

## Chapter 13

## Varying intensity

### Strong and Light Weight

Imagine the following scene:

*The music begins as a whisper. Soft melodies from flutes and clarinets fill the auditorium, punctuated by light taps on the triangle and delicate plucks from the violins. Dancers skim ethereally across the surface of the stage in a series of pas de bourré couru. Gentle piqué arabesques ripple one after the other, like floating feathers scattering in the space.*

*The music builds in intensity. Soft melodies become forceful as trumpets and trombones join the flutes and clarinets. Pounding drumbeats replace the triangle. Buoyant piqué arabesques transform into exploding leaps. Soft runs now roar across the space with herculean energy.*

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Floating melodies of a flute. Bellowing cries of the horns. Twinkling taps on a triangle. The changing intensity of sounds in a musical score creates differing moods.

Dancers also change their performance intensity to affect choreographic mood. Take, for example, the differences between the White and Black Swan in the classical ballet *Swan Lake*. **Light Weight** characterizes the White Swan. The fluttering movements of its arms and the buoyant use of its torso transcend gravity, giving the image of a swan floating on water or flying in the air. A **Strong Weight** demeanor is characteristic of the Black Swan's personality. The Black Swan jumps, turns, and lunges with powerful and weighted forcefulness; its disposition is firm and resolute.

"Weight" in the context of Effort does not refer to how much you weigh or how strong or weak you are, but instead to the quality of how you use your mass while dancing. For example, during technique class, you might convey a fierce and foreboding attitude in one exercise and a gentle attitude in the very next exercise. Or, you might move your lower body powerfully while your upper body moves with soft buoyancy. *Are these examples familiar to you?*

Table 13.1 presents a list of synonyms, images, and musical suggestions for Strong and Light Weight. *Add to each list as you explore Weight Effort.*

Table 13.1 Synonyms, imagery, and musical suggestions for Weight Effort

<i>Strong Weight</i>	<i>Light Weight</i>
<i>Synonyms</i>	<i>Synonyms</i>
Resolute	Delicate
Powerful	Gently
Firm	Buoyant
Explode	Airy
Push	Sprinkle
Mighty	Billowing
Forceful	Misty
Herculean	Wispy
Vigor	Whisper
<i>Imagery</i>	<i>Imagery</i>
Bellowing boom of a timpani or bass drum	Soft feathers floating in the air
Sound of thunder	Billowing chiffon fabric
A mighty growl from a tiger	Helium balloons
<i>Musical suggestions</i>	
Album: <i>The Rodeo Eroded</i> , Tin Hat Trio	
<b>Light:</b> “Sweep”	
<b>Strong:</b> “Under the Gun”	
Album: <i>The 50 Most Essential Pieces of Classical Music</i>	
<b>Strong:</b> The Valkyrie: Ride of the Valkyries, Wagner	
<b>Light:</b> Nocturne No. 2, Op. 9 in E-Flat Major, Chopin	
<b>Strong:</b> Requiem: Dies Irae, Tuba Mirum, Verdi	
<i>Musical variation</i>	
Symphony No. 5 in C Minor, Op. 67 “Fate”: I. Allegro con Brio, Beethoven	
Hungarian Dances: No. 5 in G Minor, Brahms (also excellent for variation in Time Effort)	

## Weight Effort: technique and artistry

Weight Effort is an effective tool to use when propelling through space and achieving both a weighted and weightless sense of verticality. Strong Weight grounds your lower body during moments of stability and promotes a bounding and driving use of force during weight shifts and direction changes. Light Weight enlivens the torso with delicacy, giving the impression of transcending gravity’s pull. This is especially helpful for promoting buoyancy and rebound during lower body weight shifts, consecutive relevé, and balances.

Table 13.2 Technical and artistic benefits of Weight Effort

**Strong Weight** is useful when:

1. Grounding the lower body and activating the torso.
2. Performing direction changes and weight shifts with force and commitment.
3. Conveying a powerful emotional state: *resolute, proud, celebratory, firm, aggressive, boisterous, angry, vigorous*, and so on.

**Light Weight** is useful when:

1. Enlivening the upper body and arms with buoyancy and lift.
2. Performing direction changes and weight shifts with buoyancy and lift.
3. Conveying a delicate emotional state: *serene, gentle, ethereal, demure, poised, sneaky, delicately commanding*, and so on.

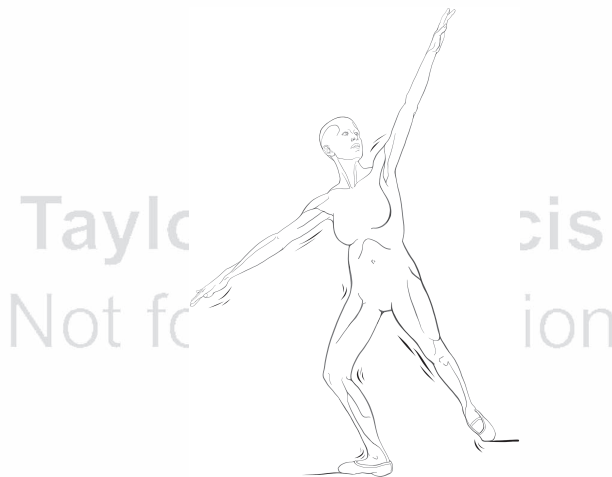


Figure 13.1 Explore buoyancy and lift in balletic steps

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## Embody Weight Effort

### Explore Light Weight

1. Imagine your pelvis, torso, and head are balloons. As your body fills with helium, you float upwards, transcending gravity's pull. Allow the helium to travel from your torso to your limbs with Light buoyancy.
2. Choose three balletic movements to perform: perhaps a gentle *tendu*, a billowing *port de bras*, a buoyant *piqué*, or a wispy *pas de bourée couru*.
3. **Reflect:** What does balletic movement feel like in this Light Weighted world?

### Explore Strong Weight

- 1 Imagine your body is an immense tree. Your lower body forges deep into the ground through an extensive root system. Extending upward from the roots is your core, a mighty trunk, and your upper body, a towering display of thick branches. Exhale, and establish an expansive and commanding posture, allowing power to emanate from your wise tree-like body.
- 2 Choose three balletic movements to perform: perhaps a mighty *balançoïre*, a herculean *port de bras*, a roaring *pirouette*, or a vigorous *pas de bourrée*.
- 3 **Reflect:** *What does balletic movement feel like in this Strong Weighted world?*

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Both Light and Strong Weight activated your body's center and enliven your limbs. Light Weight does this with buoyancy and lift, and Strong Weight does it with compression and force. So, either quality is advantageous to access during technique class if you experience difficulty:

- Stabilizing your lower body during balances.
- Moving your arms without dropping your elbows.
- Travelling efficiently during locomotion steps.
- Achieving greater rebound during jumps, balances, and weight shifts.
- Establishing lift and ease in your upper body *port de bras*.

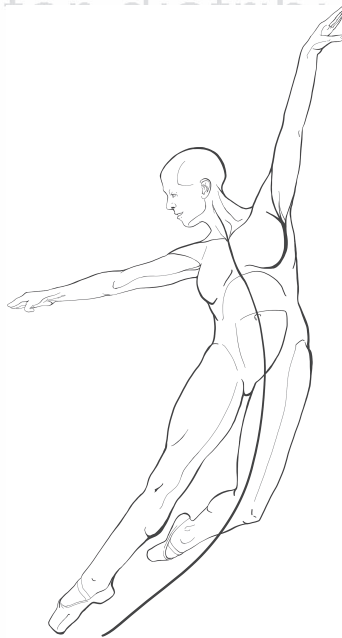


Figure 13.2 Powerfully activate the body's mass in space

Artistically, the use of Strong and Light Weight may convey a large range of emotional states depending on the mood or context of the choreography or class phrases. So, Weight Effort is a great tool to use when developing onstage characters or attitudes. Notice how the overall attitude of the movement changes as Weight Effort changes in the following explorations. Embodying these expressive differences is good practice for rehearsals and performances. You'll find that many different characters and attitudes emerge when you take time to notice them.

## Let's explore Weight Effort!

### Name the steps!

Instead of referring to a balletic step by only its French name—a *balancé*, for example—refer to it by both its dynamic name and French name: a *booming or softly sweeping balancé*. Play with multiple terms this way: a *firm or soft rond de jambe*, *thunderous or sprinkling sauté*, a *whispering or shouting pas de bourrée*, and so on.

### One word, one image

- 1 Create a list of Light and Strong Weight words and images, such as those presented in Table 13.1.
- 2 Choose one word and one image to experiment with during technique class. The word and image can be, but do not have to be, from the same Effort category. You decide!
- 3 Embody the quality of the word and image during *barre* and *centre* exercises.
- 4 Repeat this process over five technique classes, choosing different words and images each class.
- 5 **Reflect:** *How do different Weight Effort words and images impact your technical and expressive performance of the balletic exercises?*

### Light, Strong! Upper, Lower!

Choose a *barre* or *centre* exercise you practiced in class recently. Feel free to replace the imagery in the below activities with images you created.

#### Upper body

- 1 As you perform the exercise, imagine your upper body floating upward and outward like glistening mist.
- 2 Perform the exercise again. This time, imagine moving your upper body firmly with the resolute power of a grizzly bear.
- 3 **Reflect:** *How does Light Weight or Strong Weight enhance your upper body movements?*

**Lower body**

Perform the exercise two more times.

- 1 Imagine your lower body as voluminous clouds propelled by delicate puffs of air.
- 2 Then, imagine the booming sounds of timpani drums driving your lower body through space.
- 3 **Reflect:** *How does Light or Strong Weight enhance your lower body movements?*

**Monotonous no more—Weight Effort**

- 1 Choose an exercise you practiced in class recently.
- 2 Perform the exercise as if it were a monotonous speech. Do not allow the intensity and “tone” of the movement to change.
- 3 In your second performance, alternate between “whispering” and “shouting” the movements.
- 4 **Reflect:**

How did the use of Weight Effort strengthen your technical execution? Describe any characters or feeling tones that emerged as you played with each Effort quality.

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