

Choreography

How do you develop choreography?

Delivering the end result in an organized method is essential. You need to have a plan and a way to get there.

There are a few different ways to arrive at your end result. Start with the easiest way for yourself. After a while of experience in the field you will find different ways to deliver the same material.

Two methods that are very standard are structured method and freestyle. In 1993 Dr. Lorna Francis established these two methods. She defines the structured method as “movements that are formally arranged and repeated in a predetermined order and usually performed to the same piece of music each time the routine is used.” Both Judi Sheppard Missett from Jazzercise and Jacki Sorensen from Aerobic Dance are good examples of this type of method. Some people and instructors feel more comfortable with this method. They know which choreography is done at a certain section. However, it is not favorable with those who are creative and who enjoy new choreography frequently.

Freestyle method gives an instructor more freedom to create and play with new moves. Francis defines freestyle method as “movements that are built and sequenced by the instructor during the aerobics class.”

Francis explains that Freestyle movements can be sequenced either by using linear progressions or by placing movements into patterns or combinations. Linear movements are easier for instructors to use in the beginning because the movement develops from the prior movement.

A great drill for this would be what I call the “Follow me method” and “Only change one thing at a time.” Candice Copeland Brooks would use these types of drills to teach instructors. One instructor to be would start at the front of the room and start with a march. The instructor would add arms, and then change the arms gradually. Changes need to be progressive and not abrupt so a front raise might turn into bicep curls. The only two rules of these drills would be:

1. Only change one thing at a time.
2. Gradually change the movement.

One thing that is very important is to be a great leader. Your students will feel so much more successful if they can follow along with you. Also, keep in mind; try not to give them TMI (Too Much Information). Keep your cueing short and sweet. Only cue when a change is coming up or to give some encouragement or motivation.

Another drill that Candice would employ I call the “Blindfold Game” (Click [HERE](#) for Video Clip). If your partner in this drill had a blindfold on his/her eyes and you were calling the moves, would that

person be doing what you asked?

Try it and see. This is a great drill to see if your cues are coming across in the correct way.

This leads me right into the next topic of how do we cue for our students.

There are **verbal** and **visual cues**. The best drill to use for learning how to lead into a movement is “4, 3, tell me what to do”. Practice a very simple movement with a partner. For example, standing with legs apart and use the arms to push over head, unilaterally. Find the beat of the music and start to push the arms up over head, one at a time. Start to count “4, 3, tell me what to do”. Or, “4, 3 arms go down”. Then reverse the cue with “4, 3, arms go up”. Repeating the cue over and over again will give you practice and repetition to help you get the feel of teaching. After a while it will be second nature.

Visual cues are using your hands to show how many left or which direction you are going. Each instructor may have hand signals that work for them. One that is very obvious is a hand held up meaning “stop” or circling the hand around to indicate turn around.

Returning to the second method of teaching choreography (Click [HERE](#) for Video Clip) would be teaching via combinations. There are quite a few ways to teach choreography. One way is to teach a movement, for example, step heel in front and repeat. Then add step toe back and repeat. With no arms added yet, put these two movements together. (This is shown in the video)

After the students get the leg movement, add in the arms. Part A would be the “step heel in front” and Part B would be the “step toe back”.

This is a very basic combination. You could add to the combination by adding Part C and D. If you taught a grapevine for Part C and step touch for Part D and put those two movements together for another small combination. Then, you can place A and B with C and D.

Elements of Variation was a term coined by Candice Copeland Brooks in 1987. In order to change the look and feel of a movement, Candice described five elements of variation (lever, planar, directional, rhythmic and intensity). Starting with a base movement we can vary that movement in a few different ways. For example, if you started with both arms moving straight forward you could change the straight arms into bicep curls, or change the arms to the side with bent elbows and then straight arms. You could also speed up the arm movement or slow it down. You could change both arms at the same time to one arm at a time. Using this idea, there is a drill to do which I call, “One thing at a time”. Stand in front of the mirror and start with a march. Then add arms and continue to change just “One thing at a time”. This is a great drill for those who are just starting to teach. It also gives instructors a way to think about progressions in a logical method. Try it with yourself and then with a buddy. Use all of the elements of variation. This is a great way to keep transitions smooth and to have your students follow along.