

November 2010

MODERN spotlight

HOW TO Hinge

LEARN THE PROPER TECHNIQUE FOR THIS CRUCIAL MODERN MOVE. By Jenny Dalzell

You see it everywhere in contemporary and modern choreography. It's the "wow" step that takes you from standing to the floor with just a simple bend of the knees: the hinge.

The hinge's roots date back to the 1930s when Lester Horton began to establish his approach to modern dance. He created six exercises (Hinge Studies) focused on the step. Today, the Horton tradition is carried by Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater (Ailey was Horton's student). "If you watch Ailey's *Revelations*, you can see at least two of the studies," says Ana Marie Forsythe, co-director of the Ailey/Fordham BFA Program at The Ailey School in NYC. DS consulted Forsythe to bring you a complete guide to the hinge.



1 START SMALL

Before trying a full-out hinge, familiarize yourself with the proper alignment by practicing the move on your knees.



Start on your knees in an upright position with your toes tucked under and your arms by your sides. Feel your torso being lifted by your abdominal muscles and imagine your pelvis dropping through the floor while keeping the natural curve in your lower spine.

Maintain your alignment as you lean back as far as your quadriceps allow. The angle to which you can tilt depends on the length of your quadriceps; don't compromise alignment for a deeper hinge.



Engage your abdominal muscles and glutes to return to the upright position, always keeping your torso straight.

2 THE REAL DEAL

After you're comfortable with a kneeling hinge, you're ready to try it from a standing position.

Begin in parallel with your feet hip-width apart and arms at your sides. Engage your abdominal muscles and elongate your neck so that your head pulls away from the end of your spine. Press your knees forward over your toes—your body will lean back to compensate for the weight shift.

Use your stomach and inner thigh muscles to hold your torso in a straight line.

TIP: Check your body position in a mirror



Although you're descending, use your abs to lift your torso upward in opposition. Keep your head in the same position it was in while you were standing.

Practice at the barre to help maintain proper alignment.

TIP: Imagine an airplane landing. It glides forward, hovering above the ground, descending incrementally.



As you approach the ground, continue to press your knees forward and lengthen your torso.



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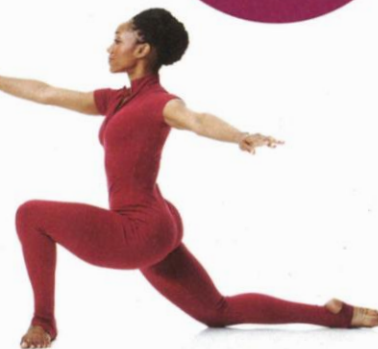
3 FINISHING TOUCH

There are different ways to complete a hinge. Sometimes the step is part of a choreography sequence, so you'll transition into another move. While practicing the hinge, try this easy and elegant finish.



Once you've descended as far as possible, engage your glutes, and, on a breath, lift the torso forward. Windmill your arms to gain momentum so you can step through on one foot.

Lean forward into a lunge, then push off your front foot to return to a standing position.



TIP: After you've descended, your knees might not touch the floor, depending on the length of your quadriceps. If so, lift your body slightly to accommodate the quads.

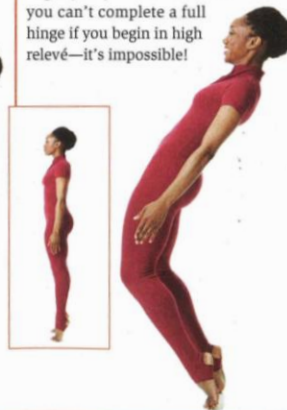
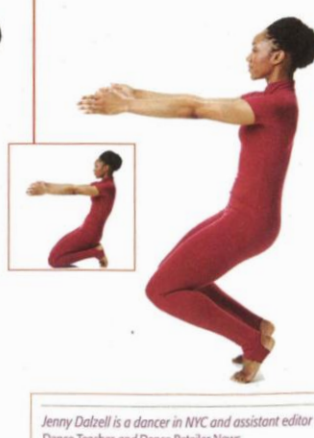
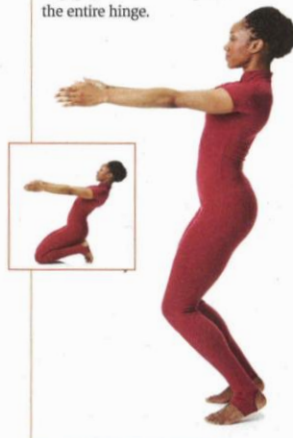
COMMON MISTAKES

When performed correctly, the hinge is a dazzling feat of strength. But doing the hinge without proper technique can cause injuries.

Don't arch your back. This places a huge amount of stress on your lumbar vertebrae—a recipe for injury. To avoid arching, engage your abs throughout the entire hinge.

Don't drop your abs or let your pelvis sink. Make sure you lengthen the torso.

Don't initiate the hinge with a relevé. When done properly, your heels will lift slightly as you descend. But you can't complete a full hinge if you begin in high relevé—it's impossible!



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Visit dancespirit.com/videos to see a step-by-step hinge demonstration by Demetia Hopkins.