15 CORRECTIONS TO *STOP* GIVING + *WHAT* TO SAY INSTEAD

A modern, emotionally safe
feedback guide for ballet educators

BALLET REEDUCATION

Welcome!

You're one step closer to transforming your teaching and empowering your students! I'm so happy to be sharing this guide with you. I've spent many years configuring the best possible way to teach ballet to todays generation & now you get to partake in this knowledge too.

ABOUT ME

Austin Crumley is a passionate dance educator & advocate for holistic ballet training. With over 10 years of experience & a Masters in Education, he has helped countless dancers & teachers embrace the principles of Ballet Reeducation. His mission is to transform ballet education by promoting mindful movement, anatomical awareness, and human-centered learning in ballet classrooms worldwide.

As a dance educator, you have the power to shape not only dancers, but also confident, creative individuals. This guide is your tool to transform your language from vague to actionable & successful for your 21st-century ballet classroom.

Austin Crumley

BALLET REEDUCATION

Traditional correction language can unintentionally trigger fear, tension, or shame, especially when dancers juggle school, social pressures, identity, and growth.

Modern ballet education needs feedback that is emotionally safe, technically precise, developmentally appropriate, and informed by learning science.

This guide gives you 15 common, outdated corrections to retire + clear, research-influenced alternatives to use instead. It's quick to scan in class, rehearsal, or pre-planning, yet rooted in a deeper understanding of how feedback works when learners feel safe to engage.

Research on feedback conversations underscores that psychological safety, such as trust, respect, and a focus on learning, helps learners engage in candid dialogue and co-construct knowledge. (PubMed)

Your language choices in the studio are a direct lever for that safety.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

For each correction below, you'll see:

1. What to retire & why it can be counterproductive
2. What to say instead *(precise wording you can use immediately)*
3. Teacher notes on pedagogy, biomechanics, or SEL
4. Age differentiation tips for ages 2 through post-secondary and beyond

Use any single item in the moment, or revise your entire cue bank over a week.

This is both a quick reference and a foundation for deeper practice.

Ready to begin?

1) “PULL UP”

Why retire it:
vague; often produces tension and gripping rather than true length.

Say instead:
“Lengthen by stacking your vertebrae upon your spine and feel your ribs floating above your hips.”

Teacher notes:

- Encourages vertical alignment via sensory imagery rather than a stress cue.
- Supports spinal alignment from the core outward, not just a top-down command.

Age tips:

- Younger dancers: Grow tall like someone is gently lifting the top of your head.
- Teens+ adults: Stack ribs over hips—inhale up, exhale to stabilize

2) “TUCK YOUR PELVIS”

Why retire it: can force posterior tilt, disrupting neutral pelvis and natural hamstring-glute relationships.

Say instead:
Bring your pelvis to neutral; front hip points facing forward, tailbone lengthening down
(see next page for anatomical image)

Teacher notes:

- Uses anatomical landmarks rather than a loaded word that students may interpret as forced.
- Keeps pelvis neutral, safer for joints and more sustainable for technique.

Age tips:

- Younger: Imagine your pelvis like a bowl full of water, don’t tip forward or back.
- Older: Feel equal contact of hip points to the front, tailbone lengthening without gripping.

2) “TUCK YOUR PELVIS”

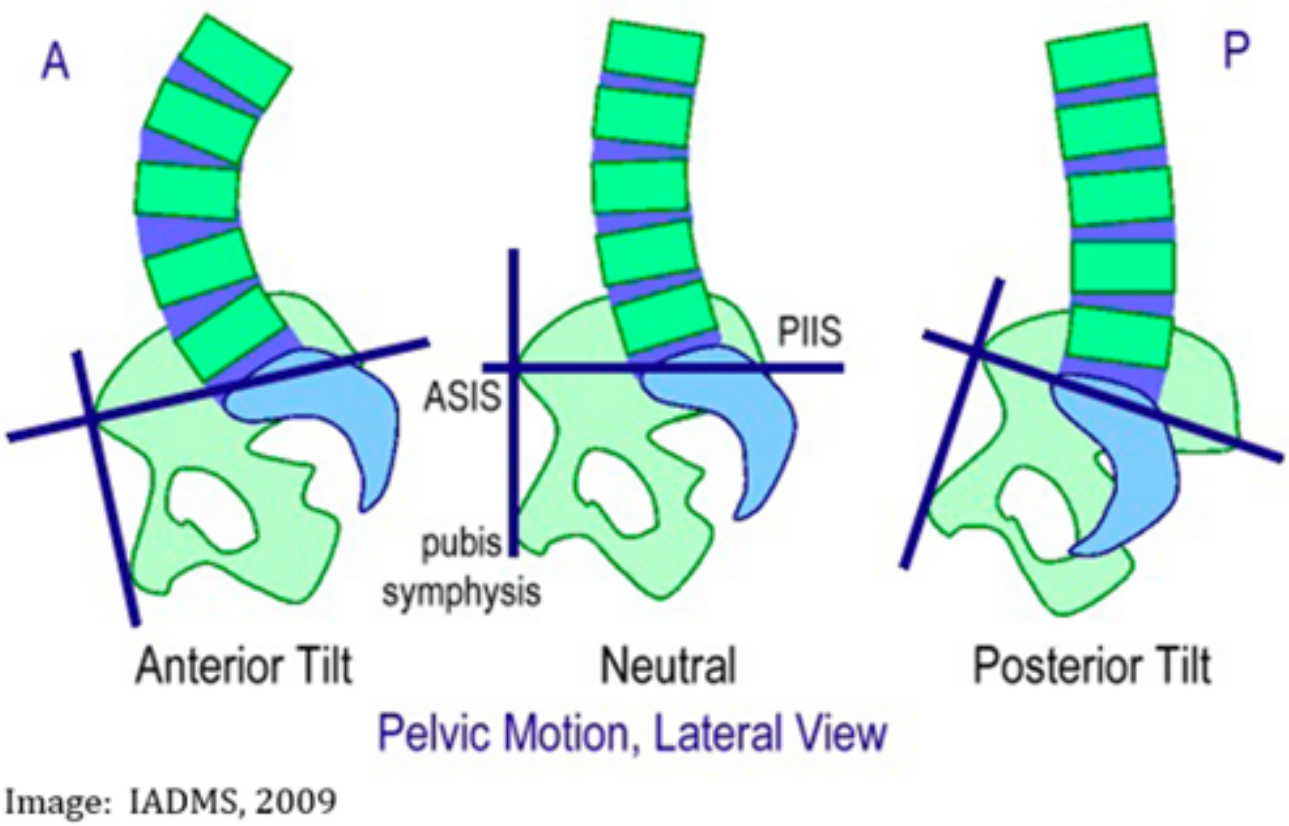

Image: IADMS, 2009

Check out this article from the International Association of Dance Medicine & Specialists (IADMS) for more information.

3) “STRAIGHTEN YOUR KNEES”

Why retire it: risks hyperextension or dominance of quads over balanced leg muscle use.

Say instead:
Lift from above the knee & a radiating sensation up & down the back of the thigh to engage the full leg line.

Teacher notes:

- Promotes co-contraction between quads and hamstrings, more stable joints.
- Focus is upward lift and whole-leg integrity, not forcing the joint angle.
- FYI, the knee is a complex unit with many muscles; therefore, this cue may need to be altered depending on the student.

Age tips:

- Young: Think of a string pulling your leg straight from just above the knee.
- Teens+: Feel the front and back of the leg supporting each other.

4) “POINT YOUR FEET”

Why retire it: misses teaching where articulation should start; can lead to rigid ankles or sickling.

Say instead:
Start the point by articulating through your ankle, then continue through the middle of the foot, then your toes.

Teacher notes:

- Guides students to initiate movement correctly, improving foot articulation and alignment.
- Reduces over-reliance on toes only; teaches the chain of motion.

Age tips:

- Young: Pretend your ankle is a little hinge that closes first, then your toes.
- Older: Notice the smooth flow from ankle to toes without forcing or collapsing.

5) “TURN OUT MORE”

Why retire it: often increases gripping, knee torque, or unsafe compensation.

Say instead:
Rotate from your hips, show me your zipper line staying centered.

Teacher notes:

- Emphasizes hip-origin turnout and alignment, not just foot angle.
- Zipper imagery helps maintain mid-line awareness to prevent twisting.

Age tips:

- Young: Imagine turning your legs from your hips like a compass needle.
- Teens+: Keep the center line stable; adjust rotation from hip sockets, not knees.

2) “TURN OUT MORE”

Image: IADMS, 2011

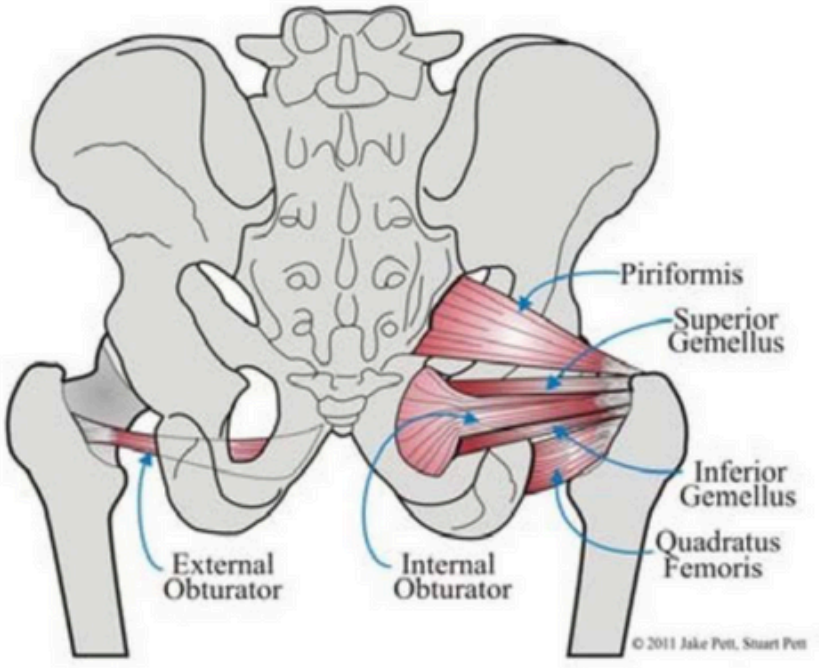

Figure 7: Hip outward rotators

Check out this resource paper from the International Association of Dance Medicine & Specialists (IADMS) for more information on anatomical turnout for dancers.

6) “RELAX YOUR SHOULDERS”

Why retire it: cue lacks direction; students may misinterpret or disengage muscles in charge of port de bras.

Say instead:
Slide your shoulders down your back like butter melting in a pan while also keeping your collarbones wide.

Teacher notes:

- Encourages active, supported posture rather than limpness.
- Balances relaxation with subtle engagement for posture and breathing.
- FYI, this cue becomes inadequate when arms are *en haut* as the shoulder blades need to move upward & outward for appropriate usage.

Age tips:

- Young: teach them the opposite action like shrugging their shoulders up so they understand the feeling. Then have them perform the opposite motion.
- Older: review the affiliated muscles surrounding the glenohumeral joint that allows for the required posture

7) “DON’T FALL”

Why retire it: fear-based; doesn’t teach what to do technically.

Say instead:
Press into the floor and find your supporting leg before you rise; keep attempting the movement until you find that feeling of balance *(“falling to the right? Try falling to the left!”)*

Teacher notes:

- Moves attention from fear to actionable preparatory steps.
- Improves stability, alignment, and control from the ground up.
- introduces biomechanics & physics of movement in a tangible way

Age tips:

- Young: begin with proprioception activities that introduce the feeling of balance *(i.e., 2 feet to 1 foot; walking on yoga blocks)*
- Teens+: Sense support underfoot, then initiate rising, not the other way around.

8) “SMILE!”

Why retire it: invalidates genuine emotional state of portrayed character, can pressure performers to fake affect.

Say instead:
Bring intention to your face; what story are you telling here?

Teacher notes:

- Supports authentic expression aligned with artistic intent.
- Reinforces that facial expression is part of storytelling, not forced cheer.

Age tips:

- Young: Show what your character feels without just showing teeth.
- Older: Choose an expressive tone that fits the mood, not a default smile.

9) “YOU’RE NOT TRYING”

Why retire it: damaging to trust; misreads effort and internal focus.

Say instead:
Tell me what you were focusing on, let’s build from there.

Teacher notes:

- Opens dialogue, shows respect, shifts toward problem-solving.
- Helps identify cognitive load, distraction, or misunderstanding.

Age tips:

- Young: Ask what they remember trying a moment ago, then guide a tweak.
- Older: Encourage reflective self-report before making corrections.

10) “FIX YOUR ARMS”

Why retire it: too broad; dancers can’t know whether to change height, shape, tension, or direction.

Say instead:
Round from the back of your arms and soften your fingers; in other words, allocate the problem & give 1 tangible action the student can work on for the time being.

Teacher notes:

- Offers specific anatomical target, refined shape, and expressive detail.
- Easier to implement immediately; reduces guesswork.
- Often times students don’t understand which muscles are involved in *port de bras*, so enlighten them with a mini-anatomy lesson!

Age tips:

- Young: Pretend your arms are soft snakes, not stiff sticks.
- Older: Focus on back of arms smoothing, fingers relaxed, not clenched.

11) “HOLD YOUR CORE”

Why retire it: often causes gripping, breath holding, or rigidity.

Say instead:
Exhale and feel your low ribs knit gently together OR feel the area beneath your rib & give a gentle cough to discover your transverse abdominis *(muscle in charge of stability)*

Teacher notes:

- Promotes dynamic engagement tied to breath rather than static tension.
- Supports posture, stability, and efficient movement.

Age tips:

- Young: Blow out a little air and feel your belly button draw in softly.
- Older: Sync gentle rib-region support with exhale for controlled movement.

12) “RAISE YOUR LEG”

Why retire it: fear-based, unclear direction; does not clearly explain how to effectively raise the leg to a desired, safe position.

Say instead:
Maintaining our turnout muscles & alignment, let’s discover a leg height where we feel a gentle stop & hold it!

Teacher notes:

- Focuses on quality over arbitrary height.
- Encourages self-management and awareness of safe limits while also pushing said limits safely.

Age tips:

- Young: provide age appropriate alignment & technical steps *(i.e., tendu → degagé → en hauteur)*
- Older: Find a level where technique stays clean, then refine from there; add in conditioning exercises that targets strenghtening the iliopsoas & other hip flexors + lengthening the hamstrings for utmost height.

13) “JUMP HIGHER”

Why retire it: height is a result of biomechanics & strengthening prep, therefore we cannot simply just demand for more. Improper advancement in movement can result in short & long-term injury.

Say instead:
Push through the floor using both legs evenly and land with soft ankles, articulating through your feet as you come down. The energy you push into the floor is the energy you will get up into the air.

Teacher notes:

- Teaches proper force application and landing mechanics, which naturally improve height and safety.
- Reduces risk of injury from over-straining or poor technique.

Age tips:

- Young: Pretend the floor is a balloon you push down to bounce up.
- Older: Equal leg drive, mindful landing; height comes as a byproduct.

14) “BE SHARPER”

Why retire it: ambiguous, culturally loaded; students may not know what to change.

Say instead:
Define the beginning and end of each movement → clarity first, then speed.

Teacher notes:

- Teaches phrasing and musical structure rather than vague aesthetic judgment.
- Supports precision, then flow, then speed, building in logical order.

Age tips:

- Young: Show where the movement starts and stops clearly.
- Older: Focus on crisp initiation and finish; speed follows when clarity is solid.

15) “DON’T RUSH!”

Why retire it: scolding tone; student feels criticized without understanding pacing. If student is rushing, then musicality literacy needs to be addressed/taught.

Say instead:
Breathe into the movement and match the count; let’s feel the space between beats.

Teacher notes:

- Directs attention to breath, timing, and musicality rather than reprimand *(artistry in the making)*
- Helps students internalize rhythm and pacing in a positive way.

Age tips:

- Young: Count out loud with a gentle voice or clap; feel the spaces.
- Older: Use breath as a timing tool, not just a reminder to slow down *(encourages appropriate oxygenation of muscles for top performance)*

Closing Note + a special offer!

Emotionally safe feedback is *not* soft on standards, it's smart, respectful, and results-driven. When dancers feel safe to engage, they learn faster, take healthy risks, and build stronger technique that lasts.

Use this guide as your quick reference, then layer in your studio culture, sequencing, and communication style. Over time, the language itself becomes part of the environment that nurtures artistry and growth.

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special offer!

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