

ANATOMY OF A POINTE SHOE

pointe dance boutique

As elegant as dancing on pointe may appear, it is an athletic talent which requires strength as well as grace. The shoes involved are truly considered to be part of the foot and a continuation of the leg line. It absolutely must fit properly to provide the support dancing on pointe requires. In attempting to achieve a correct fit, dancers should consider these critical elements of design. To create a shoe, all the fabric, leather and other components need to be shaped on a form.

Last—A last is designed to create that shape by replicating the form of a dancer's foot. Every style, size and width requires its own last.

Box—The sturdy compartment for a dancer's toes which provides the support standing on pointe requires.

Side Wings—Side wings are an extension of the box and provide lateral support.

Vamp—The vamp is the section of the shoe "upper" measured from the platform back to and including the binding. A longer vamp can help draw the foot closer to the shank for more support on pointe, so that the foot doesn't overextend.

Throat—The open area located between side seams at the center front of the shoe is the throat. It gives shape to the upper which accentuates a dancer's arch.

Drawstring—The drawstring, encased in the binding, snugs the upper to the foot.

Binding—The binding finishes the edge of the upper.

Platform—The exterior, flat end of the box which allows the dancer to stand on pointe is the platform.

Crown—The crown is the vertical height between the vamp and the sole.

Pleats—Pleats occur where the fabric folds into the sole and are located on the underside of the box.

Stay—The fabric that covers the seam in the back of the shoe at the dancer's heel is the stay.

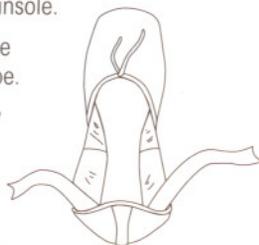
Side Quarters—The side quarters are the sections of satin from the side seams to the back of the stay.

Sole—Made of either buffed or scored leather to provide traction, the sole is internally stitched to the upper.

Shank—Created from leatherboard or redboard, this is the backbone of a pointe shoe. It is located under the socklining and provides support to the arch. A dancer's strength and technical ability determine shank preference.

Sewing on Ribbons

1. Fold down the seam of the shoe toward the insole.
2. Ribbons must be stitched exactly at the angle where the fold meets at each side of the shoe.
3. Ribbons should slant slightly forward so they lie flat over the instep.
4. Be sure that ribbons are sewn underneath the binding and drawstrings of the shoe.
5. Repeat steps one through four for the other shoe.



Fitting a Pointe Shoe

Remember you have more than just two feet to consider. You also have two points of view—the dancer's preference and those of the dance teacher. While selecting the correct shoe, take your time. The only way to fit a pointe shoe is carefully. Since confronting two different sized feet is common, always apply the following procedure to BOTH feet.

1. Study the dancer's feet in a flat, standing position. Note the general shape, width and length of each foot. Keep in mind that just because a dancer has a square foot doesn't mean he/she will need a square shoe, nor will a tapered foot definitely require a tapered shoe.
2. Select a pointe shoe that best resembles the shape of the dancer's foot. The dancer must help decide this after trying on the shoes. Be sure to follow the fitting process each shoe style requires.
3. Once the dancer makes a selection, place the box of the pointe shoe between the palms of your hands. Gently apply pressure to soften the box. Do this for each shoe.
4. Slip the shoe onto the dancer's foot. Using a crisscross motion, lightly pull the drawstring BY BOTH ENDS and tie a loose knot. Note the overall fit of the shoe. It should fit like a glove. Allow no excessive pressure or room for growing.
5. To help determine the length, have the dancer demi-plié in a parallel position. This is the longest the feet will ever be in the shoes. The dancer's toes should just be touching the end of the box without being curled or pushed back. If correct, there will be a slight pinch of fabric while the foot is on pointe which disappears in a flat position. When a dancer is on pointe, his/her foot contracts. This is why it is imperative that the shoe must be snug when the foot is flat on the ground.
6. To help determine the width, make sure that the edges of the foot, including the large and small toe joints, are pressing slightly against the edge of the shoe. The dancer should be able to feel all five toes flat with some pressure. Try various widths until this is accomplished. Confirm the width by having the dancer put one foot on pointe and apply pressure. If correct, the foot will not slip and be properly supported. The shoe must support the dancer's foot. Any slipping or movement inside the shoe could leave the foot unsupported and vulnerable to injury.
7. While on pointe, proper support for the bones of the foot is crucial. We suggest the teacher supervise and approve all shoe selections. Depending on the dancer's age, pointe shoes may have to be checked for proper fit at six month intervals.

These simple steps will help you create a perfect fitting. Also be aware your dancer does not have to stand on full pointe. If a dancer insists on full pointe, the result may be some slippage at the heel during the transition from flat foot to full pointe. This is due to the lack of ribbons and it has no impact on a correct, overall fit.