



Dressing for Dance

*The Hows and Whys
of the Traditional Clothing
and Hairstyles for Ballet Class*

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Ballet, like many other traditional arts such as martial arts or horseback riding, has very special and specific clothing. The very action of putting on this special clothing helps prepare the young dancer to focus in a different way, and to participate fully in the dance class. The clothing is specific in many ways, which relate to safety, utility and aesthetics. Here are some guidelines which will help dancers look the part, and do well in dance class in this narrow, but important way.

Within the past few years, there has been an explosion of consumer options for different styles, fabrics, and colors. As each family makes its own choice and adds accessories, the clean, clear look of the classroom is becoming cluttered, and the dancers are not looking as neat as we would like. This year, we are inaugurating a new line of Princeton Ballet School leotards, some of them especially commissioned for us. This uniform can be purchased through Giselle Dancewear, either by filling in the enclosed order form, or in person in our Princeton lobby. Please note that a portion of each sale will be donated back to the ballet school. This service is being offered as a convenience. Basic dancewear you already own, such as tights, can continue to be used, of course, as long as it fits the description of what is called for.

I hope this brochure can help you gain a better appreciation of the uniqueness of dance clothing, and the special respect in which our profession holds this badge of honor. In the theater professions, looking good is not considered narcissism, just good self-discipline and good common sense. Please help us integrate this additional aspect of dance training into your dancer's life. We will all work together on this project and see excellent results, I hope!

— Mary Pat Robertson
Director of ARB's Princeton Ballet School

Princeton Ballet School

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GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN

Let's start with some definitions—

- **LEOTARDS** cover the torso (and sometimes arms)
- **TIGHTS** cover the lower body

LEOTARDS:

Beginning Dance, Children's Ballet 1 and 2, Children's Intermediate 1 and 2:

we have commissioned a special line of leotards with tiny skirts attached. We expect this leotard to be worn in all classes.

Intermediate 3, Student 1, Middle School Ballet: We have ordered for you a very flattering princess-style leotard with a square-cut back (Motionwear #2643), in maroon. We recognize that many of you probably want to have more than one leotard. If you already have a PLAIN maroon leotard, you may augment your wardrobe with it, or take a look at the other two we have ordered as additional approved styles (Motionwear #2149 and #2150). But please make sure that you have a minimum of one maroon in style #2643 for special occasions ("Nutcracker" auditions, Parent Observation Days, Picture Day, Assessment Classes, etc.).

Student 2, Student 3: We have ordered for you a very flattering princess-style leotard with a square-cut back (Motionwear #2643), in navy. We recognize that many of you probably want to have more than one leotard. If you already have a PLAIN navy leotard, you may augment your wardrobe with it, or take a look at the other two we have ordered as additional approved styles (Motionwear #2149 and #2150). But please make sure that you have a minimum of one navy in style #2643 for special occasions ("Nutcracker" auditions, Parent Observation Days, Picture Day, Assessment Classes, etc.).

Student 4, Student 5: We have ordered for you Motionwear #2643 in Royal Blue. This will be your special class leotard, for "Nutcracker" auditions, Parent Observation Days, Picture Day, Assessment Classes, etc. You can augment your wardrobe with approved Motionwear style #2149 and/or 2150. You may also wear the pull-on skirt that we are ordering.

ARB Workshop: we would like you to all have one black Motionwear # 2201, with matching pull-on skirt, for special occasions (Assessment classes, guest teachers, etc.) If you are in need of further new black leotards, we recommend augmenting with Motionwear styles #2149, 2150, or 2643. You may continue to wear most of your current wardrobe of black leotards, with these guidelines:

- 1) No mesh, lace or rhinestones
- 2) No cutout sections
- 3) For any leotards with contrasting trim, we ask that it be trim only; in other words, no bodices of one color with torso of another.
- 4) Colored leotards may be worn for rehearsals on Sundays only.

TIGHTS:

- Dancers need tights to keep their legs warm and to keep down bacteria and odor in ballet shoes.
- We recommend style #C30 (children's sizes) or #A30 (adult sizes) available on the order form. Plain pink tights from other dancewear makers are also fine.
- We do not allow white, beige, or black tights, or patterned tights.
- Full-footed tights are required.
- Very young dancers (Children's Division) may go bare-legged in very hot weather. If they choose to do this, they must wear thin anklet socks under their ballet shoes.
- Tights belong UNDER the leotard, not over.
- Dancers in Beginning Dance and Hand in Hand do not wear ballet shoes, so they will need tights without feet, or bare legs.
- Dancers old enough to wear pointe shoes might want convertible tights (C31 or A31).
- ARB Workshop dancers might want to buy professional mesh tights with seams. These are the most suitable for dancers at this elite level. "Ballet Pink" color will be required of you for performance. If you prefer "Theatrical Pink" for classwear, that's fine.

UNDERWEAR:

- Dancers don't wear underpants. To us, this would be like wearing panties under a bathing suit.
- Leotards and tights should therefore be washed after each wearing. Manufacturers recommend hand washing and line drying for best results. One can wash them in the machine if you prefer (on cold), but don't put them in the dryer.
- Most professional dancers don't wear bras, either—again, the leotard functions as its own support, in most cases. For those of you who would like the support of a bra, we have chosen the styles for Student 1-5 carefully to allow for wide enough shoulder straps and high enough back to suitably cover a bra. Please make sure your bra doesn't show.

COVER UPS:

We keep the studios fairly warm, but a dance sweater can be useful for the beginning of class. As fall approaches, we will be stocking long-sleeved cotton teeshirts and pull-over dance sweaters with our logo. These will be the only coverups allowed. Please DO NOT BUY wrap around and tie dance sweaters.

SKIRTS:

No skirts are allowed except for the built-on skirts for the youngest levels, and the special skirts available to Student 4 and up.

HAIR:

It is very important for hair to be pulled back neatly away from the face. It is not only safer and more comfortable, but also helps create the “look” of the dancer. Loose hair gets sweaty and uncomfortable, and when it is very long and the dancer is turning very fast, can actually sting the eyes and face. Girls with very short hair can come up with cute and appropriate combinations of barrettes and headbands (soft ones will stay on better) which will work just fine. Girls with longer hair should either make a ponytail (if they are very young) or a bun (if they are in Intermediate 3 or above). Here are some pointers on creating these classic dance hairstyles.

1. The classic ballerina bun

One of the best ways to start looking like a young dancer is to put your hair up in a bun. We would like to encourage the dancers to learn to do this for themselves. It takes practice, so summer would be a good time to try. It's a very cool hair-do for the hot months! All the girls in Intermediate 3 and above should have their hair in a bun, if it is long enough. If not, we have some tips for you below (see #4).

You will need:

- hair spray, or gel, or a spray bottle with water
- hair brush and comb
- covered rubber band to make the pony tail
- hair pins (these are large open pins. They can be hard to find in regular stores—Giselle Dancewear carries them)
- bobby pins (these are the smaller, crinkly sliders, useful for under the bun to hold up the shorter hair at the nape of the neck)
- fine hair net the same color as your hair (like your grandmother used to wear).

Now let's make the bun:

- Spray your hair with water to make it damp, and/or apply hair gel – this will help control all the little thin, wispy areas. Gather your hair and pull it back tightly. If you're making this bun for onstage, get rid of any bangs. For dance class, bangs are ok, as long as they're not too long and messy. Some dancers wear a thin elastic headband with their bun to hold back shorter lengths of hair. If you wish to do this, be sure to bobby pin the headband into place.
- Use your brush to smooth the hair. Form a ponytail by brushing the hair up from the jaw line and then to the back of the head. The placement of the ponytail (ie high or low) determines the placement of the bun. For short hair use hair clips or bobby pins (the same color as your hair) to keep ends from coming loose.
- Use a strong elastic, or even TWO elastic bands to secure the ponytail, especially if your hair is thick or very straight. A loose ponytail will result in a sloppy bun.
- Start twisting the ponytail. As you twist, start to coil the ponytail into a tight circle. Use the hairpins to pin each section of the ponytail as you go (about every 1 or 2”).

- As you add each new section, use hair pins all around the coil to secure the new section to the already done parts of the bun. Slide each hair pin through the outer part of the coil and into the base (center) of the bun.
 - Wrap a fine hair net over the bun. Keep twisting and wrapping so that the hair net tightly fits the bun. You end up with several layers of hairnet. Secure the hairnet with bobby pins. Don't count on the hairnet to keep the bun secured to the head. The hairnet is just there to keep little lengths of hair from sticking out in different directions. What keeps the bun secure is the hair pins.
 - Make sure the hairnet is the same color as the hair. If this bun is for a performance, do not use a crocheted bun warmer or snood – the color will stand out badly onstage. These decorative additions are fine for classroom use.
 - Very thick hair can be challenging. A good technique is to divide thick hair into two coils. Do one first, then fit the other one around the edge of the first.
2. **For an easier version**, which works well on medium length hair, ie hair long enough to fit into a ponytail, but not long enough to easily coil:
- Start as above
 - Braid the ponytail as far as possible, then secure the end with another elastic band. Fold the end of the braid under and press it flat against head. Secure in place with hairpins. If this is just for class, you could also use a very large, strong barrette to quickly do this.
3. **One can also do a modified French twist.** Start twisting the hair at the nape of the neck (no rubber band). Twist up a few inches to the middle of the head. Fold the top part of the hair back under to hide it, then secure the whole thing with a very large, very strong barrette.
4. **For very short hair** that will not fit into a ponytail, use any combination of hair clips, bobby pins, barrettes, and/ or headband to hold hair back and away from the face. You may wish to use hair spray for extra hold.

For Our Youngest Dancer, through Intermediate 2:

We suggest a ponytail, pigtails, braids, or a bun. If your hair is too short for any of these classic little girl hairstyles, then it's probably short enough that you can just leave it as is for ballet class. But please do not send dancers with long loose hair flopping around. Any hair longer than chin length should be put up in some way, for the dancer's comfort and coolness, and also for the neat look that is a part of ballet training.

“I believe we learn by practice. Whether it means to learn to dance by practicing dancing, or to learn to live by practicing living, the principles are the same. In each it is the performance of a dedicated, precise set of acts, physical or intellectual, from which comes the shape of achievement, a sense of one's being, a satisfaction of spirit.”

— Martha Graham

SHOES

Ballet shoes divide into two types. More definitions:

1. **BALLET SHOES** (also known as technique shoes or ballet slippers) are worn by both sexes. Girls should purchase pink, boys should buy black. They should be reputable brands such as Bloch, Sansha, Capezio. Do not buy off-brand house slippers that are made to look like ballet shoes. Buy the real thing.

Frequently Asked Questions:

- Canvas or leather? It's up to you. Leather lasts a little longer. Canvas breathes a little better in very hot weather. So feel free to buy whichever is more comfortable for your dancer.
- Full sole or split sole? We far prefer full sole. The split sole ballet shoe was invented to help the dancer's foot appear to be more well-arched. We prefer to get that look by having them work their muscles more and actually arch the foot.
- What about those little strings at the top? You are supposed to use these to pull the shoe snug on the dancer's foot (the fitter will show you how to do this). Then tie them in a square knot. You can then cut off some of the excess. Contrary to pictures in children's books, the little strings are not supposed to be tied in bows and left on top of the shoe—they are to be tucked neatly into the shoe. That's why they shouldn't be too long. If they are, they will be very uncomfortable against the toes.
- What about elastic? Yes, all dancers should wear elastic on their shoes. Your dance-wear supplier will show you how it is to be sewn (by you, but very simple to do).
- Why don't they come pre-sewn? Because each dancer's foot is a little different, and you will want to find the best place to sew.
- Can we safety-pin them? Please don't! The pins could open and hurt the feet. Sew them firmly with doubled-over thread and a good knot.
- Some shoes come with two elastics already half-sewn on to the shoe. These are to be completed in a criss-cross pattern—your shoe fitter can show you how. Please do not tie these elastics to each other, but sew them to the shoe.

ALL OF THE ABOVE INFORMATION IS THE SAME FOR BOYS AND GIRLS.

2. The second type of shoe worn by ballet dancers is the pointe shoe. (This is the shoe also commonly known as toe shoes). This shoe is only worn by females, and only after several years of intensive training. We will not discuss pointe shoe lore in this brochure, because that is done separately when the dancers are ready to purchase and wear these shoes.

BOYS

Boys who are just starting the study of ballet are encouraged to wear any loose, comfortable clothing, such as sweatpants or bike shorts, with the ARB/PBS logo teeshirt and ballet shoes (see SHOES).

Boys who have been advanced into **Intermediate Ballet for Boys or above** should wear:

- ARB/PBS teeshirt or leotard with logo, tucked into
- Dance belt (a type of athletic supporter for dancers), worn with
- Tights: - **Intermediate Ballet for Boys through Student 3:** black footless tights with thin white socks
 - **Student 4 and above:** black footed tights
- Black ballet shoes (see SHOES)

The thickness of most boys' cotton socks makes their ballet shoes fit too snugly for good training or their comfort. We have arranged for Giselle Dancewear to stock appropriate thin white socks for you.

Please buy the teeshirt snug (see order form or try on in lobby) — the point is to see how the core strength musculature is developing.

ARRIVING AND DEPARTING

To those of us in the dance world, wearing leotards and tights in a non-theatre, public arena, such as a parking lot or grocery store, would feel like walking around in a bikini. You just don't do it outside of the appropriate place. So please help your dancer understand that we are very proud and happy to dress in this special, unique way as we enter the special area of the dance studio, where we are in a safe, non-judgmental environment with teachers also wearing dance clothing.

Arriving: we have large dressing rooms for females and males. Some dancers come "under-dressed," ie they have their dancewear on and street clothes on top, in which case they visit the dressing rooms to remove street clothes and hang them on the hooks. Some dancers prefer to arrive in their street clothes and change clothes in the dressing room. That's why we don't allow parents of the opposite sex in these changing rooms. Please leave clothing neat, and please do not leave valuables (including pointe shoes) in the dressing room.

Departing: Some dancers just put on a sweatsuit and jacket on top of their clothes. As the dancers mature and sweat profusely in class, it becomes more pleasant for them to remove their dance clothes and put on full street clothing. The choice is yours. What we don't want to encourage is dancers just walking out in their dancewear with nothing on top. This is not appropriate behavior. Parents, please do not encourage your children to do this in an effort to hurry them along. We need to help them understand what clothing is appropriate in what context.

No one, male or female, before or after class, should ever wear dance shoes outside of the studio area. This shortens the life of your dance shoes, and of our dance flooring, by tracking in dirt, mud, and floor wax.