

Common English Country Dance Terms

The Presence – Traditionally, this would have been the highest ranking person(s) at an event, who was always seated at the opposite end of the hall from the entrance upon a raised platform, to keep them physically (and symbolically) higher than any others. Dances would normally have started and ended with a bow or curtsy honoring the “presence” at the “top” of the hall. In modern times, the place of this honored person is now typically occupied by the musicians and the caller or prompter (or in our case, the laptop computer and speakers).

Up (the hall) – In the direction of the “presence” (or band). **Not** towards the ceiling.

Down (the hall) – Away from the direction of the “presence”. **Not** towards the floor.

Longways (or Whole) set – The double line of dancers, up and down the hall, that is interacting in a dance. Traditionally, a line of men and an opposing line of women, with partners facing in towards each other.

Men's line – When facing the “presence” or top of the hall, the line of dancers to the left, traditionally occupied by men. In gender-free dancing descriptions, this is known as the “left file”.

Women's line – When facing the “presence” or top of the hall, the line of dancers to the right, traditionally occupied by women. In gender-free dancing descriptions, this is known as the “right file”.

Minor set – The grouping of dancers interacting when performing a round of the dance, two couples for “duple minor” dances, and three couples for “triple minor” dances. Before teaching the dance, the caller will ask dancers to “take hands four” (or “hands six”) to establish the initial minor sets for the dance. The term “four” (or “six”) refers to the number of dancers, **NOT** the number of hands. Within the minor set, couples are numbered from the “top”, Ones closest to the top, then twos below (and then threes below that for a triple minor dance).

Across (the set) – Towards or to the opposite line in the set.

Inside (the set) – In between the the two lines of the whole set.

Outside (the set) – Outside of the two lines of the whole set.

Neighbor – Normally closest person in the same line and minor set as a dancer.

Corner – Normally the person diagonally opposite a dancer in the minor set; in the other line and the other couple. Usually the opposite gender.