

Backstage Coach Productions

Dance Education

BackstageCoach.com

BALLET TERMINOLOGY FOR THE BEGINNER DANCER

by
Gina Sawyer

Grand Battements strengthen the legs and aid the dancer in gaining control of the lower body. A battement is like a large kick and the correct placement will benefit other movements such as grand jetés, tour jetés, and fouettés. Hips remain level as the dancer uses the heel of the working foot to brush from the floor in order to gain power in lifting the leg. Remain lifted on the supporting leg and release the working leg without grabbing or tensing the thighs. The opposite heel remains in contact with the floor. Both the supporting and working legs are fully stretched. The dancer's strength and flexibility will determine the height of the battement.

Frappé is a striking motion which strengthens and quickens the dancer's footwork and it is the basis for the jeté. In a style of ballet known as the Cecchetti method, the foot begins flexed in sur le cou-de-pied (on the neck of the ankle) and then strikes forward in a degage (foot disengages from the floor). The purpose of this flexion into stretching is to build strength in the toes, in-steps, and shin muscles in the lower part of the leg to aid in elevation. In the Russian or Vaganova style the dancer begins with the foot pointed in sur le cou-de-pied. Some believe that there is no need to practice with a flexed foot in frappé if a dancer never performs that way. However, no matter which philosophy is practiced, I believe both will enhance the dancer's footwork.

Pliés aid in gently stretching the Achilles tendon and slowly increasing the body's core temperature. Plié means to bend or yield into gravity with an even distribution of weight in which turn-out begins with the hips and the knees open over the toes. The dancer then pushes away from the floor and returns to standing by defying gravity. The body should rise out of the plié at the same speed as from lowering into it. The plié may be performed in a demi-plié (half bend of the knees) or grand plié (full bend of the knees). Demi pliés are performed with the heels placed on the floor. A grand plié is performed with the heels lifted off the floor with the exception of second position. Pliés are performed in all five positions of the feet. A properly executed plié is essential for the preparation and landing of all jumps, leaps, and turns.

The **rond de jambe** is a circling movement which strengthens the rotation or turn-out in the hip joints. The dancer performs a rond de jambe a terre or on the floor by tracing a semi-circle or half-moon with the foot stretched from first position. The dancer is careful to perform with the heel leading while the entire foot relaxes and makes contact with the floor when brushing through first position. The rond de jambe may be performed en dedans (inside) or en dehor (outside). As the dancer gains strength the rond de jambe can be performed en l'air (off the ground) at higher levels. The more turn-out, flexibility, and strength that is developed, the greater the height of the working leg.

Tendu literally means to stretch. In order to develop strong and flexible feet the dancer practices using the floor as a tool of resistance. By the repetition of performing the tendu, the feet become increasingly stronger and the arch of the foot and toes naturally stretch from pushing away from the floor. The dancer begins a tendu by releasing the heel, ball and toes into a fully stretched foot and then returning to the original position by placing first the toes, ball, and heel on the floor. Dancers who practice this exercise perform with beautiful footwork.

Backstage Coach Productions

Dance Education

BackstageCoach.com

BALLET TERMINOLOGY FOR THE BEGINNER DANCER

Turn-out is used by dancers in order to execute movements like a battement à la seconde with greater height. Without turn-out the dancer has a limited range of motion. Turn-out is a rotation that is initiated from the hips and continues through the knees, ankles, and feet. Everyone experiences different flexibility in the hips and other joints so the degree of turn-out is highly individual. Most of the muscles and tendons in the hips have developed by the time a dancer reaches the teen-age years; therefore, younger dancers embody a propensity for more notable change in the elasticity of these muscles.

For more information on ballet terminology you may be interested in the following source from the Backstage Dance Library.

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