

## **Dancer Discipline 101: How to Practice at Home**

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You finally did it! You signed up for a dance class, you bought your hip scarf and a pair of zils, and you scheduled the class time in on your calendar. You have aspirations of becoming one of those lovely, talented, bewitchingly ethereal beings who spin and shimmy to the delight of a mesmerized crowd.

And then class begins. By the 2nd or 3rd week, you are beginning to have serious doubts that you will *\*ever\** be stage-worthy. You keep attending, (I mean after all, you *\*did\** pay for this, right?) but it is becoming increasingly frustrating as the movements become more complex week by week. What is happening?!

Perhaps your teacher forgot to tell you about the P word. Or maybe she thinks you don't really want to hear about it; you're so busy, after all, who has time for that? Or maybe she doesn't want you to know about it, because then you'll actually improve and may become a threat to her. (Yikes!)

What is the P word, you ask? PRACTICE. You've been hearing this little mantra since you were a child, "Practice makes perfect". I'm here to tell you that it doesn't make perfect, but it does make *\*better\**. And there's a word that must go along with the P word, and that is the D word: DISCIPLINE.

Without Practice and Discipline, belly dance will not become part of who you are. It will not become a personal expression that you can share with an enraptured audience. It more likely will become just another workout, with fancy costumes. (Which for some is all they want, and there's a place for that too.)

But if you want more...if you want to dance for the rest of your life, sharing your dancer's vision with adoring audiences near and far, then the P word and the D word must be the bottom line.

Exactly how does one implement practice and discipline into what we've been learning in class? Following are the basics of how to structure your home practice, and some helpful tips to keep yourself disciplined about practicing.

***Set aside a specific time to practice.*** Whatever time/day it is, write it on the calendar for yourself. If it's staring you in the face and the time is blocked out, it makes playing hookey more difficult.

***Invest in music to practice to.*** The value of inspiring music should not be underestimated! The class CDs I put together for my students make practice accessible by having a specific order/intention for all the tracks printed on the back label.

***Take notes in class.*** When you leave class, go home and spend 10-15 minutes reviewing what you just learned while it's still fresh in your mind. Then the next time you are practicing, it will seem less foreign (and you will know what your notes meant!).

***When you enter your practice space, make it a mental space in your mind as well.*** Don't try to practice in the middle of your living room while your kids (or partner!) are watching television. Go somewhere you can be undistracted, uninterrupted and unobserved, so it feels safe. Changing into your workout clothing can be very helpful in getting into the right frame of mind for practicing.

***Work on a movement until you see improvement.*** Remember, I did not say perfect, but \*better\*. Your teacher can help you with the details, but you must keep going over a movement again and again and again until it gets closer to what your instructor is asking for.

This last point is where people usually start to have difficulty. This is where the D word begins to take hold. You must discipline your self to keep at it until it looks right. It may take a few minutes or it may take a few months, depending on the difficulty of any given movement, and the amount of quality time you are spending working on it.

(Notice the word 'quality' in the above paragraph. That means that when you start to work on a particular movement that you find challenging, you don't stop and have a drink after 2 minutes, you don't stop to answer the phone, you don't decide part way through that your hip scarf is way to [bright, shiny, orange, whatever] and you simply \*must\* change into a different one this instant, etc. etc. etc. Focus!)

Call it persistence, stick-to-it-ive-ness, or whatever, continuing until some improvement is obvious is key. Why? Because the way you practice is the way you perform. Let me say that again: ***The way you practice is the way you perform.*** The discipline you exert in your daily practice is going to show through in your performances. It doesn't matter if it's a student hafla or the big stage, the discipline you have invested (or neglected!) into your dance will show.

Whew! I realize the above can seem like a tall order. If it seems overwhelming, start simply by putting your practice time on the calendar, and follow through on it. Then move on through the rest of those points. Before you know it, practice will become part of your routine, and thus become a rewarding time of progress for you.