



**Tips and Tricks for Teaching Artists, Musicians, and Assistant Teaching Artists in
The School at the Mark Morris Dance Center**

Please read below for some tips and tricks to make your classroom feel cohesive to the others in our community.

1. **Dance is for anybody!** – The School at the Mark Morris Dance Center is a non-pre-professional school that provides a nurturing, inclusive learning environment for anyone who wants to dance. We encourage all to participate, regardless of race, sexual orientation, gender identity, and/or physical or intellectual disability. All students should be welcomed into your classroom. If at any time you feel you need more support in your classroom to be able to provide the best learning environment possible, please contact the Education staff so that we can support your needs.
2. **Stay committed to the music** – The use of music in the classroom is paramount to the overall mission of the school. In any genre of dance, Teaching Artists should underline the importance of music by giving detailed and specific instructions for the musicality of the steps or combinations, giving younger students instruction in counting the music, spending time counting and clapping out rhythms, keeping combinations rhythmic, and assigning exercises that change the tempo and quality of movement while keeping the steps simple. Importantly, Teaching Artists should communicate the tempo and style of music to the Musician clearly.
3. **Keep it Sophisticated** – Just because many of our students take dance class once per week, doesn't mean they shouldn't have high quality dance experiences. Teaching Artists can stimulate students artistically and technically by making use of musical accents, holding positions, and speeding up combinations. Other ways to push students include allowing them to work on the same movement for many weeks, but emphasizing different aspects of it (quality, timing, etc.), as well as challenging them to pick up each combination quickly, the first time it is given.
4. **Maintain flexibility** – Not just in your body! Our students choose us because they want high-quality programming with a lower level of commitment. We remind them that the more they attend, the faster they will progress, but we don't penalize them when they miss class. This can also mean you'll have students at a wide variety of technical proficiencies in your class. Your creative challenge is to provide a curriculum that creates space for everyone to feel successful at some point in class, and for everyone to feel challenged at some point in class.
5. **Get to know each other** – Forming positive relationships with their peers and teachers is what will keep our students coming back to class. Take time in class on a regular basis to have students participate in activities that encourage collaboration and cooperation with their peers. Be sure to learn your students' names within the first few weeks of the semester and model respectful and supportive behavior towards your students. Subsequently, require this same behavior between them by facilitating positive talk and discouraging negative comments.



6. **Set clear expectations** – Begin with clear expectations regarding the space and how students should interact with it and each other. A few suggestions: Make a list of 5 things students will need to do in order to be “ready to learn” and remind them about the list at the beginning of each class – this can include things like having their hair tied back, not chewing gum, being prepared to listen and contribute, etc.; Notice when students are not meeting these expectations and have them refer back to the list themselves, to encourage ownership over their behavior. Give students a warm-up that they recognize but that progresses during the semester. All these tactics will create clarity and cohesion in your classroom. Students should use the bathroom before class. **Encourage students, in the upper levels, to bring a bottle of water to class or get a drink from the fountain before/after class.**
7. **Balance safety with challenge** – Your classroom should be a place where the students feel safe to push their limits and take chances. Let students in on the payoffs of working hard at something they find difficult (and perhaps monotonous), for example: “If you work hard at doing your breakdance 6-step slowly, one day we’ll speed it up!” They will build confidence by knowing you believe they can master the movement if they work at it.
8. **Use positive reinforcement** – Try to inspire a sense of joy within discipline; we want students to become dedicated and committed to dance through positive experiences. Engage with students by using eye contact and by increasing their excitement for dance and music through demonstrating your own passion for dance. Encourage expressive feeling through movement. Use positive feedback to reinforce beneficial behaviors and to create a supportive classroom tone. Faculty should make sure not to single out one student when demonstrating how something was done badly. Remember to reinforce good behavior by giving them compliments.
9. **Plan for the time you have** – Studios at the Mark Morris Dance Center are booked back to back, with the assumption that teachers will plan for transition time; for example, a 60-minute class should really include only 50 or 55 minutes of dancing to allow the previous class time to exit and the next class to come in. That being said, class should begin and end on time, and be paced appropriately: time at barre in the ballet classes should not take more than ½ the class. Balancing information your students will accomplish by the end of the semester with the amount of time you see them weekly will take skilled planning on your curriculum map!
10. **Use Responsive Curriculum** – Our classes should value all the voices that are in them. Your curriculum is your classroom road map; a tool that will guide you through the daily lessons for duration of the class or residency, but it can and should be fluid. Sometimes, we focus on the lesson plan too intently and forget to think about how the students are responding our class. Be sure to create space for students’ interests, needs, and voices to influence the content in and methods of delivering the curriculum.



11. **Use the whole space** – To give students a well-rounded sense of the dance classroom and to hold their interest, it's important to use space in a variety of ways. Make sure to include center, across the floor exercises, and different formations and facings in each class so students become accustomed to dancing with this added layer of complexity.

12. **Communicate! Communicate! Communicate!** – Sometimes, despite our best efforts, miscommunication happens; trains run late; students misinterpret something you say; a member of your teaching team went out of town and forgot to get a substitute. The more you communicate to the Education Staff about any miscommunication that happens, the more support you will get and the less the issue will persist.