

The Dance Place

Where Culture Meets Fun!

d a n c e p l a c e k y . c o m

How To Choose A Dance Studio

When choosing a particular studio or method of learning to dance you must first answer the following basic questions. Your answers will determine the keys needed to evaluate a studio, and whether it is a fit for you.

What is the most important element in your dancing?

This question is the most important one. If your answer is to learn to dance for FUN, pure enjoyment -- stay with the inexpensive ways of learning to dance.

However, if your answer to this question involves elements of learning to be the best, learning the proper technique, learning to dance for enjoyment but to also be "better than the average bear", or possibly competing -- your best decision would be to choose a studio in which you felt the particular element was being addressed.

What is the monthly or yearly total you are willing to spend?

Before making any decisions as to which studio, you must decide for yourself what your yearly or monthly budget can afford. Do your budget numbers before you look for a studio -- this will be one less hassle if you know upfront what you can afford. As well, it will help you to be wise and not get straddled with a payment that is uncomfortable.

Why do you dance?

Ensure that you understand why you enjoy dancing or at least why you want to dance. Only you know the true reason -- but as long as you know - this will help you in deciding where to attend.

For example, some people dance because it gives them a "workout" time with their spouse, some dance because they love to move to music, some dance because they gain self-confidence from learning motor activities, others dance to meet people, etc. These are just a few reasons - determine yours.

Do you need or want the social benefits of belonging to a particular studio?

Belonging to a particular studio, is just like having a membership at a country club. It's a place you belong to -- it meets your social needs and gives you the benefits you're looking for. Is this something that you believe you want in your life? Do you like having a membership? Ensure you know the answer.

NOW, ARMED WITH YOUR ANSWERS TO THESE QUESTIONS here are some criteria to help you choose the studio that will meet your dancing needs:

1. What is the philosophy of the studio and its owners?

Check out what the basic philosophy of the studio is. Is the number one goal to teach people to dance? Is it to teach people to dance technically correct? Is it to teach people to enjoy dancing and do it correctly? Is it to make the studio owners look good at a competition with students who do well? Is it to support the competing professionals in the studio and ensure they are advancing? Is it run as a profitable business? Is it a combination of the above? All you have to do is ASK -- and then LISTEN to the answer.

LISTEN to hear the answer and then compare the philosophy that is stated with the way the business is operated and with the answer you have to your question of what is the most important element in your dancing. Ensure that somewhere in the philosophy of the studio you find the element you determined was important for you.

2. What services are available?

What various kinds of lessons are available -- privates, groups, practice sessions, 10 week specialized courses, coaching lessons, floor time for individual practice? What other services are provided -- information on shoes, competitive dresses; information on dance organizations in town; outside functions, social dances, etc.

What special activities is the studio planning to participate in? Does the studio regularly attend competitions?

AGAIN, see how the answer to this question matches up with your reasons for dancing and the social aspects you are looking to fulfill in your life.

3. What level of training/accomplishment have the owners and teachers attained?

This is a critical question whether or not you would like to compete. Ensure that the individuals who are teaching you have qualifications that will improve your dancing competitive edge.

Ask for a history on the training of the instructors, ask about their own personal accomplishments in dancing. A key here is that the ability to TEACH another individual is not inherent in a GOOD DANCER. The top competing couples are not all equal when it comes to teaching others. Winning competitions does not make you a better dance trainer than someone who is skilled at TRAINING AND TEACHING skills to others.

Ask for some information on the method of teaching that is used in the studio. Ask for the policy they adhere to with respect to outside coaches -- especially check into the charge for these lessons. Careful that when you are quoted a price for an outside coach that you also know whether that is in addition to a charge for a private lesson or not. This makes a difference to the dollar amount you will be budgeting for. Ask for information regarding whether or not staff participate in coaching sessions for their own improvement.

If competing is a prime objective of your dancing -- check out the ability of the studio to offer choreography. Especially critical to a well-performed routine is often the movements and the transition between steps. Not all individuals are equally trained or have the creative ability to offer GOOD choreography.

Lexington is blessed with some exceptional TEACHERS and a few GOOD choreographers. To find the two elements in one individual is rare, but in my opinion, they can be found even here in our own city.

4. What is the atmosphere/environment of the studio?

Is the physical setting of the studio pleasing to you? Does it make you feel like dancing? Does it relax you, calm you and yet entice your feet to move?

Sit back and enjoy the setting of the studio, look around at the surroundings and observe the "atmosphere" of the studio. Ensure you feel good when you're there.

Do the owners/teachers make you feel comfortable and welcome on a consistent basis? Are students treated equally -- fairly? Is everyone, no matter what size, or shape, or age, or colour treated equally by all the management? Check it out -- it matters in the long run.

Another issue, do the owners encourage a good attitude towards all other studios? Do they support the dance community as a whole?

The choice of any individual to attend other classes or participate in other functions should not mean that the individual should be treated any differently than anyone else. People are still people -- no matter where they work or where they choose to take their dance training. Courteous treatment of all people, acknowledgment that you know someone, saying "hello" is not a form of treason or disloyalty to your own studio -- it's COMMON PEOPLE COURTESY. What is the attitude of the studio you attend?

5. What is the student body's opinion/feelings about the studio?

Are people happy with the service they've received from the studio? Did they receive what was promised to them? Are they happy with how they are treated? Do they believe they are getting their money's worth?

Is there an undue pressure applied to students -- does everyone have to compete to be "special" in the school? Is there always a push for students to spend more money? These pressures can make it uncomfortable.

The saying -- You can't please all the people all the time -- IS VERY TRUE. If a student has a complaint, they must address it with management, as long as management is willing to LISTEN and attempts to either address the issue or explain to the student why the policy exists. If you have a complaint, ensure that you give the owners a fair chance and before you discuss the complaint with others -- let them know and see if they can address the issue for you. This will give you two successes -- one, is that you have taken the issue up with someone who can effect a change and second, if any other student in the studio is having the same feelings perhaps the owners can help them too.

Most importantly, however, is that students feel welcome in the studio, that they feel as if they are a part of the studio and that they can contribute positively to the experience of others who choose to participate in the studio.

6. Fees for Services

The last question that must be answered is what are the fees. How much will it cost me to do the amount of dancing I'd like to do in the month or year?

All you have to do is ask ... studio owners will give you this information. Ensure that prices are they same for everyone. Are there any special deals? Be careful if the pricing information varies from student to student -- ask for the criteria that is used. What determines special circumstances? Specifically, ensure that you completely understand exactly which lessons are included in the prices that are quoted.

The above six questions are simple -- but you need to get an answer for yourself. Don't ever decide on which studio to attend based on someone else's criteria -- know what you want and then GO SHOPPING. The best advice I can give you is ensure that you are aware of what is important to you, exactly what it is that you are looking for, and then go and find it. Try them all out until you find a place where you are happy and your needs are being met. Never forget that you, the student, are the CUSTOMER -- you have the right to choose.

Personally, dancing is an enjoyment -- it relaxes me and allows me to disappear from the stresses of everyday life for a few hours to a place of serenity and joy. For me, a studio should be a place that provides me the opportunity to learn, to improve my dancing, and to meet new friends in life -- all of this and I can have FUN, too!

“The Dance Place, the place to start, the place to stay”