

## Chapter 12

# Fluidity

## Free and Bound Flow

Perform the following:

- Initiate a *grand battement devant* with an unhindered (Free Flow) toss of the leg upward followed by a controlled (Bound Flow) descent of the leg back to *fifth position*.
- Four *balancé à la seconde* with a fluid and sweeping movement quality (Free Flow).
- A *promenade* in *first arabesque* with contained fluidity (Bound Flow).

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Balletic movement has a rhythm of tension and release, inflow and outflow. Sometimes the steady flow of energy is unhindered, or **Free**, and sometimes it is controlled, or **Bound**.

Bound Flow animates familiar classical ballet characters, such as the noble and dignified Apollo in George Balanchine's ballet *Apollo*, as well as onstage scenarios, such as Swanhilda's cautious and sneaky investigation of Dr. Coppélius's doll shop in *Coppelia*. The use of Bound Flow also creates a regal onstage atmosphere in the opening scene of Balanchine's *Serenade*: the ensemble of dancers stand calmly in parallel position, arms gliding toward their faces with controlled elegance.

Free Flow animates familiar classical ballet characters, such as the excited, uninhibited demeanor of the Petrushka Doll in in Act I of *Petrushka*. Free Flow is also a common quality in the celebratory finales, codas, and national dances in popular classical ballets. Even in contemporary or neoclassical ballets, such as George Balanchine's *Who Cares?* Free Flow is essential in conveying an outpouring and carefree atmosphere.

Table 12.1 presents a list of synonyms, images, and musical suggestions for Free and Bound Flow. *Add to each list as you explore Flow Effort.*

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Table 12.1 Synonyms, imagery, and musical suggestions for Flow Effort

Bound Flow	Free Flow
<i>Synonyms</i>	<i>Synonyms</i>
Controlled	Unhindered
Contained	Sweeping
Careful	Outpouring
Withheld	Carefree
Crystallize	Abandoned
<i>Imagery</i>	<i>Imagery</i>
Water pooling in an eddy	Water gushing over a cliff
Stoic gait of a lion	Carefree monkey swinging through the trees
Cautious creeping in a haunted house	Streamers freely blowing in the breeze
<i>Musical suggestions</i>	
Album: <i>Uncommon Disturbances</i> , Edgar Meyer with Béla Fleck and Mike Marshall	
<b>Free:</b> “Barnyard Disturbance”	
Album: <i>Foreign Legion</i> , Tin Hat	
<b>Bound:</b> “Sunrise at Independence”	
Album: <i>Divenire</i> , Ludovico Einaudi	
<b>Free:</b> “Fly”	
Album: <i>Astor in Paris</i> , 3 Leg Torso	
<b>Bound (mostly):</b> The Cat and the Rooster	
Album: <i>The 50 Most Essential Pieces of Classical Music</i>	
<b>Free:</b> Concerto for Violin in E Major, RV 269, Op. 8:I, “Spring”: I. Allegro, The Four Seasons, Vivaldi	
<b>Bound:</b> Troi Gymnopédies: Gymnopédie No. I, Satie	

Flow Effort: technique and artistry

Bound Flow requires a contained use of energy and is therefore useful when you need greater control or accuracy in your movements. Free Flow, on the other hand, is useful when you need more ease and mobility in your body. Any movement in ballet may be performed with Bound or Free Flow. Determining which quality to use is highly dependent on your technical and artistic goals.

Table 12.2 Technical and artistic benefits of Flow Effort

<p><b>Bound Flow</b> is useful when:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Performing controlled movement transitions.</li> <li>2. Crystallizing a balance or practicing clarity of line or form.</li> <li>3. Conveying a contained emotional state: <i>nervous, proud, restrained, noble, sneaky, tense, contained aggression</i>, and so on.</li> </ol>
<p><b>Free Flow</b> is useful when:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Embodying the momentum of the movement (during movement transitions or movements that travel).</li> <li>2. Moving with freedom of motion in the upper body (especially during fast footwork).</li> <li>3. Conveying an outpouring emotional state: <i>carefree, playful, uninhibited, celebratory, excited, reckless, out of control</i>, and so on.</li> </ol>

Table 12.3 Physical signs of excessive Bound Flow

1.	Tense spinal postures and clenched jaws.
2.	Restricted breathing patterns.
3.	Stiffness in the hip joints and shoulders.
4.	Pinched shoulder blades.
5.	Tightness in the rib cage.
6.	Rigidity in the fingers and wrists.
7.	Toes of the supporting leg curl under.
8.	Reduced range of motion in lower body.
9.	Restricted ability to travel through space.
10.	Clenched gluteal muscles.

Precise and controlled movement is emphasized in ballet training. Not surprisingly, it is easy to become excessively Bound during class. The increased muscular tension that results from excessive use of Bound Flow is counterproductive to good technique. It causes tense body postures, less adaptability and mobility in the spine, and decreased range of motion of the proximal joints.

Are the descriptions in Table 12.3 familiar to you?

Do you emit loud, breathy exhales after you finish performing a difficult exercise? It is common to restrict the flow of your breath when you attempt difficult balances, perform complex or fast sequences, or execute muscularly taxing movements, such as those found in *grand adagios*. Incorporating easeful and conscious breathing during class is one of the simplest ways to reduce excessive Bound Flow and increase the use of Free Flow.

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Breath as Flow

- 1 Choose a *plié* or *battement fondu* exercise from a recent technique class.
- 2 **Restrict your Breath** as you perform the exercise. *What do you feel happening in your distal, mid-limb, and proximal joints? What about your torso?*
- 3 **Free up your Breath** as you perform the exercise. Establish a relaxed rhythm between inhaling and exhaling, but especially emphasize the moments of exhale. *What do you feel happening in your body now?*

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If you struggle with excessive Bound Flow in class, generate imagery and sounds that invoke Free Flow. Add to this list in your dance technique journal:

- A soft ocean breeze is carrying the upper body and arms through space.
- Your body is carried by water currents in an easily moving river.

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- “Whooosshhhh!” or “Whhheeeeeeee ...”. Use these sounds during transition steps, such as *glissé*, *pas de bourée*, *temps lié*, and so on.
- Your chest and arms are windsocks enlivened by the blowing wind.
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- \_\_\_\_\_
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### Let’s explore Flow Effort!

#### Same exercise, different flow!

- 1 Learn the following exercise. Create your own counts and rhythm.

##### **Centre floor waltz**

Begin in *fifth position en face*, right leg *devant*.

- Right *balancé à la seconde*
- Repeat left and right



Figure 12.1 A soft ocean breeze carries the upper body into space

- Left *chassé effacé en avant*, *pas de bourée* to *croisé sous-sus*, right leg *devant*
  - *Plié fifth* into *chassé relevé croisé attitude derrière*
  - Lower the *derrière* leg (left leg) to *croisé fourth* position
  - Double *pirouette en dehors* landing in *croisé fourth position lunge*
- 2 **Focus on Free Flow** as you perform the exercise. Execute the movements with a sweeping and carefree quality. Imagine your limbs are streamers flowing freely in a breeze (or use one of the images you generated). During each exhale, allow your energy to pour out from the core of your body, through your arms and legs, and into space.
  - 3 **Focus on Bound Flow** as you perform the exercise. Execute the movements with control and subtle restraint, emphasizing clearly the articulation of the lower body. Contain your body's energy at the edge of your skin, perhaps conjuring feelings of regal elegance.
  - 4 **Alternate between Free and Bound Flow.** Examples: Perform the first *balancé* with Free Flow and the second with Bound; perform the *pas de bourée* with Bound Flow and the *pirouette* with Free.  
Notice how your breath patterns follow rhythms of Freeing and Binding.

*How might that influence your Effort choices?*

5 **Reflect:**

How did your performance change expressively or artistically in the above explorations?

In what ways did Bound or Free Flow enhance your technique?

**Balancing freely!**

Do you immediately Bind your energy as if some imagined object is suddenly pressing you downward in space when you initiate one or two-legged balances? If so, Free up your Flow.

**One- or two-legged balances at barre**

- 1 Exhale as you release the *barre* and initiate a balance of your choice off of *relevé*. Feel your body easefully flowing along clear Countertensional lines in space.
- 2 While in the balance, Freely and Lightly exhale again and send your energy past the edges of your body, flowing outward from your center through your limbs and into space. Imagine your body as warm rays of the sun with heat flowing freely outward.
- 3 Repeat 1–2 *en relevé*.

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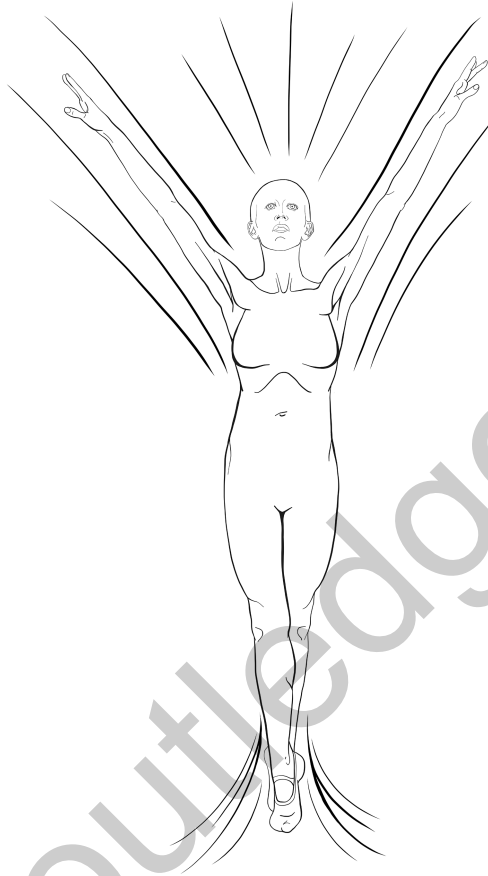


Figure 12.2 Use a Free Flowing, outpouring exhale during *sous-sus*