



## Why Take More Ballet Classes?

by Anne Easterling Freifelder

Why should a ballet student take more ballet classes per week? As students approach the age of 8-9 years old, they are at the age when additional training has a significant impact on development.

Most dance students begin to spend more time at the dance studio by the age of 9. At this age children's bodies are strong enough and have sufficiently developed motor skills to begin serious work in ballet, and at the same time their bodies retain malleability to adapt to the demands of ballet. After age 11 or 12, this typically tapers off, as bodies develop and stiffen - "age" sets in. While there are exceptions, most students who hope to master a certain standard of achievement or skill, whether or not they want to be professional, should be taking at least two classes per week by the time that they are age 9.

Ballet is a language, and its development can be compared to humans learning a language. The younger children are when they learn a second language, the less accent their speech has. The same is true to a large extent in ballet, although until the age of 7 or 8, provided that the training is sound, the number of classes a student takes per week does not have an impact on the ultimate level of skill a student develops. Once students reach the age of 8 or 9, however, their development in ballet is much like learning a language. The more they train when they are young, the less "accent" they will have. While there are a few exceptions, the window will begin to close for most students who begin ballet training after the age of 11 or 12 -- they have an "accent" or a stiffness that is apparent.

What I am recommending does not require a student to proclaim an early ambition to be a professional dancer; if a student enjoys ballet and is age 8 or older, taking two or more classes per week will advance development and offer many rewards. The student can always cut back later if interest subsides or other pressures arise, but holding back now with the idea of taking more classes later will make it more difficult to master skills later, and is not an efficient way to train. Multiple classes per week enable students not only to learn new material, but to develop the incredible strength needed to execute the increasingly difficult material. Without extra classes, students are at a far greater risk of experiencing "plateau" where skill development is only maintained and progress stagnates. Multiple classes per week improve strength, muscle memory, and build a solid foundation of technique that will enable the student to grow and become "fluent" in ballet.

It is great to be well-rounded, but testing your limits and achieving a level of excellence in a discipline can be a transformative experience, and that process and the achievement that results will give students an incredible joy and be a source of pride and accomplishment.