

Ballet History

Definition: (From *History of the Dance in Art and Education* by Richard Kraus and Sarah Chapman)

"The term 'ballet' came to mean a form of theatrical storytelling through dance. The Encyclopedia of Diderot, published in France about 1772 says, 'Ballet is action explained by a dance...specifically theatrical, spectacular, and done to be seen...'"

Characteristics of ballet include rotation or turnout, a lifted, high center of gravity, and little floor work, if any.



Brief History:

Ballet is the oldest form of western dance art that exists today. The strict rules and movement patterns of ballet are derived from the Italian court dances of the 15th and 16th centuries. The courts of Europe were swept with the creation of new musical forms. The creation of the new music insured new forms of entertainment beyond the traditional court dances, thus the rise of ballet in France. Historians credit the "Ballet Comique de la Reine" as the first ballet performed in 1581. It was an elaborate production depicting the celebration of the marriage between the mother queen, Catherine de Medici, and Henry II.

In 1661, because of his tremendous love for dance, King Louis XIV, affectionately known as "The Sun King," asked his ballet master to establish rules for the study of ballet. Some of what we recognize today as the positions of the feet and arms, as well as other movement patterns, are a result of those rules. At this time, King Louis XIV also began the Academie Royale de Danse as the first formal ballet school in one of the rooms of the Louvre.

There are three schools or methods of ballet: French, Russian, and Cecchetti. We study mainly the French school of ballet, though there are some parts of the Cecchetti method that we will also cover. The French school was known for its elegance and soft, graceful movements, rather than technical virtuosity. Its influence spread throughout Europe and is the basis of all ballet training.



Some notable ballet choreographers and dancers after the Sun King include: Marie Taglioni (first en pointe), Marius Petipa, Sergei Diaghilev, Margot Fonteyn, Anna Pavlova, Vaslav Nijinsky, Rudolf Nureyev, George Balanchine, and Mikhail Baryshnikov, to name a few.

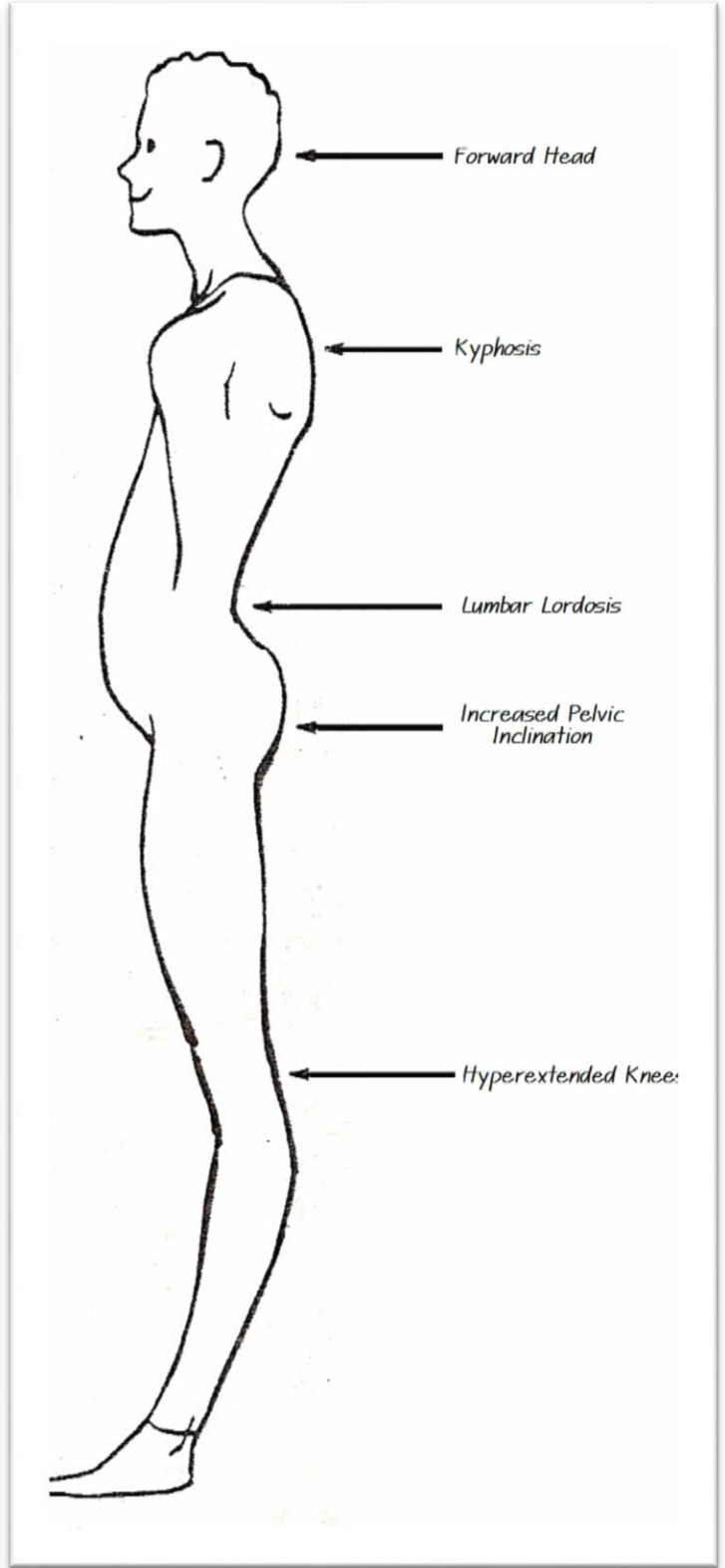
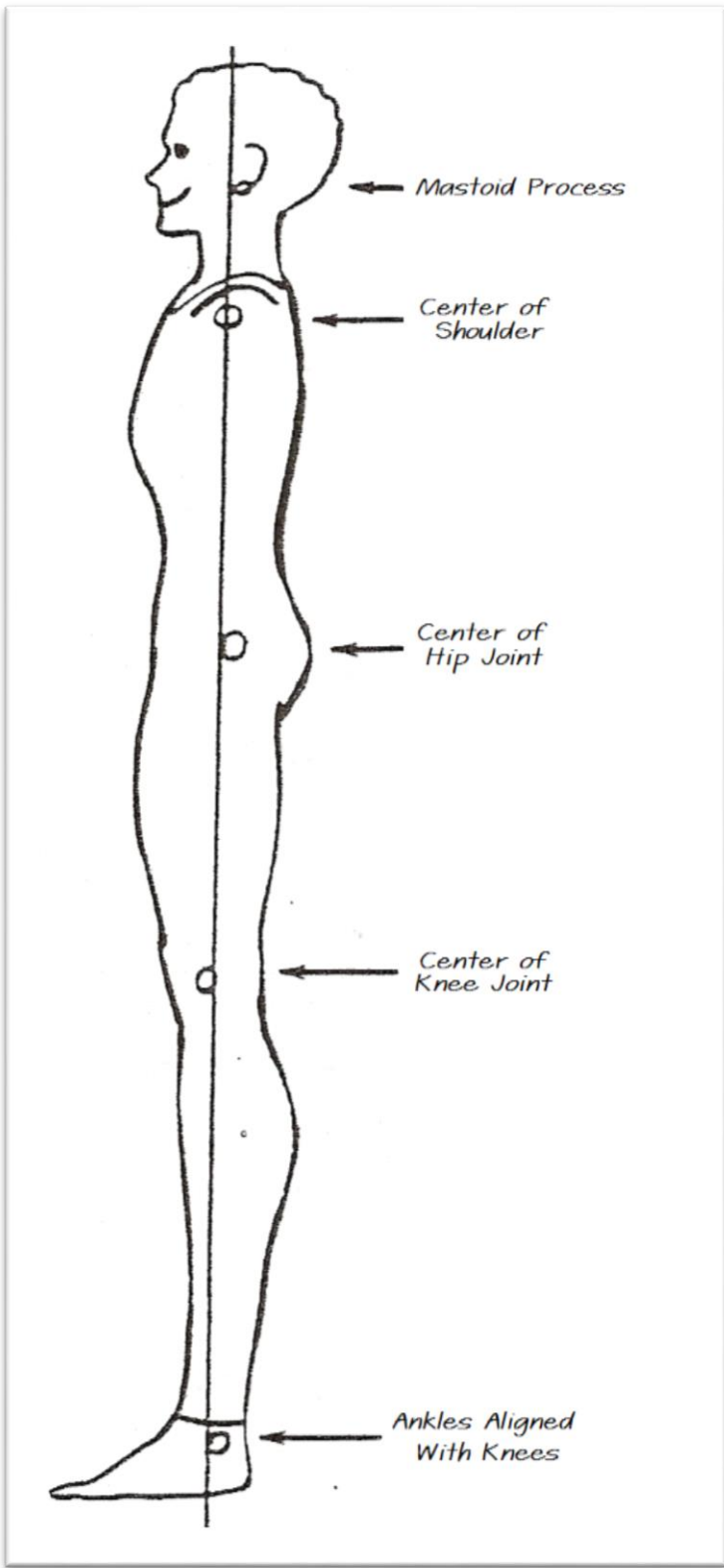
Contemporary Ballet: (from Wikipedia.com)

Contemporary ballet is a form of dance, which incorporates elements of both classical ballet and modern dance. It takes its technique and use of pointe work from classical ballet, although it permits a greater

range of movement that may not adhere to the strict body lines set forth by schools of ballet technique. Many of its concepts come from the ideas and innovations of 20th century modern dance, including floor work, balletic movements and turn-in of the legs.

Elements of Proper Ballet Alignment/Posture

1. Spine lengthened (all the way up behind the nose)
2. Chin and eyes level, not lowered
3. Shoulders down and relaxed and centered over the hips
4. Sternum lifted, but ribs not flared
5. Arms rounded and forward of the body, supported from the back
6. Abdominals lifted, not “sucked in”
7. Pelvis is neutral, neither tucked nor swayed
8. Legs turned out at hip sockets only as far as the rotation can be maintained without disturbing the rest of the alignment
9. Knee caps in line with toes, knees straight but not locked
10. Ankles are straight, no pronation or supination
11. Ankles in line with knees and the weight slightly forward on the balls of the feet.
12. Toes relaxed on floor—no gripping



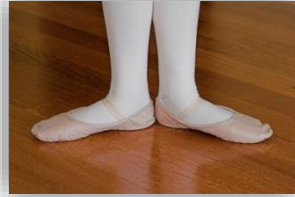
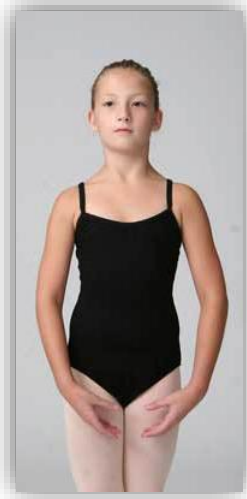
The Five Positions of the Arms and Feet

There are five basic positions of the feet...

- * Start in **first**. **Première** is the French word for first, but we just call 1st position “First”. The heels are comfortably together, with the toes comfortably turned-out.
- * Then slowly slide one foot out to the side, apart from first where the heels are together until the feet are as wide as your shoulders. This is **second** position, **à la seconde**.
- * Slide the heel of the right foot slowly back in toward the left foot. Keep sliding the heel of the right foot back in slowly until the heel is in line with the middle of the left foot that is not moving. This is **third**, **Troisième**. You may also practice this, and the next two positions, with the left foot in front of the right.
- * **Fourth** position, or **Quatrième**, is like fifth, with the front foot out in front of the back foot. Be sure to keep the hips in line by turning out the front foot as far as possible first, then the back foot, and keeping your belly button facing forward.
- * **Fifth**, **Cinquième**, is like third except that the front foot crosses completely over the toe joint of the back foot.

The Five Positions of the Arms and Feet

**Preparatory Position (En Bas)
(Première)**



First Position



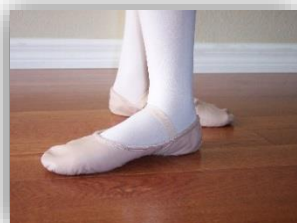
**Second Position (Seconde)
(Troisième)**



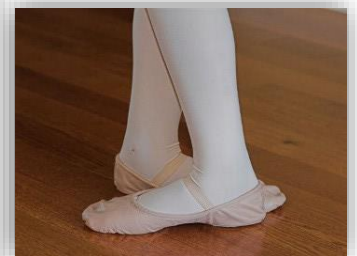
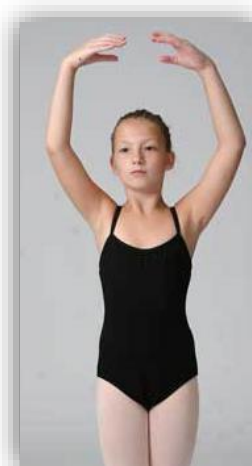
Third Position



**Fourth Position (Quatrième)
(Cinquième)**



Fifth Position



More at: <http://dance.about.com>

Beginning Ballet Vocabulary

Combinations	
Adagio	Slow and sustained
Petit Allegro	Small jumping and turning steps, performed at a lively and brisk tempo
Port De Bras	Carriage of the arms
Jumping Movements	
Saute	To jump
Changement	To change
Chasse	To chase
Grand Jete	Large throw
Echappe	To escape
Pas De Chat	Step of the cat
Turning Movements	
Chaine	Chain or Link

Pirouette	To whirl or spin
En Dehors	Outward (“Open the Door”)
En Dedans	Inward
Pique	To prick
Directions	
Devant	To the front/ forward
A La Seconde	To the side
Derriere	To the back
En Croix	Performed to the front, side, back, and side ‘Shape of the Cross’
Level Change	
Plie	To bend
Demi	Half or Small
Eleve	To rise (without plie)
Releve	To rise with a plie
Leg Action	
Attitude	A position where the working leg is bent to 90 degrees, can be done to the front, side, or back

Tendu	To stretch
Degage	To disengage
Grand Battement	Large beat
Pas De Bourree	Movement done as a series of 3 steps (back, side, front)
Glissade	To glide
Balance	Rocking step. Shifting the weight from one foot to the other in the pattern down, up, down. Foot can cross front or back.
Develope	To develop
Sous-sus	Under-over. Drawing the legs and feet tightly together in an elevated position
Foot Action	
Coupe	To cut
Passe	To pass through
Miscellaneous	
Barre	A horizontal bar which dancers use for support while doing exercises in ballet class
Ballerina	The Italian term for a female ballet dancer
Ballerino	The Italian term for a male ballet dancer