

Instructional Touch Best Practices

The Department of Dance is dedicated to integrating consent-based practices into all classroom and production environments.

In all dance studio activities, all participants are expected to understand and apply the *Instructional Touch and Intimacy Best Practices* described below.

Any studio activities that require adaptation or addition to these guidelines must establish community awareness and agreement prior to practice; helpful notes for this process are included below.

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Communication Best Practices

- In non-production coursework, if you have a concern regarding instructional touch or touch between peers, first speak to the instructor, and if further conversation is needed, contact the Department Chair.
- In rehearsal and production, if you have a concern regarding instructional touch or touch between peers, first speak with faculty associated with the project (dance-maker or rehearsal director), and if further conversation is needed, contact a faculty or staff member associated with the production (Director of Dance Production, Production Stage Manager, Production Manager) and/or contact the Department Chair.

Instructional Touch

“Instructional Touch” is defined as any physical contact between instructor and student, or between two or more students, occurring in the context of a class, rehearsal, production, or other program activity.

**Please note: Instructional Touch is different from touch made in emergency situations, such as touch that attempts to prevent accident or minimize injury. In those situations, all participants should, using best judgement, act rapidly and/or spontaneously.*

Examples of Instructional Touch include:

- Adjusting alignment/positioning
- Bringing awareness to physical use
- Partnering for demonstrations
- Correcting placement in space
- Costume Fittings
- Creating choreography that moves in contact
- Contact Improvisation / Compositional Improvisation that moves in contact (*see below for additional notes*)

Consensual Touch (root word: consensus)

The concept of consensual touch starts with the notion that people have the right to say, “**yes**” and say, “**no**” to being touched, and with the notion that it is possible to make general agreements about touching and being touched. In the field of Dance, due to its physical nature, physical contact is often an essential part of learning, creating, performance, and expression in the art form; agreements that guide this process are essential to a safe, respectful and professional environment.

In the UI Department of Dance, instructors follow best practices when they ask a student’s consent to physical touch each and every time that they believe: *tactile contact is necessary or beneficial here to the learning process*. Without explanation or repercussion, every student has the right and responsibility to say **yes** or **no** in that particular moment; throughout a year, a semester, or a single class, students may, without explanation or repercussion, change their **yes** and **no** answers in response to internal feelings and external circumstances. In lieu of physical contact, instructors must, to the best of their ability, replace physical contact with other means of helpful instruction.

Instructional Touch Best Practices

- Ask before you touch and *be specific* about the contact
 - Where
 - For what purpose
- Try Questions about Specific Contact
 - “Would you be open to *[type/location of contact]*?”
 - “Would *[type of contact]* be helpful right now?”
 - “Can you experience *[correction/suggestion/concept]* through touch today?”
- Instructional responses to “**no**”
 - Use tone and attitude to demonstrate acceptance and flexibility
 - Apply alternatives (considered and prepared in advance)
 - Guided visualization; verbally describe images and actions, and use kinesthetic imagination to invoke experiences
 - Demonstrating on yourself, with or without self-touch
 - Guided self-touch; invite and guide students to use their own hands
 - Using props or other material support (*barres, walls, chairs, appropriate objects*)
- Refrain from calling attention to, or “calling out” individual consent decisions
 - Practice and model attitudes of nonjudgement and equanimity regardless of the “**yes**” and the “**no**.”
- Model and Guide the steps above when directing students in peer and partnered touch
 - Describe specific location and purpose of touch; demonstrate when possible
 - Establish steps for consent, and provide options and alternatives as part of the assignment
- Responsiveness, Observation, and Keeping Track
 - Practice “the pause” between requesting contact and inviting the answer
 - Practice quick shifts between touch/no-touch strategies
 - Practice remembering what students have said, requested, or prohibited about making contact, even though you will ask anew for consent in each instance

Boundary Practice

A useful concept in navigating physical touch is a “boundary practice.” At the start of an activity where touch is involved, each participant indicates boundaries for physical touch. A boundary practice could be

especially useful for creative exercises where specific contact locations are not tightly defined in advance.

Instructors and rehearsal directors may:

- Demonstrate hand gestures that can indicate preferred no-touch areas
- Invent terms for no-touch areas; practice gesturing and saying, “fence,” or “road closed,” for different body locations
- Use colors and hand gestures to denote body zones: red=no touch, yellow=caution/care or minimal, green=available
- Include the concept of a “button”; when a boundary needs clarifying or a brief hold is needed for quick assessment, a participant cues this by saying “button,” or other term (*e.g.*; “*pause*” “*moment*” “*tag*” “*system check*”) or can use established action-placeholders (*e.g.* *fist bump*, *snap*)

Improvisation / Spontaneous Creative Process

At the start of any class or creative process that requires spontaneity, it is strongly advised to review basic concepts of consent, and to engage in a *boundary practice* prior to the activity.

In addition to stated **yes/no** preferences or **red/yellow/green body zones** at the outset, it is important to provide context and explanation for listening and responding to signals spontaneously. Instructors should call awareness to, and provide instruction on “*listening for the yes, and listening for the no,*” as part and parcel of any creative process where physical contact may arise unplanned.

Giving and receiving **yes/no signals** in spontaneous activities should be explained, modeled, discussed, and normalized. Students benefit when they understand how to engage in, or abstain from, spontaneous invitations to make contact; creative contact can occur while respecting limits, can operate without fear, and can avoid lapsing into narratives of rejection and personal offense. Through reviewing basic concepts, developing community agreements, and incorporating boundary practices, a spontaneous process can confidently and creatively include touch.

Choreographing “Intimacy”

In the context of choreography, *intimacy* could be understood as: choreographed touch and closeness between bodies that is sensual, romantic, or sexual in nature, for the purposes of artistic expression and performance.

Choreographing intimacy requires following instructional touch policies above, including:

- Practice a consent-based process
- Practice using “button” for pause and assessment
- Determine and engage in a boundary practice

Additional Requirements:

- Use an Audition Disclosure form to allow performers to opt-in or opt-out of intimacy.
- Safeguards: A third party such as Stage Management or Rehearsal Cast Representative must always be present for the staging of intimacy.

- Privacy: In order to protect privacy, productions with intimacy should have a no-cell phone policy in rehearsal and backstage for all members of the production; in order to protect privacy, video recordings of intimacy should not be created.
- Dance-makers and directors should never step in to stage intimate moments or have any physical contact with the performers during the staging or rehearsing of intimacy. Only those performers enacting the roles should engage in intimate contact during the creating and performing process.

Choreographing Intimacy Best Practices:

- Desexualize the Process:
 - Draw clear boundaries between the mechanics and choreographic moves, and any personal relations of the cast, real or virtual.
 - Refrain from making sexual jokes, innuendo, or comments.
 - Use non-sexual language for staging the intimacy or discussing it.
- De-personalize
 - If you need to talk about the performer's actions, use/invent role names; practice "de-role-ing (differentiating oneself from the character).
- Timely Communication
 - If a performer requires new or different boundary agreements that those that have been established, especially if these affect the choreography, it is important to communicate with the instructor or dance maker *as soon as possible*; adequate time to make modifications reduces stress on all parties and promotes a thoughtful process.
- Setting and Scripting
 - All intimacy, regardless of how simple it might be, must be choreographed; performers must not deviate from choreography; performers must discuss any changes to choreography with the dance-maker and may not make changes without consultation.
 - Placeholders should be used until choreography is set; placeholders may be used any time after choreography is set except during performances.
 - Choreography should be notated/scripted by dance-maker, performers, and stage management; choreographic record can include an audio recording.

Costume Fittings

The measuring process for costume fittings requires accuracy. This process involves physical contact with the measuring tape and minimal touch from the measurer. Students and Shop Personnel have the same tools available during measurements as above.

- Students and Shop Personnel have the following tools in a fitting:
 - Use self-touch instead of designer or staff touch for measurements and fittings
 - Boundary practices
 - Request two-minute break or use a "button" word or gesture
 - Request a reduction in the number of people in the room
 - Request that the door be open or closed; Request to be fitted in an open or closed area of the shop; Request help or additional privacy for dressing or undressing
 - Request that the appropriate faculty or staff member makes the adjustments, rather than a student designer or draper
 - Ask questions for clarification