

FAQ's About Our Ballet Classes

1. 2 hours per week of dance seems like a lot for a kindergartener or 1st-grader - why is this encouraged?

Like any other skill, dance requires practice in order to achieve cognitive and muscular memory. But unlike other skills, young students often don't have the resources, space, or know-how to practice independently just yet. We recognize that our students have diverse interests, and our youngest students may not yet know how they want to spend a lot of their time, so we do not require them to enroll in multiple classes at a young age. We encourage 2 hours a week so that their cumulative time spent dancing is commensurate with the amount of time they might spend practicing other skills.

2. My child enjoys ballet, but they like [insert other activity] more and are not willing to make time to attend a 2nd class during the week. Are they truly not welcome at the Academy?

Quite the opposite - we would love the opportunity to continue nurturing your dancer! Unfortunately, the most common bit of feedback we receive when a student withdraws is that they felt unwelcome when they were not progressing at the same rate as their peers. We can never make any guarantees, but one thing we know for sure is that a student who is not willing to commit to 2 classes per week by the time they are in Ballet II is much less likely to progress with their peers, and therefore much less likely to feel successful. As an Academy, our curricular focus is geared toward students who place a relatively high priority on dance education. If we are not the right fit for your family we are disappointed, but understand, and are happy to recommend studios in the area that may be better suited to your needs.

3. My child is in 1st grade but has been dancing since the age of 3. Why are they automatically placed in Level I classes?

Level I is the beginning of "formal" dance training and occurs at an age when it is developmentally appropriate physically, cognitively, emotionally, and socially. Early childhood dance classes are similar to preschool - concepts and movements are introduced and reinforced by teacher modeling, but there is no expectation that the student will repeatedly mimic the teacher with accuracy. Even though many of our Level I students have a few years of exposure to dance and some familiarity with the vocabulary, this class is when we begin to teach quality of movement and ask for accuracy.

- a. But my child really is very mature for their age...

We love it when we have a student who is wise beyond their years and can set a great example for their peers! But we also have many, many years of experience in watching the development of our students. Most often students who are pushed into classes that are not developmentally appropriate for them end up losing their passion for dance. Our staff is well-trained in teaching to the room and meeting each student where they are; we are confident your student will grow on their unique timeline and get exactly what they need from each class they are placed in.

4. My child has never danced before, but is already [age]. They will not be comfortable with "little" kids. Can they just take class with other kids their age? We would love to accommodate your request, and if we have at least 5 older students we may be able to create a beginning level class for you (so tell your friends, because we also have a great referral incentive). But we are an Academy with a well-established curriculum. For your student to feel successful it is critical that they start at the beginning of the curriculum so as not to be frustrated and overwhelmed.
5. Why was my child not promoted to the next level? They meet the minimum age requirement and they have been in their current level for 2 years.
Many factors determine readiness for promotion, and age only provides a baseline for "potential" readiness. Each dancer has their own unique timeline for growth, much like popcorn, each student "pops" or is ready to progress at a different time. For that reason, there is no "cookie cutter" answer to this question. Please make an appointment with your child's teacher for clarity on their placement.
6. Why are levels repeated? My child is bored.
Our curriculum is based on the concept of circular learning. During a student's first year in a level, most of the steps and vocabulary are new, and their focus is primarily on learning the "what's". During their subsequent years in a level, their focus can shift to the "how's"; they gain a deeper understanding of the material and are able to more seamlessly connect verbal cues to their movements. It is most typical for students to spend 2 years each in Level I and Level II. By Level III, the rate of progression depends largely on the dancer's commitment to their ballet classes. Level III is when the combinations of movements become more complex and musicality becomes more challenging. As the levels become more difficult, it is reasonable to expect that the material will take longer to master.
7. What's the deal with pointe, and when is it appropriate to begin "sur les pointe" studies?
Pointe can be a valuable experience for dancers who love ballet, but it does come with physical and financial commitments. However, it is not necessary to study

pointe to have a successful dance career - pointe is only required for Ballerinas. Readiness for pointe is determined by many factors, including but not limited to: age/physical maturity, ankle mobility, core/gluteal strength, and strong body awareness with consistent retention of corrections. If your student's teacher believes they are a good candidate for pointe studies, it will be indicated on their yearly evaluation.

8. Can my level IV or level V dancer take Conservatory classes "a la carte"?

We have set aside one Upper Theatre ballet class on Tuesday (for Ballet V students) and one Middle Theatre ballet class on Wednesday (for Ballet IV or V students) that will be appropriate for students who are not "full-time" Conservatory students. By identifying one "hybrid" class day per week for each of these levels, we can maintain consistency in the curriculum and ensure that every dancer in the room has the best possible experience.

9. What is the Academy Ballet Conservatory? How do I know if my child should audition?

The Academy Ballet Conservatory is a pre-professional training program for dancers who wish to pursue a career in ballet, whether as a performer, choreographer, teacher, arts administrator, or a combination of these fields. Like any elite sport (figure skating, travel soccer, etc.), it is a rigorous yet rewarding curriculum that requires significant physical, time, and financial commitments. Also like most sports, there are physical attributes (that some people are born with) which make success in ballet more likely (when coupled with years of training and dedication), and other physical attributes that make success in ballet a much more difficult struggle. This is not to say that dancers are only included if they fit a specific mold; we just think it is important to have a realistic understanding of the field. More often than not, Academy staff will reach out to you if they believe your dancer might be a good candidate for this course of study. But please do not hesitate to reach out to us with questions regarding your dancer's interests as they approach ages 9/10 for the Lower Theatre Ballet Program for advanced beginner studies in the art of ballet.