

Pointe Shoes – Correct Fitting

Having pointe shoes that fit well can make all the difference you loving or hating pointe work, so it is important to get it right from the beginning. Ill fitting shoes can result in not only pain and discomfort while dancing, but also black toenails, blisters and even stress fractures in the foot. As there are so many different types of pointe shoes this is often very confusing for first time buyers, so if at all possible see if your dance teacher can come with you to your first fitting, or if you know an experienced older student, ask them to come along. Ask your teacher if she knows a good fitter in your area that she trusts, and book an appointment ahead of time.

While the person who fits the shoes should check all of the following things, always make sure you check the fit of the shoes with your dance teacher or dance physiotherapist before you sew on the ribbons, break in the shoe or dance in them. If the shoes get dirty by wearing them around the house, they may not be able to be returned to the store, and it can become a very expensive exercise. You should always try the shoe on with any padding or ‘Ouch Pouches’ that you will wear while dancing, so check with your dance teacher or dance physiotherapist of what padding they feel is suitable before the fitting.

After you have bought the shoes, check the shoe in each of the following positions.

a Check the fit of the box:

The foot should fit snugly in standing; with the toes not too squashed in (They should be able to lie flat). There should be no bulging of the skin over the top edge of the shoe in standing. The top of the box should sit against the skin of the top of the foot. You should be able to just slide the first section of your finger inside the shoe. If the box is too high for a flat foot, there will be more space here. You can flatten the box slightly, but this will also alter the width.



b Look at the length of the wings:

The wings should come up to the side of the big toe joint. If they are too short, the box will pull the big toe in on an angle and may cause a bunion to form. If they are too long, it may be hard to work properly through the demi-pointe.



c Check the position of the heel of the shoe:

The satin of the heel should come 7/8 of the way up the heel bone. Too high, and you may get problems with the Achilles tendon attachment. Too low, and you will get frustrated with the heel of the shoe popping off when you tries to rise.



d Watch the length of the vamp:

This is the depth of the front of the shoe. If the vamp is too long you will not be able to rise through the demi-pointe effectively. If it is too short for long toes however, you will feel like you are falling out of the front of the shoe. The vamp should end about 1cm above where your toes join your foot.



e Plié in first and seconde position:

When performing a plié the foot is at its longest and widest, so it is important to check that there is enough room in the shoe for the foot while dancing. The toes must stay long in the shoe, and only just touch the end of the shoe at the depth of the plié. If you have very short toes, you may need to pad up inside the box of the shoe to get a nice line of the shoe, and a correctly fitting box.



f Placed en pointe:

It is important to check the fit of the shoe in an upright position before putting any weight on it. Place the tip of one shoe on the floor, with the other foot flat on the floor. Press down slightly to check the fit of the box. The foot should be supported in the box, and not sink down too much. Check the amount of satin at the back of the heel. If the foot has slid forward in the shoe, because the shoe is too wide, there will be more satin. If the top of the foot is bulging out, or the shank is twisting, the box is too small. Make sure that both the big and little toe knuckle joints are supported by the wings. If they are too short the top of the wings will cut in and give an unsightly line to the toe of the shoe and may increase the likelihood of blisters.



g The length of the shank:

Check the length of the shank by peeling the satin of the shoe off the heel and folding it back under the shoe. Place the foot back en pointe, and check where the sole finishes. The end of the sole/shank should be just short of the end of the heel. If the shoe is too long there may be bagging of the satin at the back of the shoe, as the satin is cut to cup the heel. If the shank is too short however, the foot will tend to wobble more, and the satin will pull too low. This results in the back of the shoe often popping off when rising from demi to full pointe and can be very annoying.



h Weight-bearing en pointe

Once you have a good fit, you may try weight-bearing through the shoe by stepping up onto pointe. Hold onto the back of a stable chair or bench, and place one foot en pointe. Put some weight through that shoe and then bring the other foot up onto pointe. Make sure the toes are pointed long in the shoe and that there are no areas of severe pressure on any toe. Look to see that the shank sits in line with the sole of the foot when the foot is en pointe. If the shank of the shoe is twisting, this may be due to the shank not conforming to the shape of the arch and can be remedied by breaking in the heel of the shoe before wearing. However, the shank may also twist on the foot if the box is too narrow, so recheck this area again



- g.** Initially the shank of the shoe will sit off the sole of the foot, as the shank is still hard. This may mean the line of the foot is not displayed fully. When a correct fit is established, breaking in the shoe under the heel will give a much nicer line.

