

Function



In the Functional section we take all of the elements that you have been working on and bring them all together to develop the patterns of movement needed to give you an effortless nature to your adage. Once the correct mobilisation of the area is achieved, you have isolated each necessary muscle group, and integrated them into the patterns needed, the functional exercises should be a whole lot easier. Our aim is to get past the conscious activation of all of the previous exercises, and become “unconsciously competent” in all of the elements, to allow you to have seamless technique, while focusing on your artistry and the story that is being told. After all, isn't that the whole point of dance?

QF Transfer with Port De Bras

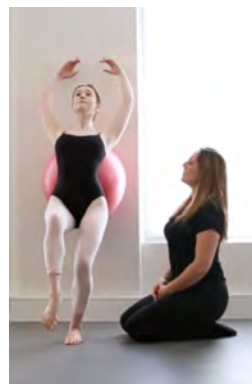
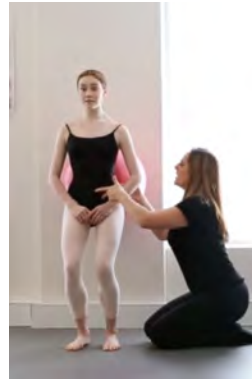
Once you have mastered this exercise, it is really nice to do when you are warming up in the morning before class, to help activate and wake up your deep stabilisers in a functional way before you start going into class. It helps develop functional activation of your QF without over gripping other muscles around the hips. Adding on a beautiful Port De Bras to this exercise really highlights whether you are gripping on with outer abdominals or if you have found the connection to your true core. For this exercise I like using a big Swiss ball. If you don't have one of these you can use a smaller ball, simply place it behind your sacrum and keep the upper back off the wall.

Basic Version:

- Place a large Swiss ball, or small stability ball on the wall behind you just above your sacrum.
- Keep the spine in neutral and bend both your knees.
- Focusing on the deep rotators of the supporting leg, slowly transfer your weight onto one foot.
- Think of collecting the centre, lifting slightly through the low back to maintain neutral, and adding the Iliacus Suck to float the working leg to 90 degrees.
- Slowly lower the foot back down to the floor and then transfer to the other side.

Advanced Version:

- This variation adds in some upper body with a port de bra. This helps to ensure that you are not gripping with your outer abdominals for stability
- Plié in parallel, keeping lifted through the low back, and transfer onto one leg as for the previous version.
- Float your arms up through first position and then up to fifth, extending the upper back a little over the ball in a small cambré.
- Try adding a gentle Port De Bras including a small side bend over to each side.
- This one is really challenging because you need to make subtle adjustments as the centre of gravity changes.



Développé Devant in Lying

This exercise is very good way to refine your technique and correct any ‘cheating’ habits that you may have used in the past in an attempt to get your leg higher. Performing this exercise on the ground allows you to create a new movement pattern which is much more focused on centralising the hip, finding your deep rotators and flexing the hip using your Psoas Major. Combining these elements in sequence, but in a more abstract position, helps create a new motor pattern in your brain, rather than modifying your old one, which helps retrain your patterning for performing développé much faster. As there is less effect of gravity on the working leg, you can learn how to subtly coordinate the correct muscles around the hip to place the leg in a good position, so that when you return to standing, it is much easier.

Make sure you are nice and mobile through your hamstrings, and have woken up all of the deep core and hip muscles before attempting this. This is a really good exercise for those dancers who have lots of mobility but who struggle to control their leg at the front. It helps gather all the things we've been talking about in sequence so that you can transfer them directly into your dancing.

Level 1:

- Start lying on the ground, with feet in fifth position.
- Flex your supporting leg and keep the back border of the foot engaged with the ground, so that your standing leg turnout muscles are working.
- If you do not have the available range to have the foot flat to the floor, simply visualise this, and make sure to keep the deep rotators engaged throughout.
- Slowly peel the right leg up into a retiré focussing on keeping flat through the hips.
- Make sure to use all available range through this movement, rather than lifting the leg in a turned in position and dropping it out in the retiré position.
- Slowly, unfold the leg to a développé devant at 90 degrees, making sure that the hips stay nice and square.
- Rotate your leg into parallel and then back into turnout three times.
- Make sure to keep connected to your centre and use your deep hip rotators to isolate the leg in the socket.
- Slowly lower the leg in turnout, then repeat on the other side.
- You only need to do 1-2 repetitions of each variation.



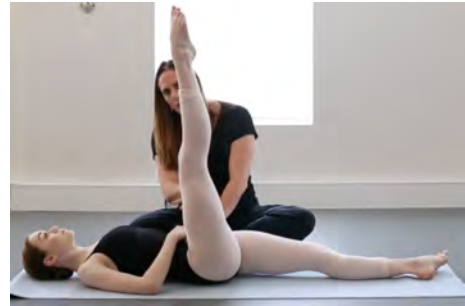
Level 2:

- Start as for Level 1, peeling up through retiré to a développé devant at 90 degrees.
- Using your opposite hand, mount your lifted leg to where you'd like your développé to be.
- Take special note of your placement, keeping the thigh bone really rotated into the socket.
- Make sure you don't hitch the hip of the working leg up.
- Think of keeping a little lift through the low back to activate those deep muscles.
- Maintain a deep connection with your psoas from the front of the hip through to the front of the spine.
- Once you have found the correct position, slowly let go of your leg and see if you can maintain the position of the leg with your Psoas and Iliac connection.
- Lengthen the back of the knee, keeping the whole leg nicely rotated and foot fully pointed.
- Hold for a breath or two, then lower the leg to the floor.

Level 3:

- Start as for Level 1, but as you unfold from the retiré, place your leg where you'd like it to be when standing.
- This will require a deeper engagement of Iliac and Psoas Major to place the thigh bone above 90 degrees.
- Maintain the deep rotation in the socket, deep connection in the front of the hip, and unfold the leg keeping it in midline.
- Lengthen the back of the knee of the supporting leg and ensure turnout is maintained.
- Pause for a few breaths, before lowering the leg.

This exercise is more of a neural activation process than a loaded muscle exercise. It's more about learning how use your brain to connect to the required muscles rather than doing repetitions under load to create strength. When training the hip it's more about subtle coordination of all of the muscles around the hip rather than brute strength. There should never be any pain following any of these exercises but you will feel a lot more woken up around the hips and should feel more stable when you come to standing

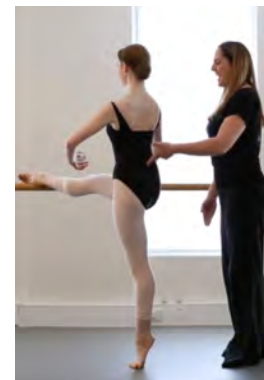
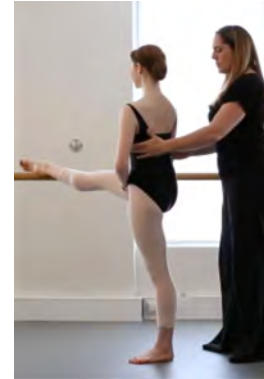


Placement at the Barre, with Fondu and Rise

This is a nice exercise to do with the foot on the barre to practice your pelvic control. When moving into standing many dancers tend to habitually tuck their pelvis under. We were often taught this position in an effort to activate turnout and deep core muscles, however in reality the tucked position encourages gripping of the outer gluteal muscles and inhibits the deep spinal stabilisers. This exercise helps you practice your deep back control and pelvic stability in standing, combined with the placement of the leg in front.

Level 1:

- Face towards the barre and place one foot onto it. You want to find a comfortable position, so try not to avoid the bony parts of your ankle.
- You may like to place a folded yoga mat or towel over the barre to make it more comfortable.
- Keep the spine in neutral and lift and lengthen the side waist.
- Make sure your deep back muscles are activated to support your neutral spine position and your deep rotators on your standing leg are gently activated to maintain your turnout.
- Spend a few moments connecting to the feeling of rotation of the leg on the barre, as well as the standing leg, and just breathe.
- Feel the expansion and collection of through the rib cage, and your connection to your diaphragm and pelvic floor.
- If you feel any tension or pulling down the leg or in the front of the hip, go back and try an appropriate mobiliser to release.



Level 2:

- Once you have established good placement in this position, slowly fondu on the supporting leg, making sure you're keeping lifted through the lumbar spine, and relaxed in the upper body.
- Make sure to keep the pelvis and ribcage square to the barre.
- Straighten the supporting leg, then slowly rise, making sure the hips stay square and you are gently lifted through the low back.
- You can place one hand on the barre for balance initially, or try with your arms in first, on your hips or just relaxed down.

Level 3:

- Once you feel confident with your placement try increasing the speed and progress to repeated fondu/relevé on one leg.
- Try performing this exercise side on to a mirror to observe you spinal control.
- Make sure not to sit into the supporting hip or tuck the tail under.

