

# Cabeceo : A Users Guide

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## Cabeceo: A user's guide

Since so many people still seem confused about how cabeceo works, here is a brief guide to what I understand by effective cabeceo.

1. From your seat (at a formal milonga) or (at a semi-formal or more informal place) from some other position from which you have a clear sightline to your target: look at them until you make eye contact. You can do this at any point during the tanda, in principle, but during the opening bars of the first song is most practical, particularly if the milonga is crowded (later, people on the floor will block your sightlines across the room).

2. The first step is to establish eye contact. This may take longer than you think. Use judgement and discretion but be aware that people need time to respond.

3. You are both looking at each other? Great. Men (or, at some milongas, leaders of either sex) indicate your interest in dancing. This is usually done by cocking your head to one side and raising your eyebrows, but choose whatever gesture is clear and unambiguous.

4. Women (or, at some milongas, followers of either sex), nod your agreement.

5. If the milonga is very crowded and there are many people seated near you, you might need to clarify that you really are the person intended. Look around you to check to see if someone next to or behind you is cabeceoing your target person. Men (or leaders) often point at their chests and mouth "me?" to clarify.

6. Men (or leaders), if you are sure the woman has accepted, cross the floor and collect her from her seat. Women, stay seated until he gets there, but maintain eye contact with him, smile encouragingly and make bottom-shifting motions to indicate that he is not mistaken, you are waiting to dance with him.

7. Congratulations! Your cabeceo was successful.

Some considerations to bear in mind:

1. Don't cabeceo during the cortina. You can, however, do flirtatious pre-cabeceos, looking at and smiling at people, so that you know where they are seated, they are aware of your presence and you are signalling your probable desire to dance with them at some point in the evening. This is not actually a cabeceo, it's more like "hey, big boy/cutiepie, I will look for \*you\* later". Like all flirtations, this does not imply any future contractual obligations.

2. While there is no rule against dancing consecutive tandas with someone, if you have just danced with them within the last couple of tandas, they will probably not be expecting to dance with you again and will probably be unreceptive to your cabeceo.

3. If you look over at someone for cabeceo and they wave, grin and mouth 'hello' this usually means "I am acknowledging your eye contact in a friendly way, but I don't want to dance with you right now."

4. If someone is seemingly staring fixedly at you but doesn't respond to your cabeceo/cabeceo you, they are probably actually trying to look at someone directly next to you or behind you. Look away to give them a chance to do that. You can try to look back at them again later.

5. If someone is clearly trying to do cabeceo with someone else, it's fine to wait, see whether they are successful and try to catch their eye if their first choice doesn't work out.

6. At milongas where you can move around, don't position yourself really close to your cabeceo target — it can seem very aggressive. You need to give them the option of graceful refusal.

7. Remember that it's fine to have several (or more) people in mind for a particular tanda. If one cabeceo doesn't work, move on to the next. This is normal. And remember that "no, thanks" in cabeceo means "not right now" not necessarily "no never".

Final point: what happens if I make a mistake?

If you make a mistake, you will be publicly flogged.

Not.

It can easily happen that two men cross the floor, both thinking their cabeceo has been accepted by the same woman. Some particularly suave men have mastered the art of swerving off at the last moment to visit the toilet or get a drink from the bar when they suddenly realise it wasn't their cabeceo which was accepted. As women usually stay seated, their mistakes are less obvious, but often two women think they have been accepted by the same man. If this happens, it is really NO

BIG DEAL at all. There is absolutely NO OBLIGATION to dance with the person who was mistaken about the object of the cabeceo, either then or in the future. The people who actually wanted to dance with each other, go ahead and dance, after a brief apology to the mistaken-ee/s (as I'll call them). If you were the one who was confused, don't worry. It happens to everyone from time to time and is not a reason for any special drama.

And, lastly, always, always spell it C-A-B-E-C-E-O. It comes from the word for cabeza, meaning head; not calabaza, meaning butternut squash. So use your noddle not your pumpkin and make sure you only have one A in the word.

Please note that this post was first published in Sugar Mountain Land. I'm republishing here for my WordPress readers who prefer to stay off the saccharine peak.