



DANCE

ELEMENTS OF A SUCCESSFUL

DANCER

ELEMENTS OF A SUCCESSFUL DANCER

When starting out as a dancer, or any profession or activity for that matter, it's important to recognize what it takes to be successful. There are eight essential elements in dance. As your skills improve, your understanding of how those elements are vital to your body will change as you come to learn what they mean. Those elements add up to give you technique.

The first element is balance. Balance has to do with more than just how well or how long you can stand on one leg. Your purpose is to achieve and constantly maintain an inner balance of the whole body. There must be mutual support among all parts of your body to bring everything together in a new way. There must also be an inner relationship between all points of your body, which you should be aware of at all times. This is something that should remain constant - a sense of balance whether you are moving or standing still.

Centering, which is the second element, is fundamental to your ability to dance. This is maintaining a sense of your body's center, which holds you together as you move. It allows you to move freely and gracefully. You have the ability to hold, move, and organize yourself around your own body. If you are centered, you can learn how to do anything... through the proper progressions of course. If you are not centered, however, you may develop beautiful-looking arms and legs, but you will never be able to move well. Every movement has to go through center. And moving from your center will make movements easier to control.



Gravity, the third element, is the force that holds you to the earth. It's a force you have to work with, as it constantly inhibits movement. Try to become aware of the pulls in your own body. What points are pulling the most weight? When you push on these points, can you feel tension from them? If so, you should be holding yourself better. When you dance, you want to feel as if someone is pushing you from underneath and at the base of your spine, which should direct the energy up through your chest.

To achieve correct **posture**, which is the fourth element, you need to change your own perception of your body. There is often a wide discrepancy between what feels right and what looks right. Dancers work all their lives on their posture, or alignment. It is the key to balance and movement. Your posture not only reveals your feelings, but it can also reveal feelings in you. By learning how to stand properly, you will actually feel brighter and more aware.

The fifth element is **rhythm**. Finding rhythm is largely a matter of staying focused. Though everyone has it, some people are not as aware or sensitive to it. Your heart beats to a rhythm, as do your lungs. Rhythm is essential for a dancer. To make sure you are on the right beat, and not a second late, pay attention. To get it right, you must anticipate the beat slightly. Try to feel as though you are making the beat with your body, as well as hearing it.

Try to beat as one with the music, rather than simply dancing to it. It's the rhythm and the beat of the dance that forms the "threads," which allow you to memorize the structure of a dance.

Gesture, the sixth element, involves using the body as an expressive instrument to communicate feelings and ideas in patterns of movement. With subtle gestures and attitudes, you show cooperation, confidence, and even aggression. Hands on your hips mean, "show me." Arms crossed are a protective wall. Weight on one hip means you're waiting. Hands out in front mean you are ready to give or receive. Raising your shoulders either means you don't know or you don't care. Shoulders forward express pain. Tapping your foot means you're bored.

Be conscientious of what your body is saying. You don't want to make the wrong statement with a simple gesture.

You must always be aware of the **space**, which is the seventh element, around you. You have to move with care and awareness, testing the space. Space is not just empty air; it's a tangible element you move through. Feel your thoughts, emotions, and accomplishments as you journey through space. Press your feelings out through your torso and limbs in such a way to show people how you are feeling and to satisfy your desire of movement. This is especially seen in lyrical routines.

Your muscles feel better when they are used, and once you get used to moving them, your body will respond by working in harmony with itself - to dance.

The eighth and final element, **breathing**, is crucial to dancing. Not only does it bring oxygen to the body, but it also gives your movements fluency and harmony. It is an expressive tool. Calm, slow breathing suggests a certain degree of self-control. A movement with breath has a controlled and considered extension of time, a clear beginning and end.

You must learn to stay focused and work on combining these eight elements. That is the only way to correctly and successfully progress your dance technique.