

The 5 fundamental arm positions



There are many different names for ballet arm positions depending on the ballet method. It must be mentioned, however, that only the name changes, not the position. This manual follows the guidelines of the Royal Academy of Dance.

First position

The arms are held in an oval shape with the hands and are in line with the waist. Shoulders remain open and relaxed. The hands should not be touching each other. The elbows point out to the sides, not downward.

Second position

In second, the arms are extended to the sides, but a little in front of the body. The arms are not extended exactly horizontally to the side – there is instead a gentle, small slope downwards from the shoulders. The elbows should remain supported, with the palms of the hands facing forwards.

Third position

For third position, one arm is placed in first position and the other in second position (in RAD terminology), while observing all rules for these two positions. The dancer should imagine a vertical line down the centre of their body, dividing it in two; the front arm should not cross this centre line.

Fourth position

One arm is placed in first position and one arm is placed in second position (RAD), observing all the rules for these positions. The dancer should imagine a vertical line down the centre of their body, dividing it in two; the front arm should not cross this centre line.

Fifth position

The arms maintain the same oval shape as in first position, also keeping the same distance between the hands. The palms of the hands are facing the dancer and the elbows are supported and pointing to the sides. The shoulders should remain relaxed.

Strength, control and awareness is required to properly hold the arm positions engage the basic positions of the arms. Muscles in the back body, side body and the core will be working together. The imagery of finding the initiation of the arms from within the core center of the dancer works best to ensure an embodied use of arms.