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Dance Education

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TURN TECHNIQUE

by
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TERMINOLOGY

en tournant: indicates that the body is to turn while executing a given step

pirouette: a full turn of the body on one foot; the working leg may be placed in a variety of positions

pirouette, grande: any skill linked to a pirouette; a series of turns

spinning: turning without spotting

spotting: the movement of the head and focus while turning; the eyes are focused at a definite point eye-level; the head is the last to move from the spot and the first to arrive as the body finishes the turn; a photograph impression of the face is created by these quick snaps of the head in which it remains forward during the turn; prevents dizziness

tour: a turn of the body

HEAD

- the shoulders, neck, jaw and tongue are relaxed; any undue tension will affect the alignment of the spine
- spotting helps to refocus the eyes and aids in balancing
- the dancer must spot when turning in order to produce multiple turns with accuracy and consistency
- the focus remains level
- know where to spot before you begin a turn
- know where to end the spot if it is different from where you started
- the spot along with the arms control the speed of the turn so adjust as needed
- spot on the second step of a pas de bourrée turn

UPPER BODY

- if falling to one side, think of stretching up and down versus turning
- make note that joints on both sides of the body are balanced for correct alignment

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UPPER BODY

- placement of arms will either aid or hinder the momentum in the ability to turn
- complete the entire revolution with the shoulders and hips squared to the desired ending
- drop the shoulder blades and gently pull down the upper back or trapezius in opposition to the body rising in relevé; this affords the performer with a more secure balance
- when the arms are placed first en avant the fingertips remain level with the sternum
- the arms should be placed as follows: elbows are lower than the shoulders; wrists are lower than the elbows; fingers are lower than the wrists
- at the descent of the plié the arms are placed in 3rd position; in relevé the arm rounded in front of the sternum opens to a demi-second before both arms close in 1st for the turn
- longer arms may need to cross while turning
- release any tension in the fingers and thumbs by simply shaking the hands vigorously

LOWER BODY

- turn-out must be maintained in the duration of the turn for classical ballet; rotating inward will result in a loss of force in the spin; turned-in is also classically incorrect
- relax the hip in turn-out so that tension does not cause misalignment
- hips should remain aligned when the working leg is lifted in passé or any other desired position
- experiencing the opposition between the working leg and the opposite hip is the key to maintaining turn-out while turning
- plié adequately for the number of revolutions performed
- breathe out on the plié; consciously control breathing to control the turn
- rise into a fully stretched relevé on demi-pointe
- remain in relevé until the end of the turn
- the working leg should remain in position without slipping during the turn
- finish with a final pose

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FEET

- understand the proper preparation from which to begin the turn
- parallel turns require a parallel preparation; turned-out turns require a turned-out preparation
- in parallel preparations shift the weight forward over the toes before turning to eliminate having to shift the weight while turning
- keep the toe connected to the ankle in coupé and to the knee in retiré during the entire revolution
- keep the working foot aligned with the ankle versus sickled

Suggested Resources:

Grant, Gail. *Technical Manual and Dictionary of Classical Ballet*. New York: Dover Publications Inc., 1982.

Grieg, Valerie. *Inside Ballet Technique: Separating Anatomical Fact from Fiction in the Ballet Class*. New Jersey: Princeton Book Company, 1994.

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

Turns and Turn Combos Instructional Dance Video. Dir. Michelle Assaf. DVD. Tezoro Productions, 2003.

Warren, Gretchen Ward. *Classical Ballet Technique*. Florida: Univ. Press of Florida, 1989.