

# Going on Pointe

Each student responds to the demands of pointe preparation differently, and some will need longer than others to be ready for pointe work. Students will be notified by their dance director when they are ready to go on pointe. Beginning students on toe will probably spend between 10-30 minutes per class on pointe at the barre in the beginning, and will gradually build up their time as their strength develops. Ballet is all about proper form and conditioning to help prevent injuries, temporary or permanent.

## Criteria for Pointe Work.

1. The student should be at least 12 years or older. (younger ONLY if the director deems their experience and strength qualified based on the following information as well)
2. Preferably, the student should have at least 2-4 years of classical ballet training. Noting that some may take ballet classes for 5-10-15 years and never have the proper preparation or strength to do point. It's not for everyone.
3. The student should be taking a minimum of two ballet classes a week consistently. The Barre work you will do will be extremely important to the moves you are able to execute center floor. Though it may seem slow going and boring, it's an essential foundation necessary for ballet training. If you are serious about ballet, you should consider taking classes as often as you possible can – 1 1/2 hours 3-4 times a week isn't unusual for ballerinas. Once you go en pointe, it is expected that you will still continue your regular 'flat' ballet classes in addition to this class.
4. The student must have sufficient strength to do the following:
  - Be able to hold their turnout while dancing. The most basic concept of ballet is turnout. It makes it possible to do certain steps that could not otherwise be done. Holding turnout while dancing is a good sign of strength. If the student does not have the strength to maintain their turnout, they are not strong enough for pointe, since it is much more difficult to hold turnout on pointe.
  - Have a strong, straight back while dancing, especially the lower back (keeping the hips/buttocks pulled under). Pointe work requires that the student use the muscles in her legs and feet to stand on pointe and not use the pointe shoes as a crutch. A weak back will throw the student off balance while on pointe and will make it difficult to do ballet steps. A straight back is also essential for pirouettes.
  - Keep the heels forward toward the big toe (no sickling- when instead of a straight line from your leg through your foot, the foot bends inward. It's a dangerous weak position to be in en pointe. Besides being unsightly, there is no strength in that position and can lead to injuries-like breaking and spraining your ankle). The most stable position for pointe work is to have the weight slightly forward over the big toe. If the weight is over the little toe, it is more difficult to stay up on pointe, and will increase the chances of strain and injury.
  - Use plié while dancing. Students must use their pliés while dancing because this is how they get up on pointe. If they don't use their pliés, they will have to bend their leg incorrectly in order to get on pointe. Pliés should be done with the knees pointing straight over their toes and with the heels down and hips tucked under.
  - Point their feet while dancing. Students must point their feet while dancing in order to strengthen the muscles that pointe work requires. These muscles need to be strong enough to support their body weight on the ends of their toes. If the student is not in the habit of using these foot muscles then they will not be able to support themselves on pointe and will probably knuckle over on their toes, thereby increasing their chances for injury.
  - Pique passé with straight leg. Student should have enough strength to push themselves onto half-pointe. This step is harder to do on pointe and a bent leg is usually a sign of weakness or improper step preparation.

- Be able to do at least 16 relevés in the center without stopping. Strength for pointe work is achieved by repeating exercises. Relevés are excellent for building up calf muscle strength, which is vital for pointe work. This exercise is more difficult to do on pointe because of the extra height, so strong relevés on half-pointe is a good sign of strength. The student must also go up as high on half-pointe as she can, since pointe work demands this ability. A student who keeps her heels very low to the ground is not preparing her calf muscles adequately, and will not have the strength for pointe work.

- Be able to hold a passé balance on half-pointe. The student should be well-placed (hips square, back straight, legs turned-out), and have the strength to balance on half-pointe. This pose is more difficult to correct on pointe, as the surface area for balancing is smaller and the strength requirements are greater.

5. The student must be responsible enough to bring all the ballet equipment she will need to class. Pointe shoes require extra care and accessories.

6. The student must be in good health and able to take a whole class. If the student frequently needs to rest because of illness or injury, she is not strong enough for the extra demands that pointe work requires.

7. The student must pay attention in class and must work well. Going on pointe is a big step and requires commitment on the part of the student. The dancer should be able to properly execute bar and floor movements and positions. These are the foundation for future progress and need to be mastered before moving on to pointe.

8. The student must be of normal weight.

9. The student must have enough of an arched instep to stand on pointe.