



Criteria for Beginning and Continuing Pointe Work

Pointe work is an exciting and essential part of an advanced ballet student's training. Our students prepare for pointe work during each and every ballet class. Going *en pointe* is a big step and requires commitment on the part of the student.

The following is not an exhaustive checklist for beginning pointe work, but a guideline for determining whether a dancer may be ready to begin the next step in her training.

- The student must be 11 years or older.
- The student should have at least 2 years of dance training.
- The student must be taking a minimum of two technique classes a week consistently. At least one of these is ballet technique.
- The student must complete a Pointe Physical Evaluation.
- The student must have sufficient strength to do the following:
 - Hold her turnout while dancing.
 - Show a good use of plié.
 - Point her feet while dancing.
- The student must be responsible enough to bring all the ballet equipment she will need to class (to include proper attire and grooming).
- The student must be in good health and able to take a whole class. If the student frequently needs to rest because of illness or injury, she is not strong enough for the extra demands that pointe work requires.

A dancer's ability to begin pointe work will be assessed with regard to a number of factors to include: strength, length and intensity of training, proper placement of the body, bone development, and instructor recommendation.

Dancers who have been selected to begin pointe work, will be notified in writing by the Ballet Director over the summer.

Please feel free to speak with the Ballet Director or your ballet teacher about any concerns you may have about pointe work.

About Pointe Work

Ballerinas first started dancing en pointe (or toe) in the 19th century. It made them appear light and agile and became an important and admired quality of ballet that remains today. Although dancing en pointe appears effortless, it is the result of very hard work and discipline.

How are pointe shoes different from regular ballet shoes?

Ballet shoes (or flat shoes) are made of leather or canvas and are designed to be flexible enough for the dancer to move on the balls of her feet. The tips of pointe shoes are made of layers of satin, paper, and burlap glued together and hammered into a platform so that the dancer can stand on her toes. The vast majority of pointe shoes are still made by hand which is the reason for both their integrity and expense.

How much do pointe shoes cost and how often do dancers purchase them?

Pointe shoes cost from \$60-\$120. It is important for students to find a proper fitting shoe that will allow for optimal performance. Beginning pointe students rarely need more than two pairs of shoes in the first year and often use the same pair throughout the first year of study. The frequency that shoes need to be replaced varies by dancer and shoe. Your instructor will assist you in determining when new shoes are needed and finding the right shoe for your foot.

Is dancing on pointe dangerous?

If a young dancer attempts pointe work without proper strength and technique, there is a risk of serious injury or damage to undeveloped foot bones. However, if a dancer is truly ready, part of a gradual and carefully supervised program, and pointe shoes are well chosen and properly fitted, there is minimal risk of injury even if bones are not fully formed. Starting pointe work is not just a question of age or physical maturity; readiness depends on strength, technique, attitude and commitment.

Preparation for Pointe Work

Below is a list of concepts and exercises that can be helpful in preparing for pointe work. Consistent and correct execution of these exercises and concepts often indicates a dancer is ready to begin pointe work.

Strong Pliés. Students must use their pliés while dancing to get en pointe. Pliés should be done with the knees pointing straight over their toes and with the heels down. Bodies should be straight, and arms should be strong and properly placed.

Pointed feet! Students must point their feet while dancing in order to strengthen the muscles that pointe-work requires. These muscles need to be strong enough to support their body weight on the ends of their toes. If the student is not in the habit of using these foot muscles then they will not be able to support themselves en pointe.

Turnout. A basic concept of ballet, turnout makes it possible to do certain steps. Holding turnout while dancing is a good sign of strength. If the student does not have the strength to maintain her turnout, she is not strong enough for pointe.

Pique passé with straight leg. Student should have enough strength to push themselves onto demi-pointe. This step is harder to do en pointe and a bent leg is usually a sign of weakness or improper step preparation.

Balance on demi (half) pointe. The student should be well-placed (hips square, back straight, legs turned-out), and have the strength to balance on demi-pointe. Balance is more difficult to correct en pointe, as the surface area for balancing is smaller and the strength requirements are greater. Practice balances of 15-30 seconds with minimal ankle movement and light use of the barre. Try balance in: passé, coupe, fifth (both feet) position and first position.

Relevés in the center without stopping. Strength for pointe work is achieved by repeating exercises. Relevés are excellent for building up calf muscle strength, which is vital for pointe work. This exercise is more difficult to do en pointe because of the extra height, so strong relevés on demi-pointe is a good sign of strength. Practice series of 16 with proper placement and turn out.

Allegro. A series of quick jumps is a good way to measure how strong a student's classical technique is. It is important to have the strength to maintain turnout and proper plié during dance sequences. Practice series of sautés in 1st, changements, and echappes sautés.

Am I Ready for Pointe Work?

Age and years of technical training are important factors in indicating preparedness for pointe work. However, dancers must be proficient in many technical skills before they will be invited to begin pointe work. Below is a checklist teachers use to determine a dancer's technical aptitude to begin pointe work:

Turn-out used consistently and correctly in:

- Plié
- Relevé
- Retiré
- Pirouette
- Petite Allegro: sauté, changement, jeté, etc...
- Tendu (to include stretched ankle and no curling of toes)

Relevé

- Stretched ankle
- Stretched toes
- Maintains rotation for 8+ counts
- Maintains rotation after successive relevé
- Height of the relevé

Pirouette

- Turn is clean, correct, consistent and turned out
- Consistent, correct preparation
- Dancer can spot
- Clear and strong landing
- Can do one or more rotations while maintaining correct technique
- Arms are properly placed and core is strong

Demonstrated Understanding of Ballet Technique

- Use of plié to jump
- Use of plié to relevé
- Ability to engage the correct muscles to maintain turnout throughout exercises
- Strong ballet vocabulary

Dancers that have not mastered the above skills will not be invited to begin pointe work. If you have questions about your technical level, Miss Maggie will be happy to meet with you.