

Components of Classical Ballet

- Every leg action develops from one of the five positions of the feet. When the dancer moves out of a basic position of the feet, the leg which is freed from weight-bearing is said to be 'working' - but working in balanced harmony with the supporting leg and the rest of the body.
- Every arm movement builds from a basic position of the arms. Arm positions serve to complement positions of the legs and often to frame the head, without disrupting the controlled state of the torso. Balletic arms are carefully shaped in long curved lines, with the hands and the fingers tapered to complete and extend these lines. 7 basic positions have been codified.
- The limbs are usually extended in the main planes, that is either directly in front of, or behind the body, or outwards beside the body. A leg may be extended devant, derriere, or to 2nd; and a movement may be executed en place or travelling en avant, en arriere, or de cote.
- To add spatial interest and diversity, the dancer's body is often turned slightly away from the audience so that arm and leg lines appear to create longer lines which stretch diagonally.
- To simplify the naming of directions, there are 8 basic directions: walls 1 - 4 + corners 5 - 8.



- 3 basic body alignments are defined, describing the dancer facing the audience squarely or facing a downstage corner: en face (facing 1), croise (facing 5 with the right foot front, or 6 with the left foot front), or efface (facing 5 with the left foot front, or 6 with the right foot front).
- The basic arm and leg positions and body alignments combine to produce 9 basic poses of the body, 3 basic arabesques, and 3 basic attitudes. Each is characterized by a unique 'look' or 'feeling' which each dancer must discover for themselves, through personal practice and active experience.

- Everything stems from the dancer's posture which reflects the classical ideals of balance, simplicity, and restraint. When the body is mechanically balanced over the feet, the dancer has a solid base from which movement can proceed with ease and grace.
- The head is poised, the chest open, the spine lengthened, with the eye line projected outward.
- Although posture may be described in static terms, the human being is a living, breathing organism and its posture is always dynamic.

*If central control of the body is understood,
there will be ease of movement,
and a strengthening of technique.*

Rotation and Turn-Out

For centuries, ballet dancers have begun their training by learning the 5 positions of the feet. First codified by Pierre Beauchamps in late 17th-century France, each position was executed with the legs rotated outward to present a more attractive view of the leg and foot and to provide a wider base of support. To achieve this out-turning, some dancing masters used a mechanical device called a *tourne-hanche* which twisted the dancers feet outward towards 180°. The turned-out stance required the dancer to walk forward at a measured, leisurely pace, with little disruption to the hips and body above. It also created greater stability for sideways actions, allowing dancers to move broadly without turning their backs on the monarch. This physical openness mirrored the extrovert attitude of the aristocratic performers who used their dancing skills to attract kingly attention and favour.

Today, we still use turnout for its aesthetic and mechanical benefits, striving of course to accomplish the action from the hips and not the feet! Students need to be aware that turning out the legs into the hip socket naturally unbalances the body unless the control of the pelvis, spine, shoulders, and weight placement are understood. Sound control of turnout is fundamental to all ballet technique.

The external rotation of the hip is controlled by the gluteus maximus, the small rotators which are the deepest muscles in the gluteal area, and, most importantly, the adductors, or the inner thigh muscles.

Once the pelvis is balanced, these muscles of the inner thigh are activated strongly, pressing the thighs together, rotating them forward and flattening the thigh at the front.

With this action the rest of the leg rotates, and the foot is held in a turnout that corresponds with that of the hip.

This control of turnout is reinforced when the balance is over one leg. A strongly controlled supporting leg will also facilitate use of the working leg.

Turnout must be particularly well reinforced in pointe work and jumping where contact with the floor is reduced.

Posture

The pelvis

- Placement of the body must come from its centre.
- The pelvis is the connection between the spine and the lower limbs, and when used correctly, gives strength to the back and helps control the hip.
- In Classical Ballet, the pelvis is kept 'square'. This squareness is controlled by the oblique abdominal muscles on either side of the waist which hold the pelvis in relation to the ribcage.
- The pelvis held in balance is also controlled by the straight abdominal muscle pulling up at the front and the seat muscle pulling down at the back. The hamstring muscles at the back of the thigh also play an important part in holding this adjusted tilt without tucking under.

The shoulders + arms

- Only if the thoracic spine is well placed and the shoulder girdle held directly over the pelvis can the muscles controlling the scapulae be fully engaged.
- The shoulder blades are held flat against the chest wall and held down by the latissimus dorsi muscles which span the back giving it support from the lumbar spine upwards.
- A strong base is created from which the arms can move.
- Fluidity of port de bras and tension-free, expressive arms and hands result from a strong, correctly placed back and shoulder girdle.

The spine

- The spine forms the central axis of the body, and is composed of two forward and two backward curves.
- In the dancer, these are held in a lengthened position by the abdominal muscles at the front and the extensor muscles at the back, and the sides of the waist.
- Whether the dancer is performing adage with high extensions, or allegro, the length of the back and sides is retained as far as possible. The openness of the chest is achieved by activating the muscles of the thoracic spine.

Breathing

- A good breathing pattern is fundamental to the use of the upper body.
- Shallow breathing causes tension in the neck and pulls the shoulders up and back, disturbing general placement.
- The sideways expansion of the ribs allows an efficient and deeper use of the lungs without affecting postural control, and therefore discourages tension.
- Breathing is essential to stamina, phrasing of movement, and lift.
- Controlled rhythmical breathing is necessary in all forms of exercise to focus in the mind and instil confidence.

Turnout (see *Rotation and Turn-Out*)The knees

- The knee should be regarded as a hinge joint and should therefore always be worked alignment with the leg.
- All turnout is controlled from the hip, which is the only ball-and-socket joint in the lower limb. The patella is kept in line with the tibia and the foot, whether the knee is held straight or flexed in fondu.
- This joint relied on equal support from the main muscle groups controlling it: the quadriceps pull up the front of the thigh controlling the patella, while the hamstrings brace the back of the knee.
- The knee also relied on support from the muscles of the inner thigh balancing the muscles of the outer thigh.

The foot

- The arched structure of the foot and the ankle joint are designed to be used always in alignment with the tibia.
- Correct weight placement strengthens the foot.
- Each toe should bear the body weight, and the intrinsic muscles which control the toes and support the forefoot should brace against the floor.
- Whether the leg is en fondu or making the transition to half pointe, full pointe, or jumping, the foot retains its alignment with a straight line from the femur through the ankle and the centre of the foot.
- The foot en pointe bears the body weight through the tips of the toes which are held strong and straight as they meet the floor.

Weight placement

- The body weight should be distributed through the forefeet and the front of the heels (rather than the back of the heels).
- This creates a more alert position with the muscles of the back of the thigh, and the calf muscles strongly activated to hold balance.
- This use of the muscles of the back of the leg, the muscles of the forefoot, and the inner thigh muscles free the front of the ankle from tension, gives strength and control to the dancer's leg, and balances the musculature of the lower limb.

Positions of the Feet

- 1st
- 2nd
- 3rd - A closed position where the dancer stands with the feet together with one foot in front of the other, so that the heel of the front foot is placed at the middle of the back foot.
- 4th
- 5th - A closed position where the dancer stands with the feet together, with one foot in front of the other, so that the heel of the front foot is placed in line with the big toe joint of the back foot.

Positions of the Arms

- Bras bas
- 1st - A position in which both arms curve to form an oval in front of the body so that the little fingers are slightly above waist-level.
- 2nd - A position in which the arms are held to the side and are just in front of the body. They are slightly curved and slope gently downward from the shoulders to the tip of the fingers.
- 5th - A position in which both arms curve overhead to form an oval, and are held slightly in front of the body with the hands just within vision.
- 3rd
- 4th
- Demi-second - A position in which the arms are slightly curved halfway between bras bas and 2nd position with the palms facing each other.
- Demi-bras - A position in which both arms are held in front of the body, wider and lower than 1st position, with the palms slightly upward.

Placements of the Working Leg *(see attachment)***Positions of the Body** *(see attachment)*

Basic Definitions

A Terre

Describes a position in which the working foot is in contact with the floor

En L'air

Describes a position in which the working foot is off the floor

Devant

Describes the working leg placed in front of the other leg, or in front of the body

A la Seconde

Describes the position for the working leg extended to the side of the body

Derriere

Describes the working leg placed behind the other leg or behind the body

Sur Place

Refers to an action performed without travelling

En Avant

Denotes movement travelling forward

En Arriere

Denotes movement travelling backward

De Cote

1. Refers to a step or series of steps which travel sideways either right or left, in relation to the dancer's body
2. Describes the dancer facing 2 or 4

En Croix

Describes a sequence repeated devant, to 2nd, derriere, and again to 2nd; or the reverse

En Dehors

1. Describes the outward circling action of the working leg
2. Describes a turn of the body away from the supporting leg

En Dedans

1. Describes the inward circling action of the working leg
2. Describes a turn of the body toward the supporting leg

En Tournant

Refers to an action performed while turning

Cou-de-pied

Describes a specific point just above the ankle bone devant or derriere

Sur le Cou-de-pied

Describes the placement of the working foot on the cou-de-pied of the supporting leg.
Indicates the foot is fully pointed unless indicated otherwise.

Petit Retire Position

A position in which the toes of the fully pointed foot are in contact with the supporting leg at the base of the Achilles tendon

Retire Position

A position in which the toes of the fully pointed working foot are in contact with the *side of the supporting knee (*devant, or derriere)

Dégagé

Describes an extended position of the working leg where the toes are in contact with the floor, either devant, 2nd, or derriere. The supporting leg may be straight or en fondu.

Transference of Weight

An action in which the weight is transferred from one foot to two feet by lowering the heel from a dégagé into an open position simultaneously centralizing the weight over two feet, or from two feet to one foot by returning from the open position to a degage.

En Fondu

Describes a position in which the supporting leg is bent and the heel stays in contact with the floor

Epaulement

A rotary action in the upper torso, combined with the use of head and eyes, which enhances the dancer's line and sense of poise

Ballon

Resilience in jumping actions, resulting in a buoyant quality

Turnout

Maximum outward rotation of the leg at its hip joint