The 3 Simple Rules of a Prima Ballerina

by Anita Leembruggen
Introduction

Close your eyes and picture the beautiful harmonious movements of a ballet dancer. Picture the elegant posture, amazing flexibility, and finely sculpted body. Now… think of yourself as that ballerina. You’ve just learned the greatest secret to success, not just in ballet but in everything. If you can see it in your head, you will eventually see it in the mirror.

Now don’t stress because right now you can’t even fathom yourself as a beautiful dancer. That’s why I’ve written this book. By the time you’re through reading this information that picture will be clear in your mind. You will be set on the right path to achieving your goals and transforming yourself into a beautiful ballerina. You’ve a lot of information right here in this book to help you become a great ballet dancer. It’s up to you to practice, work hard, and succeed. I believe you can do it. Now it’s up to you.
Contents

Introduction................................................................................................................. 2
Contents .................................................................................................................... 3
Setting Goals............................................................................................................. 7
Ballet Today ............................................................................................................... 8
Dancer by Design ..................................................................................................... 10
Famous Dancers ..................................................................................................... 11
Adult Ballet ............................................................................................................... 12
Ballet Moms ........................................................................................................... 13
Nutrition .................................................................................................................. 19
Training ..................................................................................................................... 22
Cross Training ......................................................................................................... 24
   Pilates ..................................................................................................................... 24
   Yoga ....................................................................................................................... 24
   Strength Training ................................................................................................. 25
   Cardio .................................................................................................................... 25
The Successful Student ............................................................................................ 26
   The X-Factor ....................................................................................................... 26
Selecting a Dance Teacher ...................................................................................... 27
History ..................................................................................................................... 30
Elements of a Ballet Class ....................................................................................... 33
   Barre ...................................................................................................................... 33
   Center .................................................................................................................... 34
   Adage .................................................................................................................... 35
   Allegro .................................................................................................................. 36
   Pointe .................................................................................................................... 37
Things you need to Know ....................................................................................... 38
   Terminology ........................................................................................................ 38
   Movements .......................................................................................................... 41
Class Etiquette ......................................................................................................... 42
Ballet Attire ............................................................................................................. 44
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Auditions</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major Schools of Ballet</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The 3 Simple Rules</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turnout from the Hips</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Move from your Center</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dance from Within</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ballet Style</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standing</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walking</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bending</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arm Raising</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hands</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fundamentals</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posture</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turnout</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At the Barre</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standing at the Barre</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holding the Barre</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leg Raising</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positions</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feet</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arms</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ballet Movements</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demi Plié</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grande Plié</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sur le coup de pied</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Releve (in 5th Position)</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arabesque</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reverence</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Battement Tendu</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Battement Glissé</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Battement Jetté</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pas de Bourrée dessous</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rond de Jambe a Terre</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head</td>
<td>169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stretching for Dancers</td>
<td>171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why Stretching is Important</td>
<td>172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Dancer’s Body</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warming Up and Cooling Down</td>
<td>174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improper Stretching</td>
<td>175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stretching Strategies</td>
<td>175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stretching Exercises</td>
<td>177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neck</td>
<td>177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shoulders</td>
<td>178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arms</td>
<td>179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Back</td>
<td>180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abs</td>
<td>182</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turnout</td>
<td>183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quadriceps</td>
<td>184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hamstrings</td>
<td>185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buttocks</td>
<td>189</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hips</td>
<td>190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ankles</td>
<td>192</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ballet Injuries</td>
<td>194</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Typical Ballet Injuries</td>
<td>195</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What you should do when you are injured</td>
<td>196</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Injury Prevention</td>
<td>196</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ballet Stories</td>
<td>198</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Nutcracker</td>
<td>199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swan Lake</td>
<td>201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sleeping Beauty</td>
<td>202</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giselle</td>
<td>204</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coppèlia</td>
<td>205</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>207</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Setting Goals

I have to start here because without a goal for your ballet dancing career you are going nowhere. The secret to success in anything is to know what you're aiming for!

I guarantee that if you ask any professional dancer how they got there, they won't tell you "I just kinda fell into it". It takes hard work and determination to be a ballerina. But if you're up for it... then it's the best thing you could ever do.

Grab a piece of paper and write down your main objective for why you are studying ballet. It could be "To be a Prima Ballerina for the New York Ballet company" or it could be "To improve my coordination, artistic expression, and feel beautiful when I dance". Whatever your goal is, it doesn't matter. Now frame that piece of paper and stick it on your wall. Put it somewhere where you can see it when your muscles hurt or when it all just seems too hard.

Now that you have your main goal, grab another piece of paper and write down your goal for this year. It could be something like "Pass my Grade 4 exam and be able to perform a perfect pirouette."

Repeat this process further. You may want to set weekly goals.

Now this is important. When you achieve each one of those goals, write "Completed" on it and write the date next to it. Then frame or laminate it and put it somewhere where you can see your accomplishments. You need to have milestones and be reminded that YOU CAN DO IT. That's very important.
Ballet Today

Ballet is becoming increasingly popular as people around the world are recognizing ballet dancers for their flawless physique, strength, fitness, and agility. If you have ever seen a professional ballet performance you can’t help but notice how spectacularly the dancers seem to float through the air in long slow leaps defying the laws of gravity. They keep perfect balance through multiple spins and twirls. Their feet move rapidly with perfect precision. The women gracefully dance on the tips of their toes, and the men lift them high overhead as if they were as light as feathers. For many, becoming a ballerina is something they have wanted to do ever since they can remember. It’s funny how you can ask almost any three year old girl what she wants to be when she grows up and she'll tell you, "I want to be a ballerina."

Dancers love ballet because it allows them to express themselves physically, emotionally, and beyond what mere words can describe. Ballet is one of the oldest choreographed dance forms, and from ballet stems many other dance styles. Learning ballet before other dance styles makes the transition easy and often ballet dancers will excel far beyond other dance students because of their fundamental training.

Ballet requires great skill to master complex movements, and solid training to develop poise and balance. To a performing dancer, technical ability is important but ultimately not the goal itself. To perform ballet is not to say: "Look at me, see what I can do." Instead, it is to say: "I am striving to reach something so beautiful that it does not seem to belong to this world."

Ballet is becoming popular as a form of fitness, as people are
looking for a more imaginative way of keeping fit. Dance centers which cater for adults of all abilities are becoming a common fixture in many major cities, around the world.

Not so long ago, ballet was suffering from a drastically low number of male participants. However, thanks to movies such as Centre Stage glamorizing the male role in ballet - not to mention showing the incredible looking girls who do ballet, the numbers of males in the sport is again rising.

The one thing that never changes however is the dream of little girls loving the chance to be able to arrive at a ballet class, and act like they belong to a different time where fairy tales came to life. To be able to dress up in extravagant costumes and play the role of the princess in performance is the everlasting enchantment of ballet.
Dancer by Design

There are specific body shapes and characteristics dancers require to enter the professional ballet arena. Some of these characteristics can be obtained through training and others are simply genetic body structure and cannot be changed. Nowadays the bodily requirements for professional ballet are not so strict and you will find many ballet companies will be looking for different things in a dancer.

Traditionally, desirable physical attributes include long arms, long legs, a long neck, and a comparatively short torso. Ballet is all about accentuating the line of the body which is why there is such an emphasis on long limbs. If you ever feel discouraged from practicing ballet because you feel your body doesn’t meet the requirements, remember every great dancer began with a less than perfect body for ballet.

For many, ballet isn’t about getting into a professional ballet company or performing in front of hundreds of people. Ballet training benefits many people for many different reasons. Good training will improve posture, balance, flexibility, speed, strength, and concentration.

Children especially benefit from early dance training, even though they may ultimately choose another career path. Children learn to work as a team and push themselves while developing creative thinking skills. They learn coordination to music and rhythm and are introduced to the French language through the terminology used in ballet. Early ballet training gives children the opportunity to enter society with self confidence and produce high standards of work required during their dance training.
Famous Dancers

Perhaps the most known of all ballet dancers, Dame Margot Fonteyn was born in England in 1919. She was well known for her style, and grace, as well as her constant professionalism. Her most famous role was that of Aurora in Sleeping Beauty. The reason that her dancing was so absorbing to the audience was the fact that she danced with an unbridled passion, which had the entire audience hooked on her every movement.

Rudolf Nureyev was her male equivalent. Later in Margot Fonteyn's career he became a regular partner. He danced with power, and was equally famous for his impatience and volatile temperament. He was also a powerful actor. His training was in the ballet academies of the former Soviet Union, where he quickly became a star. However he soon defected to the west, where he again received innumerable accolades.

Maya Plisetskaya, was trained at the Bolshoi ballet in Moscow. She is most well known for her performances in Swan Lake, and the full length version of Don Quixote. She is renowned as being a dancer of a strong expansive style.

Sir Robert Helpman was born in Australia in 1909; however his formal dance training was undertaken at the now Royal academy of ballet in England. His strongest point was his proficiency in ballet mime, although he was competent when dancing the classical styles. His acting career slowly took over his ballet career, with him pursuing a career in film, while returning for guest roles in the Royal ballet company.
Adult Ballet

Ballet is a fun form of recreation for all ages and abilities. Many studios cater for adults who wish to take up ballet, with beginners classes held at various times.

The first step is to find a studio which offers classes for adults as not everyone does. You may like to call the studio and see if it okay for you to observe a class. Once you see that there are dancers of all levels you will feel much more comfortable about starting to dance. This will also give you a chance to meet the instructor and discuss with him or her exactly what it is you hope to gain from a dance class, be it fitness, stress relief, fun, etc.

Also have a quick look around at what the other students are wearing, you will feel much more comfortable if you are dressed similarly to them. Maybe even ask a student where they bought their ballet shoes or leotard from, this way you will better be able to find a store equipped with the needs of an adult beginner.

Make sure that your hair is kept off your face, and bring a towel and water bottle. At the first class arrive a little early to meet the students, and find a place toward the middle of the class, if someone comes toward the section of barre you are standing at, MOVE, dancers are generally territorial about where they practice.

If there is something that you don’t understand, be sure to ask your teacher about this after the class. Often it is much easier for adults to pick up the basic movements than it is for children, however most adults want to know if they can move on to pointe shoes. Unfortunately it is harder for an adult to develop the strength and flexibility required to progress to pointe shoes, but with practice,
anything can happen.

The most important things though are too have fun, if you are feeling frustrated, talk to your teacher, let the music flow through you, and persevere. Ballet can provide years of enjoyment.

Ballet Moms

Although this section is titled ballet moms, it also applies to the many dads who are responsible for arranging their child’s extra curricular activities. Often when a child comes to their parents asking to start ballet lessons, there is a certain feeling of misapprehension on the part of the parents in letting their child start an activity which seems to involve so much time, money and dedication in order to find any reward. This section will dispel many of the myths associated with ballet dancing and help to make the experience a fun and exciting time for all.

The first step is to find a suitable ballet school. Sometimes there is not a great deal of choice, with there only being one school nearby. However it is important that the teacher is assessed, the style of the studio in which the lessons are to take place, the cost, the time, i.e. how many sessions are required each week, and if the school has the facilities to cater for beginner dancers. The next step is to dress your child for practice. When registering them at a ballet school it is a good idea to ask if there are any requirements for attire, for example are they required to wear a particular colored leotard or slipper. Also ask if they can recommend any dance wear stores. For a first lesson your child won’t need a great deal of equipment. A well trained retail assistant in a dance store should be able to direct you to the things that are necessary. Before their first lesson, if they have long hair, ensure that it is out up in a ballerina’s bun, and ensure they
have a drink bottle of water.

When your child is attending an audition it is essential that as a parent you remember the way that they are feeling. They don’t need anyone on the way to the audition to pick over troublesome parts of their routine, instead they need a friend who they can talk to and receive support and encouragement from. In the lead up to the audition, offer your time to watch them rehearse their routine. The day before, and the day of the audition ensure that the household is as peaceful as possible, make sure that you tell your young dancer how proud of them you are for just having the courage to audition. Make sure they know that you don’t care if they get the part they are auditioning for, instead remind them you love what is on the inside. After the audition be positive, even if the audition didn’t go too well, perhaps have a small treat prepared, a stop for ice cream on the way home, again remind them that they are precious to you.

Concerts are often the culmination of a lot of hard work on the part of the students, the teacher and the parents. As such they are a huge event in the life of a dancer and should be treated accordingly. The first thing to do is to find out as far in advance as possible the date of the concert and mark it down, making sure that no one in the family has any other plans which clash with this important date. This includes other siblings, as a parent, it is your responsibility to ensure the whole family turns out for this special occasion. The next important thing is for the parent to offer their services in anyway possible, with costumes, sets, hair and make up. In the weeks before the concert, offer to watch the dancer rehearse; even learn part or all of the routine, to ensure that it is being performed correctly.

The day of the concert is likely to be a big day for the dancer. Ensure they are calm, and eat healthy light meals; this is particularly helpful in the short period before the concert, as butterflies don’t feel at all nice on a full stomach, and likewise an empty stomach will
make a nervous dancer feel sick. Before the performance, wish the dancer luck, and make sure she or he knows that you are proud of them. During the performance, sit still, but make sure there is a huge smile on your face, as your little dancer will more than likely to be on stage straining to find you in the audience. This is particularly true of small studio concerts. After the concert allow the dancer time to mingle with the other dancers. Perhaps arrange an outing with the other parents to allow the dancers to celebrate together. Finally, don’t forget to offer praise to your dancer, nothing will make them feel prouder.

Everyone at some stage feels inclined to compare their child’s performance against that of another. It is important however to remember that every one has a very different body structure. Some children will have a perfect turn out and others will not. It is important that a parent understands that this is not important in a child’s ballet class, what is important is the child enjoying themselves, regardless of ability.

As a parent of a young dancer, one of the most important roles you will play in their dancing careers is that of taxi driver. Ballet classes, eisteddfods, and concerts can be a great distance from the dancers home, and this requires transportation. In these cases, it is often a good idea to start a car pool with other parents, so that every parent is not required to travel to each rehearsal etc. However, if this is not possible, remember that this is all for your child, and be careful not to complain a great deal.

Dancers need costumes, and for those costumes to become a reality, dancers need parents. Quite often costumes will require the parents to sew small parts of them together. Anything which is complicated, such as a tutu, can be taken to a dressmaker, or purchased ready made. Most ballet schools will have a preferred dressmaker who they will refer parents to. Remember that the sewing needs to look
good from the audiences’ point of view, and needs to stay together for the duration of the performance. Sewing on costumes, is often a good thing to do while waiting for your child to finish at a dance class, or while watching television. The earlier that the sewing is started, the sooner it will be finished, this will help prevent having to stay up into the early hours of the morning on the night before the dress rehearsal, and therefore make a much more relaxed environment for everyone.

Your child’s ballet teacher is an important person in the life of your child, respect their decisions, and don’t openly criticize them in front of the dancer. Instead offer your assistance whenever possible, and try to make their life as easy as possible, with prompt payment of class fees, and costumes prices. If you have any problems with the teacher, arrange a time when the two of you are able to discuss this civilly, away from other parents and children.

Often being the parent of a young ballerina requires long hours spent at dance halls with other parents who are in the same situation as you. This presents a wonderful opportunity to make new friends, who have something in common with you. Maybe while your children are dancing you could take a walk, getting in a small amount of exercise. It is helpful to be on good terms with the other mothers as there will undoubtedly be times in the life of every parent when they are unable to make it to a rehearsal or they are unable to sew sequins onto a leotard, and they may call on the assistance of another parent. If you are friendly with the parents it will make these times progress much more smoothly for all involved. Of course in every situation where there are young children involved there will be arguments. It is important that as parents, these small problems are not forced to escalate, rather just let the children sort them out on their own accord, as parents who are not getting along will make a miserable experience for all.
For children who have a great deal of talent, there is the opportunity to progress through to studying ballet at an advanced level. If as a parent the ballet teacher has spoken to you about your child having exceptional style, etc. it is a good idea to consider the prospect of further advanced training. In order to help your child progress, it may be a good idea to seek out other schools in the area or other classes where your child can get more specialized and personalized treatment. It is also important to ensure that the child practices on their own, as all the practicing at classes won’t suddenly transform the child into a wonderful dancer if they are not doing practicing movements on their own.

Of course some children absolutely love ballet and would spend every waking moment dancing if possible. In these circumstances, it is a good idea to ensure they receive an appropriate amount of rest time. Let them know that it is still ok to be a child.

Not every child can be a perfect ballerina. It is important to still provide encouragement and let them know that you are proud of them for the effort that they are putting in each week. Commend them on improvements no matter how small, and always remember that the child is dancing for their own enjoyment. If it comes to feel like a chore, they won’t like going to dance class and the whole event will just turn into a failure.

Every parent thinks that their son or daughter is perfect. Never is this more apparent than in the performing arts. Often mothers who start their children in a dance class at a young age have dreams of their child progressing through and becoming the next Margot Fonteyn, or Rudolf Nureyev. Maybe they dreamt of being a ballerina themselves but didn’t make it through injury or just poor technique, or maybe they just believe their child has a gift.

The most important aspect with parents and their involvement in
their children’s activities is the child. No child should be forced into any activity they don’t enjoy. Nor should any child come to despise their activity due to their parent’s involvement. If this is happening to a child you know, approach their parent, don’t attack them, and rather just have a light, casual conversation about what is in the best interests of the child.

Sometimes ballet moms become tyrannical through their own boredom. If there is a mother in your child’s dance class, or a friend or relative who is starting to become completely absorbed by her dreams and wishes for her child, invite her to a social activity, the gym, out for coffee, anything to take her mind off her child’s ballet for a second.

If you notice that a mother’s interest in their child’s ballet is impacting negatively on the child, if they are becoming tired through too many dance classes, missing out on school to attend practices, or missing out on being a child because of their parents desire for them to be the best. It is essential that you intervene. Mention that the child should take a short holiday from ballet. Suggest this will have huge benefits for the whole family.

If your child is new to a ballet class, and you notice such a parent, it is a good idea to keep your opinions to yourself. These parents are usually the ones who are constantly there with the teachers, offering assistance, and as such could make your child’s time unbearable, especially with young and inexperienced teachers.

Of course no matter who you are if you know a tyrannical ballet mom, the situation must be handled very delicately. These moms have usually invested a lot of time, energy and money into their child’s career, and as such won’t react kindly to anyone telling them to give up.
Nutrition

Nutrition is important for dancers because our bodies need to be in top condition for the physical exertion we place on them. Eating correctly has a lot to do with our performance, improvement, and muscle development. Keeping your system clean by eating fruit, vegetables, and other health food products not only aids in your dance development but gives you a positive outlook on life. You will be a happier person and you will feel great!

There is no ideal weight for a dancer because every person is different in height, bone density, muscle etc. Many dancers starve themselves to keep slim. I don't recommend this as our bodies need energy from food to function correctly. Your body is burning energy when you dance and if there is no food to refuel your energy cells then you are just asking for trouble.

I recommend every dancer seek the advice of a qualified nutritionist. They will give you some great tips on eating healthy and even create a diet plan for you so that you obtain the right amount of protein, carbohydrates, and fats for your lifestyle and metabolism.

If you are having problems keeping your weight at a stable level then see your doctor. They will be able to tell you if you are doing something wrong or if you may have other issues complicating the matter.

The ideal diet for a ballerina varies, depending on age, maturity level, activity level, and gender. However despite all of this, the aim of a dancer’s diet is to fuel the body, helping to keep it strong enough to participate in all training sessions and performances.
The diet of a dancer should be made up of about 55-60% carbohydrates, when the dancer is in heavy training, this should increase to around 65%. The carbohydrate gets broken down by the body into glycogen to fuel the body. Without adequate carbohydrates a dancer will fatigue easily. Complex carbohydrates such as cereals, breads, pasta and bagels are better for the body than simple sugars, as they release energy slower and are able to sustain the dancer for longer.

An ideal diet would also include around 20-30% fats, although only 10% of this should be made up of saturated fats. Oily fish, and nuts, are the best source of fats. The consumption of these helps the body to absorb the fat soluble nutrient. A fat deficiency in a dancer’s diet can drastically impair performance.

About 12-15% of the diet should be made up of protein such as tofu, chicken and turkey. Protein is the building block of muscles, and so is needed to help repair the tiny tears that dancer’s muscles sustain through training.

Dancers also need to maintain adequate water levels. During a class it is advisable to drink at least a cup of water each time there is a break to replace fluids lost through perspiration. In a day a dancer should aim at drinking between 2 and 4 liters of water, depending on temperature, and activity level.

A dancer may also take vitamin supplements if they hold the belief that their diet is missing out on any of these, however with a healthy well balanced diet the dancer should be receiving all the vitamins the body needs, and so should not need to take any additional supplements.

Eating disorders are a common problem for dancers Anorexia Nervosa is a disease in which the sufferer see themselves as being
overweight. As a result they will eat little to no food, and exercise excessively. As a consequence their body weight can drop to dangerously low levels. At this stage they can fatally damage their vital organs and must be admitted to hospital.

Bulimia involves the sufferer eating often large quantities of food which is then purged in a bid to keep the body slim. The usual methods of purging include vomiting, and taking laxatives. Bulimia is often harder to detect than anorexia nervosa as the sufferers generally don’t lose excessive amounts of weight, and the purging is done in secret.

If you or someone you know is suspected of suffering from an eating disorder, it is essential that you seek medical help. A family doctor is usually the best place to start, as they can then refer the patient to other medical practitioners specializing in this field. Early detection is always the best.
Your training will be in two forms - quality and quantity. The aim is to balance these two so that you achieve your desired outcome. Obviously how much you practice will have a direct effect on your skill level. You don't want to over train though. I believe the best improvement comes when a student learns enough in one lesson to challenge them but not too much to overwhelm them.

A student needs time of their own to practice the movements learnt in class and think for themselves things like - "Am I doing this right", "Do I look correct in the mirror", "My arms are too sloppy", and experience thoughts like "So that's why I need to keep my head in that position". A student will not understand and develop quickly if the only time they are thinking about ballet is in the studio with their teacher picking them up on little things all the time. It doesn't give the student time to think "why".

If you are aiming to reach a professional level then you will want to be taking classes 3 times a week at least. This is where the quantity aspect comes into play - Continual repetition until you get it right. There's a fine balance here between mastering the art and overdoing it. If you have a good teacher they will be able to guide you through the intense training and teach you how to handle it and get the most out of your efforts.

For younger children I encourage them to show their parents what they learnt in class and also encourage the parents to watch them, have fun with them and ask them questions about the movements. This in turn helps the children want to practice outside of class even if it's just to show off to their parents. This provokes thought about their dancing and how they can improve.
Training for the dancer does not end however when they leave the dance studio. A dancer should also practice their moves at home, especially those exercises which are designed to develop strength in the legs, feet, and ankles such as relevés.

Before undertaking any strict training regime however it is a great idea to speak to the dance teacher. Explain what you were thinking about doing at home, and ask if this is too much of a particular exercise. The dance teacher has been trained to know what the right amount of activity for the body is.

When training on your own it is important to allow time for warming up and cooling down. This helps to prevent muscle tearing, which could set a dancer’s training back years. Even if just doing a small amount of training requires a comprehensive warm up and cool down.

There are other types of training which may be beneficial to a dancer. These forms of training are called cross training, and generally are used to provide the dancer with benefits that aren’t available through ballet. A very popular form of cross training with dancers over recent years has been Pilates. Even when doing these other forms of training it is still important that a dancer knows how to set limits to prevent over training.
Cross Training

Although ballet in itself is a wonderful form of exercise, there are other forms of exercise that complement and even enhance your dance performance.

Pilates

Pilates was invented by Joseph Pilates as a way of helping injured soldiers recover. Pilates has now become a worldwide fitness craze. Part of the appeal lies in the fact that rather than building bulky and unattractive muscles, Pilates works at strengthening and elongating the muscles. Much of the focus in a Pilates workout is on the all important core region. It is essential for a ballerina to have a strong core, as it is these Muscles which provide the strength to properly perform many of the movements.

Yoga

What was once the domain of Buddhists and the new age has now become mainstream. Yoga provides a gentle and relaxing way of stretching all of the muscles, while resting and rejuvenating the soul. Flexibility is important to a ballet dancer and so Yoga can be very beneficial. In addition to this there is none of the competitiveness that often is a part of the ballet class in the Yoga studio as everybody is encouraged to be at one with their bodies, and only go as far as their bodies will allow them. This provides a useful message to take back into the studio.
**Strength Training**

Despite what many people say there is a place for a light strength work out for ballet dancers. Take care to use low weights for high reps and low sets, and this will help to develop the lean muscle and strength that is needed to perform many movements.

**Cardio**

Stamina is essential for a ballet dancer. Participating in any form of cardio-aerobic activity will benefit the dancer. This may include running, walking, cycling, or swimming.

In addition to providing the stamina to last a full class or performance, cardio also helps to control a dancer’s weight, without the dancer needing to constantly monitor his or her weight and resort solely to diet changes.

Any form of exercise is great for a ballet dancer. Of course the body needs time to heal, and as such it is important that the dancer allows days of rest between classes, and exercise sessions.
The Successful Student

The successful ballet student will have great determination, strong will, and iron clad goals. Having an ideal dancer’s body and natural talent will do wonders for any student, but the real testament of a successful dancer is their mental strength and prowess that sees them soar into the dancer’s elite. Determination and self-confidence is the key to success in dancing but is something that does not always easily come on its own. Joining a dance school will help any aspiring dancer to keep pushing towards their goals and ensure they are practicing with correct technique.

The X-Factor

The X-Factor is individual to every person and can be seen in all age groups. There are specific things that will contribute to this X-Factor as mentioned previously, but I believe the key is confidence and personality. It has a lot to do with a child's upbringing. Most of our personality traits are defined when we are young. Children that are comfortable with themselves and are able or allowed to express themselves verbally, emotionally, and physically tend to be the children that naturally have the X-Factor and do well at dance. Being accepted and encouraged as a young person promotes self-esteem, confidence, and develops a strong personality that ultimately is expressed through their dance without them saying a word.

I'm not saying that the loud, tantrum kids are going to be the best dancers by any means. Dance is all about expression of oneself. Good training, correct technique, consistent stretching, proper nutrition etc. all contribute to the X-Factor but ultimately it comes down to the basics of who you are and what are you
saying/expressing.

**Selecting a Dance Teacher**

You will experience far greater success under a good teacher than you will be trying to do it alone. Trust me on this.

There are many ballet studios around and most will teach more than one style of dance. Some may require you to take multiple classes including jazz, contemporary or tap. The most important thing is to find a teacher that you feel comfortable with. You are going to get nowhere if you absolutely hate your teacher and argue with them every time they want you to do something. You need to have confidence in them that they know what they are doing and will ultimately benefit you rather than stint your progress.

There are a few different styles of ballet that you can learn. There's the Cecchetti method, Bournonville, Vaganova, and R.A.D to name a few. Make sure you choose one that will get you to where you want to go. Some studios don't actually teach an accredited syllabus. If you want to teach ballet yourself some day or want to go professional then make sure you are taking exams for an accredited syllabus.

The ideal ballet teacher doesn't have to be of a certain age, height or body shape. Take note that the dancer with the most glamorous and impressive performance credentials may not be the best teacher. The ability to perform brilliantly is different from the skills required to be a great teacher.

I suggest you find a directory of dance schools in your area and give each one a call. Talk to the teacher personally and get a feel for their personality, their experience, their teaching methods, and give them
a score out of ten. Once you have called a few, review your scores and then you be the judge on which teacher is right for you. You may want to talk to a few friends or relatives and get a few recommendations. Remember you don't have to stay with one teacher forever. You don't want to be chopping and changing all the time but keep this in mind - it's your money and your career.

It is a good idea to take note of the teachers’ credentials when selecting a dancer teacher. Working with bodies, and knowing at which stage they require rest, or at which stage they can progress to the next level requires a great deal of training. Therefore look for a teacher who is qualified to teach dance in your particular area. You may also like to look at their own dance history; a teacher can’t understand what the dancer is experiencing unless they have been through this phase.

It is important that you decide on the style of ballet that you wish to learn. A good way of doing this is by calling school, and asking if you can view a class, or by hiring DVD’s which display the different styles, then use this information to narrow down your search for a teacher.

The dance studio also plays a large factor in choosing a ballet class, ballet is supposed to be a fun activity. Unless you feel that the studio is welcoming and comfortable for you, you won’t enjoy attending lessons there. It’s also important to see if the studio is kept clean; it’s hard to dance on a floor that has not been swept. Look at the fixtures while your there. Look at the barre and the mirrors, make sure they are attached securely to the wall, and ask if the studio has a sprung floor. In some schools the studios aren’t full time dance studios, and the floor has a concrete base. This can jar the dancer’s body during jumps, and cause damage in the long term.

The teacher plays a large part in selecting a dance school. For this
reason it is essential that you have the opportunity to meet with the
dance teacher before you sign on to take any classes, this way you
can find out if you get along with the teacher. This is often left out
when advising students of how to choose a dance school, but if the
student is unable to get along with the teacher, there is a limited
chance of them being able to work together successfully. The
teacher’s attitude is also a major factor. They should teach for the
love of ballet not for the money. Teaching for the love of ballet
enables them to take a greater interest in the dance, and their
students.

Competitions are a chance for dancers to test their skills and abilities
against students from other schools who are at the same level.
Competitions help to get dancer used to the processes used in
auditions, as well as allow them to meet other dancers. If this is
something that the dancer is interested in, it is important that they
ask if the school provides this option. Don’t just assume anything
about a dance school and its teachers.

Finally the syllabus is set by an organizing body and is consistent
across all schools following this. If a dancer wishes to progress with
his or her dancing career attending a school which follows a syllabus
is essential as this allows anybody to see what the dancer should
know.
History

An understanding of the history of ballet is essential for a dancer to fully appreciate the significance of modern ballet. Knowing how this beautiful art came about emphasizes the tradition and values of ballet.

The earliest remnants of ballet began in Renaissance Italy. The words “ballet” and “ball” are derived from the Italian word Ballare which means “to dance.” The first performances were not the extravagant stage productions we see today. They included simple movements emphasizing elaborate costumes, painting, poetry and music. Since much of the audience saw the ballet from above, the choreography emphasized synthetically appealing floor patterns created by lines and groups of dancers.

Ballet spread to France where it became popularized by King Louis XIV, the Sun King, during his reign (1643 – 1715). King Louis was a dancer himself and established the first official ballet school now known as the Paris Opera Ballet. Most of the Kings ballets were choreographed by the French choreographer Pierre Beauchamp who is said to have created the five positions of the feet. Today these positions are the founding elements of classical ballet taught throughout the world.

Originally ballets were performed solely by men, and men in masks danced women’s roles. In those days ballet was more of a macho pursuit and it was thought that women should not attempt such daring moves. The first women did not appear in professional ballet until 1681 where they wore long skirts, high heels and wigs. This was the attire until the early 1700’s when the French dancer Marie Camargo, shortened her skirts and adopted heelless slippers to
display her sparkling jumps and beats.

The Frenchman Jean Georges Noverre, who’s Letters on Dancing and Ballets (1760), influenced many choreographers both during and after his lifetime. He advised using movement that was natural and easily understood and emphasized that all the elements of a ballet should work in harmony to express the ballet's theme. Noverre created the seven movements of ballet. They are:

Bend - plié (plee ay)
Stretch - étendu (ay tahn due)
Rise - relevé (ruh leh vay)
Jump - sauté (soh tay)
Turn - tourné (toor nay)
Glide - glissé (glee say)
Dart - élancé (ay lahn say)

The ballet La Sylphide, first performed in Paris in 1832, introduced the period of the romantic ballet. Marie Taglioni danced the part of the Sylphide, a supernatural creature who is loved and inadvertently destroyed by a mortal man. Taglioni was the first women to dance en Pointe in a performance. The performance of toe (Pointe) dancing was meant to give the audience the illusion that the dancer is floating through the air or is as light as a feather. Ballet’s popularity quickly grew and spread to Russia, America, and Denmark where women started to dominate the romantic ballet. A Frenchman by the name of Marius Petipa became the chief choreographer of the Imperial Russian Ballet. He perfected the full-length, evening-long story ballet that combined set dances with mimed scenes. His best-known works are The Sleeping Beauty (1890) and Swan Lake (co-choreographed with the Russian Lev Ivanov), both set to commissioned scores by Peter Ilich Tchaikovsky.

In 1932 the German choreographer Kurt Jooss created The Green Table, an antiwar ballet. Antony Tudor developed the psychological
ballet, which revealed the inner being of the characters. Modern dance also eventually extended the movement vocabulary of ballet, particularly in the use of the torso and in movements done lying or sitting on the floor. Balanchine began to create ballets in which the primary motivation was movement to music rather than an underlying story. His ballet Jewels (1967) is considered the first evening-length ballet of this type.

Two great American ballet companies were founded in New York City in the 1940s, the American Ballet Theatre and the New York City Ballet. Beginning in 1956, Russian ballet companies such as the Bolshoi and Kirov performed in the West for the first time. The intense dramatic feeling and technical virtuosity of the Russians made a great impact. Russian influence on ballet continues today, both through visits from Russian companies and the activities of defecting Soviet dancers such as Rudolf Nureyev, artistic director of the Paris Opera Ballet from 1983 to 1989, Natalia Makarova, and Mikhail Baryshnikov, director of the American Ballet Theatre, New York City, from 1980 to 1989.

Dance in general underwent an enormous upsurge in popularity beginning in the mid-1960s. Ballet began to show the influence of a younger audience, in both themes and style. The athleticism of dancing was enjoyed in much the same way as sports, and complicated steps were admired for their challenge and daring. Popular music such as rock and roll and jazz were used to accompany many ballets.

Today you will find ballet performances in many countries all over the world. If you have never seen a professional ballet performance I encourage you to go see one. Seeing the magic of ballet on stage is one of the best ways to inspire you to greatness in your own dancing.
Elements of a Ballet Class

Barre

The Barre is an important piece of equipment in the ballet dance studio, particularly for beginners. It is constructed of wood or metal and can be free standing or mounted to a wall. The barre is generally found in front of a mirror so that the dancer can observe his or her actions. Generally at waist height and with a diameter of approximately 4 cm or one and a half inches, its main role is as means of support, helping the dancer to balance.

Although an important feature of the ballet studio for those who are just beginning, the barre is widely utilized by dancers of all levels as they attempt to refine and perfect their moves. Barre work in addition to being a heavy composition of the beginners dance class, also makes up a large part of the dance classes in the short term after pointe shoes have been introduced. When the dancer progresses through to pointe shoes, the body’s centre of gravity is changed; therefore the barre is there to provide extra support.

The barre plays a prominent role when a dancer is moving towards partner work. The dancer is encouraged to use the barre for support in a way similar to what they will use their partner.

While the term barre can be used to directly refer to the object, it is also used to describe the series of exercise performed at the barre, as well as the block of time in a ballet class which is devoted to these exercises.

Exercises at the barre are generally slow and repetitive; their function is to build strength, and flexibility, and to assist the dancer
in their efforts to perfect every element of a movement.

**Center**

Center refers to that part of a ballet class which the students are not positioned at the barre; rather they assume a position in the center of the room.

The exercises generally done during center work can include those floor exercises which are designed to develop strength and flexibility. The center work is generally broken down into adagio and allegro. Turns, walks, arabesques, waltz combinations and reverence are all emphasized during center work.

Center work helps to recreate a similar dancing environment to that of a performance. During a performance there is no barre for the dancer to use for balance. Therefore they need to learn to balance without any aides during lessons. For this reason a large part of the class is devoted to center work.

When students are doing center work in a ballet class it is desirable that they all have enough space to perform some of the bigger movements. Another important point is that they create enough space, and position themselves so that the instructor can clearly see any students and correct any mistakes they may be making.

Center work is often the exercises that students are able to take from their ballet classes, and practice whilst at home. This is because there is no need for the student to install any equipment into their houses. Instead all that is needed is some free space, and the knowledge on how to do each movement correctly without causing any injuries.

Generally speaking center work will come after the barre work, after
all the muscles have been thoroughly warmed up so that any injuries can be limited if not avoided.

**Adage**

Adage translates into “at ease”. This provides an idea of the type of exercises of exercise described by this term. Adage refers to the second half of a ballet class, where all movements are performed slowly and in a completely controlled manner. With adage there is an emphasis placed on sustaining positions, and balance, rather than moving with the music.

During the adage, the students are also taught how to combine different movements. This is important for when the students are learning choreography for a performance. If a student does not understand the correct way to combine movements, they may have trouble with timing etc.

It is important that during adage the dancer extends his or her legs to the front, the back and sides. The adage must also include the incorporation of both leg and arm action. This is a particularly important aspect of a beginner’s class, as it allows the dancer the time to coordinate their movements.

The adage should also include both stationary ballet, that in which one leg is grounded, such as an arabesque, and moving ballet, that in which both legs are working, such as a pirouette. Unless the entire class shows a deficit in either stationary or moving ballet, the time devoted to adage should be divided evenly between the two.

There are three further elements in which it is essential are included in adage; the interactive movement between both arms and legs, such as in an arabesque. The extended leg moving whilst the
remainder of the body remains stationary, such as in a ronds de jambe, and finally the movement of the body that switches directions while the extended leg remains stationary, such as a pivot.

It is important that the exercises are repeated during the adage, as this allows the student to fully comprehend what their body is doing. Having said that, it is essential that the movements are not overdone placing unnecessary stress upon the body.

**Allegro**

Allegro is the term which is applied to all movements which are performed both quickly and brightly. The most important qualities of allegro are the lightness, and that the dance appears happy.

Usually the allegro is the third part of the ballet class, and the emphasis is on fast work, jumping, and turning. Allegro is usually divided into two sections; petit allegro (small movements) and Grande allegro (large movements).

Petit allegro is becoming less common, as choreographers are incorporating bigger, more extravagant movements in their performances. However, it is still important for a dancer to learn petit allegro, and for there to still be the devotion of time to this in a dance class, as it allows the dancer to gain an appreciation of how the lower body is able to move.

The allegro section of the class is performed in the center, and requires a great deal of space, especially for the Grande allegro component. Usually the allegro section of the class is fairly short due to its tiring nature.
Pointe

Pointe work is only undertaken when the dance teacher advises the student that they are ready. Pointe work begins before the student moves on to pointe shoes as time is spent strengthening the muscles and bones in the foot, in order to minimize the risk of injury.

Due to the strenuous nature of pointe work, there is only a small time, maybe 10 minutes, devoted to pointe work when students are beginning. This is built up very gradually, until the student is able to wear pointe shoes for the entire lesson. This generally only happens in the case of very advanced dancers.

Pointe work is done both at the barre and as an element of center work. When a dancer moves onto pointe their whole sense of balance must be regained. This is done at the barre, where the dancer practices the basic movements again using the barre for support. The larger movements which are done in center work are also worked up to gradually. No student should be doing pointe work before they have the experience, ability, and strength to do so. This can not be stressed enough. This just causes obvious injuries to the dancer through falling, when the feet lose strength, or when the dancer loses balance.
### Things you need to Know

#### Terminology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Petit retire</td>
<td>Small retiré</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temps leve</td>
<td>To hop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sus-Sous</td>
<td>Over-Under</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soutenu</td>
<td>To sustain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sous-Sus</td>
<td>Under-Over</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sauté</td>
<td>To spring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retiré</td>
<td>To draw up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pied</td>
<td>Foot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Petit</td>
<td>Small</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passé</td>
<td>Passing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ordinaire</td>
<td>Ordinary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Levè</td>
<td>Lifted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand</td>
<td>Large</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epaulement</td>
<td>Rotation of the shoulders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>En Rond</td>
<td>Round</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>En l'air</td>
<td>In the air</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>En Dedans</td>
<td>Inwardly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>En De Hors</td>
<td>Outward</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>En Croix</td>
<td>In the shape of a cross</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
<td>-----------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Echappé</strong></td>
<td>To escape</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ècartè</strong></td>
<td>Separated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Devant</strong></td>
<td>In front</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Détournè</strong></td>
<td>Turned aside</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dessous</strong></td>
<td>Under</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dessus</strong></td>
<td>Over</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Derrière</strong></td>
<td>Behind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Demi</strong></td>
<td>Half</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Décoté</strong></td>
<td>To the side</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Changement</strong></td>
<td>To change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cambrè</strong></td>
<td>Bent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bras</strong></td>
<td>Arms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Battu</strong></td>
<td>Beaten</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bas</strong></td>
<td>Down</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ballonné</strong></td>
<td>A bouncing step</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Avant</strong></td>
<td>Forwards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Assemblé</strong></td>
<td>Joined together</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Arrière</strong></td>
<td>Backwards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>À Terre</strong></td>
<td>On the ground</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>À Deux Bras</strong></td>
<td>With two arms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chassé</strong></td>
<td>A sliding movement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Leçon</strong></td>
<td>Lesson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>En face</strong></td>
<td>Facing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Penché</strong></td>
<td>Tilt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Plie</strong></td>
<td>To bend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French Word</td>
<td>English Equivalent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>--------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retiré</td>
<td>Withdrawn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sauter</td>
<td>To lead</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>à la Seconde</td>
<td>In the second</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soubresaut</td>
<td>Sudden Leap</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terre-à-terre</td>
<td>Ground to ground</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tombé</td>
<td>Fallen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>En Travesti</td>
<td>In disguise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>à la Quatrième</td>
<td>In fourth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>à la Premiere</td>
<td>In first</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balancé</td>
<td>Rocking</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Movements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Movement</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pliè</td>
<td>To Bend the knees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Port De Bras</td>
<td>Carriage of the arms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Battement</td>
<td>To toss your leg in the air</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tendu</td>
<td>To stretch the feet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chassè</td>
<td>To slide along the floor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degagés</td>
<td>To disengage the floor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curtsey/Bow</td>
<td>To Bend or Gesture – To say “thankyou”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jetè</td>
<td>Leap from one foot to the other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fouettè</td>
<td>To whip out your leg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pas De Chat</td>
<td>Step of the Cat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Releve</td>
<td>Raising your heels off the ground in a sharp movement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tours en l’air</td>
<td>Turning in the air</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passè</td>
<td>Pass the leg from one position to another</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emboîtè</td>
<td>To jump alternating legs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balançoire</td>
<td>To perform battements like a see-saw</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Battement</td>
<td>Beating the leg on the floor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chaîné turns.</td>
<td>To tuirn quickly en pointe, or demi pointe, in a tight first position.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elancer</td>
<td>A darting movement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Etendre</td>
<td>To stretch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fouetté en tournant</td>
<td>A turn in which the qorking leg is moved in a fast whipping motion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pointe tendu</td>
<td>Stretched tendu of the foot</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Class Etiquette

One of the first rules is to make sure that you are not wearing a heavily scented perfume or deodorant in class. Ballet studios are notorious for being small enclosed spaces, and the scent of your choice may be distracting or even cause an allergic reaction in another dancer.

If you are standing at a crowded barre be sure to angle your body toward the side, especially if you are performing a movement such as battement which is a large movement and as such requires personal space.

If you are moving forward and get stuck in a movement, continue moving forward, there are people behind you. Likewise don’t turn around to walk back to your starting position, walk along the wall to get back to your original position, so as to not interrupt another’s movement.

Dancers are often territorial particularly over their position at the barre, if you see that someone has draped their towel over the barre, they have reserved that spot so don’t move the towel. Likewise you can reserve your own spot using this method. If you’re new to a class and someone pushes you along from the spot you have reserved, it is best if you just move along.

Often a ballet class requires a great deal of concentration, for this reason chattering is not welcome. When entering the class, before the lesson has begun, it is fine to engage in conversation with your class mates, however once the teacher has started, talking time is over. If you and another student wish to continue with your discussions, do so elsewhere as this is distracting to the rest of the
class.

Finally if there is something which you are not quite able to understand raise your hand and politely ask the teacher about this. However, if this question is long and involved, or you are having a great deal of trouble with a particular movement, find a free time after or before a class to discuss this with your teacher, so that the rest of the students are not disturbed.

Above all remember that a ballet class is meant to be a positive environment for all students to learn the dance they love.
Ballet Attire

The type of clothing worn to a ballet class depends on the type of class. While one would expect a teenagers advanced class to be dressed in a leotard and tights, the rules may be a little more relaxed for an adult beginner’s class.

The most important element to the clothing worn to a ballet class is that it allows the teacher to see the movements of the body. For this reason leotards and tights are popular. They don’t in anyway restrict the movements of the dancer, there is nothing hanging from them which will get in the way of moving, and their tight form allows the instructor to see each individual movement clearly.

Many schools have a rule on the type and color of the attire worn. Most of the time girls are required to wear pink tights with a black leotard, while boys are required to wear black tights, with a white tight fitting top.

A dancer must wear ballet slippers. Until the teacher advises the dancer that she is able to progress through to pointe shoes. These shoes must be soft ballet slippers in pink satin for girls and black leather for boys most of the time. Male dancers don’t generally progress through to pointe work.

The face should be kept free from hair, if girls have hair long enough to be put back with a hair net into a ballet bun; this is how it should be worn. There should be no jewelry dangling from the body of the dancer.

After class it is important that a dancer has a set of sweats handy, as they can perspire during a ballet class, and if they leave into a cold
atmosphere slightly damp, this increases the chance of them catching a cold. The sweats are to be pulled on over the leotard and tights.

Auditions

The first step to a successful audition is the attitude of the dancer. A dancer should be friendly to everyone, and should act themselves. Being fake, doesn’t win any extra points, and it is harder to remember the steps if you are trying to remember a different persona.

Remember to arrive on time with all equipment, including music if needed, and the auditioning clothes. It’s a good idea to wear a leotard and tights so that your well practiced routine is clearly visible. Tie your hair back from your face, and don’t wear too much make up. If you feel the need to set yourself apart from everyone else wear tights or a leotard in a vibrant color. Most importantly don’t forget your ballet shoes.

Wear a set of sweats over your leotard and tights to the audition, and put these on again after the audition has finished. If you need quiet time, take a set of headphones. This signals to other dancers that you are having some quiet time.

Greet the judges warmly. When auditioning, smile, and show them that you are confident. This way they won’t know how nervous you really are. It’s also a good idea to act in a gracious manner toward others who are auditioning. You may end up dancing along side of them and if you have been rude this will become an unpleasant experience.

Finally, despite what you think of your own ability, auditions
provide great experience. Maybe you won’t get the part in your very first audition, but the next time you will have a greater understanding of the process, having seen it first hand and this will make it much less daunting.

Major Schools of Ballet

Most countries where ballet dancing is a popular form of recreation have a major school of ballet. Generally these major schools experience close ties to that country’s professional ballet companies. The competition to gain a place at these schools is fierce, with only a small number accepted each year, and many, many dancers hoping to gain entry.

New York City Ballet is descended from the American Ballet Company. The Studio is located in the New York State theatre and is known as the nations premier dance company. Dancers from all over the world move to New York in the hope of gaining a place at this prestigious school.

England’s Royal Ballet School has two separate campuses. The juniors attend a studio in Richmond park and once old enough, and if the dancers standard is high enough they progress on to the seniors studio in London where the Royal ballet Company also rehearse.

Other renowned ballet studios include, Russia’s Bolshoi ballet in Moscow, with its integrated academy, Also located in Russia, the Leningrad State Kirov ballet, where there is more emphasis placed upon elegance and style in dancing.

The Royal Danish ballet Company, in Copenhagen, and the Paris Opera School, are two of the most famous on the European
continent. Of course these schools are available to only the most gifted dancers, and so provide something for the ambitious ballet student to aspire to. However for the average dancer, the local ballet studio, and teachers are more than well equipped to teach ballet.

**The 3 Simple Rules**

The 3 Simple Rules comprise of the 3 most common things dancers forget to do when practicing or performing. This is mostly relevant to beginner dancers but you would be surprised at the number of seasoned dancers who relax in these areas and therefore look sloppy in their performance. If you make a focused effort to remember these things every time you dance then you will find your movements will come more naturally and your technique will improve automatically.

**Turnout from the Hips**

As you may already be aware, the turnout of the feet is one of the most essential parts of ballet dancing. If you don’t do it correctly you will find that your turns will be harder to complete and your jumping exercises will look sloppy. Correct turnout of the feet involves turning out from the hips, NOT the knees. That is the key to remember. When you turn out from the knees you put pressure on your ankles which can result in serious injury. To turn out correctly you need to squeeze in your buttocks and rotate your hip joints outwards. This will take the stress off your ankles and give you the maximum turnout degree possible. Now don’t get discouraged because you can’t get a 180 degree turnout first try. It is actually very hard to achieve perfect turnout even for professional dancers. There are numerous stretching exercises that will help you achieve a greater turnout but the important thing is to go easy and not force the
movement as this will put excessive strain on your joints. See the section on page 18 for correct and incorrect turnout examples.

**Move from your Center**

The second simple rule is all about carrying your body so that you look like an elegant swan and not like a bouncing elephant. There are many aspects to correct posture which you can reference from the sections Standing and Posture later in the book. But the crucial element to graceful movement starts with your midsection. This is your abdominal muscles. Everything else from your lower back up to the top of your neck plays an important part, but the key to holding it all together is in the center of your body which is labeled your “core strength” and is your center of balance. As shown on page 17, if you don’t “pull in” your abdominal muscles you will end up either rolling your hips forward or backward and give yourself what is called either a “banana back” or “turtle back” - Not very pleasing for a ballet dancer. If you slightly tense your abdominal muscles and “pull in” your whole midsection you will find that your shoulders will stay square and it will feel natural to hold your head and chin high therefore maintaining the correct upper body posture throughout every movement.

**Dance from Within**

The lasting impression to every performance is in the expression and feeling of the dancers on stage. It is in how well they expressed the music or story rather than how well they danced the steps. The key to a great performance lies simply in the fundamental reason to dance: Interpretation and expression of oneself. Self confidence is the underlying key. So be Bold and Daring or be Soft and Sweet but whatever your mood or feeling, dance it with confidence in your
own ability. You will know when you have reached that level of “Ballerina” because you will forget the steps and your mind will stop racing. You will “feel” the music and the emotion, and you will dance from within.
Ballet Style

Ballet requires the dancer to adopt a style which is quite different to the way in which they would normally act. Everyday we do normal things, we run, we walk, we stand, and we bend, without thinking too much. Ballet however requires each element to be perfectly controlled, and performed in a certain way.

Ballet relies on the dancer moving in a manner which can be considered to be noble, graceful and majestic. This can only be achieved, through the dancer practicing moving. Often developing the style required to perform ballet can take an extended period of time. This should be worked on, with the teacher before moving on to any of the more advanced movements.

Ballet style works at controlling the body, in such a way that the entire body appears to be elongated and aligned, which allows the dancer to perform the movements with a greater sense of style and ease. In order to correctly align the body, the dancer can imagine a pole running the length of the torso, keeping the body straight.

This style is adopted so as to form a more visually appealing line of the body, during performance. During a performance, the dancer should appear to be moving across the stage, as if this controlled movement is natural. However, the body should be working to maintain the required straight lines.

This next section addresses ballet style, by first referring to the way in which the dancer body would be held under normal circumstances, and then comparing this to the way the dancer’s body will be held whilst performing.
Normal - When most of us stand normally, ourselves and everyone around us thinks we are standing up straight and tall. We are lucky, that our normal clothes actually hide the imperfections and flaws in our bodies.

When we stand the way we normally do, often our shoulders slump forward slightly, allowing the spine to curl. Our pelvis is usually slightly tipped forwards. Together these cause a curving in the spine. Our feet are usually pointing straight ahead. They may be turned slightly in, or out, but this turning comes from the ankles. We can see that the rest of the legs are pointed straight ahead.

Unless made conscious of this, we usually don’t exert any control over the abdominal muscles, rather letting them hang. The chin is usually tilted slightly down toward the floor, and our eyes follow down unless we are looking for something. In our normal lives we show our emotions through our posture.
Ballet - Each individual element of ballet is carefully controlled. This includes the stance of the dancer. Unlike an everyday person a ballet dancer is required to wear an outfit which shows off their body, highlighting any imperfections so that these are easily spotted and able to be worked on by the instructor.

A ballerina holds his or her chin parallel to the ground. The eyes are cast straight ahead. The shoulders are held back, and also parallel to the ground. The chest is lifted, and the abdominals held tight, showing that there is a power lying within.

The pelvis is not tilted forward or back, and the spine is in one straight line. The turnout in the legs comes from the hips, therefore the knees are slightly pointing out toward each side. The feet are also turned out. For a ballerina there is no rolling of the ankles onto the sides of the feet.
Walking

**Normal** - When we walk, it is the role of our feet to act as the body’s shock absorbers. The heel is the first part of the body to strike the ground; this is followed by the rest of the foot as it slowly rolls down.

The rest of the body is pulled over the foot and leg through the quadriceps muscles. There isn’t a great deal of attention paid to the rest of the body with the arms generally swinging in a casual manner at the walkers sides.

The purpose of our walking is usually at the forefront of our minds, and the way that our body is positioned is the last thing that we think about, therefore we often tilt the upper body slightly forward, and shrug in a way that makes the top of it seem rounded.
**Ballet** - In ballet, a walk requires the flexed toes to reach the floor first, slowly followed by the rest of the foot, as it is placed gracefully upon the floor. The leg is pulled under the body through the hamstring muscles. In this way walking in ballet involves a complete reversal of the way one would normally walk.

The ballerina’s back and abdominal muscles are held firm to support the body. The chin is held high giving a lifted eye line and the knees and feet both act as shock absorbers while the dancer is moving. As with everything else in ballet, the dancer has control over their body every time they take a step. The rest of the body is held straight and erect while walking. The arms move as they are required, as required by the teacher, and are always strong and elongated.
Normal - When we bend in normal life, we slowly roll over the top of our spine, bending the lower half second. We generally don’t pay too much attention to what our legs are doing, as our main focus is on the reason we are bending.

When we are at the bottom phase of the bend, our spine is curved inwards towards our legs. The legs are usually bent also, and there is not a great control over the body.

When we are returning to a standing position, we start by rolling up the vertebra of the lower back, and working our way up until the upper back is also up right. If we have bent our knees to bend, these straighten as the back does, so the whole body resumes its normal stance, at the end of the bend.
**Ballet** - A bend in ballet requires a great deal of control, and awareness of the body and its limitations. The legs are kept straight and elongated when bending in ballet.

The dancer bends the body forward from the hips, and then the bottom of the spine is bent forward, with the dancer’s spine still straight.

When a dancer is returning to a standing position, he or she will straighten the top of the spine first, then the bottom of the spine, and finally straighten up at the hips.

At all stages of the bend, the dancer is conscious of the placing of the head, the legs and the arms. Bending in ballet is often used as the basis for a movement such as a port de bras.
Arm Raising

*Normal* - When we raise our arms in normal life, we immediately raise the shoulder blade, hunching the shoulders up, and shortening the neck, our head generally pokes forward slightly as this happens, or tilts to rest on one of the arms.

The chest slowly expands forcing the rib cage out, and the abdominal muscles in. Our hips also become slightly uneven as they attempt to compensate for the elongation through the torso.

If only one arm is raised, only one shoulder blade rises, and forces the shoulder to hunch. As this happens the other shoulder blade drops toward the floor, and this pattern is followed down the body as the body slightly tilts toward the non raised arm. The hip of the raised arm lifts dramatically, to lean over with the rest of the body.
**Ballet** - When a dancer raises their arms, they keep their shoulder blades down and parallel to the ground and each other. The neck is kept elongated, and the torso remains controlled.

This control means that there is little to no movement in the hips which remain parallel both to the floor and each other.

Raising the arms is common in ballet and makes up many of the movements including the port de bras. When learning these movements the dancers are taught to hold their shoulders in such a way that their necks are elongated.
**Hands**

**Normal** - Our hands are an important part of our normal lives. We use them to pick up, put down, and communicate. We are constantly flicking, and shaking them around. Our wrist joints are one of the most used joints in our body, and often are used for no specific purpose.

When we aren’t consciously, or sub consciously using our hands in any activity, we normally just let them hang from the ends of our arms, where they are left to sway as we walk, and curl up as we sit down.

Despite the huge role that our hands actually play in our everyday lives, we are generally oblivious to them.
Ballet - In ballet, a dancer is required to be constantly conscious of their whole bodies, hands included. Unless designated a specific purpose, the hands are an extension of the dancer’s arms. They are to help provide the elongated line required in dance.

When a movement requires the hands to be used, such as in ballet mime, or when practicing at the barre, the wrist must be soft and graceful. Like every other body part, the hands must be constantly controlled in an elongated, elegant, and dignified manner.

To hold your hand correctly have your fingers relaxed but not curled in. Tuck your thumb into your palm without bending it and slightly lower your middle finger. If you struggle with this try placing a pencil on top of your middle finger but under your index and ring fingers.
Fundamentals

There are a number of movements and positions in ballet which every dancer needs to know. These are those positions and movements that are generally taught during the first year. Although they do get progressively harder, and the basic positions must be able to be performed by the dancer before moving onto the next ones, these movements are all needed to perform many major ballets.

It is through the linking together of some of these movements that performances are created. Some of the fundamentals are in themselves a series of positions linked together to become combination movements.

Posture

A ballerina’s posture is essential to their ability to dance. It should always remain erect, graceful, and elegant. Unfortunately in most cases, this is easier to advise a dancer of, rather than actually train the dancer to do.

In order to maintain good posture, the tip of your head must feel as if it is almost reaching the sky. Next are the eyes. The whole body follows the line of the eyes. If they are cast down, the rest of the body will do the same. The chin should be held so that it is parallel to the ground. If the chin is parallel to the ground, the whole head will be focused forward and upright.

Next are the shoulders. The dancer should be conscious of the shoulders being rolled back. And the shoulders should be held
slightly square, and parallel to both the ground, and each other. The arms should be left to fall freely, being free from clinging into the body; this signifies a lack of confidence within oneself. In a ballet dancer the hands must appear as an extension of the arms, falling in one line, either side of the body.

The chest and ribcage should be held open. This should be natural if the shoulders are held in the correct manner. The abdominal muscles need to be held in tightly. Those who have done any Pilates will know that this is referred to as the body’s core, and it is responsible for the strong powerful actions of the rest of the body.

The spine must be held straight and erect. This is one of the areas that almost everyone is conscious of when told they need to stand taller and improve their posture, and although important it is just one element of the body. Next the pelvis shouldn’t be tilted toward either the front, or the back of the body. This is an obvious indication of the posture having a problem elsewhere as the pelvis tilting is usually to try and compensate for something.

The hips should be held parallel to the ground, as well as each other. This helps to prevent the body from naturally tilting to one side. Finally we come to the legs; they should be gently extended, although the knees should not be locked. The turnout in the legs should come from within the dancer’s hips, and should be evident through the knees pointing outwards. The ankles should be held upright with no rolling either inwards or outwards.

Together all of these different components help to perfect the posture of the dancer.
Incorrect

- Back Arched Forward
- Relaxed Midsection
- Pelvis Tilted Forward
- Ankles rolling forward
- Center too far forward of body
- Shoulders curled forward
Incorrect

- Pelvis Tilted Back
- Shoulders Rolled Forward
- Ankles Rolled Forward
- Head looking down
Correct

- Weight Centered
- Lifted Up through Ankles
- Turned Out Legs
- Pulled in Midsection
- Shoulders Pressed Down
- Lengthened Neck
- Head and Chin Held High
Turnout

The first thing that comes to the minds of most people when they think about ballet dancers is their legs. Ballerinas are well known for their well turned out legs, and many believe that this is well beyond their grasp. Unfortunately a lot of ballet dancers also believe this, and give up after a couple of lessons. While a perfect turn out is partially the result of nature, a dancer can improve their turn out with patience and perseverance.

The key element of a dancers turnout is to remember that it originates from the hips, rather than from the knees or the ankles. Before the dancer can begin turning out from the hips, the upper body must be held perfectly erect and upright.

Balance is a big issue when a dancer is first learning how to turn out; this is also a big factor in many cases where the turnout is not correctly executed. To stop the dancer from worrying about falling so much, the dancers are positioned at the barre when learning how to correctly do their turnout.

The dancer has to know that the legs need to turn out from deep inside the hip. Despite what some may think, the turning out of the legs in ballet isn’t any type of convention that has developed over time; rather it is a necessity if ballet is to be performed correctly. It allows the dancer to have the required freedom of movement in all directions. In addition to this it helps a dancer’s line and is more aesthetically pleasing.

The easiest way to turn the legs out from inside the hip joint is to visualize the actual turn of the leg from coming within the hips. This helps the dancer understand how high in the body the perfect turn out must start.
A common mistake is turning the leg out from the knee as this creates an unnecessary strain on the knee joints as they attempt to turn the foot out. Another mistake is the turning out of the leg from the ankle. This can stretch the delicate ligaments inside of the ankle, and make the ankle more susceptible to injury.

If the leg is turned out properly, this is clearly seen by the direction of the knee pointing outward. The feet can be noticed if performed incorrectly, to be rolling backward onto the outside edges of the feet, or forwards so the legs are resting on the inside edges of the feet. Any mistakes in the dancers turn out technique can easily cause injury, as it is performed constantly.

Incorrect

- Heels Rolled Forward
- Pressure on Ankles
- Pressure on Knees
- Uneven weight distribution through feet
- Center of balance forward of body
Incorrect

- Heels Rolled Backwards
- Pressure on Ankles
- Pressure on Knees
- Uneven weight distributed through feet
- Center of balance behind body

Correct

- Pulled Up through Ankles
- Weight evenly Distributed through the Toes
- Calves / heels pressed together
- Legs straight
Standing at the Barre

Standing at the barre appears to be a relatively straightforward element of ballet. However there are many things which should be considered by a dancer when positioned at the barre.

First is the general positioning of the dancer’s body. It is important that the dancer doesn’t stand too close, so that when she or he reaches out to grasp the barre, the arm is left hugging into the side of the body. Likewise the body shouldn’t be so far away that an over extended reach is required to grasp the barre. Instead the dancer should stand so that the arm is able to comfortably reach the barre. The arm reaching shouldn’t be completely straight, rather it should remain slightly bent at the elbow.

Just as the body shouldn’t be too close to the barre, the dancer shouldn’t stand too close to another dancer. This is especially true when a large movement that requires the dancer to have space is being performed. This will help to prevent injuries to both dancers.

Another important thing to remember is the dancer must be standing with a straight back; there should be no bending within the body to allow the dancer to hold the barre. The barre is there as an assistant only, the dancer’s stance should not indicated that she or he is reliant on it.
Incorrect

- Hips tilted Forward
- Back Arched Forward
- Unstable center of balance
- Increased risk of injury to ankles, knees and lower back
- Abdominals relaxed
Incorrect

- Hips tilted Backward
- Shoulders Dropped
- Unstable center of balance
- Increased risk of injury in ankles, knees and lower back
- Ankles rolled forward
- Abdominals relaxed
Correct

- Pulled Up through Ankles
- Back Straight
- Shoulders Square
- Legs turned out from hips
- Legs straight
- Lengthened neck
- Abdominals pulled in
The function of the barre in ballet is assisting the dancer with balance, when performing a movement or exercise. There are a number of common mistakes which are made, particularly by beginning dancers when holding the barre.

If the dancer’s fingers are tightly gripping the barre, they are holding it too tightly. The barre should be held gently with a soft hand. The dancers hold should be so that it is able to be released at any time.

If the hand is reaching up above the shoulder, the barre is too high. A lower barre or alternative means of support should be found for this dancer. A barre which is too high, encourages, incorrect technique.

Finally a dancer should remember when the right side of the body is working; the left hand should be holding the barre. When the left side of the body is working the dancers right hand should be holding the barre.
Incorrect

- Hand Tensed
- Fingers Gripping
- Thumb Underneath Barre
- Increased tension in arm

Incorrect

- Hand Pulling on barre
- Fingers Gripping
- Thumb Over Barre
- Increased tension in arm
- Decreased stability
Correct

- Hand Gently Resting
- Fingers Relaxed
- Thumb on Top of Barre
Leg Raising

Leg raising is a major part of ballet. Unfortunately it is an area which many dancers struggle with, and can cause large amounts of pain to dancers.

One of the most important things to remember with leg raising is that the body must be completely warmed up, before any movement is commenced. The muscles involved with raising the legs, are large, and very susceptible to injury, therefore the dancer must dedicate ample time to ensure that these muscles have been warmed up.

The next important thing is flexibility. In order to lift the leg high the dancer needs flexibility in the hips, and legs. Some dancers are fortunate enough to be genetically blessed with a high level of flexibility within these areas, for other dancers this requires patience, and practice.

Many beginner dancers use their quadriceps to lift and hold their leg in a position. This can cause cramps, bulky muscles from over use, uneven hips, incorrect weight distribution, and will greatly affect the height of the leg. It is much easier and more technically correct to engage the hamstring muscle when lifting the leg. This will lessen cramps, make correct weight distribution easier, give pleasing lines and increase the height of the leg and the time it can be held in place.

Some dancers may feel pain whenever their leg is lifted, regardless of the time spent preparing the body for the raise. This pain may be a sciatic pain, caused by the sciatic nerve, and this needs to be addressed by a medical professional.

A dancer should only dance to the ability of their bodies. In a
performance it is much more visually appealing for an audience to see a leg that is only slightly lifted, than it is to see a dancer badly injured. Any dancer experiencing problems with leg raising should speak with their ballet teacher, to work out exercises, or alternative movements to assist the dancer.
Incorrect

- Lifting up with knee - Raising with the knee causes your hip to raise and your leg to turn in
- Leg turned in – Should be turned out
- Leading out with toe – Should lead out with the heel forward
- Body weight moving forward creating an unbalanced position
- One hip is raised
- Center of balance is too far forward
Correct

- Center your weight over your supporting leg
- Keep your leg turned out from your hip
- Lift with hamstring muscles underneath your working leg
- Lead working leg away from your body with your heel
- Keep your hips square and pulled down
- Extend your leg away from your body
- Keep your toes pointed
1st Position - First position of the feet is one of the first movements taught to a beginning dancer. In first position the dancer is required to stand with the feet turned right out from the hips, with the heels together. Performed correctly, first position will mean that when viewed from above, the dancer’s feet will appear to form one straight line. It is a good idea when starting, that a dancer imagines his or her feet to be firmly attached to the ground when in first position, this helps to make the whole body feel more secure, as well as provides a solid grounding for the feet.
2\textsuperscript{nd} Position - Second position of the feet is similar to first position, in that the feet are turned out from the hips. Unlike first position in second position the feet are held about hip width apart. For some dancers this is more comfortable and easier for them to understand than first position, as the feet apart allow the body to balance.

3\textsuperscript{rd} Position - Third position again has the legs turned out. The feet are partially overlapped, in such a way that the front foot is slightly in front of the back foot. The heel of the front foot is level with the arch of the back foot. Dancers often complain how hard it is to balance in this position. However if they remember to place one hand lightly on the barre, to provide extra support, it will be easier for the dancer to trust their balance. This is especially true if the upper body is held upright
4th Crossed (Opposite 5th Position) - There are two different parts to fourth position, the first is known as fourth position crossed. In this position, the front leg is approximately 30 centimeters, or 1 foot in front of the back leg. The feet are directly in line with one another. If a line was to be drawn connecting the two heels, this line would form a diagonal. This is where the position gets the crossed name from. This is an important position for the dancer to grasp before moving onto fifth position.

4th Open (Opposite 1st Position) - The second part of fourth position, is known as fourth position open. Similar to fourth position crossed, the front leg is grounded approximately 30 centimeters in front of the back leg. However this time the feet are positioned so that the heel of the front foot is directly in front of the heel of the back foot. So if there was a line drawn from heel to heel in this position, the line would be completely straight. This position is quite similar to first position except that the front foot is held in front of the back.
5th Position - Fifth position involves the legs turned out from the hips, with the front foot placed directly in front of the rear foot. This is the hardest of all positions, and also the most rewarding. (It is important that a dancer’s turnout is correct in this movement in order for the dancer to maintain balance.)
**Arms**

Bras Bas - This position involves the arms of the dancer forming a full circle in front of the body, with the finger tips almost touching and the palms facing in. The elbows should not be hugging in at the sides of the dancer, and the pinky fingers should be held so that they are almost touching the front of the dancer’s thighs. Occasionally this position is referred to as fifth position en bas.
Demi Bras - Demi bras involves lifting both arms to the front of the body at an approximately 45 degree angle. In this position both of the palms should be pointing toward the ceiling and elbows should be lifted. It is important for the aesthetic quality of this movement that the arms are held strongly.

1st Position - First position of the arms involves them being held in front of the dancers body directly opposite the belly button. The pinky fingers should not be touching the front of the dancer’s thighs, and the hands and fingers should become an extension of the dancer’s arms, held in such a way that they gently elongate, and are
slightly curved. In order for a dancer to achieve first position, the dancer's shoulders must be held back, and the neck held long. The elbows shouldn’t be hugging in at the waist, but rather be slightly pushed out to the sides.

Demi 2nd - This involves the arms positioned halfway between first and second position. Here the arms are held almost straight although there is no locking of the elbows. The hands are an extension of the arm and should be following the line of the arms. The arms are held at an approximately 45 degree angle from the shoulders which are held back. It is important for this movement’s effectiveness that it looks strong and controlled.
2nd Position - Second position involves the arms being held almost straight out from the shoulders. Although the elbow is to be held slightly lower than the shoulder, and the hand is to be held slightly lower than the elbow, the arms must be held in a straight line with an extremely gentle curve. There is to be no obvious line between the shoulder and the wrist. The arms should be held straight out strongly to the sides, with the dancer exerting complete control over the entire movement.

3rd Position - In third position, one arm is held in front of the body
as in first position, while the other arm is held out to the side similar to second position. As both of these actions make the one position, the arms need to be held on the same plane. Both arms should be slightly away from the dancer’s body so that neither one is in contact with the torso. Third position can be performed with either arm assuming the lowered position.

4th Crossed - Like with the feet; Fourth position of the arms is broken down into two distinct positions. Fourth position crossed, has one arm in first position. This arm is held in toward the body so that the hand is held in front of the dancer’s torso. The palm should be facing the dancer and slightly tilted toward the dancer’s face. The pinky shouldn’t be touching the dancer’s torso. The other arm is to be held up as if in fifth position. The dancer’s chest needs to be opened in this position.
4th Open - The other position that makes up fourth is fourth position open. This involves one of the dancers arms stretched out above the dancers head at an approximately 135 degree angle. The forearm and the hand should be gently arch in toward the dancers head. The entire arm should be elongated and graceful. The hand must be held as if it is a natural extension from the arm. The dancers other hand should be held in second position. The dancer should maintain an open chest with this position.
5th Position - Fifth position of the arms involves the arms of the dancer laced above the head in a gentle circle. This is known as au courante, or crown. The elbows need to be held well out to the sides in this position. And the hands as they continue from the arms should be graceful, and elongated. The tips of the fingers should be just touching. The dancer must be careful to keep the shoulders down and neck elongated in this position.
Ballet Movements

Ballet consists of a number of stylized actions. Over time these actions have become more formal, and are now performed according to a strict set of rules. The movements in ballet can involve the feet, arms or body of the dancer and each begins with one of the five basic positions of the feet and arms. From the starting point, the body of the dancer is able to move with ease in any direction.

The movements in ballet change slightly depending on which style of ballet being studied; however the concept behind each movement is generally the same. The movements in ballet are able to described as being graceful elegant and dignified. At all times the dancer must look as if the movement is being performed easily, but in reality, every element of the dancer’s body must be strictly controlled.

Some of the movements such as a pirouette are designed purely to be performed, either in class, or in a choreographed performance. Others however such as a releve, can be used to develop strength in the dancer’s muscles, and therefore assist in the performance of other movements.

It is essential that the movements in ballet be performed correctly; this is to improve the aesthetic quality of the dance, and also to protect the dancer from injury. A fully trained dance teacher will be able to assess any movement, and ensure that it is correct. Although each movement is an individual action, the choreography in ballet strings together movements, in order to form a visually appealing performance. In order to be able to perform however, the dancer must first be able to master each step individually.
Demi Plié

- Stand straight in any of the five positions. Bend your knees as far as you can without lifting your heels off the ground.
- Keep your knees positioned directly over your feet; try to keep your knees and feet from rolling inwards toward the centre.
- Keep your heels squarely on the floor; firmly tuck your buttocks under you (without tilting your pelvis forward or back) with your back straight and perpendicular to the floor.

Demi Plié involves the slow bending of the dancer’s knees approximately half way to the ground. The top half of the body should remain completely straight and upright throughout this movement.

The dancers hand should be gently holding the barre to maintain balance. As the dancer lowers their knees, their heels should stay
firmly on the ground. The elbow of the arm at the barre should be lifted, and not hugging at the waist, also the free arm should not be left in such a way that the pinky is in contact with the front of the dancer’s thigh. It should instead be 2-4 inches (4-8 centimeters) away.

The most effective way for a dancer to hold their body upright, is by imagining an inflexible rod running the length of the spine, reaching up to the top of the dancers head, and down to the dancers pelvis. It also helps if the dancer maintains a parallel distance between the ground and the chin. Once the dancer’s posture has been corrected the rest of this movement should be relatively easy to perfect.
Grandes Pliés

- Stand straight in any of the five positions. Bend your knees as far as you can. Your heels should lift off the floor.
- Keep your knees directly over your feet. Try to keep your knees and feet from rolling inwards toward the centre.
- Keep the balls of your feet squarely on the floor; tuck your buttocks under you (without tilting your pelvis forward or back) with your back straight and perpendicular to the floor.

A Grande Plié involves the dancer’s knees slowly bending so that the dancer drops right down to their raised heels. In doing this a dancer should pass through a demi-plité. The dancer should not lift their heels off the floor until they absolutely have to. Similar to the demi-plité the back should be held erect, and the chin constantly parallel to the ground.

With a Grande Plié it becomes more difficult for a dancer to
maintain a straight back. For this reason the dancer should have perfected their demi Plié before progressing to this movement. It is important for the dancer’s balance that the legs drop down evenly on both sides when doing a Grande Plié, and also that the hips are constantly parallel to the ground and each other.

It is essential that this movement is well thought out, and that control is exerted over the legs so that they drop down in the required manner. If this is not done the whole movement will look messy. If a dancer is unable to properly perform a Grande Plié, they should instead do a slower version of a demi Plié in a performance, making sure the movement is in time with the music.
Sur le coup de pied

- Keep working foot wrapped around your supporting ankle
- Push your working heel forward
- Keep your toes back
- Makes sure both legs are turned out
- Your working foot must be pointed

Devant - Sur le coup de pied translates to on the neck of the foot.

The term Devant means in front of the body. Therefore this movement involves the dancer placing their foot just above the ankle, on the front of the leg. If the ballerina was to perform Russian style ballet, the foot would be gracefully wrapped around the front of the ankle.

This movement requires balance, and is practiced at the barre by beginning dancers.
• This is the same wrapped position as above
• Place the heel of your working leg so it is touching your supporting leg just above the ankle

**Derriere** - The Sur le coup de pied derriere, is similar to the Sur le coup de pied, however, instead of the foot resting on the front on the ankle, its held in such a way that it appears to be resting on the back of the ankle.

This movement requires the leg to be held with a great deal of control, as the working foot is not actually resting on the grounded foot.
Releve (in 5th Position)

- Snap your feet up and together so that from the front you can only see one toe and two heels
- Keep both legs turned out
- Keep both legs straight

Releves are commonly used by both male and female dancers in ballet to strengthen the arch of the foot while on demi pointe. This makes it an important exercise for increasing general balance. Releves are commonly used to assist the dancer in preparing for pointe work.

A releve in fifth position involves the dancer assuming fifth position with one foot placed directly in front of the other, and both legs turned out form the hips. The dancer than takes hold of the barre, taking note of the upper body being held upright, and snatches the body up onto the toes with the feet crossing over so that when looking in the mirror you can only see one set of toes and two heels.

This movement can also assists the dancer in developing a well developed turn out whilst dancing en pointe. Due to the large muscle
groups worked during a releve, it is important that the dancer knows their limitations, and does not overwork the muscles.

The dancer’s arms should be free from the body, the upper body should be completely erect. The chin, shoulders, and hips should be parallel to the floor. It is important that the dancer has mastered fifth position before attempting fifth position releve.
Arabesque

1st Arabesque

- Same arm forward as supporting leg
- Your legs can extend however far you can manage
- It is important to pull up through your torso and supporting leg
- Try to lengthen away from your body with both the working leg and arms, being careful not to pull your shoulders forward out of their sockets
- Don’t twist your shoulders
- Your hips should remain as square as possible
- Both legs should be turned out
- Keep your toes pointed

1st Arabesque - The first arabesque is the most well known arabesque and also that which is first taught to a beginning dancer. It
involves the dancer moving from first position to slide the front foot forward until the dancer is conscious of the weight being spread evenly across both legs.

From here the weight is transferred to the front leg, and the foot of the back leg is pointed. The working leg is raised in a controlled manner as slowly as possible. When it has reached its limit, the body is tilted slightly forward, allowing the leg to rise higher.

The same arm as the supporting leg is extended out in front of the dancer level with the chin. The same arm as the working leg is held out to the side at shoulder height.

At all times the upper body must be straight, as if held in place by an invisible support. When the dancer has performed this move sufficiently it is time to move on to the arabesque allonge, lengthening both the raised arm and leg, to create a more visually appealing line.
2nd Arabesque

- Same arm forward as working leg
- Your legs can extend however far you can manage
- It is important to pull up through your torso and supporting leg
- Try to lengthen away from your body with both the working leg and arms, being careful not to pull your shoulders forward out of their sockets
- Don’t twist your shoulders
- Your hips should remain as square as possible
- Both legs should be turned out
- Keep your toes pointed

2nd Arabesque - Similar to first arabesque, second arabesque involves the body assuming second position, and from here gradually moving into an arabesque.

The aim of the first arabesque is to allow the dancers to gain an
understanding of the way that the body must function in order to achieve this pose. Therefore second arabesque should not be attempted before the dancer has perfected first arabesque.

In second arabesque the same arm as the working leg is extended out in front of the dancer at chin height and the same arm as the supporting leg is held out to the side at shoulder height.

After second arabesque has been achieved the teacher may encourage the student to push the leg higher, and tilt the upper body a little more, moving into a penchee. This shouldn’t be done without supervision.

In order to maintain balance in the arabesque, the dancer should fix their gaze upon a stationary object past the working arm. If the dancer is aware of any balance issues, these should be worked on before attempting an arabesque as a fall may cause injury.
3rd Arabesque

- Both arms forward
- Arm furthest from the audience is raised
- Your legs can extend however far you can manage
- It is important to pull up through your torso and supporting leg
- Try to lengthen away from your body with both the working leg and arms, being careful not to pull your shoulders forward out of their sockets
- Don’t twist your shoulders
- Your hips should remain as square as possible
- Both legs should be turned out
- Keep your toes pointed

3rd Arabesque - In 3rd arabesque, both arms are held in front of the body. It is important for aesthetic reasons that the dancer remembers to hold the arm which is further from the audience slightly higher than the other.
The fingertips and hands should be held roughly at chin height, and the elbows and shoulders must be extended, yet soft. The knee of the working and supporting legs should be straightened, so it forms a perfect line.

Of course it is important not only for aesthetics, but also for balance that the dancer holds his or her chin parallel to the floor, and focus their line of sight to a point beyond the fingertips.

It is a good idea to pretend that the arabesque is being performed in a small room, if the arms and leg are fully extended the dancer can almost touch the opposite walls. This helps the dancer aim at stretching the body to its full potential.
Traditionally the reverence is the final movement in a ballet class, or performance. In a class setting the reverence is used to acknowledge the hard work of the teacher, and also the accompanist if present. In a performance the reverence is performed facing the front, and acknowledges the audience.

It is essential that the dancer leans forward from the waist and remembers that even at this stage the body must remain elongated and graceful. While this move is designed to acknowledge those who have helped contribute to the performance in any way, the dancers’ gaze should be directed toward them, rather than be right at them.
Battement Tendu

- Lead out with your Heel
- Keep your leg turned out
- Shift all your weight onto your supporting leg
- Point your toes (still touching floor)

A battement tendu is a movement where the dancer stands with one leg grounded; this leg can be either stretched out, or bent. Battement Tendu refers to a battement where the working foot maintains contact with the ground. The working foot can move from front to back or from back to front.

A battement tendu can form the beginning positions for many other movements including the pirouette and ronds de jambs. A battement tendu provides a good exercise for developing the leg and hip
muscles of a dancer.

The battement tendu is one of the first battements taught to a beginning dancer, and should be properly mastered before moving on. A tendu can be performed from any position, and the working foot can move in front of the body, behind the body or to the side.
Battement Glissé

- Lead out with your Heel
- Keep your leg turned out
- Shift all your weight onto your supporting leg
- Use floor pressure to flick your foot so that it is slightly off the floor

The term Battement glissé literally translates as a gliding battement. A battement glissé is similar to a normal battement, in that the working leg is lifted 2-3 centimeters (1 inch) of the floor.

This movement is performed at a rapid pace. A battement glissé is generally one of the later battements learnt by a dancer, as they need to have developed the skill to effectively perform the movement at the speed required.
Despite the speed, this movement still requires an element of grace, and elegance. Therefore the dancer must appear as if the leg is moving freely and with the music, while the dancer retains strict control over the entire movement.
Battement Jeté

- Lead out with your Heel
- Keep your leg turned out
- Shift all your weight onto your supporting leg
- Swish your leg to 45 degrees
- Use floor pressure

The Battement Jeté is a battement where the working leg is taken between 1 inch (2 centimeters) and 45 degrees from the ground depending on the style of ballet being performed.

The battement jeté requires the dancer to keep the torso and derriere tight and firm, while the shoulders are held back, and the neck is elongated. When the dancer is performing the battement jeté to the derrière, the working leg should be constantly turned out, and the
torso should move only slightly forward.

The battement jetê assists the dancer is developing speed and precision in leg and foot movements. It helps in developing the strength in the muscles of the foot and instep, and is a very good exercise for any dancer preparing to progress through to pointe shoes. It also helps in developing a freedom of movement in the hips, and provides a strengthening routine for all the muscles in the dancer’s torso, and the legs from the thighs to the toes.
Pas de Bourrée dessous

- Shift your weight to your supporting leg
- Your supporting leg should be en fondu
- Shoot your front foot de cotè (slightly off the floor)
- Bring your feet together on Rise
- Bring your working leg to derrierè
- Keep your legs straight
- Take your front foot out to second on rise
- Close your right foot to devant
- Demi Pliè

Pas de bourree refers to a quick step, which the dancer performs on his or her demi pointe. Three small rapid steps are taken, moving in the opposite direction to the extended leg.

In order to perform a pas de bourree dessous (with the front foot) correctly, the dancer should start in fifth position. The dancer extends the front foot to the side with the supporting leg en fondu,
and then brings it into fifth position on demi pointe with that foot now at the back. Move the front foot to the side, also on demi pointe and then transfer the weight onto that foot. Close in fifth position bringing the other foot to the front. This is finished with a plié. The easiest way to remember a pas de bourree dessous is “Back, Side, Front” as these are the positions that the feet take.

There are six other types of pas de bourree.

Pas de bourree devant - Front, Side, Front

Pas de bourree derriere - Back, Side, Back

Pas de bourree dessus (Using back foot) - Front, Side, Back

Pas de bourree dessus (Using Front Foot) - Front, Side, Back

Pas de bourree dessous (Using Back Foot) - Back, Side, Front

Pas de bourree pique - The back foot starts in coupe, step onto the back foot and bring the front foot up under the knee. Step onto that foot and bring the other foot up under the knee. Finish in coupe with opposite foot in front to when you started. This movement is the same when performed en pointe, the only difference being that the dancer places the working foot en pointe rather than on demi-pointe. When performed en pointe the movement has more of a gliding quality. This movement is most commonly used to link two other movements together, in sequence.
The above sequence is Ronds de jambe a terre en dehors

- Degage devant
- Move your foot to side in a circular motion
- Move from your hip without twisting
- Keep your legs turned out
- Your big toe stays on the floor
- Move your working leg to derriere keeping the circular motion
- This is a continuous movement
- Can be performed in the opposite direction (en dedans)

Ronds de jambe translates literally to circles with the feet. Ronds de jambe a terre refers to a ronds de jambe which is performed entirely on the ground. Both the grounded leg, and the working leg, as it
moves through its movements are grounded.

A semi-circle is signaled on the ground by the working leg. This semi circle is able to go from front to back (en dehors) or from back to front (en dedans).

When learning the ronds de jambe a terre, it is important that the dancer imagines that they are drawing a semi circle with their big toe. Lead with your heel to the front and your toes to the back to ensure consistent turn out.
Petit retire (mid shin) en fondu
Shift your center of balance over your supporting foot
Extend your working leg forward
Unfold from your knee
Begin to straighten your supporting leg
Fully extend both your working and supporting legs
Keep your toes pointed
This can be done devant, a la second, derriere

The word fondu means to melt, and melting can be considered a general description of this movement. In ballet, the fondu position requires one of the dancer’s knees to be bent. Therefore the battement fondu is a normal battement, which is performed from the fondu position. The battement fondu is also performed slower than a regular battement.

To begin the movement, the working leg should be a la seconde en
l’air (it can sometimes begin in fifth position). From here the working leg comes into retire and at the same time the supporting leg bends. The working leg develops away from the body as the supporting leg straightens. This movement can be done devant, derriere or a la seconde.

A battement fondu requires much coordination and strengthens the muscles in the dancers’ hips and legs. As this is one of the harder battement movements it is generally taught later, and after the dancer has mastered the battement tendu.
Battement Frappé

A battement frappe begins with the working foot flexed and resting at the neck of the grounded foot. From here the working leg extends out into a straight position by striking the ground with the ball of the foot. The foot is then brought sharply back to the starting position. In a battement frappe, the working foot may begin the movement from in front or behind the grounded foot.

When the battement frappe is being performed from behind the grounded foot, it is important with this movement that only the ball of the foot, or if performing en pointe, the toes strike the ground. If the position of the foot is changed, the timing of the movement will be altered.

When Russian ballet is being performed, this position is slightly altered in that the working foot is wrapped around the ankle rather than remaining flexed beside it, and the foot does not strike the floor as it is being raised.
Développé

- Draw your leg up to retire position
- Point your working foot to your supporting knee
- Shift your weight to your supporting leg
- Turnout from your hips
- Push your heel forward and toes back
- Keep your knee back
- Lead out with your heel
- Your leg should be lifted from underneath your thigh for maximum height
- Unfold from your knee
- Take your arms to 2nd position
- Fully extend your working leg

The Développé involves the dancer usually beginning the movement
in fifth position; from here the dancer moves the working leg to
retire position and unfolds the working leg until it is fully extended.
This can be performed devant, derriere or a la seconde.

Many dancers have trouble performing a développé, due to the
complicated nature of the movement. It is important that a dancer
has mastered an arabesque before moving onto a développé.
It is also important for a développé to be performed effectively that
the dancer remains conscious of the placing of the leg throughout the
movement. Rather than just letting the leg move up and into
position, it should be rotated within the hip joint to maintain the
perfect turnout. The hips should remain square when performing a
développé and lifting from underneath the thigh will help.
Grand Battement

Note - Images 2 and 3 are intermediate positions. These are not held as a Grand Battement is a large smooth kick of the leg.

- Degage devant
- Shift your weight onto your supporting leg
- Keep your hips square and pressed down
- Lift from underneath your thigh
- Don’t crunch your body
- Both legs should be straight all the time
- Control your leg back down

A Grand Battement is an exaggerated, powerful battement action. The dancer is required to throw the working leg as high as possible and then control the leg back down. The grounded leg must remain straight and the hips square.
Despite the way that this movement sounds, control is still important. The movement is meant to look strong and calculated. The dancer must know how high their leg is able to go, rather than forcing it higher than it is able. With time, and practice however the leg should be able to move higher as flexibility increases.

A Grand battement is a movement which is best suited to being practiced inside a controlled ballet environment, this is because the muscles need to be thoroughly warmed up to prevent injury, and there is a large amount of space required.
**Pirouette (en Dehors)**

- Demi Pliè
- Releve to pirouette position (under the knee) picking up the front foot
- Take your arms to 1<sup>st</sup>
- Your head should be spotting the front
- Turn on your toes
- Close with your working leg behind in a Pliè

The Pirouette is one of the most famous of all the ballet movements; it involves the dancer spinning around a vertical axis en pointe or demi pointe, standing on one leg. During the Pirouette the working leg can assume a number of different positions, with the most famous being retire. A Pirouette can be performed en dehors with the movement starting in the pliè position, and turning outwards, or en dedans where the body will turn inwards.

The Pirouette is most commonly performed from fourth or fifth
position. The force required to turn the body comes from the working leg, as it pushes off the ground. It is easier for a dancer to perform a Pirouette in fourth position, due to the greater distance between the feet in the starting position, therefore a dancer should have a thorough understanding of a pirouette in fourth position, before moving on to fifth.

It is important that the dancer’s body weight is kept centered and stable during the Pirouette to prevent the body from tipping over. The dancer should also ensure that their stance is lifted through out the pirouette, with the chest lifted, the shoulders back, the neck elongated, and the derriere tucked under. Together, these adjustments to the dancer’s stance will ensure that the body maintains a straight line. This helps to maintain a straight and centered body in the turn, and helps to prevent the dancer’s body from wobbling.

The arms also play an important role in a pirouette. Strong arms make for a strong center but sloppy arms make for a sloppy center. When preparing for a pirouette the dancer must remember to keep their arms in line with their shoulders as leaving them behind the shoulders will throw the dancer off balance. Make sure that the arms whip strongly into place as the dancer begins the pirouette to ensure a strong centre and balanced turn.

The head should be held completely upright, in order to easily spot the front. The neck should also be relaxed, so that the head is able to easily spin without tilting. Each revolution the eyes should focus on the front. Until both of the dancers feet are again resting on the floor, and ending the movement, the dancers vertical axis, must be maintained.
Port de Bras

- Lift up and out with your upper body from your hips
- Look towards your hand
- Bend from your hips
- Keep your legs and back straight
- Keep your eyes outward on your hand
- Keep a straight line from your lower back up to your neck
- Take your arms to 5th Position
- Keep your back straight
- Move from your hips
- Return to position 1 but with your arms in fifth position

Port de bras means ‘carriage of the arms’. The most basic form of port de bras involves moving from bra bas, through to the first position of the arms, second position of the arms, and then returning to bras bas. To fully perform the port de bras however, the arms must move from bras bas, into first position of the arm, through all the positions to fifth position of the arms, and then returning to bras as via second position of the arms.
It is essential that the arms remain relaxed throughout this movement, and at no time should they appear to be over extended. In order for a Port de bras to be performed effectively, each individual movement should be perfected. The arm movements are often more apparent to the audience, and so a great deal of time should be devoted to them.

The hands and fingers should appear as though they are an extension of the arms, so during port de bras there should be no overt motions in this region, and the arms must always appear to be strong. It is also important that the arms are held in front of the plane of the body, and that the elbows are constantly lifted, away from the body.
Dancing en pointe requires the dancer to rise up onto the toes, performing the traditional ballet steps. This style of ballet requires the dancer to wear shoes which have hard toes, and a stiff shank to assist the dancer in balancing. Dancing en pointe is exclusively for female dancers.

Dancing en pointe requires a great deal of skill, and strength within the foot, and ankle joint. If a ballerina dances en pointe before she is ready, or if she does not dance correctly, she puts herself at risk of permanent injury.

The origin of dancing en pointe has been credited to Marie Taglioni, who in 1832 danced the La Sylphide, in its entirety en pointe. Her movements were however considerably different to those of ballet today, and consisted mainly of releves and balanced poses.

Dancing en pointe has evolved to be a predominant fixture on the dance stage, and a stage to which the majority of young ballerinas hope to reach.

In the 1920’s, Harriet Hosker, a vaudeville dancer, wore pointe shoes which were fitted with steel shanks which allowed her to include tapping, and backward bends in her performance.

This ingenuity has allowed dancing en pointe to be adapted to suit other forms of dance, including jazz ballet, and street dancing.
Anatomy of the Shoes

The shoes worn during ballet are specially constructed to allow the foot to move in the desired way. Ballet shoes are usually made from a soft leather or canvas.

There are three different types of ballet shoe. The soft shoe, the demi pointe shoe and the pointe shoe. The soft slipper worn before dancers progress to pointe shoes have a soft upper, and sole, and are made so that there is not a great deal of stress placed on the dancers foot.

The demi pointe shoe is designed to help dancers progress from the soft shoe to the pointe shoe. It has a hard sole and is made from the same satin as the pointe shoe but does not have the box in the toe. This helps dancers to balance in a stiffer shoe making the transition from soft shoes to pointe shoes a little easier.

The pointe shoe has a reinforced toe area, known as the platform, a box which surrounds the toes, and the sole which is known as the shank. Increasingly the shank and the box are made out of the same piece of material, as this reduces the incidence of the blisters, where the individual components join together.

The shank can run the full length of the shoe if a dancer needs extra support in the arch area, or can run only $\frac{3}{4}$ of the shoe to allow the dancer extra flexibility.

Ballet slippers are tied by ribbons which wrap around the dancers ankle. The ribbons are attached to the binding of the shoe. This is the rim of fabric, which runs right around the shoes opening.

It is important that a ballet shoe, especially pointe shoe is fitted by a
professional. Shoes which fit incorrectly cause the dancer a great deal of discomfort, as well as risking injury.

Tying the Shoes

Tying the ribbons of the pointe shoe correctly is essential in order to give stability and confidence en pointe. The shoe, when placed in the correct position, is kept in that position when the ribbons are tied correctly, therefore creating stability and giving the dancer more confidence en pointe. It is also important that the ribbons and the knot are placed correctly as incorrect placing can affect the Achilles tendon and any other muscles and tendons around the ankle area.

Step 1

Take both ends of the ribbon and pull them firmly away from the shoe to create tautness in the ribbons. Cross the ribbons over each other, with the ribbon that is on the inside of the foot crossing over the ribbon on the outside of the foot.
Step 2
Cross them over again at the back of the ankle a little higher than the previous cross.

Step 3
Cross them over again at the front, at the same level as the cross at the back.

Step 4
Take the ribbons after the third cross at the front around the ankle to meet at the inside of the ankle (as shown in the picture) Cross them over each other in this placement to start tying a knot.
Step 5

Tie the ribbon in a knot on the inside of the ankle. Make sure that the knot does not cut off circulation to the Achilles tendon or the tendon at the front of the ankle.

Step 6

Place knot underneath ribbons for neatness and for a nice line of the foot when dancing.

Step 7

Make sure that no part of the ribbon sticks out and that the ribbons are not too tight around your ankle.
Foot Strength

Foot strength is an integral component of ballet. It is essential that any dancer progressing through to pointe shoes has developed enough strength in the feet. There are numerous exercises designed to develop the required strength. It is important that the dancer knows when the feet need to rest, over working the feet can lead to a large number of occasionally serious and often very painful problems.

The most effective way to develop the required strength is through doing ballet classes which have a focus on developing foot strength. Other forms of dance, and fitness activities, while being worthwhile in some respects, are unable to develop the required style of strength.

Battement frappes are an excellent movement for strengthening the feet, as is a tendu, pressing into the foot. Another good idea is to practice doing releves at the barre, first on both feet, holding on to the barre for support. As the foot strengthens, loosen the grip on the barre and pay particular attention to which parts of the feet bear the most weight. The next step is to practice releves on one foot, again holding the barre in the beginning and again slowly loosening the grip. This not only improves the strength in the feet, but increases the dancers awareness of the feet.

When beginning any exercise, even those designed to improve the strength in the foot it is advisable that practice is done under the supervision of the dance teacher, at least until the basic step has been mastered, to avoid any mistakes, which could lead to long term problems.

No matter what exercise is being done it is important that the dancer remembers to properly stretch out the foot before doing the
movements, paying particular attention to the Achilles tendon. If the muscles and tendons in the foot become tight, this not only increases the risk of the dancer injuring their foot, but also their lower leg and ankle. Any injury in this area can set back the strength of the foot greatly, and in some cases the foot may never be able to develop the same level of strength again.

As with most other things in ballet the main thing to remember with foot strength is to practice constantly. A small amount of practicing each day will greatly contribute to building up the strength in the dancer’s foot, and make their progression into dancing in pointe shoes easier, and much more successful.

**Turnout en Pointe**

It is much more difficult for a dancer to maintain a turnout en pointe, than it is to maintain a turnout in soft slippers. The main faults of the dancer beginning in pointe shoes are demonstrated in the photographs, and these are rolling the feet in, or rolling the feet out. As the turn out is the most fundamental aspect of ballet, it is essential that this has been mastered.

As with the first ballet lesson a dancer takes, the first pointe lesson should be dedicated to perfecting the dancer’s turnout in pointe shoes.

Strength in the feet is required for a dancer to maintain a turn out en pointe. The dancer’s teacher should know, prior to pointe shoes being introduced, if the student has the required strength to do this.

Unfortunately it is difficult for a dancer to see if their turn out is correct, therefore it is the responsibility of the dancers teacher to check on the turn out, and advise them if this needs fixing.
If the dancer has an incorrect turnout, their movements may be affected, as the body does not have the correct line to perform these movements. There is also an increased risk of injury within the knee joint, as extra strain is placed upon the ligaments with the uneven placing of the foot.

In order to correct an incorrect turnout en pointe, the dancer should devote a large amount of personal practice time to performing releves and temps lie in order to gain extra strength in the foot.

The turn out can also be affected by the change in the body’s line in pointe shoes. The dancer must concentrate on holding the entire spine, from the neck to the bottom of the pelvis completely still and straight. If the pelvis is slightly tilted forward, or backward, this will affect the dancers turnout.

Often working on the turn out is frustrating for a dancer who has moved on to pointe shoes, however it is important that they remember that the pointe shoes drastically change the line of the body, and so they must relearn how to hold themselves.
Incorrect

- This is what is commonly known as rolling the feet forward or pronation of the foot. Not only does it create instability, it also can result in future knee and ankle joint problems.
- The instep is no longer working, the ball of the foot is the predominant weight bearer and the outside of the ankle is shortened.
Incorrect

- This is what is commonly known as rolling the feet backward, or supination of the foot. This can result in the hamstring muscles and gluteus minimus being used incorrectly and also created instability.
- The instep is being overused which causes the inside of the ankle to be shorted with the weight predominantly on the heel and/or little toe.
Correct

- Ideally the back of the heels should be touching in first position, however some dancers may have hyper extended legs, as seen in this picture.
Correct

- The ankles should be stabilized and ‘pulled up’ so that the outside of the ankle is not shortened.
- The instep should be pulled up off the floor in order to create a straight line of the leg.
- All five toes should be in contact with the floor, which creates a flat base at the front of the foot and ensures that the proper muscles are being used.
Balancing en Pointe

When a dancer moves on to pointe shoes, the whole body’s center of gravity is changed. No longer is the dancer able to balance the body over the entire foot, or the ball of the foot, they must work at balancing the body over the tips of the toes. The platform in the pointe shoes is designed to help the dancer do this, but if the dancer’s technique is incorrect, they will still be unable to balance correctly.

The photographs show the common mistakes, when a dancer is attempting to balance on pointe shoes. They often balance on one side, generally the big toe, rather than balancing on the entire foot.

This is as much a trust issue, as an issue of poor technique. A dancer must gain enough trust in her own body to understand that it is strong enough to support the weight.

Of course there are circumstances when the dancer’s balance is incorrect, due to a poor level of strength within the toes. With a properly accredited dance teacher, this shouldn’t happen, as they have been trained to know when the dancer’s feet are strong enough to move on to pointe shoes.

Another thing that may affect the way that the dancer stands, is pain. Pointe shoes if fitted incorrectly, or if they are not well padded, may cause the dancer pain when wearing them. To help prevent this pointe shoes should be bought from a qualified fitter, who will ensure that the shoes fit the foot perfectly. They will also advise the dancer of any other padding which may be able to be used to help prevent injuries.

Sometimes the shoes will fit properly, the toes will have the required strength, and still the dancer will struggle to maintain balance en
pointe. This can be due to the dancer’s lack of faith in the strength of their own feet. This is where strapping tape can be useful. Many dancers use strapping tape to help prevent blisters on the feet, for others it is a safety net, allowing them to think that there is an extra reinforcement around their toes.

Practice makes perfect, therefore a dancer should practice balancing en pointe. This can be done at the barre, by loosely holding the barre, and practicing releves. Once this has been mastered, the dancer can hold their hand 2-4 inches (4-8 centimeters) above the barre and practice some more, this way the dancer still has the security of the barre but the knowledge that they are balancing alone. Once the dancer is able to balance on both feet, the can repeat this exercise standing on only one foot.
Incorrect

- The weight is predominantly on the little toe and the outside of the ankle is over extended.
- There is a release in the ankle and calf muscle, which can create instability en pointe.
- Some dancers who find it difficult to rise en pointe can often have this positioning of the feet in the pointe shoe.
Incorrect

- The weight is predominantly on the big toe, which can eventually lead to the development of what known as a bunion (Hallux Valgus), or the enlargement of the big toe joint. The inside of the ankle is overextended which causes the outside of the ankle to shorten.
- This action can lead to or result from the adductors, sartorius and calf muscle being used incorrectly, and therefore any weakness in turnout can be exaggerated en pointe.
Correct

- There should be a straight line running from in between the 1st and 2nd metatarsal, up the shin, and to the knee.
- The weight will fall predominantly on the big toe, as this is usually the longest, but there should be some weight distributed on the other toes as well.
- There should be a feeling of the heel rotating forward, which requires the adductors, satorius muscle and the calf muscles to engage and therefore support the foot en pointe.
Pointe Exercises

The exercises performed en pointe don’t vary all that much to those which are done by a dancer in flat slippers. Again the main thing for the dancer to remember is that they should not overdo the exercise. This leads to problems with the foot both now and at a later stage, and is often counter productive, setting the dancer back weeks, months or even in extreme cases, years. The key is to do a small amount of practice constantly.

A great daily routine involves rises in first position, followed by releves in first position. A dancer should do no more than 32 of these unless instructed to do otherwise by their ballet teacher. This could be followed by the left foot in coupe and performing half the amount of rises and releves again, and then putting the right foot in coupe, and repeating this. Finally the foot should be stretched and flexed. The purpose of performing exercises en pointe is to help strengthen the feet, and lower legs, and work at getting them to a stage where the pointe shoes feel almost normal. For some dancers though it is important to remember that this stage never comes, so there is no reason for any dancer to overdo the exercises.

It is also important to warm up and cool down thoroughly before doing any of these exercises. The foot is full of tiny bones, muscles, and tendons. An injury in any one of these could have disastrous effects on a dancer. As a ballerina the feet are your most important possession, and so they should be treated accordingly.

If you are unsure of anything at all you should ask your teacher before doing it. If your teacher hasn’t already prescribed any exercises for you, take your list of exercises and ask for their opinion before doing them. Quite often we over estimate our own abilities
and put ourselves at a great risk of injury.

**Rises**

A rise is a movement that can be performed in normal ballet slippers or en pointe. It involves the raising of the heels from the ground. When the dancer has risen, he or she balances on the balls of the feet, or en pointe.

This exercise is done often to strengthen the foot, in order for the dancer to progress through to pointe shoes. If the dancer already has pointe shoes, this exercise lets them get used to the change in the center of gravity, as well as further strengthening the foot.

A rise is often a movement only done in practice. For this reason dancers at times perform it imperfectly. It is important that as the body rises, the spine remains in a completely straight line. The way that the ballerina practices the movements often translates into the way that he or she dances the movements.

When practicing rises a dancer often has the tendency to overdo the exercise. This is because it is easy, and is able to be performed anywhere. Each time the dancer practices rises they must take the time to warm up properly. Concentrate on the technique, and cool
down properly. It is also important that a dancer practices this in ballet shoes, as other forms of footwear don’t supply the needed support.

A rise also provides an exercise for dancers calf muscles. It is important that a dancer doesn’t overdo rises. This is because the muscles worked during a rise become developed very quickly. As they develop they also shorten which can cause tightness and other associated problems.
The main function of the Temps Lie is to transfer the weight from one leg to another. This movement involves a set of arm and leg movements based on fourth, fifth, and second positions. It helps teach control, and balance when transferring the weight of the body through different movements.

The temps lie is often performed as a combination movement, where the dancer moves forward in the center of the ballet room during an adagio. Temps Lie however can also be used in certain styles of ballet to refer to the individual form of a step.
Ballet mime, involves telling the audience a story, not only through the music and dance, but also through the incorporation of movements. The main point to remember in ballet mime is that although there is often the scope to make the movements detailed, and involved they need to be easily translated by the audience.

The actions involve using posture, body language, and facial expressions to convey a character or emotion. It is the responsibility of the dancer to understand how they are best able to do this, using the instructions of the teacher, or choreographer, and their knowledge of their own body.

The difficulty in being able to combine new actions with the basic movements means that this is something that is often only taught to advanced students. However it is also used for young children who have only learned a few steps, to increase their enjoyment and understanding.

Quite often the action used to portray a character or emotion is changed according to the choreographer, although, there are a few basic actions which are utilized often, and are universally understood.

It is important for a dancer performing ballet mime to be aware of the fact that the audience still wishes to view a ballet performance. For this reason, the movements should still be performed according to the ballet style. Furthermore the basic steps should be performed properly.

This becomes a problem if a dancer hopes that dramatic actions take
the focus away from their faulted movements. These dancers often
over exaggerate and as such draw more attention to their
performance. In order to avoid this, the dancer must again only do
what is within their individual capabilities.
In ballet mime, mother is signified by the dancer recreating the loving, motherly gesture of gently cradling a baby within the arms. The arms are the focal point of this action, and as such, should be both graceful and elongated. The palms should be turned up toward the face of the dancer. The elbows should be approximately 4-5 centimeters (2 inches) away from the dancer’s body, preventing them from being seen to cling in at the hips, with the elbows slightly softened. Likewise the hands must be held slightly away from the body.

The dancer’s neck should be elongated, as the face gazes lovingly at the baby. The motion of the arms should be clearly visible to the audience.
Come is a reasonably easy action for the dancer to display to the audience. This is done by holding the body in an open position. This means that the shoulders must be held down, with the neck elongated and the chest opened up.

From here the arms are held out in front of the dancer, and away from the dancer’s body. The hands are held partially closed, with the palms facing toward the body as if an attempt is being made to draw the object of desire in toward the dancer.

During this movement, the dancer must remain conscious of elongating the arms and hands, despite the partially closed nature of the hands. A good way for the dancer to remember this is if the dancer thinks if the very ends of the finger tips as being the body part which is making the inviting gesture.
Crying is a sad emotion. Therefore the entire body of the dancer should be slightly down turned. The shoulders should be held down, but not quite as far back as is customary, while the head must be tilted slightly toward the floor.

Meanwhile the arms must be still held elongated, and forming a straight line, as the hands are held to the dancers eyes, as if motioning the wiping away of tears.

Crying involves a great deal of focus being on the face of the dancer, therefore there face must be showing a great sadness, and this must be clearly displayed to the audience.
Dance is shown by the dancer holding his or her arms above their head, almost as if in fifth position. Unlike fifth position however the fingertips shouldn’t be almost reaching each other, instead one arm should be held so that its hand is slightly above the hand of the other arm. The dancer moves their hands from the wrists and the hands circle each other above the dancers head.

The dancer should maintain an elongated line of the arm, which runs from the shoulder to the tips of the fingers. The elbows should be following this smooth line of the arms, rather than being locked into a tight position.

Like fifth position, the dancers shoulders must be held down and back, forcing the neck to appear elongated, and the chest to be open.
Death

Death is a grim action. In order to display this adequately to the audience, the whole body line of the dancer must appear to be down cast.

The dancer’s arms should be held together at the wrist, one on top of the other, as if they have been shackled, and the dancer is being led away by this.

The shoulders should be pushed down and slightly forward so that the chest is not opened. However all the lines of the body should be constantly graceful and elongated.

Death is rather hard to portray to an audience, great care must be taken to ensure that this movement fits into the story, and that each element of the dancer's body including positioning and facial expressions, are working together to signify death.
In order for a dancer to show the audience that they are frightened, their entire body must effectively assume a frightened style of stance. The dancers body should be slightly closed, as if withdrawn, and angled toward the ground.

One arm must be slightly bent at the elbow, and aiming toward the ground. To do this, the entire side of the body, from the top of the head, down to the foot must be held lower than the other side of the body.

The dancer's other arm must also be slightly bent at the elbow, but pointing toward the sky in an elongated line. As if the dancer is attempting to turn away from something.
Listen

Listening involves the ears. This is common knowledge, and easily understood. Therefore when a dancer is attempting to convey a message of listening to an audience, it is important that they make gestures toward the ears.

This is done by holding the body in the usual open pose, with the shoulders held down and back, and the neck held long and graceful with the shoulders open. As well as creating a more visually appealing line, this makes the dancer’s body seem open and receptive.

One hand is then held near the ear, as if to channel the noise into the dancers ear. This arm must be held in a long continuous line which runs from the shoulder, through to the tips of the dancers fingers.
In mime, love is generally displayed by the dancer making overt gestures over their heart. When doing this the hands must be held so that they are open, with the palms facing the dancer’s body, as if drawing the loved one in.

The dancer’s body must be held in a joyous and uplifted manner. The chest must be opened, with the shoulders held down and back.

The dancer’s facial expression must portray love and desire to the audience, this involves the dancer gazing at the loved one.

The most important element of showing love to an audience is the positive interaction between the two (or more dancers). Without this the movement will appear to be false, forced and completely out of place.
Marriage is depicted in ballet mime, by the dancer holding both arms extended in front of the body. The left hand is held below the right hand, with the right hand making a dramatic and overt motion toward the ring finger of the left hand.

In this action, it is important that the dancers shoulders rain down, and back, with the chest held open. The hands should form an elongated line of the arms which continues from the shoulders.

The detail in this action lies in the hands. This means that the actions must be over dramatized, and exact. It also means that the hands must be able to be clearly seen by the audience.
In order to depict the act of pleading to the audience, the dancer must demonstrate their desperation with their whole body. The stance should be slightly lowered; this can be done by imagining the breast bone dropping. It is however essential that the dancer’s shoulders are still held down so that the neck is elongated.

The dancer’s arms should be held slightly away from the body and bent at the elbows so that the dancer’s hands are held approximately at chin level. The hands are then gracefully clasped together, with the outer hand wrapped around the inner hand.

The dancer’s eyes should be held wide, and should show the urgency of the dancer. This is particularly important as the hands held in front of the chin draw attention to the facial expressions.
Seeing involves the eyes of the dancer. Therefore to portray seeing to the audience it is important that the dancer’s eyes become the focal point of the action.

In order to do this the rest of the body must be standing in an open position, yet still neutral, with the shoulders held down, and back, and the neck elongated.

At least one of the dancer’s hands must be directed toward the eyes, as if magnifying the object of interest. There must be an elongated line of the arm, which runs from the shoulder to the hand.
Sleep is shown by the dancer gently motioning as if the head was resting. However the dancer must be careful to ensure that the entire movement can be clearly seen by the audience.

For this reason, the head should be slightly tipped to the side, with the gracefully elongated neck being shown, and the head should be resting approximately 2 inches (4-5 centimeters) above one hand. That hand should be a continuation of the arm that is almost resting on the other arm, which is folded and held up in front of the dancer.

It is important for this entire movement to be seen clearly. The arms should not be hugging in at the sides of the dancer, nor resting on one another, but rather they should be held about 2 inches (4-5 centimeters) above.
Swear

The act of swearing is shown to the audience by the dancer assuming an open stance. The shoulders are held back, and down opening up the dancer's chest, and elongating the neck. The dancer's chin is held so that it is slightly angled upward, increasing the confident, assertive pose of the dancer. The dancer's feet are held hip width apart.

The dancer's arms are held so that one arm is pointing toward the sky, with two fingers raised, the other hand is pointing toward the ground. Both arms are held so that a long line runs from the dancer's shoulder to the finger tips.
Expressive Elements

Ballet is a medium for expressing feelings, emotions and actions without the use of words. Instead the movements of the body help to convey the dancers’ message to the audience. Body parts commonly used in the expression of a meaning includes the head, the arms and hands, the legs, and the feet.

Using a movement to express a meaning to an audience requires the dancer to have a high level of understanding of that movement, as well as having the ability to accurately perform.

The dancer must also have a strong understanding of what it is that they are attempting to express to the audience. This is an area where many young dancers experience difficulty. Their own interpretations of their movements are often different to the interpretations of the audience. In this case the dance teacher must carefully and subjectively observe the lessons, and provide guidance when required.

It is important for expressing a message to an audience that the costumes, music, and choreography all work together toward a common message. Expression can be done through a combination of ballet movements, and ballet mime.

While each body part is discussed independently, in order for an action on the dancers part to be effective the whole body must be coordinated. Not all of the guidelines provided are going to work with every movement. Rather the choreography given to a dancer for a performance should be closely followed.
The legs of a dancer are a major part of any movement. It is essential that at all times they are held long and graceful. The legs are one of the body parts upon which much of the audience’s attention is focused during a ballet performance. It is important that all movements involving the legs are perfected before performing.

At all stages the dancer should know that all of their movements are strictly controlled, however to the audience, it should appear as if each movement is carefree and joyous. This is particularly true of the legs, when a movement requires the dancer to leap this must look light and carefree to the audience. But to the dancer this must be careful and calculated.
The dancer’s feet are not often spoken about in terms of expressive qualities. Instead the feet are thought of merely in their capacity to transport the dancer across the stage. Further to this, as long as the technique is correct and there is no pain caused to the dancer they are largely forgotten about.

Dancers however, must realize the expressive power held by the feet. If a dancer moves across the stage lightly, and briskly, the mood indicated is joyful. Similarly slower, heavier movements indicate a much darker mood.

The movements of the legs, and subsequently the remainder of the dancer’s body follow those of the feet, so time should be taken to ensure the movements of the feet are well thought out.
Arms

The arms of a dancer are integral to expressing the emotions of ballet. The arms are a body part through which the dancer has the ability to control the perceptions of the audience. It is relatively easy for a well trained dancer to exert the required control over his or her arms, while the audience sees each movement as being free.

When arm movements are required to express a message of meaning of a movement to the audience, they are generally large, overt and overdramatic. The arms can be kept down, when the dancer is attempting to convey a somber tone, while elevated and free if the tone of the movement is lighter.

The arms are able to be easily interpreted by the audience, and for this reason they are well utilized when expressing a feeling or action.
For the most part the hands are required to follow and elongate the line of the arm. However when attempting to display a feeling or emotion to the audience, no body part is more able than the hands. In our normal lives, we constantly use our hands as an additional form of communication, and this is no different on stage.

The hands can control the message being displayed, by the size of their movements in addition to the speed with which they move, small, fast movements can portray a more frantic mood, while large, slow movements, can almost seem melancholy.

However it always the dancers responsibility to remember that the hands should be under constant control, there is no room in ballet for flippant flicking motions from the wrists, rather all movements must have a strict purpose.
Although often neglected, the dancer's head plays a leading role in dance. The head is the body part which guides the remainder of the dancer's body across the stage.

In order for the head to be recognized as an important body part, it should be recognizable as being independent from the remainder of the body. It is important that the neck is held elongated, and the shoulders held down, so that the head is able to stand out from the rest of the dancer’s body.

If the dancer's chin is held strong and proud, the dancer is able to show the audience strength of character. While if the chin is slightly angled toward the ground that same character can come across as being weak.

It is important that a dancer remembers the role of his or her facial
expressions in conveying a message to the audience. Through the use of strong, make up and well developed facial expressions, the dancer is able to make the audience believe anything.
All physical activity requires a certain level of flexibility. The level required for ballet is extremely high, with looseness in the joints of the body being one of the most highly desirable body characteristics among dancers.

Flexibility is an element of ballet with which beginning dancers are able to become very disillusioned, quite quickly. When practicing alongside another dancer who has a much larger range of motion within the joints, a dancer can feel below standard. It is important that every dancer understands that flexibility is an extremely personal issue, everyone has a certain level of genetically determined flexibility.

Some dancers are born flexible, for others the required flexibility demands time and patience. All dancers should know though, that stretching exercises are rewarding, especially when a new level of flexibility has been reached after each session.

Each class should have a large proportion of time set aside for stretching exercises. These exercises should work toward training the muscles and joints to function in the way required.

With time and practice, stretching helps to increase the range of movement within the joints. In terms of ballet this increased range of movements improves the dancer’s ability to perform movements in the correct manner.

In addition to practicing the stretching exercises in the ballet classes, the dancers teacher should educate dance students, providing them with an understanding of the range of motion required, as well as an
understanding of their joints, allowing them to undertake stretching when at home.

### Why Stretching is Important

Stretching is a vital part of any active healthy persons exercise regime. In ballet the need for a stretching plan is made all the more obvious. Flexibility is a highly prized trait among dancers and while some people are lucky to be born with a flexible body, others have to work toward achieving this.

Stretching helps to increase a persons flexibility by training the joints to experience a more expanded range of motion. It also helps to prevent the muscular imbalances that occur when a muscle is over worked, and shortened, such as often happens with the leg muscles of ballet dancers.

Stretching can help prevent injury; this is due to the fact that a muscle or tendon with an increased range of motion will be much less likely to experience tears and other trauma during physical activity.

Stretching is a gradual exercise, and everyone should be prepared to wait a long period of time, before witnessing small gains. However, it is essential that stretching levels are kept constant, as when stretching is stopped, any flexibility gained will be lost.

If any one experiences any recurring pain in the back, hips, shoulders or any other body part, it is essential that they seek professional advice before embarking on a stretching regime, which may cause further damage to the body.
Many experts also believe that stretching aids in the recovery process after a training session, and also may enhance performance in physical activity. However, these claims have been proven inconclusive. The only tangible benefit to be found from stretching is the increased flexibility.

**A Dancer’s Body**

An ideal dancer’s body consists of a small head, naturally elongated neck, and a shortened torso. The dancer should ideally be thin, yet toned, and in no way emaciated looking, and have long, lean legs. Dancers are preferred not to have a long torso, with short legs, rounded shoulders, a short neck, and a large derrière. This is purely for aesthetic reasons.

Bow legs are a trait highly desired among adult ballet dancers. This is because they are able to increase the turnout of the leg, while creating a more visually appealing line. Like wise hyper extension of the knee joint is favored as when dancing en pointe this helps to create a more aesthetically appealing S shape line of the leg.

An ideal foot shape for a dancer is one which is broad and square. This allows the weight of the body to be evenly shared among all five toes when the body is dancing en pointe.

Loose joints are also highly prized among ballet dancers. This may be genetic, with the dancer being born flexible, or something which has been developed through training. Flexibility allows the dancer to adequately perform the majority of the movements in ballet.

These traits are those which are considered ideal in the body of a
professional ballet dancer. However dancers of all shapes and sizes are able to enjoy ballet socially. Body type shouldn’t be considered a turn off when contemplating starting ballet for the fitness, social, or any other recreational benefits.

**Warming Up and Cooling Down**

Warming up and cooling down helps increase the dancers level of performance, and reduce the recovery time, required after each session.

A warm up should include some light cardio, to increase the blood flow through the body, some stretching, to prepare the muscles, and some exercises which are specifically targeted at the muscles groups to be used during the practice or performance.

A warm up allows the blood to flow into the muscles preparing them for activity. It reduces muscle stiffness, and it increases the oxygen levels in the muscles. These all help to protect the dancer from injury.

A cool down may include some stretches, some targeted activities at a much slower pace and a light level of aerobic activity.

The purpose of the cool down is to assist in the dissipation of lactic acid which has accumulated in the muscles, lower the heart rate and reduce the risk of blood pooling in the bodies extremities.

For these reasons, a thorough warm up and cool down is an essential part of ballet. Whether the dancer be participating in an organized practice, practicing on their own, or performing.
Improper Stretching

Improper stretching is any stretching which may be putting the body of the dancer at risk of injury. Any stretches that place extra strain upon the delicate tendon and ligament fibers may cause the body permanent injury, and must be avoided.

It’s important that the dancer does not force any stretch further than what the body is capable of. Stretching is designed to increase the body’s flexibility, gradually and overtime, not instantly.

Overstretching is a very real threat to the muscles of a ballerina. Occasionally a stretch will be completed and no real pain will be felt, however in the days following the stretch, the pain may begin, if this pain gradually fades away with normal daily activity, this is just the muscle repairing itself. However, if several days after the stretching, the muscle is still sore, this may be due to damage which has been sustained in the muscles.

One of the main reasons that dancers, particularly beginners over stretch the body, is due to them watching someone else while performing stretches, and then attempting to reach the same level of flexibility as that person.

Stretching Strategies

Many dancers employ certain strategies to ensure that they are stretching to their ability, and that they aren’t going to hurt themselves.

Dancers who have spent a long time dancing together often have a similar level of flexibility. In these cases, they may stretch together
ensuring that each of them gains a stretch that is up to their level. They do this by gently pushing or pulling each other into the stretch. However, unless a dancer knows that their partner has the same level of flexibility, this could cause injury to either one or both of the dancers.

Other dancers use aids such as blocks (small shaped pieces of foam) or bands, to help them move deeper into the stretch. When doing this however it is important that the dancer still recognizes the limitations of their bodies.

More experienced dancers will often devote a great deal of time to improving the flexibility in a certain area such as the hips. It is not uncommon to notice that a dancer spends a great deal of time, in one particular stretch, occasionally they may watch television, or listen to music while doing this. Until a dancer is fully aware of their own body however this would not be recommended as it puts the body at a greater risk of being overstretched.

It’s important that each dancer works out a strategy that will allow him or her to gain the most stretch out of their own body. Whether following one of the strategies mention, or trying out another, it is important that they first discuss this with someone else to ensure their body is not being pushed too hard.
Stretching Exercises

Neck

The neck is full of very vulnerable and delicate bones. As such, any exercise which is designed to stretch the muscles in the neck must not to put any strain onto the bones.

An ideal stretch involves the dancer seated, or standing with a straight back, lowered shoulders, and elongated neck. The dancer slowly moves the head to the side, until a slight stretch is felt
running down the stretched side of the neck.

Once this stretch is felt this position should be held for a slow count of 10. The dancer shouldn’t use the hand or anything else to press the head down, which can cause extra strain on the neck.

The head should then be returned to the center, before the stretch is repeated on the other side. Finally the head must return to the center position.

**Shoulders**

To stretch the shoulders the dancer should be again sitting or standing with a straight back lowered shoulders, and elongated neck. The dancer then raises one arm, stretching it across the body at chest height (this is the stretching arm). The other arm (supporting arm) is then wrapped around this arm, so that the stretching arm rests in the elbow.
The supporting arm gently increases the stretching force on the shoulder, until a decent stretch in the shoulder joint is felt. This position is then held for a slow count of 10. Following the stretch, both arms are released, before the stretch is repeated on the other arm.

**Arms**

![Arms](image)

To stretch the arms, a sitting or standing position with a straight back, elongated neck, and lowered shoulders is assumed. The dancer then raises the arm to be stretched, and bending the elbow reaches as far down the opposite shoulder blade as possible.

The other arm is then also raised with a bent elbow, while the hand pushes down on the elbow of the stretching arm, increasing the level of stretch. Once a decent amount of stretch is felt in the arm, this position is held for a slow count of 10.
Following this, both arms are released, and the action is repeated on the other arm.

**Back**

The muscles of the back are very delicate, and so care must be taken when stretching these muscles, not to stretch them too far, as this can cause damage which can delay training for months.

In order to stretch the back, the dancer must lie on the ground, facing toward the ceiling. Both arms are out at the sides. The dancer bends one leg at the knee, raising it, and rolling the lower half of the body, so that this leg crosses over the leg that is still straight.

The dancer is aiming to reach the knee to the floor. Once a degree of stretch is felt in the back, the dancer must hold the pose for a slow count of 10, before releasing the leg, and assuming the original position. This action is then repeated with the other leg.
This stretch is borrowed from yoga where it is called, the serpent pose. This stretch involves the dancer lying on the ground face down, with the hands placed shoulder width, elbows bent, and palms facing the floor. The dancer’s legs should be touching at the knees, and the ankles, and the toes should be flexed.

Form here the dancer presses the palms down into the ground, the elbows straightening, and the top half of the body lifting off the mat.

At its peak this stretch involves the chest open, the head facing up, and the lower back being stretched. It is important that the dancer doesn’t over extend this stretch, as this may cause damage to the lower back.
The exercise used to stretch the abdominal muscles is taken from Pilates, and is known as the Hundred. This involves the dancer lying facing the ceiling, with arms beside the body, and legs straight and together.

From here the dancer takes a breath, in which the core muscles are engaged. The legs are brought up to an angle which is comfortable for the dancer, as are the arms.

From here the dancer slowly bats the arms, as if batting the surface of water, while slowly breathing in and out. Each breath should take five pulses, or “bats” of the arms.

The dancer should aim to achieve 100 arm movements, or 20 breaths in this movement.
The stretch to increase a dancer’s turnout involves the dancer lying face down on the floor. From here the dancer’s legs are moved so that they are bent out at the knees and come together at the feet. The hips must remain in contact with the ground.

The dancer is required to push, the groin further into this stretch, until a deep stretch is able to be felt along the inside of the legs. This pose should then be held for a slow count of 10.

Ideally this stretch should be repeated at least once, with the dancer aiming to push further into the stretch, and effectively achieving a more pronounced turn out each time.
The quads can be stretched by the dancer lying down with their stomach to the floor, or standing, with both legs stretched out straight. From here one leg is brought up so that the heel reaches the buttock. The dancer must then reach and pull the foot in toward the body until a stretch can be felt in the quads.

This stretch should then be held for a slow count of 10 before being released. This stretch should then be repeated on the other leg.

Performing this stretch on the floor is more effective as it allows the dancer to feel if the stretching leg is in the right position. The front of the stretching leg should maintain contact with the ground.

Stretching the quad muscles helps to prevent injuries not only to the quads, but also to the knees as the level of support is increased.
To stretch the hamstring muscle the dancer should lie on the floor, on their back. From here the stretching leg should be bent at the knee and brought in toward the dancer's chest.

The dancer then wraps his or her arms around the leg pulling it in closer to achieve a deeper stretch in the hamstring muscle. Once a stretch is felt this position it should be held for a slow count of 10.

The stretching leg should then be released and this stretch performed on the opposite leg.
Another popular hamstring stretch involves the dancer again lying on the floor facing toward the ceiling. Both legs are stretched out straight in front of the dancer with knees touching and the toes pointed.

The dancer then raises one leg, keeping this leg straight and bringing it toward the body. The dancer’s arms should reach out and wrap around this leg, holding it in position once a stretch is felt. This position should be held for a slow count of 10. Following this, the leg should be released, and return to the original stretched out position. The stretch is then repeated on the other leg.

It is important that a dancer who experiences any problems with their lower back does not perform this exercise, as there is a great deal of strain placed upon the muscles and bones of the lower back as the leg is brought in toward the body.
This hamstring stretch again requires the dancer to begin by lying on their back, with legs stretched out in and the knees together. This movement requires that the dancer raises the leg to be stretched, and pulling it in to the side of the body.

Once a deep stretch is felt in the hamstring this position should be held for a slow count of 10. The stretching leg is then released and returned to the original position. The stretch is then repeated on the other leg.

This stretch is designed to provide a slightly different stretch of the hamstring than the previous stretch, and in many cases, the stretch feels much deeper.
This stretch designed to increase the flexibility in the hamstrings involves the dancer lying on the floor on his or her side. The body should be in a straight line. The dancer may use the arm closest to the ground to provide support for the head, while the other arm helps to balance the body.

The dancer then moves the leg closest to the ceiling upwards as far as is possible. Once in this position, the dancer holds this stretch for a slow count of 10, before releasing. This stretch is then repeated once more on this leg with the aim of getting the leg closer to the dancers head. The dancer then relaxes, before rolling over. The stretch is then repeated twice on the other leg.

This stretch helps to prepare the dancers body for kicks, and arabesques. It is important that a dancer realizes his or her personal limitations with this stretch, as it is quite easy for the dancers hamstring to tear.
The buttocks are often neglected in a dancer's stretching schedule, however they are often tight, and if stretched properly will help improve a dancer’s performance. One of the most popular stretches for the buttocks involves the dancer being seated on the floor, with their legs crossed in front of the body.

The dancer then bends the body forward at the waist, walking forward with the hands until a stretch can be felt in the buttocks, at this point, the position should be held for a slow count of 10, before the dancer attempts to walk the hands further forward sinking down into the stretch for another slow count of 10.

After this the dancer’s body should return to an upright position, and the crossed position of the legs should be swapped over so that the leg which was on the bottom is now on the top. This stretch is then repeated.
The movement used to stretch the hips, is not unlike a lunge. To be performed correctly, the dancer needs to start off by standing up straight. From here one leg is stepped forward a reasonable distance. The dancer’s body is lowered so that the back leg is resting on its knee, and the knee of the front leg is forming a 90 degree angle.

Once in this position, the dancer must push the body down, feeling the stretch across the hips. If the stretch is unable to be felt, the dancer should push the pelvis further into the stretch. This should then be held until the stretch disappears.

The dancer then returns to the standing position, and steps the other leg forward, and repeats the action with this leg.
Another stretch which is useful for increasing the flexibility in a dancer’s hips, involves the dancer lying on the floor, on his or her back. With the legs stretched out straight in front. From here the knees are bent in a way that the soles of the feet come together on the floor in front of the dancer. This is almost the same action used in the stretch for the dancer’s turnout.

As the dancer’s feet come together, the knees will rise up. The dancer should aim to force the knees back toward the ground. Once a strong stretch is felt the dancer should maintain this position, for a slow count of 10. After being released this exercise should be repeated with the dancer aiming to get the knees closer to the ground this time.

It is important that the dancer stretches the hips as flexibility within the hips assists in improving the dancers turnout. As well as helping to prevent many injuries.
The ankles are one of the easiest body parts to stretch. A good way of increasing the flexibility in the ankles, involves the dancer sitting on the ground with a straight back, and his or her legs stretched out straight in front of the body with the knees, and ankles together, and the feet relaxed and pointing toward the sky.

The dancer then slowly points the toes. The dancer then relaxes the foot again, and repeats this movement another 10 times.
Another good ankles stretch involves the dancer again sitting on the ground with his or her legs stretched straight in front of the body and knees and ankles together. From this position the dancer leans forward from the waist, and grasps the toes.

With a rounded back, and shoulders, the dancer then gently pulls the toes back toward the body. A stretch should be felt in the calf muscles at the back of the leg. Once this is felt the position is held for a slow count of ten before the hold is released. This stretch can then be repeated.

It is important for a dancer to remember to properly stretch the ankles, as stretching helps provide the strength required to perform ballet with a minimal risk of injury.
Ballet Injuries

Classical ballet has one of the highest rates for participant injury out of any physical activity, ranking higher even than many contact sports, including football and hockey. This statistic includes injuries to the ankles, knees and feet, and eating disorders.

There is an obvious difference between the injuries suffered by ballet dancers and those suffered through other forms of physical activity. The injuries of ballet dancers are largely confined to those which are caused by incorrect technique, or overuse of the muscles, bones and joints.

Overuse injuries are caused when the dancer fails to allow enough time between dance practices, and performances to allow the body to properly heal.

Incorrect technique injuries can be caused when the dancers technique is incorrect, and so undue strain is being placed on one part of the dancers body.

A full accredited dance teacher should be able to recognize both scenarios, and assist the dancer in rectifying this, and subsequently reduce the risk of the dancer obtaining an injury.

The risk of injury, should in no way act as a deterrent for anyone wishing to start ballet, as with proper management, and the implementation of a couple of preventative measures the risk is greatly diminished.
**Typical Ballet Injuries**

Ballerinas are commonly injured in a few key areas. Most injuries are usually due to either over use, where the body has not been allowed adequate rest, or when a dancer attempts to do movements that are more advanced, than their body is able to handle.

A dancer's foot is required to deal with a lot of pressure and common injuries to the feet include, toe nail problems, such as ingrown toe nails, bruising beneath the nail, infections, and the nail separating from the skin. The foot is also susceptible to calluses and blisters. While the bones and muscles in the foot are at risk of muscles strains, bunions, fractures, deformities, and sprains.

The legs of a dancer are at risk of sustaining shin splints, strains, fractures, and compartment syndrome, where the muscles become too developed, too quickly.

The knees of a dancer are extremely susceptible to damage. This can include ligament damage, cartilage damage, tendonitis, inflammation within the joint, and damage to the patella, or knee bone.

A dancer's hip, can also experience injury, with the main causes being stress fractures, arthritis, tendonitis, inflammation of the connective tissue.

The last area which is overly open to injury during ballet is the spine. Common injuries to the spine among dancers can include deformity of the vertebrae, dislocation of the vertebrae, lower back strains and spasms, herniated disks, sprains in the pelvic region and sprains of the spine.
What you should do when you are injured

The first step in managing an injury is to follow the RICER method of injuring treatment. The ‘R’ in RICER stands for rest. The dancer must rest the injury, so that no further injury can occur. The next step is Ice. Ice should be applied to the injury to help reduce swelling. Next is Compression. This is done by tightly bandaging the injured area, being careful to allow the blood to still flow freely. E stands for elevation. The dancer should be positioned so that the injured body heart is resting above heart level. Finally is Referral, where the injured dancer is referred to a health professional.

Seeking the advice of a professional is one of the key elements in managing a ballet injury. Self diagnosing injuries may lead to worsening of the original injury, and therefore prolonging the time the dancer is unable to practice.

The ideal person to see for an injury is a family doctor, or physiotherapist. The next step will come down to the individual injury, and a plan of treatment will be prescribed by the health professional.

It is important that the dancer does not return to dancing until advised to do so. The health professional will know when the injured body part is able to handle the pressure applied through dancer, and their opinion should be strictly followed.

Injury Prevention

Although there is no way that a dancer can completely eliminate the risk of injury, there are a few strategies which a dancer may employ to help reduce the risk. These can include thoroughly warming up, and cooling down, ensuring that the body has adequate rest, and
dancing to ability, rather than the ability of another.

Warming up and cooling down are an important part of a ballet lesson. In the warm up, the muscles are given time, and exercises which allow the blood to begin flowing to these areas. This aids in preparing the muscles for movements which are outside of the usual range of movement. While the Cool down helps to disperse the lactic acid that builds up during exercise and causes cramps.

Making sure that the body has adequate rest, is an important component of avoiding injury. When the body is pushed to a level that is further than its capabilities, small tears are caused in the muscle fibers. With rest, these tears heal, and increase the strength and/or flexibility of the dancer. With no rest, these tears continue to increase, and cause over use injuries. Overuse injuries can also affect the bones. Tiny fractures may appear in the bones, and without rest, are unable to heal.

When a dancer dances above their own ability, they put themselves at increased risk of injury. Such as if a dancer moves to dancing en pointe without being strong enough, the foot will be damaged, as it attempts to cope with this level of dancing.

While there is no way of completely protecting a dancer from injury, eliminating these risk factors will ensure that the body remains much healthier, and the risk of injury is much lower.
Ballet Stories

Ballet is often used to tell a story. This is where the dance movement, costumes, music, and scenery all come together to entertain the audience. The most famous stories include Sleeping beauty and Swan Lake.

In most cases, dancers are usually reasonably advanced before performing a story. This is due to the large amount of training required to learn the choreography, as well as the advanced level of ability needed to accurately dance the ballet.

The role of the lead character is highly prized and the audition process can be long and arduous. This is followed by extremely extensive training. Therefore a dancer must be absolutely certain they want to be a part of the ballet before embarking on auditioning for this role.

Being in the audience of a famous ballet such as Swan Lake is extremely rewarding, and before any dancer considers auditioning for a role in a ballet it would be strongly advisable that they have already seen the ballet performed.
The Nutcracker

The Nutcracker is a Christmas story written by Marius Petipa in the late 1800’s. He based the story on a tale written by a German author, E.T.A Hoffmann. Choreographed by Lev Ivanov and composed by Tchaikovsky. The first performance of this ballet took place in 1892 at the Maryinsky Theatre in St Petersburg, Russia.

One Christmas Eve many years ago in Germany, a well-to-do family was hosting a big festive party. Clara and her little brother Fritz were so excited they could hardly wait for the party to begin. After the guests finally arrived, all the children played together dancing and singing. Herr Drosselmeyer, Clara’s godfather, arrived to surprise everyone with his magic tricks and life size dolls as presents to the children including a toy rat for Fritz. “Now, I have a special gift for a special girl,” said Drosselmeyer as he drew a painted wooden soldier out of his deep pocket. “What a wonderful nutcracker,” says Clara. “Thank you. This is the best present of all.”

“Give it to me,” shouted Fritz, as he jealously snatched the wooden doll out of Clara’s hands. The doll slipped and fell to the floor breaking the nutcracker’s jaw. Drosselmeyer quickly bandaged the nutcracker’s head with his handkerchief and promised Clara “He will be fine by morning.” Fritz was sent straight to bed for his misbehavior. Clara tucked her wounded toy into one of her doll’s beds under the tree and went to sleep too.

During the night Clara tiptoed downstairs to make sure her nutcracker was safe. To her relief, he was exactly where she had put him and his jaw had been fixed. She fell asleep with the doll in her arms. In her dreams she hears strange noises coming from around the Christmas tree. Suddenly the room is filled with giant mice and
toy soldiers. The mice led by their king attack the soldiers. The nutcracker, now life size, battles with the Mouse King in a sword fight. Eventually, with Clara’s help, the Nutcracker and his soldiers defeat the Rat King and his army, but the Nutcracker is wounded in the fray. Clara’s Uncle Drosselmeyer appears and magically turns the Nutcracker into a real prince – the Nutcracker Prince.

The Nutcracker Prince takes Clara on a journey through the land of the Snow Queen, and they finally arrive in the Land of the Sugar Plum Fairy. The prince tells the story of the battle to the people in the Sugar Plum Fairy’s court, and of how brave Clara was. Clara then takes the seat of honour and is treated to a display. Coffee from Arabia, Chocolate from Spain, Tea from China, Bon Bons from France, Marzipan, and finally is transfixed by a wonderful dance by the Nutcracker Prince and the Sugar Plum Fairy herself.

Finally, after many hours of fun, Clara becomes sleepy, and the Nutcracker Prince takes her back to her home. Clara wakes to find herself back in the sitting room, and hugs her Nutcracker doll which was where she had left him.
Swan Lake

The composer Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky was commissioned by Vladimir Petrovich Begichev to compose the music for Swan Lake in 1875. Although Swan Lake was originally thought to be a failure due to its first choreography by Reisinger, it actually was a success in terms of number of performances. The choreography that we see today descends from the original choreography of Marius Petipa and Lev Ivanov for the Maryinsky Theatre. The ‘white acts’ of Swan Lake were the first to be choreographed, and this was done by Petipa’s assistant Lev Ivanov. Petipa then added to the choreography in order to stage a full length version of Swan Lake in 1895.

The story begins with a celebration of Prince Siegfried’s birthday. During the wonderful festivities that take place, the Queen presents him with a beautiful crossbow as a present, and quietly tells him that he has come of age and needs to find himself a woman to marry. Lost in thought, Prince Siegfried sees a flock of swans and decides to use his new crossbow to hunt them by the lake. There he meets a beautiful woman named Odette by the lake surrounded by swans, with whom he immediately falls in love. She tells him that she is Odette, the Queen of the Swans, who was kidnapped and put under a spell by the evil sorcerer, Rothbart. By night she is human and can wonder around freely, but by day she has to remain as a swan in the lake. Only if one swears to love and marry her and remains true to that promise, will the spell be broken and she will no longer become a swan. However, if he was to fail her, she would return to being a swan and die.

Prince Siegfried swears to love her before Rothbart appears and takes Odette away. Rothbart disguises Odile (his neice) as Odette, and sends her to the castle to betray Prince Siegfried. Meanwhile, the Queen has brought many a fair maiden to the castle

201
in order to find a suitor for her son. He dances with them, but refuses to marry any of them. Odile then arrives at the castle and dances with Prince Siegfried, persuading him that she is really Odette. Prince Siegfried then declares his love for her, breaking his pledge to his true love. Rothbart appears and reveals that he has betrayed Odette, and reveals her to the court for all to see. Siegfried rushes to the lake to beg forgiveness from Odette. He fights with Rothbart and defeats him in order to break his pledge with Odile and restore his faithfulness to Odette.

The evil spell is broken, and Siegfried and Odette are united in their love for one another.

There are varying endings to this story, some say she dies, other say she lives, and still others say the both her and Siegfried jump into the lake to be with each other in death.

**Sleeping Beauty**

The earliest known production of the Sleeping Beauty or la belle au bois dormant is in 1825 by Pierre Gardel for the Paris Opera with music composed by Carafa. There were several versions of this particular production until the version which we are most familiar with was made. This was the version by Marius Petipa for the Maryinsky Theatre in Russia, with music composed by Peter Ilyich Tschaikovsky in 1890.

The King and Queen expect a child, and they give birth to a daughter whom they name Aurora. At her Christening, many of the townsfolk arrive, and the fairies of the land are invited to the event. They all impart upon her a gift – beauty, song, temperament, grace and generosity. However, before the Lilac Fairy is able to share her gift, the evil Carabosse arrives, claiming not to have been invited to
Aurora’s christening. As a result of this negligence, she imparts her own ‘gift’ – that Aurora will prick her finger on a spinning wheel needle on her 16th birthday, and die. The Lilac Fairy confronts her and states that Aurora will not die, but will sleep for one hundred years with the rest of the kingdom, and upon a prince kissing Aurora, the spell would be broken. Although the King and Queen are somehow comforted by this, they take every precaution including banning every single spinning wheel from the country.

Aurora’s 16th birthday arrives, and celebrations begin which includes an elaborate party. At the celebrations, a strange woman arrives bearing a bouquet of flowers as a gift. Aurora accepts the gift joyfully, only to prick her finger on the hidden poisoned needle. Carabosse reveals herself to the court triumphantly before being confronted by the Lilac Fairy, who orders her to leave. The Lilac Fairy turns to the distraught King and Queen, and casts a spell which puts the entire Kingdom into a deep sleep until the time would come when the spell was to be broken.

One hundred years later, Prince Florimund and his hunting party arrive at the Kingdom, which has now become overgrown with vines and weeds. He sees a vision of the most beautiful woman brought to him by the Lilac Fairy, and he is compelled to go to her. He cuts his way through to the castle only to meet Carabosse in a fierce battle in order to reach the castle. He defeats Carabosse and enters the castle to find Aurora asleep inside. He kisses her, and the whole Kingdom awakes to celebrate their marriage and live happily ever after.
Giselle

Giselle is one of the most well-known romantic ballets created in 1841 by Jules Perrot and Jean Coralli, with other versions of the ballet by choreographers such as Marius Petipa. The ballet was choreographed on one of the rising ballerinas of that time, Carlotta Grisi, and was written for her by Theophile Gautier. The music was written by Adolphe Adam, although a full score has been very difficult to come by.

A fragile young girl named Giselle, lives with her mother, Berthe, in a small German village. One day during the wine festivals, Duke Albrecht visits the village disguised as a peasant. They fall in love and they dance for everyone at the festival. Another young man, Hilarion, who has always loved Giselle, suspects that Albrecht is not who he says he is and becomes jealous of him. Berthe, in the meantime, is worried about her daughter’s frailty and that if this man breaks her heart Giselle would be claimed by the Wilies, the ghosts of virgin-brides who have their heart broken on their wedding night. One day, the Duke Albrecht’s fiancée visits the village with the Prince of Courland’s hunting party. Hilarion takes this opportunity to reveal Duke Albrecht’s true identity and his deception of Giselle. Giselle falls into a fit of hysteria, losing her mind and eventually dies in her mother’s arms.

Giselle becomes a Wilie and joins the others who reside in the woods and are lead by the Queen of the Wilies, Myrtha. Their purpose is to accost any young man who enters the woods after nightfall, and force them to dance to their deaths. Hilarion enters the woods first, and death becomes his fate. Albrecht is then caught by the Wilies, and he is brought to the Queen. Just as he is about to meet the same fate, Giselle comes forward to protect him. It is only her pure love for him that saves his life and when dawn comes, she
departs with the rest of the Wilies. Albrecht says his final farewell.

Coppélia

The ballet, Coppélia, was originally choreographed by Arthur Saint-Leon, a famous male dancer of the time, between 1868 and 1870. The score was written by a famous composer, Leo Delibes. Other productions have surfaced in many countries, including that of Marius Petipa in 1884.

Coppélia is about a girl named Swanhilda who is betrothed to a boy named Franz. During the village’s annual harvest festival, Swanhilda catches Franz trying to get the attention of an attractive woman sitting in the window of Dr. Coppelius, the town’s strange toymaker. Swanhilda becomes very annoyed at Franz, and is even more irate when the mysterious woman does not respond to her salutations.

During the annual festival the young couple are encouraged to take part in a ritual of waving wheatears to each other, and if it makes a rattling sound they will be married. Unfortunately it does not rattle, but Franz thinks it is a silly ritual and Swanhilda soon dances with her friends and they are happy once more.

Swanhilda and her friends see Dr. Coppelius coming towards them and he drops his key during a scuffle with some of the village’s youths. They decide to enter his house to meet this mysterious woman and discover that in his workshop are many automated dolls. They discover that the mysterious woman is also a doll but are caught by Dr. Coppelius. All except Swanhilda escape, and she disguises herself as the beautiful doll. At the same time Franz climbs into the toymaker’s window to find the mysterious woman who he
saw in the window. The toymaker drugs him and binds him to his magical wheel in order to transfer his life to his beloved doll to make her come to life. Swanhilda plays along with the game to make it seem as if Coppelia has come alive, all along trying to save Franz. Eventually the toymaker discovers that his spell has not worked and the two youths leave him in the workshop in dismay.

After the adventure has ended, Franz and Swanhilda realize that they do love each other and marry in the village’s festival.
Conclusion

Hopefully you have been provided with an insight into the world of ballet. Whether you are a dancer, friend of dancing or just a fan, this guide has worked toward dispelling many of the myths associated with ballet.

In no way however, should this guide be used as a replacement for receiving lessons from an accredited teacher. An accredited teacher has the required skills to ensure that each movement is performed accurately and the risk of injury is greatly minimized.

Above all, the most important thing is that every dancer enjoys ballet dancing, and every spectator enjoys watching.

Thanks for reading,

Anita Leembruggen