Jessica Tatum

The Washington Ballet Summer Intensive:

Honors Experience Daily Journal

Week 1

**6/22/25**

Classes: Nutrition Seminar, Barre, Placement Class → Level 9

**6/23/15**

Classes: Ballet Technique, Pointe, Coaching, Workshop, Jazz

Corrections:

* Think of dancing with color, texture, and sound
* Twist and extend through the Thoracic spine, not just the Lumbar
* The Cervical Spine is the most mobile part of the spine, so use it!
* Think of cross-body connections whenever you move through space
* To execute a correct Balanchine style turn: push off from a straight back leg in line with your 5th position, push your opposite arm back so that, when closing, you don’t have to open the leading arm, only close the opposite quickly

**6/24/15**

Classes: Pilates, Ballet Technique, Pointe, Workshop, Flamenco Workshop

Corrections:

* In corps work, be sure to hit each position with clarity on the correct count; otherwise the piece as a whole looks messy.
* In Flamenco, each movement, including the circling of the hands, must have intention behind it, almost an accent

**6/25/15**

Classes: Ballet Technique, Variations, Pas de deux, Workshop, Modern

Corrections :

* In an assisted pirouette, keep your weight pulled up and forward over your leg so that you don’t fall back into your partner. No sinking into the hyper-extension!
* In a single arm promenade en pointe, continually think of turning out your bottom leg to maintain the shape of your body as you turn. Additionally, keep your shoulders parallel to your partner, your back engaged to maintain the shape and height of the leg (especially in attitude), and your chest and arm immobile and strong – pushing against your partners hand.
* The Paul Taylor modern technique is rooted in graham technique, but tends to be more free and expressive (ie. leans toward postmodern choreography)

I’m struggling to find a new Pointe shoe that will show off my foot better than my Russians, which are very supportive but seem to limit the articulation of the arch, and separate me from the floor in a way that makes it hard to balance. I like the Suffolks that I have switched to in terms of addressing these problems, but the construction seems to be more inconsistent, with some shoes having a more rounded-off box which makes partnering difficult.

**6/26/15**

Classes: Ballet Technique, Pointe, Workshop, Choreography

Corrections:

* Keep your arms fluid in contrast to fast footwork combinations at the barre. This provided neuromuscular preparation for effortless petite allegro in the center
* Keep your ribs closed and chest lifted, not one or the other
* When presenting your arms a la Bourneville, open the hands out slightly, as if presenting a gift

Week 2

**6/29/15**

Classes: Pilates, Ballet Technique, Pointe, Workshop, Flamenco Workshop

Corrections:

* In Balanchine technique, the arms more often go through first/pass through the center line of the body when moving from one position to another, especially arabesque (as opposed to simply reaching a straight arm up and out)

A note on networking; I’m trying this week to be outgoing and friendly with the teachers here. I feel like it’s important to remember that even if you’re not sure how it will help, you should never pass up an opportunity to make yourself memorable to a teacher. To this end, I approached my technique teacher this week to see if she remembered me from previous classes I took with her at another studio. I’m happy to say she did. It just reinforces how small the ballet world is, and how important references and a good reputation can be to eventually securing a job.

**6/30/15**

Classes: Ballet Technique, Variations, Coaching, Workshop, Jazz

Corrections:

* Focus on the articulation and turn-out of the lower leg, not just through the foot.
* Clean footwork combined with coordinated port de bras = complete performance and professionalism

I’m icing my feet every night now in order to control swelling from the large amount of pointe work. Finding that this works best in small containers and gradually increasing the amount of ice to make the pain bearable.

**7/1/15**

Classes: Ballet Technique, Pas de deux, Coaching, Workshop, Modern

Corrections:

* Once your partner takes you off balance, you cannot, and should not do anything but maintain a rigid/strong shape. Everything else is completely his responsibility.
* Don’t bourre or shift you weight/position when being partnered, because it makes it much more difficult for the guy to feel if you are on your leg.
* Don’t be tentative with your partner. You have to trust them fully and just go for it.
* When in a properly placed graham contraction, the placement of your shoulders over your hips should not change.

**7/2/15**

Classes: Ballet Technique, Variations, Coaching, Workshop, Modern

Corrections:

* In the Bourneville style, foot work is extremely important, together with musical phrasing, accented and elongated balances (derived from a time when it was a BIG deal to stand in Pointe shoes), and presentation of the arms toward the audience.
* In a petite jete, get to coupe as quickly as possible to form the shape in the air.
* Simplify the pathways and expressions of the arms; they don’t need to be convoluted in order to be fancy

**7/3/15**

Classes: Ballet Technique, Coaching, Choreography

Corrections:

* When performing a traveling sissone into an entre la six, make sure to accompany the increased height of the jump with fast legs, the working one beating front-back-front clearly.
* DON’T give up or assume you can’t do it. Push yourself

A note on demanding teachers; you cannot allow yourself to become discouraged when taking these classes. They push you to be flawless, which, as difficult as it often is, is so valuable. You can give nothing less than your absolute best. The best way to get through these classes is to give everything – work harder than you think is possible- because there is so much you can learn if you decide to be receptive of their criticisms.

Week 3

**7/6/15**

Classes: Pilates, Ballet Technique, Pointe, Workshop, Flamenco Workshop

Corrections:

* When warming up, don’t stretch to your fullest and don’t hold for more than a few seconds. This could damage the connective tissues in your joints since your muscles are not yet warm enough to stretch properly.
* Don’t be afraid to incline your upper body in stylistic port de bras, just make sure to keep your core strong and your lower body in line; as in a brise.

Vaganova-style teachers seem to be, as a general rule, very insistent that you adhere strictly to their technical specifications, regardless of your previous training.

**7/7/15**

Classes: Ballet Technique, Variations, Coaching, Workshop, Jazz

Corrections:

* It may seem rudimentary, but remember to follow your hand(s) with your hand, as this is what drives the rest of the port de bras and ultimately, the proper coordination of the upper and lower body
* Pay very close attention when a teacher is demonstrating a combo; not only to memorize the steps, but to take note of the nuances demonstrated therein. This will help to fix technical/artistic problems before they begin
* Just because it’s the end of the day, it’s still important to remain respectful and focused in non-ballet classes/rehearsals

**7/8/15**

Classes: Ballet Technique, Pointe, Workshop, Flamenco Workshop

Corrections:

* Focus on connection between the upper and lower body and presentation to the audience for all movements
* Make the upper body “human” as opposed to robotic. Breathe through it instead of just snapping to the position without using the head.
* In flamenco, the arms remain held in place even as the wrists circle use the strength in the arms and positions from ballet, but don’t allow the arms to react to movement as they would in ballet

**7/9/15**

Classes: Ballet Technique, Pointe, Coaching, Workshop, Modern

Corrections:

* In petite allegro, consider not pointing your feet underneath/bringing your heels above the center line of the foot, instead roll through the arches heel-ball-toe and push the toes out. This way you don’t have to flex your feet slightly in order to land. This will also lessen the noise impact when landing

I injured my back today in Modern class; it feels like the same thing that happened this past March, when I locked a Facet Joint in my Lumbar Spine. If I ever do Graham bison runs again, I need to be exceedingly careful and hold my back. I should know more after my Physical Therapy appointment next week.

**7/10/15**

Classes: Ballet Technique, Flamenco Workshop, Choreography, Injury

Prevention Lecture

Corrections:

* None. I’m sitting out of class today – sigh – but I don’t want to hurt myself any worse for a simple ballet class.

To summarize the ironically timed lecture, the time to care for your body is not after and injury occurs, but rather before. Identify the flaws in your technique or body dynamics that predispose you to a certain type of injury (like my scoliosis contributing to more back problems, or my knees not lining up properly with my toes – contributing to pain there) and strengthen them. Don’t work through sharp pain, or pain outside of the day-to-day aches that come from being a dancer. This can make a minor issue flare up into something more serious that will ultimately keep you out of things for even longer. A single pirouette is not worth your career.

Week 4

**7/13/15**

Classes: Pilates, Ballet Technique, Pointe, Workshop, Flamenco Workshop

Corrections:

* If your lower back is hurting (yup) when performing strengthening exercises prone, fold up a sweatshirt and place it under your bellybutton
* Tennis balls are great for rolling out the tight muscles in your back and hips
* In piques, the lift needs to be distinct and accented, especially in doubles, where the first movement up and down is often indiscernible
* Keep your hips square and your leg shooting out straight to the front in traveling fondu to pointe

**7/14/15**

Classes: Ballet Technique, Pointe, Coaching, Workshop, Jazz

Corrections:

* In a soutenu, be sure to not only hit fifth position before turning, but also to think of sliding your pointed/shaped foot along the floor to get to the position (instead of jumping up onto the box of the pointe shoe)

At this point I’m fairly convinced that slow Balanchine tempos are fast to everyone else.

**7/15/15**

Classes: Ballet Technique, Pointe, Coaching, Workshop, Flamenco Workshop

Corrections:

* In fouette turns, really focus on bringing the same arm as your standing leg around quickly and with strength so as to keep the momentum up and the back engaged and supportive

My experience so far this summer has been much different than at my previous intensive, mostly, I think, because I am in the top level instead of the middle level of students. It’s easy for someone in the top level to look down on everyone else that isn’t, and it limits the connections you are able to make with your peers. Beyond that, the decision of level placement can be incredibly subjective, and placement in a lower level does not automatically make one dancer worse than another. Even though I’ve missed out on most of the inter-level interactions since I’m not living in the dorms, I can see the results of the strong friendships forged with those in other levels while dancers live together.

**7/16/15**

Classes: Ballet Technique, Pointe, Coaching, Workshop, Modern

Corrections:

* Turn-out is probably one of the most important parts of a fouette turn, competing only with lower leg strength. Be sure to keep your hips under and rotated throughout without sacrificing getting up and over your leg.

Physical Therapy: I have hypertrophied muscles along the right side of my spine and back due to minor scoliosis. This, combined with a tendency to hinge at the L1/2 vertebrae whenever I extend my spine is what is causing the recurring stiffness and inflammation in the facet joint. To help reduce the likelihood of this continuing to happen, my best bet is to re-learn how to extend through my entire back, not just at that one level in my lumbar spine. I can also utilize rolling to help relax the overdeveloped muscles on my right side in tandem with anti-inflammatory medication for acute flare-ups.

**7/17/15**

Classes: Ballet Technique, Pointe, Choreography, Choreography presentation

Corrections:

* (a choreographic note) When dancing with a prop onstage, be sure to interact with it in a meaningful way that contributes to the success or depth of the dance. If you’re going to go to all the trouble of bringing it with you, it should be an integral part of the choreography; otherwise it serves no purpose except to distract the audience from your dancing.

Working in a large group to create a piece of focused choreography is, in my opinion, one of the hardest things a dancer can be asked to do. Furthermore, the larger and more diverse the group, the more difficult it is to synthesize these diverse movement qualities and perspectives into a piece with clear purpose and cohesion. This is, of course, exactly the task assigned to us. In many ways I think there were just too many roadblocks, that we only had about 4-5 hours to do so, we could not work alone in a room with control over the music, and in the first few weeks, we could not communicate with two of our group members without a translator. (They were from Japan) On the other hand, I have found all the similarities and differences in my group member’s movement styles very interesting. We have all come from such different training backgrounds that our approaches to creating movement are completely different. For me, it also brings up some interesting thoughts about how language affects dance. I mean, sure, dance is definitely a universal way of communicating the basics of human emotion, but what about more complex storylines? But I’m rambling… the bottom line to all of this is I’m disappointed that we didn’t have the time or energy as a group to explore such interesting questions when creating our choreography.

Week 5

**7/20/15**

Classes: Ballet Technique, Pas de Deux, Flamenco Workshop, Workshop

Corrections :

* (final notes on flamenco) There is an inherent sensuality in the movement, and it’s meant to allow a dancer to really strut their stuff. For the men, this means that the pelvis is carried slightly forward of the rest of the body, and for women, the chest.

Today we took class from the Artistic Director of the Washington Ballet, Septime Webre. I was so nervous! This is the guy that hires dancers for the company, a fact not easily forgotten by any student with professional aspirations. Even though I have already committed to remaining another year at the University of Cincinnati, I still hope that I was memorable – in a good way of course.

Today was also my last partnering class of the summer. Even with just 4 over the course of the 5 weeks, I feel much more confident and secure in my partnering ability, even if my amount of experience still leaves something to be desired. I have a better kinesthetic knowledge of the “his needs-her needs” of partnering, so I can let my partner know what I need and give him what he needs in order for the partnership to succeed.

**7/21/15**

Classes: Ballet Technique, Variations, Workshop

Corrections: performance notes from Alonzo King himself, the original choreographer of the level 9 workshop piece.

* Think of your movement as lightning striking space
* Stop thinking about yourself and get lost in the movement

**7/22/15**

Classes: Ballet Technique, Pointe, Dress Rehearsal

Corrections :

* Put intention and hard work behind each movement, you can’t just coast on your accumulated technique even if you’re having an off day.
* Think of flattening the front and inside of the thigh in passé in order to more fully engage your leg (it looks better too).
* Cross the legs in battement front and back; in line with your fifth
* Footwork must be precise. For example, when preparing for a adagio fouete on demi-pointe or pointe, be sure to hit a clear sousou along the way.
* Be aware that the arms are constantly passing through and utilizing classical positions (except for by a choreographer’s discretion)
* Work the outside line of the foot and the intrinsic muscles of the toes to help balance the strength of the foot for pointe work.

**7/23/15**

Classes: Ballet Technique/Warm-up, Performances 1 & 2

**7/24/15**

Classes: Ballet Technique/Warm-up, Performances 3 & 4

The best cure for stage fright is laughter.

Dance each performance like it is your last, because in the ballet world, you never know when it will be. When in doubt, return to and remember why you love to dance.