Composition and choreography

International Baccalaureate · IB Diploma · Dance · HL

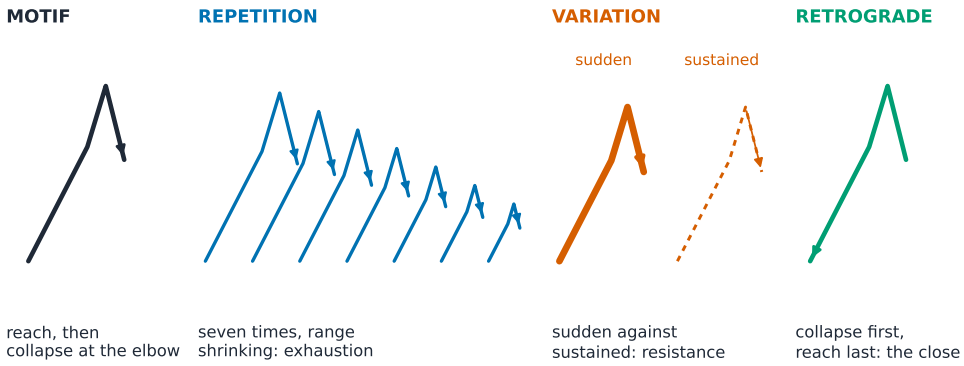
IB Diploma Programme Dance HL (first assessment 2016; 2014 guide). This topic equips the COMPOSITION side of the externally assessed composition and analysis task (35% HL): three dance works totalling 8-15 minutes composed by the student, plus an analytical statement on the processes of composition and analysis of one of the dances. Composition is taught as craft: motif, development, form and contrast serving intention, content and form. This handout teaches the compositional toolkit, the development methods and the reflective statement. All worked examples are original.

Must-know for composition and choreography:

Family	Content
works	three composed works totalling 8-15 minutes, submitted on video
motif	a movement cell: the smallest unit that carries the intention
development	repetition, variation, transposition, retrograde, accumulation
contrast	works must differ from each other: contrast across two of the three
statement	analytical statement on the processes of composition and analysis of one dance

The motif and its development

A **motif** is a movement cell: the smallest phrase that carries the dance's intention, small enough to transform and recognisable enough to anchor the work. Composition grows by **development** of the motif: repetition (the cell returns, meaning accumulating), **variation** (timing, dynamics or facings changed), transposition (the cell moves to a new body part or level), **retrograde** (the cell performed backwards), and accumulation (cells stacked into longer phrases). The discipline: every development is a choice that serves the intention; decoration that develops nothing is cut.



The motif and three of its developments, from the worked example "Reach".

> **Worked example.** "Reach", a trio: the motif is a reach that collapses at the elbow. Repetition seven times with shrinking range reads as exhaustion; variation in dynamics (sudden against sustained) reads as resistance; retrograde (collapse first, reach last) closes the work by reversing its story.

Form and contrast

Form is how the work organizes time: the **compositional structure** (statement, departure, return; ABA; theme and mutations) must be audible to the eye: the viewer should feel the return. Within a work and across the submitted works, **contrast** runs at two scales: inside one dance (levels, tempo, density, dynamics) and ACROSS the submitted works: at least two of the three must contrast in subject matter or compositional approach, or the submission reads as one work three times.

> **Worked example, continued.** The second submitted work "Doorframe" contrasts "Reach" completely: unison walking material, no floorwork, motif built from a stopped gesture rather than a flowing reach; the third "Counting House" contrasts again by structure (accumulation only, no retrograde).

Worked programme. The three works' minutes serve their forms: "Reach" 4:30 (seven shrinking repetitions need time to exhaust), "Doorframe" 5:00 (unison walking earns its length slowly), "Counting House" 2:30 (accumulation is dense and ends itself) – 12:00 inside the 8–15 window, each duration argued from its form, not padded to the limit.

The analytical statement

The statement analyses the processes of composition and analysis of ONE of the dances: not a diary but an account of decisions: which compositional problems arose (the collapse reading as injury rather than exhaustion), which solutions were tried and chosen, and what the making taught for future development. Key terms and concepts of composition are applied, sources attributed.

> **Worked example, concluded.** The "Reach" statement: the problem (the collapse read as accident), the trials (slower collapse, weighted collapse, silent collapse), the chosen fix (the weighted collapse with the breath audible), and the lesson (a motif's meaning is set by its development, not its shape).

Checklist

- The motif small, recognisable, intention-carrying (motif).
- Development methods chosen to serve intention, decoration cut (development).
- The return legible; contrast within and across works (contrast).
- The statement analysing decisions and problems, terms applied (statement).
- The worked "Reach", "Doorframe", "Counting House" set understood (worked). Boundary notes: the examiner must see the making: compositional decisions visible, sources attributed, the performance interpreted. All worked examples are original.