

Hello Dance Educators!

Welcome back! I hope your startup has been wonderful! Now that we are in the swing of things, I thought I would share an awesome and easy way I incorporate choreography practice into my dance classes, by using *Choreography Starters*.

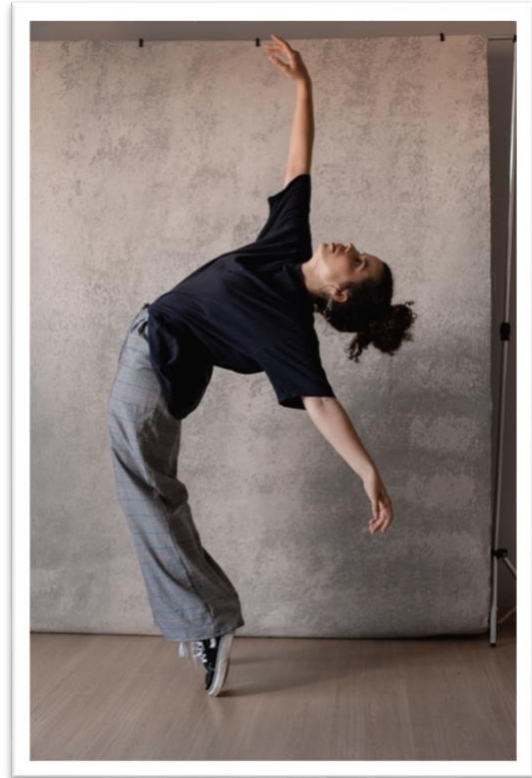
Choreography Starters

Background

This is an exercise that I just recently started integrating into my dance classes. It is something I developed after many years of watching students struggle with the overwhelming panic when they had to begin a piece of choreography. No matter how much we explored improvisation and planned out our choreography there were still so many moments of students freezing and stressing, not knowing how and where to begin and feeling so overwhelmed before finally diving into their choreography. My goal was to adapt my practice for students to engage in more “off the cuff,” low stakes choreography exploration, so they could build more confidence and practice, so that when they did begin choreography for a summative project or performance, they had the vigor and assurance to start.

What is a Choreography Starter

A choreography starter is a prompt given to students, where they jump up and begin a phrase or section of choreography based on the prompt. The prompt is used to get the student out of their own head, and instead engage with a focus on the prompt only. I love these starters, because students know they are just an activity, an exercise, a practice, nothing more. I structure it to my students that we will not continue these past today and the phrase they create is not for marks. This instantly reduces the stress the students feel on creating the most “perfect” choreography.



Benefits of Choreography Starters

- Flexible for class time:
 - You could do this every class, especially if your high school classes are on the longer side, or you could do this once a week or every couple weeks
 - You could spend 5 minutes on this, or 50 minutes, depending on the prompt and structure

- You could do it at any time during your class period: beginning, middle, end
- Flexible for age level, ability, experience, and dance genre. These prompts can be adapted, changed and you could create your own for your own situation and class setting.
- I try to use choreography starters on days when students aren't already doing a lot of movement, like on theory or lecture days. I would often follow up our warmup with a Choreography Starter, to get their brains firing!
- It could be individual, or in groups, this is a great way to encourage students who don't usually work together, because it is low stakes, no marks, the activity duration is short and maybe not even a sharing of these 'pieces'.
- Could be used to share and show each other or just used in a reflection question or as a journal prompt.
- Great for substitute plans, as the substitute would not need to lead any dance or have a background in dance to organize students to work on this exercise.
- Great for days when many students will be away, as these projects don't need to continue past today and to worry about students missing choreography etc.
- You could write a whole bunch of prompts on cue cards and hand them out to each student/group, or pull a random one for the whole class to use
- Extension: Could use these short phrases of choreography the students have created and continue them into a larger piece, the sky's the limit!



Choreography Starter Prompts

Below are a few basic, introductory prompts I have used in my class, to get you started.

- Give everyone the same song (you pick the song), I often find students want to pick the same style of music, so this is a way to integrate some new sounds into their work. And they won't mind trying something new because it's just for today!
 - Some songs I am loving right now:
 - *Ribs* by Lorde
 - *Swift Automaton* by Eluvium
 - *Suite pour Dantan: I. Prelid* by Nathalie Joachim, Spektral Quartet
 - *Falling* by Lyra
 - *Wildfire* by Forest Blakk
 - *These are songs I would use in my high school classes, but as always use these songs with your own discretion.
- Using YouTube Videos as prompts:
 - Use a video with information and knowledge to prompt the beginning of a piece of choreography
 - Prompt: Choose one concept from the video as a focus or starting point for your choreography
 - Eg: *Meet the Artists: Dancing Earth Indigenous Contemporary Dance Creations*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dv5cfgu49sQ>
 - Prompt Eg: Choose an element of the earth to inspire the movement (Eg: a tree: starting as a seed, growing, losing leaves, breaking branches etc.)
- Take a normal daily movement activity: brushing your teeth, walking the dog, emptying the dishwasher and turn it into a choreography phrase (could be more literal or abstract)
 - Now how could you take this phrase and do it on three levels?
 - Could you use repetition to show this activity in different seasons or times of the day or year?

After developing this concept and using it in my classroom, I realized there were other teachers, instructors and choreographers doing this too and there were some great resources online. Here are some:

<https://shannondoolingdances.com/2018/04/18/choreographyadventures1/>
<https://shannondoolingdances.com/2022/06/29/9-choreography-adventures-inspired-by-summer/>
<https://shannondoolingdances.com/2019/03/26/choreographyadventures2/>
<https://dancecurriculumdesigns.com/choreography-prompts-for-movement-invention/>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FhTgeOUSTRo>

I would love to hear from you if you try out some of these prompts out with your students or have created some of your own. Please feel free to email and share your successes or questions about Choreography Starters! I would love to see videos of your dancers'

creating choreography with these starters! As always, please feel free to reach out if you have questions or want to connect at dance@fineartsata.ca.

Keep shining!

Victoria