

Inclusive Technique Class Checklist

By Gretchen Alterowitz

Western concert dance techniques are often taught in an authoritarian manner, which separates the roles of instructors and students by demarcating who holds power and knowledge (instructors), and who is subject to power and needs to gain knowledge. Authoritarian models, while sometimes defended for their rigor or results, can be abusive (emotionally, psychologically, physically) and lead to fear, anxiety, and injury. Intimidated dancers are less creative, exploratory, and willing to take risks, and their capacity to learn and develop is diminished. Inclusive teaching reimagines traditional ideas about who can and should dance and what the studio environment should feel like, with the goal of creating equity, care, and growth opportunities for all participants.



USE CHOSEN PRONOUNS

- Ask students for their chosen names and pronouns at the start of every term, and make sure to use them consistently.
- Model this to the students in how you introduce yourself; tell students how to refer to you and what pronouns you use.
- If you slip and use the wrong name or pronoun for a student, simply correct yourself and apologize.
- Knowing that pronouns and names may change over time, it's a good idea to do this every term.



EXPAND YOUR DRESS CODE

Dress and grooming codes based on gender or race can discourage students from participating in dance classes.

- Religious considerations may also apply to such decisions.
- Giving students choices allows them to enter the classroom from a self-defined position.

Ask yourself if your dress or grooming code is based on gendered or racialized assumptions, or is exclusionary in other ways, and consider other options that can support the technique.



ASK FOR PERMISSION TO TOUCH (EVERY TIME)

If physical corrections are necessary, ask students for permission to touch and manipulate their bodies, and be prepared for them to say no.

- Direct students to ask for permission to touch in partner exercises.
- Do not assume that previously-given permission grants consent every time – students' bodies, experiences, and needs may change.
- Develop non-physical options for corrections.

✓ ACKNOWLEDGE ANATOMY

Anatomical differences create opportunities and challenges, and some aesthetics will not be accomplishable by every body. For example, the angle and shape of the femur's neck, as well as the orientation of the acetabulum, affect how much turnout a dancer can achieve. And while deviations in spinal alignment or hypermobility may increase a dancer's ability to achieve certain lines and positions, they may also increase pain and injury. Work with individual students to identify, understand, and value their own bodies' capacities.

✓ USE DIVERSE EXAMPLES

If you provide examples (from historical sources, the professional world, music, etc.), share a variety of bodies, genders, races, cultures, and abilities.

When choosing class demonstrators, select different students each time.

✓ ENCOURAGE DISCUSSION AND DISSENT

- Students learn, process information, and demonstrate their abilities in a variety of ways.
- Encouraging students to voice their ideas creates an environment where knowledge and power are shared among participants.
- Emboldening students to draw from their personal experiences demonstrates that the information they bring into the room matters.

✓ REMEMBER INTERSECTIONALITY

Identities overlap, and students' experiences and ways of being are shaped by multiple, intersecting identities. Yours are too.

Take stock of any assumptions you may make about students' behavior, work ethic, and attitude. Pursue information about identities that are unfamiliar to you.

✓ SELF-REFLECT FOR BIAS

Turn your attention inward to ask yourself how you are perpetuating traditional narratives around gender, race, class, sexuality, bodies, and ability. This is ongoing work.

✓ (RE)CHECK AND EXPAND THE LIST

Things change – while a checklist implies a stable set of circumstances,

- it is essential to tune in to social, cultural, and political moves.
- Be willing (maybe eager) to change and incorporate new understandings.



Gretchen Alterowitz

Gretchen Alterowitz is an artist-scholar-educator whose research focuses on feminist, queer, and democratic dancemaking, performance, and teaching. Her writing is published in *Dance Chronicle*, *Conversations Across the Field of Dance Studies*, *Journal of Dance Education*, and the forthcoming *Oxford Handbook on Contemporary Ballet*. She is Associate Professor of Dance at UNC Charlotte, where she teaches ballet technique, choreography, and dance studies.