

Philosophy of Training – Strength15



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Let me preface this up front that this is not an encompassing book for powerlifting. There have been lots of books that cover everything from putting on your belt to what you need to bring with you at the meet. I am going to cover training that will raise your 1 rep max. Of course this does apply to powerlifting but there are a lot of guys that want to get strong and raise their 1 rep max that have no plans of competing in powerlifting.

With that said, I highly urge anyone and everyone to compete at least once. It's a lot of fun, you will learn a lot, and your training will be very focused because you will have to "show up" for something.



Proper Programming –

When you are training for pure 1RM strength whether it be for a meet, or just hitting a gym PR for self satisfaction, the programming should perform (at least) four key principles.

1. Get you stronger (duh) - This is the reason you are lifting weights.
2. Teach you how to lift more explosively - This isn't speed work, so don't confuse the two. I personally think "speed work" is worthless the way it is applied by most lifters and will cover this later. I'm talking about learning how to explode into a weight.
3. Build confidence that you can hit the goal you are after (granted that it's a realistic one) - If you know you can't lift a weight, you can't. Even if you can. Think about it for a minute. Physically you may be able, but mentally you may not be ready. Your program should build confidence that you can indeed move weights you haven't moved before.
4. Gives you feedback that you are indeed getting stronger - Something in a program should let you know that you are in fact getting stronger before moving on to the next phase.

However a good training program is also only as good as the programmer. A guy with a 500 deadlift max is not going to deadlift 700 on a 9 week peaking cycle. That's a fact. It's better to set a 5 pound goal and achieve it, than set a 50 pound one and not even gain the previous 5 pounds because your programming was far too overzealous. I have never adhered to the "shoot for the moon" bullshit. More times than not when you overshoot a realistic goal you fall short of achieving anything, because you get overzealous and eventually the machine breaks down.

This is one of the biggest reasons I split the peaking across three spreadsheets even though the numbers programmed in are the same. It is supposed to force you into programming in an opener, a second attempt, and your closer. This way you know mentally what you're going to shoot for at the meet, and you will get constant feedback that you are good for those weights. You get stronger, you receive the feedback that you are stronger, you gain confidence, and you get on the platform with the knowledge that shit is about to get done that day.

Strength peaking -

Strength peaking is a very real thing. Even if you have not trained for a meet or followed a certain cycle, if you think hard you can probably remember a time where your strength was climbing really nice, you hit new PR's every few weeks, and training was awesome almost all of the time. Then you would hit that big PR you had been after, and within the next two weeks you'd feel a decline in everything.

You tried to hit that same weight again and failed. Heck you may have even failed to hit some weights well below that. You began to dread going to the gym and soon everything had gone to shit. Such is the ebb and flow of weight training and progress.

As Eric Lilliebridge noted in my interview with him "I can't deadlift 800 any day of the week. I only do that at the meet."

You can't hold your top strength levels all the time. I think about two weeks is what I have found that your body will maintain that, then it will start to decline. There is a pendulum swing the body will do. It will ramp up, then it will decline a bit. Knowing how to work this cycle is key being at peak strength on meet day.

My cycle breaks down over three phases for 11 weeks all told. 9 weeks of training, 1 week off or with light work, and the week of the meet, i.e. 10 days off from squatting and deadlifting and then 7 days off from benching.

A second option is to squat, deadlift, and bench for 1 set of 5 @ 50% of your planned last attempt, then don't do anything at all for the next 6-7 days. I like both options fairly equally depending on how training has been going. If I feel beat, I may take the full 10 days off. If I feel fresh and strong, I will do the 50% workout and just rest for the 6-7 days. You have to gauge this a little bit on how your cycle has run.

If your last workout on squats, deads, and bench were grinders, take the full 10 days for squat and bench and 7 for bench. If you have been kicking ass and taking names, try the 50% session. Again, these are just my general guidelines.

"Duh, Winning..."



Let's be clear, I hate hearing bullshit from guys like "well if you didn't miss a lift you didn't go heavy enough."

Horseshit.

Why would I put in months and months of hard training, spend my money and time traveling, just to miss lifts? This is fucking stupid beyond comprehension.

Would an MMA fighter train his ass off only to get in the ring and forgo his game plan, then get his ass kicked, just so he could say that "well I just showed I can still hang in there even if I don't follow the game plan."

This is nonsense.

There are no moral victories. You win or you lose. And in strength sports you either make a lift or you don't. If you don't, you lost. So why would you train, then go into the competition and pick shit you know you probably have no chance of hitting? It makes zero fucking sense.

Your training, which includes picking your weights at competition time, should be centered around success. You should KNOW that you are capable of hitting a weight on that day because your training constantly reinforced that you could. You know that it did, because you were smart and programmed for it. This does not mean you will never miss a lift. You probably will because when you're going for new PR's that can, and will, happen. However the point is to set up your training cycles for success. Not walk into a meet or the gym and wing it, hoping that you might hit a certain lift but not knowing for sure. Having confidence because your training was dialed in is a huge key in hitting new PR's. If you miss your third attempt, but still got a PR out of all of your second attempts, then you will win that day. If you miss shit that you had no hope of hitting and got zero PR's you didn't plan very well.

Raw -

Let me preface this by saying we are talking about raw powerlifting in this manual/book/whatever. My definition of raw may be different than yours. When I say raw, that's no belt, no knee wraps, nothing. You and your singlet, shoes, and thong, whatever.

Some people have called me a zealot, and I don't give a shit. To me, raw is raw.

If you are wearing a piece of supportive equipment that helps you lift more than if you did not have it on, you're not really raw. That is my opinion and I am entitled to it. I am not condemning anyone as a lifter if you don't agree with me, and I am not attacking your manhood. When I lift in a meet, I don't bitch or moan or say "well he's got on knee wraps and I don't." I personally don't give a shit what everyone else is doing. I am there to lift weights for me, challenge myself, and set PR's. But I'm just saying up front, that is my own personal definition of raw. To each his own.

Getting Stronger -

Obviously this program is to help you get stronger for a meet or to hit some nice 1 rep max PR's. Similarly to the Philosophy of Training For Mass big-15 template, this program is built around the 5-4-3-2-1 back off set but with a few modifications (not bastardization!).

The model now will look like 5-4-3-2-1-1-1 then back off sets with either a supplemental exercise, like pause squats or close grip benches, or a testing week to see how things are coming along and if you need to reprogram for the next phase.

The programming ramps you up over each phase using your planned opener, second attempt, and third attempt as baselines. You should walk into the meet feeling supremely confident that you can hit everything you planned for in your training cycle, or at least have a good chance to. Again, this is training to win. Not training to "I guess I'll take X amount for my second attempt" and winging shit.

Let me add that this is not a "new" or "discovered" idea. Lots of guys have used this exact style of template over the years, and it was especially popular in the 70's. My own personal advice would be to use the Big-15 training in the offseason to increase your mass, and then use the strong-15 for meet prep. You're constantly going to need to up your mass if a bigger total is what you are after. This does not mean becoming a fat slob but increasing lean muscle mass so that your strength ceiling increases as well. I believe that both of these programs, which are centered around some basic philosophies, will accomplish all of that.

Let me also state that my way may not be the best way for everyone. As I noted in the big-15 manual, your buy in and mental approach will play a part as to whether or not my training ideas will work best for you.

The Testing Phase -

There are three cycles in this program. Each cycle has a three week minicycle, and at the end of each three week minicycle is a testing week.

For the squat and bench, you will rep it out, leaving a rep in the tank. From there you can plug in that number of reps into the "Reps Achieved" part of the spreadsheet and it will give you an estimated 1RM. This is just to give some kind of feedback as to where you might currently be. With the bench press you will actually rep out to failure every week on the back off set. I talk about why later.

For the deadlift, I have programmed in a set of 8 to perform. The reason why is because after doing a lot of research, talking to lifters about their lifts, and my own personal experience if you can hit that set of 8 on the deads there is no doubt you will be good for the max you programmed in. If you don't hit it but get 6 or 7, it doesn't

mean you aren't good for that max, but if you can hit it you are pretty much 99.999% guaranteed to hit it. This is why smart, and not overzealous programming, is required.

This is not science, but it is based in solid anecdotal evidence.

The Spreadsheet -

There are a few ways you can run the spreadsheet.

1. You can plug in your openers, second, and third attempts and just go with that. If you need to adjust the testing weeks will let you know that. If you are smart, you won't have to adjust. Are you getting what I am saying? In other words, when you program all three at the same time, you should know that your opener is doable (duh), your second attempt is a small PR (5-10 pounds), and your third attempt would be a slightly bigger PR (10-15 pounds or possibly more depending on what you did in the testing phases).

So in other words your opener should be your last warm up, your second attempt a SMALL PR, then your third attempt should be a larger PR. Yeah you could go nuts on the third attempt, but again, you have another chance at "winning" by being smart, so why not?

2. You can just start with phase 1, plug in your opener, see how you do on the testing week, and plug 5% less than the estimated max in for phase 2 (the second spreadsheet). You can then do the same for phase three. See what you hit in the third week of phase 2, plug 5% less than that in phase 3 (unless that is less than what you hit for phase 2).

So like this...

Program the opener and when week 3 comes around do the testing phase and plug 95% of the estimated max number into phase 2.

Do phase 2 and plug 95% of the testing estimated max into phase 3.

The danger here is winging it. You're waiting to see what each phase brings. Sure it can work, but it's not ideal.

You know your lifts and what you are capable of. Be smart with your programming and it will pay big dividends.

For those that think a 15 pound PR isn't worth getting worked up over, if you did three meets and added 15 pounds on each lift all three times, you would have added 135 pounds to your total in that year. So if you had a 1400 pound total you'd now have a 1535 total. That's a hell of a difference. So be smart.

Hit Every Lift –

I always preach to make sure and hit every lift you have programmed in for training. Never miss a lift. This is a big confidence booster and gives affirmation that your programming is solid.

Missing a lift in training can really play havoc with some peoples psyche. I know it does me. So I now make sure whenever I look at the lifts I need/want to hit in training in prep for a meet, that I almost certainly will hit them all.

If you're having a -10% session, remember to throw that shit out the window and be done with it. We all have those. Get over it and continue on. If you're missing lifts left and right, then rethink your programming, plug in some new numbers, and quit being an ass about your programming.

Assistance Work and Weak Points –

I'm not big on assistance work, and the only reason I'm going to talk about it is because so many guys are obsessed with it. Generally speaking, your best assistance work is the adjusting of the volume of the lift itself. Whether that be more volume on the back off sets or just concentrating on breaking rep PR's every third week of the training cycle.

Either way, my "assistance work" is generally just doing the basic lifts (squat, presses, deadlifts, chins, dips, rows, curls) from top to bottom to get the body bigger and stronger all over. Rather than worrying about where you missed a lift and fucking around trying exercises to get stronger at that point, just worry about getting stronger period. I say this because I have gone down that route, and been left wanting every time. And so have a shitload of other lifters I have spent time talking to about it.

For example, just because your bench is weak at lock out, doesn't mean you need lock out work. Lots of guys don't understand this at first, but you could be missing that lockout simply because you're not strong enough yet.

Let me explain.

The lock-out guy may be missing at lock out because he isn't generating enough power at the beginning portion of the press, thus he doesn't have enough momentum to finish. I see enough fucking board pressing these days to know that powerlifters alone are keeping Home Depot in business, yet I still hear how weak they are at lockout. Simply getting stronger at the point where the lift is failing isn't always the answer, and often times its all for naught.

If you want to improve a "weak point" just get stronger, or get stronger well BEFORE the sticking point. This way you generate more force to carry yourself through the sticking point. Training at the sticking point itself is generally an exercise in futility because if

you have lost power before you get there, there won't be a transfer of strength at the sticking point.

Think about it.

Every time you miss a lift, you generally miss it in the same spot. This doesn't mean you have a "weak point" this just means you aren't strong enough to lift that amount of weight yet. It's really that simplistic but some guys won't accept that.

"There has to be a weak link! A reason why I'm missing the lift there at that point!"

Yeah, because you're not strong enough yet. Doing a shit ton of fucking banded good mornings with a curvy bar standing on foam while a midget makes you a blender drink in the background probably isn't the answer.

When you get your mind around this weak point training shit, you'll start devoting more time and energy into the actual lifts, and training them.

When you look at the training of the majority of the strongest guys from the 1970's and 1980's it was squat, bench, and deadlift for singles, triples, and five's with some curls, pushdowns, leg extensions and leg curls thrown in. Yet plenty of those world records still stand today. This is because getting strong doesn't require rocket science. It just requires effort, consistency, and patience.

If I did have to admit any type of "weak point" training or assistance work that will pay dividends, it's training the lifts from the bottom and/or putting yourself into a leverage disadvantage with the lift. Pause squats, t-shirt bench presses, paused benches, close and wide grip benches, and block deadlifts all accomplish this.

So to get back to the main theme here, concentrate on getting stronger on the lift and from the bottom of the lift. This should be your plan for getting stronger.

Making your warm up sets work for you –

One thing I think some guys do is really coast through warm ups, eyeing the prize of the big sets. Your warm up sets are a valuable training tool and should be treated as such. You often see guys devoting whole workouts to "speed training" when the fact is, you should just be lifting like that anyway. Move the positive portions of the warm up sets as brutally fast and explosive as possible. Use a controlled (not slow) negative on the press and squat, then explode through the positive portion of the rep.

This is the kind of force you want to generate on the heaviest sets. No, they aren't going to move as fast as your warm ups, but you want the same kind of forceful application.

A couple of simple keys here that may help you is to...

Work on finding your best starting position – This may sound overly simplistic but you're going to find your own personal sweet spots for the start of each of the big three. When you are in it, you will feel strongest and most confident. When you feel this way you will be able to move the bar as forcefully as possible. For squats, it will be foot placement, bar placement, and head angle. For bench it will be foot placement, shoulder retraction, and hand placement. For the deadlift it will be foot placement in relation to the bar, hip and knee angle. If you are still working on these things finding your sweet spots for each of those will make you feel dramatically more confident before you start the lift.

Hold your breath – Before you start each rep, take a big breath and hold it. This creates internal pressure and stabilization. This alone will make you stronger. If you don't think so, do a pause squat then let your breath out at the bottom and watch how much harder the lift becomes instantly. I generally hold my breath for 3 reps before I take a new one.

The Program –

In the spreadsheet you will see a few things.

Three Phases –

There are three pages at the bottom. One for each phase. Again, the first phase is the opener, the second phase is the second attempt, and the third phase is the last attempt.

Setsxreps –

This is sets and the number of reps, duh.

Session Grading –

I've talked about this before. An 80% grade means you got the work in, but it wasn't an over the top session, but it didn't suck either. A +10% means it was just an unreal good workout with some PR's, and a -10% session means it sucked royal balls and even warm ups felt heavy.

I put 80% in each block just so you can see that each session should be an 80% session. Log your session grading for each workout so you can see a pattern in how things are going.

If you wanted to know what a perfect 3 phase cycle would look like on session grading it would be like this...

Week 1 – 80% normal workout

Week 2 – 80% normal workout

Week 3 – testing +10% hit a PR

Two out of the three weeks should just be 80% sessions because you should just be getting the work in and your programming should be carrying you along perfectly. That third week you should be ready to kick ass.

Reps Achieved –

On testing week you will put in the reps you achieved with the testing weight. In the Pro Max column a number will show up that gives you an idea of your estimated max. I did not do this for the deadlift because the deadlift is a slightly different animal than the squat or bench press. On deadlift testing week the goal is to hit 8+ reps with that weight. As I noted before, if you don't get 8 reps it doesn't mean you won't be good for that on meet day but you need to be close (6 reps or so). If you get the 8 reps you will almost certainly be assured of hitting that programmed max, and if it's more than 8 you should be over it (duh). Just make sure you've programmed so that you're good for the 8.

Bench Pressing –



As I noted earlier, you will need to find your sweet spots for bench setup. This may take some playing time. I'm not going to try and break down every possible issue you could have but I will outline some keys that I use for setting up in my bench.

My benching is all close grip, with my index finger just outside of the smooth part of most standard bars.

I will lie down on the bench and get under the bar. I will grab the bar and I then move my head about a foot towards the end of the bench (the head end), plant my feet, and then pull myself (via the bar) back down towards the foot end of the bench, creating my arch. I then use my feet to push myself just a few inches back towards the head of the bench again and drive my upperback into the bench. From there I am usually into position and do my own lift off.

Movements to help the bench –

Pause Bench Presses – This is nothing more than pausing the weight on your chest, like you have to do in competition, then pressing. What I have always done is paused the first rep of every bench set. That way I still get practice with this. You can pause every single rep as well, and this is tough as shit.

T-Shirt Bench Press – This is where you bring the bar down and try to touch your t-shirt as lightly as possible before you drive the bar back up. This makes you have to lower the bar slowly, then hold it around the bottom position for a few seconds before you can press. This is a great bottom position strengthener.

Shoulder Work – Overhead pressing of pretty much any type is called for here.

Close and Wide Grip Bench Pressing – After the programmed work, you can do some volume on these light as assistance work.

Cambered Bar Bench Presses – You obviously need a cambered bar here. My recommendation is to lower the bar just slightly below the top of the chest, then pause for a second before pressing. Be careful of going too heavy here as this does put the shoulders in a precarious position.

Incline Press – This has actually become my standby on weeks I don't bench and has served me well. I can still press relatively heavy, and the incline doesn't beat me up. I generally do a heavy incline workout, then 1 or 2 light incline workouts before I do another heavy one.

Dips – Lots of guys have had good results with their bench if they pushed their dip poundage up.

Remember not to get crazy on the post bench work. You're always benching heavy, and the bench is the lift you are training for. So don't sweat the assistance work. Just get some in and call it a day. Dips for 3-5 sets of 10-20 for bodyweight is fine if that's all you want to do. Or don't do any.

Deadlifting –



The deadlift has been the hardest lift for me to develop, so I've had to do a lot of different things to get it to move. The first thing was getting into proper position for me. I took some cues from Mark Rippetoe and cut the bar in half with my feet (meaning when looking down the bar will be across the middle of your feet), quit worrying about getting my hips low enough, took some slack out of the bar (pull on the bar slightly), and focused on pulling as hard and as fast as possible once I was ready. I do not jerk the weight up, I take the slack out of it, then I pull as hard as possible.

As far as movements that I feel are beneficial to the deadlift are...

Block deadlifts – Everyone thinks this is deficit deadlifts. Deficit deadlifts are where you STAND on something. Block deadlifts are where you put the weights on blocks, so that the bar hits you somewhere below the knee. Pulling above the knee block pulls/rack deads are virtually worthless in my opinion, and nothing you do from that height will transfer to the floor.

I found that pulling from mid-shin and below the knee carried over immediately to my regular deadlift. You will probably find that the weight feels more “dead” when pulling from those heights, so when you go back to the floor, the deadlift will have a little more pop to it.

Rows – T-bars, dumbbell, barbell, whatever. Just the basics here to keep everything covered.



Chins and Pulldowns – Same as rows.

Shrugs – I have found high volume heavy shrugging to be helpful as well. I think more than anything, you can never get a strong enough back and this is just part of it.

Squatting –



For squatting, I am going to include part of my raw squatting article because it talks extensively about raw squatting and the nuances involved in it. I personally believe the squat to be the most technical lift of the three powerlifts and generally gives people the most trouble from a technical learning standpoint.

So here it is...

<http://www.lift-run-bang.com/2010/04/developing-your-raw-squat-pt-i.html>

Let me preface this article by saying I am not a great squatter. I would consider myself a decent raw squatter. I do all my squats no belt and no wraps, so what you see is what you get. I've done 605 on numerous occasions, tripled 585, done 500x8 and 455x10+ many times. All rock bottom, at around 245-250 pounds. I hope to put my best squatting together for a meet this year in August and hit 650 no belt, no wraps. When I hit a 700 no belt no wraps squat I will quit powerlifting and the interwebs. Maybe.....

So if you are squatting 700+ raw or were one of those 500 pound 15 year old squatters, this article may not be for you. Or you still may find something useful, who knows. I

really intend it for guys who are struggling to find their way squatting and hope they can learn something from the mistakes I made, and things I learned.

Let me reiterate that my suggestions are just that. Everyone has to find their squat "sweet spots". My hope is that this will help you do that. My opinions are my own, they are not going to be gospel for everyone. Take what is useful and discard the rest.

The beginning -

Anyway, I was not a naturally good squatter, so this isn't an article by some guy that was squatting 400 at 15 years old the first time he walked into the gym. Hell, for the first many many years of lifting I didn't train legs a lot, and when I finally got into a real gym I did a lot of bodybuilding style workouts and leg pressed a lot.

When I first started squatting, it flat out did not feel right. I would hurt my back a lot going too heavy and had no real "feel" for what I was supposed to be doing. I knew I was supposed to be squatting because well, everyone says so (and with good cause). But I hated it. I wasn't good at it and when you're at a small gym in a small town with no competitive lifters to help you, everything goes by trial and error.

In the beginning I squatted with the bar high on my traps and would allow my knees to travel forward to start the movement, trying to keep my torso very erect. When the weight got heavy I would inevitably end up with my upper body doing the St. Louis arch, all bent over and low back taking a beating. Did this convince me that I was squatting all wrong? Oh heavens no, I kept doing it! Because I'm smart! (your sarcasm meter should be in the red there) Actually I just didn't have any help and was very frustrated. So I suffered through one low back strain after another. My squat poundage did not move and I was finding no benefit to this whole squat thing.

Eventually I smartened up. I knew if I was ever going to squat worth a damn, I needed to figure all of this out. Bar placement, foot placement, hip extension, hand placement, everything.

This took a lot of years of experimenting. And because I am patient when it comes to lifting, I will run something to give it a fair chance. Far too many lifters spin their wheels because if they haven't added 30 pounds to a lift after 3 workouts they scrap whatever they are doing. Finding what works for you can take time so be patient.

Without boring you with every iteration of squatting I did, this is what I finally settled on...

Bar placement -

I found that the bar sitting right on top of my rear delts felt best. This is a low bar placement. It also put me in my strongest position leverage wise. You will need to play with this to see where you feel strongest. Remember, if you have been squatting high bar forever, low bar placement might not feel normal at first. This is because bar

placement will ultimately determine back angle, i.e. how much lean you have in your squat. The higher the bar is the more upright you tend to be. The lower the bar gets the more lean you will naturally have in your squat. This is normal. There is no right or wrong here, only what puts you in the most comfortable and strongest position.

Also let me say that the con (sort of) to low bar placement is that your shoulders need to be fairly flexible for this bar placement. This is not an unhealthy position for your shoulders, in fact your shoulder health NEEDS to be good to work with this bar placement. If you can't get the bar back that far on your shoulders, work on shoulder flexibility with shoulder dislocates every day. I have permanent AC joint separation in my left shoulder and squatting like this gives me no problems. Doesn't mean it won't for you however. So be cognitive of your shoulder health if you switch to this style of bar placement.

Foot placement -

This one didn't take quite so long. I knew pretty quickly I could not squat wide. I had guys try to tell me to get my feet out wider and "spread the floor" and all of that bullshit. If you're wearing double ply or canvas and squatting out of a monolift in a Jean Claude Van Damme full splits stance, maybe that works great. If you are a raw squatter walking your squat out from a rack this doesn't work as well. All it did was make my hips hurt like crazy. I found just at shoulder width with a very slight outward pointing of the toes is about perfect for me. Once you get your bar placement down, play with foot placement. When you hit your "sweet spot" you'll know it. The weight will move fast and feel lightest.

Hand placement -

If you go high bar this isn't as big a deal. Your traps (if you have any HAH!) "hold" the bar in place. You just need to grab onto the bar and stay tight. If you go low bar, hand placement will also be determined on how flexible your shoulders are (see how this comes full circle?). In the beginning I would get REALLY tight and try to squeeze my hands in as close as possible. However this would naturally tilt my elbows up a little more than I found ideal, and believe it or not elbow angle plays a bigger role than you think.

If your elbows are tilted up and back too high, you're going to get more bent over than ideal and lose ideal back angle. Now I go wider with my hand placement and just concentrate on squeezing everything together back there together with shoulder blades. I try to make sure my elbows do not rise too high in relation to the angle of my torso.

Have someone video tape you from the side on some heavy squats and notice what your elbows do. If they shoot up on the ascent, play with your hand placement and shoulder blade retraction to get them to stay down and aligned with the torso.

Head/Eyes -

A lot of guys tell you to look up don't they? I have no idea why. Trying to "drive the bar back" and worrying about where the torso is going was big waste of energy and time for me. The squat is a hip/quad/hamstring/glute movement. The idea is to move it with those muscles, not driving your upperbody back to get it up. This never made any sense to me. To keep the cervical spine neutral you should be looking at a point on the floor about 6-7 feet in front of you. NOT up. What you want to worry about is strong hip drive out of the bottom, not where your torso is going. Now this doesn't mean you can get sloppy with your torso and arch. Your upperbody should stay tight and rigid and your arch maintained, but the weight should be moved with the lower body. Driving the bar backwards may work for some guys, but I found this to be one of the biggest wastes of time ever. Driving hard through the heels and facilitating hip drive boosted my squat more than worrying driving back into the bar.

Again, play with both. See which cue helps you drive harder out of the hole. For some guys driving the bar backwards may be a better cue, or it may not. Experiment to find which one is best for you.

Descent -

This is, in my opinion, the real key to squatting bigger, and the most complicated for guys who aren't natural squatters. You have three different joints involved in squatting, two that perform extension (hip and knee) and one that performs flexion (ankle). Making this all work can at first be complicated. Once you get some cues down for yourself, it will feel natural and your squat will really begin to move.

Before you even begin the descent you should have taken a deep breath and held. I put 20 pounds on a guys squat one night simply because he was not taking in a big breath to stabilize his midsection for the squat. So make sure you pay attention your breathing on each rep. I usually take in a single big breath for 2-3 reps.

The next part is to think about "sitting back". The degree of sit back will be determined by you. The "sit back sit back sit back" mantra that is preached in geared circles did not work for me. There are a few reasons why. First off, in raw squatting the quads are vitally important. I know this seems like an obvious statement to some, however some geared lifting circles have likened training quads to training biceps for the powerlifter (you should be training biceps too as they help stabilize the elbow and shoulder joint when you bench).

Raw squatters need superior quad strength to squat big. The quads share the majority of the load and work in conjunction with the hips and hamstrings. When you perform an exaggerated sit back in a raw squat the knees do not travel forward very far, or at all, (keeping the shins more perpendicular, straight up and down) and the quads are not engaged as much, and your levers get all F'd up (to be scientific about it). You lose

power and leverage. If you look at the example above you will see the knee travels in front of the toes. Regardless of what you have been told this is not bad. The knees do need to track in the same path as the feet/toes however to REALLY engage the quads they will in fact need to travel slightly over the toes. The length which they travel will obviously be different for everyone. Someone with short femurs it won't be very much, and someone with longer femurs it would obviously be more. But the overall angle of hip to knee should be similar.

Now the actual sitting back part is going to be different for everyone to get into position. So play with how much you sit back and get a feel for what feels best for you. I use a small sit-back.

After the sit back, you should actually drop straight down, keeping the low back arched hard. Now explaining the next part is fairly difficult. Some say you need to push your knees out, just enough to allow yourself to sit down between your legs. This is true, but this cue did not work for me. Ed Coan said you needed to spread the groin after the sit back. This cue did not work for me. For me it was to let the hips "unhinge" (my sit back) and to keep the weight over my heels. This put everything into place and the squat felt more like a leg press and I could press properly from my heels. Either way, you need find your mental and physical cues that help you drive best with your hips and legs out of the hole.

Let me also address that a high bar squatter and lower bar squatter will have very different looking descents. A high bar guy might really just drop straight down with very little unhinging of the hips. A low bar guy will unhinge more, with that slight sit back I talked about above. So remember that bar placement will effect your descent as well, then of course the angle of your torso.

My back is flat and my head looking down just ahead of me to keep my spine neutral. From this position I will drive with my hips from the hole.

My mental and physical cues work like so -

- Grab the bar right out around the rings or right outside of them
- Hips under the bar in the rack
- Pull bar into my rear delts and squeeze shoulder blades together
- Unrack bar and take two steps (right foot back first then left foot)
- Check toe angle
- Find spot on floor about 6 feet in front of me
- Take in deep breath and hold, making sure midsection is tight and back is arched
- Unhinge and descent (I have a pretty good forward lean in my squat)
- Make sure weight stays on heels
- Put hams on calves
- Drive hard out of the hole with hips making sure to maintain arch

It seems like it might be a lot of thinking but it's second nature to me now. Play with each of the things mentioned to find your sweet spot. You might find a bit of each one as you try new things, so make a written note of them. Soon you will be able to put it all together and your squat will feel natural to you.



Routine Options –

My personal favorite routine when training for powerlifting is the following...

Day 1 – Squat/Deadlift

Squat – cycle

Deadlift – cycle

Pause Squats – cycle (part of the spread sheet)

Abs – any exercise 5x15

Day 2 – Bench

Bench – cycle

Incline Press – 2x10-12

Overhead Press of some sort – 2x8-10

Optional – Triceps work like pushdowns or overhead extensions or maybe dips

Day 3 – Back/Biceps/Light Press

Rows – Db rows 1x20-30 or T-bar rows 6x10-20

Chins or Pulldowns – 5-4-3-2-1 back off, 5x5/5x7/4x8-10 choose one

Ez Curl or Db Curls – 1-2x10-12

Light Bench or Light Incline (optional) – 2x10-12

Notes about this routine – I like this routine because I do the squat and dead together and that saves my low back and overall recovery system a beating. I get the big workout of the way early and then the rest of the week is pretty fun.

Light Bench just means light bench. So something LIGHT for 2 sets of 10-12. You can also do a light incline here for 2x10-12 as well.

If you want to perform each lift on separate days this is how that could work out –

Day 1 – Squat

Squat – cycle

Pause Squat – cycle

Leg Curls – 5x10

Day 2 – Bench

Bench – cycle

Incline – 2x8-10

Military or Dips – 2x8-10

Day 3 – Deadlift

Deadlift – cycle

Block Deadlift – 2x5

Db Row – 1x20-30

Chins or Pulldowns – 5-4-3-2-1 back off, 5x5/5x7/4x8-10 choose one

Notes about this routine – This has been a standard for a long time. I used to use this kind of routine quite a bit but I found that I recovered better with the previous one. With that said, this one still has merit. If you are a naturally good bench and need more work on the squat and pull this could be your ticket to ride, as you can just squat and pull only on those deads and pour all of your energy into that if need be.

How to make all of this shit work and Q&A –

This is really straight forward guys. Plan out your three attempts and plug them into each phase. Every third week, test the lift just to make sure you're on track. For the deadlift, so long as you get the 8 reps you are good for your programmed lift.

DO NOT OVERCOMPLICATE THIS!!!!!!!!!!!!

“Why do I have to do pause squats?” –

You don't have to. You can do the back off sets as a regular squat, but I haven't met anyone that hasn't benefitted from pause squats.

“Why do I do as many as possible every week on the bench for the back off?”

Because you can do this on a press and it not hinder your recovery ability, and because it works really well.

“What assistant exercises should I do?”

Grrrrrrrrrrrr.....

“Why am I going to bastardize this thing and screw it up all to hell?”

I dunno man, maybe it's because people are never happy with something unless they can put their stamp on it. That's all I can figure out.

Getting stronger is not a difficult chore from a planning perspective. I'm not saying getting stronger is easy, I'm saying my program here and my plan does work and it's not difficult to put into action, but the work will be hard. Pour your heart and soul into the lifts and

Elite Raw Totals (in my opinion) This is the old USPF standards for elite -

MEN

Weight Class	114	123	132	148	165	181	198	220	242	275	SHW
Elite	1064	1157	1246	1394	1527	1642	1731	1824	1890	1946	2033
Master	981	1064	1146	1279	1400	1505	1593	1675	1736	1786	1857
Class 1	882	953	1025	1152	1257	1350	1422	1505	1554	1598	1670
Class 2	777	838	904	1009	1102	1190	1257	1323	1367	1411	1472
Class 3	672	733	788	887	965	1036	1097	1157	1196	1229	1279
Class 4	590	639	689	772	838	904	953	1003	1047	1075	1119

WOMEN

Weight Class	97	105	114	123	132	148	165	181	198	SHW
Elite	639	683	733	782	827	909	981	1053	1130	1190
Master	579	623	667	711	749	827	893	959	1025	1080
Class 1	518	562	601	639	672	744	805	865	920	970
Class 2	463	496	535	568	601	661	716	766	821	865
Class 3	402	435	468	496	524	579	623	672	716	755
Class 4	347	375	402	424	452	496	535	573	617	650