with the music; creating amazing musicality. This is the “gravy” of the music – it’s where the magic happens!
 4. To add “layers” to your choreography, add in different movements or group work for different “instruments” in the music. Animate those layers!
 5. When choreographing to very percussive music, such as Hip-Hop routines, use word cues while counting to accentuate the dynamics in the music (i.e. kah-kah-kah, boom-cha, a-unn-clack-clack-clack).

VI. Reality Check!

- a. **We can’t do everything!** Be patient with yourself, your staff and your team. Success and change doesn’t happen overnight. It takes a long time to learn how to translate those amazing ideas from your head to the dance floor.
- b. **Don’t be overwhelmed with too much information – just do what makes sense! Make the changes & improvements that you understand and are possible for you and your team.** Repeat after me: “Baby steps”.

VII. My Words of Wisdom...

- a. **Be confident!** You can’t choreograph well when you lose your confidence... so “fake it until you make it!”
- b. **Remember not to let the trophy be your only goal.** If it is, your success will be very shallow and short-lived. Celebrate all the little achievements along the way and try to remember WHY you love dance so much!
- c. **NEVER STOP LEARNING!!** Always be the student, be teachable, and seek out dance education whenever you can. The moment you stop learning is the moment you stop growing. So, soak up knowledge like a sponge!
- d. **Don’t be afraid of the judges!** We’re here to help and want you to succeed almost as much as you do. If you don’t understand something – just ask! We love seeing teams progress every year.

****Please feel free to email me with questions!! I love talking about Content ;]
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Exercises:

I. Musical Phrasing “All Around the World” by ATC

Practice “Mapping” a song and notice the musical phrases. (Remember, musical phrases & choreographic phrases are not necessarily the same thing... but knowing the phrasing to your music is KEY to great choreography).

Intro	88
+ Lyrics	8888
+ Beats	8888
Beats + Music	8888
No Lyrics	8888
Verse	8888...

This is a VERY predictable & flat piece of music – it’s great for this exercise because it’s easy to map & hear the phrases. But it’s NOT the best choice for creating a routine with any depth because it lacks levels, layering and intriguing musical dynamics. To do well (in both Content in OE), you must start by choosing GREAT music that has many levels, layers, and dynamics to play with and amplify/emphasize/illustrate in your choreography and design.

II. Musical Dynamics - Take another look at your music! *We often get “STUCK” hearing the same thing in our music... so we need to identify the different levels that are there and display it in your choreography!! The dancers should be instruments in the band. ANIMATE YOUR MUSIC WITH YOUR CHOREOGRAPHY!! Here are a couple songs that are great examples of music with multiple layers, levels, and dynamics:*

Shadow of the Day by Linkin Park

- Dancer 1: Accent primary beat (1, 2, 3, 4, 5...)
- Dancer 2: Accent the Upbeat (2, 4, 6)
- Dancer 3: Accent the Downbeat (1, 3, 5, 7)
- Dancer 4: Grab the pings
- Dancer 5: “Wind” (Violin)
- Dancer 6: Lyrics- interpretive

Headlock by Imogen Heap

- Dancer 1: Bouncy (on primary beats)
- Dancer 2: Accent the Upbeat (2, 4, 6)
- Dancer 3: Grab the pings – like an operator
- Dancer 4: Drum-humm
- Dancer 5: frog- hop on 1 and 4

Tami Smith – Bio in Short

West Albany Dance Team (member) – 4 years

BYU & OSU Performer (mainly ballroom) – 3 years

Dance Coach & Choreographer since 1999 – 10 years

8 Years coaching at High School level, mostly at West Albany

2 Years coaching at College/Pro level, Oregon State (Beaver Dancers)

Dance Judge since 2006 – 5 years

Trained in dance, since the age of five, from dance pros & choreographers all around the country (Jazz, Hip-hop, Ballet, Ballroom, Latin, Swing, Lyrical and Contemporary)