

Strength Hacking Course Day 10:

Meeting standards and filling gaps: simplifying the process to general and specific strength gains

“If you don’t know where you’re going, any road will get you there.”

- *The Cheshire Cat, Alice in Wonderland*

A number of years ago I attended a workshop being taught by Dan John, one of the foremost strength coaches in the world. In the workshop – titled “Reasonableness” – he talked about the critical importance of helping athletes fill gaps and reach standards.

Having standards to be met gives you something reasonable but challenging to shoot for. Filling gaps makes sure you don’t lean too heavily into only a few favored moves while letting weaknesses and the muscle imbalances they bring with them sneak in through the back door and wreak havoc on you.

In other words, both of these things make sure you don’t get too big for your britches and decide to take on big, impressive-sounding goals when you’re nowhere near ready for them.

This is important, because it’s not at all uncommon that I hear people say “I’m already pretty strong” in one breath, and “I can’t do any pullups” in another. Both of these things can’t be true, and when I point this out, I typically get a confused look and have to explain my position.

Strength standards

There is no shortage of strength standards out there. Dan John has a great list consisting mostly of barbell and kettlebell lifts for his high school athletes; powerlifters and Olympic lifters have their own standards, and gymnasts still others.

Strength comes in many shapes and forms, so for our purposes, rather than trying to conjure up another “strength standards” list, I’m going to present to you a “not weak” list. Building up to the standards listed below will not make you world class at anything, but they WILL make you strong enough to handle just about anything that life throws your way.

Filling gaps

Strength without stamina, mobility, and athleticism is lame. The “Not Weak” list requires the following:

- Above average levels of bodyweight and kettlebell strength
- Good hip, knee, and ankle mobility
- Good thoracic spine and shoulder mobility
- Far above average conditioning
- Top notch coordination
- Excellent body control

Being able to lift something heavy requires strength – but without the athletic qualities found in mobility, stability, and stamina to transfer that strength to useful, real-world tasks, what good is it other than to demonstrate your ability to do party tricks?

The mobility, stability, and basic strength movements that made up the previous section will all help you hit the standards (which can be found in the “Maps” section of today’s lesson) and do so simply, effectively, and easily.

The method for getting to each of them can be achieved through low-rep, submaximal strength training, using the parameters set out below:

- 2-5 sets of 1-5 reps
- Reps should be performed as described in the section on rep speed and statics (for grinds)
- Ballistic drills should be performed as explosively as possible. Don’t let your speed drop off!
- Your average working weight should be your 5-10 rep max (i.e. a weight or variation that allows you to do 5-10 reps in a row)
- You should always leave 1-2 reps in the tank on each set to keep the quality of your practice high
- Test out your strength once every 1-2 months.

A more in-depth template for reaching your strength standards – be they the ones on this list or ones on your own list – will be shared in a few days.

For now, head to the Map to get this lesson’s list of standards.