

*The
Bellydance
Bundle*

A close-up photograph of a person's hand holding a blue and silver pen, poised to write on a piece of paper. The paper has some faint, light-colored sketches or drawings on it. The background is blurred, showing what appears to be a stage or a performance space with some lights. The overall image has a dark, muted color palette.

FIGURING OUT WHAT TO PRACTICE

A GUIDE FOR THE MODERN DANCER

WHEN YOU'RE AT THE STUDIO, IT'S SO SIMPLE.

WELL, NOT SIMPLE.

It's hard as hell to remember the 12 million things you're supposed to be doing at the same time and smile (do they think we're magical?!)

But everything is laid out for you. You know what you **SHOULD** be doing, what you **SHOULD** be working on.

Practice that $\frac{3}{4}$ shimmy, work on your posture, get those arms up, make those arabesques flow.

You get home.

Then everything falls apart.

- What music should I practice to?
- What moves should I work on?
- Do I need to do more studying instead?
- What about putting together that solo my teacher is always trying to convince me to do?

You fall into traps with your practice. Your lack of clear direction turns against you.

- You spend your entire practice time looking for music, then run out of time to actually dance.
- You start to work on moves, end up working on those moves that feel the most comfortable almost without thinking about it, and avoid moves that are the hardest.
- You hop on YouTube to start doing some research and end up down a rabbit hole. You find cool dances & dancers, but end up not practicing.
- You think about putting together that solo, but then your brain blanks and you lay on the floor listening to the song on repeat.

We've all been there. It doesn't matter your experience level. Practicing the things you're not as good at is HARD. It's extra hard when you're struggling to make the time to practice in the first place, let alone working on the stuff that makes your brain hurt. Haven't you already expended enough willpower to be there in the first place?

And so we end up in the cycle. We practice at the studio, and we practice choreographies for the recital, but the other stuff? It tends to fall by the wayside. We get better over time, because we keep going to class and our teachers are awesome, but we know we're capable of SO much more.

So the question becomes, *"How do I figure out what to practice?"*

Introducing: **The Limiting Factor.**

The limiting factor is defined as "the factor that limits the reaction rate in any physiological process governed by many variables"

Applied to belly dance, it's the part of your dancing holding the rest of it back from being amazing.

In a field like dance, limiting factors are constantly changing, and are extremely personal. They may even change from choreography to choreography, or move to move.

For example, you've memorized the moves, you've timed them to the music, but your posture is off. Your posture prevents your moves from looking their best, restraining your flow from move to move. Before you fine tune that flow or the transitions in your piece, focus on getting your posture on point. Otherwise, it won't matter what else you do; your posture is going to throw off the rest of the dance.

In the following sections, we'll break down bellydance into some basic categories, find your general strengths, and the challenges working as your limiting factors.

As you break down your challenges into smaller and smaller bits to set accurate goals, keep looking for that limiting factor. We'll talk about this more after we identify our challenges, but let's keep that idea of limiting factor front and center as we move forward!

Using the worksheets, you'll review some of your previous performances (watch recordings of haflas, recitals, gigs, etc.) or go over the worksheet with your teacher for some direction.

By making a list, you'll get one step closer to creating practice goals that can help you cross those items off!

Things to note when filling out your worksheets:

- Constructive criticism only! You know yourself. If you're going to be too hard on yourself, watch your videos with a dance friend and have each of you fill out what could have been better & what was great about the performance.
- Run your list past your teacher. They'll be able to help you pinpoint your challenges and point out your strengths. We can practice our strengths all the time, but bringing up those challenging points and working on them only increases the strength of everything else!
- Take it slow. Even when we start with good intentions, going through exercises like this can be draining, and we tend to get more negative as we go. Dedicate a little bit of time each day to work through different performances. Tackle each performance with a fresh mind!
- Keep your style of dance in mind. Whether you know it or not, you've already started to develop your personal style. Do you not like to move around the stage much? Why is that? If it's because you're not that great at using the space/traveling moves, we need to talk. But if it's because your favorite style is the Golden Age of Egyptian dance, well, that's part of the style!

*DON'T AVOID SOMETHING BECAUSE YOU CAN'T DO IT YET.
MAKE A CONSCIOUS CHOICE!*

- Practicing the things outside of your style will help your dance practice in other ways, but when it comes to your performances, so much depends on style. Think less about what you think you SHOULD be doing and more about WHY you're doing it.

Steps to Find Your Strengths and Challenges:

1. Read over the **categories**. (Optional, but will give you a good grasp of how to rate each section.)
2. Have a Jam Session! (more info on next page)
3. Fill out your **strengths sheet**.
4. Gather videos of your recent performances. Pick at least one of your favorites and one of your least favorites. Choose as many or as few as you like, but I recommend at least 2 - 3.
5. Fill out a **challenges sheet** for each video.
6. Compare your sheets to find your strengths and challenges.

STRENGTHS

What are my dance strengths?

Put on your favorite song to dance to. If you can, set up your phone to record, then dance like you're just having a ton of fun. No pressure. You're enjoying the music, it's your favorite song, no one is judging you (except your cat, but you're used to that), and you're rocking it out.

Once you're done, come back and answer these questions, both about what just happened, and how you feel about your practice in general. Reference the Categories page for questions to ask yourself in each category to make a good assessment. Remember you're using your jam session as a peek into your strengths, since we tend to lean on these when we're dancing without thinking.



POSTURE - 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

STRENGTHS WORKSHEET

MOVES - BASIC TECHNIQUE Cross out your strongest moves

Straight Leg Shimmy	Bent Knee shimmy	¾ Shimmy	Omi/Umi
Maya	Reverse Maya	Chest 8's	Reverse Chest 8's
Hip Drops	Tucks	Camel/Undulations	Reverse Camel/Undulations
Belly Rolls	Large Hip Circles	Vertical Chest Circles	Horizontal Chest Circles
Snake Arms	Figure 8's	Reverse Figure 8's	Hip Ups

LAYERING

Best layers _____ + _____ + _____
 _____ + _____ + _____

Height Variation - 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Basic moves with zills - 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Speed variation - 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Speed variation - 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Traveling variation - 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Zill patterns - 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

MOVEMENT VARIETY

Number of moves: _____

AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT - 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

SPEED - 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

EXTRAS (COSTUME/MAKEUP) - 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
 Notes: _____

ARMS

General framing - 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Variation - 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

RESEARCH - 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

GRACE/TRANSITIONS - 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

IMPROV - 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

EXPRESSION/GAZE - 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

PROPS
 Zills - 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
 Sword - 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
 Cane - 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
 Veil - 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
 Notes: _____

THE FEELING - 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

MUSICALITY - 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Notes: _____

EXPRESSION/GAZE - 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

FLOORWORK - 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

STAGE USAGE/TRAVELING - 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

CONDITIONING - 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
 Notes: _____

CHALLENGES

Now that we have an idea of what our strengths are, let's work on our challenges.

Pick 2-3 performance videos if you have them. If not, ask your teacher or mentor if they can give you some feedback on your performance. They'll have a good idea of things for you to work on.

For each performance, fill out the following sheet, referencing the Categories page for questions to ask yourself. Stick to the particular performance in question, not how you feel about your overall dancing. Do you feel like your arms are normally awesome, but in this performance they weren't so great? Feel free to make a note, but judge this performance only by itself.



WHAT ARE MY
DANCE CHALLENGES?

POSTURE - 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

CHALLENGES WORKSHEET

MOVES - BASIC TECHNIQUE Circle the moves that are challenging

Straight Leg Shimmy	Bent Knee shimmy	¾ Shimmy	Omi/Umi
Maya	Reverse Maya	Chest 8's	Reverse Chest 8's
Hip Drops	Tucks	Camel/Undulations	Reverse Camel/Undulations
Belly Rolls	Large Hip Circles	Vertical Chest Circles	Horizontal Chest Circles
Snake Arms	Figure 8's	Reverse Figure 8's	Hip Ups

LAYERING

Challenge _____ + _____ + _____
 layers _____ + _____ + _____

Height Variation - 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Basic moves with zills - 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Speed variation - 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Speed variation - 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Traveling variation - 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Zill patterns - 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

MOVEMENT VARIETY

Number of moves: _____

SPEED - 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT - 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

ARMS

General framing - 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Variation - 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

EXTRAS (COSTUME/MAKEUP) - 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Notes: _____

GRACE/TRANSITIONS - 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

RESEARCH - 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

EXPRESSION/GAZE - 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

IMPROV - 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

THE FEELING - 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

PROPS

Zills - 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Sword - 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Cane - 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Veil - 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

MUSICALITY - 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Notes: _____

Notes: _____

EXPRESSION/GAZE - 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

FLOORWORK - 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

STAGE USAGE/TRAVELING - 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

CONDITIONING - 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Notes: _____

FINDING YOUR LIMITING FACTORS & WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT

Now that you've viewed some of your performances and filled out the strengths sheet, some patterns should be emerging.

Did you see your strengths reflected in your performances? Is there a pattern to your challenges? Start comparing sheets and see what you've consistently picked out as your biggest challenges and your best strengths.

Remember, you don't have to be perfect at something for it to be a strength. They're just the items that get the highest scores. Your camels might still need work, but they're leagues ahead of your belly rolls.

Write out your 5 highest strengths and your 5 greatest challenges.

STRENGTHS	CHALLENGES

Now we have some idea of where to go.

Time to dig a bit deeper. WHAT about those challenges makes them hard? WHY do you avoid practicing this thing? What's the limiting factor within this particular challenge?

- Do you need more knowledge? (E.g., you simply don't know enough traveling steps.)
- Do you need to strengthen that part of your body? (E.g., you let your arms fall when you practice because they get so tired.)
- Is it not embedded in your muscle memory enough to be a default? (E.g., you're not using enough movement variation when dancing.)

The more you dig into your whys and figure out the root cause of something, the more able you are to set measurable, appropriate goals to help you move past your challenges.

I KNOW WHAT I SHOULD WORK ON, WHAT DO I DO NOW?

Figuring out what you need to work on can be one of the toughest parts of figuring out where to start your goal setting. Congrats! You've made it!

Now it's time to use the resources available to you.

YOUR TEACHERS

Take your list to your teachers, grab a second after class, or if you get to express what you'd like to work on in class, ask for drills & exercises that can help with your challenges. Write them down! Use these as the bulk of your practice

sessions, supplementing with research, and using your strengths as your warm ups to get you pumped to practice!

THE INTERNET

The internet is a great resource, but it's easy to get distracted & lost.

If you know of a dancer who does one of your challenges beautifully, watch a couple of videos.

But don't just watch them. Take notes.

WHY do you like the way that person uses their arms? Is it the variation in patterns? The way they flow from one position to the next? Their ability to frame their movements?

Keep asking yourself why. Why, why, why? Pull the items that could be good drills from the video - combos to practice layering or variety. Break down the way they do their omis if they really speak to you.

Take your challenges and your video research and create drills for yourself. Then practice, practice, practice!

OUR PROGRAMS!

Keep an eye out for our annual bundle sale, or for our next round of (non)competition in Struggle to Strength! You can learn more at TheBellydanceBundle.com. Including the dates these programs will be running this year.

Our teachers and guides have expertise in a wide array of topics, and the digital products in the bundle can help direct your practice in a number of ways.

From basic technique to conditioning, costume making, research, and style specific options, The Bellydance Bundle can provide you with some great resources and teachers to help you with your challenging subjects.

With Struggle to Strength is specifically formatted to help you achieve specific dance goals with the help of our guides. Essentially it's the accountability and feedback of a competition, without any of the rest. It's an excellent resource for you if you have a specific topic or piece that you're working on at the time.

And the best part is, once you find a new teacher or guide you like, you have a whole new world of resources available to you!

If you're checking out this PDF when there isn't a sale coming up, don't fret! We provide value and content all year long through our email list & our Instagram [@TheBellydanceBundle!](https://www.instagram.com/TheBellydanceBundle)

TAKE WHAT YOU'VE LEARNED FROM YOUR RESOURCES AND SET SOME GOALS.

Goals should be **SMART**:

Specific - Measurable - Achievable - Realistic - Time bound

Things to keep in mind while setting your goals:

- The aspects should be COMPLETELY under your control.
- You should focus on the process, not the result! I know this seems counterintuitive, but if you stick to the

process, the desired result will usually come about. Being consistent with your process is worth a million goal results!

It's time to get that shimmy in gear and practice!

- TIFFANY

The Bellydance Bundle

REFERENCE - THE CATEGORIES

There are so many aspects to dance, it's hard to narrow it down when it comes to practice time.

This section breaks down some of the aspects of dance technique and practice to help you home in on your strengths and on the challenges that should take more of a priority in your practice time.

POSTURE

Is your teacher always reminding you to tuck? Does your lower back bother you? What about slumped shoulders? Are your arms always falling out of the default position for your style? That's part of your posture, too!

MOVES - BASIC TECHNIQUE

How is the basic technique for your moves? Do you follow them through all the way? What moves did you find yourself doing the most during that recording? Which moves seemed to be absent?

LAYERING

What moves do you rock at layering together? Which ones make your brain feel like mush? Is your bent knee shimmy + figure 8 the hottest thing you've ever done, while your bent knee shimmy + walking needs some work? For your strength sheets, think back to class drills and fill out your best layers.

Layering doesn't always mean doing moves together! Keep other aspects of layering in mind when gauging your proficiency, including:

- Height Variations
- Speed Variations
- Traveling Variations
- Basic moves w/ Zill Patterns
- Zill Patterns on top of the height/speed/traveling variations

MOVEMENT VARIETY

If your recordings are all of dances you didn't choreograph, this may be harder to measure. Use your Jam session recording for both your strength & challenge papers if possible. If you recorded that jam session, how many different moves did you do? How many moves do you feel need to be done to keep it interesting? This is PURELY personal style and choice. Having more moves in your back pocket is always a good thing, but some of the best dancers only do 10 moves or less during their whole performance.

SPEED

How do you feel about your speed? Most of us struggle with dancing too fast. . Is one of your strengths slowing down and listening to the music?

Individual movement speed can be addressed in layering & in musicality.

ARMS

We forget about these things that are useful in the rest of our lives when we start dancing. Sometimes I'm sure we wish they just didn't exist while we were dancing.

Do you use a variety of arm positions? Do you frame your movements? Create contrasting directions to draw interest?

GRACE & TRANSITIONS

Making moves flow together while you float across the stage is a skill. Look at your level of grace while you move. Do you stomp across the stage? Do your movements flow together?

Different styles encourage different levels of grace and flowlike transitions in your dance, so take that into account when deciding on this factor.

EXPRESSION & GAZE

Can people tell how hard you're thinking during that choreography piece? Are you always looking at the floor, the ceiling, or at your fellow dancers?

Look at the quality of your expression, whether you look engaged, and what you appears to be looking at while you dance. The ceiling is definitely interesting, but it doesn't have any answers!

THE FEELING

You want to bring the right mood to your pieces. Is it a sad song? A happy one? Are you trying to tell a story?

Nobody wants to look like a robot when they're dancing, and this is a great place to work on bringing that emotion into your dance.

MUSICALITY

How much of the music are you dancing to? Are you hitting those background accents? Are you matching the rhythm of the music or just dancing over it?

As dancers, we're a visual medium for the music. Through us, our audience gains a greater understanding of what they are hearing. Bits of the music they've never noticed before are revealed by our accents, the emotions of the song given more weight.

STAGE USAGE & TRAVELING MOVES

Do you dance in place? Why? Are you doing it on purpose or because you're unsure how to use the stage?

Different styles of dance approach this topic differently. Look within your preferred style before giving yourself a score here. Regardless of your style, learning to use a stage can be a powerful tool for everything from solos to group choreographies.

AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT

Even if you can't get down and interact with the audience directly from a stage, you can keep them engaged with your feeling, expression, and gaze.

If you're dancing in restaurants, at parties, or at haflas, you have the ability to directly engage the audience. Ham it up if that's your style!

Think about the kind of dancer you WANT to be with your audience. Are you living up to that?

THE EXTRAS (COSTUME/MAKEUP/HAIR)

For some of us, this is the easiest part. For others it's the toughest. Examine the "togetherness" of your look. Are you paying attention to the small details? From the top of your head to your toes, take care to match the extras to your theme to the feeling you're trying to portray to make a complete package.

This CAN be something you practice! Especially as recital season draws close, it's worth spending some quality time on the extras.

BUT, these things don't hide the actual technique. They don't hide a lack of expression, or a forgotten choreography. These are bonus items, and should come after those things have been achieved.

RESEARCH

Do you know know the different styles of belly dance? The differences? Their basic histories? What about a more complete history of your own style? What are the differences between homestyle belly dance and what we see on stages? What role does dance play in its culture of origin? In the culture in which it's being portrayed?

There's a lot of information out there, and it can be hard to separate fact from tall tales. Use those skills you learned in school. Check your sources. Find academic articles if you can. Do your own research on the things that intrigue you the most.

Knowing these things makes you a more well rounded dancer and can help you interpret the things you see in videos and movies. Knowing these things also makes you a more culturally sensitive dancer something that any and all of us can benefit from.

IMPROV

Even if you're only participating in group choreographies or group style dances, improv is KEY to learning.

By practicing your improv, you practice your musicality, your ability to follow others on a minute's notice, to fumble through that portion of the dance you ALWAYS forget.

Improv gets our brain's creative juices flowing, creates new combos, and helps lead us to our own personal styles.

Even if you never perform an improv piece, I highly recommend working on your improv for the improvements

you'll see in all aspects of your dance.

PROPS

Props can change everything. Thought you were good at mayas? Stick a sword on your head and try again. Sometimes adding this element can totally mess with your brain. Go through the props below (and feel free to add any others you practice with) and gauge your strengths and challenge areas.

ZILLS

Knowing the basic beats, being able to play along with the movements, the music, and moving your arms at the same time can sometimes feel impossible.

Once you've got that down it's time to work on playing along with any music.

WORD

How's your posture? Does the quality of your basic technique moves and layering moves suffer when you're balancing a sword?

What about floorwork?

And all those other moves you can do with a sword? How is your technique? Make your whole dance interesting, not just the part where you're balancing the sword.

CANE

How's your spinning technique? Do you have flappy elbows? Can you time your spins to match everyone else in the choreography?

Balancing a cane is much different than a sword, but the same applies. Can you do your basic moves with it balanced? Layered moves?

What are the folkloric roots of cane dancing? Do you use them appropriately?

VEIL

Does the veil flow, or are you ripping it from location to location? Does it appear as an extension of your arms, framing your movements?

Are you moving and dancing while holding the veil, not just doing veil tricks?

FLOORWORK

This is a mixed bag. Some dancers love it, others don't. It's also highly style dependent. Adding another height layer to your dance can always be interesting, and can help develop leg and core strength, which will never serve you wrong.

Whether or not this is a priority in your dance is entirely up to you.

CONDITIONING

There's not a dancer this won't help. Need to work on your posture? Stronger shoulders will make it easier to keep your shoulder blades back, stronger thighs will make the slightly bent knee position easier to maintain.

Having trouble with those Mayas? Stronger obliques can help you control the movement and make it flow.

Stronger ankles make releve both easier and safer, while stronger arms will result in better prop work.

Cardio makes it easier to dance longer, and can help prevent stitches when you're practicing.

So take a hard look inward. Do you find yourself winded in class? Feeling trembly after practicing a move for a while? Gauge your level of conditioning and see if this is your limiting factor.

We'd love to hear feedback about this guide and are happy to answer questions and help however we can! Reach out to hello@TheBellydanceBundle.com and let us know what you need.