

Alignment

Alignment is not a static concept. In fact, alignment is in constant flux. It is not a "correct" way of lining up body parts but a way of embodying how we live in our bodies. Additionally, effective alignment does not look alike on all bodies. Different techniques, styles, and dance forms often require different bodily alignments.

Often, alignment is fluid and changes overtime. There are many influences on one's alignment including culture, society, previous dance training, prior physical and emotional experiences, as well as structure.

Nevertheless, there are some guidelines that can be used to identify effective alignment in western modern dance; these guidelines may not apply to other movement forms. For example, a plumb line may be dropped directly through the center of the three body weights (head, thorax, and pelvis) to establish effective working alignment. The plumb line should be center in each of the body weights. Additionally, a straight plumb line may be dropped through the following bodily landmarks: outer malleolus (outer ankle), outside of knee, greater trochanter (at outside of femur), glenoid fossa (shoulder joint) and inner ear. These guidelines for alignment allow the bones to carry much of the weight of the body, resulting in safe and effective movement and body mechanics. When the weight is not carried through the bones, the muscles are forced to hold the body in place, thereby creating excessive stress and work. The main job of the muscles is to help the bones move, not to carry the weight of the body. When an imbalance exists, some muscles are required to work overtime to hold the body up while others become underutilized, thereby opening the dancer to bodily injury and insult. The purpose of alignment work in dance is not to create a straight and "held" posture of the spine; the curves of the spine are necessary for shock absorption during movement. However, the alignment landmarks may be used to keep the weight moving through the bones in a safe and effective manner. It helps to think of alignment as kinetic, whereby small adjustments continually provide a more moving and changing balance.

Common areas of excessive or frozen tension and problems on the body include:

Spine, pelvis, and chest/rib, including inability to release the lower back causing excessive habitual retraction of the pelvis, sticking out or held movement in the chest, and collapse in the chest.

Habitual distortions in the line of the body landmarks (listed above).

Problems of the hip joints, extremities and knees, including pronation of the feet or inward movement of the knees or upper thighs.

Protrusions of the chin.