

Unit 45: Developing Contemporary Dance Technique

Unit code:	H/502/4911
QCF Level 3:	BTEC National
Credit value:	10
Guided learning hours:	60

● Aim and purpose

This unit is about developing contemporary dance technique giving learners the opportunity to gain a solid foundation of skills in this style of dance. Learners will take part in regular technique classes in order to develop the skills required to dance in a contemporary style.

● Unit introduction

Contemporary dance technique is essential for anyone intending to work in choreography and performance or wishing to progress to higher qualification levels. Many dance companies and choreographers use contemporary dance, and ballet companies often stipulate that they require understanding of contemporary dance in performance. Professional dance companies also use contemporary dance classes as part of their ongoing training schedule.

Learners will gain the underpinning knowledge of the skills needed to progress in the performance of contemporary dance. They must be aware of their technical ability in order to evaluate their progress and improve. This unit introduces the essentials of contemporary technique; it will develop strength, flexibility, stamina, and coordination. Learners will need to have a professional approach to all activities, to understand their own strengths and weaknesses and be able to learn how to evaluate their performance for future consideration. Learners also need to understand the disciplined way in which a technique class works and demonstrate improved and developed technical skills over the course of the unit.

This unit also aims to give learners a chance to recall combinations and sequences in order to build on movement memory and the technical skills of contemporary dance in class. This unit will provide the building blocks of contemporary dance to ensure that the dancers understand how to use their physical skills to their full potential. Whilst the contemporary dance style is not prescribed, classes and set studies can be drawn from a variety of contemporary techniques such as Cunningham, Release, Graham and Limon.

● Learning outcomes

On completion of this unit a learner should:

- 1 Be able to demonstrate contemporary technique in classes
- 2 Be able to improve physical and interpretative skills
- 3 Be able to absorb and reproduce sequences of movement in class
- 4 Understand individual technical progress.

Unit content

1 Be able to demonstrate contemporary technique in classes

Application: appropriate presentation; focus; commitment; application of technical knowledge; direction; corrections; self-discipline

Structure: warm-up; centre and floor exercises; travelling; phrases/sequences/combinations; cool down

Movement vocabulary: floor work; positions of feet/arms; parallel/turnout; rotation of spine/limbs; contraction and release; flexion; extension; spiral/rotation; swings; plies; use of feet; balance; elevation; travelling; shifting of body weight

2 Be able to improve physical and interpretative skills in class

Physical skills: posture; alignment; balance; coordination; flexibility; strength; stamina; body awareness; extension; contraction; rotation; ability to reproduce movement accurately; whole body participation and or/isolation; application of dynamic range; placement of the feet; awareness of centre

Interpretative skills: projection; focus; phrasing; emphasis; rhythmic awareness; quality; musicality; dynamics; facial expression; timing; use of breath; use of gravity; suspension

3 Be able to absorb and reproduce sequences of movement in class

Movement phrases: formal exercises; phrases; sequences; combinations of movement material; travelling sequences; short set studies

Accurate reproduction: of order; body actions; body shape; timing/phrasing/rhythm; use of personal and stage space; dynamics

Movement memory: repetition; increased length of phrases; practice

4 Understand individual technical progress

Evaluation: self-assessment; strengths and weaknesses; peer observation: tutor feedback

Improvement: identification of targets; setting appropriate targets; rehearsal; repetition; re-evaluation

Assessment and grading criteria

In order to pass this unit, the evidence that the learner presents for assessment needs to demonstrate that they can meet all the learning outcomes for the unit. The assessment criteria for a pass grade describe the level of achievement required to pass this unit.

Assessment and grading criteria		
To achieve a pass grade the evidence must show that the learner is able to:	To achieve a merit grade the evidence must show that, in addition to the pass criteria, the learner is able to:	To achieve a distinction grade the evidence must show that, in addition to the pass and merit criteria, the learner is able to:
P1 demonstrate self-discipline within the majority of technique classes [SM]	M1 demonstrate self-discipline within technique classes	D1 demonstrate a highly disciplined approach to technique classes
P2 apply technical direction and respond to corrections [SM]	M2 apply technical direction and respond positively to correction	D2 apply direction and respond to all corrections, general and individual
P3 demonstrate the application of physical skills in the execution of movement phrases	M3 demonstrate the consistent application of physical skills in the execution of movement phrases	D3 demonstrate the competent use of physical skills in the execution of movement phrases with correct alignment
P4 apply interpretative skills to the performance of class work	M4 apply appropriate interpretative skills to the performance of class work	D4 confidently apply appropriate interpretative skills to the performance of class work
P5 demonstrate technical phrases with only occasional errors in action, dynamic, rhythmic or spatial content [SM]	M5 demonstrate technical phrases demonstrating an awareness of action, dynamic, rhythmic and spatial content	D5 demonstrate technique phrases accurately and confidently
P6 evaluate own technical performance setting targets with guidance. [SM, RL, EP]	M6 evaluate own technical performance setting appropriate and achievable targets with guidance.	D6 thoroughly evaluate own technical performance setting focused and challenging targets with minimal guidance.

PLTS: This summary references where applicable, in the square brackets, the elements of the personal, learning and thinking skills applicable in the pass criteria. It identifies opportunities for learners to demonstrate effective application of the referenced elements of the skills.

Key	IE – independent enquirers CT – creative thinkers	RL – reflective learners TW – team workers	SM – self-managers EP – effective participators
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Essential guidance for tutors

Delivery

The styles chosen will reflect the tutor's training and ensure that there is consistency throughout the unit. All classes need to follow a similar structure, with exercises, phrases, sequences, combinations and studies taught over a number of weeks to enable learners to develop physical skills, increase movement memory and challenge their abilities. If learners have not had any dance or movement training before starting this unit, they will need to develop basic skills in the first few weeks, for example, establishing correct posture, alignment, distribution of weight, correct positioning of the feet and arms.

Over the course of the unit exercises will increase in complexity giving learners the opportunity to develop their skills further. This unit will provide learners with a solid foundation in technique and the opportunity to experience the ways in which dancers are committed to regular technique class, training and evaluation in order to maintain their artistic 'tools' or bodies. It is important to allow learners to build up their knowledge of contemporary dance over the course of the unit allowing time for corrections, evaluations and target setting to come into effect. Learners also need to understand the disciplined way in which a technique class works and demonstrate an improved and developed technique over the course of the unit.

Although the focus of the unit is on two or more contemporary dance styles tutors might like to introduce a variety of styles to enable learners to have a broader understanding of contemporary dance and its many influences. As is often the case the tutor may deliver a class that 'borrows' from a whole host of contemporary dance styles that could be appropriate as long as all the unit outcomes are addressed.

Learners should be encouraged to observe recordings of their individual performances of exercises, phrases, sequences, combinations and set studies, evaluate their own progress and identify and set targets to aid further development. Learners could also encourage peers giving direction and receiving simple targets. The content and outcomes of this unit should be demonstrated through the development of practical skills.

Outline learning plan

The outline learning plan has been included in this unit as guidance and can be used in conjunction with the programme of suggested assignments.

The outline learning plan demonstrates one way in planning the delivery and assessment of this unit.

Topic and suggested assignments/activities and/assessment

Introduction to the unit – health and safety considerations, correct dress and how to achieve P1, M1, D1.

To give learners lessons in a contemporary style incorporating: Graham, Limon, Cunningham and release techniques. Over 10-12 weeks:

- Using sequences and exercises that use floor work, centre work, travelling and longer movement phrases.
- Challenging individual learners to increase stamina, flexibility, coordination, strength, and movement memory and performance qualities.
- Floor work, centre work. Exercises building learners coordination. Use of suspension and breath
- Warm-up spine, swings, feet, legs, curves, travelling, learning longer phrases.
- Warm-up. Learners to watch each other performing sequences; giving peer feedback.
- Class work looking at technical skills, eg alignment and placement, use of space when travelling, use of torso and tilts.

Topic and suggested assignments/activities and/assessment
Warm-up. Recapping all sequences learnt to date. Learners execute sequences and exercises learnt to date without tutor in preparation for assessment.
Assignment 1 – P1, M1, D1, P2, M2, D2, P3, M3, D3, P4, M4, D4, P5, M5, D5 For this assignment learners will perform class exercises Rehearsal and studio practice for assessment.
Workshops throughout the course – or at the end of classes – on evaluation and how to assess strengths and weaknesses, how to set targets and the type of dance language needed.
Assignment 2 – P6, M6, D6 Evaluation. Watching self on video and noting strengths and weaknesses. To create a list of things to improve. Further development of contemporary dance exercises and challenging learners with more complicated movements that require more strength, flexibility, stamina and correct alignment. Over 10-12 weeks:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using sequences and exercises that use floor work, centre work, travelling and longer movement phrases. • Challenging individual learners to increase stamina, flexibility, coordination, strength, and movement memory and performance qualities. • Floor work, centre work. Exercises building learners strength and stamina. Travelling sequences. • Warm-up spine, swings, feet, legs, curves, travelling, learning longer phrases. • Warm-up. Learners to watch each other performing sequences; giving peer feedback. • Class work looking at technical skills, eg alignment and placement, use of space when travelling. • Warm-up. Recapping all sequences learnt to date. Starting to form the material into a technical study. • Learners execute sequences and exercises learnt to date without tutor in preparation for assessment.
Assignment 3 – P1, M1, D1, P2, M2, D2, P3, M3, D3, P4, M4, D4, P5, M5, D5, P6, M6, D6 Class work and longer technical work. Rehearsal time for assessment and evaluation evidence created.
Assignment 4 – P1, M1, D1, P2, M2, D2, P3, M3, D3, P4, M4, D4, P5, M5, D5, P6, M6, D6 Visiting workshop(s) and classes from a contemporary dancer in a different style of contemporary dance. Or a second style of contemporary dance. To build a new class that challenges learners.

Assessment

Assessment will take place mainly in technique classes but it is also possible to grade learners in workshops and performances. The structured class environment is ideal to observe how technique and stylistic qualities are developing. Learners taking regular contemporary classes will be given opportunities to build on their understanding of technique.

Learners are required to identify their strengths and weaknesses so that they can develop their technical skills. For tutors to gain an insight into how learners intend to do this, they need to be encouraged to self-evaluate their progress and performances.

The delivery of this unit should be as practical as possible for the learners to really get to grips with the style. A variety of methods of presenting evaluations and target setting can be used, eg in the form of a tick-box record sheet with comments, written evaluation or indeed a discussion with the tutor over a video recording of learners' work. This unit does not demand written work in assessment but tutors may wish learners to produce notes for evaluation. It could even be written targets that each learner writes on a white board at the beginning of a class. The emphasis of the unit is on learners taking responsibility for their own technique and working on their strengths and weaknesses to become better dancers.

It is suggested that learners be assessed in the minimum of three full class activities. The classes may build on movement vocabulary in a number of ways, eg adding on to, quicker, more demanding as well as having new movement phrases and exercises.

The development of contemporary dance is integral to this unit and learners need to be given opportunities to prepare, learn, develop and rehearse set movement sequences. Learners are encouraged to demonstrate independence in their learning and may also lead other learners in exercises, sequences and set studies.

The work produced for this unit should clearly communicate the principles of contemporary technique in whichever techniques are being studied. Evidence will take the form of video recordings, tutor observation and feedback, self-evaluation, witness statements and peer feedback.

Learning outcome 1 requires learners to participate in contemporary dance techniques classes with a disciplined approach. This includes responding to technical direction and any other corrections, making the relevant changes in the body and building skills. Differentiation between pass, merit and distinction will be apparent through the level of self-discipline, the ability to apply the corrections made to movement and to show improvements as a result of corrections. This relates to grading criteria 1 and 2.

At pass level, learners will be able to come to class correctly dressed and work hard at their technique most of the time. They may also listen to corrections trying to make the relevant changes in the body but attempts are either limited or the corrections are not fully understood.

At merit level, learners will be able to act appropriately in all classes being consistent in their willingness to dance. Learners achieving merit will be able to attempt most corrections with a degree of success faltering with occasional mistakes when one or more aspect is being corrected.

At distinction level, learners will have a keenness to listen to all correction and directions given so that they can improve making them highly disciplined. Learners achieving distinction will be able to demonstrate a considered and successful approach to making corrections and may ask for further assistance to achieve the best they can. Distinction level learners will want fulfil their full potential.

Learning outcome 2 requires learners to learn and perform movement phrases, sequences, and dance pieces in a contemporary style with the use of developed physical and interpretative skills. Differentiation between pass, merit and distinction will be evident through learner's technical ability to recreate exact steps with correct placement of body parts, dynamics and stylistic qualities such as suspension. Learners will also have the ability to use focus, musicality and breath to get across the mood, feeling or meaning behind the movement material.

Grading criteria 3 and 4

At pass level, learners will produce a performance that recognisably reproduces the original steps with some sense of technical detail. There may be some inaccuracies but this does not detract from the overall performance.

At merit level, learners will provide a performance that will be consistently watchable and with elements that make it memorable. There is engagement with the material and an interpretation which works, although it may not necessarily be inspired or technically correct throughout.

At distinction level, learners will have an unmistakable confidence in everything they perform in assessment. Their performance will pay close attention to the full range of dynamics in the body, the correct alignment, technical skill with focus and stylistic qualities of the technique demonstrated with excellence.

Learning outcome 3 requires learners to reproduce technical phrases learnt with accuracy in all aspects. Differentiation between pass, merit and distinction will be apparent through the use of dynamics, a sense of rhythm and use of space in the whole body and a consistency of correct body actions. Movement material used must challenge learners at this level.

Grading criterion 5

For P5, learners will be able to demonstrate the movement material with a basic understanding of rhythm, dynamic and use of space. They may miss counts, a cue or find it difficult to perform actions at the correct tempo. Learners in the most part will perform the movements in a considered way but there may be occasional errors.

For M5, learners will be able to use the whole body, whether in isolation or moving as a whole, to demonstrate clearly the timing and rhythm of the material and the chosen dynamic.

For D5, learners will have a true understanding of the correct rhythm, dynamics and of the use of space. The rhythm will be shown through the body. Distinction level learners will be able to perform complex contemporary dance sequences confidently and accurately.

Learning outcome 4 requires learners to understand their own technical progress by evaluating their own performance, making corrections and further technical developments. Learners will improve as a result of rehearsals, which can be demonstrated in performance. Differentiation between pass, merit and distinction will be apparent through the understanding of learners' own strengths and weaknesses by setting achievable targets for improving in rehearsals.

Grading criterion 6

For P6, learners will be able to list some of the weaknesses that need improving and will have considered their strengths. They will be able to set some targets that are achievable but these may not all be addressed in rehearsal. Improvements will be made in performance but these may be obvious or a fractional improvement. Pass learners may struggle with learning the movements and need more time to absorb the material before they can make corrections.

For M6, learners will be able to evaluate their own performance and set targets that they think can be achieved. In performance they will show improvements that will have considered weaknesses and used rehearsal time to achieve.

For D6, learners will have a true understanding of what improvements they need to make in rehearsal, having an awareness of their strengths and weaknesses and setting targets that they can achieve. These improvements will be obvious in performance as rehearsals will have addressed nearly all corrections that needed to be made.

Programme of suggested assignments

The table below shows a programme of suggested assignments that cover the pass, merit and distinction criteria in the assessment and grading grid. This is for guidance and it is recommended that centres either write their own assignments or adapt any Edexcel assignments to meet local needs and resources.

Criteria covered	Assignment title	Scenario	Assessment method
P1, M1, D1, P2, M2, D2, P3, M3, D3, P4, M4, D4, P5, M5, D5	1: Class Work	For this assignment learners will perform class exercises, phrases and sequences learnt over 10 weeks.	Tutor observation. Practical class videoed.
P6. M6, D6	2: Evaluation	Watching self on video and noting strengths and weaknesses. To create a list of things to improve.	Tick list worksheet of strengths and weaknesses. List of achievable and relevant targets – either written or in discussion with tutor.
P1, M1, D1, P2, M2, D2, P3, M3, D3, P4, M4, D4, P5, M5, D5, P6. M6, D6	3: Class Work and Evaluation Class work and longer technical studies	Developing skills in class trying to meet targets set and making new ones.	Tutor observation. Practical class: videoed. Tick list worksheet of strengths and weaknesses. List of achievable and relevant targets – either written or in discussion with tutor.
P1, M1, D1, P2, M2, D2, P3, M3, D3, P4, M4, D4, P5, M5, D5, P6. M6, D6	4: Class Work and Evaluation 2	Visiting workshop(s) and classes from a contemporary dancer in a different style of contemporary dance. Or a second style of contemporary dance. To build a new class that challenges learners.	Tutor observation. Practical class: videoed. Tick list worksheet of strengths and weaknesses. List of achievable and relevant targets – either written or in discussion with tutor.

Links to National Occupational Standards, other BTEC units, other BTEC qualifications and other relevant units and qualifications

This unit forms part of the BTEC Performing and Production Arts sector suite. This unit has particular links with the following unit titles in the BTEC Performing and Production Arts suite:

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
Exploring Dance Skills	Contemporary Dance	Dance Performance
	Performing Dance	Applying Contemporary dance
		Dance Appreciation

Essential resources

A practical dance space will be required, with mirrors and preferably with a sprung floor. Access to sound equipment and/or accompanist, a video camera and video playback facilities would be useful. It will be necessary to video examples of technique classes as well as set studies. Learners would also benefit from theatre visits and workshops with visiting artists and companies.

Employer engagement and vocational contexts

Centres are encouraged to develop links with professional dance companies, choreographers, local universities and dance colleges and dancers. This could be talks, demonstrations, workshops, classes, taught repertoire, performance opportunities, visits to the theatre, visiting performances to centres and education resources that are available to centres.

Indicative reading for learners

Textbooks

Ashley L – *Essential Guide to Dance, 3rd Edition* (Hodder Arnold, 2008) ISBN 9780340968383

Cohan R – *The Dance Workshop* (Dance Books, 1996) ISBN 9781852730512

Franklin E – *Dance Imagery for Technique and Performance* (Human Kinetics, Europe, 1996) ISBN 9780873229432

Shurr G and Yocom R – *Modern Dance: Techniques and Teaching* (Dance Horizons, 1980) ISBN 9780871271099

Journals

Dance Europe

Dance Theatre Journal

Websites

www.dancebooks.co.uk

They carry a range of books, CDs, class CDs, videos, DVDs and sheet music on all forms of dance.

www.phoenixdancetheatre.co.uk

Phoenix Dance Theatre Company

www.rambert.org.uk

Rambert Dance Company. Touring of Contemporary dance in theatres, resources to buy including DVD's and education packs, 'learning and participation' department offers workshops, residencies and Inset's.

www.surrey.ac.uk/NRCD

The National Resource Centre for Dance (NRCD) is a non-profit national archive and resource provider for dance and movement.

www.theplace.org.uk

Richard Alston Dance Company

Delivery of personal, learning and thinking skills

The table below identifies the opportunities for personal, learning and thinking skills (PLTS) that have been included within the pass assessment criteria of this unit.

Skill	When learners are ...
Independent enquirers	evaluating their own and their peers strengths and weaknesses rehearsing set movement phrases independently
Creative thinkers	adapting movements learnt to a new facing or timing sharing peer feedback
Reflective learners	target setting for ways to improve physical and interpretative skills re-evaluating targets and setting new ones
Team workers	performing unison work in small groups considering other dancers in the space during technique classes reviewing work with other learners and agreeing ways of improving collaborative work in the future
Self-managers	pushing their own technical abilities in class work being responsible for self discipline responding to tutor direction and correction
Effective participators	identifying strengths and weaknesses for improvement giving appropriate direction to peers

Although PLTS are identified within this unit as an inherent part of the assessment criteria, there are further opportunities to develop a range of PLTS through various approaches to teaching and learning.

Skill	When learners are ...
Independent enquirers	carrying out research into different styles of contemporary dance researching dance companies and visiting the theatre
Creative thinkers	generating ideas and collecting stimuli for use in choreography
Reflective learners	watching themselves on video reviewing theirs and their peers progress and performance
Team workers	working in small groups considering how to create innovative movement phrases being responsible collaborating on choreographies
Self-managers	improving their own performance organising rehearsal time responding to direction from tutor and peers researching dance pieces planning rehearsal schedules
Effective participators	working in groups on choreographic ideas negotiating movements answers proposing practical ways forward working in groups to create choreography and performance pieces offering improvement suggestions

● Functional Skills – Level 2

Skill	When learners are ...
English	
Speaking and listening – make a range of contributions to discussions and make effective presentations in a wide range of contexts	taking part in a group discussion listening to direction and corrections from the tutor and peers having in group discussions and peer conversations on strengths, weaknesses and areas for improvement
Writing – write documents, including extended writing pieces, communicating information, ideas and opinions, effectively and persuasively	producing written evaluations.