

# Dragonfly Dance Curriculum Framework

## Introduction

### Purpose of the framework

The Dragonfly Dance Curriculum Framework is the structural spine of the Dragonfly Dance curriculum and teaching ecosystem.

It defines the core skill and knowledge domains that underpin learning across all dance styles and levels, and provides the organising structure from which style-specific curricula, syllabi, and teacher training are developed. The framework links directly to the Dragonfly Dance Teaching Method, which describes how the curriculum is taught in practice.

In simple terms:

- the curriculum defines what is learned
- the method defines how it is taught.

### Scope and application

The framework applies universally across ballet, jazz, tap, and contemporary. Each style has its own detailed curriculum and syllabus, outlining movement vocabulary and level-specific expectations, while this framework provides the shared structure, principles, and progression logic that sit underneath all styles.

### Learning through doing

The framework is grounded in kinaesthetic learning: learning through doing. It recognises that dance knowledge is developed primarily through physical experience, repetition, sensation, and application, with explanation and theory used to support movement learning.

### Curriculum domains

The document introduces each learning domain, outlines how skills and knowledge develop over time, and maps expectations across the three broad stages of learning that underpin the Dragonfly level system: beginner, intermediate, and advanced. It provides high-level guidance about progression, expectations, and the approaches used to develop skills and knowledge within each domain over time.

The curriculum framework is organised into the following domains, each addressed in its own section:

- Vocabulary of movement
- Technique
- Conditioning

- Proprioception
- Pattern recognition
- Memory
- Rhythm, musicality, dynamics, expression, and artistry
- Theory

Together, these domains describe the capacities that enable dancers to learn, progress, and perform with increasing confidence, clarity, and autonomy.

## Application of the domains in practice

The domains outlined in this framework describe core capacities that are developed and expressed across a range of learning contexts. These include individual practice, group work, partner work, improvisation, and choreographic or task-based processes.

These contexts are not treated as separate skill domains. Instead, they are environments in which multiple domains are integrated, applied, and refined simultaneously. For example, partner work draws on proprioception, conditioning, technique, and temporal intelligence; improvisation relies on pattern recognition, memory, musicality, and expressive capacity; choreographic tasks require dancers to organise movement, time, and intention with increasing independence.

Expectations for how dancers engage in these contexts progress across levels and are articulated in style-specific curricula and syllabi. The framework establishes the underlying capacities that enable dancers to participate effectively in these contexts, regardless of dance style.

## How the framework is used

The Curriculum Framework is used to:

- inform and shape the development of genre-specific curricula and syllabi
- guide teacher training and professional development
- act as a shared point of reference for teachers and dancers, regardless of dance genre or level

## Wider teaching ecosystem

The curriculum framework is one part of the broader Dragonfly Dance teaching ecosystem, which also includes:

- the Dragonfly Dance Teaching Method
- detailed genre-specific curriculum and syllabus documents for each dance genre
- learning resources for dancers and teachers
- optional workshops, courses, and other learning experiences.

This document is intentionally high-level and durable. It does not prescribe specific exercises or combinations, nor does it explain learning theory in detail. Instead, it provides a coherent

structure within which consistent, progressive, and meaningful teaching and learning can occur over time.

## Domains

### Vocabulary of movement

Vocabulary of movement refers to the repertoire of movements that dancers have in their movement toolkit. It is not 'terminology', but a language of movement, where foundational movements function like letters, simple combinations like words, and longer sequences like paragraphs.

The Dragonfly Dance Curriculum outlines the movements (or steps) and combinations that dancers are expected to develop competence in at each level.

At each level dancers expand their repertoire of movement by:

- learning new and more complex movements
- combining movements into longer and more layered sequences
- improving speed of uptake, retention, and execution quality
- incorporating directional change, coordination, and rhythmic variation.

Vocabulary development is cumulative. It is supported by, and inseparable from, technique, memory, pattern recognition, and musical understanding.

### Level expectations for vocabulary

Beginner	Dancers develop a foundational movement vocabulary appropriate to the genre. Material is limited in range and complexity, with clear structure and repetition. Familiarisation and recognition of basic steps and patterns are prioritised over speed or volume of choreography.
Intermediate	Dancers expand their movement vocabulary to include more complex steps, transitions, and combinations. Familiar foundational steps are developed into more demanding forms. Dancers are expected to recognise and combine known elements with increasing speed, coordination, and directional variety.
Advanced	Dancers work with a broad and sophisticated movement vocabulary, including technically complex and demanding steps specific to the genre. They are able to learn complex material efficiently, adapt known vocabulary in new contexts, and integrate movement choices with musicality, dynamics, and expressive intent.

### Technique

Movement vocabulary describes what is done. Technique describes how it is executed.

Technique encompasses posture, alignment, weight placement, coordination, control, articulation, joint sequencing, and body awareness (proprioception). It provides the scaffold that supports safe, efficient, and expressive movement.

Technique is developed through consistent, conscious practice and feedback, training the neuromuscular system until execution becomes increasingly automatic. As this occurs, dancers are able to direct conscious attention towards expression, musicality, and artistry.

The technique of each dance genre varies, although there are common elements across dance genres. The Dragonfly curriculum defines level-specific technical expectations so teachers can ensure readiness before progression.

It is the teacher's responsibility to ensure the dancers are executing movements with sound technique before introducing more advanced movement vocabulary.

Development of technique is cyclical, rather than linear. Dancers continually revisit foundational principles as new layers of complexity, speed, coordination, and expression are introduced.

Technique cycles through:

- Awareness – noticing a principle
- Application – attempting it in movement
- Integration – it becomes more automatic
- Revisiting – the same principle is refined under new conditions.

### Level expectations for technique

Beginner	<p>Technique focus is on basic alignment, coordination, and safe execution of movement.</p> <p>Technique is introduced consciously and explicitly, supporting clarity and consistency rather than speed or virtuosity.</p>
Intermediate	<p>Effective technique is increasingly ingrained and applied more consistently and automatically.</p> <p>Dancers are expected to maintain technical integrity while managing greater physical demand, coordination, and cognitive load.</p>
Advanced	<p>Correct technique is deeply ingrained and automatic, underpinning all movement with very little conscious effort.</p> <p>Automatic application of technique means dancers can dedicate more cognitive effort to movement quality, nuance, and expression.</p> <p>Dancers' technique supports execution of advanced movement vocabulary.</p>

## Conditioning

Vocabulary is what you do, and technique is how you do it. Conditioning the mechanism to improve physical capacity to execute the movement vocabulary safely, repeatedly, and with control.

Conditioning trains the body for strength, stability, mobility, flexibility, endurance, coordination, speed, and power. Conditioning is intentionally integrated into class rather than treated as separate or optional.

Teachers are responsible for:

- Embedding conditioning within class structure
- Explaining its purpose and relevance
- Ensuring safe execution
- Progressing physical demands in line with level expectations and individual readiness. It is not appropriate to incorporate conditioning exercises that exceed the expectations of the level.

As dancers advance, they are increasingly educated about anatomy, physiology, and training principles, supporting greater independence and responsibility for physical preparation. This education may include discussion of concepts such as gradual progression, load management, fatigue, recovery, and adaptation.

The Dragonfly curriculum defines progressive conditioning expectations at each level to support safe execution of movement vocabulary and technique. Conditioning expectations increase across levels and focus on readiness, sustainability, and the ability to maintain technical integrity under increasing physical demand.

### Level expectations for conditioning

Beginner	Conditioning supports basic strength, mobility, and endurance required for safe execution of foundational movement vocabulary. Conditioning demands are limited and directly related to what is required from the level.
Intermediate	Conditioning supports the greater physical demands, including strength, control, and stamina, necessary for more complex movements and longer sequences. Conditioning remains purposeful and targeted, supporting dancing rather than functioning as fitness training. Dancers develop more sophisticated understanding of conditioning and are able to apply it to their own warmups and home practice.
Advanced	Dancers develop knowledge of anatomy, physiology, and training principles, supporting greater independence and responsibility for physical preparation.

	Conditioning expectations support sustainability, load management, and the ability to maintain technical integrity under increasing physical demand.
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## Proprioception

Proprioception is the dancer's internal sense of the body in space, including awareness of joint position, weight placement, limb placement posture, balance, coordination, and spatial relationships with others.

While technique describes how a movement should be organised, proprioception describes how it feels as it is occurring.

Teachers help dancers improve their proprioception through visual feedback, verbal and physical cues (with consent), repetition with correction, peer observation, partner work, and education about proprioception.

As task complexity increases, so do proprioceptive demands. Proprioception capacity is a key indicator of readiness for progression, alongside technique, condition, and movement vocabulary.

### Level expectations for proprioception

Beginner	Dancers develop basic awareness of body position, alignment, and spatial orientation. External cues and feedback are heavily relied upon to support accuracy and coordination.
Intermediate	Dancers show improved internal awareness and are able to adjust alignment, weight placement, and coordination with less external prompting. Spatial awareness within group settings becomes more consistent.
Advanced	Dancers demonstrate refined proprioceptive awareness, enabling precise control, efficient movement, and responsiveness to subtle changes in space, timing, and partnering or group formations.

## Pattern recognition

Pattern recognition is the bridge between sensing movement and retaining it.

It refers to a dancer's ability to identify and apply recurring structures within movement, rhythm, and space, allowing learning to transfer efficiently across exercise, styles, and concepts.

Patterns commonly appear through directional organisation, rhythmic groupings, spatial pathways, and coordination relationships between body parts. Strong pattern recognition reduces cognitive load and frees attention for execution quality.

Pattern recognition is taught deliberately through pattern scaffolding, where familiar structures are retained while movement content changes. Teachers support this by naming patterns, sequencing complexity, and using visual or creative tasks to reinforce structure.

### Level expectations for pattern recognition

Beginner	Dancers are introduced to simple structural, rhythmic, and spatial patterns, including basic group work. Patterns are limited in complexity and repetition is used to support recognition and organisation. Dancers may need the teacher to explicitly highlight patterns so they are aware of them and can recognise them more easily.
Intermediate	Dancers recognise familiar patterns more quickly and are better able to recognise patterns without them being pointed out More complex unison, canon, and phrasing structures are introduced.
Advanced	Dancers easily identify structural, rhythmic, and spatial patterns, enabling efficient learning, adaptability, and sophisticated group work.

### Memory

Memory underpins a dancer's ability to progress beyond following and into independent execution.

In dance, memory involves a sequence of interrelated processes: attention, perception, encoding, rehearsal, retention, and recall. Teachers are responsible for managing cognitive load and directing focus so material can be learned reliably and with quality.

Attention	What am I focusing on?	The ability to direct focus to relevant information at each stage of learning, such as sequence, rhythm, spatial pathways, or qualitative detail
Perception	What am I actually sensing?	How movement information is sensed and taken in, including what dancers see, hear, and feel, and which aspects of the movement they notice
Encoding	What do I think this is?	How new movement is internally represented, organised, and given meaning, including the order of movements, timing, and qualitative characteristics
Rehearsal	How do I stabilise it?	The processes used to stabilise and clarify material, including physical repetition, marking, mental rehearsal, verbal or visual walk-throughs, and practising without cues
Retention	How do I retain it?	How reliably material is maintained over time, particularly between classes

Recall	Can I retrieve and use it independently?	The ability to retrieve and perform material independently, without reliance on demonstration, prompts, or external cues
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Expectations increase across levels. Beginners work with shorter material and high repetition; advanced dancers encode efficiently, retain material between classes, and recall it under changing conditions.

If dancers cannot retain material well enough to refine technique, timing or expression, the quantity or complexity of material is too high.

When attention is overloaded or unfocused, perception becomes partial, encoding is incomplete, and dancers may be able to follow others, but are unable to develop reliable recall or performance quality.

Teachers support the development of attention, perception, encoding, rehearsal, retention, and recall through deliberate class design. Expectations and teaching strategies shift as dancers progress.

### Level expectations for memory

Beginner	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Retain short movement sequence with simple structure and limited layering</li> <li>• Direct attention toward one primary domain at a time, with perception of finer details developing gradually</li> <li>• Encode new material more slowly and with greater effort, as everything is novel</li> <li>• Benefit from frequent rehearsal and external cues (eg visual, verbal) to support encoding and recall</li> <li>• Require more time and repetition for encoding and consolidation</li> <li>• May require guidance to recall material learnt in a previous class (eg from the previous week)</li> </ul>
Intermediate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Retain longer movement sequences, with increased structural complexity and moderate layering</li> <li>• Sustain attention across multiple domains, with growing ability to integrate them simultaneously</li> <li>• Encode new material more efficiently, supported by familiarity</li> <li>• Reduced reliance on external cues for rehearsal</li> <li>• Consolidate material more quickly, requiring fewer repetitions</li> <li>• Recall previously learned material with less guidance after time has passed</li> </ul>
Advanced	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Retain extended and complex movement sequences, with high levels of layering across multiple domains</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Distribute attention flexibly across domains, integrating movement, rhythm, technique, and expression with minimal conscious effort</li> <li>• Encode new material rapidly, drawing on extensive previous knowledge</li> <li>• Use both physical and mental rehearsal autonomously to strengthen encoding and retention</li> <li>• Demonstrate rapid consolidation, allowing memory to support refinement rather than basic recall</li> <li>• Recall material independently and reliably after extended periods without rehearsal.</li> </ul>
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## Rhythm, musicality, dynamics, expression, and artistry

This domain develops temporal intelligence: the dancer's capacity to understand, inhabit, and shape time through movement. These elements are grouped together because they are experienced together, determining how movement is shaped in time, energy, and intention.

Rhythm and musicality organise movement in relation to time and sound; dynamics shape how energy unfolds; expression and artistry arise from how these choices are integrated, sustained, and refined.

Rhythm	A pattern of movement, usually repetitive, organised through time
Musicality	The dancer's ability to make intentional connections between the movement and music
Dynamics	The quality of movement energy, including variations in speed, weight, and intensity
Expression	The communication of feeling, intention, or story through the body
Artistry	The integrated use of technique, rhythm, musicality, dynamics, and expression to communicate movement with clarity and intention.

As dancers progress, they move from treating time as a series of points to inhabiting it as a continuous medium. Temporal intelligence also includes knowing which tools are required in different contexts.

Structural tools such as counting and subdivision may be essential for complex rhythmic relationships, unison, or canon, while other contexts rely more on phrasing, breath, or stylistic feel. Developing dancers learn to move fluently between these approaches rather than relying on only one.

### Level expectations for temporal intelligence

Beginner	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work primarily with simple, repetitive rhythmic patterns, most commonly based on quarter and eighth notes, and can manage half</li> </ul>
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	<p>and whole notes but may struggle to sustain duration without external cues</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stay in time mainly by following the teacher or other dancers, listening to verbal/musical/lyrical cues, rather than by counting</li> <li>• Require</li> <li>• music with a strong, easily identifiable beat</li> <li>• Limited capacity to track rhythm independently or anticipate phrase endings</li> <li>• Musicality is minimal and largely externally directed</li> <li>• Dynamic variation must be explicitly prompted and is often inconsistent</li> <li>• Expression is emerging and typically requires imagery, story, or direct coaching</li> <li>• Artistry is not expected at this stage</li> </ul>
Intermediate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Perform movement using more complex rhythmic structures, including combinations of quarter, eighth, twelfth (triplets), and sixteenth note groupings</li> <li>• Able to count to track time and use counting as a support, but may require conscious effort</li> <li>• Capable of engaging with syncopation and less predictable rhythmic patterns</li> <li>• Begin to track phrasing and recognise the end of musical phrases with greater reliability</li> <li>• Musicality is developing and often requires guidance or prompting to shape choices</li> <li>• Demonstrate dynamic range, though consistency and clarity may still need coaching</li> <li>• Expression becomes more evident once choreography is secure</li> <li>• Early elements of artistry may appear intermittently, but are not yet sustained</li> </ul>
Advanced	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organise movement confidently across complex rhythmic structures, including syncopation, cross-phrasing, polyrhythms, and variations in metre/time signature</li> <li>• Track time subconsciously, using counting as a tool when needed</li> <li>• Sustain accurate timing across longer phrases and variable tempos without reliance on external cues</li> <li>• Make intentional musical choices, including aligning with, contrasting, or working in counterpoint to the music</li> <li>• Dynamic variation is integrated automatically into movement</li> <li>• Expression is embodied, consistent, and emerges alongside technique rather than after it</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Artistry is evidence through the coherent integration of technique, rhythm, musicality, dynamics, and expression.</li> </ul>
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## Theory

Theory supports kinaesthetic learning by providing language, context, and understanding that enhances physical practice without displacing time spent moving.

The theoretical components include:

- terminology
- music and rhythm
- science (anatomy, safe dance practice, neuromuscular and motor learning, basic physics of movement)
- different style and techniques within a dance genre, from a historical and contemporary perspective

Within the Dragonfly curriculum, theory focuses on knowledge development, while the other areas of the curriculum focus on skill development. Knowledge development supports and enhances skill development by giving dancers language, frameworks, and understanding that inform how they move.

Language used in teaching is functional and accessible, often pairing technical terms with plain-language descriptions. Theory always serves the dancing and relates directly to the movement material being taught in class.

Theory is introduced through brief, frequent references in class rather than lectures, and reinforced through resources such as handouts, diagrams, videos, posters, or whiteboards.

The Dragonfly Method is supported by a growing library of curriculum-aligned theory resources, along with optional workshops, courses, and online learning experiences.

The curriculum does not assume prior theoretical knowledge, but progressively builds dancers’ capacity to recognise, understand, and apply theory in service of movement quality, safety, and artistic development.

## Level expectations for theory

Beginner	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limited prior theoretical knowledge unless gained in other contexts</li> <li>• Are developing basic familiarity with:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Terminology (movement names, simple anatomical terms)</li> <li>• Musical concepts (beat vs rhythm, staying in time)</li> <li>• Foundational body awareness (major muscle groups, basic safe dance principles)</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Rely heavily on demonstration, repetition, and plain language explanations</li> </ul>
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Theory is primarily absorbed through exposure and association, not recall or explanation</li> <li>• Knowledge supports recognition rather than independent application</li> </ul>
Intermediate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demonstrate working knowledge of foundational theory relevant to their dance genre:</li> <li>• They are able to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recognise and respond to commonly used terminology</li> <li>• Count and move reliability in time when music has a clear pulse and phrasing</li> <li>• Distinguish common time signatures (4/4 and <math>\frac{3}{4}</math>) and basic beat sub-divisions (quarter and eighth notes)</li> <li>• Identify major muscle groups and relate them to movement function</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Developing understanding that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Multiple techniques and styles exist within a dance genre</li> <li>• Theoretical concepts inform movement choices and learning efficiency</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Theory increasingly supports independence and memory, even if not fully articulated</li> </ul>
Advanced	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demonstrate broad and integrated theoretical understanding across domains</li> <li>• Are able to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interpret verbal instruction using terminology with minimal demonstration</li> <li>• Organise movement using musical structure, rhythm and phrasing</li> <li>• Understand and apply anatomical and training principles to support safe, sustainable practice</li> <li>• Recognise and describe major techniques, influences, and trends within the dance genre</li> </ul> </li> <li>• May vary in formal music or science knowledge, but are highly capable of acquiring and applying it</li> <li>• Theory functions as a tool for refinement, decision-making, and self-directed learning, rather than basic comprehension.</li> </ul>

## From framework to curriculum

This Curriculum Framework provides the shared foundation for all genre-specific curricula within Dragonfly Dance.

The next level of documentation translates this framework into detailed curricula and syllabi for each dance genre (ballet, jazz, tap, and contemporary). These genre-specific documents articulate movement vocabulary, progressions, and level expectations in detail, while remaining anchored to the domains, principles, and progression logic established here.

Within each genre, individual styles and techniques (for example, rhythm tap within tap, or release-based techniques within contemporary) are addressed through the genre curriculum, ensuring both stylistic clarity and structural consistency across the wider program.

The framework also links directly to the Dragonfly Dance Teaching Method, which describes how the curriculum is taught in practice. While this document defines what is learned and how capacity develops, the Method document addresses teaching approaches, decision-making, and strategies that support effective learning for adult dancers.

Together with:

- genre-specific curricula and syllabi
- the Dragonfly Dance Teaching Method
- teacher training and professional development
- dancer learning resources and optional learning experiences

this framework forms part of an integrated teaching ecosystem designed to support consistent, progressive, and meaningful dance education for adults.

As the Dragonfly curriculum continues to evolve, this framework remains the reference point that ensures alignment across genres, teachers, and learning experiences, while allowing flexibility, depth, and artistic diversity within each dance form.