MUSICAL THEATRE SYLLABUS

Suggested Dance Steps & Musicals by Grade

Choreography and repertoire guidance to support teachers planning Performance and Technical Skills Demonstration material, from Premiere through to Grade 8.

01 Dance in the Musical Theatre Syllabus

Musical theatre dance should communicate character, story, mood and intention, rather than simply demonstrate technical steps. Choreography may incorporate dance vocabulary, gesture, travelling patterns, formations, partner work and physical storytelling, as appropriate to the style and context of the performance.

Movement should be selected to provide candidates with opportunities to demonstrate the skills required by the assessment criteria, including coordination, control, musicality, spatial awareness, technical accuracy, expressive communication and performance quality.

As candidates progress through the grades, choreography should reflect increasing levels of technical control, stylistic understanding, precision, musicality and expressive purpose, enabling candidates to meet the expectations of the relevant Learning Outcomes, Assessment Criteria and Grading Descriptors.

AT-A-GLANCE PROGRESSION

Level	Expected standard	Example Steps	Primary focus
Premiere	Simple, accessible group movement	Walks, marches, sways, gestures and skips	Visible participation, simple character and musical response
Debut	Basic movement phrases linked together	Step-touches, grapevines, jazz squares and gallops	Coordination, commitment and group awareness
Grades 1-3	Developing control across linked phrases	Jazz steps, turns, kicks, leaps and travelling patterns	Timing, control, clarity, character and ensemble awareness
Grades 4-5	Increasingly secure technical and stylistic work	Developed turns, kicks, leaps, floor transitions and style vocabulary	Accuracy, control, style, dynamics and storytelling
Grades 6-8	Secure to advanced, style-appropriate performance	Complex combinations chosen for the material and candidate	Musicality, artistry, intention, technical control and performance quality

02 Premiere & Debut

Premiere

Choreography should consist of short, accessible and repeatable movement phrases that enable candidates to participate confidently and respond to clear musical cues. Movement should support a simple character, mood or story and provide opportunities for candidates to demonstrate the skills identified within the assessment criteria, including participation, focus, coordination and communication. Movement may be simple and does not need to be technically demanding; however, each candidate's contribution should be clearly visible throughout the performance.

SUGGESTED MOVEMENT VOCABULARY

- Walking or marching on the spot
- Travelling walks and marches
- Step-touches, heel digs, toe taps and step digs
- Sways, claps and rhythmic gestures
- Simple arm patterns, bends and stretches
- Skips and simple two-footed jumps
- Walking turns and basic formation changes
- Character walks, mime and action-based movement

CHOREOGRAPHIC FOCUS

- Visible and willing participation
- Simple coordination and response to music
- Safe use of space
- Clear facial expression, gesture and body language
- Movement that supports character, mood or storytelling
- Engagement with the group performance and simple performance focus

Debut

Choreography should link simple movements into short sequences, enabling candidates to demonstrate developing coordination, timing and confidence. Movement should support character, mood or storytelling and provide opportunities for candidates to demonstrate the skills identified within the assessment criteria, including participation, focus, basic movement control and cooperation within the group. The group dance or movement sequence should last approximately one verse and one chorus and demonstrate basic coordination, commitment to the choreography and engagement with the performance.

SUGGESTED MOVEMENT VOCABULARY

- Step ball changes and ball changes
- Simple grapevines
- Jazz squares or box steps
- Chassés or gallops
- Step hops and drag steps
- Simple kick actions
- Shoulder rolls and basic isolations
- Three-step turns at an accessible tempo
- Partner mirroring, simple canon or ripple movement

CHOREOGRAPHIC FOCUS

- Performing a short sequence from memory
- Basic timing and coordination
- Simple changes of direction, level and formation
- Awareness of others in the group
- Clear communication of character, mood or storytelling
- Commitment to the choreography and overall performance

03 Grade 1 & 2

Grade 1

Develop basic technical foundations while keeping the choreography clearly character driven. Movement should be controlled, achievable and appropriate to musical theatre performance. The group dance or movement sequence lasts approximately one verse and one chorus. If dance is selected for the Technical Skills Demonstration, candidates perform in groups of up to four in a prepared character-driven routine lasting 30-45 seconds.

SUGGESTED MOVEMENT VOCABULARY

- Step-touch and grapevine variations
- Jazz squares and step ball changes
- Kick ball changes at a controlled tempo
- Chassés, gallops, step hops and drag steps
- Simple pas de bourrée
- Controlled kicks and small leaps
- Three-step and pivot turns
- Basic jazz walks and isolations
- Port de bras or expressive arm lines
- Simple floor-level changes and character movement

CHOREOGRAPHIC FOCUS

- Basic alignment and posture
- Controlled timing and coordination
- Clear starting and finishing positions
- Simple direction and level changes
- Character communicated physically and facially

Grade 2

Use a broader range of movements and begin combining steps with clearer accuracy, rhythmic response and ensemble awareness. The one-minute group sequence should include a range of dance steps and movements and show coordination, timing and the ability to work within the group. A dance Technical Skills Demonstration lasts 30-45 seconds in groups of up to four.

SUGGESTED MOVEMENT VOCABULARY

- Pas de bourrée combinations and turns
- Jazz walks with coordinated arms
- Kick and turn combinations
- Grapevines with direction changes
- Chainé turn preparations
- Small leaps with controlled take-off and landing
- Body isolations linked into phrases
- Simple floor transitions, partner interaction and canon
- Travelling turns at an accessible tempo

CHOREOGRAPHIC FOCUS

- Increased accuracy
- Coordinated arms, legs and focus maintaining group spacing
- Responding to rhythm and phrasing
- Sustaining character through the full phrase

04 Grade 3 & 4

Grade 3

Create longer, more connected movement phrases with developing technical control, musical phrasing and expressive detail. The one-minute group sequence should include a range of dance steps and movements. A dance Technical Skills Demonstration lasts 30-45 seconds in groups of up to four and should show coordination, control, accuracy, clarity, character and expressive intention.

SUGGESTED MOVEMENT VOCABULARY

- Step-touch and grapevine variations
- Jazz squares and step ball changes
- Kick ball changes at a controlled tempo
- Chassés, gallops, step hops and drag steps
- Simple pas de bourrée
- Controlled kicks and small leaps
- Three-step and pivot turns
- Basic jazz walks and isolations
- Port de bras or expressive arm lines
- Simple floor-level changes and character movement

CHOREOGRAPHIC FOCUS

- Basic alignment and posture
- Controlled timing and coordination
- Clear starting and finishing positions
- Simple direction and level changes
- Character communicated physically and facially

Grade 4

Use a broader range of movements and begin combining steps with clearer accuracy, rhythmic response and ensemble awareness. The one-minute group sequence should include a range of dance steps and movements and show coordination, timing and the ability to work within the group. A dance Technical Skills Demonstration lasts 30-45 seconds in groups of up to four.

SUGGESTED MOVEMENT VOCABULARY

- Pas de bourrée combinations and turns
- Jazz walks with coordinated arms
- Kick and turn combinations
- Grapevines with direction changes
- Chainé turn preparations
- Small leaps with controlled take-off and landing
- Body isolations linked into phrases
- Simple floor transitions, partner interaction and canon
- Travelling turns at an accessible tempo

CHOREOGRAPHIC FOCUS

- Increased accuracy
- Coordinated arms, legs and focus maintaining group spacing
- Responding to rhythm and phrasing
- Sustaining character through the full phrase

05 Grade 5 & 6

Grade 5

Choreography should demonstrate increased control, confidence and stylistic understanding, while maintaining clear character and performance focus. For the Performance component, candidates should perform a variety of dance steps as part of a group sequence lasting a minimum of two minutes. For the Technical Skills Demonstration, candidates perform a prepared character-driven musical theatre routine lasting 45-60 seconds in groups of up to three. The choreography should enable candidates to demonstrate secure technical skills, musicality and expressive communication.

SUGGESTED MOVEMENT VOCABULARY

- Linked turn combinations
- Jazz walks and travelling sequences
- Chassés and directional changes
- Kicks, leaps and elevation appropriate to the choreography
- Coordinated arm lines and expressive movement
- Floor work where appropriate to character and style
- Body isolations and changes of dynamics
- Syncopated and rhythmically varied movement
- Partner and small-group interaction
- Formation changes and ensemble movement
- Character, period or style-based movement

CHOREOGRAPHIC FOCUS

- Secure timing and coordination
- Consistent alignment and posture
- Technical control and accuracy
- Clear musicality and phrasing
- Sustained character, expressive communication, stylistic understanding and performance confidence

Grade 6

Choreography should demonstrate secure technical control, musicality and expressive intention, with movement used to support character, narrative and style. For the Performance component, candidates should perform a complex variety of dance steps as part of a group sequence lasting a minimum of three minutes. For Acting Through Dance, the choreography should enable candidates to demonstrate technical control, musicality, spatial awareness and sustained performance focus.

SUGGESTED MOVEMENT VOCABULARY

- Jazz walks and stylised movement phrases
- Kicks, leaps and elevation appropriate to the choreography
- Changes of level, direction and dynamics
- Body isolations and expressive movement
- Floor work and transitions where appropriate
- Partner and duet interaction
- Ensemble formations and layered staging
- Character, period or style-based movement vocabulary
- Linked turn sequences and travelling turns
- Syncopated and rhythmically varied movement
- Physical storytelling and narrative movement

CHOREOGRAPHIC FOCUS

- Secure technical control and coordination
- Musicality and phrasing
- Effective use of space and spatial awareness
- Clear characterisation and expressive intention
- Sustained focus and performance quality
- Stylistic understanding and consistency

06 Grade 7 & 8

Grade 7

Choreography should demonstrate assured technical control, stylistic understanding and expressive communication. Movement should support character, narrative and musical intention, with confidence and consistency throughout the performance. For the Performance component, candidates should perform a complex variety of dance steps as part of a group sequence lasting a minimum of three minutes. For Acting Through Dance, the choreography should enable candidates to demonstrate technical control, musicality, performance focus and clear expressive intention.

SUGGESTED MOVEMENT VOCABULARY

- Linked turn sequences and travelling turns
- Jazz walks and stylised movement phrases
- Kicks, leaps and elevation appropriate to the choreography
- Changes of level, direction and dynamics
- Body isolations and expressive movement
- Floor work and transitions where appropriate
- Partner and duet interaction
- Ensemble formations and layered staging
- Character, period or style-based movement vocabulary
- Choreographic motifs that support storytelling
- Syncopated and rhythmically varied movement

CHOREOGRAPHIC FOCUS

- Assured control, coordination and spatial awareness
- Clear musicality, timing and phrasing
- Confident response to dynamic and rhythmic change
- Sustained character and expressive communication
- Stylistic understanding and consistency

Grade 8

Choreography should demonstrate a mature integration of technical control, musicality, character and performance quality. Movement should be selected to serve the material, style and dramatic intention, rather than to showcase individual steps or techniques. For the Performance component, candidates should perform a complex variety of dance steps as part of a group sequence lasting a minimum of three minutes. For Acting Through Dance, the choreography should enable candidates to demonstrate technical control, expressive communication, stylistic understanding and sustained performance focus.

SUGGESTED MOVEMENT VOCABULARY

- Complex turn and travelling sequences
- Jazz walks and stylised movement phrases
- Kicks, leaps and elevation appropriate to the choreography
- Sophisticated use of dynamics, levels and direction
- Detailed body articulation and expressive movement
- Ensemble formations and layered staging
- Character, period or style-based movement vocabulary
- Linked turn sequences and travelling turns
- Syncopated and rhythmically varied movement
- Physical storytelling and narrative movement

CHOREOGRAPHIC FOCUS

- Precision, control and artistry
- Sophisticated musicality and phrasing
- Stylistic maturity and consistency
- Nuanced expressive communication
- Clear character, narrative and intention
- Effective use of space and movement dynamics

07 Important Guidance for Teachers

The vocabulary is not a checklist

Candidates are not expected to demonstrate every movement suggested for their grade. A smaller number of well-chosen movements performed with control, musicality and character may provide stronger assessment evidence than an ambitious routine performed without security or expressive intention.

A range of styles may be used

Musical theatre encompasses a wide range of physical and dance styles. Choreography may draw on musical theatre jazz, character dance, period movement, Fosse-inspired movement, contemporary musical theatre, commercial or street-influenced musical theatre, ballet-influenced movement, naturalistic movement, stylised gesture or physical storytelling. The chosen style should be appropriate to the musical, character, story and period.

Character and storytelling

Candidates should understand why the movement is being performed. Teachers may use the following questions during rehearsals:

- Who am I?
- Where am I, and what is happening in the story?
- What does the character want?
- How does the movement communicate character, relationship or intention?
- How does the movement respond to the music?
- How does the candidate interact with the other performers?

Safety and suitability

All choreography should be appropriate to the candidate's physical ability, experience and preparation. Advanced turns, kicks, floor work, lifts or partner work should only be included where candidates can perform them safely and with suitable control.

- Dancewear should allow the examiner to observe body line and form.
- Footwear or bare feet should be appropriate to the selected style and performance surface.
- Jewellery should be removed.
- Costumes and props should be carefully considered and must not create avoidable risk.
- The available space and the number of performers should be considered when planning travelling patterns, formations and partner work.

> **Reminder**
> Select choreography for the candidate and the material, not simply for the grade label. The strongest performances show purpose, control, musicality and clarity.

08 Suggested Musicals by Grade

The musicals listed in this guidance are examples only. STAGESCHOOL does not prescribe particular musicals, songs, scenes or performance material. Teachers may select published, adapted, centre-devised or original material, provided that it meets the requirements of the relevant grade and allows candidates to demonstrate the published learning outcomes and assessment criteria.

The inclusion of a musical at a particular grade does not mean that every song, scene, character or theme from that musical will be suitable. Teachers should consider:

- The candidate's age, maturity, ability and experience
- The language, themes and dramatic context of the selected extract
- The vocal, physical and technical demands
- Character, storytelling and ensemble opportunities
- The requirements of the Performance or Technical Skills Demonstration
- The learning outcomes, assessment criteria and grading descriptors for the grade entered

Material may be adapted or shortened where appropriate, provided that the meaning and dramatic context remain clear and all syllabus requirements are met.

Premiere and Debut

Material should offer clear storytelling, accessible characters and simple opportunities for singing, movement and imaginative participation.

- The Aristocats
- Bambi
- The Jungle Book
- The Lion King
- The Little Mermaid
- Mary Poppins
- Peter Pan
- Pinocchio
- The Sound of Music

Use selectively: Oliver! — this musical provides recognisable characters, simple objectives and opportunities for playful physical storytelling. Teachers should ensure that any material selected from Oliver! is appropriate to the age and experience of the candidates.

Grade 1 & 2

Material should enable candidates to develop character, communicate a clear emotional journey and combine acting, singing and movement within the group performance.

- Chitty Chitty Bang Bang
- Matilda the Musical
- Oliver!
- Enchanted
- Frozen
- Honk!
- Coco
- Annie
- Aladdin
- Seussical
- Madagascar: A Musical Adventure
- Charlie and the Chocolate Factory

Grade 3

Teachers should select extracts with manageable vocal and dramatic demands. Material from Billy Elliot, Les Misérables and We Will Rock You should be checked carefully for language, themes and content.

- Anastasia
- Matilda the Musical
- Enchanted
- The Greatest Showman
- The Hunchback of Notre Dame
- The Wizard of Oz
- Frozen 2
- Encanto
- Cinderella
- Beauty and the Beast
- Bugsy Malone
- Elf the Musical

Grade 4

Material should support increasingly secure characterisation, technical control and stylistic communication. Candidates should be able to sustain their performance choices across more developed sections.

- Hercules
- Encanto
- Sister Act
- The Princess and the Frog
- Matilda the Musical
- Billy Elliot
- Tangled
- Fame
- Everybody’s Talking About Jamie

Grade 5

Material should allow candidates to demonstrate secure character choices, musicality, performance focus and stylistic understanding.

- Hairspray
- Moana
- Sister Act
- Wicked
- Legally Blonde
- Newsies
- Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat
- Guys and Dolls
- Little Shop of Horrors
- The Addams Family

Grade 6

Material should offer opportunities for sustained character development, stylistic interpretation and the integration of acting, singing and movement.

- Mamma Mia!
- Newsies
- The Wiz
- Into the Woods

- Once on This Island
- The Prom
- West Side Story
- Anastasia
- Chess
- Legally Blonde

Grade 7

Material should provide scope for assured characterisation, emotional development, stylistic understanding and sustained performance quality.

- Chicago
- Hadestown
- In the Heights
- The Greatest Showman
- The Color Purple
- The Last Five Years
- Waitress
- Into the Woods
- Kinky Boots

Grade 8

Material should enable candidates to demonstrate sophisticated interpretation, nuanced characterisation and mature integration of technical and performance skills.

- Chess
- Come From Away
- Dreamgirls
- Fiddler on the Roof
- Hadestown
- Hamilton
- In the Heights
- Into the Woods
- Kinky Boots
- Les Misérables
- Miss Saigon
- Next to Normal
- Parade
- Ragtime
- Sweeney Todd
- The Color Purple
- The Last Five Years
- West Side Story
- Wicked
- Dear Evan Hansen

These are broadly appropriate for Grade 8 because the level expects nuanced characterisation, sophisticated interpretation and sustained technical and expressive control. However, several contain mature or emotionally complex themes and should therefore remain subject to careful extract-level review.