

Extra Ballet Class – Which one is best for me?

Ballet 1 (1 hour)

This class is for first year dancers enrolled in the extra ballet program. A dancer must be in Shining Stars 3 or above to take this class. Younger dancers must be recommended by a staff member.

Ballet 2 (1 hour)

This class is for dancers in Grades 4 or above who have successfully completed Ballet 1.

Consider Pointe (90 minutes)

By now your child may be beginning their third year of extra ballet. At this level, the teachers devote one entire class to testing each child for pointe shoe readiness. (See Pointe Facts and Pre-requisites) Some of these students will be allowed to go on pointe for the last 30 minutes of the class while others continue to work on pre-pointe exercises and strengthening in ballet shoes. All students will perform in ballet shoes at the recital.

Beginning Pointe (90 minutes)

This class is for dancers already on pointe who have mastered strong barre work and pointe strengthening skills. At this level you will perform in pointe shoes. Dancers who have advanced forward forfeiting pointe will perform in ballet shoes.

Int. Pointe/On Pointe/Advanced Junior Pointe (90 minutes)

These classes are for dancers who are developing strong centre floor pointe skills. Dancers not on pointe will perform in ballet shoes.

Advanced Senior Pointe (1 and 3/4 hours)

This class is reserved for our most advanced ballet students. Dancers may be on or off pointe at this level. Dancers not on pointe will perform in ballet shoes. Most dancers at this level have been studying extra ballet for 6-10 years.

Ankeny Dance & Performing Arts Academy Extra Ballet Program

Thank you for your interest in our extra ballet program at Ankeny Dance & Performing Arts Academy

The extra ballet program emphasizes ballet instruction as the foundation and building block of all forms of dance curriculum. Extra ballet is like the A, B, C's of dance. A dancer should have a strong ballet background to develop the strength, balance, flexibility, and technique to excel in tap, jazz, pointe and other dance styles. Ballet instruction is fundamental and basic to the art of dance. Although combination classes always include ballet instruction, at the advanced levels they use techniques that the student should already have developed in the extra ballet curriculum. A student who desires to excel in dance needs a strong basis in the fundamentals of ballet to transfer and build on that technique in other forms of dance.

Throughout the training process, students progress at an individual pace. Dancers are not automatically moved from one level to another without mastering the skills being taught at each level. Students are evaluated constantly based on their physical readiness, skill level, body type, and attitude. Dancers must eventually develop a dancer's mind set to accept constructive criticism as the physical demands increase with each level.

As children mature, they grow into a variety of body types. Certain body types will unfortunately lessen one's chances of successfully going on pointe. This has nothing to do with one's ability or work ethic. Ankeny Dance will not risk a child's long term health by being pressured by parents and/or students to do something they are not physically ready to do. Our teachers and staff are professionals who have the knowledge and experience to know what is right for each student. It is unprofessional and potentially unhealthy for the student to go on pointe prematurely no matter how badly they want it. We encourage each dancer to stay in the extra ballet program using ballet slippers as an alternative to pointe shoes.

Students wishing to be considered for pointe must have the necessary physical attributes and technical skills required by pointe to reduce the risk of physical injury.

The teacher will advise your child if and when she is ready for pointe shoes. Please understand that not all students are ready at the same time. Dedication, posture, body type, shape of feet, bone structure, and muscular tone are all important factors. Many students have to simply wait longer for their body to mature. Pointe students are under constant evaluation. Some students may have to wait two years or more. This is normal and expected. Professional teachers and studios must be very strict on pointe readiness. Thank you in advance for trusting our professional judgment and experience. The ballet part of each class is what is most important to excel as a dancer. Pointe shoes are not necessary to be an excellent dancer.

Pointe Facts, Knowledge, and Pre-Requisites

1. It is an unfortunate fact that students are allowed to start Pointe at too early of an age
2. It is easier to say when a child should not begin Pointe work than to give a definite age limit, or lay down the length of training to precede it.
3. Children of the same age group vary enormously in physical maturity, weight and strength. Additionally, aptitude and ability cannot be standardized and as every teacher knows, these must largely govern the timing for starting pointe work.
4. It cannot be stressed too often that it is the teacher and the teacher only who can decide when the moment arrives to recommend a student go up on Pointe. Parents should understand that there is always an element of risk involved with pointe and the teacher is in the best position to make that decision.
5. The most important requirement for pointe work is good coordination of the whole body with each part adapting correctly and without strain to any new position without losing the “placement” which should have been established by barre and centre training.

Posture

Is the child's posture correct? Can she stand and move without losing this posture.

Strength

Can all exercises on the demi-pointe be performed with the supporting knee absolutely straight? If not, back, hip, abdominal and thigh muscles are not yet strong enough so that thighs can be well pulled up and weight pulled up and weight lifted off the feet. There is risk of damage to the feet and possibly to the knee joints or spine.

Feet

Are the feet absolutely free from any tendency to sickle in or out? If not, the ankle joints in particular will be subjected to undue strain. Is the ankle joint sufficiently flexible to form with the forefoot a right triangle when on demi-pointe? Are the toes being correctly used inside soft shoes, i.e., without any clutching or curling?

Examples:

Look at a typical six year old, slightly chubby and with a tummy and hollow back, which is perfectly normal for her age.. When she is on half-pointe, facing and holding the barre, her posture looks better. But if she were allowed to go on the full pointe the soft tissues around the bones of her feet and knees could suffer damage. The pressure on the lower back could result in injury which might hinder the child for life. No parent would want to take such a risk and must trust the expertise and experience of the teacher.

Nine years of age. The back is a little hollow and therefore the head is a little forward. The latter is accentuated by the difficulty of maintaining balance on the half-pointe, because the thigh and abdominal muscles are weak. Much more training is required before contemplating Pointe work.

Ten years old. Hollow back which the child can correct, but with effort. It has not yet become her habitual stance and therefore, however good her execution on demi-pointe, she is not ready for anything else.

A lovely foot could be damaged in a few minutes on Pointe. The loss of head position on demi-pointe is a sure indication that the back and thigh muscles need a great deal of training before they can do their share in lifting the weight off the feet, so as to prevent the toes from damage and preserve the arch of the foot.

Top Ten Reasons Teachers Do Not Let Students Start Pointe

Improper placement

Too young

Not pulled up in body or feet

Feet not arched sufficiently

Overweight

Lack of torso strength

Weak knees

Weak ankles

Basic stance on demi-pointe not strong or correct

Taking too few classes per week

The following information has been excerpted from the Pointe Book:” Shoes Training and Technique” by Janice Barringer and Sarah Schlesinger.

Buying your Pointe shoes

It is important to purchase pointe shoes where the sales people are knowledgeable about the shoes and the proper fit. Each pair is different. Many are handmade, so even within a particular style there could be variations. Always bring padding you will be using with you. It can affect the fit. A shoe should not be baggy when standing flat. There could be slight gaps when on pointe, but nothing major. A good way to know if the length is good is to stand in second position (flat) and grand plie. The toes should just touch the front of the box. “Painful” is the best way to describe the experience of dancing in pointe shoes that are too short. If they are short, the shoe will dig into your heel and will become painful to roll through. A shoe that is too big is also bad, because when you go on pointe, your foot slides down into the box, which could create serious foot problems in addition to the heel slipping off the foot during class.

Sewing on Ribbons and Elastic

Ribbons and elastic are very important. Never leave the ribbons off as they support the ankles when you go up on pointe. To find out where to sew them, fold the heel forward and where the crease ends is where the elastic should go. Consider sewing them straight up and down, some people angle them towards their ankle slightly. Pin the ribbons to your shoe first and tie them to see if it works. Elastic is sewn at the heel making a loop at the ankle. Sew each side about an inch to either side of the back seam so the elastic doesn’t irritate the Achilles tendon. Angle the elastic away from the heel. Make sure to pin it on and try it out before you sew. This helps keep the shoe on your heel, although not everyone needs it.

Tying Your Pointe Shoes

Some people tie their pointe shoes while their foot is on pointe, but this is wrong. Tie them with the foot flat, slightly flexed, that way you avoid a cut-off of circulation. Never wrap ribbons above the ankle. Keep them close together around your ankle for support. Get out all wrinkles and bumps. Be sure to tie the knot on the inside of your ankle and not at the back. It won’t be putting pressure on your tendon that way.

Padding

There are many types of padding for pointe.

Loose lambs wool- you have to form it yourself and if you leave a thin spot your toes can work their way through. Lambs wool is good for extra protection along with other types of padding. Lambs wool toe pads work well. Pillows for Pointe don’t have any seams along the edge like other brands. Consider putting them over bare toes and then pull your tights on over them to prevent them from shifting when you dance. Pillows for Pointe also make foam rubber pads (pink ones). Consider using them with a little extra loose lambs wool around the big toes. Put the lambs wool under your tights and the toe pads on top. They are good because your toes don’t move around a lot which helps to stop blisters from forming. In addition, put small strips of tape over the parts of the feet where you are prone to blisters. The pads with gel are plastic and when your feet sweat, blisters can form. Everyone has their own preferences. Experiment each time you get a new style of shoe to determine what padding works best for your foot and whether to put the wool under or on top of your tights.

Breaking In Your Shoes

Each time you wear your shoes they break down a little. When wearing new shoes, you need to point your foot extra hard during class. Consider doing some breaking in at home to make class time more comfortable. You may want to put socks over your shoes to warm them up faster and to protect the satin from getting dirty. When the shoes are warm, do a few releves in first position taking extra time to slowly roll through them. Pause at demi-pointe and while going over the arch after reaching full pointe. The key here is the slow part. When you take off the shoes, slightly bend the shank with your hands. Some people use alcohol on the wings or vamp of the pointe shoes to soften them up if they are uncomfortable.