



DANCE

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TECHNIQUE

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For most of you, it's that time of year when you are working hard to clean up and improve those routines! However, while you spend the majority of time at practice focusing on your routines, you shouldn't forget to continue improving upon the most critical element in dance ... **TECHNIQUE!** Technique is the basis of all fundamentals of dance, from holding your body correctly while performing, to executing skills properly in a routine. Strong technique extends across all areas of dance, regardless of the style of your routine. Whether it's jazz, pom, hip hop, or kick, there is always an element of technique that can be improved upon. So give your girls a much needed break from routine cleaning at practice, and work on their technique for at least a half hour each time you meet! Below, you will find some helpful tips to use with your teams at practice to improve their overall technique as dancers.

BODY ALIGNMENT

Sometimes dancers get caught up in the choreography and forget to hold themselves correctly when dancing. Whether your dancers are beginners or more advanced, it never hurts to go back over the basics of body alignment. Have them stand with their feet together, hands by their sides, and go from the top down of how they should be holding their bodies:

- Lifted chin, elongated neck, eyes off the floor
- Shoulders pressed naturally down and back
- Rib cage closed, as if there was a safety pin holding it together
- Stomach muscles engaged
- Hips held even and level
- Knees relaxed, not locked
- Feet parallel or turned out (remind them that their turnout comes from their hips, with their knees in a line over their toes)

POM & KICK



- All motions should be held in front of the dancer, to where they can see their hands using their peripheral vision
- Watch for broken wrists (a line should be drawn from the shoulder to the middle finger of the fist)
- Drill your dancers on motions as you call them and they execute. The burn sensation a dancer feels when they have worked the muscle to the max is a sign that the exercises are working. Stop if you feel any pain!

- Distinguish between breaking your arms from one motion to the next or keeping them straight
- With kicks, backs should be straight, chins lifted, toes pointed, and hips level

TURNS

- Begin with their prep, making sure they have an even weight distribution between both legs
- Have them practice moving from the prep to the turn position without the actual rotation to practice finding their center of balance (remind your dancers that if they will execute proper body alignment they will find their center for turns)
- Practice spotting by going across the floor doing chaine turns, which are turns that link together by simply staying on the balls of the feet and spotting as you take tiny steps (they should be focusing on one spot and whipping their head directly back to it after each rotation)
- Work on control by having them walk across the floor starting on the right foot 1-2-3, prep on 4, balance or turn 5-6, down to their right knee 7-8 (this will teach them to have control and to remain lifted coming out of their turns)
- Execute turns on the floor, whether singles, doubles, triples, etc. watching for shoulders that go up, arms that wind up before the turn, dancers who do not remain on the ball of their foot for the duration of the turn, and hips that are uneven.

LEAPS AND JUMPS

- Constantly remind your dancers to point and stretch their feet the second they leave the ground
- Encourage your dancers to use their plie instead of their arms to gain height on any jump/leap. Plie, push off both feet to go up and your dancers will "fly." Make sure to land in plie out of any aerial movement to avoid injuries!

- With toe touches or leaps in second, make sure their hips are level and their bottoms are tucked under
- Always have them land in plie in elevation skills, with knees bent, to avoid injury
- Watch their eyes, have them try lifting their chins, to gain even more height

Once your students master the basics, your dancers are ready to challenge themselves with more advanced skills and technical elements. Dance is like building blocks, after one skill is mastered, your dancers will be ready for the next. Practice and repetition are the keys to success. If you are worried about incorporating difficulty, remember that difficulty in a routine is not necessarily measured by the level of the skill performed, but rather the proper execution of it.



TIPS FOR TURN TECHNIQUE

As forms of dance vary, so do the types and styles of turns. One thing, however, remains constant, and that is the basic technique elements of the turn and how to execute it.

The body needs to move as one unit, not in pieces. Body placement is of utmost importance. Your dancer's square (square formed from shoulder to hip to hip to shoulder) must always be in alignment, with your rib cage pressing together, sternum open, shoulders pressed down and arms properly placed (not thrown) for each and every turn. Here are some examples of basic elements of what is a good turn. Please note as forms of dance

vary, so does the way a turn may look and be executed. These are just one example of how to properly execute these turns.

Hint for arms on turns – In any turn you want to use centrifugal force. You want to bring your arms into the center of your body, you don't want to push them around and make your center in front of your body.

Hint for a better releve in turns – You want to be up as high on the ball of your foot as you can. Use the area just behind your toes as a platform. Spread your weight equally among this area as not to be forward or back on your releve.

All elements given are for turns on the right side – just reverse it for the left.

CHAINE TURN

Definition: Turns that are linked together; chain.

Preparation tendu devant. Turn hips to direction you are turning as feet move into a fourth position (not very wide – chaines should not be used for large moving steps). Make sure as you take this first movement of the turn that the left side of the body moves with you so that the ribs stay together. Pull the arms into first position (left should meet right) as you are stepping left and rotating the hips completely around for one turn. Continue the process for as many turns as you want. Use your head to spot. Keep your eyes focused on one spot in the direction you are turning. As you execute the turn leave the head there until the last moment when you have to whip it around to complete the turn. Whip it into exactly the same spot you started the head in to keep you in a straight line. You should be in a high releve throughout the turn, pulled up through the hips and thighs with your hips always as your guide for placement. In using the arms please note they should come from the back – not be a separate unit.

PIQUE TURN

Definition: To prick.

One of the most important concepts on this turn is to reach way out onto a straight leg into releve. As you turn, the hips need to push to center yourself.

Preparation tendu devant. Plie the left leg and carry the right leg to a la second en la air. Push off the supporting leg and reach the right leg and hips way out into fourth position to the direction you are turning. You want to feel a big push up and out through

your derriere. As this push happens the left leg comes into turn out passe while the left arm pulls in to the right into first (as in chaine) and makes one or more rotations to the right. To finish the turn, bring the passe leg down behind into fifth position and begin the process again. Spot as you would a chaine.

JAZZ PIROUETTE

Definition: Pirouette means turn on one foot.

Pirouettes can be done from many different preparations and with the working leg in many different positions. This will be an example of an outside pirouette in passe.

Preparation parallel first. Tendu a la second with arms pushing to strong second. Carry the right leg back into a fourth position plie arms follow. Body should be straight up and down with the left leg into the ground and the right heel lifted. Make sure your dancer's square is in proper position with hips center and upper body center to forward with those ribs in. All at one time lift to releve on the left leg with the right leg pulling into a high passe turning the body one or more rotations to the right. Arms pull into first as in a chaine or pique. To finish the turn, end in plie parallel first. The two biggest technical mistakes that beginning dancers make in a pirouette turn is they try and whip their arms to give them momentum. This will just pull the dancer off balance. All the arms need to do is pull together and with proper position and spotting and a lot of practice the single turns will turn into doubles and triples etc. The second mistake is when the left heel begins the turn before the right leg even leaves to come into passe. This makes the pirouette choppy and off balance. All movement needs to happen simultaneously to make the turn work. Let your arms come from the back and spot as you would in the other turns. Practice hitting spots on specific counts and this will clean up the pirouette technique even more.

Once you master a passe pirouette, try it again with the working leg in coupe or cou de pied (neck of the foot) or even attitude. These are all pirouettes just in different positions.

PIROUETTE A LA SECOND

Begin in fourth position plie, body front, and arms in third. Hips make one rotation in plie as right leg moves into second position at 90° releve (beginners may want to start at 45°). As you spot to return to the front, plie then releve up again (make sure to keep the right leg level and steady. You may do singles or more before you take the plie again. You need to have a good spot and level shoulder and head. Arms can vary, but the most simple is to open second and pull into first. Try and finish turn segment with a passe pirouette and land.

FOUETTE TURN

Definition: A continuous turn on one leg with the other leg whipping around in rond de jambe.

Begin in fourth position plie, body front, and arms third. Pull up into releve as right foot beats passe behind then front and then extends croise devant (across the body). The beats are very quick you barely see them, but they are there. Open to second and pull back into beat back front passe and extent croise devant again. When you extend croise you should be in plie then releve as moving to second to help you get around. Arms will open to second as you releve and close into first on the rotation. Using a pencil or a very light (one pound) weight you can switch hands as you open and close from second to first. This will help the strength and look of the arms. Double pirouettes passe can be done in between the plies and a nice finish would also be a double pirouette.

PIROUETTE ATTITUDE

Begin wide fourth position croise devant arms in third right leg plie. Lift the left leg into attitude and pirouette on the right leg high releve with the arms to fifth position. Take a single or a double and when finished slide through to fourth on the other side and turn side two.

PIROUETTE ARABESQUE

The same turn as above except the left leg moves into arabesque and the arms press down to fourth arabesque.

Learning to Leap

Proper technique and execution of a leap is crucial for the dancer both physically and aesthetically. Knowing the correct measures when springing off the ground is the first step to improving your height, body alignment, and consistency.

- The first point in leaping is to think height and not distance. Height is achieved by a plie, or bends in the knees, which allows the dancer to take a down action before the leap. In order for the dancer's legs to reach a full split in the air, the body must be traveling directly up, rather than out. When a dancer travels forward in the air, momentum pushes against the legs, making it harder to obtain the split.
- In the air, the toes must be pointed. Aesthetically, pointed toes continue the line from the dancer's hips. The toes should point immediately after the preparation. The foot brushes through a first position, leading with the heel. After this position is

performed, the foot immediately points as the dancer leaves the ground.

- The location of a body's center is about one inch above and one inch below the belly button. Engaging the muscles in the stomach helps the dancer maintain control over the leap in the air. The shoulders stay in-line with the hips, allowing the body to move as one unit. The dancer is able to hit the position in the air, having power over all body parts. A strong center is the foundation needed to perform the more advanced level leaps.
- Strong arms, having energy extended past the shoulders, is an important component of body alignment. Arms are held from the back muscles called latissimus dorsi. A common error is thinking the shoulders hold the arms. This mistake causes the shoulders to lift and to tense, making the leap looked labored.
- Landing a leap incorporates the bend of the legs/knees to compensate for its impact. A dancer must also roll through their feet during the landing, starting with the toes, followed by the ball of the foot, and finally the heel. Both measures are taken to protect a dancer's knees and ankles against the force of their leap. Focusing on the knees and feet allows the body to automatically absorb the landing, preventing injury

TYPES OF LEAPS:

1. **Grand Jete**—large throwing step. It is a jump from one foot to the other in which the working leg is brushed into the air and appears to be thrown. In a grand jete, the legs are thrown to 90 degrees with a corresponding high jump.
2. **Side/Straddle Leap**—large leap with legs in second position. It is a jump from one foot to the other in which the working leg is developed (bringing leg through passé) into the air to a second/side position. The leg is thrown to a position of 90 degrees or higher and is immediately followed by the other leg, which is brushed to a second position, meeting the height of the first leg. Landing consists of the working leg landing on the ground first, and the second leg breaking through passé to land behind it.
3. **Switch Leap**—large leap switching legs in the air. A jump where the dancer brushes the first leg 45 degrees forward off the ground, then back, lifting into a grand jete or split leap.

TIPS FOR IMPROVING LEAPS:

1. **Flexibility** is an important component in the execution leaps. The elasticity of a dancer's muscles allows the legs to extend fully, especially when a wide range of motion is available.

Flexibility is maximized by maintaining a stretch position for at least 15 seconds and ideally for 30 seconds or longer. Make sure to stretch thoroughly before any attempt at a leap.

2. Before leaping, dancers must **use a plie** or bend in the legs to propel their bodies into the air. A plie permits the energy to shoot straight up off the ground, making the dancer air-born.
3. Always keep in mind that the **energy comes from the leap itself** rather than the preparation. In order to explode in the air, the preparation taken before the leap must be a conservation of energy. Imagine that your body is a metal spring. Before the spring can extend its coils and jump into the air, all the spirals must be compressed and contracted together. This same analogy applies to a leap where the dancer must build up momentum, rather than using it, before leaping.
4. Give the **illusion** that you are higher by lifting your head/chin and arms during your leap. This is a simple tip, yet is often taken for granted. During your leap, the simple focus change from a level position to a raised position gives the audience the impression that you are higher in the air.

