

# DanceTeacher®

## Ronni Favors' Tips for Teaching Long, Extended Lines

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Odds are, your dance students' Instagram feeds are filled with images of professionals showing off their 180-degree penchés or demonstrating their highest extensions.

It's enough for a student to come to equate the length of their lines with the quality of their dancing—after all, dancers so often hear “long lines” as something to strive for.

And, yes, having elongated lines can elevate movement, says Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater rehearsal director Ronni Favors. But it's not about how long a dancer's legs are, or how much flexibility they have. It's about a dancer finding the best version of their line, which will in turn allow them to dance at their fullest.

“As a dancer, you're making shapes in space,” she says. “And so to be able to inhabit the greatest amount of space, that is something that we all really strive for.”

### Give Them a Solid Foundation

Early in her career, Favors says, she found “strength through tension” rather than “strength through length.” What changed: training with master ballet teacher Maggie Black and studying Pilates, both of which helped her find the alignment that then freed up her limbs.

If you're seeing tension or gripping in your students' lines, misalignment or lack of core strength could be the cause, as dancers often “hang on for dear life” in their extremities when they lack stability in their torso and pelvis. (This could also look like grippy hands or overwinged feet.) According to Favors, helping students develop strength and alignment won't happen overnight, but your careful eye can help them work towards a solid foundation.

### Focus on Quality

Just because a line is long doesn't mean that it has the breezy, stretched quality many dancers strive for, says Favors, pointing out that sometimes when a dancer is seeking a long line it actually looks like they are pulling or tense. For easy, attenuated lines, she suggests asking students to imagine that there's additional space in the joints, to avoid compressing them. She also likes the idea of feeling the air around you—between the fingers, coming up from the top of the head—and keeping that air in constant motion. The breath can also help create this elongated quality: For some dancers, it may make sense to inhale as they gather and exhale as they extend, but Favors encourages dancers to do whatever feels most natural. That they have continued inhales and exhales is most important, as a lack of breath can make a line appear static or stilted.

### Practice Length in Transitions

Luxuriating in long, effortless lines is one thing when you have lots of time to play with. It's an entirely different challenge during fast movement or moments of transition. Favors suggests helping students find the most efficient routes between destinations to ease into these difficult sequences. “You have to be very economical because you don't want to cut the movement short, but you also don't want to go past it,” she says. “You need to know where the movement begins and where it ends.”

This also means not neglecting the in-between moments as you teach and rehearse movement. “You have to make sure that you're paying as close attention to transitions as you are to the next big movement,” Favors says, “because lots of times we just think of the ‘Tada!’ but it's the transitions that set us up for that.”

Creating elegant lines has less to do with the height of your students' développés and more with attention to detail and careful finessing. “I love to see people with a really exquisitely worked line that they have crafted and sculpted through their own discovery,” says Favors. “That's as beautiful as somebody whose leg goes up through their ears.”

