

When can I go on Pointe?

Getting ready for pointe work involves a level of maturity of mind, as well as body.

THE MIND

Students need to have a strong knowledge of basic technique, good balance and strength. Just importantly, students have to be mature enough to recognize that strong technique is necessary to advance to pointe. There is a lot of repetition in ballet and pre-pointe. Understanding the value of repetition is important. It is not enough to just go through the motions without intention. Each exercise is given in order to prepare a student for pointe work and students must demonstrate that they are mature enough to accept corrections and work willingly and consistently to improve upon their technique, balance and strength.

Advancing to pointe is not a right of passage based on the number of years a student has taken ballet or the age of a dancer. It is based on their ability and maturity. It is necessary for students to learn to enjoy the process of the work and to understand that there are no short cuts. **Repetitive intentional work is imperative.**

THE BODY

Although age is not the deciding factor as to when a dancer can do pointe work, there are some important guidelines to consider.

Doctors suggest waiting until age 11 or 12, when growth plates in the feet are less prone to deforming. "The danger of starting too early is either compressing the growth plate, causing an irregular growth of the bone or dislodging the growth plate, causing a fracture," says Thomas Novella, a podiatrist who works with American Ballet Theatre dancers. It is simply not safe for a student to start on pointe before she is physically strong enough. "If a dancer's ankles and feet aren't strong enough, tendonitis can also occur as the tendons struggle to hold everything in place."

continued

Technique

Getting the basics right is the first step to advancing to pointe.

- Staying pulled up in the knees on rele'ves
- Correct placement of ankle over the ball of the foot on rele've
- Placement of balance so there is no rolling forward or backward on demi pointe
- Turnout from the hips and not from the ankles and feet
- Hips and back aligned properly over feet

Balance

- Landing jumps solidly without wobbly knees or leaning forward
- Holding a retire' on demi pointe at the barre for a minimum of 8 counts while maintaining correct posture.

Strength

Students must have a strong core, back, abdominal, leg and ankle strength and be able to demonstrate this by holding themselves properly when standing, turning and jumping.

Pre-Pointe Class

Pre-Pointe class is a conditioning class as opposed to a dance class. The goal is to prepare students to become strong enough for pointe work. Students will be evaluated several times throughout the course to determine how they are doing and what they need to focus on.

At the end of the dance season, we will discuss who is ready to advance to pointe shoes the following year. Taking this course does not guarantee that students will automatically be permitted to take pointe. Some students may need extra work or simply more time to develop in one or more areas outlined above.

I look forward to working with you in pre-pointe class!

Sources Used

Baringer, Janice and Schlesinger, Sarah. *The Pointe Book*. Princeton Book Company Publishers, Princeton, NJ, 1991.

Diana, Julie. *Prepared for Pointe?* July, 2011.

Hunt, Mary Ellen. "Pointe Prep," *Dance Studio Life*, August, 2014.