

# A Dancer's Essay



## *Dance has always been who I am ...*

This year is my eleventh year of dancing, and my ninth year on the competitive team at Protégé Dance Company.

I used to be the little kid looking up in wonder at the older dancers at my studio, and I am now the older dancer that has been through it, and is so excited to watch another generation of dancers do the same. Throughout that journey, I have learned how important dance is to me, as well as how beneficial it can be. Dance is packed with so many health benefits, both physical and mental. It is a large influencer in a dancer's social life. Dance helps a student develop so many important skills and habits, and overall it breeds creativity.



## *"Dance is an art form, but it also very athletic"*



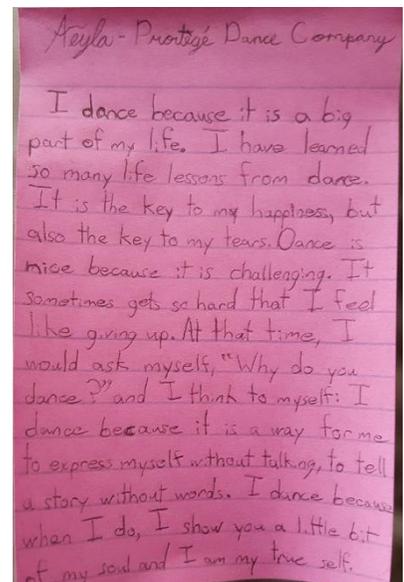
While dance is undoubtedly an art form, it is also very athletic. Personally, I think dancing is the most fun way to exercise. Dance works on flexibility all throughout the body, as well as a dancer's balance and their awareness of their body. In fact, a dance education does a lot for a person's physical awareness. With experience, dancers understand how their body works under different conditions, they gain coordination, and they are trained to understand what their body is currently doing and how to improve. I can easily detect when a muscle is tight, and generally which one it is, too. I have educated myself to learn how nutrition affects my body, and how I can use that knowledge to fuel myself properly. I can tell at dance when I'm leaning too far back, when I need to use my core more, and when I need to lower my hip to get my leg higher. Dance also has all the normal benefits

of any exercise, including pushing and improving your stamina and your cardiovascular health, improving memory and cognitive performance, and raising dopamine and endorphin levels in the brain.

(Lindberg, 2019)

## *"Dance has been the key to my happiness in so many ways ..."*

Speaking of dopamine and endorphins, dance is also good for one's mental health. Those chemicals are what I call the "happy chemicals", and they help to reduce depression and anxiety. (Elite Dance Studio, 2019) When I was younger, I wrote, "Dance is the key to my happiness. It is a way for me to express myself without talking, to tell a story without words". I still hold the same feelings today. Dance is such a good and healthy outlet for a dancer's emotions. No matter how you're feeling, the expressiveness of dance allows you to channel whatever energy you have into the movement. This specific point has been quite helpful for me during these emotional teen years, especially with the frustration of lockdown.



Whenever stress is really getting to me, I can always count on using dance class to let go of that stress, or even just as a distraction from everyday problems. Even when I don't have class, I can find an open space and just improvise to express whatever I am feeling in that moment. In a way, my dancing and my emotions live in a reciprocal relationship. My emotions fuel my art, and my art controls my emotions. "I dance because when I do, I show a little bit of my soul and my true self".

Dance is sometimes frustrating or stressful, say if I am having trouble getting a trick, but nothing can replace the satisfaction I get when my hard work pays off and I finally accomplish my goals.

*"The feeling that dance gives me is often indescribable,  
but for those that know me well – can see it in me."*

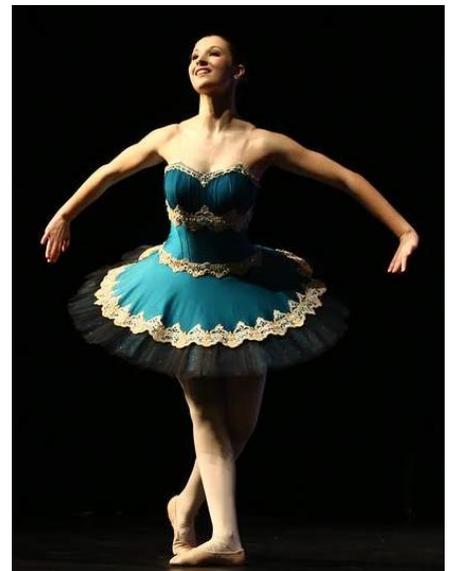


Dancing in a studio is a team sport, and having a healthy environment there is so important socially for a dancer. A studio itself provides an open space of mostly like-minded people. The people I have met through dance have been my closest friends and the most important people in my life, fellow dancers and teachers alike. They are my second family, because we are all there for each other; it's really just a big support system. I often refer to my entire competitive team as my sisters, not just teammates.

*"My team is truly my extended family – my sisters."*

Whenever I talk about why I love dance, for me and for others, I always mention what I have learned from years of competitive dance. We are all taught many skills that will be so important for our future selves, whether or not we continue dancing. One of the first things I learned when I started on the competitive team was professionalism. This includes the discipline it takes to represent a studio; the same discipline used to represent a company or future employer. Conjoined with this, we learn to have respect for our teachers by listening to them, respect for our fellow dancers by being kind and keeping negativity to ourselves, and respect for competitions, judges, and venues by conducting ourselves in a professional manner.

With our busy schedules, I have had to learn proper time management. I know how to prioritize, and I can schedule my days like a pro, which will be important for post-secondary. Another one of the most important "skills" to have is to believe in yourself. Because of dance, I had to learn to be confident in my abilities. Being on stage is such a vulnerable experience, that self-doubt could make you feel lost. Instead, I used it to my advantage. I love being on stage to show everyone what I can do, so I transferred that confidence and self-assurance into my everyday life as well.



*"Dance is my art. My opportunity to create. My voice."*

Lastly, one of my favourite parts of dancing, is how it breeds creativity in each person. Dance has surrounded me with so many very creative people who are there to mentor me, to inspire me, and to influence me. Dance is my creative outlet, as it has allowed me to find my own voice and my own style. This is the truly amazing part about my journey: I learned the vocabulary in my younger years so now I can explore and write myself a story! This is my art that I get to create through music and movement, and I am so grateful! Have an amazing International Dance Day!

Aeyla Webster (age 16)