



Preparation for Pointe Work

Preparation for pointe work needs to start a year before using pointe shoes and students need to gain the following:

- Strong and flexible feet and ankles
- The ability to hold turnout in all positions
- Good articulation through the forefoot
- Strong core muscles
- Strong calf muscles
- Good balance
- Mature attitude to dancing

Sometimes students can do their barre work in bare feet to check for any issues that could hinder pointe work and make sure they are articulating correctly in a tendu and using the correct technique for rises. There is no set grade or age that students start pointe work, it is different for each child. Generally we start looking at students from Grade 4 upwards however pointe work is not examined until Intermediate level.

Buying Pointe Shoes

It is important that parents/carers attend the studios with their child to talk about pointe shoe shopping and that you phone ahead to arrange an appointment. We recommend the following shops:

- Adage, Harrogate - 01423 530777
- World of Dance, Leeds - 0113 2461100
- Twinkle Toes, Bradford - 01274 728648

For the Appointment

- Allow plenty of time - most pointe shoe fittings will take at least an hour.
- File down nails before going for a fitting and then keep a nail file in dance bag
- Wear convertible ballet tights
- Be honest with the fitter about how the shoes are feeling
- Choose a pair that feels best on flat and pointe
- Purchase ribbons, elastic, pads as directed by the pointe shoe fitter

After the Appointment

- Return to the studio with the unworn pointe shoes for checking and advice for sewing on ribbons and elastic.
- Wear shoes around the house with slipper socks over the top - walking up and down the stairs will help to break in new shoes.
- **Students must not go on pointe until their first lesson**
- After the first lesson, students must practise as much as they can, but only the exercises given in class, no solo dance routines on pointe yet!
- Keep plasters and a nail file in your dance bag

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Exercises for Home

Working at home can dramatically increase the strength and flexibility in a dancer's feet. These simple exercises can be done before or after class and at home whilst watching TV!

1. Place a hand towel on the floor and sit so the soles of your feet are flat on the towel. Begin "scrunching" your toes so that you're pulling the towel closer to you. Keep doing this until you've reached the end of the towel, and then spread the towel out again and repeat. This will isolate the joints and tendons of the toes, providing dexterity and articulation in the feet.
2. Write the alphabet with your foot. Lay on your back with one leg in the air. Without moving the leg and isolating just the foot and ankle, trace the letters of the alphabet in the air. This will help strengthen the muscles and tendons that provide stability to the ankle on pointe and also increase ankle mobilisation. This exercise can also be done sitting down holding the thigh to the chest.
3. Use an exercise band to manipulate and strengthen one foot at a time. You can wrap it around the ball or top of your foot and give resistance while flexing and pointing the foot. Have someone hold the band round your ankle as you rise to create resistance, ensure you rise correctly and don't let the ankle sway towards the band. Exercise bands come in several different resistance levels, so as you get stronger, you can add more resistance. Several repetitions of these once a day will show dramatic results in a dancer's regular ballet training.
4. Strength in the calf muscle is extremely important for pointe work and can be improved with daily relevés and heel raises. Simply stand on the edge of a step with the heels dropped off the edge, and then slowly rise up on toes and then control the descent. Being able to control your descent to gravity is just as important to pointe technique as being able to rise up to your toes. Also practice relevés on flat ground, first with both feet and then one foot at a time with the other foot in coupé.
5. Using a wobble board or wobble cushion is excellent for ankle stability, core control and balance all which are crucial in pointe work.
6. We have put a number of these exercises in our YouTube tutorial which can be found here:
https://youtu.be/fU1OZ7XAF_k