Movement, A Basic Concept

Technical dance steps are explicitly defined in training manuals. My instructor introduced me to concepts of movement which I initially found difficult to grasp. Sway, rotation, and extension all had distinct explanations yet implementing them into natural action and muscle memory was a challenge. With much thought and intent, I laid out a beginner’s perspective.

At the very basic, movement is the action transferring an object from one location to another. In dance, a syllabus tells me the patterns to take my body and feet from one point to another. I take limited steps to demonstrate what I hear and perceive to be correct action. Once I feel comfortable that I have the steps or structure of the pattern accurate I progress to another level. I feel the timing, the rhythm of the music to coordinate my body with my feet. The third all important stage is to harmonize my action with my partner.

A simple way to identify my process of movement, I ask several questions.

1. ***Is my movement forced or natural?*** In the beginning it may be mechanical (or forced) while learning steps and patterns, then I begin to mesh the natural body action with the music, my feelings, and my partner.
2. ***Where is my energy coming from to drive the movement?*** Initially I find it is mental, an effort to follow verbal (instructor) or written instructions (syllabus). Then visually I am trying to copy the instructor’s example. I remember the steps while drawing from that inner force, the desire to communicate my feelings through creative movement.
3. ***Am I connecting the dance patterns through continuous motion with my whole body?*** To begin dancing I move my feet in designated designs as my head, my arms and hands, my torso, my hips, my legs, my feet, my toes all become an extension of each other as I move. At this point music is vital for me to integrate expression with action.
4. ***Is my partner comfortable that we are moving as a unit, not individual people?*** The primary challenge for me in ballroom dancing is the responsibility to exhibit interwoven movement with my partner. For International Standard there is required physical connection in movement. In Latin dancing, even when the partners are not physically touching, through emotion and styling they are “connected” in their movement.

To the audience, movement is what they see. To the individual, movement is interpretation of the music, what they hear. To the couple, it is blending movement with each other, what they feel. To judges movement includes transitions, not solely steps and patterns but an uninterrupted flow of action, a continuous expression in dance.

Suggestion: Check with your local studio for syllabus definitions; multiple online dance sources may also provide a deeper understanding and greater perspective of movement.