# Elements of dance – definitions and examples

Elements of dance is one of the 3 content groups for the Dance 7–10 Syllabus (2023). NESA defines the elements of dance as ‘the tools used to perform, compose and appreciate dance works in artistic, cultural, social and personal contexts.’ Space, time and dynamics are central to the study of dance as they support the interrelationship of the focus areas: performance, composition and appreciation.

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When performing using the elements of dance, explicit guidance and adjustments should be provided for students that are inclusive of individual performer needs. Students should be supported to compose dance using their individual contexts and abilities, which may include assistive devices and/or mobility aids.

The following examples could be used as a guide for teaching and learning related to the elements of dance. They include suggestions for each component and are not intended to be prescriptive.

## Space

Refers to the space through which the body moves and includes the components of space: shape, level, direction, dimension, pathways, floor patterns and stage space.

Space can be used to manipulate movement by generating symbols and images to communicate and interpret intent. The components of space can be considered in relation to individual dancers and group work. The components of space and their examples can be integrated to represent specific ideas. Examples for each component of space are listed below.

* **Shape** refers to the position of the dancer in space as an individual or as part of a group. Shapes are present in all actions. In a movement sequence, the performer transitions through a range of shapes, which could include curved, straight, angular, twisted, symmetrical, asymmetrical, open, closed, complimentary, contrasting, organic shapes or a combination of these.
* **Level** refers to where the dancer moves in space in relation to the ground. Movement that features a specific level includes floor work and aerial work. Levels could include high, medium and low; however, movement can span multiple levels and explore all spaces in between.
* **Direction** includes the way the dancer is facing and the route they travel through space. Direction applies to shapes, movements and sequences of movements. Direction could include forward, backward, sideways, diagonal, up, down, inwards, outwards, towards and away from.
* **Dimension** is the size of the shape or movement. In dance, it describes the height, width and depth of the movement. Dimension of movement could include small, large, narrow, wide, two-dimensional (the height and width of a shape/movement) and or three-dimensional (the height, width and depth of a shape or movement).
* **Pathways** are the transitory lines that body parts, objects and/or assistive devices create in space when performing movement or gestures. Pathways could be curved, circular, organic, indirect, straight, angular and/or direct.
* **Floor patterns** are the paths or patterns made when locomoting (performing movement that travels) across a space. It is the course along which the dancer moves. Floor patterns could be curved, straight, zigzag, spiral, helical, spoke and multiple variations and combinations of these patterns.
* **Stage space** is the area where dance is performed. This could be a purpose-built performance space like a proscenium arch stage, or a non-conventional space, such as site-specific dance or dance on film.

## Time

The components of time include metre, rhythm, accent, tempo, duration and stillness.

The components of time can be considered in relation to movement and its music or sound accompaniment. Time can be used to manipulate movement and the components can be combined to generate, communicate, and interpret ideas and intent. Time is inherently related to dynamics. One cannot be manipulated without altering the other. Examples for each component of time are listed below.

* **Metre** is the grouping of beats into measures or bars to form a recurring pattern. This may incorporate time signatures such as 3/4, 4/4, 6/8, 5/4, 7/4. Counting phrases of movement can highlight strong and weak beats. Metre can be consistent or changing (multimetre).
* **Rhythm** is the pattern created by movement and/or sound. This is often a strong, regular, repeated pattern, but can be varied and unpredictable. Rhythm could be simple, complex, regular, irregular, syncopated or natural.
* **Accent** is used to emphasise a particular feature of dance. A significant movement can be used in isolation, or alongside sound, to create an accent in dance.
* **Tempo** is the rate or speed of the movement and/or sound. Tempo could be slow, moderate, fast, accelerating or decelerating.
* **Duration** refers to the length of a movement, phrase of movement and/or sequence or dance work. Duration could vary in length, such as long or short.
* **Stillness** is a purposeful pause with the intention to resume movement.

## Dynamics

The release of energy, weight and/or force over a period of time to create movement qualities.

Dynamics are manipulated to generate, communicate and interpret ideas and intent. Release of energy, weight and/or force can be used in combination to create different movement qualities. Dynamics are inherently related to time. One cannot be manipulated without altering the other. Examples for each component of dynamics are listed below.

* **Release of energy** refers to how the dancer’s energy is used to initiate movement and propel the performer through the space. The release of energy could be sudden, gradual or sustained.
* **Weight and/or force** refers to how the dancer uses force to shift their weight. This could include the body, body parts, assistive devices or props. The degree of weight and/or force could be heavy, light, strong or gentle and might be used to create or decelerate momentum.
* **Movement qualities** are generatedby applying different effort to the release of energy, weight and/or force to movement. The quality of movement could be sustained, percussive, suspended, swinging, collapsing and vibratory.

## References

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