

The Pirouette

How to train

- Tendu, plié and relevé exercises will strengthen the feet and ankles for turning.
- Practice turning in place and traveling in across-the-floor exercises to experience a variety of weight distributions.
- Practice spotting the pirouette both facing towards and away from the mirror so that you may quickly adapt the focus to any given space.
- Challenge yourself to complete multiple pirouettes in technique class. In a performance, turn the number of pirouettes you have the ability to complete consistently with balance and control.
- Pirouettes, like any other skill, take practice. Repetition is the key to consistency. Repetition will build pattern recognition with the body informing the mind of what it means to experience the technique of turning. Create an “at home” studio space and practice on your own for quicker progress.

Awareness for how to turn

- Understand the following parts of the turn: the preparation, the spot, and the turn.
- Fully realize the yield (plié) and then push (relevé) to enable momentum in turning.
- Engage in the sustainment of the pirouette at the height of it by lifting the torso before you end the turn in plié.
- Keep your head level and focus steady to maintain control in the pirouette.
- A change of direction when turning effects balance. Know where to begin and end the spot before turning.
- Initiate arm movements from the spine with awareness of extension and placement.
- Practice the proper shape and spatial pathways of the arms.
- Distinguish between turn-out and parallel in both the supporting and working leg.

- Keep the shape and placement of the working leg consistent throughout the duration of the revolution.

Turning in ensembles

- Dancers who spot together turn together. Determine the location for spotting.
- In a group emphasize the timing of the spot in the pirouette so that all dancers are turning on the same beat. Dancers may verbally say “spot” to reinforce that all bodies are synchronized and rotating at the same time.
- When traveling (especially in a series of turns like piqué pirouettes) determine where to spot in regards to the spatial design. For example, if turning in a circle, change the location of the spot each time you turn. Ensembles may find it helpful to spot the four corners of the room for greater precision among all dancers while turning.
- Create clean lines among the dancers’ bodies by clarifying the directional facing of the shoulders and hips in the preparation for the turn, during the turn, and at the end of the turn.
- Clarify the feet and arm pathways for the turn so that the group is performing in unison.
- Counter the ensemble with featured dancers performing more complex turn sequences.

Turns and choreography

- Create weight shifts that make kinesthetic sense to connect the movements before and after the turn so dancers can execute it with greater fluidity and control.
- Incorporate a variety of transitional movements into and out of a turn such as a chasse, pas de bourrée, or détourné. Experiment with new transitions not found in a traditional dance vocabulary. Whatever the choice, examine the approach in how the dancer moves into and out of the turn.
- Link turns to leaps and acrobatics to achieve an effective series of technical skills.
- Include a variety of spatial pathways turning downstage, upstage, on the diagonal, in a box, or perhaps in a circle.
- Incorporate a variety of directional facings turning “inside” (en dedans) and “outside” (en dehors).
- Add variety in the shape of the working leg with it drawn to retiré, extended to à la seconde, or perhaps placed in arabesque.

- Create visual appeal with a contrast of level changes in the space from high to low, moving in/out of the floor while turning.

For more information about turns you may be interested in the following resource.

Sawyer, Gina. *The Performance Dictionary*. Dallas: Backstage Coach Productions, 2005.