

## MODERN DANCE TECHNIQUE LANGUAGE / TERMINOLOGY

### The Body Anatomy

#### Spine

- **Cervical Spine:** The vertebrae of the neck.
- **Thoracic Spine:** The chest area of the spine.
- **Lumbar Spine:** The area of the spine pertaining to the lower back vertebrae. There are five lumbar vertebrae.

#### Hip / Pelvis

- **Acetabulum:** Hip/thigh socket.
- **Greater Trochanter:** Bone located laterally at the junction of the shaft and neck of the femur (thigh). Often considered as the outside of the hips.
- **Head of Femur:** A ball-like bone on the upper end of the femur (thigh) that articulates with the acetabulum, comprising the hip joint.
- **Hip Joint:** The hip joint is comprised of the head of the femur (thigh) fitting into the acetabulum of the pelvis.
- **Pelvis:** A complex bony structure made up of the sacrum and the left and right hip bones (os coxae).

#### Leg

- **Femur:** Thigh bone, large bone of the upper leg.
- **Quadriceps:** A group of four muscles located on the anterior (front) aspect of the thigh. The primary function of the quadriceps is to extend the knee joint.
- **Hamstrings:** Because the hamstrings cross two joints, they have essentially two primary functions. First, when the hip is fixated and movement takes place at the knee, the hamstrings are responsible for knee flexion. On the other hand, when the knee is fixated and movement takes place at the hip, the hamstrings will work in concert with the gluteals (minimus and maximus) to produce hip extension.

### Body / Leg / Feet Positions

- neutral standing position
- first position (rotated)
- second position (rotated)
- narrow parallel position
- wide parallel position
- inversion

**Developmental Movement Patterns** (from "An Introduction to Body-Mind Centering" by Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen)

**Spinal Movement:** head to tail movement; correlates to the movement of fish

**Homologous Movement:** symmetrical movement of two upper and/or two lower limbs simultaneously; correlates to the movement of amphibians

**Homolateral Movement / Body Half:** asymmetrical movement of one upper limb and the lower limb on the same side; correlates to the movement of reptiles

***Contralateral Movement / Opposition:*** diagonal movement of one upper limb with the opposite lower limb; correlates to the movement of mammals

## Body Actions

***Abduction:*** Abduction of a joint moves a bone away from the midline of the body.

***Adduction:*** Adduction of a joint moves a bone toward the midline of the body.

***Flexion:*** Flexion of a joint is to bend it or decrease the angle between the bones of the joint.

- dorsiflexion: bending at the ankle joint; there are infinite positions of dorsiflexion
- plantar flexion: straightening/pointing at the ankle joint; there is one position of plantar flexion
- forward flexion: flexion toward the front of the body
- lateral flexion: flexion of the spine away from the midline of the body
- complete flexion: position at the shoulder joint in which upper arm is raised straight overhead


***Extension:*** Extension of a joint is generally to straighten it.

***Hyperextension:*** Hyperextension is extreme extension of a joint or the spine.

***Lateral:*** Movement away from the median plane or longitudinal center of the body.

***Rotation:*** Movement around a central axis.

- inward: rotation of a limb toward the front of the body.
- outward: rotation of a limb away from the front of the body.
- spiral (right/left rotation): rotation of the spinal column along its vertical axis.

***Plié*** : bent or bending; coordinated flexion at the hip and knee joints and dorsiflexion at the ankle joint.

## Types of Movement Initiation (from principles found in Laban Movement Analysis)

***Core (Proximal) Initiation:*** Movement initiated by body parts situated next to or nearest the point of attachment to the body.

***Distal Initiation:*** Movement initiated by body parts situated away from the point of attachment to the body.

## Performance Attributes

***Weight/Grounded Pelvis***

***Intentional Focus***

***Traveling***

***Body Part Initiation and Awareness***

***Range of Motion***

***Movement Intention***

## Modern Dance Technique Glossary of Terms -- Expanded List

***Abdominals:*** Muscles found on the belly of the body. The abdominals include the rectus abdominus, the obliques, and the transversalis.

***Abduction:*** Movement away from the midline on the lateral plane.

***Adduction:*** Movement toward the midline on the lateral plane.

***Accent:*** In music, accent refers to a stress or an emphasis on a musical event. Accents can be created by

changes in loudness, by extreme pitches and by rhythmic placement.

**Alignment:** The ability to efficiently organize the body in relationship to dancing.

**Attention:** Mindful and conscious awareness of sensation.

**Body half:** The movement of the right or left half of the body, while the other half is stationary or playing a supportive role. The term is associated with Bartenieff Fundamentals and developmental movement patterns.

**Brush:** Gliding the foot along the floor, also known as a tendu in ballet.

**Cervical:** Pertaining to the neck vertebrae. There are seven cervical vertebrae.

**Coccyx:** The tailbone, which consists of three-four fused vertebrae.

**Conditioning:** Enhancement of strength, flexibility and endurance through physical training. A dancer strives to achieve a balance of flexibility, strength, and muscular and cardiorespiratory endurance.

**Core-distal:** Energetic relationship between the center and the limbs.

**Core strength:** Postural tone (strength) and connectivity of major muscles of the torso, hip and shoulders.

**Contralateral:** Cross patterning of arms and legs. A twisting action that underlies oppositional use of arms and legs. The term is associated with developmental movement patterns.

**Crease:** Deep folding at the hip joint.

**Distal:** Furthest away from center.

**Downstage:** Part of the stage closer to the audience.

**Downward dog:** An inverted V shape form the yoga tradition with both arms and legs supporting weight.

**Dynamics:** The use of weight, space, flow and time to create different energetic statements.

**Femur:** Long, upper leg bone.

**Flat back:** Torso is suspended horizontally in space like the top of a table.

**Flexion:** Decreasing the angle between two joints on the sagittal plane. (exception is the shoulder joint)

**Focus:** The gaze of the eye. It is also used in dance to refer to internal or external focus. Internal focus is awareness of sensations inside the body. External focus is full attention to the space outside the body. Focus can also refer to the ability to concentrate.

**Hip joint:** The articulation of the femur (leg bone) with the acetabulum, a deep hole in the pelvic girdle. This large, strong joint accommodates three planes of motion of the leg-flexion/extension, lateral/medial rotation, and abduction/adduction.

**Hamstrings:** Group of three muscles (biceps femoris, semitendinosus, semimembranosus) on the back of the thigh that acts to extend the hip and flex the knee.

**Hanging over:** Usually refers to standing on two legs while creasing the body at the hip joints and letting the torso, arms, and head release to gravity.

**Head-tail:** An energetic relationship between the head and the tailbone (coccyx).

**Heel rocks:** An energetic rocking with the heels while lying on the back of the floor. Associated with Bartenieff Fundamentals.

**Heel-sitz bones:** The energetic relationship between the heel and the bottom of the pelvis (ischial tuberosity).

**Homolateral:** Distinction between right and left half (body half). Term associated with Developmental Movement Patterns.

**Homologous:** Distinction between upper and lower body. Term associated with Developmental Movement Patterns.

**Initiation:** The body part or location from where movement begins. Movement can be centrally (core) or peripherally (distal) initiated.

**Intention:** Choices concerning weight, flow, space, time and purpose by the performer, in conjunction with the dancemaker, that give distinction to the movement.

**Inversion:** Moving the body upside down in space while weight bearing with arms, hands, shoulders or head.

**Isolation:** The ability to hold one part of the body still while moving another part.

**Kinesthetic:** The perception of movement through aural, tactile, articular, muscular, vestibular channels.

**Kinesthetic memory:** The ability to physically remember and repeat body actions or forms.

**Lateral curves:** The sideward bending of the body.

**Lateral plane:** The plane that divides the body from front to back.

**Lateral shifts:** The transfer of weight from side to side.

**Locomotor:** Knowledge of both weight transfer and rhythmical patterning.

**Walk:** The transfer of weight from one leg to the other with one foot always on the floor. Generally, the heel strikes the ground first.

**Run:** The transfer of weight from one leg to the other during which there is a brief moment when both feet are off the ground. The weight is usually leaning forward in a run.

**Leap:** The transfer of weight from one leg to the other during which there is a suspended moment when both feet are off the ground.

**Prance:** The transfer of weight from one leg to the other, but weight is transferred toe-ball-heel. Weight is carried vertically. Can be done with straight or bent legs.

**Hop:** An elevation or scoot which takes off from one leg and lands on the same leg.

**One to two:** A transfer of weight (usually with elevation) from one leg to two legs. In ballet, this is called an assemblé.

**Two to one:** A transfer of weight (usually with elevation) from two legs to one leg. In ballet, this is called a saissonne.

**Jump:** A transfer of weight (usually with elevation) from two legs to two legs.

**Phrase/Combination/Sequence/Pattern:** Terms used to describe two or more movements linked together.

## Complex Locomotor Movements

**Triplet:** Three steps usually done in a down (pli) up (relev), up (relev) sequence.

**Slide:** An undercurve movement that combines a slide (a sliding step in a pli), an elevation and a landing on the other leg. In ballet, this is called a chassé.

**Step-hop:** A combination of a step and a hop. Usually done in an even rhythm with level change.

**Skip:** A combination of a step and hop in an uneven rhythm.

**Gallop:** A combination of a step and a leap. The overcurve airborne moment occurs after the step.

**Lumbar:** The area of the spine pertaining to the lower back vertebrae. There are five lumbar vertebrae.

**Lumbar curve:** The curving or rounding of the lower back.

**Meter:** Sets of beats grouped together according to a consistent accent pattern. For example: 123, 123, 123, etc. or 12345, 12345 etc.

**Duple meter:** A meter with two apparent beats per measure.

**Triple meter:** A meter with three apparent beats per measure.

**Compound meter:** A meter comprised of multiple groups of three beats (6/8, 9/8, 12/8 etc) with an accent or apparent beat occurring on the first of each group of three beats (12345678910 11 12).

**Complex meter:** A meter with an asymmetrical accent pattern.

**Mixed meter:** The practice of changing meters sequentially in music or dance.

**Polymeter:** The practice of performing two or meters at the same time.

**Time signature:** A time signature is a notational indication of the organization of a piece of music. The top number specifies the number of beats per measure while the bottom number indicates which note value will be equal to one beat.

**Movement pick-up:** The ability to learn and execute movement sequences quickly.

**Musicality:** 1) The ability of a dancer to move responsively to music. 2) Independent of music, the ability of a dancer to move with nuanced coherency where all movement materials are given specific physical and dynamic expression in and of themselves and in relationship to each other.

**Overcurve:** The shifting of weight from one leg to the other while lifting the body weight up at the top of the curve through space.

**Pelvis:** A basin-like bony structure formed by the sacrum and os coxae. It acts like a container to hold the organs of the torso and it serves for muscle attachments. It receives the weight of the upper body and passes this weight on to the lower limbs via its articulations with the femurs.

**Phrasing:** The use of weight, space flow and time to create a sequence of movement in time.

**Presence:** The ability to be aware and fully invested in the present moment.

**Proximal:** Closest to the center.

**Pulse:** A beat at regular intervals.

**Quadriceps:** A group of four muscles on the front of the thigh (rectus femoris, vastus lateralis, vastus medialis, and vastus intermedius) that act to extend the knee.

**Release:** The relationship of the body with gravity, and the ability to let go of unnecessary muscular tension.

**Rhythm:** A sequence of varied accents and durations in either motion or sound.

**Rotation:** Movement around an axis on the transverse plane. Lateral rotation at the hip is known as turn-out.

**Sacrum:** The posterior, wedge shaped component of the pelvis located between the two pelvic bones.

**Scapula:** The triangular bone on the back of the body that forms the posterior part of the shoulder girdle.

**Sensing:** The ability to read or listen to what is coming in from our sensory channels: the eyes, ears, nose, skin, muscles, etc.

**Sitz bones:** Also called the ischial tuberosity, these are the bones that make contact with the ground while sitting.

**Spirals:** A twisting action of the spin or joints.

**Stability/mobility:** Stabilizing a joint in order to create efficient movement. For instance, performing a grand battement without lifting the hip.

**Stage left:** The left side of the stage from the performer's perspective, when gazing at the audience.

**Stage right:** The right side of the stage from the performer's perspective, when gazing at the audience.

**Sustained:** Movement performed with flowing consistently and without accent.

**Swinging:** Pendular movement consisting of a release with gravity, an arcing follow through, and a suspension. Usually done in a triple rhythm.

**Syncopation:** A character of rhythm that occurs when accents occur in unexpected paces within an otherwise predictable or repetitive pattern.

**Thoracic:** Pertaining to the upper back vertebrae. There are twelve thoracic vertebrae.

**Thoracic curve:** Rounding of the upper back.

**Tilt:** A movement of the upper body laterally and downward.

**Transverse plane:** The plane that divides the body into upper and lower.

**Turn-out:** Lateral/outward rotation of the acetabular/femur (hip) joint.

**Undercurve:** Shifting of body weight from one leg to another while dropping the weight lower in the center of the curve.

**Upstage:** The part of the stage that is farthest from the audience.

**Upper back arch:** The extension up and back of the upper body and head.

**Upper back curve:** Rounding of the upper back (thoracic curve).

**Weight shifts:** The transfers of body weight from one leg to the other.

**X-rolls:** Rolls on the floor, initiated by the distal reach of a foot or hand, that runs the body from belly to back or back to belly while lying on the floor. A term associated with Bartenieff Fundamentals and developmental movement patterns.

**Yield and push:** The release of body weight into the floor followed by an activated push away from gravity. A term associated with developmental movement patterns and Body-Mind Centering.

**\*\*** Some of these terms and definitions are used with permission of Jan Erkert & the Dance Center of Columbia College in Chicago.