

The Little Book of Belly Dance Etiquette

Hello and welcome to our booklet "The little book of Belly Dance Etiquette". This information has previously appeared in the book "Becoming a Belly Dancer: From Student to Stage" as part of the seventh chapter, but we hope you will agree that it also stands alone.

No matter if you are a performer, teacher, event host or promoter, this booklet will be an invaluable tool to help everyone understand the written and unwritten rules of etiquette in the world of belly dance. When we all understand the rules, we all build a better community! In this booklet you will find dozens of hints, tips and advice for those attending belly dance classes, workshops and shows, both as a performer and as an audience member. Rather than a long list of what not to do, we have tried to stay upbeat, positive and give inspiring suggestions. We not only want people to follow the rules, but to also have a good time!

As we feel this information would be useful for everyone, please feel free to share this digital download with your dance community, students and event hosts. Sharing is caring! However, please be mindful of our work and include our credits and watermarks.

The full version of "Becoming a Belly Dancer: From Student to Stage" is available in the USA through our web sites and world wide via Amazon. At over 400 pages it provides everything a belly dancer could need, from training, through costuming, music, venues, stage fright, social media and prolonging your career. It even has a chapter on low sew and no sew costuming projects. The physical book also includes around 600 lush and glorious photos of our local belly dance community, our suggested reading list and an extensive glossary, to help further your study of belly dance. "Becoming a Belly Dancer: From Student to Stage" is essential reading for everyone who puts belly dance before an audience, no matter your style, age or talent.

We hope you enjoy this booklet and explore our other titles,

Sara, Dawn, Alisha and Poppy

Here is a 5 star review of "Becoming a Belly Dancer" from Amazon UK:

"There are now a fair number of books covering "everything a bellydancer needs to know" - so why add this one to your reading list? Quite simply, because it's a fantastic 402 page read filled with equal measures of common sense, personal experience, and jolly good fun. Put together by four hugely-experienced dancers, this feels like a book made by members of your bellydance family because they love you and want you to have the very best time, whatever your age or experience. I could list all the good things I found inside that I've never seen anywhere in print before. I could equally list all the good things I've read before, but never seen quite so clearly or entertainingly expressed. There isn't a dull page in all 402. And nearly every one of those pages comes with a beautiful studio portrait shot too - so along with everything else there are lots of ideas for poses and personas next time you put yourself in front of the camera. It's such a happy book, you're guaranteed to come away smiling."

Other Books by the Authors

Sara Shrapnell

Teaching Belly Dance, 2014

Dawn Devine

Color Theory with Pencils and Mandalas, 2017

Zills: Music on Your Finger Tips, 2016

The Cloth of Egypt, All About Assiut, 2014

Skirting the Issue & Pants for the Dance, 2011

Embellished Bras, 2003

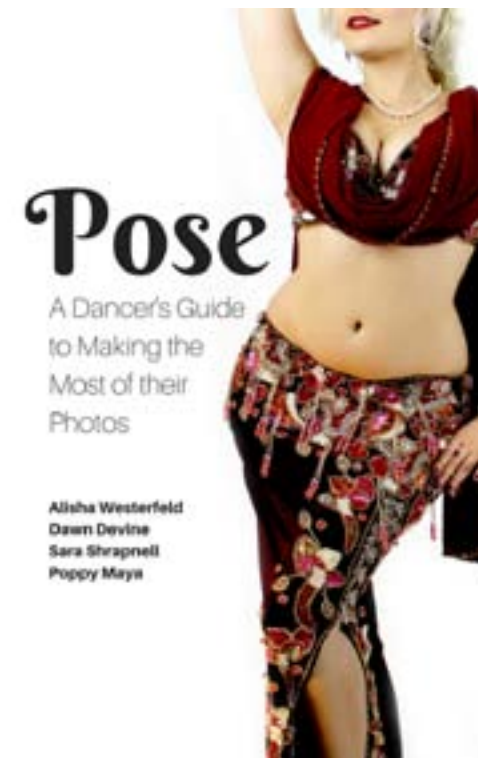
Style File, 2002

Bedlah, Baubles, & Beads, 2001

From Turban to Toe Ring, 2000, 2011

Costuming from the Hip, 1993, 2009

Coming Soon From the Authors Fall 2018 "Pose"



Join our email lists to find out more about our upcoming publications.

Sara: www.Letsbellydanceusa.com

Dawn: www.Davina.us



Sara Shrapnell, mastermind behind the belly dance guide book, "Becoming a Belly Dancer: From Student to Stage."



Chapter Seven

Etiquette, Ethics, and Staying Safe

To get the most out of your dance community, it is important to get along with others, support new belly dancers, and be open to learning from more experienced performers. In the belly dance world, there are rules, hierarchy, and social norms. Community standards vary from town to town and country to country. In this section we hope to provide you with a set of guidelines for developing into a poised, polished, and influential belly dancer. It is important to learn how to build friendships rather than feuds. Focus on your own hard work, praise others for theirs, and keep an open mind and heart for everyone you meet.

Hold yourself to high standards and engage in elevating our dance form. Often belly dancers are not taken seriously. Become an ambassador for our dance. Study our dance history, discover other cultures, and learn from belly dancers from around the world.

Poppy says, "Etiquette, ethics and staying safe is a topic lots of people don't want to talk about. Between us the authors have been dancing for more than 50 years. If it falls under the umbrella of etiquette, ethics and staying safe we have probably seen it. We have chosen to share with you some of our observations so you can have positive experiences."

Etiquette in Dance Class

Each instructor has her own expectations for behavior in her class or workshop. Some provide a list of class rules, and it's worth asking for these before you start a new class. Others rely on talking through class standards or by tackling each problem as it arises. It is best to establish your own level of decorum and behavior that will fit in with every dance teacher.

Here are some general guidelines for all dance classes:

- **Arrive with plenty of time** - Build time into your schedule to find the venue, change, and use the restrooms.
- **Turn off your phone** - You don't need it during class.
- **Bring everything you need** - Pack carefully but don't bring excessive bags.
- **Wear comfortable, flexible clothing** - Bring layers, so you can adapt to the temperature of the room.
- **Arrive clean** - Shower before class, clean your teeth, and don't overuse the perfume; better yet, follow a fragrance-free policy.
- **Limit your jewelry to small, tightly fitting pieces** - You don't want to distract others with too many coins, bells, and bangles. It can be dangerous to send jewelry flying as you turn.
- **Bring water in a nonspill container** - Don't bring other food, drink, or gum.
- **Don't bring anyone else with you to class** - Class is for learning, performances are for presenting. Don't bring anyone who will not be participating.
- **Wait quietly** - That may be outside the studio if a previous class is still in session. Wait quietly in the studio if the previous class is over.
- **Pick a space that works best for you** - Stand where you can hear and see the instructor.
- **If you are new to class, pick a space that is toward the sides** - Be considerate of others and don't block them during traveling movements.
- **If you are a long-time student, move to a more central spot** - Leave room so beginners can find room around the edges.
- **Enter quietly** - If you arrive late, finish all conversations before entering the studio, arrive quietly, apologize briefly, and then join in.

- **Leave quietly** - If you have to leave early, talk to your teacher before class, and store your belongings near the door.
- **Don't touch that dial** - It is rude to change the studio environment without permission. Don't turn the heat up or down, change the lights, open windows, adjust fans, or move furniture.
- **Always ask before making any recordings** - Consult your instructor prior to making an audio or visual recording of the class.
- **Keep the floor space clear of all objects** - If you need to bring bags or purses into the studio, keep them to the back or side.
- **Avoid fussing with your clothes** - Don't rearrange your outfit or hair so much that you become a distraction.
- **Stand in good posture** - Even when listening or waiting your turn. Don't slouch, cross your arms, or present a bad attitude.
- **Avoid profanity at all times** - There is no place for bad language in the dance studio.
- **Be open to new ideas** - Everything is challenging at first.
- **Do your best** - Pay attention, and stay positive.
- **Show respect for your teacher** - Consider them in all you say and do.
- **Stay silent when your instructor is talking** - Practice active listening.
- **Avoid disrespectful comments** - Think twice about statements that start with "My other teacher says . . ." or "I found out online . . ." These are things to share in a private conversation with your teacher.
- **Keep moving** - If you get lost midway through a combination or choreography, keep moving, keep counting, and join in again when you are able. If you stop, everyone behind you has to stop.
- **Keep it down** - If you need to verbalize a move, combo, or choreography, do so quietly and in a way that doesn't disrupt others.
- **Don't give up during class** - If you are becoming frustrated, try a slightly simpler version, or take it at half speed.
- **Avoid giving your opinion on the content of a class** - Unless asked by your instructor, keep your thoughts to yourself.
- **Ask permission** - It is polite to ask before sitting and watching your fellow students. Ask before taking notes.



- **Schedule a one-on-one** - If you need help or have a question that will take more than two minutes to answer, do your own research at home, or schedule a personal class with your teacher.
- **Smile and interact** - When you make eye contact with your teacher, smile. Answer her questions, even if the answer is “I don’t know.”
- **Don’t ask other students questions** - If another student asks you something, during class, refer them to the teacher.
- **Give others space** - Particularly if you are doing traveling steps or combinations.
- **Pay attention and watch any presentation** - Smile at the person giving the demonstration.
- **Be patient with classmates who mess up** - Don’t let their mistakes affect your learning.
- **Remember to pick up your trash** - Leave with all your belongings.
- **Leave the studio promptly** - If another class is coming in, it’s perfectly acceptable to use the time after class to ask your teacher a question in the hallway. If you want to chat with your classmates, however, take that conversation somewhere else. Your teacher may have another class to prepare for and need to set up the studio, or may be hungry or thirsty and eager to leave.

Sara says, “As a teacher I get to set the rules of my studio. I also get to bend and break the rules when I think it necessary. I had a doctor attend class, who worked in the emergency room. She was always worried that she might get called in to help with a major medical event. She asked before her first class, and everyone understood that her phone needed to stay on. Thankfully, she was never needed. There are always exceptions to the rules because some things are more important than a belly dance class!”



Information to Confirm with Your Teacher

There are some etiquette topics that teachers have strong opinions on. To prevent a faux pas, ask these questions ahead of time. Knowledge is power. Knowing the rules can help you to become the perfect student for this class.

- Are outdoor shoes allowed in the studio?
- Where should bags and coats be stored?
- Do you want me to warm up before class?
- When is the best time to ask questions?
- May I take notes or record myself?
- Can I still attend class if I am injured, unwell, or tired?
- Do you have a dress code?
- Can I wear a coin belt?
- What is your policy on arriving late?
- If I learn your choreography, where can I perform it? Do I need to ask your permission each time?
- What is your policy on missed classes and class make-up sessions?
- Do you have a handout that includes your policies?
- What is the mission or goal of this class/workshop or session?
- What needs to be in my “student kit”; that is, what do I bring to class each week?

Dawn says, “I always make a point of having student information and rules available in a handout with all my contact information. On my website I craft a page to include information for this specific class or workshop. On the first day of the session the students get all this information and ability to look up more. This literally gets everyone on the same page and sets up group expectations.”



Being a Supportive Classmate

People attend belly dance classes for a huge variety of reasons. If you want to be the best performer you can be, it can be irritating to share space with the gigglers or someone who is more interested in the costuming than perfecting their dance technique. Try to be accepting, and remember we can all learn from others.

Belly dance classes should be a safe place for people of all genders, ages, sizes, races, religions, dance styles, and sexual preferences. During your development as a dancer you will meet a wide range of people from all walks of life. Your role, as an ambassador of belly dance, is to make your fellow classmates feel welcome, wanted, and treasured. Strategies for welcoming fellow students to your class include initiating introductions, offering to be a study partner, and sharing info outside of class. The greatest friendships come to us when we least expect them. Your lifelong friend may already be in your dance class, just waiting for you to connect.

Equally, do not compare yourself constantly with your classmates. There will always be someone who is fitter, more beautiful, younger, or stronger, or who simply practices more. In the world of belly dance there is room for everyone to be successful. By joining a class with dancers who are better than you, you will be encouraged and motivated to improve. This is your own private dance journey. Compare yourself only with the dancer you were yesterday. Belly dance is about being the very best you.

Sara says, "I have been classmates with, and taught, many male belly dancers over the past last twenty years. It takes immense bravery for a man to attend a belly dance class, especially if that class doesn't already have any male students. Some men come to class from other dance forms, and I have learned a huge amount from those I have met about fusing their existing dance skills into belly dance. People who are transgender or are just starting their transgender journey come to belly dance class to find a safe place for fitness, joy, feminine expression, and friendship. Accept the gender they identify with and always treat others as you would wish to be treated."



Dawn Says, "Every person in a room contributes to the energy, vibe, and psychological landscape. If you are happy and upbeat, yet serious and committed, your presence will be an asset for your teacher."

Etiquette in Workshops

Attending workshops from a variety of teachers is essential to your development as a dancer. In a workshop environment you will meet up with dancers from different backgrounds, styles, and techniques, and from all over the globe. Everybody will have a different set of expectations, learning capacity, and standards of etiquette. The rules for workshops are very similar to those for your regular classes, with a few additions.

- **Check if the workshop is suitable for your level** - Most will let you know beforehand. It is fine to attend a workshop aimed at a slightly higher level than you have achieved, but be realistic about what you hope to learn, and don't obstruct others.
- **Connect with the teacher ahead of the workshop** - Send them a request via your social network, or a friendly email, but don't be a pest; avoid asking for too much info ahead of the event.
- **Over-pack your dance bag** - You may not know exactly what the teacher wants you to bring until you get there. Some teachers like coin belts, others need silence. You may need finger cymbals, writing materials, a veil, dance shoes, a full skirt, or a yoga mat.
- **Pack water and a light snack** - If your workshop is longer than an hour, you may expect a short break, so bring water.
- **Bring your business cards** - Workshops are a fabulous place to meet new friends.
- **Position yourself where you can see and hear** - Stand where you won't block the routes of others when traveling steps.
- **Wear your hair in a tidy style** - Don't block the view of those behind you.
- **Be aware of swaying** - Drifting, shimmying, opening or playing with a veil, or leaning in to talk to a friend can block the view of those behind. Don't fidget. Make yourself small and still.
- **Obey all instructions to change formation of the room** - Teachers often call "front to back," which means that the front row of dancers walk around to the back and all the other rows take a few steps forward. If you don't move quickly and decisively at these points of the workshop, the room becomes disorganized and dancers run out of space. It is polite to share the front row.

- **Find your level** - If the room is overcrowded, settle into an area with dancers you know or who are of a similar level to you. That way you will all dance at the same speed, travel the same distances, and take up an equal amount of space.
- **Accept that accidents happen** - There is no need to apologize continuously for the occasional stray arms or bottom bump. simply make eye contact and smile.
- **Share the space** - Conflicts over ownership of space is a huge cause of stress in workshops. Serious students don't let petty annoyances affect their learning.
- **Keep the floor clear** - If you want to take notes, move to the side or back of the studio space. If you must take notes constantly, do so only when everyone is still, and use a tiny reporter's notebook that will fit into your waistband quickly and easily. Never leave anything on the floor while others are dancing.
- **Thank everyone** - Always thank the teacher and the host of the workshop.

Sara says, "If you would like a video of the material, check with the teacher and then ask someone to video you. Don't video the whole class or any of the participants without their consent. 'Whole room' videos are not a great learning tool. Far better to find a quiet area and video yourself close up, or do a 'report to camera,' where you share your learning in a way that you can use later. Never post videos of workshop content online."



Etiquette for the Audience Member

Events are a wonderful place to meet friends, discover new dance styles, and shop for all that sparkles. As a student, you still have much to learn. Attending events is an important part of your education and solidifies your place in the community. It is a place to see and be seen. Here are a few hints that will help you start out your belly dance career as part of the local and international community:

- **Remember you are an ambassador of belly dance** - You represent your dance teacher and classmates. Present yourself in the fashion that suits your style. Glamour girl, tribal dancer, historical reenactor—each has her own dress and behavior code.
- **Be nice** - Cheer everyone, smile at everyone, and thank everyone.
- **Give everyone you meet the benefit of the doubt** - You don't have to be best friends with everyone, but be polite, friendly, and open. Other people's drama doesn't have to be your drama.
- **Always purchase food and drink** - If the event is being held at a restaurant, always make a purchase. The organizer has probably negotiated a deal to get the venue for a reasonable fee, by assuring the owners that the audience will buy food. If you don't, then the venue may not host the event again.
- **Arrive in good time** - Pick a spot in the audience that will allow you a good view of the event. Saving seats for one or two friends is acceptable. Never rely on coats and personal objects to reserve a whole row.
- **Avoid a dramatic entrance** - If you arrive late, wait by the door until a break in the show and then make your way to a nearby empty seat.
- **Be careful about where you put your feet** - If you are at a restaurant, it is acceptable to turn your chair to face the dancer while she performs. You don't want to suffer from a stiff neck for the next week.
- **Watch your words** - Depending on the venue and your local area, quiet chatting in the audience during a hafla or restaurant show is acceptable. Resist the temptation to comment about the dancer beyond "She is wonderful." Sound travels very strangely in restaurants, and she can probably hear you.



- **Never put your hand across your mouth** - No matter what you are saying, others will think you are being disrespectful.
- **Enjoy the real thing** - If photography is allowed, take one or two photos, but don't watch the whole show through your lens or on your camera or phone screen.
- **Don't video the whole show** - The dancer has probably asked someone to video her if she wants a record of her performance. Never upload a video of any length without permission from the venue, dancer, and musicians.
- **Feel free to clap, cheer, and smile** - Belly dance is interactive. Demonstrate your enjoyment in a way that lets the dancer know you enjoyed her performance.
- **Get up and join in the dancing only when you very clearly invited** - Pretending to invite the audience up to dance is part of the act, and often the performer doesn't really want you to join her so much as to interact with her. Act your part with a shy shake of the head and a blush, and mouth the word "Later." Cheer and clap as she shows off her moves for you. If she really wants you to dance, she will make that clear. Get up and copy her dance moves for a moment, throw in something fun of your own, point to her, clap, and return to your seat. The whole "double act" shouldn't last more than thirty seconds. Toward the end of her set a dancer may invite the audience to come up for open dancing; then you can feel free to follow her lead as she fills the dance floor.
- **Learn from every performance** - The dancers at any event will cover a spectrum of styles and abilities. Use a critical eye and evaluate performances as you see them. If you don't like a number, try and work out why and how you could improve your own performance. If you like a performer, what are your takeaways from watching her show?
- **Keep any negative opinions to yourself** - If you don't like a performance, don't say anything while at the venue. Even if you walk into a discussion about it in the lobby, resist the urge to join in. If you discuss a performance later with your teacher or classmates, limit your comments to thoughts on how you can learn from the poor performance.
- **Smile at everyone** - Particularly the nervous performers. The dancer on stage may mistake your resting, passive face for grumpiness or criticism of her dance. The more we encourage others, the more wonderful dancers we get to see in the future.



- **Follow the lead of others in tipping the dancers** - There is so much variation from area to area that it's hard to follow any set rule. Put some low-denomination paper money near the top of your purse before you leave the house. It is never necessary to tip every dancer in a long show or to tip any one of them more than the cost of a coffee.
- **After the show, be sure to thank your favorite dancers** - A simple "You were fantastic" or "I loved your performance" is perfect. If you find yourself face to face with someone whose number you did not enjoy, then compliment them on something you did like, such as their costume or stage presence. If you are really stuck for something positive to say, then try "Thank you for dancing tonight."
- **Remember, performers may be stressed after a show** - The dancer may have another event she needs to get to, so don't assume that her brief interaction with you is a sign of rudeness or snobbery.
- **Give the performers space** - Many of the most outgoing performers are actually introverts and find social interactions extremely difficult and taxing. Make life easy for them by being warm, giving them space and accepting their change in character.
- **Enjoy any chance to dance** - Post-show open dancing is fun. If the dance floor is opened up to the audience after the show, then take the opportunity to let off some steam. Don't go on the dance floor in shoes if anyone else is barefoot—a bad foot injury can end the career of a belly dancer. You will be welcomed onto the floor even if you don't know anyone else, so don't be shy. Make eye contact with a few other people and pick out the moves that they are doing, then mix it up with a few you enjoy. If space is limited, keep your moves small and your arms under control.
- **Thank everyone** - If there are musicians or a band, thank them before you leave, even if that is just a wave from the doorway. Thank the organizer as you leave, or send them a message the next day.
- **Be active online after an event** - Thank everyone again, offering to share photos (with permission), and spread the word about upcoming events.



Etiquette for the Performer

As a performing belly dancer, it is important to understand the etiquette that goes with presenting a good act. Hostesses will invite you back time and again if you are easy to work with in addition to putting on a good show.

- **Ask nicely if you can perform at an event** - Gather all the info you need in plenty of time to put your act together. It takes time to write choreography, make or purchase costumes, and rehearse your performance before a show.
- **Find out the organizers' expectations** - Do your best to exceed them.
- **Promote your performance on social networks** - Include the contact information so that your fans, family, and friends can purchase tickets.
- **Arrive in good time** - Bring everything you need.
- **Be warm and friendly to everyone involved in the show** - Be especially nice to the volunteers, who are usually unpaid and helping out because they love belly dance.
- **Be prepared to exchange warm greetings and smile** - Even if you are shy or nervous, do your best.
- **Make sure you have supplied everything others need from you** - Take time before your performance to check in with the stage manager and ensure that your music is with the DJ and your bio is with the MC.
- **Claim an area in the changing room** - Keep your belongings neat, contained, and tidy.
- **Don't spray anything in a changing room** - Spray products can damage costumes, and cause life threatening allergies. This includes perfume and hair spray.
- **Keep it quiet** - If you want to listen to music in the changing area, wear headphones.
- **Don't practice in the changing area** - There is never enough room.
- **Never practice outside of the building where the show is happening** - It spoils the illusion for audience members.
- **Never smoke or eat in the changing rooms** - Don't paint your nails or use body lotions. Limit your drinking to water, and be careful not to damage costumes with spills.
- **Respect other peoples belongings** - Don't borrow anything, move things around, or touch the other people's costumes. Dancers are very protective of their kit.



- **Don't hog the changing room** - Space is limited. Once you are changed, move on from the changing area. Allow dancers who are performing before you to change ahead of you.
- **Don't watch the show from the wings** - The audience can see more of the off stage area than you think.
- **Be prepared to make last-minutes changes** - Be cheerful and adaptable. Another dancer may have packed a costume that is similar to yours or be dancing to the same piece of music. Professional dancers always have options. Others will admire you for being prepared.
- **Always wear a coverup when watching the show** - If performers are allowed to watch the show, do so, but put on a cover-up. Move carefully to limit your costume noise. Be a good audience member as well as a good performer.
- **Offer to pay for a ticket to the event** - While restaurants cover their overheads by the sale of food, theater venues need to be paid for by the event organizer outright. It might not be expected, but it is polite to offer.
- **Enter and exit the stage in character** - Your performance starts from the moment you leave the changing room and continues until you return.
- **Make eye contact with your audience** - Even if it's too dark to see them.
- **Stay on stage to take your applause** - Choreograph a plan for filling that time, so you look relaxed and comfortable.
- **Be fast and courteous** - Clean up your belongings ahead of the end of the show.
- **Thank everyone involved** - You can do this in person or after the event by email or a personal card.

Poppy says, "The stage manager or event organizer may be super stressed on the day of a show, so forgive them if they seem cold or upset. Find out where your music and biography need to be delivered and ask about the show lineup. Will the stage manager give you a call time? Can they place props on the stage for you or collect them after your performance? Let them know if you start on or off stage and if you have a surprise element in your performance, such as a silence, a blackout, or a friend joining you."



Tips

Tipping the belly dancer is often a big part of the restaurant experience. Audience members get to interact while showing off their generosity. The etiquette for tipping varies widely from country to country, town to town, and even venue to venue. On Friday night you may be expected to take on-the-body tips, while Saturday night's show might be all about passing around a tambourine. Each method has its own advantages and disadvantages. Ultimately you take control and accept tips in a way that makes you feel comfortable.

On-the-body tips

This is when people place money into your costume, the traditional way for a belly dancer to receive tips in a restaurant. Many people from around the world will assume this is the expected tipping method. Westerners may associate body tipping with strippers and be less comfortable putting money into your costume. The biggest disadvantage is having to be aware of people who take too long placing their money or go too deep into the costume. Many dancers wear an arm band to encourage tips to be placed in an area where they don't mind being touched. Others turn their hips to allow money to be placed only on the side of their belt. Each dancer chooses the location of her body to offer the tipper and controls the amount of time the tipper can spend placing the tip.

Tip jar

This is where an object is clearly labeled "tips" and either handed around during the dance or left in an obvious place for the audience to place their cash. A tips jar or basket left on the floor in front of the performers is a great way to collect when busking or doing an informal, outdoor performance, but can seem out of place in an upscale venue. Tip jars should be monitored by someone during a performance so attendees do not help themselves to the tips. At a restaurant the tip jar may be placed on a table near the door along with promotional material from the dancer.

Envelope tipping

This method involves the show organizer putting envelopes on each table. Over the course of the evening restaurant attendees will fill the envelopes, which are collected at the end of the evening. If you are the only dancer at an event, using envelopes can

be a good way to collect generous tips. Some audiences will feel more comfortable tipping privately in an envelope. However, just as patrons may worry that the tip they leave for the waitress might make its way into the restaurant owner's pocket, so some people would prefer to give the dancer the cash in hand. If you are one of a group of dancers, nominate someone to divide the cash among the performers.

Poppy says, "Put a couple of business cards in the envelope, so patrons know who is being tipped. They can also take a copy of your card with them and perhaps book you for their event!"

Balance prop

This is where the dancer uses a basket, tambourine, or tray as part of her performance and collects tips as she dances. Some dancers dislike this method, as it feels more like begging than earning the tips. A skilled dancer can work her collecting time into her set as part of her dance and often uses her balancing technique to make a show of her basket or plays the tambourine before using it to collect cash. Using your own balancing prop to collect tips offers the opportunity to avoid body tipping but allows the audience to tip each dancer individually.



Overhead tipping

Also known as a money shower, this is where the money is collected and thrown overhead, so it falls over the dancer and then gathers at her feet. This is popular with Middle Eastern and Mediterranean audiences and with audience members from India and Pakistan. Some dancers feel this has a connection with stripping, while others see it as part of the party atmosphere of family celebrations, such as a wedding or graduation. Obviously the notes on the floor can become a slipping hazard, so take care when using traveling steps or turning. The main disadvantage is that the notes have to be collected from the floor at the end of the night. Dancers should never bend down to pick the money off the floor themselves. In most restaurants a waiter will gather the notes for you—and expect a generous tip for doing so. Some dancers ask their dresser or bodyguard to collect their tips from the floor.



Etiquette Online

The internet provides the entertainer with numerous opportunities to connect with their fans. Your online persona may be the only version of you that they will ever know. Presenting yourself to the wider world will help you build a following for years to come. Be friendly to others, and you will find friends and fans at every event you attend.

- **Know where the belly dancers hang out online** - Share information, resources, and opinions with other belly dancers. Everything we know, we learned from others. Be the next chain in the link of knowledge, and share it with friends and fans.
- **Back up your comments with good quality data** - If you “know” a fact, then provide the proof. Belly dance history is greatly hindered by people who share anecdotes, hearsay and “wishtory” (that’s wishful history) but present it as fact. Don’t be offended if people ask you to cite your sources.
- **Stay upbeat** - When reviewing music, books, and performances, keep your comments positive. Always assume the author, dancer, or musician is going to read your critique. If you have been asked for an honest review, balance your opinions to highlight how the dancer/teacher/writer/musician could improve. Avoid getting personal or excessively negative.
- **Stay on point** - You are perfectly entitled to have another obsession besides belly dance. However, if you share information about politics, religion, money, or sexual issues, you may reduce the number of people who choose to connect with you. Kittens, gardening, food, fashion, and movies are safer topics for your belly dance persona to enjoy.
- **Make sure you have permission for everything you share** - If you share a photo, you need the permission of both model and photographer. If you share a video of a performance, you need the permission of the dancer, venue (if private), choreographer, musician and videographer. If the artists involved have posted the photo or video on social media, you can assume they want others to forward or share it, but it’s easy enough to ask before you share. Share the credits, so that others can easily find the artist. When in doubt, ask.

- **Take time to create good content** - If you are uploading a video, take time to edit out the fidgeting at the beginning and the empty stage at the end. Learn how to add a watermark with the dancer’s name, so she will be forever credited for her work.
- **Don’t swear or use vulgar language** - If you wouldn’t use those words in front of your grandma, then don’t talk like that online.
- **Never engage in personal attacks online** - Know when it’s best to walk away. Belly dancers cover all age groups, political beliefs, cultures, and religions. Avoiding confrontation is the best way to keep the peace.
- **Be strategic** - When selecting your social media remember that you can’t do everything. Pick one or two sites that you can use, and try to post daily. Select topics and links that will interest your followers. Use other social network sites to funnel people to your interesting contributions on other sites.
- **Be active, not passive** - Click, like, reply, comment, share; let people know you appreciate their networking.
- **Promote events you are involved with** - Post your events as soon as you know about them, and again about two weeks before, a week before, and two or three days before. On the day, post something interesting about your preparations, a quick note to say you have arrived, and again once you have performed. There is a fine line between making sure everyone knows about a fun event and being a bore. It’s fine to post copies of a flyer, but be sure to add commentary.
- **Post information about other events** - Include everything you think your local community would enjoy. Do this as soon as you hear about it and again a week or so before. The day before, add a comment to say you will be going or that you wish you could go.
- **Police your social media** - Non-belly dancers may post rude comments on your photos and videos. You can choose to disable the comments function or to remove the comments one by one. If someone puts a rude comment on a photo of you that someone else has shared, ask them nicely to remove it. If another dancer asks you to remove an unpleasant comment, do so. Respecting free speech is one thing; you also have the right to defend and protect fellow belly dancers from insults.
- **Use sites, apps, and groups for their intended purpose** - If you are part of a discussion group, join in and initiate discussions. If you are part of a costumers group, post pictures of your costume designs. Know your community.

Dawn says, “It’s easier to be genuine over the long haul, so don’t create a persona out of thin air. Eventually the real you will come out. If you can’t be informative, be fascinating.”

