

The Academy of Expressive Dance

316 Latimer Road South Mountain, ON K0E 1W0 613-989-3418

info@academyofexpressivedance.com

www.academyofexpressivedance.com

Director: Andrea Gaw-Prekob, CD.T.A.

Our checklist before allowing students to start pre-pointe:

Length and intensity of study: Time and preparation is required for the student to develop adequate strength and proper technique. We do not allow students under a high level 3 (or low 4) ballet to begin pre-pointe. Students at this level are strongly encouraged to take 2 ballet classes per week at this level of training. For the first year Pre-Pointe is introduced, the student may be allowed to only do the one, but thereafter should be adding in a second class to increase and maintain strength.

Strength: Pointe is extremely physically demanding and the student must exhibit proper muscular strength in their regular ballet class in order to accomplish ease of movement on pointe. Going up on pointe too early may result in significant musculoskeletal problems. Students must have enough strength to “pull up” and keep their weight out of their toes.

Age/Bone development: Bones have different rates of ossification (hardening). Children’s foot bones ossify from approx. age 10 to 14. As a precaution, the student must therefore must have sufficient muscular strength to ensure that the joints are kept in alignment, and we NEVER allow students on actual pointe until they are at least 12-13.

Anatomy of the foot and ankle: the structure of the foot and ankle is taken into consideration as special exercises are required for each type of foot. Some students will naturally have an easier time with pointework because of the shape and/or flexibility of their foot and ankle.

Attitude: A love of dance is absolutely a requirement for starting pre-pointe. The student must be committed to her training, and willing to persevere. A casual attitude towards dancing will soon dissolve into negativity and frustration. Also, we consider the students level of maturity and responsibility because of the seriousness of pointe training.

To the “Pointe”--

Everything you wanted to know, but were afraid to ask

Lots of young ballet students dream of getting pointe shoes and becoming a “real” ballerina, but most do not realize the hard work and dedication it takes to actually “get” on pointe. Here at the Academy, we start years in advance to train and build muscles before the student will ever even get “real” pointe shoes.

The following is The Academy’s philosophy and practice of training students so that the transition from soft ballet shoes to pointe is seamless, painless, and as injury-free as possible. We strive to ensure the student is ready mentally as well as physically, and here are the steps we take.

First, before we talk about classes, let’s talk in general what it is all about. Pre-Pointe is a series of exercises for the foot, arch, and ankle. Obviously, we need strong feet and ankles in order to safely hold up our body weight on the tip of our toes. We do sometimes forget that our feet and ankles are not the only thing involved in pointework. Your entire body must work as a well-oiled machine in order to achieve beauty and grace...as well as strength...on pointe. Dancing on pointe is an extension of your regular ballet class. If you cannot perform the steps, or hold your body in proper “dance position” in soft ballet shoes, the addition of pointe shoes to the equation is a recipe for disaster and injury. All ballet barre exercises are designed to strengthen the ankle, foot, leg and work on flexibility....which are all essential elements that lead to a healthy dancer. Pre-pointe exercises further target specific smaller muscles within the ankle and foot, but we always consider the whole picture when allowing students on pointe. Our process may seem extreme or slow to some, but we feel it is the healthiest and safest way to produce strong dancers.

At about age 10 or 11, interested, dedicated students have the choice (with their teacher’s permission) to start Pre-Pointe classes. These classes do not involve special shoes; it is only the first step in a long journey. In Pre-Pointe class, we focus on special exercises that strengthen both the foot and ankle muscles, targeting the muscles that will be used for pointework. During the first year, this is the only extra class required for the student. There are, of course, always exceptions to this rule. Perhaps the student is advanced/older and wants to really get ahead faster; another factor to consider is the student and their body/muscle structure—if pointework is a serious goal for the student, then the teacher may suggest an extra class to help build muscle and flexibility—for more than the usual time suggested.





An unofficial Guide to Pre-pointe Training at the Academy of Expressive Dance

1st year: regular ballet class and the introduction to Pre-pointe

2nd year: regular ballet class, addition of a lower level ballet class, and minimum of 1 pre-pointe class

3rd year: like 2nd year, with the addition of pre-point shoes, 2 pre-pointe classes

4th year: like 3rd year, those students that are ready will progress into pointe shoes.

So, you want to be a ballerina....

All right. Your dream is one step closer, and you've been asked if you want to start pre-pointe. What does this mean?

If it is your first year, you will need to add in a pre-pointe class to your schedule. This class will start to help you prepare for the next few years ahead. Even if you later decide that you want to wait or not continue with pointe, pre-pointe will help with the strength in your feet and ankles, which is useful no matter what you do—it is never a "waste".

In your second year (if the student is keen, we suggest this second class be added in the first year), you are strongly encouraged to add another ballet class in to your weekly schedule that is at a *lower level* than your regular class. *Why do you have to take a lower level?* In your regular class, sometimes we get so caught up in learning new things, we forget to do simple things like head positions, or arm positions. In an "easy" class, the student should know the steps, and have the time to concentrate on the technique—pulling up, muscle control, pointing and turning out the feet, arm positions, head positions, and general "perfection" of the basics. The second class also increases and maintains your muscle strength, which is exactly what we are trying to do. ... The higher the level of the class, the more demanding and difficult the steps are; requiring more strength, control, speed, etc.

Once you've gotten through your second year (or earlier or later— whenever your teacher approves), you will be given permission to get pre-pointe shoes, also known as "soft block" shoes. These are NOT pointe shoes, but rather more like a "training" shoe. (See the definition to the right)

When you first transition from ballet shoes to pre-pointe shoes it feels a bit like you are wearing flippers...or cement blocks on your feet. Suddenly, it's like trying to write neatly with huge mittens on. So, at the Academy, we use our pre-pointe shoes in the lower level class during barre. This helps not only with getting used to the feel of a pointe shoe, but it also gives resistance to the foot, forcing it to work harder, thereby increasing strength.

When your teacher feels you have gained sufficient strength and have enough technical training behind you, then she will invite you to get "real" pointe shoes. Your class time must never drop below twice a week, plus your pre-pointe and/or pointe class. Adding in extra classes like jazz or tap are encouraged, as they target different sets of muscles, as well as help with your creativity, flexibility, and musicality, but are not necessary.

Pre-Pointe Shoes

"A demi-pointe shoe, which is also variously called a break-down, pre-pointe, or soft-block shoe, shares many characteristics with pointe shoes. Its outer appearance resembles that of a pointe shoe and it has a toe box, although the box is softer and the wings (sides of the toe box) are typically not as deep as those found on pointe shoes. Demi-pointe shoes are secured to the feet with ribbons and elastic band in identical fashion to pointe shoes. Unlike pointe shoes, however, demi-pointe shoes have no shank and, as a result, they do not provide the support necessary for pointe work. Demi-pointe shoes are used to train dancers who are new to pointe technique. They serve to acclimate dancers to the feel of wearing pointe shoes and to strengthen the ankles and feet in preparation for dancing en pointe in pointe shoes. The toe box allows the dancer to experience the feel of a pointe shoe, while the insole and outsole work together to provide the resistance needed for developing foot and ankle strength." (copied from Wikipedia)