

the *B*rainy
allerina guide to *Pointe Shoes*



Are you ready for pointe?

Getting your first pair of pointe shoes is an exciting and formative time in any young dancer's life! While you may be anxious to take this next step in your training, it is essential to wait until you are ready physically, emotionally and mentally.

Going on pointe too soon can permanently damage immature bones and cause life-long detriment to a young, growing dancer. Your body will thank you for waiting!

How do you know when you are ready? When your experienced ballet teacher gives you the green light! Here are some elements they may be looking for when determining if you are ready to start pointe:

Pointe shoe readiness checklist:

- Minimum age of 12 (some dancers may be considered at 11 but are typically asked to obtain an x-ray to ensure their growth plates have closed)
- Proper placement in relevé (weight toward first and second toes)
- Sufficient ankle flexibility to point foot fully and obtain a high relevé
- Strong overall postural strength and coordination
- Able to maintain turnout while dancing
- Emotional maturity (the ability to stay focused and apply corrections)
- At least three years of ballet training
- Attending at least three ballet classes per week

If you consistently show proficiency in these areas, you may be ready for pointe...but not necessarily! Only an experienced instructor who has been working with you closely knows when you are ready.

DO NOT purchase pointe shoes without a teacher's approval.

Trust your instructor's expertise. You have your entire career to dance on pointe...there is no rush!

Frequently asked questions

Do I need to be professionally fit for pointe shoes?

YES! The perfect pointe shoe should fit just like Cinderella's glass slipper, as if it was made for your foot! A professional pointe shoe fitter will ensure you find the right fit.

Can I buy pointe shoes a size up and grow into them?

NO! Pointe shoes need to fit like a glove. A pointe shoe fitter will ensure your shoes are just right. This is not a time to size up!

What else do I need to purchase when I buy my shoes?

When you go to get fit for pointe shoes, be sure to also purchase:

- Ribbons
- Elastic
- Toe pads
- Spacers (if recommended)
- A mesh bag to store shoes in

Can I buy pointe shoes online?

Once you have been professionally fit, your feet have stopped growing, and you are happy with your shoes, yes! You may then order the same style and size online. But until this happens (or if you want to try something new), you will need to visit a professional.

Who should sew my pointe shoes?

You should! As an aspiring dancer, it is your responsibility to sew your own pointe shoes. Only you can be sure they are sewn to the correct specifications to best fit your foot!

I just got my shoes! Can I practice at home?

When you are a beginner, NO! Pointe work is very intricate and should only be done under the watchful eye of an experienced instructor with proper flooring. The only thing you should practice at home is tying your pointe shoes. As you advance, you may be able to do simple exercises such as relevés at home to build strength with the permission of your instructor.

How do I break in my pointe shoes?

The best way to break in your pointe shoes is by wearing them! You want them to mold to your feet. Doing prances, roll throughs, tendus and relevés will break your shoes in the right place. Once they have formed to your foot, you may gently bend the shank.

You may have noticed some more advanced dancers doing things such as standing on the box, closing their shoes in doors, banging them on a hard surface or applying water to the wings. Until you become more advanced, it is not recommended to go to these extreme measures. Over time, you will figure out exactly what works for you and your shoes and may begin implementing new techniques to break them in.

Frequently asked questions

What will happen in my first pointe class?

I know you're itching to get working on those 32 fouettés! But the reality is much less glamorous. While you may practice some movements like reverence in center, you will start out working with two hands on the barre until you gain enough strength. Typically beginning pointe work includes a lot of relevés, échappés and bourrées!

How should I store my pointe shoes?

In a breathable, mesh bag. If you shove your shoes into the bottom of your dance bag, the build up of moisture will make them break down faster.

How long will my pointe shoes last?

That depends! When you're first starting out, they may last for 3-4 months. As you dance on them more, they will begin to die faster. Professional dancers can go through 3-4 pairs a week!

Is there any way to extend the life of my pointe shoes?

Yes! The lifespan of a pointe shoe is finite, but if you take care of them properly they will last longer. You can:

- Store them in a breathable mesh bag
- Rotate two pairs so that they have a chance to dry out before being worn again
- Use a small amount of jet glue/wood hardener in the box

How do I know when my shoes are dead?

Pointe shoes break down in two places: the box and the shank. When your box is dead, it will feel squishy to the touch. When your shank is dead, the shoes won't be able to support your arch any more and you will push too far over the box.

How do I deal with blisters?

When you're first starting out in pointe shoes, your feet will take some time to acclimate. One of the most common issues dancers face is blisters. Over time you will develop callouses, but until then:

- Tape your toes in any trouble spots before dancing
- Apply some petroleum jelly or antibiotic ointment to help reduce chafing
- Remove any bandaids and tape after dancing, wash your feet and let them breathe

Does wearing pointe shoes hurt?

It is normal for pointe to feel painful, especially when you first start out. You are holding your entire body weight on your toes! But there is a difference between normal pain and an injury. If something doesn't feel right, tell your teacher and seek medical attention.

Pointers for Parents

Your budding ballerina finally got their pointe shoes! This is such an exciting time in any dancer's training. What do parents need to know?

Pointe shoes are an investment

One pair of pointe shoes costs anywhere from \$65-\$100 (not including accessories such as toe pads, ribbons and elastic). Each pair can typically be worn between 12-15 hours before being replaced. While beginning dancers will go through shoes more slowly, as your dancer advances they will begin going through shoes more quickly. Be prepared to buy multiple pairs each month as they progress through their training.

Injuries happen

Just like with any athletic endeavor, the risk for injury can increase as dancers begin training in more advanced disciplines such as pointe. Your dancer will be properly guided every step of the way to ensure they are gaining strength slowly and surely. The most common injury in ballet dancers is ankle injuries, which is why it is so important to ensure dancers have adequate strength before starting pointe.

Dancers need to sew their own shoes

For many dancers first starting out, sewing pointe shoes can be an extremely tedious and time consuming task. It is tempting to jump in and do it for them, but this is an important part of their dance training. Not only is sewing a skill they will need to master, it encourages dancers to plan ahead and be responsible for having shoes prepared in advanced. Offer help and guidance, but ultimately the responsibility for completing the task lies with the dancer.

Dancers shouldn't practice at home

Your ballerina is going to be SO excited that they won't want to take their pointe shoes off. Of course we want to encourage that commitment, but when a dancer is just starting out it is imperative that they only practice pointe work under the watchful eye of their instructors. You can encourage your dancer to work on their strength without pointe shoes on by doing theraband exercises and relevés in flat shoes.

Your dancer will need reassurance on tough days

As if ballet wasn't already challenging enough, pointe adds a whole extra element of difficulty. It is a huge milestone, but can also be frustrating. It is likely that your dancer will remain at the barre for many months and may not perform on pointe for at least a year. Remind your dancer that it is imperative to take it slow so that they can build strength and technique. They will be twirling across the stage on pointe soon enough!