

TOP 5 MISTAKES WHEN TEACHING TAP

by Christine Denny

Teacher, Choreographer & Tapatak Oz Syllabus Creator



MISTAKE #1: ONLY ASSESSING AS A GROUP

No matter how big or small your class size, it is imperative that every exercise is performed by each student, one at a time. That's right! No matter what age your students – whether they are 5 year olds just starting off or your Senior Advanced class – they must do each step or sequence one at a time. Yes, it is time consuming but it pays real dividends in the long run. Why?

- (1) You can identify whether or not the student has grasped the step;
- (2) The student can hear their own feet - and feel the joy of sounding so fabulous or concern that they may not have the step as well as they thought when tapping with the group.

Either realisation is a win for you and will result in a class full of students who sound great!

MISTAKE #2: NOT TEACHING THE 'ACCENT'

Sometimes we as teachers forget that what comes to us naturally may not come so easily to our students. So we must not forget to point out every rhythmic element of a step or sequence to our students. One of the most important of these rhythmic elements is the accent! In tap dancing every step has a distinct accent that gives it an edge and locks it into the rhythmic flow. Remember to point this out to your students. You will notice a huge improvement in the sound – and an increased improvement in the rhythmic synchronicity when tapping in a group. Lock in the accent and you lock in a great edge to your sound! This particularly works a treat in group competition routines and can give your routines a distinct advantage. Go with the accent – it makes a huge and impressive difference!

MISTAKE #3: FORGETTING THE EMOTION

So often in tap these days, little time is given to thinking about what 'informs' or 'drives' the step. That is: why are you tapping? This is a fundamental part of any dance – but especially relevant with tap. Tap is fundamentally rhythm, so there must be a reason you are suddenly making those rhythms with your feet. Are you happy, sad, excited or perhaps whimsical? Are you sharing the rhythm with a friend or tapping in a competitive way to see who is best? Did the music inspire you to start tapping as were you daydreaming or are you just creating off the cuff, no music, on a whim – a capella?

All these things need some thought to bring out the best in whatever you are doing in class, otherwise it can come across as just dull, lifeless noise. Make this connection and you will see a massive change in how your students perceive and perform tap, as they tell a story and connect their emotions with their feet.



CHRISTINE DENNY

FEEDBACK: TAPATAK OZ'S TAP SYLLABUS

"The best investment I have put into our studio...I would be prepared to spend anywhere up to \$10,000 for this product...I just can't speak highly enough of Tapatak Oz"

DOUGLAS MCFARLAND,
Director, Laycock St Dance

TAKE THE STRESS OUT OF YOUR TAP CLASSES

BUY YOUR SYLLABUS NOW

Programmes for teachers
by a tap teacher
video, music, manuals & more

www.tapatak-oz.com

TOP 5 MISTAKES WHEN TEACHING TAP

MISTAKE #4: STEP EQUALS RHYTHM

It's very important to explain the difference between the step and rhythm. Not doing this is a classic mistake - and one that I see often when travelling around teaching masterclasses and workshops. You may be surprised to hear that many students have it in their heads that a certain step has a certain rhythm and that is it. Well - unlike classical ballet, where often times there is only one correct way to do something, tap dance is far from that way where rhythm is concerned.

For example, a shuffle may have a standard accented rhythm: e.g. a1 a2 a3 a4 [x4]. BUT it can also be performed as an even rhythm: e.g. 1& 2& 3& 4& [x4]. It is really important that students understand that this is the case and that the step can change to an infinite possibility of rhythms. They need to understand that the 'step' is the machinations of what you do - that is the combination of beats you hear. But the rhythm is the way you place those beats within the time frame. The pauses and accents placed around, upon and through these beats to give them a particular rhythm.

This is a fundamental understanding missing from many a student's tap experience, that can make grasping tap much easier. Again - do not assume your students know and understand this. Pointing it out can make a big difference to their rhythmic understanding and prowess.

MISTAKE #5: TERMINOLOGY ABSOLUTES

In tap dancing there is not one universal terminology used. From country to country, teacher to teacher and syllabi to syllabi, many different names have been coined to describe the same step. For example - let's take this rudimentary step: Heel dig R, brush up R, ball dig R, heel drop R = 1&2&. In Tapatak Oz we call this a single heel. I have also heard it referred to as the following: a paradiddle, a heel up step heel, a heel, a heel roll, a roll, a paddle etc. etc.

The most important thing to remember here is that terminology is just a language we use to communicate within our own framework. In Tapatak Oz for instance, it is most helpful for the students to understand our particular terminology - our framework! But if a visiting teacher comes from the USA for example, it is important that the students can watch, listen and recognise when a step they have learned is being used....even if it is being called another name. Getting hung up on the typical: "but my teacher calls it this" or the really common "we have never learned that before" - is simply not productive. What is important is the step and the rhythm - the terminology is just the language used to communicate this to you. Being able to recognise a step by the rhythm and beats, is just as important as being able to recognise it by name.

So there you have it.

The top 5 mistakes made when teaching tap.

I hope this helps you all in your classes. Love tap and pass it on!

- Christine Denny, Tapatak Oz - *The Total Tap Syllabus*



Above: Fiona Scott & student
ALL THAT JAZZ (WA, Australia)

FEEDBACK ABOUT TAPATAK OZ'S SYLLABUS

"Tapatak is going great at All That Jazz. We have nearly our whole school doing the classes now. My jun/adv kiddies just love it. There is just so much to learn in each grade. Keeps us going. I'm just loving it. Thanks again for providing such a wonderful tap program."

Fiona Scott,
Principal/Tap Teacher
ALL THAT JAZZ - Perth, WA

TAKE THE STRESS OUT OF YOUR TAP CLASSES

BUY YOUR SYLLABUS NOW

Programmes for teachers
by a tap teacher
video, music, manuals & more

www.tapatak-oz.com