

BALLET TERMINOLOGY FOR THE DANCER

Plié

The **plié** includes two parts. The first part is to bend, and the second part is to stretch (*étendu*). Plié means to bend or yield into gravity. Turn-out is initiated from the hips and continues throughout the knees and ankles. The knees are aligned over your second and third toes as you perform the plié. The dancer then presses away from the floor stretching through the feet and legs to defy gravity. The body should rise out of the plié at the same speed as from lowering into it.

The plié may be performed as a demi-plié (half bend of the knees) or as a grand plié (full bend of the knees). Demi pliés are performed with the heels placed on the floor. A grand plié is performed with the heels lifted off the floor with the exception of second position. Pliés are performed in all five positions of the feet.



The plié aids in gently stretching the Achilles tendon and slowly increasing the body's core temperature. A properly executed plié is essential for the preparation and landing of all jumps, leaps, and turns.

Relevé

The **relevé** consists of rising to one or both feet to balance and of lowering into the floor with control. The dancer stabilizes the balance in the performance of the relevé in two ways.



The first technique to aid in balance includes actively pressing away from the floor to rise through the ball of the foot into a three-quarter point, with equal weight distribution between the big and little toes. Depress the shoulders down and in to stabilize your

balance. Next, the dancer resists gravity when lowering into the floor by activating the adductor muscles (inner thigh), while engaging in external rotation or turnout for control in the closure. Overtime, repetition in the performance of the relevé will build strength in both the feet and legs.

Tendu

Tendu means to stretch. In order to develop strong and flexible feet the dancer practices a tendu using the floor as a tactile means of resistance. The feet become increasingly stronger through the repetition in performing a tendu. The ability to stretch through the arch of the foot and toes is helped by the opposition in pushing away from the floor.



The dancer begins a tendu by stretching the working foot away from the body lifting the heel, ball, and toes into a full point. The dancer then returns to the original position drawing the foot towards the body by articulating the placement of first the toes, ball, and then heel on the floor. Dancers who practice this exercise perform with beautiful footwork.

Frappé

Frappé is a striking motion which strengthens and quickens the dancer's footwork, and it is the basis for the jeté. In a style of ballet known as the Cecchetti method, the foot begins flexed in sur le cou-de-pied (on the neck of the ankle) and then strikes forward in a degage (foot disengages from the floor).

The purpose for this action of flexion into stretching the foot is to build strength in the toes, insteps, and shin muscles in the lower part of the leg to aid in elevation. In the Russian or Vaganova style, the dancer begins with the foot pointed in sur le cou-de-pied.

Some see no need to practice with a flexed foot in frappé if a dancer never performs that way. However, I believe this is necessary because working through a dorsi-flexed position of the ankle in opposition to a stretched ankle, strengthens your feet for greater power in your leaps and jumps. No matter which philosophy is practiced, both may enhance the quality of the dancer's footwork.

Grand Battements

Grand Battements strengthen the legs and aid the dancer in gaining control of the lower body. A battement is a large kick which will benefit other movements such as a grand jeté, a tour jeté, or a fouetté.

The dancer brushes through the floor with the working foot to gain power in lifting the leg. The hips remain level and balanced for stability of the joints in performing through a full range of motion for the greatest height in the battement. As the leg lifts, the heel of the opposite foot remains in contact with the floor. Both the supporting and working legs are fully stretched. The dancer's strength and flexibility will determine the height of the battement.

Rond de jambe

The **rond de jambe** is a circling of the leg and requires mobility in the rotation of the hip socket to perform. The dancer may perform a rond de jambe à terre by tracing a semi-circle or half-moon shape with the foot on the ground. Brushing through a first position, the dancer makes contact with the floor while circling the leg. The rond de jambe may be performed en dedans (to

the inside) or en dehor (to the outside). Practicing these spatial designs will inform the dancer's ability to distinguish between inside and outside pirouettes.

The dancer may perform a rond de jambe en l'air (off the ground in the air) at higher levels. The pelvis should remain centered and balanced for symmetry in circling the leg through two diagonal facings. Imagine your energy spiraling down through the supporting foot in opposition to the circling leg. The more turn-out, flexibility, and strength that is developed, the greater the height of the rond de jambe.

Turn-out

Turn-out is used by dancers in order to execute movements like a battement à la seconde with greater height. Without turn-out the dancer has a limited range of motion. Turn-out is a rotation that is initiated from the hips and continues throughout the knees, ankles, and feet.

Everyone experiences different flexibility in the hip joints so the degree of turn-out is highly individual. For example, a dancer with a shallow socket with a long femur neck will experience more turn-out with a greater range of motion. A dancer with a deeper socket is more limited in flexibility and range of motion, but experiences greater stability and control.



Most of the muscles and tendons in the hips have developed by the time a dancer reaches the teen-age years; therefore, younger dancers embody a propensity for more notable change in the elasticity of these muscles. By participating in conditioning and stretching exercises, dancers can improve their turn-out regardless of age or physical limitations.