How To Write Your Own Training Program

Introduction

The goal of this ebook is to arm you, the reader, with the information to write, execute and evaluate your own training program and diet specific to your goals. In the world of fitness there is a saturation of information and "experts", these experts will charge you extortionate rates to do exactly what this ebook will allow you to do for yourself. These experts care more about money than your goals, your success or your safety. They will not take the time and energy to coach you in the most effective exercises which have been known to bodybuilders and athletes for decades. And the bottom line is they will not get you the results you could achieve yourself in less time and at less expense. Regardless of your goal, whether it is to become a hulking behemoth or simply lose a little fat and generally firm everything up this book will provide you with the information for the first few years of your training.

The key idea of this book is resistance-based strength and weight training which we believe is superior to cardiovascular exercise and other muscle training like calisthenics and isometrics. Socrates once said, "No man has the right to be an amateur in the matter of physical training. It is a shame for a man to grow old without seeing the beauty and strength of which his body is capable." The ancient Greeks were a warrior society with no professional soldiers or training, Socrates believed it was the responsibility of citizens to train themselves, the same is true today. The superiority of strength training comes from its unparalleled effectiveness in building strength and size whilst also improving conditioning and power. Unlike cardiovascular training, strength training is safer and healthier, as long as it is performed correctly, removing stress from bones and joints as well as increasing the lean body mass (LBM) of the body thus increasing the metabolic (fat burning) capacity. Other health benefits of strength training include stronger muscles and surprisingly bones thus decreasing the chances of injury in other aspects of fitness. Aside from its superiority to other aspects of fitness, strength training provides similar aspects of mental fortitude, the thrill of setting a heavy goal and destroying that goal is greater than beating your 5 mile time by a few seconds. This physical and mental improvement will transfer out of the gym making you more confident in your new body in social interactions or on the football field.

Barbell Weight Training

The core of any strength training programme is barbell exercises, the reason for this, as opposed to machine-based training is that weight training should be focused on as many body parts as are possible to train in a given lift. The body is a whole and as such it must be training as one, machines and isolation exercises do not training strength and size as effectively as whole body exercises like the squat and deadlift. That is why in every gym in the world there will be a large group, usually of young men, who train with bicep curls and seated shoulder press week-in, week-out and never gain anything more than a few pounds of muscle. This idea of whole body movements is propounded by many in the strength industry and its history goes as far back as the 19th Century. One of the best books on the idea is Mark Rippetoe's *Starting Strength* whose knowledge of the squat, deadlift, bench press, overhead press and power clean is extensive, although his dietary and routine advice is not quite as sound.

Barbell training provides a number of benefits for the human body, working the muscles under heavier loads allows for greater muscle growth whilst also providing stimulus for the nervous system which is often forgotten in more mainstream fitness books and routines. The two systems, nervous and muscular work in synergy as the neuromuscular system and exploiting them both is half the battle to attaining greater strength and a better physique. The other half of the battle is the endocrine system, our hormones, numerous scientific studies have proven the relationship between heavy barbell exercises and increased levels of testosterone and human-growth hormone as well as helping to mitigate the catabolic hormonal responses associated with prolonged exercise which are responsible for tissue breakdown, both fat and muscle.

The science is all well and good, and many people claim that statistics can be made to say anything you want, and in some cases that is true. So how about some different evidence. Heavy barbell workouts have been the core training of bodybuilders, strength athletes, track athletes, football players as well as a plethora of other sports trainers for half a century.

*The Deadlift*

Widely known, hardly renowned yet simply one of the best exercises you can perform in the gym with a barbell. As many strength trainers and bodybuilders recommend the squat as the best and most important strength building lift the deadlift seems to be a forgotten son of strength training. In Rippetoe's *Starting Strength* Routine squats are performed in 5 sets of 5 reps whilst the deadlift is only performed in 3 sets of 5 reps. This is due to the higher load placed on the central nervous system by deadlifts but also seems to relegate the importance the lift compared to squats, also performed in every workout. Whilst Rippetoe propound the squat for its fuller use of the posterior chain - the adductors and abductors - the deadlift, by contrast, uses the main posterior chain muscles as well as the upper back, shoulders, traps, arms and grip. For a full body workout there is nothing that can match sets of heavy deadlifts.

The deadlift is also a more functional lift, how many times have you loaded up your back and squatted something off the floor? Now how many times have to bent down, back straight, knees bent and lifted something from the floor to hip height? The functionality also crosses into the territory of sports where although the posterior chain is the main driving force the synergy with your arms and your back is often important, this makes the deadlift a superior lift to the squat.

Aside from functionality, the deadlift is a safer lift. The weight is not bearing down upon you as you lift and it is easily dropped if the lift is failed. Less equipment is required, even in powerlifting competitions the deadlift is the simplest and easiest lift of the "big three". The technique is also simpler, as long as the back and abs are braced and the arms are extended the lift will be performed safely and efficiently. The deadlift is also easier to train, training to failure with squats can be unsafe but as mentioned earlier training to failure with a deadlift is much safer. Simply the deadlift is a truer test of raw strength and aggression.

Deadlift form pictures

*Deadlift Form*

The key to conventional deadlift form is the triple extension of the ankle, knee and hip join resulting in being stood fully erect. In *Figure 1* you can see the lifter is stood with the bar over the middle of his foot, this is important, with the knees bent and the hips down so the shin comes into contact with the bar. The chest is brought up to keep the spine in a neutral and safe position (this is the most important part of the lifting form) and the arms are fully extended and a firm grip is taken on the bar. A fully pronated or mixed grip is permissible. To achieve the fully erect position the legs drive downwards and the hips drive through, keeping the chest high and back neutral and strong the lifter drags the bar up in contact with the legs the entire time and extending the back and hips fully to achieve lockout. Timing is key to fire the legs, hips and back at the same time and lift as efficiently as possible.

*The Squat*

The squat is simply the most popular exercise in the strength training world, many coaches and athletes advocate its sheer power and strength building abilities. Despite my preference of the deadlift over the squat, it is a very functional lift providing a lot of strength building in the legs and posterior chain as well as the back and core. Squatting heavy, like the deadlift, provides a solid basis of strength and power upon which further training can build. From powerlifters and bodybuilders to sprinters squatting provides a main building-block in training programmes. Unlike the deadlift, the squat builds mental toughness, once you drop into the "hole" of the squat you must power back out with your own strength.

It is important to squat properly when squatting, many people claim to have high totals on their squats but they only half squat. The femurs must go parallel to the floor at a minimum, squat lower is you can. Another aspect of the squat is the hip drive, rather than simply pushing down into the floor with your feet you must force your hips under your torso and through to the erect position. This hip drive activates the powerful posterior chain engaging the hamstrings and glutes.

Squat form pictures

*Squat Form*

The most important part of the squat is the set up, without a good, tight set up you will not be ready to squat anywhere near as heavy as you should be. The bar must sit on your traps below the prominent vertebrae in your neck at the top of your back. If the bar at any point comes up towards your neck you must stop the squat and set up again. However, if you are tight enough this should not happen. If the bar sits high up on the top of the traps, this is known as a high-bar position, and results in a more upright body and more quad activation. If there bar sits directly across the traps then this is a low bar squat favoured by powerlifters and this is the squat which activates the posterior chain more effectively. Your grip should be a comfortable distance apart for the bar position and you should take a firm grip of the bar, pulling your upper back and traps against your grip creating tightness in your upper body. As with the deadlift, the chest should be up and the back neutral or arched inwards with the abs tight. Unlike the deadlift, your feet should be shoulder width or in some cases wider with your feet pointed slightly outwards. Before the lift, fill your belly with air and hold it tight as you sit back into the "hole" and find parallel. As you drop you should drive your knees outwards and lower your pelvis keeping the core tight and the back straight, your body will naturally dip forward to accommodate the flexion of the hips and knees. Drive out of the "hole" by driving your heels into the floor and pulling your hips through. The back should extend and you should be fully erect.

*The Bench Press*

The bench press is famous the world over, as is "International Chest Day" (Monday), to anyone who goes to any gym in the world. The bench press is the single best exercise for building strength and size in your upper body and a properly executed press will activate the pecs, triceps, traps, lats and core. Many people bench press and claim to bench press heavy weights but often the case is they press poorly and inefficiently and these heavy presses are the result of time and effort rather than skill. The key to an efficient bench press is to activate as much of the upper body musculature as possible and utilise as much of its strength as possible. As important to upper body strength building as the squat and deadlift are to lower body, the bench press is an essential exercise, despite the gym rat nature of many who bastardise it.

Bench Press form pictures

*The Bench Press Form*

Many believe that bench pressing is simply lying on a bench and pressing the bar to the chest and back up. In terms of building a large chest this may be effective but to efficiently recruit all the muscles of the upper body as well as the core and legs a powerlifting style must be used. To set up in the powerlifting style, you must first lie on the bench and make sure your eyes are under the bar. Now sit up and force your feet as far back as they can go whilst still keep your heels on the floor. Now lie back and arch your back only your glutes and your upper back are in contact with the bar. Your whole body from ankles to neck must be tight at this point. Make sure your eyes are still under the bar and take the bar with a comfortable and equal grip. Too wide and you will not activate your triceps enough, too narrow and it will be a tricep ruiner with no chest, experiment to get comfortable and efficient. As soon as you have your grip you must become aggressive and strong, try and break the bar with your grip. Push the bar off the bench, this will be difficult as it is behind the main muscles of this lift the chest and triceps so you will have to use your lats. Allow the bar to drop in a controlled manner, too fast and you might not be in control, too slow and you are wasting energy. Allow the bar too touch your chest (around nipple level), pause for a fraction of a second and then explode up, the explode should start in your heels, keeping your glutes on the bench but driving through your hips and into your upper body where you power through. Training with higher weights will result in the press being more of a grinding rep and this will reveal your sticking points. Train with lower weights to improve explosivity and power.

*The Overhead Press*

An underrated exercise by many, including myself until recently, many say it is dangerous (it is not) and others simply hate its difficulty and humbling weights. The overhead press is renowned in powerlifting circles as a better pressing movement than the bench press and a strict bodyweight press is an achievement anyone can and should be proud of. The issue with the overhead press compared to the bench press is that core stability is a more limiting factor therefore it is not as effective at training the upper body due to weaknesses in the core - which many powerlifters simply do not have. The overhead press is, however, highly effective for training your core stability especially with heavy weight overhead your body from foot to hand is forced to contract and support the weight. As well as this core workout, the overhead press is a great trainer for the shoulders and upper chest as well as the lats.

Bench Press form pictures

*The Overhead Press Form*

Like the bench press, the overhead press appears to be a simple movement, especially to those accustomed to seated dumbbell presses. However, if you are one who seated dumbbell presses prepare to be humbled as your core and glutes suddenly find themselves unable to handle weight you usually press for reps. To properly overhead press the bar should be set up to around neck height. Take a firm grip of the back narrower than you would for bench press so your elbows and forearms are under your wrists as opposed to flayed out to the sides, this will be healthier for your shoulders. Take the bar off the rack by getting under it and lifting it firmly with your entire body. Before the lift take a deep breath and tighten the core as well as consciously tightening the glutes. This glute contraction must be maintained throughout the lift. Press the bar, keeping it as close to your face as possible and as it clears your head force your head and neck forward under the bar as you continue to press it until lockout. As you lower the back make sure to bring your head back through.

Nutrition and Training

*Introduction*

Training and nutrition are symbiotic, one will not work without the other and optimising one will often require optimising the other to match. The perfect balance between nutrition and training will yield the best results. For example, powerlifters often do not care how much fat they gain along with muscle mass and often eat in excess of their calorific requirements to optimise recovery and growth times enabling them to train on schedule. Bodybuilders however, use diet as well as training to manage their weight either gain muscles with as little fat as possible or losing fat whilst maintaining their muscle mass. The core of this ebook will be centred around a bodybuilder style nutrition scheme. The three main types of nutrition are known as bulking, cutting and recomposition. Bulking is usually an attempt to increase strength and size with little regard for fat gain although in some cases there is no regard and others careful planning is put into gain little or no fat whilst bulking. Cutting is an attempt to reduce body fat percentage (BF%), or sometimes just weight (in the case of boxers and fighters), whilst maintaining the strength and size gained. Recompositions are an attempt to manipulate nutrition and training to lose fat and gain muscle. Traditional bodybuilding doctrine dictates that this is impossible but new ideas are beginning to change that view. We will be sticking with the traditional bulk and cut cycles.

*Basal Metabolic Rate/Total Daily Energy Expenditure*

The basal metabolic rate (BMR) is the amount of energy a given body will consume if it expended no additional energy in a 24 hour period. The total daily energy expenditure (TDEE) is a more self-explanatory term and represents the BMR plus the additional energy expended throughout the day. For a sedentary person this will only be slightly higher to account for a slight increase in activity but for somebody exercising 3-5 times a week or with a physical job this will be a markedly higher number than the suggested 2500 calories a day suggested for men. The rule of thumb for bulking is your TDEE + 20% and the for cutting TDEE - 20% although the intricacies of this will be discussed later.

*Bulking*

A bulking cycle requires specific nutritional and training protocols to achieve increased muscle strength and size. Even trainers aiming to achieve pure size should attempt to attain a reasonable level of strength to improve the general health of their muscles, bones, joints and connective tissues. For first time trainers, and by first time I mean anyone who has never squatted or deadlifted before, it would be prudent to start with a bulking cycle lasting no less than 8 weeks. As an example we will use a 70kg/154lb trainer at 15% body fat and 5' 10". His TDEE would be 2754 calories to maintain his weight but to bulk he will consume an additional 20% (550 calories) resulting in a daily intake of 3304 calories. As this is a bulk this can be "ballpark".

In terms of nutrition, the most important aspect of weight training is protein intake, many studies have proven the use of proteins and amino acids by the body to rebuild muscle fibres after weight training resulting in greater strength and size. Recommended protein intakes range anywhere from 1g per lb of lean body mass (LBM) to 2g per lb of goal bodyweight. For our 70kg/154lb at 15% body fat these protein intakes could range from 131g to 348g assuming a reasonable +20lb goal bodyweight. It is my belief that a range of 1-2g per lb of goal LBM is optimal for correct protein intake so for our 154lb trainer this would give us 302g per day for 1204 calories a day. This may seem excessive but the benefit of additional protein means that less calories are required from carbohydrates avoiding the fat gaining properties of them.

When bulking carbohydrate intake is crucial to recovery and growth, additional carbohydrates give the body calories with which to build muscle and feed the cells. Carbohydrates also fuel your workouts but it is important to avoid eating too many carbohydrates late in the afternoon or in the evening as they will interfere with sleep and energy levels. Carbohydrate intakes range from 0.9g-1.8g per lb of bodyweight, carbohydrate intake is a slightly more exact science than protein as the mechanisms of carbohydrates and sugars are more fully understood within the body. Although high carbohydrate intake is necessary on a bulk for growth it is important not to exceed the calorific requirements of the body to avoid fat gain. Our 154lb trainer will need 277g of carbohydrates which is 1108 calories. This should be enough to fuel the body and gain a reasonable amount of muscle mass without fat gain. However, some people have differing sensitivities to carbohydrates and will require some tweaking to balance recovery rates and weight gain depending on goals. More on this later.

Fat intake usually just fills the rest of the calories, there is no specific formula because as long as healthy fats are consumed fat is one of the healthiest forms of calories you can consume. 992 calories remain of our trainers target calories and as there are 9 calories per gram of fat we can see this will result in 110g of fat. 110g of fat may seem daunting but fat is a naturally calorie dense food and adding oils and consuming nuts allows this 110g to be filled fairly quickly.

Although the weight training advocated in this ebook is for beginners and therefore will be fairly similar whether bulking or cutting there are some protocols which will differ. Like a cutting diet any beginner should start on a basic linear strength programme before progressing to more complex or difficult programmes; even the bodybuilders of the 'Golden Age' in the 70's advocated strength in the core lifts. For us it will be a simple 5 set programme for the core lifts with 3-5 heavy reps for the workings sets, experiment with rep ranges. Some people for example may find that 5x3 on the bench press yields greater strength results but that 5x5 is required for squat. For the deadlift it is recommended that only 3 sets are attempted for the first 3 months of training moving up to 5 if you want after that point. For accessory work between 3-5 sets of 6-12 reps depending on person preference and strength levels. For example, you may begin with bicep curls doing 3x12 but as the weight increases you move down to 3x8, allow your strength to get you back to your previous 3x12 on the new weight before increasing again. Some additional tips, avoiding squatting or deadlifting more than once a week when beginning as the strain on the CNS can be significant in new lifters, increase the volume as you become stronger. Again, avoid overhead pressing or bench pressing more than twice a week, training the same muscles repeatedly can lead to injury and in any case you should be lifting heavy enough in your sessions that additional work it not required.

Follow this bulking protocol for no more than 12 weeks with no break. If you feel that you do not need to cut take a two week break of eating at your TDEE and deload (reduce the weight of) your lifts so you will just be maintaining strength, get plenty of sleep during this period and then resume your bulking for, again, no more than 12 weeks.

*Cutting*

As mentioned, the essence of a cut is to reduce body fat percentage whilst maintaining as much muscle mass as possible, although inevitable reductions in size and strength will occur. A cut is a necessary evil for many people, although difficult they will make you healthier in the long run and your body will be in a better position when you return to lifting heavy on a bulk. For the same trainer as before at 70kg/154lbs we will take is TDEE of 2754 and subtract 20% (550 calories) which gives us a daily intake of 2204 calories.

Nutrition and training needs to be optimised for these goals. The simple fact of the matter is that as long as calories consumed < calories used the body will use its own energy stores and thus you will lose weight. But the key for those trying to retain muscular size and strength is that the body will break down proteins (found in the muscles) to do this as well as the other stores of glycogen and fat. To minimise muscle loss, weight training must be used to continue the muscle building process to negate the degeneration caused by the body being starved of calories. Higher protein in the diet will also serve to mitigate muscle loss by providing excess protein to be used for energy.

Protein intake on a cut will be elevated to offset carbohydrate cutting. There is no need for high amount of carbohydrates on a cut as they elevate insulin levels thus causing fat storage in the body. Similarly to bulking an amount of roughly 1-2g per lb of bodyweight is necessary to achieve this. For our trainer that would give us 308g of protein at 1232 calories over 50% of daily calories. High protein diets also provide better satiety than high carbohydrate diets so a diet high protein is ideal for a diet scarce in calories.

Carbohydrate intake will be cut drastically whilst cutting, high to enough to provide energy first thing in the morning and energy post-workout but little else. The idea is to keep carbohydrate intake to a time when the body is most insulin sensitive thus mitigating any negative effects of carbohydrate intake, these times are first thing in the morning after a long fast and straight after exercise when the body is trying to replaced used energy. The suggested intake of carbohydrates when cutting is 0.9g per lb of bodyweight (or lean body mass for those hard cutters) which for our trainer gives us 138g of carbohydrates for 552 calories. With the suggested intake timings it would be best to consume at least 60g for breakfast and then 60g with the post-workout meal with the remaining 18g to be used for the spare carbohydrates that appear in fruit, vegetables, salads, protein shakes, etc.

As with the protein macronutrient ratios, calculating fat intake is as simple as filling the deficit. For this trainer fat will make up 420 calories which is 47g. Fat is important to maintain high levels of especially during a cut to help ensure that hormone levels are kept at healthy rates, fat is integral to creating and sustaining our hormones, especially testosterone in men.

Training one a cut will need to change slightly in order to optimise muscle preservation especially in trainers who have kept accessory work in the lower end of the 8-12 re range it is important for the rep and set range to increase. Increasing both reps and sets increases the overall time under tension which is crucial to building size. Trainers must understand that to lose fat effectively, some size and strength losses are inevitable, but with correct diet and training it is possible to mitigate this to almost undetectable levels. For the core lifts training for strength will remain important but the training attitude may have to change somewhat, certainly, trainers will have to leave their egos at the door, as there is no guarantee of increased strength week on week. Cutting is difficult but hopefully nobody will attempt it until at least 8 weeks of bulking and those 8 weeks will have allowed the trainer to become more in tune with his body and thus able to optimise his diet and training through feeling as opposed to doctrine style protocols found in this book. To clarify, to optimise strength training, one who had trained in the 5x5 rep range may find it easier to decrease the reps and sets and increase the weight training closer to maximal strength in a 3x3 rep range, this will also help to decrease pressure on the central nervous system at a time when calories are not in a surplus. The majority of training on a cut should be centred around high intensity reps aiming to build muscle. A useful tool for strength exercises, only if you have a spotter, is drop sets. Having completed the agreed rep range for bench press, you could remove 20-30% of the weight and go for an all out, high intensity drop set to get the muscles burning and the heart rate elevated.

As with bulking, follow this protocol for no more than 12 weeks with no break. If you feel that you are not ready to move on in your training take a two week break of eating at your TDEE and reduce the volume and intensity of your workouts maintaining strength, get plenty of sleep during this period and then resume your cutting for, again, no more than 12 weeks.

*More on Reps and Sets*

Some of the advice offered on reps and sets may be new information to some people and it is not entirely clear in the more nutritional sections above. Here rep ranges, sets, volume and all things to do with moving weight will be explained so you can use that information to write your own training programme depending on what your goals are.

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| **Objective** | **Reps** | **Percentage of 1 Rep Max** |
| Maximal Strength | 1-3 reps | 85%-100% |
| Strength | 4-6 reps | 75%-85% |
| Hypertrophy (size) | 6-12 reps | 60%-75% |
| Muscular Endurance | 15+ reps | 60%- |

*Table on generally accepted rep ranges*

The rep ranges seem simple, if you want to train to be a powerlifter your training will be dominated by mainly the 1-3 rep range. The way powerlifters usually assess volume is simply to start low and work-up to a heavy triple, go for a theoretical 1-rep max for the day, this could be up to 5% lighter than they know they can do, and then add in any accessory work they feel they need. Bodybuilders on the other hand may use a simple 5x5 rep/set scheme for the bench press and supplement this with further chest work focused in the 6-12 rep range to increase size. For athletic performance a mixture of the two is going to be useful to generate maximal force in various aspects of performance but also to provide muscle mass to help protect the joints and connective tissues, this should also be supplemented with any cardiovascular and skill-based training required by the sport. For beginners it is generally accepted that working with 5 reps is the best rep range for quick strength as well as some size gains. It is not considered safe enough, or effective enough, for novice trainers to work with the 1-3 rep range due to the lack of neuromuscular adaptation present in their bodies. Working with 5x5 for 12 weeks will fix this deficiency. Accessory work for beginners can be more goal-oriented, if a trainer wishes to move onto strict bodybuilding once they become an intermediate lifter then a rep/set scheme of 5x10 would be recommended to get the body used to heavy volume work, however, for a novice this should only mean there are 3-4 accessory lifts per session. For a trainer wishing to pursue strength whether as a weightlifter, strongman or powerlifter then accessory exercises should focus on the 6-8 rep range with 3-4 sets depending on volume of accessory work and fatigue.

*Cardio And Other Aspects Of Training*

Cardiovascular training as well as calisthenics have their place in the strength world. Powerlifters and bodybuilders alike share admiration for weighted dips and pull ups and powerlifters especially utilise bodyweight exercises to target the glutes and hamstrings. Cardiovascular training is a difficult subject. There is no need as a strength athlete to be able to run 10 miles, that is not your goal and training to do so will detract from your training. However, conditioning is an important part of strength training, known as HIT or High Intensity Training is the best way to get your body conditioned. Hill sprints, sprint sessions, plyometric jumping and sled and prowler work all contribute to conditioning at high intensity and often you can increase the load similar to strength training to maintain the intensity as opposed to increasing time as with many forms of cardiovascular training. Conditioning is important to maintain a healthy cardiovascular system but should not be anywhere near the core of your training. Whilst cutting the use of high intensity training can provide a useful fat burning tool whether that is with traditional conditioning tools or simply increasing the intensity of your weight training.

*Supplementation*

The supplementation business is worth a lot of money, as such, they would have you believe that not taking a certain supplement will yield poor results or the converse, that taking a supplement will yield quick, easy and exceptional results. The fact is there are only three supplements that are proven to be a necessity for effective training. Whey protein will allow you to consume cheap, high levels of protein regardless of financial restrictions on food it also optimised to enter the cells quickly and is peerless as a recovery and growth tool used throughout the strength and athletics world. The second is multivitamins whether specifically optimised for strength training or simply supermarket brand multivitamins they allow you to fill any gaps in your micronutrition for a relatively cheap price. The third is fish oil, rich in the fatty acids EPA and DHA which are proven to reduce stress and inflammation within the body. Fish oil is an exceptional supplement in allowing greater volumes of training and better recovery rates as well as maintain a healthy cardiovascular system. There is a fourth, more optional, supplement that is creatine. Creatine is the most divisive supplement in the strength world with a camp of supporters who swear by it and its effectiveness and a camp of detractors who believe it is a complete scam. Use at your own discretion and preference. Any other supplements are probably not worth it, that is not say you are welcome to try them, but it is important to be incredibly wary of marketing and advertising. The internet is a great source for reviews of products and can tell you very quickly whether a product has any remote effectiveness. Whilst cutting many people are tempted to buy and take expensive fat burning tablets, now I am not saying that these do not work, but they often do not give the desired effect and are usually made of simple ingredients that could be obtained almost anywhere such caffeine, green tea extract and cayenne pepper. Be wary of fat strippers.

Writing Your Own Training Programme

*GOALS*

The heart of any training programme, and any trainer, is goals, and setting goals is as hard as achieving them. Setting a goal too high and you will not reach which will in turn effect your training and your attitude. Set it too low and you will reach it easily and become overconfident, this is when injuries can occur. Many people sit down in the morning of New Year's Day and they write their goals for the year, these include vague aspirations to "get in shape" or "make more money" these people have already failed before they have started. The key to achieving your goal is to be specific, "compete at the local natural bodybuilding competition in 18 months time" or "compete in the local powerlifting competition in the 85kg weightclass in 12 months time". These goals give you something to fixate on, something to believe in and something to visualise yourself doing every time you step into the gym. The next step is break your goals down into short-, medium- and long-term goals. Short-term would be 2-4 months, the length of a training cycle, medium-term will cover 5-7 months, a couple of training cycles, and long-term will cover between 12-18 months or however long it is until your goal arrives. Set 3-5 goals per "term" that will allow you to achieve your goal. Your first few goals may to drop BF% or to achieve certain lifts but as you go through your training you will be able to make them evermore specific such as "utilise glute assistance work to fix my deadlifting form". Your goals must always focus on the main goal, you must take them seriously, you must live and die by that goal. This may sound dramatic, but this attitude is what is going to separate you from the skinny kids that term up to the gym every week and never look any different.

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **GOAL** | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| Short-term  (3 months) | *Drop 3% BF from 15% to 13%* | *Achieve a 70kg bench press for 5 reps* | *Achieve a squat 1RM of 100kg* |
| Medium-term  (6 months) | *Increase LBM to 80kg* | *Achieve a bench press 1RM of 85kg* | *Be able to do 20 pull ups* |
| Long-term  (12 months) | *Drop BF% to <9%* | *Achieve a 120kg Squat x5* | *Achieve a deadlift 1RM of 200kg* |
| YOUR GOAL  (August 31st 2014) | *Complete a "before and after" photoshoot, arranged by me, to send to bodybuilding.com* |  |  |

*A sample goal table*

All these goals are achievable for our 70kg trainer and some are even fair conservative especially if he is a novice lifter in his first year of lifting. Depending on his athletic ability and his dedication it is theoretically possible to exceed all his lifting goals. The table also shows how simple goals can be, not everyone is ready to compete after only a year in the gym, so committing to before and after shots can be a simple goal that will still hold you accountable if you fail and still gives you something to visualise.

*Themes - Size, Strength, Athletic Performance*

As well as these goals, your training programme must have an overarching theme that will help you achieve your goal. If your goal is to compete in powerlifting, then your theme will be strength, this is the buzzword to which you evaluate all your training and nutrition. Always be asking yourself "is this making me stronger?"if it is not then you need to change something. If your training is not helping you achieve your goals, change it, however, it is important not to be impetuous, building muscle takes time and you cannot expect a transformation after 4 weeks, be patient. A detailed evaluation of your training can be carried out after a cycle to assess what went wrong and why it went wrong to help you avoid making the same mistakes again. This idea of a theme is especially important for those who are not prepared to write a programme from scratch, there are plenty of novice, intermediate and advanced programmes available in books and on the internet but the ability to change and edit aspects of a successful programme to suit your own goals can make all the difference between using a successful programme and being successful on a programme. What worked for 100 people may not work for you. This ebook aims to arm you with the information to make the subtle changes that could be the difference between meeting your goals and smashing them.

*Nutrition*

Nutrition is the most important part of a training programme and should always be the first aspect you decide upon. Many training programmes do not give nutritional advice, especially those for advanced lifters, and some novice nutritional advice is questionable. Tailoring the nutritional information in this ebook to your goals should always improve a programme both in terms of results and your performance on the programme. The first question you must ask yourself is whether you need to bulk or cut to achieve your goals. In most cases, bulking will always be the most sensible course of action, gaining strength and size first allows you to attack fat loss with an already higher LBM which will result in a higher BMR. In some cases cutting may be the better option, for example somebody with a BF% of 30+ would probably find a pseudo-cut to be useful by this I mean eating around or just below the TDEE but not significantly. A trainer such as this would find gaining strength easy due to neuromuscular adaptation and the weight would shed due to the cut-style training protocols in place. However, most trainers will want to start with a bulk and attain a reasonable level of strength before beginning a cut. There are also many questions that pertain more to lifestyle than to any real training goals. Although there is many opinions on macronutrient timing and meal frequency these things have not been fully explained by science and in case are probably immaterial for a beginner. Whilst bulking between 4-7 meals a day is sensible because consuming nearly 4000 calories in 2-3 meals will be difficult and similarly whilst cutting between 2-4 meals would be prudent simply because the psychological effect of eating 7 tiny meals may prove too much and provoke cravings, the prospect of at least a few meals that will fill you up is usually a better alternative. However, much of this boils down to preference and lifestyle, be sensible hit your macros and it does not matter whether you eat one meal or fifteen.

*Training Protocols*

Your training protocols must be entirely centred around your goals. It is acceptable to split your training programme into core lifts and accessory lifts. The training protocols for each can be different, in fact, for most beginners I would suggest this. Train for strength in the core lifts and train for size in the accessory lifts at least for your first two years of training after which specialisation will be more relevant and more effective. Of course, in the information in this ebook allows you to ignore this advice and shape your own programme according to your goals. Remember to bear in mind that you must be able to stick to your programme so writing a six day split exercising two muscle groups a week will be difficult for most people to stick to, be sensible. Many beginner workouts suggest a two whole body workouts completed over three sessions a week. You must also make a decision as to how much cardio you will include in your programme and what it will consist of, make sure that the inclusion of cardio directly serves your goals and is not something you feel pressured to do, all programmes should include at least two sessions of cardio a week. It is important to make sure your decision reflects workouts you know you can commit to and complete alongside your life, work and other commitments.

*Training Attitude*

This is perhaps the most important section in this ebook. It may happen that you have misunderstood or misinterpreted some of the information presented here, this section will reveal how you can conduct yourself in your attitude to your training that well turn even a poorly constructed training programme into a useful one.

The first characteristic you must instil in yourself is strictness. You must become strict with regard to your nutrition, resisting cravings and temptations that could sidetrack you and slow results, especially when cutting. Strictness essentially means the aspect of your life dedicated to you goals will be conducted exactly as you have written it on the paper. There will be no shortcuts, no missed workouts, no skipped meals and no lack of sleep. If you begin to be strict with yourself and learn to enjoy the discipline you will be infinitely more successful than another trainer.

The second characteristic is to be precise. You must be precise in your nutrition, constantly evaluating whether what you are preparing or what you are eating is helping you towards your goals. If it is not then why are you eating it? In your training you must be precise in your exercise selection, training economy is a useful aspect of training and serves to minimise your time in the gym whilst still maximising gains. Precise selections in your nutrition and training will mean they are helping you towards your goal but are minimising the impact on the rest of your life.

The third characteristic is being accountable. Accountability has become more popular in many aspects of life in recent years. Join a forum and start a progress thread for your training or speak very frankly with a family member who will hold you accountable for not completing your goals. Avoid speaking to all your friends and family about your goals and your plan as this will probably bore them but will also give you a sense that you are close to achieving your goals, you are not. One person with detailed knowledge of your plan will help you achieve it, many will not. This accountability means you will accept your own successes and failures on their merit, credit yourself for the hard work you put and evaluate when things do not go as planned. At the end of the day it is your responsibility.

Assessing Progress

The simplest way to assess your programme's effectiveness is by testing before, during and after. Photographs are a useful tool for seeing overall body progress as well as weight and BF% measurements. You could also use a tape measure to measure aspects of your body like your arms, chest, waist, shoulders, legs and calves. Log these measurements with a date and then do them 6-8 weeks later and you will be surprised at the difference. Strength is another useful aspect for more advanced lifters, I do not recommend testing 1-Rep Maxes until you have been lifting for a few months and are confident in the core lifts. But testing these 1-Rep Maxes is a terrific indicator of success on a programme especially one geared for strength, if testing 1-Rep Maxes is difficult for you for whatever reason then a 3- or 5-Rep Max is equally sufficient. Feel free to do these tests as frequently as you want but do not be surprised if there is progress some weeks and not the next, the human body is a living organism and will fluctuate in weight, for example, almost hourly. Always try and do the measurements at rest and at the same time each time you do them.

With much of this data it will become clear how successful your training programme has been. But to further evaluate the programme you can ask yourself a few questions:

* Did you achieve your goals?
* If not, why not?
* What next? Continue with updated goals or move onto a new programme?
* What else did you achieve that may have been a surprise?

Answering these questions will help you when you are making a decision as to what to do next, the most important thing is to stay confident, work hard and persevere. Rome certainly was not built in a day and neither will you be.