

Pointe Shoe Guidance for Beginners

There are lots of different types of pointe shoes and some preparatory steps for one type, will not necessarily apply to another.

As a dancer, I used Bloch's when with the Australian Ballet and Freed's when I moved to Europe and both had different preparation regimes!

I never used elastic and it shouldn't be necessary, however if after your first lesson you find the backs were slipping off and wetting them didn't keep them on, you may wish to do so. If you've splashed out on Gaynor Mindens, which don't allow a lot of flexibility to go through your demi-pointe - and thus, not a shoe I'd recommend - you will probably need to sew elastics.

Ribbons: fold the fabric at the back of the shoe (the part that touches your heel at the base of your Achilles tendon) down toward the hard base of the shoe to make a triangle; where the corners are at the sides is where you should sew the ribbons...this will be at the highest point of the arch in your foot. Elastics should not be sewn much further back than this...if they are too close to your achilles it may aggravate the tendons.

The inside ribbon (the one closest the arch of your foot) will be a little longer than the outside one as this wraps round your ankle a little further (twice) so that the ribbons are tied on the inside in a knot and tucked into the little indent behind your inside ankle bone. Only leave enough ribbon for this so you don't have too much to tuck in. (Do not tuck the ribbon at the back as this will damage your achilles)

You can burn the edges of the ribbons to prevent fraying prior to sewing them. Once you've tied your shoes, you can then trim the excess and burn the other end of the ribbon to prevent fraying (perhaps remove the shoe first just in case!!)

Bloch shoes have come a long way since I used them in the 80's but they are still quite a hard and durable shoe. You'll need to squash these with your heel a bit to soften the vamp area. Just drop them to the floor and stand on them. (We used to jam them in the corner of a door, however I am not advocating this!)

Freed shoes mould to your foot as opposed to the other way around and allow you to work through your demi pointe and really articulate your foot so it looks like an extension of your foot, rather than a brick!

They will eventually go soft at the tip of the toe but shellac, a liquid you brush / gently pour into the toe of your shoes, will solve that...Paintworks round the corner from SPACe sells it. It's a varnish that dries overnight and will harden the end of your shoes up nicely which is important to avoid bruising your toenails. If you can feel the floor through your shoe when on pointe, you'll be in pain!

Your shoes will take quite a bit of time to go soft so don't be put off by this process.

(Although not as durable as Bloch shoes, I had a pair of Freed that I named Ever & Lasting as they just kept reviving themselves thanks to shellac....they were used for Coppelia - involving hops on pointe - then painted green for A Midsummer Night's Dream, then yellow for Magic Flute, and then back to pink and used for daily class!!)

Steaming the toes of your shoes (no more than 5 seconds) over a boiling kettle will help you work them in. Make sure you give it a few seconds to cool before sliding your foot inside as it will be hot, then walk round the house in them for 10 mins or so. It's the top part of the shoe which is around the toes that you want to soften a little, not the tips of the toes.

The backs will need some gentle bending back and forth. If you've bought a shoe with a thick back such as some Bloch and Freed styles, you may like to use a stanley knife to shave the ridges off so that your foot is flatter on the floor when standing rather than rocking from side to side. You can also score the outer sole of your shoes so as to gain more grip on the floor. Some people darn their shoes for longevity but this shouldn't be necessary at this stage.

Other brands include Grishko, Sansha, Capezio, Repetto.....

Prepping your toes:

As a child, I was told to dab methylated spirit on my toes to harden the skin up. This may create friction in the shoe however and in fact keeping your toes pliable is a better idea. Please invest in some arnica cream...you can buy it at chemists and health shops. You will want to have a soak in the bath after class and massaging arnica cream into your toes afterwards works a treat at relieving any bruising while you get used to pointework.

Please cut your toenails!!!

I would also advise against wearing nailpolish as this hardens the toenails and can cause pain and bruising as a result.

You will need some cushioning inside your shoe and may have been sold ouch-pouches with your shoes...I'm a lambswool fan but either is fine. Try not to stuff too much inside your shoe as again, this will cause unnecessary friction.

If you have bony toes, you may like to tape them to prevent rubbing (rubbing can cause blisters and blood) though I never did this and I think it's a method that's been used more commonly in recent years so can't really comment.

Finally if you haven't bought shoes yet, please be fitted in a few shops before choosing as one make may suit you better than another...allow plenty of time for this expedition! The shops are all in Covent Garden...Freed, Bloch, Dancia (which stocks a selection of makes), Capezio, Sansha.

We will have a look at your shoes before you put them on in the first lesson to check they are in order.

Please can you start to do some releve' exercises every couple of days in preparation and some foot articulation exercises like splaying your toes with a flexed foot and working through the foot to point it. (From first position, plié, stretch, rise, lower slowly on straight legs; repeat; then plie' releve' x 3; repeat on one leg with the other in cou de pied derriere)

Another good exercise for the arch of the foot is to sit with the foot flat on the floor and keeping the toes flat, pull them towards your heel so that you feel the arch working.

Click [here](https://youtu.be/O3Fbu4x_wCg) for an insightful video, or paste this into your browser: https://youtu.be/O3Fbu4x_wCg

You won't need to go to such lengths as a beginner but some of the ways to break your shoes in and sew them, will be useful.