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*YOUR COMPLETE TRAINING
GUIDE FOR HIGHER
DEVELOPPES*

AMAZING
EXTENSIONS

ROBIN HOLLAND

CHARTERED PHYSIOTHERAPIST

Amazing Extensions

Your complete training guide for higher développés

Robin Holland, MSCP HCPC

Chartered Physiotherapist

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Published 2021 by The Dance Physio

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Introduction

Great extensions are the envy and goal of almost every dancer. High développés are, of course, the goal of every ballet dancer, but are also desired in contemporary dance, ballroom and Latin dance, aerial and circus arts, and nearly every form of western dance. Choreographers create movement that demands dancers achieve 170-degree développé à la seconde. Artistic directors look for full 190 degree side tilts. Teachers at the top training schools look down the line of hopeful candidates for those dancers who can get their legs the highest. Simply put, if you want to get that place in a conservatory training school or a highly coveted paid contract with a dance company, you must be able to perform great développés.

Yet despite hours of hard work and years of dedication, most dancers struggle to achieve a développé much above ninety degrees. So many dancers spend years training at the barre, trying to achieve an elusive, perfect technique that will help their legs lift higher. Dancers are convinced that stretching for hours every day is necessary to improve their range of motion. Teachers use countless well-meaning, but sometimes confusing analogies, such as “lift from the back of your leg”. A lucky few dancers do manage to achieve photo-worthy extensions simply by attending class regularly and following this standard advice. However, for most dancers these old-fashioned and unscientific techniques do not build sufficient strength and control to achieve great extensions.

If these traditional training methods are ineffective, how then do you improve your extensions?

Specific, targeted strength training outside of class is a the most successful way to improve développés. In other words, practicing exercises that strengthen the specific muscles and neuromuscular signals required to perform a développé. This program will guide you through the relevant anatomy, training principles and specific exercises that will help you achieve the best développé possible. As a bonus – the strength and control you gain through this program will not only help your extensions, but will carry over into all areas of your dancing!

To begin with, let's clear up some of the common misconceptions about développé training.

*A quick note about terminology – Throughout this book, I tend to use the ballet term développé. However, it does not matter what form of dance you are training for, the muscles and movement patterns required are the same.

**This program focuses on développé to the front and side. Extensions to the back and arabesque require a different group of muscles and are a topic for a different training plan.

Développé training: Debunking the myths

MYTH 1: It's all about technique

Many dance teachers and dancers spend hours and hours training technique. They focus on trying to achieve the perfect turn-out, leg placement, hip alignment, even arm and upper body stability. Obviously, all of these elements are important. However, there is no magic technique that will allow you to defy the downward pull of gravity.

Amazing extensions result primarily from one thing – strength. Legs are heavy, so your muscles need to be strong enough to lift the weight of your leg against gravity. You also have to be strong enough to balance on the supporting leg and control your spine and upper body at the same time. Focus on building the necessary muscle strength. Then, the technique, control and alignment will fall into place naturally.

MYTH 2: Stretch, stretch, and stretch some more

Think about this – How many dancers do you know who have amazing flexibility but can barely développé to 90 degrees? Refer back to myth 1. It doesn't matter how much flexibility you have, if you do not have enough strength to lift and hold the weight of your leg against gravity, you will never achieve significant leg height. Traditional dance training teaches us to stretch first to develop the range of motion. Then, once you have the flexibility, you can then build the control and technique to hold the leg up. In fact, the opposite is true! If you focus on building the strength to perform the perfect développé, you will easily develop sufficient flexibility at the same time. (More on this later.)

MYTH 3: Hip flexor flexibility

I have heard teachers and trainers talk about the importance of hip flexor stretching and flexibility to improve développé. Hip flexor flexibility is completely irrelevant for développés. In fact, during extensions, the hip flexors do the opposite – they shorten! The higher the développé, the shorter they need to be.

Too much hip flexor stretching could even hinder your développé training. Excessive stretching and flexibly actually weakens muscles a little. So, if you keep overstretching your hip flexors, they can become slightly weaker, which will then decrease your leg height. If you commit to this program, though, you don't worry too much about this weakening effect. As long as you strengthen the muscles alongside stretching them, you will still be able to improve your strength while maintaining enough flexibility for stretches such as the splits.

MYTH 4: Lift from the back of your leg

You've probably at some point heard a teacher tell you to stop gripping with the front of your leg and lift from the back. *It is physically impossible to lift from the back of your leg.* If you want to développé to the front or side, the only way to do it is to use the front of your leg! The muscles at

the front of your hip lift the leg up, while muscles at the front of your thigh straighten your knee. In fact, the muscles at the back of your leg, the hamstrings, have to relax.

If you feel a gripping at the front of your hip and thigh (and are told by a well-meaning teacher to relax this), it's usually because the muscles don't have enough strength to do what you are asking them to do. That gripping feeling is the muscles desperately trying hold on. To prevent this gripping sensation, you need to strengthen these muscles so they have enough force to produce the movement. Then, as the muscles get stronger, you will gradually be able to lift the leg higher.

This myth stems from the misguided notion that using the thigh muscles to *développé* will lead to bulky thighs. Dancers worry that the gripping at the front of the thigh will leave their thighs looking like a body builder. This is simply not true, and I will explain more on this later.

MYTH 5: Just practice *développés* every day, and your leg height will gradually improve

Well, possibly. However, this is a fairly ineffective and slow strategy. For most dancers, practicing specific, targeted exercises will achieve much better results, much quicker.

In fact, many dancers do practice extensions regularly but still struggle to improve. This is usually due to a 'weak link' in the *développé* process. *Développé* is a complex movement that requires an incredible amount of strength and neuromuscular control throughout the body. All the right muscles need to fire up, at the right time. You need the correct signals from the movement control centres in your brain and spinal cord to tell the appropriate muscles to switch on.

Furthermore, to be able to lift your leg into a *développé*, your body needs a stable base to work from. The muscles in the supporting leg need to work to hold you upright, your trunk muscles need to activate to stabilize your spine, and your balance system must kick into overdrive. The perfect *développé* really does require full body strength. If even one of these elements is weak or missing, your leg height will always be limited.

Therefore, if you only practice *développés* in isolation, you will never address the other areas of weakness that are limiting your improvements.

Myth 6: Strength training will make you bulky and using the front of your thighs for *développé* will give you bulky thighs

This myth is the one that limits dancers' training and improvement the most! To perform at your best, and in particular to reach advanced levels of dance technique, you have to be super strong. The most effective way to improve your strength is through strength training. So many dancers are afraid of strength training and lifting weights for the misguided notion that they will get bulky.

Building bulky muscles – or more scientifically, muscle hypertrophy – is actually very difficult and requires very specific training principles. Body builders have to follow very intricate training plans that involve *extremely* heavy weights, very specific sets and reps, and detailed nutrition plans involving excessive calories and heavy amounts of protein. Even with all of that, females in particular find it extremely challenging to develop bulky muscles due to their hormone profiles. Muscle hypertrophy is primarily fuelled by the male hormone testosterone, which is only present in very low levels in females. Most strength training programs, including this one, don't even come close to the type of training regimens required to build bulk.

Muscle size and shape, and the ability to develop bulky muscles, is also primarily dictated by genetics. It can be argued that to be a successful female body builder, women have to be born with very specific (and likely rare) genes that allow them to build bulky muscles. In other words, unless you are one of the few women born with the propensity to look bulky, no amount of strength training will make you bulky.

You can't go wrong with getting strong!

The Anatomy of a Développé

Before we dive into the exercises, it's useful to understand the biomechanics of a développé. Generally speaking, we use the same muscles to achieve développé devant and à la seconde (extensions to the front and side). The amount of force required within individual muscles varies slightly for the two positions. However, for the purpose of this training plan, these nuances are inconsequential.

In this section, I detail all of the elements required within your muscular and nervous system to perform a développé. I would recommend that you refer to a quality illustration of the human muscular system, to aid your visualization and understanding of the anatomy. I firmly believe it's greatly empowering for dancers to understand their bodies and how they work. In my experience, dancers who have at least a basic knowledge of anatomy can train smarter, and therefore better. This is the muscle chart I use in my clinic:

<https://amzn.to/2XTKk9L>

However, there are many such pictures you can find in anatomy textbooks or on the internet. Obviously, just make sure it comes from a reputable source!

Lifting your leg up: Hip flexor strength

Hip flexor strength is the essence of a développé. Legs are heavy – up to 15% of your body weight each! The hip flexors, or muscles at the front of the hip, are the primary muscles that lift the leg. These muscles have to be super strong to lift your leg against the downward pull of gravity. Most of the work to lift the leg happens from your two main hip flexor muscles - psoas major and iliacus. Rectus femoris, which is one of your four quads muscles, and tensor fascia lata and sartorius also assist the movement and help stabilise the leg throughout the movement.

Straighten your knee: The quads

Once you've lifted your leg from the hip, the next step is straightening your knee. The quadriceps muscles, a group of four muscles at the front of your thigh, commonly called the quads for short, perform this action. Yes – those muscles you feel gripping are what you need to extend your leg fully. Don't relax these muscles, strengthen them!

The deep external rotators of the hip – aka your 'turn-out' muscles

We have a group of six muscles that sit deep in our hips, under gluteus maximus – gemellus superior, gemellus inferior, obturator externus, obturator internus, quadratus femoris, and piriformis. These are called the deep hip external rotators, and they work together with glute max to form your turnout muscles. These muscles must work to hold both your lifted leg and supporting leg in turnout during a développé.

More importantly for the purpose of développé, these deep muscles help to stabilize your hips throughout the movement. In order to perform a développé, your body needs a stable base to work from. Stability throughout your body allows the working leg to move freely. These deep hip

stabilizing muscles help provide a stable base which your body needs to allow the hip flexors to do their job and lift your working leg up.

The hip internal rotators – your ‘turn-in’ muscles

The muscles that work to turn your legs inwards – gluteus medius, gluteus minor, and tensor fascia lata – are often underworked in dancers, especially those who do a lot of ballet. However, like the deep external rotators, these turn-in muscles are super important for stabilizing your hips. They must work hard to keep your hips level throughout the développé, preventing your hips from dropping or hitching. This action provides that stable base which your hip flexors need to lift your leg. Strength and control in these muscles is also a major factor in achieving secure balance. Stable hips = stable balance; wobbly hips = wobbly balance! Clearly, if you’re wobbling all over, you won’t be able to lift your leg.

Spinal, back and abdominal strength

Let's talk core muscles. From a training perspective, the term core strength is vague and not particularly useful when designing a training program. When you hear teachers, fitness trainers, and fellow dancers talk about core strength, what does that actually mean? What muscles do you need to strengthen? Many dancers wrongly assume the core strength is just abdominal strength. However, this view neglects the important role of the back muscles in stabilising your body. The best way to think about ‘the core’ is all of the muscles that support your spine, back and abdomen. We have a few layers of muscles around your middle that must all work together to stabilize your trunk. Here’s a summary of the important elements:

We have several groups of muscles that sit deep around your spinal column, most importantly a muscle called multifidus, and a deep abdominal muscle called transvers abdominus (often shortened to *trans abs*). Then, you have the outer layers of muscles, including your big back muscles – called the erector spinae – and your abdominal muscles – rectus abdominus and the obliques. We used to think that we needed the deep muscles to support and stabilise your spine, and that the outer muscles were used for movement. However – this is really important – there has been a huge amount of recent research looking at the action of these trunk muscles. The results show us that the theory of isolating and training only the ‘deep core’ simply does not happen in real life. All of the muscles work together, all of the time, no matter what you are doing. So, there’s really no point in trying to isolate one muscle or muscle group. It simply doesn’t work. To achieve good core strength, you need to train all of the muscles.

Why is training your back and abdominal muscles important? As with your hip muscles, the trunk muscles provide the stability and support your body needs to allow the hip flexors to work freely and développé the working leg.

Ankle and foot strength

Strength in your calf, shin, ankle and feet muscles are especially important for the supporting leg. Perhaps you can already guess that these muscles help provide that stable base we’ve discussed. Wobbly ankles and feet = wobbly balance; strong ankles and feet = strong balance! There are many, many muscles that work your feet and ankles, but they generally all work in unison. For the purposes

of développé training, ankle and foot strength needs to be developed during standing and balance exercises, which are included in this program.

Strength in the supporting leg

We've basically covered this in the previous sections. Just to summarize, your standing leg and supporting hip need to be strong and stable to hold yourself upright and allow your working leg to move freely.

Balance

Balance is an often underestimated but very important part of performing the perfect développé. As discussed previously, your body needs a stable base to allow your hip flexors to work freely. If you are wobbling around with poor balance, you simply won't be able to lift your leg very high.

Here's a simple test to determine how much your balance is limiting your développé: Take a picture of yourself in front of a wall performing a développé holding onto something. Then take another picture doing a développé without holding on. Compare the difference in height between the two. Ideally, your leg height should be much the same. If you find that your leg is more than about 5 degrees lower without holding on, then you need to focus on training your balance as well as your développé. Even if balance is not a significant limiting factor for your current développé level, you need to continue to improve your balance alongside your développé height for best results. Therefore, this program includes exercises to train your balance.

Neuromuscular control

Neuromuscular control refers to your body's ability to coordinate all of the above-described actions to achieve your desired movement. For a muscle to fire up and perform a movement, your brain and nervous system must send the signals to the muscles to tell them what to do. Neuromuscular control, which can also be described as technique, skill and muscle memory, is developed gradually over time as a result of the movements you practice regularly. When it comes to dance training, neuromuscular control is primarily what you are trying to improve when you attend dance class. Dance class mainly teaches the nervous system to learn and develop these dance-specific movement signals. This is where practicing the technique of a développé is important. Naturally, you need strong neuromuscular control to tell your développé muscles to what to do.

The nature of dance class, where you are mostly practicing this neuromuscular control, is also why supplemental training outside of class is important. The scope of a typical dance class does not allow time to train technique and strengthen muscles at the same time. To achieve your full potential, you need to practice your movement skills to train your nerve signals during class. Then, strengthen the muscles outside of class. These two elements will gradually come together over time to achieve great dance technique.

Psoas major

Any développé training program needs to include a discussion about the all-important Psoas major muscle. If I was to choose the most important muscle for développé, it would be this one. Psoas major has two main functions in the body. First is hip flexion, as discussed previously. In fact, psoas major is the primary muscle responsible for lifting the leg above 90 degrees. Psoas major also attaches to the lower part of your spine and works to stabilise your lower back. Therefore, the psoas major must be strong enough to lift your leg *and* support your lower back *at the same time*.

The incredible workload required of psoas major during a développé is also why training the surrounding muscles is so important. Strong back and abdominal muscles free up the psoas to act more prominently as a hip flexor. Training the other hip and leg muscles and the balance system provides the body more stability from the ground up so that the psoas does not have to work so hard as a stabilising muscle. This wider stability in the trunk and lower limb means that the psoas can focus on lifting your working leg, rather than needing to support your spine.

Put simply - Since the psoas is the most important muscle for lifting the leg above 90 degrees, the more strength this muscle can focus into lifting the leg, and the less it needs to work as a stabilising muscle, the higher you can lift your leg.

If you decide to take only one exercise from any développé program, it should be a strength exercise for psoas major. However, no matter how strong your psoas is, if the rest of your muscles are weak, and the psoas has to work to stabilise your spine, you will always be limited in your développé height.

Phew! Did you realize that so much was required for a développé? This is even a simplified version of the anatomy and biomechanics! Développé really is an incredibly challenging skill, so it's no wonder that so many dancers train for years, but never really master it. So, how can you put this new understanding into action to achieve your développé goals? Read on for your plan of action.

Stretching and flexibility

Stretching is usually considered one of the most fundamental elements of dance training, and it is always seen as paramount to développé training. In particular, dancers feel they need very long hamstrings to achieve enough range of motion for a great développé. Yet, you will quickly notice that stretching is missing from this program. Surely you need plenty of stretching to achieve the flexibility and range of motion required for a high développé? Short answer – No.

Flexibility is a complex process in the body, involving both the neurological and muscular systems. Overall, flexibility is regulated by the nervous system. In other words, the range of movement you have in a muscle is controlled by your brain *not* by the length of your muscle. When you reach the end of your range of movement and feel a stretch, this is a muscle contracting to stop the movement from going any further. This muscle contraction is designed to protect the muscles, joints, and surrounding soft tissue from potential injury. Over time, the brain and nervous system develop a picture of each skeletal muscle in the body, which includes a pre-set 'safe' range of motion. When you try to move past this 'safe' limit, the muscle tightens and you feel a stretch. When you stretch or train your flexibility, you are actually training your nervous system to accept that a greater range of movement is safe. Stretching does not actually lengthen the muscles, but rather stretching is one method that can be used to teach the nervous system that a longer muscle is safe.

It is also important to understand that we have two main types of flexibility – passive and active. Passive flexibility is what you would think of a traditional, static stretching, such as your ability to sit in a stretch or use your hands to lift your leg. Active flexibility is the range of movement you can access during active movement. For example, your passive flexibility represents how high you can lift your leg à la seconde your leg using your hand. Your active flexibility represents how high you can développé à la seconde.

The really important point is that **passive flexibility does *not* translate into active flexibility**. In essence, traditional stretching teaches your brain to accept a longer, safe length for a muscle *at rest*. If you want a muscle to lengthen during active movement, you need to train that length during movement! It does not matter how far you can stretch into oversplits. Unless you have the strength, neurological and motor control to support the range, the amount of passive flexibility you have is more or less pointless when you are actually dancing.

So, how does this understanding of flexibility science affect développé training? It is true that you need a good amount of active flexibility in your hamstring muscles for a high développé. However, as I alluded to earlier, static stretching is only one way to improve flexibility. Arguably, one of the least effective! One highly effective technique to improve both passive and active flexibility is through specific, targeted strength training. The exercises included in this plan are designed to strengthen the muscles for développé while improving the active flexibility in your hamstrings at the same time. By following this training plan, you are likely to see much better improvements in your hamstring flexibility than you would by stretching alone. Continue to practice your normal stretching routine alongside this training plan. Just be sure you always stretch after these exercises – never, ever, ever before! And do NOT force any stretch. Forcing a stretch will result in damaged, sore muscles, leaving you *less* flexible, and set your développé training back.

If you are diligently following this training plan and after about 6-8 weeks don't see any improvement in your active hamstring flexibility, please [contact me](#) to discuss what might be going wrong and how we can fix it.

How to put the program into action

The program is set out in three levels. The exercises in level one are designed to help you identify, fire up, and start to strengthen the correct muscles. Levels two and three then work on progressing the strength and control you need for great results. A few of the exercises also contain progressions within the same level. Make sure you can do all of the progressions before moving up to the next level. Don't worry if this sounds confusing now, all will become clear.

Regardless of where you are in your dance career or training journey, start with level one. This will ensure that you are recruiting and strengthening the correct muscles. If you are new to strength training, plan to spend several weeks or even a few months progressing to level 2. If you have already been including strength training in your schedule regularly, then you may be able to move up more quickly.

I want you to achieve great results with this program. In order to succeed, you need to fully understand the exercises and how to put the program into action. If at any point during reading this book or during your training you have any questions, please [contact me](#). I am always happy to answer questions via email.

If you have more complex issues, or would like personalised advice to tailor the program to your unique physiology and training level – and potentially achieve even better results – we can arrange a video call consultation. I offer a generous 50% discount off my usual physiotherapy fees for anyone who has purchased this program! That means that you can access a full session with me to discuss your individual needs for £22.50 GBP or \$30 USD. (Please contact me for any questions regarding appointments or see [my website](#) for full T&Cs.)

Exercise progression and avoiding a plateau

Muscles build strength in response to being challenged. In this case, the strengthening exercises are the challenge. However, our bodies are very good at adapting to an exercise routine. Once your body adapts to the challenges you put it through, you will hit a plateau and stop improving. This is one of the main reasons why many exercise programs fail to achieve desired results.

Exercise progression is the key to avoiding a plateau and to continue to improve. As your body adapts, you need to keep increasing the challenge. There are several ways to do this. Firstly, you can increase your reps and/or set. You can add weights or a resistance band to an exercise, or you can progress to a more challenging exercise. Your training routine should always be hard! A good rule of thumb is that the last couple of repetitions of an exercise should be *almost* impossible to perform. If you get to a point where the exercises feel easy, you need to progress your plan.

There are no hard and fast rules as to how quickly you can progress. Building strength takes time. If you try to progress too quickly, you can end up injured. Progress too slowly and you won't see the results you want. You need to constantly assess how you feel during every training session. You should be able to complete your exercise program with good form, but it should be hard work. As a rough guide, you are likely to be able to add some progressions your plan every 3-5 weeks, but listen to your body.

Sets and reps

You have probably heard the terms sets and reps, but let's just make sure it all makes sense. Repetitions refer to the number of times you should do each exercise, and that number of repetitions makes up one set. Many exercise plans will recommend performing 10-12 reps, with 2 or 3 sets of an exercise. This generic recommendation can be a useful starting point or rough guide, but it is rarely the best plan. So, how do you figure out how many sets and reps to perform?

As we previously discussed, the key to building strength is to constantly challenge your muscles. Strength training science tells us that the most effective way to sufficiently challenge your muscles is by working to failure. In theory, working to failure means you keep going until the muscle completely gives out, and you cannot physically perform another repetition. In practical terms, a good guide is to keep going until the last couple of reps feel almost impossible. Then do one more. This would then be your number of reps.

Begin with one set of each exercise. Perform as many reps as you can do with proper form – no cheating! As stated previously, the last couple reps should feel very, very hard. This number of reps will be individual. Do not compare yourself to others! Over a few weeks, you should be able to gradually increase your reps. Once you are performing 12 reps comfortably, add a second set. When two sets of 12 reps start to feel too easy, it's time to progress to a more challenging variation of the exercise or onto the next level of the program.

Note – you may not progress through all the exercises in each level at the same time. You may find that you can move up to the next level in one exercise quicker than another. Don't worry about this, some exercises are just harder than others!

How quickly you can progress through the plan will be very individual. Your progression will depend on a wide range of factors, including your previous training experiences, your current level of strength and fitness, your overall training plan, diet, and even your genetics. All of these factors combined will influence how quickly you can build strength. The important thing is to always listen to your body, assess how each exercise feels during every training session, and always challenge yourself.

As always, if in doubt, send me a message.

Form and technique

Always focus on performing every exercise and repetition with good form. Do not be tempted to cheat! If you start cheating an exercise, either to get your leg higher or to make it feel a little easier, then you will lose much of the benefit of the exercise. Poor form can cause you to use the wrong muscles, which won't then help you improve your *développé*. If you can't perform an exercise with good form, then you are likely not ready for it. Move back down to the previous level for a few sessions.

It's a good idea to use a mirror or partner to check your form when you are first starting out. Once you learn how the correct technique feels, then just make sure you stay mindful of technique throughout.

Rest intervals

A short rest interval between each exercise and set is important to maximise the amount of strength you can build. You need to allow your muscles sufficient recovery time to then be able to perform the next exercise or set. If you try to plough through a training session too quickly, your muscles will be too weak to effectively complete the whole program. For strength building purposes, the science tells us you should ideally rest 3-5 minutes between sets and exercises. However, if you are short on time, you can still achieve good results with 1-2 minute rest intervals. Any shorter than 1 minute will hamper your results.

In my experience, rest intervals can feel long. Many people get impatient and move on too quickly. Try to develop a system to fill the time usefully so you're not tempted to skip out the rest interval. One of my favourite techniques is to get people to lift light weights with their arms – rest your legs and strengthen your upper body at the same time!

Commitment: The key to success

There are no short cuts to success. If you want results, you have to put in the work. Success with any exercise program depends on regular commitment. To get the best results, you should do the program 3 times a week, on non-consecutive days. More is not necessarily better, though. Muscles need time to recover between sessions – ideally 48-72 hours. Training too frequently, without proper recovery time, can actually weaken the muscles in the long term.

Also be aware that strength building takes time. There are no 'quick fixes' to getting any fitness results! You should start to see improvements by about 6 weeks. Then, as you continue to progress through the plan, your results will continue to improve.

Développé practice

One key part of success with this program is specific développé practice, to train the neuromuscular control required for extensions. For the sake of this training plan, I am assuming that you are practicing développés or extensions within a class or training routine regularly.

If you are not attending class regularly, simply practice any standard développé or extension exercise of your choice twice a week on alternate days from this plan. Keep it basic and straightforward. This is not the time for fancy choreography. Whether in class or at home, when you are practicing a développé exercise, focus on proper technique and placement. Don't worry about leg height. Once you have mastered the technique, and progressed through this training plan, the two elements – technique and strength – will come together. You will find that your développé height improves naturally.

Technique tips

I'm not going to talk too much about technique, because the vast majority of dancers I work with have very good technique. In fact, most of you reading this book probably go to class at least two or three times a week, with great teachers, and work very hard in class. As I discussed previously, if you are working hard in class and still struggle with *développé* height, it is not technique you are lacking, but strength and neuromuscular control. However, there are two key technique principles that, in my experience, are most important for dancers to be aware of:

1. Up to about a 90 degree *développé*, both to the front and side, your hips should stay level. Above 90 degrees, your hips do need to tip. For the vast majority of people, the bone and joint structures will not allow your leg to move much higher without tipping. So, once you can achieve 90 degrees easily, do not be afraid to adjust your hip placement. The key is to avoid excessive hip and pelvis movement. Think about the hips and pelvis moving as a *result* of the leg going higher, rather than the pelvis or hips moving first.
2. You should lead a *développé* with your knee to start with. Bring your knee up and into your torso as much as you can before you then extend the knee. This action helps to fully engage the hip flexors and stabilise the hip, trunk and pelvis, which in turn helps the quads to have more leverage to extend the knee.

Important notes

- ★ If you are confused about anything, please [ask me](#)! I want you to achieve great results, without injury. For best results, you need to perform the program correctly. Make sure you fully understand the exercises and program format before starting.
- ★ You should not feel any acute pain with any of the exercises. If you do experience pain, check your form and technique. If the exercise still hurts (as in causing pain, not just hard work), then please stop the exercise and contact me so we can figure out what's going wrong.
- ★ After starting any training plan, it is normal to feel muscle soreness for a few days or even up to a week. Technically called Delayed Onset Muscle Soreness (DOMS), this is a normal physiological reaction to challenging your muscles. This discomfort should settle after a couple of weeks practicing these exercises. If the soreness is extreme, or does not settle, contact me. You might also feel less flexible during this time – but don't panic! As the DOMS settles, your flexibility will return to normal, and in the long run, will get better. DO NOT be tempted to spend hours stretching, and if you do stretch, keep it gentle! Over-stretching sore muscles can very quickly lead to tears and damage.

Tracking your progress

For any training goal, it's important to track your progress. Recording where you are when you start and the improvements you make over time helps you to visualise that your hard work is paying off. So, before you embark on this program, you need to document where your extensions are now.

Recording extensions is pretty straight forward, thanks to modern technology. Stand in front of a blank wall. Have someone take a picture of you performing your best extension to the side. Then, repeat to the front. Make sure you take pictures of both legs.

I recommend you repeat the pictures every month so that you can check your progress. Don't be tempted to photograph yourself too frequently! Strength training takes time. You are unlikely to see significant improvements in just a week or two.

When you repeat the pictures, try to use the same wall so that there's nothing to muddle the comparison. If you have good IT skills (or know someone who does), you can even overlay the two pictures and measure the improvements. The best way to precisely measure développé height is to use a protractor to measure the degree of improvement.

Troubleshooting

Tracking progress is also important to identify problems. If you are committed to the program and do not see any improvements, we need to figure out what is going wrong. Here are some of the most common reasons why dancers fail to get the results they want:

1. Poor exercise form. If you are not performing an exercise properly, then you very likely recruiting the wrong muscles or training the incorrect movement pattern. Check your form every time you practice the program.
2. Inadequate nutrition. Your body needs high-quality food to both fuel your workouts and recover afterwards. If you don't consume enough energy, your body will not be able to build muscle strength. Unfortunately, dancers are notorious for not eating enough to meet their training demands. If your progress has plateaued, I would highly recommend you take a good look at your nutrition and consider a consultation with a properly qualified dietitian.
3. Insufficient rest. Sleep is also super important for recovery. During sleep, your body repairs all of the damage accumulated through training. If you are not getting enough quality sleep, you will have poor recovery. Poor recovery will lead to a lack of progress.
4. Progressing too slowly. Dance training is hard work. Strength training is hard work. In order to strengthen your muscles, you need to fatigue them every session. If you don't 'feel the burn' every time you train, you need to push harder.
5. Progressing too quickly. While you do need to push yourself, pushing too hard can be counterproductive. If an exercise is too hard, you will be forced to cheat to complete the movement. Refer to point 1.
6. Expecting too much, too soon. This program is not some kind of dubious "get rich quick" scheme. Building muscle strength takes time, and progress will happen gradually. Those dancers posting great looking shots on Instagram have been training for years to get to where they are. Realistically, you should start to see noticeable improvement in about 6-8 weeks, with more significant progress in about 3-6 months.
7. A weak link in the movement chain. Refer back to the anatomy of a développé section. Break down the elements and assess them each individually. Is there an element in which you are particularly weak? Is your balance letting you down? Are your hips feeling stronger but your quads struggling to straighten your knee? Are you able to control your spine? If you can identify a weak link, focus your work there.
8. Lack of commitment. Don't get mad when you don't get results from the work you didn't put in... In all seriousness, success takes work. Be honest with yourself about how much commitment you have put in. Randomly doing the exercises once or twice a week, when you think about it, is simply not enough. As with any part of dance training, the benefits come with regular, focused commitment.

If you have explored all of these common problems, and are still not seeing any benefits, then please contact me ASAP! I want you to succeed. Let's work together to kickstart your progress.

The Program

Make sure you watch the videos of the exercises to fully understand the movement. If you have any trouble accessing the videos, please [contact me](#) and I can send them to you another way.

Before starting the exercises, warm up for about 5 minutes. This can be whatever you choose, but you need to get your heart rate up and muscles firing. Good options include jogging on the spot, leg swings, plies or mini-squats, or even just dancing around to your choice of tunes.

Practice the exercises in the order they are listed.

For a few of the exercises, you will need a strong resistance band loop or a length of resistance band tied in a loop. If you already have some, great, use what you've got. If not, they can be purchased here: <https://amzn.to/3EZBXtY>.

I would also highly recommend a set of ankle weights. While not essential, ankle weight can really boost your results and help you reach your goals faster. These can be purchased here: <https://amzn.to/3m2O7ti>

Pre-program Psoas Assessment

The program starts with an assessment of your Psoas major function. Strength in the psoas muscle is the key for développés. You need a good foundation of strength in this muscle before you begin the full program.

Sit on the edge of a chair. You should try to find a place to sit that will allow a 90-degree angle at your hips. So, if you are younger or shorter, try to find somewhere lower to sit on. Sit up tall and find a neutral spine. Do not allow your lower back to curve or your pelvis to tuck under. Gently pull in your tummy muscles. Lift your leg as high off the chair as you can. The higher you can lift your leg without tipping your pelvis, the better your développé potential.

This test is also the first exercise of the program. Perform 10-12 repetitions each leg, lifting your knee as high as you can without cheating the form. Once you can comfortably perform 10 reps with good leg height, move on to level 1 of the program. If you find this test fairly easy, then you can move onto level 1 straight away!

I would advise that you watch the full explanation of the exercise and its importance here: <https://youtu.be/l4LTiyaxAdU>

Or if you prefer, you can access just the exercise demonstration here: <https://youtu.be/lvYpupQHavE>

Level 1

1. Finding your form - Développé preparation exercise

This exercise is designed to fire up the correct muscles at the same time as building the control in your spine and hips.

Lie on your back with your legs straight, in turnout. Engage your abdominal muscles and find your neutral spine. This is the position of your lower back where you are neither arched nor tucked under. You should have a small gap between the small of your back and the floor. Pull one leg up into retire and extend it up – aim for a 90 degree développé. Make sure you keep a neutral spine throughout – do not tuck your pelvis under. Maintaining the control in your spine and hips, bend your knee and straighten three times. Every time you straighten your leg, try to bring it into a slightly higher développé. Slowly lower the leg. Repeat other leg.

Repeat 2 times each side.

[Developpe prep exercise](#)

2. Psoas strengthener

Sit on the floor with your legs in front of you. Support yourself by placing your hands slightly behind you, leaning back slightly. Keep your back straight and your spine in neutral throughout. (Remember that spinal position you found while lying on the floor in the prep exercise? Try to maintain that position now.) Bend one knee and rotate that leg into turnout. Gently engage your tummy muscles and lift your leg as much as you can without bending your back or tucking your hips under. Slowly lower your leg. Repeat as many times as you can, then repeat on the other leg.

Progression (optional): add some ankle weight. I use these ones in the clinic:

<https://amzn.to/3m2O7ti>

Ankle weights are optional, as you can progress onto level 2 without weights, but I would recommend you consider purchasing some weights. They are a really useful tool for not only improving your développés, but can be used to improve a range of other lower limb-based skills. You can start by using one on each leg. Then as you get stronger, use both on one leg to up the weight.

Progression point: When you can perform 2 sets of 12 reps, move up to Psoas strengthener level 2. Go ahead and move this exercise up even if you need to stay on level 1 for the rest of the exercises.

[Level 1 Psoas strengthener](#)

3. Eccentric hamstring bridge slides

Lie on your back with your knees bent and feet on the floor. Gently pull in your tummy muscles and lift your hips up. Slowly slide your feet away from you, so that you are eventually lying flat. You should feel the backs of your legs working hard.

You need to have a slidey surface under your feet. Feet tend to slide pretty easy on carpet, as in my video, but you can end up with carpet burn if you're not careful! It can be useful to put plastic bags under your feet. Alternatively, this exercise usually works pretty well on hard floors with slippery socks.

Progression: Once you can perform 2 sets of 10 reps, progress to single leg bridges. For this variation, hold one leg off the ground while you lift your hips. Keep your hips level throughout– do not let your hips drop or tilt.

[Eccentric hamstring bridge slides](#)

4. Single leg stretch with turnout control

Lie on your back with your feet off the floor, hips and knees bent to 90 degrees. Keep your legs in parallel for this exercise – your shins should be in a straight line from your knees to your toes. Do not let your feet get closer together than your knees! Engage your tummy muscles. For this exercise, you need to flatten the small of your back against the floor. Extend one leg. Rotate that leg into turnout, controlling the turnout from deep in your hip socket. Rotate back to parallel, and bring your knee back to the starting position. Repeat with the other leg.

Make sure you control your spine throughout. When you straighten your leg, the lower to the ground it is, the harder the exercise will be. Only lower your leg as much as you can while maintaining your back against the floor. If your back starts to arch off the ground, or you feel any pressure in your lower back, lift your leg up a little. As you get stronger, gradually lower your leg when extended.

Start with 10 reps each leg, alternating legs. Build up to 20 reps each side. Only perform as many reps as you can with perfect control of your spine and turnout.

Progression: When you extend your leg, keep it closer to the ground.

Progression 2: Lift your torso off the ground. Keep your neck long, your chin tucked in, and reach towards your toes. The video demonstration of this progressions starts at 30 seconds.

[Single leg stretch with turnout](#)

5. Swimming

Lie on your front with your legs in turnout and arms over your head. Engage your tummy muscles. Make sure you hold your turnout from deep in your hips throughout this exercise. Lift your torso slightly off the floor. Lift one arm up, leading with your thumb, at the same time as lifting the opposite leg. Then lift the other arm and leg. You should feel the muscles in your lower back working (aka your arabesque muscles).

You should aim to do up to 20 reps of this exercise.

Progression: Lift your torso, arms and legs higher off the floor.

[Swimming](#)

6. Single leg plié in parallel

Stand on one foot, legs in parallel. Your hips need to be perfectly level and square for this exercise. Plié the supporting leg as far as you can and push back up to standing. Keep your back mostly upright, although it is okay to let your torso hinge forward a little to counter balance the movement.

Only bend as far as you can without letting your hips tip or twist. NO TURNOUT for this exercise! As you get stronger, work on bending your knee further, into a deeper plié.

Then, repeat in turnout. For the turnout version, you don't need to work with all the turnout you can get, just aim for comfortable, well-controlled turnout. Make sure your foot stays flat with good arch control. Don't let your ankle roll in or out.

[Single leg squats for dance training](#)

7. Développé challenger

This exercise is the number one key to success with the program. You will be performing progressions of this exercise throughout the program, so prepare to really push yourself with this one! If performed properly, you will never truly progress beyond this exercise, because you can always work it harder.

Bring your knee up to the side as much as you can. Support around the back of your thigh with your hand. Straighten your knee and bend it 10 times, keeping your knee up as much as you can. Then, on the last rep, keep your leg straight and let go. Try to hold your leg up as long as you can and lower as slowly as you can. Aim to take 10 seconds to lower your leg.

You do need to be mindful of proper dance technique for this exercise, so think about the hip and leg placement you have learned in class. Up to about a 90 degree développé, your hips should be level. Above 90 degrees, you do need to tip your hips a little, but just make sure it is not excessive. You should think about the hips tipping only as a result of the leg going higher, rather than the hips tipping first.

Perform this exercise 2 times on each leg.

Make it easier: To start with, this will be *very* challenging. So, to help your body prepare for this exercise, hold on to a barre or back of a chair, etc for the first few times you practice this one. However, I would highly recommend you move onto progression 1 pretty quickly.

Progression 1: Don't hold on! True success with développés is being able to perform them in the centre. The sooner you start practicing this, the more successful you will be.

Progression 2: Bring your knee in closer to your body so that when you extend your knee your leg is higher in the développé position.

[Developpe training quads exercise](#)

8. Cool down - Balance challenge

Stand on one leg, find your balance, then close your eyes. Set a timer and practice balancing with your eyes close for 2 minutes each leg.

Progression: Practice your closed-eyes balance in both parallel and turnout. Once you've mastered this, practice the balance standing on a wobble cushion, such as this one: <https://amzn.to/39Jkkjo>. If you've never used a wobble cushion, you should definitely consider getting one. I use it all the time in the clinic, as it is a super effective way to improve balance! If you do not want to purchase one at this point, you can stand on a soft cushion or pillow, but it's not quite as effective.

Level 2

1. Finding your form - Développé preparation exercise, level 1 and 2

After your warm up, complete the preparation exercise as in level 1. Then complete the following progression:

Lie on your back with your legs straight, in turnout. Engage your abdominal muscles and find your neutral spine. Pull one leg up into retire and extend it up – aim for a 90 degree développé. Make sure you keep a neutral spine throughout – do not tuck your pelvis under. Maintaining the control in your spine and hips, use your opposite hand to pull your leg into a slightly higher développé. HOWEVER, the key with this exercise is to focus on using your leg muscles to bring your leg in. Your hand should only just assist the movement.

Let go and try to maintain your leg in the new position for about 5 seconds. Then immediately repeat, so that you are pulling your leg closer yet. Slowly lower the leg. Repeat other leg.

Repeat 2 times each side.

[Developpe prep level 2](#)

2. Hip flexor and Psoas Major strengthener (to the front)

Sit upright with your legs straight in front of you in turnout. Try to keep your hips, spine and lower back in neutral. If needed, use your hands lightly on the ground for support. Keeping your back upright, lift one leg up as much as you can without bending in your middle. Don't worry if you can only barely lift your leg – this is a *very* challenging exercise! Even if you only manage to lift your leg a couple of millimetres, you will still be strengthening the correct muscles. Hold a couple of seconds, then lower gently. Try to avoid letting your leg flop down.

Do as many as you can on one leg, then repeat other leg.

Note – In the video I demonstrate the below described progression, but it demonstrates the technique needed for all of the variations.

Make it easier: When you first start this exercise, you can slightly bend your knee. Alternatively, use your hands lightly for support, just avoid leaning too heavily on your arms. If using your arms, try to only use your fingertips

Progression: Place a small object next to your foot. Lift your leg up and over the object. Reverse to bring your leg back. The taller the object, the harder it will be!

Progression 2 (optional): add ankle weights

<https://youtu.be/WnjOn-0FLho>

3. Hip flexor and Psoas strengthener (to the side)

With your leg out to the side, in second position, rest your foot on a raised surface, e.g. chair or table. The higher the surface the harder the exercise will be. Make sure you have a neutral spine. Lift your leg up as much as you can. Hold for a few seconds and lower.

Very important point: Make sure you lift from the hip with this exercise. Many people end up cheating with this exercise and assist the lifting by hitching from the waist. Keep your torso upright and stable throughout.

Progressions: As you get stronger, work on lifting from a higher surface. Find a taller table, raise up a barre, or add books under your heel. You should be working from a height that only allows you to lift a few inches. If you can lift more than a few inches, you need to progress.

Progression 2 (optional): add ankle weights.

Repeat as many times as you can, then repeat on the other leg.

[Psoas side](#)

4. Double leg stretch with turnout variation

This is the level 2 progression from the Single Leg Stretch exercise. The technique and form are essentially the same. You will now be stretching both legs at the same time. Lying on your back, engage your abdominal muscles and flatten your back against the floor. Lift your legs up so that your knees are bent. Make sure that your legs are in parallel from your knees to your ankles. Stretch your legs out, rotate into turnout, back to parallel, then bring your knees back in. Keep your back flat against the floor throughout.

The video demonstration of this variation starts at 48 seconds of the Single Leg Stretch video.

When you stretch your legs, the lower they are, the harder it will be. If your back starts to pop off the floor, keep your legs higher.

Perform as many as you can with good form.

Progression: As with the single leg stretch version, lift your torso off the ground.

5. Double lower back extension.

This is the progression from the level 1 swimming exercise. Lie on your front with your legs in turnout and arms over your head. Engage your tummy muscles and glutes. Make sure you hold your turnout from deep in your hips throughout this exercise. Lift your torso, arms and legs off the floor. Make sure to lead the arm lift with your thumbs pointing towards the ceiling. Slowly lower. You should feel the muscles in your lower back working (aka your arabesque muscles).

You should aim to do up to 20 reps of this exercise.

Progression: Hold for 3 seconds at the top of each repetition. Also, work on lifting your torso, arms and legs higher off the floor.

[double lower back extension](#)

6. Single leg deadlift – Bent knee version

Start in parallel, hips, knees and toes facing forward. Lift one leg up to the front, then hinging from the waist, tilt forward and stretch your free leg behind you. Keep your back flat – do not round your spine! Slightly bend your standing leg as you do so. Return to the starting position without touching the floor. Keep your hips square and level throughout. Do not allow your hips to twist into turnout.

TIP: try to keep your free leg in a straight line from your head to your toes, and aim to get your torso parallel with the ground. As you get stronger, you can tilt further forward, penché-style.

Start with 6-8 reps on one leg, without touching the floor, before switching to the other leg. Only do as many as you can with good form. Gradually build up to doing 10 reps each side.

Warning – if done properly, this is very challenging! If you do too much too soon, it can leave you with serious delayed onset muscle soreness. Start with less torso tilt and fewer reps and build up gradually.

Make it easier: Very lightly hold onto something with one hand. This will just take the edge off the balance challenge and allow you to really work the muscles. As a rule of thumb, I generally advise dancers to hold on for the first 4-5 times they practice this exercise, then gradually hold on less and less.

[Single leg deadlift for hamstring flexibility and strength](#)

7. Single leg plié in parallel with band around knees

This is the progression from the level 1 single leg plié. For this version, you need a resistance band loop around your knees. These are the ones I use in the clinic: <https://amzn.to/3EZBXtY>. I would recommend purchasing a set such as this one, because you can start with the lightest one. Then, as you get stronger, you can move progressively through the band strengths. (The different colours are different levels of resistance.) Alternatively, if you already have some exercise bands, such as these <https://amzn.to/3o8DV56>, tie a length of the band around your knees. The tighter the band, the harder it will be.

Stand on one foot, legs in parallel, resistance loop around your knees. Push out against the band. Your hips need to be perfectly level and square for this exercise. Maintaining the outward pressure on the band, plié the supporting leg as far as you can and push back up to standing. Keep your knees directly under your hips. Do not let the band pull your knees inwards. As with level 1, your back should stay mostly upright, although it is okay to let your torso hinge forward a little to counter balance the movement. Only bend as far as you can without letting your hips tip or twist. NO TURNOUT for this exercise!

[Single leg squat with band](#)

8. Développé challenger – level 1 and 2

Now that you've mastered some strength in the Développé challenger level 1, it's time to add level 2. Start by completing level 1 as before. Then, complete the same exercise but to the front:

Bring your knee up to the front as much as you can. Support around the back of your thigh with your hand. Straighten your knee to the front, rotating into turnout at the same time. Bend and straighten your knee 10 times, keeping your knee up as much as you can. Then, on the last rep, keep your leg straight and let go. Try to hold your leg up as long as you can and lower as slowly as you can.

Perform this exercise 2 times on each leg.

Make it easier: Hold on to a barre or back of chair, etc.

Make it harder: Don't hold on! Bring your knee in closer to your body so that when you extend your knee your leg is higher in développé position.

[Developpe challenge level 2](#)

9. Cool down – Eyes-closed balance challenge with tilts

Finish your training sessions by completing the balance challenge, as in level 1. This time, though, rather than staying still, challenge yourself by tilting your body. Try tilting forwards, sideways, backwards, diagonally, etc, and return to upright. The goal is to make it hard!

[Eyes-closed balance with tilts](#)

Level 3

1. Finding your form - preparation exercise, level 1, 2 and 3

After your warm up, complete the preparation exercise as in levels 1 and 2. Then, practice the same exercise to the side, as detailed below:

Lie on your side with your legs straight, in turnout. Engage your abdominal muscles and find your neutral spine. Pull one leg up into retire and extend it up – aim for a 90 degree développé. Make sure you keep a neutral spine throughout – do not tuck your pelvis under or allow your hips to tip. Maintaining the control in your spine and hips, bend your knee and straighten three times. Every time you straighten your leg, try to bring it into a slightly higher développé. Slowly lower the leg. Repeat other leg. Repeat 2 times each side.

Then, practice the level 2 variation. Pull one leg up into retire and développé. Maintaining the control in your spine and hips, use your opposite hand to pull your leg into a slightly higher développé. As before, the key with this exercise is to focus on using your leg muscles to bring your leg in. Your hand should only just assist the movement.

Let go and try to maintain your leg in the new position for about 5 seconds. Then immediately repeat, so that you are pulling your leg closer yet. Slowly lower the leg. Repeat other leg.

Repeat 2 times each side.

[Développé prep to side](#)

2. Hip flexor and Psoas strengthener in standing (to the front)

This is essentially the same exercise as in level 2, but for level 3 you will complete the exercise in standing.

Stand with your working leg supported on a table in front of you in turnout. Keep your hips, spine and lower back in neutral. Keeping your back upright, lift one leg up as much as you can without bending in your middle. As with the seated version, don't worry if you can only barely lift your leg. Even if you only lift your leg a couple of millimetres, you will still be strengthening the correct muscles. Hold a couple of seconds, then lower gently. Try to avoid letting your leg flop down.

Do as many as you can on one leg, then repeat with the other leg.

Training tip: You must avoid the urge to let your lower back round or your pelvis tuck under. Make sure you maintain a neutral spine and pelvis throughout. It is very easy to cheat at this exercise, so make sure you are constantly assessing your form.

Make it easier: If you cannot lift the leg without letting your pelvis or lower back collapse, find a lower surface, such as a chair or coffee table.

Progression: This is the same as the seated version. Place a small object next to your foot. Lift your leg up and over the object. Reverse to bring your leg back. The taller the object, the harder it will be!

Progression 2 (optional): add ankle weights

[Psoas front standing](#)

3. Hip flexor and Psoas strengthener (to the side)

Keep practicing this exercise, as in level 2. To progress it, continue to find higher surfaces to lift from. Also, if you haven't yet added ankle weights, I would highly recommend you do so now!

4. Single leg squat

Stand in parallel, on one leg, in front of a chair. Sit down and stand up using just the one leg. Keep your hips level and square throughout. Make sure your knee goes directly over your toes. Try to control the movement – avoid plopping down onto the chair.

Make it easier: Add cushions to the chair to make it higher to allow for good form.

Make it harder, option 1: Add weights. The easiest way to do this is grab a backpack. You can fill it with weights, books, water bottles or anything heavy. As you get stronger, add more weight!

Make it harder, option 2: Find a lower surface. Try using, for example, a low sofa or footstool.

[Single leg squat](#)

5. Single leg deadlift – Straight knee version

The seemingly small change of keeping your supporting leg straight for this exercise actually makes it considerably harder from level 2! The technique is the same, just keep your standing knee straight throughout.

Start in parallel, hips, knees and toes facing forward. Lift one leg up to the front, then hinging from the waist, tilt forward and stretch your free leg behind you. Keep your back flat – do not round your spine! Keep your standing leg straight. Return to the starting position without touching the floor. Keep your hips square and level throughout. Do not allow your hips to twist into turnout.

TIP: try to keep your free leg in a straight line from your head to your toes, and aim to get your torso parallel with the ground. As you get stronger, you can tilt further forward, penché-style.

Start with 6-8 reps on one leg, without touching the floor, before switching to the other leg. Only do as many as you can with good form. Gradually build up to doing 10 reps each side.

Warning – as with the level 2 version, if done properly, this is very challenging! If you do too much too soon, it can leave you with serious delayed onset muscle soreness. Start with less torso tilt and fewer reps and build up gradually.

Progression: Hold some hand weights in front, as in the video demo

[Straight leg deadlift with weights](#)

6. Plank variation with fire hydrants and leg extension

This one is a killer for your whole core, as well a challenge your hip stability, turnout control, and upper body!

Start in plank position on your hands. Make sure you engage your tummy muscles. Find a flat back with a neutral spine. Avoid rounding your shoulders and upper back or sagging in the middle. Pull one leg up to the front. Rotate that leg into turnout without moving your pelvis. Do not let your hips twist! Extend the leg while holding the turnout. Then reverse the movement to bring the leg back up and finally return to the plank position. Repeat other leg.

Repeat as many times as you can with good form, but be sure you do not push past your capabilities. As soon as you can no longer control your core or pelvic position, stop.

Training note: To begin with, many dancers are limited in this exercise by their upper body strength. To make this exercise a little easier on your arms and shoulders, while still working your core and turnout muscles, try practicing this exercise on an incline. Form the plank position by putting your hands on a low sofa, footstool or step. Then, as your upper body adapts, and you can complete about 10 reps, move to the floor.

[Plank with fire hydrants](#)

8. Développé challenger – level 3

Continue to practice this exercise as in levels 1 and 2. To progress it for level 3, you should now focus on using your hand as little as possible. Try to use your hip and leg muscles to support the working leg. Your hand around the back of your thigh should only lightly support the leg. This might sound like only a small change, but if done properly, it will make the exercise much harder!

Now is also a good the time to add those ankle weights! While this is not absolutely necessary for success, it is highly recommended.

Bonus Exercise

The Ultimate Développé Training Challenge

Please note - I strongly recommend that you work through the rest of the program before trying this exercise. You should be able to confidently perform all of the exercises in level 3 before adding this one. If you are not ready for this exercise, it is very likely you will cheat and use the wrong muscles with poor form. If this happens, you will get little benefit from this exercise.

Well done for making it this far! By now your hips and legs should be feeling stronger and more stable. You should be noticing encouraging improvements in your développé height. This final exercise is really tough, but will push your strength up to a whole new level.

Ready for the final challenge of the développé program??

Start in standing, with your hips and spine in neutral. Keeping your knees straight, lift one leg up to the side as much as you can. Then, bend your knee to bring your knee in and up as much as you can. Supporting lightly behind your thigh, extend your knee. Let go and slowly lower your leg.

Repeat up to 10 times before swapping to the other leg. If you really want to push, this exercise can be practiced to the front as well.

You can practice this exercise in place of the développé challenge exercise, or if you really want to push your results, add this one on alternate days from the rest of the program.

[Ultimate Developpe challenge](#)

Conclusion

I hope you have enjoyed working through this training program, but most importantly, I hope you have been successful! Achieving a 170-degree développé or 190-degree side tilt won't happen overnight, but if you keep up your hard work and dedication, your extensions will continue to improve. Remember, great développés don't just happen. Those dancers posting amazing photos on Instagram have put in innumerable hours of training.

The exercises in level 3 are designed so that you never really progress beyond them, but rather can continue to build strength by progressing within each exercise. Keep pushing harder, adding more weights or more repetitions. Once you are happy with your développé, it is advisable to continue practicing the program once or twice a week to maintain your strength. Unfortunately, leg height can be very challenging to improve but easy to lose.

I would value your feedback on the program, as I'm always seeking to improve my advice and content. So, send me a message and let me know your thoughts. I would also love to see your before and after photos! You can send any pictures straight to me or be sure to tag me on Instagram or Facebook.

<https://www.facebook.com/dancephysiotherapyonline>

https://www.instagram.com/the_dance_physio/

For more information on the services I offer, as well as full terms and conditions of this program, please see my website.

[Welcome to The Dance Physio - The Dance Physio](#)

Be sure to follow me on social media for more great tips on how to improve your dancing!

About the author

Robin Holland qualified in physiotherapy at Oxford Brookes University, graduating with a first class degree. She gained a wide range of experience working in the NHS, including a particular focus on musculoskeletal injuries. She has completed further post graduate training in kinetic chain analysis, exercise therapy, manual therapy, hypermobility syndrome management, and sports injuries.

Throughout her dance career, Robin developed a keen interest in how the body moves and the science of movement analysis, so naturally went on to do further post graduate training in applying physiotherapy techniques and the science of dance to real life dancers and dance training. She has used her knowledge and skills to treat a wide range of dance related injuries.

Robin has over 15 years experience working with dancers. Currently, she works with a wide range of clients, from professional contemporary dancers, to budding ballerinas, to amateur dance enthusiasts. Robin works both virtually, via the wonders of modern technology, and in person at her two clinics in North Yorkshire.