

Tap Notation and Choreography

The word choreography literally means “dance-writing”, it is also used to mean the creation of a dance.

I have devised a graphic notation, using abbreviations for steps and placing them on a grid symbolizing time. I notate the tap, the foot, and the rhythm — but not body moves, direction or stage travels. If the dance is to a specific sound track, the choreography is time-indexed and the recording is credited.

Tap terminology has slowly become standardized, these are the terms I use:

| NAME | ABBREVIATION | DESCRIPTION “other” means foot without weight |
|-------------|--------------|---|
| Ball-Change | ball chng | step on ball of the other foot, change weight back to standing foot |
| Brush | br | swing the other foot and strike toe tap for one sound |
| Chug | chug | hop on the standing heel tap with a slide |
| Clap | clap | hand clap |
| Click | cl | hit one tap to another |
| Cross | cr | step onto the ball of the crossed foot (front or back) |
| Drag | drag | step onto the other foot with a slide |
| Dig | dig | hit the back of the other heel tap |
| Flap | fl ap | brush and step onto the ball of the other foot |
| Heel | hl | drop the heel tap of the standing foot |
| Hop | hop | on the ball of the standing foot |
| Jump | jump | leap onto all four taps (airborne) |
| Leap | leap | onto the ball of the other foot (airborne) |
| Scuff | sc | swing other foot and strike heel tap for one sound |
| Shuffle | sh fle | brush the other toe tap out and in |
| Stamp | stam | hit both taps of the other foot, don't change weight |
| Stomp | stom | hit both taps of the other foot, change weight |
| Step | st | onto the toe tap of the other foot |
| Tap | tap | hit the flat of the toe tap to floor, don't change weight |
| Toe | toe | hit the tip of the toe tap to floor, don't change weight |
| Pull | pull | brush off the ball of the weight-bearing foot |

Use the grid below to establish the rhythm by counting with the beat on the grey band and the off-beat (“and”) on the space between. If the step has two beats on one foot (flap, shuffle), I split the word into two parts and notate the foot under the first part only. The classic shim-sham looks like this:

| and | 8 | and | 1 | and | 2 | and | 3 | and | 4 | and | 5 | and | 6 | and | 7 | and | 8 | and |
|------------------|-----------|---------|----------|-----|-----------|---------|---------|---------|-----------|---------|---------|---------|-----------|---------|----------|-----|-----------|-----|
| SHIM-SHAM | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | stam R | fl R | ap | | stam L | fl L | ap | | stam R | fl R | ap | st L | stam R | fl R | ap | | | |
| | stam L | fl L | ap | | stam R | fl R | ap | | stam L | fl L | ap | st R | stam L | fl L | ap | | | |
| | stam R | fl R | ap | | stam L | fl L | ap | | stam R | fl R | ap | st L | stam R | br R | toe R | | Inge R | |
| BREAK | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | | | toe L | | st L | | hl L | st R | | hl R | st L | | st R | | st L | | | |