

**University of Utah**  
**Department of Modern Dance**

**TECHNIQUE STANDARDS: LEVELS I-IV**

Dance 1310, 1410, 2310, 2320, 3310, 3320, 4310, 4320, 6310, 6311, 6320, 6321, 7320  
(Compiled by: Faculty members at fall retreat – October 30, 2006)

Technique skills are built to facilitate choreography and performance. Choreography that is of an idiosyncratic nature to a high degree could demand additional specific conditioning or coaching in order for students to successfully accomplish and perform the material while remaining injury free (i.e. athletic, gymnastic, and/or genre specific vocabulary). In other cases specific coaching for the use of text/vocalization might be necessary in order for dancers to perform more theatrical works effectively and convincingly. Overall strength, connectivity, body awareness, and finesse are necessary to maximize aesthetic performance and to minimize the risk of injury in today's dance students.

In addition to the core Modern Dance technique courses, our curriculum includes a wide array of movement experiences ranging from ballet for modern dance students, West African, jazz, and other diverse cultural forms (folk dances, hip hop, flamenco, etc...). As students progress through 4 years of their technique training, it is our goal that they should become steadily more connected, strong (not to be confused with rigid or stiffly controlled), increase their ability to articulate the torso with specificity and integrate its relationship to the limbs and vice versa, specific clarity and articulate use of the feet and legs, arms, and back, head and neck. Students at each level are expected to be self motivated – intrinsically, core connection is a core value of all of the technique teachers as is the application of strength building and integrative patterning “exercises” perfected in the conditioning and movement fundamentals series during the first year, as well as inside of the technique classes themselves.

All dance majors are required to advance to Level III and successfully complete Dance 3310/3320. However, most students advance to and successfully complete Level IV Dance 4310/4320.

**LEVEL I:** Students in this level would be entering freshmen in the Modern Dance major. Entering students audition for acceptance and typically must have had previous dance training or other equivalent physical training/experience that has provided muscular conditioning, flexibility, coordination, rhythmic acuity, internal intention linking to external expression, spatial awareness, and a certain level of understanding of dynamic alignment in vertical that is energized and threaded together in at least basic and even more desirable at an intermediate level. Ideally, level one students would not have had training that is so strongly coded in other genres (such as ballet or jazz) that it prohibits their ability to embody modern training that is more released, immediate, clear of mannerisms, and affectations, and accessible to kinetic investigation.

The primary focus in Level I is on “**WHAT** I am doing.” This is a beginning level.

**Students in Level I will develop proficiency in:**

- Efficient modes of moving (including basic principles of dynamic alignment, momentum, and initiation).
  - Understanding of: core support, neutral pelvis placement (vs. under tucking or hyperextension, use of plie and cushioning through the feet).
  - Individual difference and awareness of unique limitations such as hip socket range of motion and outward rotation within those limitations so as to maintain pelvic stability (Note: stability may not always be desired but level one students need to understand a working base line of support).
  - Articulation of outward rotation and parallel positions of feet and legs.
  - Understanding of pronation and supination.
  - Support leg strength and stability.
  
- Demonstration and understanding of fundamental concepts of total body organization as related to overall movement literacy. Concepts of total body organization include: Breath support, core distal, head tail, upper lower, body half, and cross lateral (or other similar concepts of total body integration and organization).
  - Comfortable with going off vertical and finding it again.
  - Introduction to Pilates mat and reformer work as well as movement fundamentals (Bartenieff Fundamentals) and Laban analysis.
  
- Ability to investigate energy qualities (with breath support).
  
- Ability to understand and demonstrate basic rhythmic structures and patterns.
  
- Understanding of personal and environmental space – Concept of directing and projecting energy within the body and/or into space.
  
- Introduction to spatial concepts of planes, dimensions, directions, levels, and spatial pulls and tensions.
  
- Ability to acquire sequential movement material.
  
- Familiarity with basic locomotor movements and mechanics and coordination of weight shift, level change, and inverted movements (walking, running, leaping, skipping, hopping, undercurves, overcurves, falls, handstands, etc...).
  
- Development of intrinsically motivated, committed work ethic and best practices of nutrition and healthy life style habits.

**LEVEL II:** Primary focus is on “**WHERE** I am sending my attention and where I am in relation to my environment.” This is an Intermediate level.

Students will have a proficiency in the Standards in Level I. They will also have a proficiency in the following Standards:

- Ability to risk and expand one’s spatial parameters – Development of increased drive through space.
- Ability to sense one’s weight and incorporate that weight in both on-balance and off-balance movement (including the use of momentum and weight release)
- Comfortable with going off vertical and finding it again.
  - Low center of gravity and investigation of weight (and lightness).
  - Stability/Mobility awareness and facility
  - Demonstration and understanding of movement initiation and subsequent movement follow-through.
  - Increased facility in adapting to new teaching methods and styles
  - Sequencing becomes easeful
- Ability to execute energy modulations with breath support – A greater level of effort efficiency than in level I.
- Demonstration and understanding of rhythmic acuity
- Demonstration and understanding of breath support in metric and non-metric phrasing (development of melodic breath)
  - Embodiment of musicality and more complex phrasing.
- Ability to acquire movement material, sequentially and qualitatively.
- Understanding of kinesiology being developed in theory and embodied in technique and conditioning contexts.
- Knowledge of and continued practice of sound practice of conditioning, nutrition, and healthy lifestyle habits.

**LEVEL III:** Primary focus is on “How I am doing what I’m doing – Quality”

This is an Advanced Level - Students will have a proficiency in the Standards in Levels I and II. Additionally, they will demonstrate an aptitude in both their movement expressivity and their technical foundation and increasing expertise. Students will also have a proficiency in the following areas, although they may occasionally lack consistency in one or more of these Standards:

- Demonstration of expressivity in metric or non-metric phrasing
- Appetite to fulfill the movement spatially, qualitatively, and melodically with fluidity and integration
  - Seamless transitions and sophistication of phrasing
  - Drive through space in all planes, levels, and directions is committed and easeful
- Understanding and demonstration of breath support to fulfill one’s own individual performing “voice”
- Ability to more quickly and easefully acquire axial and/or locomotor sequential movement material with a qualitative sensibility.
  - Sequencing becomes easeful
  - Increased facility in adapting to new teaching methods and styles
  - Ability to embody material fully and qualitatively and to perform it with clear intention takes place with decreased processing time (i.e. longer and more complex phrases are expected to be performed well with less time spent on explanation).
  - Ability to commit and follow through with clarity
- Acquisition of mature work ethic and habits consistent with those of a future member of the dance profession.
- Increased level of conditioning to facilitate increased demands in athleticism, strength specificity especially in the use of legs and feet as they facilitate going into the air and landing or the use of arms, hands, and back as they facilitate inverted movements or weight shifts.
- As students progress through level III they find a balance between strength and fluidity.
- Comfortable with propulsion (push – reach-pull) and lower to upper and upper to lower body phrasing and connectivity.
- Freedom and accessibility to 3-dimensional movement and spiraling.

- Transverse movement facility.
- Understanding the difference between release of excess tension and relaxation or passive weight with no core support.
- Knowledge of and continued practice of sound practice of conditioning, nutrition, and healthy lifestyle habits.

**LEVEL IV:** Focus integrates “What, Where, How and now involves **Why I am doing what I’m doing.**” This is a Pre-Professional Level.

Students will have a proficiency in the Standards in Levels I, II and III. Additionally, they will demonstrate an aptitude in both their movement expressivity and their technical underpinnings. As more mature dance student performers. They will also have a consistent proficiency in the following Standards:

- Students at this level should be conditioned at an elite level.
- Understanding and full demonstration of movement melody (incorporating melodic breath, dynamic modulations, textural nuances, and rhythmic acuity).
- Ability to quickly acquire axial and/or locomotor movement material, both sequentially and qualitatively, with a full understanding of melodic breath, dynamic modulations, textural nuances, and rhythmic acuity.
- Student is facile at performing in multiple genres and styles and is adept at reading and interpreting movement phrases
- Full qualitative and technical skill investment and integration of these dimensions.
- The ideal level IV student doesn’t wait for personal feedback. They see all general feedback and peer coaching as applicable.
- They are at home with their bodies but are pro-active in seeking new information – willing to investigate new information.
- A level IV student is strong without being locked and fluid/released without being line-less.
- Availability to an increased intensity in the learning process
- Integration – connected movers. Integration physically, mentally, emotionally such that they are more versatile.
- Confidence as a performer to fully embody one’s own movement voice.

- Ability to fulfill and/or surrender to the spatial, qualitative, and temporal parameters in movement phrases.
- As students progress they both pick up on movement subtleties (Become good translators of movement) and increasingly personalize movement (use technique for personal expression)
- Embodiment of mature work ethic and habits, consistent with those of a professional performer.
- A Level IV student has a sense of the whole while being able to articulate parts. A good sense of their center and proprioception of their body in relation to that center.
- Efficiency is realized
- Continued practice of sound practice of conditioning, nutrition, and healthy lifestyle habits (hopefully beyond graduation – into professional work and life).