

Unit 46: Applying Contemporary Dance Technique

Unit code:	J/502/4917
QCF Level 3:	BTEC National
Credit value:	10
Guided learning hours:	60

● Aim and purpose

This unit is about applying dance technique skills in two or more contemporary dance styles in performance. Learners will take part in regular technique classes in order to develop the skills required to dance in a contemporary dance 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 techniques and ballet companies also require an understanding of contemporary dance in performance.

This unit aims to give learners the opportunity to recall combinations, sequences and phrases in order to build on movement memory and technical skills. Teaching and learning should draw on the unit content to provide coverage of all elements and skills needed for learners to have a rounded concept of this style of dance in performance.

Learners will be encouraged to refine their skills as performers by challenging their movement memory and technical ability and extending their performance quality and focus. Working as a contemporary dancer in performance will improve confidence, develop interpretative skills and enhance the communication between audience and performer.

This unit focuses on the performance of contemporary dance aiming to engage learners with the skills needed to bring this style of dance to life. Emphasis will be placed on developing and understanding the required stylistic qualities and improvement as a result of rehearsal.

● Learning outcomes

On completion of this unit a learner should:

- 1 Be able to demonstrate the stylistic features of contemporary technique
- 2 Be able to apply physical and interpretative skills in contemporary styles
- 3 Be able to absorb and reproduce complex sequences of movement
- 4 Be able to develop contemporary dance technique through the rehearsal process.

Unit content

1 Be able to demonstrate the stylistic features of contemporary technique

Technique, at least two from: Graham, Cunningham, Hawkins/Release, Humphrey/Limon, Skinner Release Technique

Characteristics of specific styles: physical features; action; spatial; dynamics; rhythmic content

Movement vocabulary: contraction; extension; rotation of spine, limbs; floor-work; rolling; swings; plies; use of feet; shifting of body weight; turning; stepping in different directions; elevation; travelling phrases

Physical application: posture; use of spine; torso; breath; use of phrasing and high points; use of gravity; suspension; fall and recover; weight; balance; dynamics; quality; focus; facial expression

2 Be able to apply physical and interpretative skills in contemporary styles

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

Interpretative skills: projection; focus; phrasing; emphasis; rhythmic awareness; quality; musicality; dynamics; facial expression; timing; use of breath; use of gravity; suspension; characterisation; communication of the dance idea; intention; mood; emotion

3 Be able to absorb and reproduce complex sequences of movement

Movement sequences: set studies; solo dances; company repertoire; increased technical difficulty

Movement memory: order; action; timing; spatial content; dynamics; repetition; increased length of phrases; practice; working with others

4 Be able to develop contemporary dance technique through the rehearsal process.

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

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

Performance considerations: use of space; re-assessing performing space; consideration of other dancers; corrections, directions; performance space: use of costumes; use of props; appropriate dynamics; entrances and exits; musicality

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 the application of stylistic characteristics of contemporary dance in performance	M1 demonstrate the application of the appropriate stylistic characteristics of contemporary dance in performance	D1 demonstrate the confident application of the appropriate stylistic characteristics of contemporary dance in performance
P2 show application of physical skills in the execution of movement phrases	M2 show the application of appropriate physical skills in the execution of movement phrases	D2 show the confident application of the appropriate physical skills in the execution of movement phrases with correct alignment
P3 apply interpretative skills to the performance of dance material	M3 apply appropriate interpretative skills to the performance of dance material	D3 confidently apply appropriate interpretative skills to the performance of dance material
P4 perform set studies/solos/duets/ensemble dances with occasional errors, demonstrating movement memory skills [SM]	M4 accurately perform set studies/solos/duets/ensemble dances from memory	D4 accurately and confidently perform set studies/solos/duets/ensemble dances from memory
P5 show improved technical skill in performance as a result of rehearsal. [SM, RL, EP]	M5 show improved technical skill in performance as a result of commitment to rehearsal.	D5 show a significant improvement in technical skill in performance as a result of thorough and rigorous rehearsal.

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	RL – reflective learners	SM – self-managers
	CT – creative thinkers	TW – team workers	EP – effective participators

Essential guidance for tutors

Delivery

The delivery will need to contain structured technique classes to train the dancers initially, which may focus on two or more contemporary dance styles. 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 and exercises, sequences, combinations and studies should be taught over a number of weeks to enable learners to develop physical skills, increase movement memory and challenge abilities. Learners will need to apply these skills as they experience a more diverse movement vocabulary.

Teaching and learning should draw on the unit content to provide coverage of all elements and skills needed for learners to have a rounded concept of the presentation of this style of dance. 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.

As teaching progresses, exercises will increase in complexity, giving learners the opportunity to develop their skills further. Work undertaken will be technically demanding and will include longer and more complex sequences taking the form of set studies, solos and group dance pieces. These can be choreographed by the tutor or adapted from professional repertoire. Many dance companies offer workshops that include the learning of company repertoire. Observation of professional work and research into appropriate techniques will inform learners' practical work.

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.

Learners should be encouraged to observe recordings of their individual performances of exercises, 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 in performance.

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.

Assignment 1: Creation of a Group Contemporary Piece in a Cunningham Style – P1, M1, D1, P2, M2, D2, P3, M3, D3, P4, M4, D4, P5, M5, D5

Using learnt sequences to create a group improvisation that will be performed in class and to an audience at the end of term. The technique classes will warm up dancers and give them more complicated and advanced exercises and sequences.

Rehearsal and performance of contemporary piece.

Exploration of grading criterion 5 and how to show improvements. Watching video of performance work, discussion.

Topic and suggested assignments/activities and/assessment

Assignment 2: Creation of a Whole Group Choreography – P1, M1, D1, P2, M2, D2, P3, M3, D3, P4, M4, D4, P5, M5, D5

Based on repertoire either from a visiting company or video of learnt repertoire delivered by the tutor.

Continuation of technique class for warm-up and development of strength, stamina, flexibility and coordination

Rehearsal and performance of a contemporary piece to an audience. It could be that groups use the movement material given to create their own piece or that each piece is the same.

Exploration of grading criterion 5 and how to show improvements. Watching video of performance work, discussion.

Watching contemporary dance repertoire on video – creating phrases, copying movements and style for future use.

Assignment 3: Workshop from a Visiting Contemporary Dance or Company – P1, M1, D1, P2, M2, D2, P3, M3, D3, P4, M4, D4, P5, M5, D5

Assignment 4: Small Group Contemporary Pieces – P1, M1, D1, P2, M2, D2, P3, M3, D3, P4, M4, D4, P5, M5, D5

Choreography in small groups using all contemporary dance technique learnt to date but with own theme/stimuli/role. This could be choreographed by the tutor or jointly with learners. This is for learners who have a strong grasp of technique.

Rehearsal time for assessment and performance of contemporary piece.

Assessment

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

It is suggested that learners need to perform in a minimum of three contemporary dance pieces each lasting more than two minutes to achieve this unit. These can be set studies, solos, duets, trios, quartets or ensemble pieces. It is possible to assess class work but the unit is about 'applying' contemporary dance so that the style is put into use in a more vocational setting. This setting can be performance to peers, 'sharings', platforms and performance evenings as long as learners have the opportunity to rehearse, improve and demonstrate their physical and interpretative skills. In performance work it is encouraged that dancers take on 'a role' that may challenge their communication of a dance idea to an audience.

Learning outcome 1 requires learners use the stylistic features of contemporary dance techniques developing their movement vocabulary and knowledge of different styles in the body. Differentiation between pass, merit and distinction will be apparent through the way in which learners confidently performs movement material with an understanding of the correct stylistic characteristics.

For P1, learners will be able to demonstrate simple aspects of the style that may be inconsistent with movements showing different shapes and patterns without an understanding of the correct technique, dynamic or phrasing.

For M1, learners will be able to demonstrate aspects of this style with a knowledge of the stylistic features 'on the body' but they may not yet all be 'in the body'. Phrasing may be apparent but there may be some inconsistencies in performance and breath may be occasionally used to enhance high points and suspensions.

For D1, learners will be able to demonstrate an understanding of each different style with the stylistic features 'in the body'. Phrasing, breath and suspensions will be used to full effect. Distinction level learners will be confident in the application of stylistic characteristics.

Learning outcome 2 (grading criteria 2 and 3) 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 learners' technical ability to recreate exact steps with correct placement of body parts, dynamics and stylistic qualities such as suspension. They will also be able to communicate the meaning behind the dance with the use of dynamics, facial expression, musicality and focus.

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 overall 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 a stylistic 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 with a high degree of technical detail. 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 (grading criteria 4) requires learners to reproduce technical phrases learnt with accuracy in all aspects. Differentiation between pass, merit and distinction will be apparent through the use correct use of dynamics, space and using movement memory to perform the set studies accurately.

For P4, 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 errors throughout or they may struggle to recall certain aspects correctly.

For M4, 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. There maybe moments that have a strong understanding of the body actions but all will be performed from memory.

For D4, learners will have a true understanding of the correct rhythm, the dynamics of the movement material and of the use of space. The rhythm will be shown through the body and dancers will be able to recall every small detail they have learnt. Distinction level learners will be able to perform contemporary dance studies 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 and the making of improvement in rehearsals; this can be evidenced by tutor observation.

For P5, learners will be able to address weaknesses that need improving. 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 M5, learners will be able to evaluate their own performance and, with some tutor help, know what needs to be improved. They will take responsibility for their own improvements often going over material in class and booking extra rehearsals. In performance they will show improvements that will have considered weaknesses and used rehearsal time to achieve.

For D5, learners will have a true understanding of what improvements they need to make in rehearsal having an awareness of their strengths and weaknesses and pushing their own abilities. They will be keen to improve and work hard both in class and rehearsal. These improvements will be obvious in performance, as extra self-imposed rehearsals will have addressed nearly all corrections.

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	Creation of a Group Contemporary Piece in a Cunningham Style	Learners will cover key exercises and Cunningham phrases that will form the basis of an improvisation piece for performance.	Tutor observation. Performance/sharing to an audience. Videoed.
P1, M1, D1, P2, M2, D2, P3, M3, D3, P4, M4, D4, P5, M5, D5	Creation of a Whole Group Choreography	Creation of a whole group choreography based on repertoire either from a visiting company or video of learnt repertoire delivered by the tutor.	Tutor observation Performance/sharing to an audience. Videoed.
P1, M1, D1, P2, M2, D2, P3, M3, D3, P4, M4, D4, P5, M5, D5	Workshop from a Visiting Contemporary Dance or Company	Workshop from a visiting contemporary dance or company.	Tutor observation. Videoed.
P1, M1, D1, P2, M2, D2, P3, M3, D3, P4, M4, D4, P5, M5, D5	Small Group Contemporary Pieces	Choreography in small groups using all contemporary dance technique learnt to date but with own theme/ stimuli/role. This could be choreographed by the tutor or jointly with learners.	Tutor observation. Performance/sharing to an audience. Videoed.

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
	The Development of Dance	Choreographic Principles
		Choreographing Dance
		Developing Contemporary Dance Technique
		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 set studies, workshops and performances. Learners would also benefit from theatre visits and workshops with visiting contemporary dance artists and companies as well as a professional performance setting to present work in.

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, and all titles shown in their website catalogue are in stock and available.

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	rehearsing set movement phrases independently
Creative thinkers	adapting movements learned to a new facing or timing
Reflective learners	target setting for ways to improve physical and interpretative skills
Team workers	performing unison work in small groups performing in ensemble work considering other dancers in the space during performances reviewing work with other learners and agreeing ways of improving collaborative work in the future
Self-managers	pushing their own technical abilities in performance 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 their and their peers progress and performance
Team workers	working in small groups considering how to create innovative movement phrases being responsible rehearsing performance pieces 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 proposing practical ways forward in the creation of dance material working in groups to create choreography and performance pieces offering performance 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 involved 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 of strengths and weaknesses that include physical skills and interpretative skills dance language.