

Buying Ballet Shoes

With so many ballet shoes to choose from, how do you know which ones are right for you? If you are new to ballet, or if you are buying your child's first pair, the following tips will help you find the perfect pair.

1. Make Sure They Fit

Ballet shoes are designed to enhance the dancer's technique as well as protect the feet and ankles. Many people say that a ballet shoe should fit the foot "like a glove." Although the shoe should fit quite snugly, be careful not to buy them too small. There should be sufficient room in the shoe for moving the toes. When trying on ballet shoes, raise up and balance on the balls of your feet. Your toes should not be crammed into the front of the shoe, but should be relaxed, with plenty of space to move around. If you are struggling between two close sizes, it's probably best to go with a slightly bigger size, rather than buying shoes that are a bit too snug.

2. Consider the Material

Ballet shoes are available in leather and canvas. The material you choose is a matter of personal preference. Leather ballet shoes are more expensive, but are more durable and will probably last longer than the canvas variety. Some people believe that leather ballet shoes accentuate a pointed foot and simply appear more elegant than canvas shoes. However, some dancers prefer the feel of canvas ballet shoes. Canvas shoes are easiest to clean, as they can be thrown right into the washing machine.

Another way to influence your decision is to consider the type of dance floor in which the shoes will be worn. Leather shoes work well with wooden floors, but canvas shoes are better suited to floors made of vinyl.

3. Look at the Sole

Ballet shoes are designed with full-soles or split-soles. Full-sole ballet shoes closely mimic pointe shoes, which is important to dancers that are technically ready to dance on their toes (although dancing on the toes is not recommended without true pointe shoes, and only then if a dancer has gained enough strength and technique.) Half-sole ballet shoes are preferred by some dancers because they allow the foot to create a stronger point, as the sole is split between the heel and the toe. Sole preference is acquired through experience, and rarely makes much of a difference in dancing ability.

4. Check for Elastics

When picking out ballet shoes, keep in mind that some shoes are sold without elastics. Elastics are placed on ballet shoes to secure them to the feet. The elastics are purposely left off the shoe so the dancer can sew them on in exactly the right place, depending on the location of the arch of the foot. If you buy a pair without elastics, you'll have to sew them on yourself. It's not difficult to sew on the elastics, but some dancers, and especially parents of young dancers, prefer to buy them pre-sewn. If you find a pair of ballet shoes with pre-sewn elastics that happen to fit your foot well, consider yourself lucky to avoid threading a needle.