All forms of dance require efficient arm work for power, aesthetics, balance, and momentum. Your arms are vital for turns and changes in direction. Teachers and choreographers may tell you, “Isolate your arms from your shoulders” and “Keep your shoulders down,” but do you really understand those cues? The focus of this chapter is efficiency of movement within the shoulder complex through scapular stability. Once you understand the coordination of arm movement with the upper body, your shoulders will be more secure so your arms, elbows, and wrists can move freely with style and grace.

The shoulder joint is an intricate and very mobile joint, and the muscle control is just as intricate. The elbow and wrist allow for even more detailed movement to create fluidity when you move your arms from one position to the next. Strengthening the muscles that control the shoulder will help you move more from your center. Male dancers need this control for lifting, and female dancers need it for coordinated movements. Even though the majority of injuries that you sustain are lower-extremity injuries, the shoulder should not be forgotten and deserves its own share of the attention.

**Bony Anatomy**

The bones that make up the shoulder complex are the clavicle (collar bone), scapula (shoulder blade), and humerus (upper arm). The humerus continues down to the elbow joint where it meets the radius and ulna. The radius and ulna continue down to meet the carpal (wrist), metacarpal (hand), and phalanges (fingers). See figure 5.1.

The clavicle bone of the chest forms a joint at the medial portion where it meets the sternum. The outer end of the clavicle meets a small bony protrusion called the acromion process of the scapula. The clavicle bones together create a beautiful line across the front of the sternum and are clearly seen through the skin. This is typically where instructors will guide you to open the front of the chest, the remarkable sensation of presenting yourself to the audience.

The scapula is the triangular-shaped bone that glides along the back of your ribs. It has a shallow socket where the humerus bone inserts; this is called the glenoid cavity. The scapula has an anterior surface (which lies against the ribs) and a posterior surface (which has a slightly elevated portion called the spine). The end of the spine of the scapula becomes the acromion process. There is one other bony protrusion called the coracoid process, which is important for its numerous muscle attachments. The scapula itself is an amazing bone; it has numerous muscle attachments and functions as an anchor for your shoulder.
Key Joint Motion

Although there are several joints related to the shoulder complex that can create movement, our focus is on two joints in particular: the scapulothoracic joint (where the scapula meets the thoracic spine) and the glenohumeral joint (where the humerus bone meets the glenoid cavity). In its position against the ribs, the scapula can elevate, depress (travel downward), abduct (move away from the center), and adduct (move toward the center). This bone can also curve upward or move in a downward rotational pattern. You have seen winging of the scapula—this is created by the inside corner of the scapula protruding outward, giving the upper back a look of having small wings. Some young, lean female dancers with minor muscular imbalances will display this winging of the scapula. This happens because of muscle weakness and the entire scapula not lying in contact with the rib cage.

The glenoid cavity is a ball-and-socket joint that is held together by strong muscles. This is a relatively strong joint, but it has a shallow cavity—only one-third to one-fourth of the humeral head fits snugly into the cavity. The glenohumeral joint is capable of flexion and extension in the sagittal plane, abduction and adduction in the frontal plane, and internal and external rotation in the transverse plane. This joint can also move in horizontal abduction and...
adduction. Since the glenohumeral joint is not very deep, stability is important for reducing your risk of injury.

Take a moment to lift your shoulders up and down. Visualize the movement occurring at each scapula and the ribs. Move your arms to your sides and down again along the frontal plane. Visualize the scapular movement as it lies on the ribs. Rotate your humerus bone within the glenoid cavity; note the range of motion at this joint. The muscles that create movement at the glenohumeral joint connect between the humerus and the scapula. The muscles that allow movement to occur around the scapula connect between the scapula and the humerus, sternum, clavicle, spine, and ribs. Strengthening the muscles that attach around the scapula will improve upper-body placement and shoulder alignment and allow the forces of energy and extreme range of motion to be distributed more efficiently through the glenohumeral joint. This will give you better control and help you move more from your center. The basic warm-up that each dance technique requires is not enough for shoulder stability. This is why there are so many shoulder exercises included in this chapter; use them for warm-ups and for strengthening.

The joints between the humerus and the ulna and between the humerus and the radius work together as a hinge joint. A hinge-plus-rotary movement occurs where the lower ends of the radius and ulna meet the carpal bones. This allows for pronation (moving the palm down) or supination (moving the palm up). For some dancers, hyperextension at the elbow (excessive movement past extension) occurs when the arm and forearm are in a straight line. Hyperextension can create stress on the ligaments, especially when falling on an extended elbow. It’s important for you to balance the strength between the elbow flexors and extensors to help control the motion at the elbow joint. This principle also comes into play with the numerous bones in the wrist. The scaphoid bone in particular is at risk for injury during a fall and is difficult to see on an X-ray. Balancing flexibility and muscle tone along the forearm provides the beautiful fluidity needed for an elegant port de bras, creative contemporary arm work, strong partnering skills, and gesturing movements.

**Muscle Mechanics**

The beauty and style of your port de bras come from balanced and powerful shoulder musculature. You know how inspiring it is to create unique designs with your arms, but do you know how to create the designs? Again, understanding which muscles activate will give you a better understanding of that movement. A better understanding means more quality and less quantity of movement.

**Rotator Cuff**

To understand the mechanics, let’s break down the two primary joints that create movement within the shoulder. The glenohumeral joint is stabilized
by four deep muscles called the rotator cuff muscles (figure 5.2a). They are the supraspinatus, infraspinatus, teres minor, and subscapularis. Their attachments connect the humeral head with the scapula and allow for stability, some rotational movement, and abduction. The supraspinatus, infraspinatus, and teres minor work together to create an amazing force that keeps the shoulder joint secure so each time you lift your arms, your humerus bone will not pinch against the acromion. If the rotator cuff muscles are weak, the force will be ineffective in creating security for your shoulder joint. This chronic pinching produces pain and swelling and can lead to a condition called impingement syndrome.

**Scapula**

You have learned that the scapula moves in many planes. When the humerus begins to move, it rises first, followed by the scapula. For example, when lifting your arm into forward flexion, you have approximately 45 to 60 degrees of glenohumeral movement before the scapula begins to move. When lifting your arm to the side, you have about 30 degrees of glenohumeral movement before the scapula moves. The ratio of glenohumeral movement to scapula movement is 2 to 1. Your shoulder blade and upper arm must work together within this ratio to keep the humerus bone from pinching against the acromion. If the muscles that connect to the scapula are weak, the scapula will be ineffective in its job of creating control for your shoulder joint. If you work on strengthening the following muscles, the scapula will have a better chance of being the anchor for your arm movements.

Specific muscles play an essential role in upper-body placement and are responsible for anchoring the scapula and creating efficient movement (figure 5.2a). The trapezius muscle originates at the base of the skull; all cervical and thoracic vertebrae insert on the lateral clavicle, upper acromion, and upper scapular spine. The trapezius is divided into upper, middle, and lower segments. If the upper trapezius is stronger than the other two segments, the shoulders will elevate, creating tension, imbalance, and fatigue. This tension can throw off jumps, turns, and balancing combinations. The lower and middle segments of this muscle are responsible for bringing the shoulder blades down and inward, creating balance. When you need to pull your shoulders down, think about gliding the scapulae down. When you are turning, lifting a partner, holding props, or raising your arms, you can still think about gliding the scapulae down.

The levator scapulae and the rhomboid are muscles located under the trapezius. They originate along various cervical and thoracic vertebrae and insert into the inside edge of the scapula. Because of the attachment location, these muscles can elevate the scapula and create downward rotation. The serratus anterior muscle connects ribs 8 and 9 to the scapula, and the pectoralis minor connects ribs 2 through 5 to the scapula (figure 5.2b). The levator scapulae and rhomboid also provide significant movement for the scapula. The winging scapula is related to weakness of the serratus anterior and lower trapezius muscles.
Figure 5.2  (a) Muscles of the scapula and rotator cuff. (b) Muscles of attachment.
**Glenohumeral Muscles**

The muscles that connect the humerus bone to the trunk are responsible for the larger dynamic movements of your arms. The pectoralis major is the large muscle in the front of your chest that connects the sternum, clavicle, and various ribs to the humerus bone (figure 5.3a). The pectoralis major can pull your arms forward and together. In almost all turning combinations, the arms will be pulled inward by the pectoralis major. This will generate some of the coordinated power for the turn.

![Figure 5.3](image)

The deltoid muscle divides into three sections: anterior, middle, and posterior. Each prospective section creates movement to the front, side, or back. Hiding under the pectoralis major and anterior deltoid is the coracobrachialis, a small muscle but still capable of producing shoulder flexion and adduction.

The latissimus dorsi is the large muscle of the back that connects the humerus to the last six vertebrae of the thoracic spine, the five lumbar vertebrae, the ilium, the sacrum, and the lower three ribs (figure 5.3b). This muscle creates adduction, internal rotation, extension, and humerus depression. Now you can see how significant each muscle of the shoulder complex is, and you can understand how important it is to balance the strength and flexibility of the muscles that create all of the detailed and elaborate movements that dance choreography will put you through.

**Arm Muscles**

The elbow joint can flex and extend; it is controlled by specific muscles that create those movements. The biceps brachii flexes the elbow and connects the scapula with the radius bone (figure 5.4a). The triceps extends the elbow

![Diagram of arm muscles]
Figure 5.4 Muscles of the upper arm: (a) biceps; (b) triceps.

Figure 5.5 Muscles of the forearm: (a) flexors; (b) extensors.
and the shoulder; it connects the scapula and upper humerus with the ulna bone (figure 5.4b). The biceps and triceps both have more than one originating attachment referred to as heads. The biceps has two heads of attachments and the triceps has three heads of attachments. Hiding under the biceps is the brachialis; it connects the lower humerus with the ulna.

The forearm musculature allows for pronation and supination as well as flexion and extension of the wrist (figure 5.5). Strengthening these various small muscles is important for some of the extreme choreography. In some cases, you are asked to stand on your hands, lift other dancers, and fall on your hands. Forearm strength is important for holding props and partnering skills. Many of the various styles of couples dancing require coordinated movements of the hands and the forearms. The exercises in this chapter will stabilize the shoulder, elbow, and wrist.

**Carriage of Arms**

In classical ballet, carriage of the arms is termed *port de bras*, but in every dance style carriage of the arms completes the movement. All classical ballet port de bras should move with fluidity but must incorporate scapular stability. When the arms move up into a high fifth position, the anterior deltoid and the pectoralis major are the primary movers; the scapula must stabilize and move in an upward rotational pattern, not elevate. The serratus anterior and the lower trapezius must activate to allow the balanced movement of the scapula and humerus. You have a tendency to lift the arms with limited control, allowing the humerus and scapula to elevate and, in turn, overusing the upper trapezius muscles. Remember your 2-to-1 ratio; think about stabilizing the scapula and engaging the lower trapezius and serratus anterior; then allow the humerus to move freely. This strategy is universal for all dance technique and training. The contemporary jazz movements that occur in hip-hop choreography would require the same 2-to-1 principle.

Irish dancers, again, dance primarily with the arms planted neatly at their sides. Their upper bodies must be secure; their scapulae must be anchored to their posterior ribs. Since the elbows are fully extended, the triceps must be strong. To keep the arms securely at their sides, the pectoralis major must hold firm in an isometric contraction. All of the scapular muscles are contracted to stabilize the shoulder blades.

Traditional modern dance takes the arms past their normal range of motion. Your arms will be expected to perform in flexion, extension, internal and external rotation, and variations of all of these positions. Let’s examine what happens when you move your arm and shoulder into extension. The posterior deltoid and the latissimus dorsi contract and the scapula needs to rotate downward and adduct slightly; therefore, the rhomboid and lower trapezius need to contract. Now you can see how important it is to strengthen the muscles throughout the upper body.
Dance-Focused Exercise

In most cases, as a dancer, your serratus anterior, rhomboid, and lower trapezius muscles have a tendency to be weak. A lot of exercises in this chapter have additional repetitions to improve your strength. Do not increase the repetitions if you are unable to maintain excellent form. Focus on the alignment of the shoulder joint and ease in the neck and upper shoulders. Use the breathing patterns from chapter 3 to incorporate your core into the exercises. When breathing, remind yourself to move the ribs in a three-dimensional pattern. Once you begin to feel stronger, you will find yourself working more efficiently from your center. Your instructors will also see improvement in how you incorporate corrections from their cueing.

When you receive a cue similar to “Isolate your arms from your shoulders,” remember that your scapula has numerous muscular attachments that allow for control so that the humerus, elbow, and wrist can move freely. When you hear “Get your shoulders down,” focus less on the upper trapezius and focus more on the lower trapezius, serratus anterior, and rhomboids. If you are struggling with what to do with those winging scapulae, focus on exercising the lower trapezius and the serratus anterior.
External and Internal Rotation

External rotation: start position.

External rotation: finish position.

Internal rotation: start position.

Internal rotation: finish position.

Infraspinatus
Teres minor

Subscapularis
Execution for External Rotation

1. Sit in a chair. Elbows are flexed at 90 degrees and by your sides. Your forearms are forward with palms facing inward. Hold an elastic band taut in both hands. Inhale to prepare, and glide the shoulder blades down.

2. On exhalation, begin to externally rotate your arms against the resistance of the band, keeping your elbows snug against your waist. Hold for 2 to 4 counts and feel the strength within your shoulder joint. Open the front of the chest.

3. As you inhale, slowly return with control, keeping the shoulder blades down. Repeat 12 times, working up to 3 sets of 12.

Execution for Internal Rotation

1. Use the same starting position as for external rotation, but reverse the resistance band, having the resistance coming from the outside. Inhale to prepare, keeping the shoulder blades down.

2. As you exhale, pull inward against the resistance of the band. Hold 2 to 4 counts, maintaining elbows at the waist.

3. Inhale to return with control. Repeat 12 times, working up to 3 sets of 12.

Muscles Involved

- **External rotation**: Teres minor, infraspinatus
- **Internal rotation**: Subscapularis

Dance Focus

Dance classes alone may not provide enough strength for the rotator cuff. Extra conditioning will improve the workings of this joint. While shoulder injuries are not the most common in dance, when they occur you will need treatment, rest, rehabilitation, and improvement in technique, which will put your career on hold. The glenoid humeral joint is already weak because of its shallow cavity. If you are flexible in this joint as some dancers are, then it is even more important to improve joint stability. Loads placed on the shoulder in various styles of dance can be intense; partnering and lifting require strength in all ranges of shoulder motion. You might also be required to fall onto your hands, taking full body weight on the arms. When executing any dance movement where stress is placed through the shoulder, visualize the deep rotator cuff muscles creating a firm brace for protection. This will allow stability in the shoulder joint without sacrificing the fluidity needed through the upper body.
Wall Press

Execution

1. Stand facing a wall. Lean into the wall with hands wide at shoulder height; elbows remain straight. Reemphasize core control, and inhale to prepare.

2. On exhalation, press against the wall while maintaining straight elbows. Allow both scapulae to move around the rib cage as if the outside edges are trying to pull to the front of your body; the upper back may round slightly.

3. As you inhale, allow the shoulder blades to move back and together. Movement occurs within the scapular region. Repeat 10 to 12 times, working up to 3 sets.

Muscles Involved

- **Protraction**: Serratus anterior
- **Retraction**: Rhomboid, mid- and lower trapezius

Dance Focus

In looking at this movement, you might think that this is important only for male dancers. But actually, weakness in the serratus anterior can cause scapular winging. Weakness in the rhomboid and lower trapezius muscles can cause rounded shoulders; both of these misalignments occur frequently in female dancers as well. If you are an instructor, this information can help...
you provide important feedback. By visualizing how the scapula works as it moves along the rib cage, you will be able to help your students with exercises to reduce the winging and rounded shoulders. It can be so confusing for dancers to understand corrections on pulling their shoulders down when they are not sure what muscles to use. Focus on sliding the scapulae down and inward as if you wanted to drop them into opposite back pockets. Once you are comfortable with that movement, widen through the chest and visualize the scapulae lying against the ribs. Think about moving only the scapulae forward and back, not the spine, similar to jazz isolations during warm-ups. You are separating the scapulae from your spine. Always let your breathing help you.

**VARIATION**

**Modified Push-Up Plus**

1. Begin in a basic push-up position with the knees on the floor. Engage core musculature to create stability along your spine. Wrists should be aligned directly under your shoulders. Glide your scapulae downward toward your hips.

2. Inhale to prepare, maintaining trunk stability. On exhalation, feel as though you are pushing the floor away, engaging the serratus anterior and pulling the scapulae into protraction around your rib cage. Keep the elbows softly locked.

3. As you inhale, let the scapulae move back and try to pinch them together, emphasizing shoulder retraction. Maintain trunk stability, and repeat 10 to 12 times.
Port de Bras

Execution

1. Stand firmly with legs hip-width apart, feet either parallel or turned out. Hold small hand weights in both hands. Locate neutral position of spine and pelvis.

2. Move the left arm toward a high fifth position while moving the right arm into shoulder extension. Emphasize scapular stability. Your head and gaze can follow the top arm. Breathe comfortably throughout the movement.

3. Hold for 2 to 4 counts. Feel width through the upper chest. Return with control and repeat on the other side at least 12 times.
**SAFETY TIP** Organize your placement to maintain a stable spine for safety. While executing arm movements, avoid lifting the chest and extending in the lower back.

**Muscles Involved**

**Shoulder flexion:** Anterior deltoid, pectoralis major

**Shoulder extension:** Pectoralis major, latissimus dorsi, teres major

**Dance Focus**

Basic ballet emphasizes stylized arm positions isolated from the shoulders. The upper back is secure with a light, lifted effect. The scapula separates from the shoulder joint, emphasizing the stable body placement. As the shoulder moves forward, notice the activation of the anterior deltoid and the pectoralis major, not the upper trapezius, which will cause your shoulder to lift. As the arm moves down from high fifth, gravity provides the majority of the assistance; but as your arm moves behind your body, the shoulder extensors contract. Epaulement provides even more awareness by slightly twisting the trunk to give the carriage of the arms even more dimension. Regardless of the changing movement through the trunk, the arms maintain their elegance by emphasizing scapular stability. As the arm moves down and to the back, there will be slight internal rotation in the joint. Allow this to occur gently and feel smooth and easy movement in the joint.
**Execution**

1. While kneeling on your right knee, hold a small hand weight in your left hand and rest your elbow on your left thigh. Inhale to prepare.

2. As you exhale, flex the elbow, holding steady in the upper arm. Reemphasize scapular stabilization.

3. Hold for 2 to 4 counts. Focus on the fibers of the biceps shortening, then return slowly with control to starting position. Repeat 10 to 12 times, working up to 3 sets. Start with a light weight and gradually add weight as you get stronger.
**SAFETY TIP** Do not hyperextend the elbow, which places added stress on the small ligaments within the joint. Maintain firmness in the wrist, and avoid hyperextending the wrist and causing strain in the hand and forearm.

**Muscles Involved**
Biceps brachii, brachialis, brachioradialis

**Dance Focus**
The action of elbow flexion is used often in various dance movements. Partnering, lifting, falling to the floor, resistance work with another dancer, and pantomime movements require various movements involving elbow flexion. Strength in the biceps protects the elbow from hyperextension injuries but also creates assistance in various shoulder flexion movements. Holding another dancer is challenging, especially when her body weight is completely supported by the anterior muscles of the shoulder and forearm. For the partner carrying the weight, it is extremely important to be able to use the biceps muscles in coordination with shoulder stabilization to reduce risk of injury. Weakness within this muscle will cause faulty alignment and overuse of other structures. For some women who have added mobility within the elbow joint, muscle strength of the biceps combined with the elbow extensors will create more security for the joint and reduce the risks of injury caused by hyperextension in the elbow.
Triceps Pull

Execution

1. Stand with erect posture in a short lunge with legs parallel or turned out. Hold a small hand weight in each hand. Arms are along your sides but slightly extended from the shoulder.

2. Flex the elbows as you inhale. On exhalation, extend the elbows to continue past the body without fully locking the elbow joints. Hold for 2 to 4 counts; feel the strength and contraction of the triceps from the scapulae, through the upper portion of the humerus, and to the back of the elbows.

3. Return to starting position with control. Maintain scapular stabilization. Isolate the humerus during the movement to emphasize shortening of the triceps muscle fibers. Repeat 10 to 12 times, working up to 3 sets. Again, start with light weights and slowly increase the weight.

⚠️ SAFETY TIP  Do not hyperextend the elbow; remember to use the muscles to support the elbow joint. Hyperextension will increase stress on the joint ligaments.
Muscles Involved
Triceps brachii

Dance Focus
The triceps muscle plays a significant role in elbow support; it’s involved in shoulder extension and adduction as well. The triceps will help you in the upward phase of push-ups, guiding the elbow into safe extension. Numerous contemporary combinations use the elbow extensors to assist you in raising your body from the floor. The traditional Irish dance posture must incorporate firm elbow extension to maintain security of the elbows with the arms by their sides. Weakness in this area allows the elbow to bend and move during the challenging and quick footwork of that style. Remember to visualize the three attachments (the upper humerus, the scapula, and the elbow) to create stability for the upper arm.

VARIATION
Triceps Kickback

1. You can do this exercise with the upper body in a flat-back position, legs in a short lunge for a firm base, and arms by your sides. This will add the resistance of gravity along with the hand weights.

2. Inhale as you flex the elbows, keeping the arms by your sides. Allow no movement along the humerus bones.

3. Exhale as you extend the elbows, isolating the contraction of the triceps. Hold for 2 to 4 counts and return slowly with control. Repeat 10 to 12 times, working up to 3 sets.
**Execution**

1. Sit in a chair with erect posture in a neutral position. Arms are by your sides; palms face the front while holding hand weights. The movement will occur along the frontal plane.

2. As you inhale, begin to lift the arms to the sides into a high V position. Emphasize scapular stabilization, widening through the chest. Feel axial elongation through the movement. Remain stable in the pelvis.

3. Hold at the top of the movement for 2 to 4 counts. Reemphasize the scapulae gliding down and inward toward your hips. Return slowly with control on the exhalation. Repeat 10 to 12 times, working up to 3 sets.
SAFETY TIP  Maintain your neutral erect posture. Resist extending or arching through your spine, which means you have lost core control. Practice elevating your arms without lifting through the chest and ribs. Maintain a strong connection with the oblique muscles and the rim of your pelvis as your arms go up. If lifting the arms without spinal extension is too difficult, try it with no weights and exhale as the arms go up. Since inhalation can elevate your chest and facilitate spinal extension, try exhaling as the arms go up.

Muscles Involved

**Upward phase**: Middle deltoid, supraspinatus, serratus anterior, trapezius  
**Downward phase**: Pectoralis major, rhomboid, levator scapulae

Dance Focus

This is such a beautiful movement, and it is seen in all styles of dance. You can perform this movement with jumps, on relevé, or with a partner—it’s always invigorating. Freedom in the shoulder joint gives this arm movement such grace. Focus your energy on the scapulae stabilizing with coordinated upward rotation so the shoulder joints can move with less effort. Maintain placement through your center to show off the ability to isolate the shoulders from the trunk. On the upward phase, feel width through the shoulders without tensing the neck and overusing the upper trapezius. As you begin to bring the arms down, resist gravity and feel the strength through the upper back. Reemphasize deep inhalation on the upward phase and exhalation on the downward phase. Practice without hand weights while jumping as the arms move up—this is where you must control your placement and avoid arching your spine. Let your arms glide upward, keeping you in the air as if you could float over the stage.
**Execution**

1. While seated on the floor with erect neutral posture, secure a long resistance band around both feet with legs extended out in front. Cross the band and hold it in your hands; elbows are extended with arms in front of you.

2. On inhalation, pull against the resistance of the band with elbows bending at shoulder height and reaching to the back. Feel the scapulae pulling together. Widen through the chest and maintain a firm center.

3. Hold for 2 to 4 counts. Reemphasize scapular adduction, then with exhalation slowly return to starting position. Repeat 10 to 12 times, working up to 3 sets.

**SAFETY TIP** Resist spinal extension. As the arms row back, reemphasize core control to maintain a stable spine. Isolate the middle and lower trapezius, not the upper trapezius.
Muscles Involved

Retraction: Trapezius, rhomboid, levator scapulae

Dance Focus

Moving the arms behind the body is common in dance; again, maintenance of scapular control is key to resisting injury. Freedom in the shoulder and stability in the upper body allow for fluidity in all the styles of dance, especially jazz. As the shoulder blades move into retraction, let this open the front of the chest and resist compensation from the trunk. Remember that you are isolating the muscles that create this action, so hold your core firm. Vary the speed of the rowing to simulate varying tempos; this will create more challenge for efficient scapular movement as well as efficient body placement. Your arms will function more effectively when you have a firm and balanced upper body. When you have a strong feeling of awareness in the ability to perform rowing without compensation, increase the resistance of the band to give you more of a challenge. For a variation, you can repeat this with the elbows pulling back closer to the sides of your body, emphasizing the lower trapezius muscles. This movement through your chest and shoulders really shows off your strength and flexibility. Allow your lungs to truly move in a three-dimensional pattern; you will feel so empowered.

Variation: rowing with elbows tight to the body.
Plank

Execution

1. Begin on your hands and knees. Walk your arms out slowly, maintaining control through your center, until your knees fully extend and shoulders align directly over the wrists to plank position. Toes remain in a high relevé position on the floor.

2. Maintain lift in the waist. Feel the scapulae gliding down toward your hips. Lengthen through the spine and keep your head in alignment with the spine.

3. Hold this position, breathing comfortably, for a count of 5. Feel the security in your shoulder joints and the muscles surrounding the scapulae. Slowly walk back to hands and knees with control. Repeat 5 to 10 times.

⚠️ SAFETY TIP This exercise is advanced and requires firm control in your center. Gravity will pull your lower back toward the floor, causing extension in your spine, which can be harmful. Avoid arching throughout the spine; rest and reorganize if you are unable to maintain safe, secure placement.
Muscles Involved

Shoulder flexion: Anterior deltoid, pectoralis major
Elbow extension: Triceps brachii
Scapular depression: Lower trapezius, pectoralis minor, serratus anterior

Dance Focus

This is a very challenging movement requiring strength throughout the shoulder complex and the core. As you continue to gain strength and flexibility, your physical demands increase as well. Feel the deep stabilizing muscles along your back hugging your spine for support; remember the bracing effect the abdominals provide for stability. Defy the gravity pulling you to the floor; push the floor away with your hands to feel strength through your forearms. The front fall used in some modern techniques requires firm upper-body strength and control as well as core strength. There should be a moment where the body is almost suspended in air, before the hands and arms meet the floor. Without strength in the shoulder region, the front fall will resemble an unfortunate accident involving an unstable fall! Remind yourself that technique class may not give you the needed strength for the shoulders, so make time to condition your upper body.
Reverse Plank

Execution

1. Sit with your legs extended out front. Slightly lean back on your hands, fingers facing forward. Elbows are in a soft but secure position aligned over your wrists. Inhale to prepare.

2. On exhalation, actively pull the scapulae downward and engage your abdominals as you lift your hips to align with the legs. Continue to feel axial elongation and shoulder and scapular stability. Hold for a count of 5.

3. As you inhale, slowly return to the floor, resisting gravity. Maintain control and placement. Repeat 6 to 8 times.

⚠️ SAFETY TIP Do not allow elbow hyperextension or knee hyperextension. Maintain a strong isometric contraction throughout your biceps and triceps to avoid overuse of the small elbow ligaments. Maintain a strong isometric contraction with the hamstrings and quadriceps to avoid overuse of the ligaments in the knee joints.
**Muscles Involved**

- **Elbow extension:** Triceps brachii
- **Shoulder extension:** Teres major, latissimus dorsi
- **Scapular adduction:** Middle and lower trapezius, rhomboid

**Dance Focus**

Creative poses like this are exciting and stimulating for audiences because it’s just not your typical dance move! Executing challenging skills where the body weight is bearing down into the wrists and hands can be difficult without significant strength in the upper body to share the load. Think about distributing the forces throughout the entire hand and forearm to resist straining the wrist. Push the floor away with the hands to feel more power in your forearms. As your body begins to elevate, allow the scapulae to move down to provide more upper-body security; this is typically a weak area in many dancers. You might feel a wonderful stretch across the anterior aspect of your shoulder joint; this is the eccentric pull of the biceps, pectoralis major, and anterior rotator cuff. Don’t forget to breathe; you may need to focus your breath through the upper rib cage because of the downward pull of the scapulae and the eccentric lengthening of the abdominals.