

Integrate



The Integration stage is where you start tying things together. This stage is all about developing new muscle patterning to override your old habits and motor programs to transform your dancing. Each exercise is carefully chosen to incorporate elements of the previous isolation exercises and start working deeper into range. Please keep in mind throughout this section that none of these exercises should cause any pain or discomfort.

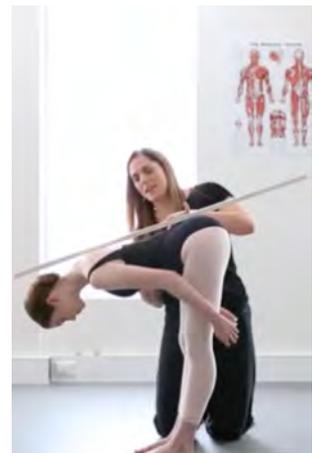
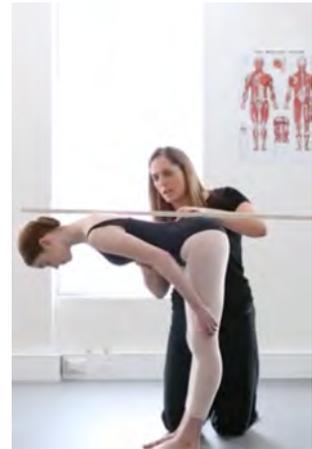
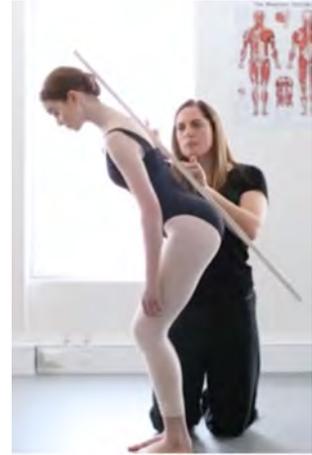
Waiter Bow

This 'Waiter Bow' exercise takes the movement that we were doing with the '4 Point Sit Back' and brings it into standing. One of the biggest issues I see in dancers is the tendency to tuck the pelvis too much in order to try and get the leg higher. When you do a full développé devant you will add a slight tuck of the pelvis, however if you are tucking to get to 90 degrees or just a little bit higher, you'll never get much higher than that. The higher you can get the leg without a tuck, the better, and then when you add on a subtle tuck you can take the leg to full height. Basically, the further forward you can go with this exercise, maintaining a neutral spine, the higher you will be able to get your leg without tucking.

- Start standing in parallel, with neutral spine with the knees soft.
- Get your partner to place the pole against your spine. You want to think of the tail bone and the ribcage touching the pole, with a little bit of a gap at the area of the low back.
- Soften your knees maintaining neutral spine.
- Watching your spinal profile in the mirror, and hinge forward from your hips, letting the heads of the thigh bones sink back in the sockets and fold in the front of the hips.
- Make sure to keep the spine in neutral but take care not to over grip with the low back.
- If the Multifidus is weak, you will tend to flatten the low back when hinging forward.
- If you are bracing with the big back muscles (Erector Spinae) the upper back will arch away from the pole.
- Only lean forward as far as you can control the back in neutral.
- Return to standing, and repeat 10 times.

Variations:

1. Perform the exercise with just a minimal forward lean, with soft knees in parallel
2. Aim to get the spine horizontal to the floor with the knees slightly bent
3. Aim to get the spine horizontal to the floor with the knees straight (not hyperextended)
4. Aim for full range with spine in neutral and knees straight
5. Try in parallel, turned out and turned in.



Cushion Squeezes with Leg Extension and Rotation

This next exercise adds in extension and rotation of the leg to the original Cushion Squeeze exercise. In all of these exercises we focus on deep, subtle coordination around the hips rather than building brute strength. You don't want to build up too much bulk around the hips, but instead want to feel a deep, subtle connection in the hips to help support your extensions to the front.

- Start lying on your back, with the ball between your inner thighs.
- Slowly squeeze the ball, imagining the thigh bones coming together in parallel.
- Check that the front of the hips are relaxed and maintain regular breathing.
- Maintaining the inner thigh activation, slowly straighten out the right knee.
- Note that the hip flexors of the working leg will activate, but the supporting hip should stay relaxed.
- Rotate your working leg in the socket, really feeling the connection from your inner thighs to your turnout muscles.
- Maintaining the inner thigh activation, bring the leg back into parallel.
- Slowly bend the knee to bring the foot back down to the floor and then release the inner thigh contraction.
- To check you're doing this exercise correctly, you can place your hands on your hip bones to check for twisting of the pelvis, or use your fingers to assess for overactivity of the hip flexors or global back muscles.



4 Point Turnout with Endurance

This exercise is designed to build endurance for maintaining turnout to the front, and is also an excellent exercise for your arabesque.

- Start on your hands and knees, in neutral with the knees directly under the hips. Keep a little arch down through the lower back, broad across the shoulders, while remaining open through the front of the chest. Stay long through the neck, elbows slightly soft (not hyper extended)
- Slowly extend your leg out the back and place the foot on demi pointe,
- Then rotate the supporting leg around, wrapping the deep turnout muscles.



- Transfer your weight onto your supporting leg and float the working leg up in parallel.
- Flex the foot and rotate the thigh bone in the socket, keeping the hips square.
- Point through demi-point and then lower the leg slowly in turnout.
- Replace the foot to the floor, come back to a 4 point position, and then rest back in child's pose.



Cushion Squeezes with Oblique Curl

This exercise is really important for activating your Anterior Oblique System (AOS) which is an important dynamic connection between your inner thighs and your opposite oblique abdominals. An effective AOS can really help you control your extensions to the front.

- Start lying on your back, with the spine in neutral
- Place your feet hip width apart and your hands behind your head, elbows wide.
- Place the ball between your thighs and do a gentle cushion squeeze, keeping slightly lifted through the low back and connected through the front.
- Keeping one elbow on the ground, and both elbows wide, gently curl the ribcage up and across bringing the left ribcage toward the right hip/inner thigh.
- Focus on feeling a connection from the oblique abdominals of one side through to the inner thighs of the opposite side.
- Exhale through the movement to help connect to your deep abdominals and pelvic floor
- Make sure to keep the low abdomen slightly hollowed, not bulging as you curl up.
- If it is difficult to keep the low abdomen gently drawing in, or just to check your form, place the hand of the lifted shoulder down on your low tummy to help improve your awareness.
- Release, switch hands and repeat to the other side.
- Repeat at least 8 times to each side.
- Once you have good activation and are confident that the low abdomen is not bulging, try reaching your free hand across to the outside of your opposite leg.
- Keep a gentle sensation of subtly activating the deep low back muscles throughout this exercise, rather than flattening the back into the floor.



Standing Iliacus Suck

Before going into the Standing Iliac Suck it is a good idea to go through the lying version. Just do a couple on each side to reactivate the Iliacus before trying to recruit it in standing. Remember that Iliacus works subtly to draw the thigh bone back into the hip socket to give you more control of the leg en l'air and help offload the superficial hip flexors.

Lying Version:

- Lying on your back, with one foot on a chair, making sure the thigh bone is vertical.
- Use your fingertips to feel the outside of your hip and top of the thigh to ensure these areas stay soft and relaxed.
- Visualise the thigh bone sinking deep into the socket and then gently float the knee towards you, keeping the spine in neutral and the TFL relaxed.
- Slowly release and place the foot back on the chair.



Standing Version:

- To perform this in standing, stand on the left leg and place the right foot onto demi-pointe. Stay lifted through the centre and lengthened through the sides of the waist.
- Connect the right hip bone deep into the socket with the Iliacus suck, then float the thigh bone up towards 90 degrees, maintaining natural breathing.
- Make sure to keep lifted through the tiny deep low back muscles, maintaining the spine in neutral.
- Make sure not to tuck the pelvis to lift the thigh bone. This will destabilise the lower back and put a lot of load into the front of the hip.
- Do not worry if the lifted leg does not stay completely in parallel. With some anatomical variations it will deviate slightly into external rotation.
- Repeat on alternate legs, approximately 4-8 on each side depending on your current strength and endurance.



Note:

- As you get stronger you will be able to take the thigh bone past 90 degrees. The higher you can take the thigh bone with the spine in neutral, the more effortless your développé devant will become!
- You are aiming for the most effortless movement you can make, using as little muscle as possible to get a sensation of the thigh bone floating up. This is the feeling we want to get when we start doing our extensions devant later on in the program.

Adult Crawling Sequence

“Adult Crawling” is a great exercise to help develop connections in the Anterior Oblique and Posterior Oblique slings which normally get developed when babies learn to crawl. If a baby misses out a significant period of crawling for any reason, this may affect their natural deep core stability later on in life. Even if a baby does have a good period of crawling, it is important that we continue to strengthen the cross patterns later on in life.

Technically ‘Adult Crawling’ is not the same as regular 4 point crawling but it's a great variation to take the load out of your knees. This is especially important for adolescent dancers between the age of about 11 to 14 as knee issues are common when you do lots of growing. This is also good for some adults who do not like being on their knees too much due to degenerative changes. This exercise develops the cross patterning through the front (Anterior Oblique System) and back (Posterior Oblique System) to develop the control needed to control your adage.

The series includes six different variations. Try working through them, but stop at the one that you can do quite well. It is better to be practicing a good movement pattern, than be struggling too hard. Once you can achieve one version well you can gradually move through the full sequence.

Level 1 - Basic:

- Stand on your right leg, and float the left knee up to have the thigh horizontal.
- Keeping the hips and shoulders square, press the right hand into the inside of the left leg. Press quite firmly so you can feel your inner thighs and your obliques (Anterior Oblique System) connect.
- Hold for 3 seconds. Keep lifted through the low back so that it stays in neutral and maintain natural breathing.
- Place the left foot down just in front of the right big toe and then repeat on the other side.
- Note that the arch of the supporting foot will tend to activate automatically. This is really helpful in hypermobile people who struggle to find good dynamic arch control.

Level 2 - With Rotation:

- Repeat as for Level 1 but add in a rotation of the chest toward the lifted leg while keeping the hips square.
- The head can stay either facing forward, or rotate to the side.
- Keep the lumbar spine in neutral, and make sure not to extend the thoracic spine.
- Repeat 8 times on each side, pressing firmly to activate your AOS.



Level 3 - With Toe Tap:

- Start with a keen float and rotation as for Level 2.
- Place the hands on the hips and go into a little fondu extending the lifted leg behind you, tapping the toe to the floor.
- When you tilt forward, think of floating through the back of the rib cage a tiny bit, getting the same feeling as you did with the 'Waiter Bow' exercise.
- Try to keep everything nice and square. Keep centred through the pelvis, lengthened through the side waist, low back in neutral and relaxed through the back of the ribcage.
- Bring the working leg back up into the initial position of knee float and rotation, and then change legs.



Level 4 - The Pedestrian Version:

- In the 'pedestrian' version the foot is flexed and the legs are in parallel.
- Lift the left leg, bringing the right arm forward and taking the left one arm back, elbow high, rotating the chest towards the lifted leg.
- Reverse the arms, taking the working leg behind you, still flexed and in parallel, rotating the rib cage towards the supporting leg.
- Come back up, repeating the first position, then replace the foot to the floor and repeat to the other side.
- Making sure you're staying nice and centred and allowing a beautiful spiral rotation throughout the movement.
- This version will activate your Anterior Oblique System to the front, and your Posterior Oblique System (Lattissimus Dorsi and the opposite Gluteus Maximus), to the back.
- This version really starts to develop coordination of the deep collective centre, with a dynamically stabled spine over top.
- Make sure to keep your back leg in parallel. If you're classically trained it may feel strange, however this will actually target the deep rotators of your supporting leg more.



Level 5 - Horizontal T:

- Start as you did for Level 4, but as you pass the leg to the back extend it into a horizontal T with the spine in neutral.
- Try and keep the hips nice and square, the back leg in parallel, and avoid extending the upper back.
- Bring the working leg back the the front and then replace to the floor.
- Repeat 8 times on other side.
- Don't worry if you have a few little wobbles when working on this variation, that's actually part of finding your centre.
- This version really helps develop dynamic stability on that supporting side, as well as solidifying through those cross patterns.



Level 6 - Aeroplane:

- Begin as for Level 5, all the way until the horizontal T shape.
- Slowly rotate your upper body towards the supporting leg keeping the arms extended.
- Make sure to rotate the chest, not just swing the arms and keep the hips square as the upper body is rotating.
- Rotate the chest towards the lifted leg, then back towards the supporting leg before recovering back to the starting position with the knee lifted to the front
- Keep neutral in the lower back and deep connection in the front of the supporting hip.
- This version teaches the spine to be able to move whilst being stable, rather than bracing for control, which results in a rigid locked off centre.
- Any wobbles simply indicate that you haven't been doing exercises focused on this dynamic control with the spine. Play with a couple of those variation, see which one you find most comfortable and just work on gradually improving through the series.



Note:

- Try to maintain natural breathing throughout
- Move slowly and deliberately in and out of each position
- You should be able to do each stage comfortably for the full length of the room, heel to toe, before progressing onto the next version.

