

Connecting Steps The Figure Skating / Ballet Relationship

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For years skating coaches have been encouraging their skaters to take ballet classes to aid in the skater's on-ice performance. What parent or coach hasn't heard their skater say, "What has ballet got to do with skating?" Does ballet really enhance the skater's performance or on-ice technique? The "skating experts" say yes, and so do the ballet pros. But what is it specifically that is taught and practiced in ballet that relates to the specific elements on the ice?

Do ballet and dance really have a valid application to all disciplines of figure skating?

First let's look at the posture needed to correctly perform the technical skating elements. The skater needs a strong core body to connect the upper and lower body for controlled powerful movements. He must be able to keep his shoulders over his hips throughout jumps, spins, footwork and edges. He must also be able to check his shoulders against his hips in Mohawks, 3-turns, brackets, rockers, counters, and Choctaws. Thus it is to the skater's benefit to become aware of the feeling of twisting in the middle of the torso, and also the feeling of staying square. These feelings are very isolated and often times the younger skater doesn't know or feel this movement in the torso, because he hasn't developed body awareness, or there are just too many "things" to think about at once.

Ballet teachers spend hours teaching students correct ballet posture; which is the same posture needed for skating. This correct posture is a neutral spine with the shoulders over the hips. The shoulders also need to be depressed with the rib cage connected and the spine lifted. The ballet student is taught to engage the lower abdominal muscles while maintaining a neutral spine. As the skater is working at the barre, he is training his body to maintain correct posture while moving isolated body parts. At the same time, he is developing the ability to apply core strength by engaging the abdominal muscles, thus learning to connect the upper and lower body for strong, powerful movements.

Maintaining neutral spine is essential to on-ice elements and ballet technique. The control needed comes from control of the hips through neutral spine. Ballet teaches the skater how to move the pelvis without losing balance or disconnecting the center in footwork sequences, including pirouette turns, jumps and leaps across the floor. With every movement, in either skating or ballet, there is a weight shift from one foot to the other which causes a constant change in the center of balance within the body. Having a good sense of balance is critical to a skater's alignment. This directly affects the skater's edge quality, footwork, preparation for a jump and maintaining his balance over his axis while rotating. It also aids in strong landings. The combination of core control and balance allows the skater to use the strength he has developed in his off-ice training. Once an athlete gains a strong core and is able to *apply* his strength, then he is able to develop the quickness required in rotations, fast footwork and quick change of edge or direction.

Correct placement, power and quickness are addressed in ballet classes through basic skills such as plies, tendus, degages, frappe, fouette and grand battement. These movements teach the basic "snap through the hips, knees, ankles and feet" used for skating basics such as power for stroking, pushing through the feet for jumps, and of course agility in quick footwork.

As the skater progresses in dance and skating, both disciplines focus on details of the basics, extension of body lines, flexibility while maintaining body alignment, quality of movement, and development of strength, and confidence. The skater learns to perform to different music rhythms, tempos, count the beats of the music

and how style and carriage change with the mood or theme of the music thus establishing a dynamic range in presentation.

While ballet is often thought of as one more thing to do, it is the ballet that teaches the skaters how to perform, to interpret and express their music by telling a story or conveying an emotion through the connecting steps of their program. This is what makes the difference between a program that is all jumps with a lot of crossovers or stroking between the jumps, and a program that is interesting, artistic and pleasant to watch.

QUICK REFERENCE

Freestyle/Pairs/Sys	Ice Dance/SyS	Ballet
Fundamental Elements:		
Stroking	Stroking Slide Chasse Progressives	Tendu to Degage Chasse forward in natural position (Travel through pelvis, push through & stretch back leg)
Pushing through whole blade		Foot Presses & Flex
Knee Bend	Knee Bend	Plie
3-Turn	3-Turn	Chaînes Turns / Grapevines Cross check shoulders & hips
Mohawk	Mohawk	3 rd Position / Turn-out
Spirals	Spirals	Arabesque / Penchee
Jumping	Fast Footwork	Changements Sautés / Jumps with beats Frappes Sous-Sous Pirouette
Spins		Attitude Position, camber back
Laybacks	Dance Expression	Degage
Leg Extension	Leg Extension	Releve Lent (45-90 degree height) / Développe
Ankle Strength	Ankle Strength Swing Rolls	Relèves Grand Battement en Cloche (Bell Swings) Balançoire Coupe
	Chasse	
Intermediate Elements:		
Spread Eagle		2 nd Position
Double Jumps		Double Jumps
	Back Cross Rolls	Degage en Fondu
	Back Cross Rolls	Demi Rond de jambes (3 rd position)
Advanced Elements:		

Choctaw
Cross Rolls

Choctaw
Back Cross Rolls

Quick Footwork

5th Position in deep Plie
Demi Rond de jambes
Degage en Fondu
Frappe & Petit Battu

Skating = Ballet Examples



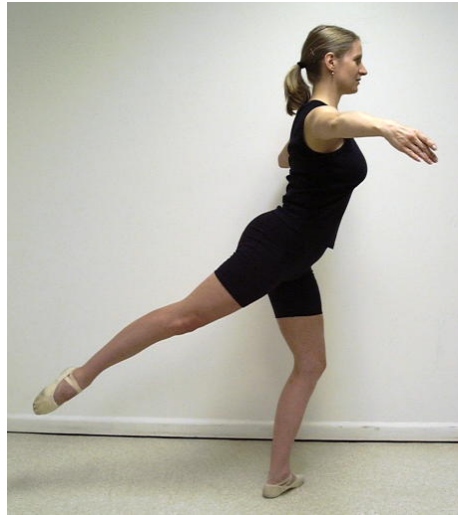
Spread Eagle = 2nd Position



Choctaw = 5th Position



Prepare to Stroke = Plie to Tendu



Stroking = Degage



Spiral = Arabesque

EXAMPLE OF BALLET LEVELS FOR SKATERS:

INTRODUCTION to BALLET (Advanced Beginner Class)

Connecting Skating & Dance Terminology:

Free Leg = Gesture Leg

Free Hip = Gesture Hip

Skating Leg = Base/Standing/Support Leg

I.D. = Ice Dance

S = Singles / Freestyle

P = Pairs

SyS = Synchronized

BARRE

- **Plie:** Teach with correct alignment. This translates into a knee bend on the ice necessary for stroking, transitions, weight-shift, 3-Turns, Mohawks, Brackets, jumps, take-offs and landings. Deep plies are mandatory to avoid injury and develop a soft landing.
- **Foot press and Flex, Tendu, and Releve:** Strengthens the foot, ankle and calf which aids in balance, edge-work, stroking, jumping. Tendu enables skaters to extend the leg away from the body with a stretched knee.
- **Degage:** Teach the ability to stand on one leg, maintaining balance, while the other is moving, also to lengthen the line of the gesture leg. Degage from 3rd position = Mohawk.
- **Ronde de jambes:** Teach the ability to keep the leg stretched, maintain turnout, balance and keep control of the hips while moving one leg.

CENTER

- **Jumps:** Sautés in first and second position teach toe-ball-heel landing, proper knees over toes alignment, and strong push off, use of core body strength to keep the body straight in the air as the skater lands. Can be taught in parallel.
- **Simple Port de bras:** Work on line, flow, shape and positioning of the arms.
- **Triplets:** Teach 3/4 meter (waltz timing).
- **Reverence (Bows):** Essential to all skaters. Skaters learn the articulation and confidence of a powerful yet refined bow. Each bow should command the presence of a champion.

BALLET LEVEL I

BARRE

- **Fondu:** Trains the base leg to bend and stretch while strengthening.
- **Cambre:** A backward arc of the spine. The axis of this movement must be in the upper body between the shoulder blades. This should be taught the same way on the ice and is the key to preventing back injury during lay-backs.
- **Frappe:** Develops strength and quickness in the feet for jumps and fast footwork.
- **Passé/Retire:** Keeps the hips square with one leg lifted. Foot placement is in front or in back of knee.
- **Cou de pied:** Is used more in I.D. with the foot attached just above the ankle.
- **Développe:** (I.D./S/SyS) Teaches leg extensions low, medium and high, control, and adagio movements. Skaters perform this with a parallel free leg.

- **Arabesque Line:** The long, extended line of the leg to the back. Square shoulders and hips must be stressed, while trying to lift the leg to the back without excess opening of the hip. This is helpful for the check out position.
- **SousSous:** Strengthens the inner thigh muscles; vital for holding the legs close together against centrifugal force in jumps and spins.
- **Grand Battement:** Strengthens the large muscles in the legs and works to extend the leg line in the air.

CENTER

- **Pirouette Turns:** Both directions en dehors and en dedans. Similar to the twizzle (I.D./SyS) or double 3's (S/P/SyS). Teaches balance & proper alignment on one leg, spotting and timing.
- **En dehors pirouette:** Back spin.
- **Arms:** Become more complex in their position and movement.
- **Balance:** For coordination, 3/4 timing and flow.
- **Changements:** Same jumping principles as sautés in 1st and 2nd position, with the addition of changing feet in the air and a tight, turn-out 5th position landing. This develops strength and quickness in the leg adductors muscles.
- **Echappe Sauté:** Practice jump for skaters. It can be taught with both turned-out and parallel legs. This is an inner thigh strengthener.
- **Soubresaut:** A jump with the legs crossed tightly together that provides the same attributes as SousSous, but in the air.
- **Petit Jeté:** Increases ability to jump on one leg.
- **Pas de Bourre:** For ankle stability and agile footwork.
- **Chaînes:** Traveling turns. Introduce some that change directions mid-sequence. (Ballet II & higher)

BALLET LEVEL II

BARRE

- **Attitude:** Layback; choreographic line
- **Grand Battement:** Swing Roll (I.D./SyS)
- **Fouette:** Develops awareness of the hips. Teach on standing leg from fondu into releve. It is helpful for lifts, footwork sequences, Rocker Fox Trot, and is necessary for 3-turns, Rocker and Swing Turns.

CENTER

- **Body Positions:** This system of various facings is advantageous for skaters as they learn to orient themselves on the ice.
- **Ports de Bras:** Foundation for (S/P/SyS) - Side by side/facing each other connection and in arabesque. General coordination of arms with changing legs.
- **Ports de Corps:** Learning to bend at the waist in all directions. In a deep 4th position lunge, en arrière = Ina Bauer
- **Croise:** Good for or cross-checking.
- **Grapevine:** Helpful for cross-checking, shoulders against hips; brackets and the line of Choctaw.
- **Chasse:** Teaches how to begin the flow of movement and travel from the center; begin stroking.

BALLET LEVEL III

BARRE/CENTER

- **Battu:** (Beats) Foot strengtheners and teaches fast footwork.
- **Assemble:** Strengthens adductors and gives agility in the air.
- **Tour en l'air:** Vital for vertical air position for jumps (S/P). Movement gathers the feet and legs under the body, strong push downward, straight alignment and pointed feet.
- **Sissonne:** Good muscle action.
- **Tour Jeté:** Waltz Jump (not scissored). Can be helpful for the toe loop, Salchow and Axel.

BIOGRAPHY:

Boucard, Jacqueline

Jacqueline all types of dance, choreography, stretch and creative movement. Jacqueline received her B.F.A. in dance from the University of Utah. She danced for seven seasons with the Eisenhower Dance Ensemble and toured the United States. She has worked with skaters both on and off-ice, including choreography for Zuzanna Szwed and Yuka Sato.

Marine, Anne

Anne graduated magna cum laude with her B.F.A. in dance from Western Michigan University. She danced professionally for the Eisenhower Dance Ensemble for 10 years, and serves as the Director of Operations for EDE. Anne has taught at Oakland University, the EDE Center for Dance, and the Detroit Skating Club for 10+ years.

Pitsos, Debbie

Debbie has been the Off-Ice Coordinator for Detroit Skating Club for 15 years. She has a Liberal Arts degree with a concentration in Exercise Science. Debbie has served 10 years on the USFS Sports Science Sports Science Council, and as a faculty member for Sports Medicine/Science Camps. Debbie is a Rated Professional Ice Dance Coach through the PSA.

Swallow, Jerod

Jerod is a five time US dance champion, and he was a senior national competitor in pairs. He is also a five time World and two time Olympic team member. Jerod served on the USFSA Board and Committees as an athlete representative for 16 years. Jerod is the new Ice Dance Coordinator for Detroit Skating Club, and is the figure skating representative for the USOC Athlete Advisory Council.