

Elements of composition

The elements of composition are an integral part of understanding dance. Equipping students with the skills and confidence to explore what the elements of composition involve will improve students' knowledge and understanding in this area. Students will then have the tools to be able to compose and perform performances of a higher quality, and the ability to better appraise performances.

An activity to help develop this understanding involves using the components of the elements of composition (see table below). This could also be done as a jigsaw activity. Activity description:

- Place the four elements of composition around the room, e.g. space, time, dynamics and relationships
- Give each student or pair a component of the elements including the definition and ask them to go to where they think it fits, e.g. level to space, beat to time, etc.
- Display groupings so students can move to appropriate element of composition (if needed).
- View a dance performance from a popular TV clip and ask students to look for their component throughout the performance, e.g. for level, looking at how the height varies throughout the performance.
- After viewing the clip, ask each group to describe how their element of composition was covered or not covered throughout the performance. Each person can describe their component or the groups can devise a group summary where one person presents.
- Discussion could then be generated on the quality of the performance, how it could have been improved, criteria judges may use to appraise performance and possible feedback suggestions on how to improve a performance.

SPACE (where the body moves)	
Level	The height at which the movement is performed e.g. high, low
Direction	The line of the movement e.g. forward, backward, left, right, diagonal
Pathways/floor patterns	The patterns or designs made in the air or on the floor by the person's movements
Personal space	The space immediately surrounding the person
Performance space	The total area of the performance and/or the performance area of the individual or group

TIME (when the body moves)	
Beat	A single element of measured time
Rhythm	The variety and patterns of the beat e.g. simple, complex, regular, irregular
Tempo	Speed of the beat e.g. fast, slow
Phrasing	The fitting of dance figures to the rhythm and/or melody of the music
Rhythmic sequences	The way the beats are organised

DYNAMICS (how the body moves)	
Energy	The muscular tension used to move e.g. from a little to a lot
Force/weight	The strength of the movement e.g. light, heavy, strong or weak
Qualities of movement	Characteristics of movement e.g. flowing, jerky, stop-start
Even rhythm	Movements of equal duration e.g. walks
Duration	The length of time needed to complete a movement

RELATIONSHIPS (what or who you move with)	
Groupings	How groups of performers are moving e.g. solo or whole group
Spatial	How performers move within and around others' personal space e.g. over, under, around, supported by other performers
Interaction	The ways performers relate to others in a composition e.g. leading, following, meeting, parting, passing by
Individual	Correspondence or connection of a dancer's body parts to each other
Objects	Correspondence or connection to props in a performance

Adapted from <http://www.sasked.gov.sk.ca/docs/artsed/dance102030/danceappdxb.html> and <http://www.curriculumsupport.education.nsw.gov.au/secondary/creativearts/dance/index.htm>