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The Little Black Book of Training Methods
by TC Luoma

A lot of you have been training for years, and as such have experimented with dozens of training methods. Most are probably long since forgotten, like the girl with the braces and padded bra that you dated once or twice back in high school. There wasn't any chemistry and you went your separate ways.

The thing is, we all grow and mature, we all *change*. The girl with braces is now an underwear model for Victoria's Secret who has a degree in comparative literature. She's definitely worth much more than a second look. Similarly, the training methods we once abandoned may now deserve a second look, too.

Hence this "little black book" of training methodologies. I've dug up a couple of dozen methods and described them. So, if it's a cold winter night, you're lonely, and you feel like trying something new or rekindling an "old romance," take one out for a spin. You two just might make beautiful music together.

Rest-Pause

This method usually involves using near maximum loads. Quite simply, the lifter does one rep of a heavy load and then racks the weight (or sets it down). He then rests 10 to 15 seconds and does another one, whereupon he rests another 10 to 15 seconds.

This is repeated until 4 or 5 reps have been done. If the lifter can't lift the weight for a third, fourth, or fifth time, his spotter helps him out.

Generally, only one set is performed, but as many as 3 or 4 exercises can be done (for that body part).

People who follow this method believe that by working close to your maximum weight, you make the most gains.

German Body Comp

This is a method that was popularized by strength coach Charles Poliquin. It's designed to burn body fat. In essence, the lifter does a series of high-rep sets — anywhere from 15 to 20 — with very little rest in-between (30 to 60 seconds).

For instance, the lifter would begin by doing a set of 15-20 bench presses. After a brief rest, he would do a set of 15-20 squats. The important thing to remember is that an upper body exercise is always followed by a lower body exercise (or vice versa).

Interestingly, the order, sequence, or choice of movements doesn't so much matter. All that matters is that you work each muscle group for sets of 15-20, and that you alternate between sets for upper and lower body. Also, the entire workout shouldn't last longer than an hour.

Poliquin theorized the production of lactic acid by this high volume, low rest workout would cause growth hormone to go up, thus leading to fat loss. Personally, I think it just burns up a lot of calories.

In either case, the system is effective in reducing fat mass. If you want to read an article that describes the system in more detail, [click here](#).

Super Slow

I've often maintained that the expression "lifting weights" is a misnomer. Instead, I believe, it should be called "lowering weights."

That's just linguistic masturbation, you say? Maybe, but when you consider that it's the lowering or eccentric part of the movement that results in the most muscle gain, the term "lowering weights" seems to make a lot more sense.

The Super Slow method takes particular advantage of the lowering portion of the movement. It simply involves taking the notion of tempo (how long it takes you to do a rep) to its logical extension.

The Super Slow method generally involves doing either both parts of a lift (the raising and lowering) very slowly, or just doing the lowering part very slowly. For instance, the trainee could take 5 seconds to raise the weight, followed by a one-second pause, and 5 seconds to lower the weight (a 515 tempo).

At its most extreme, a lifter (or "lowerer") could take 1 second to raise the weight, no pause, and a full 30 seconds to lower the weight. Obviously, in such a case, only 1 rep would be necessary.

This method is useful in a number of situations. Injured lifters can still expose the muscles to great stress while not having to use much weight. Secondly, the slow tempo allows a trainee to learn and use good form. Thirdly, it exposes muscle fibers to a great amount of tension for a long period of time, which, if used wisely, can lead to big-time muscle growth.

Negative System

This system involves taking advantage of the fact that a muscle can lower more weight than it can lift.

There are several ways to do incorporate a negative system. One way is to use spotters, of course. For example, Ian King often recommends that a lifter could put 120% of his 1RM (repetition maximum) on a bench press bar, and then have a spotter on either side of the bar lift the weight up for him. Then, the trainee, under his own power, lowers the bar. At the bottom of the lift, the spotters again raise the bar to the starting position.

Aside from using spotters, a trainee can perform negatives on various exercises by using two arms to raise the weight, and only one arm to lower the weight. For example, while doing dumbbell triceps extensions, you could use two hands to lift a dumbbell into position and then lower it with one hand. Similarly, a lot machines allow the lifter to use both legs or arms to lift the weight into the starting position, and then use one limb to lower the weight.

Examples include the leg press, leg curl, and leg extension machines.

Super Overload

Although I've never used this system, I read about it in one of Fleck and Kraemer's books (*Designing Resistance Training Programs*). It's similar to the Negative System above, but it differs in that the trainee ends up doing several partial reps to failure.

As an example, the athlete would use 125% of his 1RM bench press weight. His spotters would help him unrack the bar and get him into the straight-arm position. Then, the lifter lowers the weight as far as possible (which, because he's using 125% of his 1RM, is only a little ways) before pressing it back to the starting position. Ideally, he does 7 to 10 such partial reps before lowering the bar all the way down, whereupon the spotters help him lift it up and rack the bar.

I suspect that this method would help build strength in the upper third of the bench press motion, which is a weak range for a lot of lifters. Additionally, it would "teach" the lifter to use heavier loads, thus preparing him psychologically for bigger lifts down the road.

Functional Isometrics, or "Isometronic" Training

This method is typically used to train a particular short range of motion with the hopes that the strength gains will carry over and allow the trainee to lift more weight while doing a complete range of motion.

For instance, the athlete might wish to work on the middle portion of his bench press because it's weak. He would, using a power rack, arrange the pins so that the bar rested at a point that was roughly equivalent to where the mid-range portion of the lift would begin. The next set of pins would be placed roughly 4 to 6 inches above that point.

The athlete would power the bar through the short range of motion, and then be stopped by the upper set of pins. However, instead of just stopping, he would try to force the bar through the pins for roughly 5 to 8 seconds.

This would be repeated for 3 or 4 sets.

This method is most valuable for those that are looking to increase their 1RM.

Doubles

This system, I believe, was first introduced by the late Don Ross, but it doesn't much matter who thought it up. It involves doing three sets in succession, with no rest. The "trick" involves doing one exercise for a particular muscle, doing another unrelated move for the same body part, and then repeating the first exercise.

As an example, the lifter would do a set of 8-10 barbell triceps extensions, move immediately to a set of 8-10 close-grip barbell bench presses, and then immediately repeat the barbell triceps extensions.

I'm not exactly sure of the physiological reason behind this approach. All I know is that it's an extremely effective method.

Strip Sets

Ahh, the good old strip set. It's usually the first advanced training method we learn, but it's definitely valuable when used judiciously.

It simply involves repping out with a weight, quickly reducing the resistance, and repping out again. For instance, the trainee would do 5 reps of a bench press, rack the bar, and have his spotter remove 20 to 40 pounds. The lifter would then do 4 or 5 more reps. He would then rest about two minutes before doing his next super set. This might be repeated several times.

The trouble is, this method has been somewhat bastardized by masochists all over the world. Instead of just reducing the resistance once, they continue to rep out, pause, lower the resistance, and rep out.

This may continue for 8 or 9 sets. Were it possible to lower the weight by microscopic fractions, so much so that they would get into the sub atomic level, these lifters would continue to strip sets late into the night.

It's a cool method, but it can easily lead to overtraining. I recommend using the method as it was originally intended.

1 1/2s

This method has been popularize by Ian King. It simply involves extending a rep. For instance, a 1 1/2 rep squat involves doing a full squat, pausing, and then going down half of the way and coming up again. That would be one rep.

Similarly, 1 1/2 leg extensions would involve doing a full rep, and then going down 1/2 the way and coming back up.

Aside from lengthening time under tension, this method gives lifters added work in a specific range of motion; one in which they may be weak in.

Another reason to use 1 1/2s is to work around an injury. Many lifters can't do heavy squats for a variety of reasons. However, if they were to do 1 1/2s, they could use less weight and still create a great deal of tension in their muscle fibers.

Wave loading

Although it sounds like a method more suitable to surfers, wave loading is a great training method that seems to "trick" the nervous system into becoming more efficient. The method simply involves doing a group of sets (a "wave") that generally involves a set of 4, followed 4 or more minutes later by a set of 3; followed 4 or more minutes later by a set of 2. The weight, of course, is increased with each set, but not so much that the lifter is working to failure.

After the first wave, the lifter does another wave of 4, 3, and 2 reps, using heavier weight on each set than he used for the first wave. Amazingly, the second wave usually allows the lifter to use heavier weight than he might have had he not done the first wave.

21's

I'm not sure who invented these, but they were popularized by *Ah-nuld* in his book, "Encyclopedia of Bodybuilding. The method simply involves doing 21 reps, in three "mini-sets" of 7. There are several ways to do them, but the smartest, in my book, is to do 7 half reps in the weakest range of motion, followed by 7 full reps, followed finally by 7 reps in the strongest range of motion.

For instance, if you applied this to curls, you would do 7 half reps lifting the bar from a fully-extended position to the half-way mark; followed by 7 full-range reps; followed finally by 7 half-reps from the half-way mark to the fully contracted point.

Strength coach Ian King also recommends pausing every time to change direction to increase the training effect.

1,6 Training

This method works on the same principle (sort of) as the baseball slugger who puts doughnut-weights on his bat in the batting circle to make his bat seem heavier. When he takes the weights off, the regular bat seems much lighter and he can swing it all the more quickly.

1,6 training, which is also known as the *mixed neural drive/hypertrophy program*, was introduced to this country by National Weightlifting Coach Dragomir Cioroslan. It involves doing a set of 1 rep at maximal or near maximal weight, waiting a few minutes, and then doing a set of 6 reps, using a weight appropriate to that rep range.

By doing the 1 rep at near maximal weight and waiting for 3-10 minutes, you can lift more weight for the set of 6 than you could if you hadn't done the single rep.

Typically, the 1,6 program is done in waves. You do a set of 1, followed by a set of 6, and then the 1,6 protocol is repeated. Most often, the trainee is able to lift even more weight during the second wave.

The system supposedly works by potentiating the nervous system and thereby allowing your muscles to lift more weight. Regardless of the exact mechanism, it works pretty well.

For more information on this type of training, check out Charles Poliquin's [original article](#).

Contrast Training

Contrast training is the reverse of 1,6 training in that you do the sets of 1 and 6 in reverse order. In other words, you do a set of 1 (using sub-maximal weight), followed 3- 10 minutes later by a set of 6.

This method only works if you don't bust your balls while doing the sets of 1. Doing the sets of 1 gears the body up for doing heavy weight, and when you subsequently do a set of 6, it feels much lighter.

Typically, a set scheme looks like this:

1x6 at 150 pounds
1x1 at 175 pounds
1x6 at 160 pounds
1x1 at 185 pounds

Often, the two "waves" are followed up with a high-rep set of 10 to 20, using much lighter weight, of course.

German Volume Training

Although this workout method was probably popularized by Vince Gironda, its somehow earned the name, German Volume Training, or GVT.

It simply involves doing 10 sets of 10 on the same exercise, resting only about 60 seconds between sets. Typically, the weight used is about 60 to 65% of your 1RM, which will feel ridiculously light for the first few sets. However, as you go on and fatigue sets in, you start to do sets of 8, 7, 6, or even 5.

Amazingly, you experience some sort of neurological rebound by the 8th set and your numbers actually start to go up again.

Anyhow, once you can actually complete 10 sets of 10, you increase the weight.

The theory is, by exposing the muscle fibers to such a high volume of work, they're forced to grow (or die trying!).

GVT 2000

This method is very similar to GVT, but it attempts to correct some of the original plan's shortcomings.

It seems that doing 10 sets of 10 of the same exercise caused people to overuse/overstress certain joint angles. Furthermore, the volume, considering that the program advised you to add on a couple of other sets for the same body part using more traditional rep schemes, was just too great for most people.

In addition, doing one exercise for each body part hasn't turned out to be such a great idea. Say, for instance, your goal is to do 10 sets of leg curls for 10 reps each. Well, the hamstrings don't just flex the lower leg; they also act as hip extensors, and the way you target those muscles is through good mornings and straight-leg deadlifts. Just doing the leg curls completely ignores the other function of the hamstrings.

And lastly, the original German Volume Training program was *boring as hell*.

GVT 2000 uses the same theoretical goal of hitting 10 sets of 10, but it employs different joint angles. For instance, rather than doing 10 sets of conventional squats, you're required to do front squats (3x10); followed by high-bar, medium stance squats (3x10) followed by low-bar, wide stance squats (3x10). After that, in order to give the lower-leg extension capability of the leg some work, you're asked to do leg extensions (1x10)

Much like GVT, the same resistance is used throughout.

For more info on this workout, [check out the original article](#).

The 5x5 Training Method

Originally developed by Reg Park, the 5x5 method involves doing 5 sets of 5 reps, using the same resistance. That's the goal. However, if you've chosen the proper weight, you won't be able to do 5 sets of 5, at least not right away.

Typically, if you've chosen the correct weight, the workout would look like this:

Set 1: 5x100 pounds
Set 2: 4x100 pounds
Set 3: 3x100 pounds
Set 4: 3x100 pounds
Set 5: 2x100 pounds

Remember, the goal of doing 5 sets of 5 reps is a hypothetical goal. If you can do 5 sets of 5 right off the bat, the weight you've chosen is too light.

The 6x4 Method

This method requires that you choose a weight that you can do for 6 sets of 2 reps. Normally, this would be between 80% and 87% of your 1RM. The goal is to eventually be able to do 6 sets of 4 reps. And you don't get to increase the load until you reach your goal.

Legend has it that by doing this weight over and over again, you force the nervous system to accept the weight as being "normal".

Remember to allow between 4 and 5 minutes between sets, though. That's a long time, but practitioners of this method often work opposing groups of muscles together so that they can let the first muscle recuperate while they're working an antagonistic muscle group.

For example, do a set of biceps curls, followed by a set of triceps extensions.

The 5/4/3/2/1 Method

This method simply involves doing a set of an exercise with your 5RM. Then, after waiting 3 to 5 minutes, you add 2-3% additional resistance and do a set of 4. Then, continuing in this fashion and adding an additional 2-3% each time, you work down to your 1RM.

So, a typical rep scheme might look like the following:

Set 1: 5x200

Set 2: 4x206

Set 3: 3x212

Set 4: 2x216

Set 5: 1x220

Proponents of this system like it because it teaches your body to do a "true" one-rep maximum. They maintain that you can't go from doing sets of 8 to a true 1RM unless you teach your nervous system how to recruit the higher-threshold muscle fibers.

Once you can complete the prescribed sets and reps, you add resistance to your starting weight and recalculate the pyramid.

The Oscillating Wave Program

This one hasn't been studied, and on some levels, it refutes standard practice, but nonetheless, it works.

The program uses 3 varying rep schemes, 3 varying tempos, and 3 varying rest periods, all in the same 5-day split.

Day 1 is devoted to biceps, triceps, and shoulders. Day 2 is devoted to legs, while day 3 is an off day. It's back to the gym on day 4 to work chest and back, while day 5 is another off day. Then you start the split over again.

For instance, the first bi/tri/shoulder workout is devoted to strength training. The reps are very low (3 to 6), the tempo is slow (3121), and the rest periods are long (at least 120 seconds).

The next workout, on the very next day, legs, is devoted to hypertrophy training. The reps are moderate (8 to 12), as is the tempo (2020), and the rest periods (90 seconds).

The third workout, done after a day of rest, is for chest and back. This particular workout is devoted to endurance training. The reps are high (15-20), the tempo is explosive (10X0), and the rest periods are short (60 seconds).

After taking another day off, the split starts all over again, but this time, you're going to do hypertrophy training for the shoulders and arms (8 to 12 reps), endurance training for the legs (15 to 20 reps), and strength training for the chest and back (3 to 6 reps).

You continue to vary the type of training for each body part with each successive five-day training split. To look at it another way, the first time you train arms and shoulders, you're doing low-rep (3 to 6) strength training. The next time you train arms and shoulders, just a few days later, you're doing moderate-rep (8 to 12) hypertrophy training. The third time you train arms and shoulders, you're doing high-rep (15 to 20) endurance training.

After that, you start the whole cycle over again with low-rep training.

Each of the body parts gets subjected to this type of round-robin training. You never use the same rep range for the same body part twice in a row. Furthermore, you never do two workouts of any kind in succession using the same rep ranges.

For more information on this type of training, [check out the original article](#).

By no means have I documented all the training methods out there, or even a tenth of them. However, the ones I've included in my little black book are among my favorites, and if you feel like trying them out, be my guest. Hey, what's mine is yours. I won't be jealous in the least.