

SEWING RIBBONS AND ELASTIC

Sewing Ribbons

Even before you go on pointe, you may need to know how to sew ribbons. Some schools require ribbons on technique shoes for exams; some require students to wear shankless, “pre-pointe” shoes.

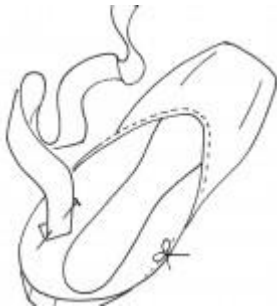
The more you dance, the more particular you will become about how and where to sew the ribbons on your pointe shoes. Their location and their angle determine how effectively they keep the shoe attached to your foot, and how attractively they do it. Because every foot is different, every dancer must determine the positioning that is right for her, and most dancers insist on sewing their ribbons themselves. However you choose to sew them – more angled, less angled, staggered, or with your personal good luck number of stitches per side – you are participating in one of ballet’s tedious but dearly cherished rituals.

Most pointe shoe ribbons are nylon or polyester satin with either a shiny or matte finish. They should be seven-eighths to one inch wide, and about twenty-two inches long. Some dancers singe the ribbon ends to keep them from unraveling.

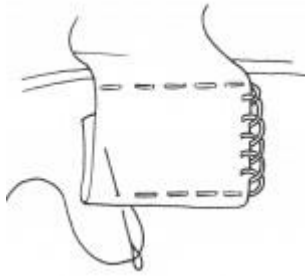
Although you will fine-tune your own method with every pair you sew, the basic procedure is this. [See video demonstration.](#)



Fold the heel of the shoe down to meet the sockliner as you would for technique shoe elastics. Mark the inside of the shoe along the crease with a pencil; this line will correspond to the position of the back edge of the ribbon and ensure that the ribbon is angled.



Ribbon should overlap shoe by at least one inch.



Using strong thread (some dancers use dental floss), sew the ribbon securely onto the shoe, using whip stitches and running stitches in a square pattern as for technique shoe elastic. For a neater and stronger result, fold the bottom end of the ribbon under so the rough edge does not show and so you are sewing through a double thickness of ribbon. If your pointe shoes have a separate, unattached lining, sew your ribbons onto the lining only. If the lining is bonded to the outer satin and you must sew all the way through, use running stitches throughout. Also, use a good strong needle and be sure the thread matches the satin color nicely.

Sewing Elastics on Pointe Shoes

Many dancers use elastics as well as ribbons to keep their pointe shoes from slipping off their heels. Pointe shoe elastic tends to be wider and more heavy-duty than technique shoe elastic.

Some dancers sew the elastics near the ribbons, which helps conceal them once the ribbons are tied. Others sew them at the back of the heel, on the outside of the shoe, to prevent chafing the Achilles tendon. Still others find that the ideal position is in between, often a thumb's width in front of the back seam.

For additional security and support, you can do what men often do with their technique shoes: use two pieces of elastic per shoe, crisscrossing them over your instep.

Sewing Elastics on Technique Slippers

You need a piece of elastic about five inches long and about half an inch wide for each shoe.

Fold the heel of the shoe down to meet the sockliner as shown above. Mark the inside of the shoe along the creases with a pencil.

Sew one end of elastic in a square pattern over the pencil mark, using a whip stitch on the sides and a running stitch along the bottom and the top near, but not through, the drawstring. About a half inch of the elastic should be attached on each side, stitches should be about an eighth of an inch long.

Pin the other end of the elastic and try the shoe on for comfort before you finish sewing. It should be taut but not too tight.

Tying Ribbons

Ribbons add support but should never be so tight that they hurt your Achilles tendon or restrict the movement of your ankle.

There are many techniques for tying ribbons, but here are the basics:



With your foot flat on the floor, grasp the inside ribbon and wrap it over your foot and around the back of your ankle. Continue wrapping the ribbon around to the front of your ankle and back around again, stopping at the inside of your ankle.



Then wrap the outer ribbon over your foot and around the back of your ankle, bringing it around to the front to meet the first ribbon at the inside of the ankle, just between the bone and the Achilles tendon; the knot will go here, never directly on the tendon.



Tie the ribbons securely in a double knot – never in a bow! – and tuck in the knot and loose ends. The knot should be invisible: if it makes a bulge when you tuck it in, trim the ribbons.