

Strength Hacking Course Day 14

Trouble shooting and my favorite programming techniques

At long last, we reach the end of the course – the part where the momentum behind all the lessons helps guide you boldly forward from where you are to where you want to be in your strength, fitness, and health.

Now is the time to note that all of the best, most time-honored advice and guidance will do nothing to help improve you if YOU don't learn how to guide yourself. This doesn't mean that there will ever come a point where the guidance of others won't be useful or beneficial, but it DOES mean that letting your common sense, experience, and informed judgement take the wheel is an important and necessary skill to develop.

Expert guidance in this direction is crucial, but so is trial, error, and experimentation. So this final section will give you a crash course in how to guide yourself boldly forward even when circumstances are not in your favor.

Earlier in the course I talked quite a bit about prioritizing, planning, and preparing for the inevitable road blocks life throws at us. If you're creative and knowledgeable enough, you can make your way forward regardless of the circumstances.

But what if you're limited on the amount of equipment you have?

Building strength with a fixed weight

Next to lack of time, lack of equipment is probably the largest problem people run into. And if it's strength you're after, this issue can seem insurmountable. Fortunately for you, it is not.

The reality is that while adding weight is a sure-fire way to get stronger, it has a somewhat short shelf life if it's your only strategy. Even in types of periodization that rely exclusively on adding weight (like linear periodization), ultimately you reach a point where you can no longer add weight, so you have to cycle back and re-start the process with lighter weight.

The takeaway here should be that lighter weight has an important place.

What's more, fixed weight training provides more opportunities for building a stable training base from which to grow your strength than simply just adding a few pounds each time you train (something doable with a barbell, but not so much with a kettlebell or bodyweight).

How do you get stronger with a fixed weight – such as 1 or 2 kettlebells and your bodyweight?

The following is a tried-and-true formula I've used time and time again with great success for myself and my students. I wish I could take credit for it, but alas, all I can take credit for is transmitting it to you.

- 1) Find your rep max with a given weight/progression
- 2) Set the volume on 3 different days as a multiple of that rep max. I like to double, triple, and quadruple the starting rep max for light, medium, and hard days respectively.
- 3) Move forward by working to do the same amount of work in fewer sets, then work to add volume via more sets, THEN race the clock to try to get more work done in less time
- 4) Find your new rep max with that given weight/progression.
- 5) Go heavier/harder and start over

Let's say with a given kettlebell/bodyweight exercise you get 6 reps. That's your intensity – a 6 rep max.

Here's how you can manipulate it.

- 1) overall (i.e. just do more reps in the workout), or
- 2) within the set.

Let's take the example from above using pullups as our exercise. To get stronger at them, you might start off doing a small, easily reproducible amount in each set – between 1-2 reps. Your workouts may look like this:

Sets x reps

Day 1: 9x2 pullups (18 total)

Day 2: 12x2 pullups (24 total)

Day 3: 6x2 pullups (12 total)

That's 3 times, 4 times, and 2 times your starting rep max of 6 reps – a medium, hard, and light day respectively

Your next step would be to do them all in fewer sets. (sets x reps)

Day 1: 6x3 pullups (18 total)

Day 2: 8x3 pullups (24 total)

Day 3: 4x3 pullups (12 total)

See where we're going with this? Your goal would be to work your way up to doing sets of 4 and maybe 5 without increasing the overall volume (or at least not much). So on your hard day you might end up doing 6 sets of 4 reps, for example.

From here, you start adding sets.

The next step is to start adding density – meaning you race the clock to try to get your reps done faster. This, like other training variables (volume and intensity) has a limit. Once you can no longer race the clock, take a few days off, rest up, and test out your new rep max. If possible, go heavier. If not, take your new rep max and recycle this process.

My favorite fixed-weight strength strategy

One of my favorite strategies to use to add an element of variability into your program is what I call “rep rotation”. I can only take credit for the name, as I didn’t invent the strategy. Nevertheless, it works like a charm. Here’s how to use it.

There are a few different ways of approaching your sets in fixed-weight training. One is with straight sets (i.e. do 5 reps, rest). The other is with ladders (do 1 rep, rest briefly, 2 reps, rest briefly, 3 reps, rest briefly, etc). Ladders are a great way to crank up the volume quickly and (relatively) painlessly. They allow you to get more reps in without having to do a whole lot all at once.

A surprisingly effective strategy is to switch them each workout. For example, let’s say you’re doing chin-ups and dips as your upper body strength work. Day 1 may look like this:

A1) Chinups – 2 reps

A2) Dips – 2 reps

Repeat for 10 minutes, resting as little as possible but as much as necessary.

Day 2 would look like this:

A1) Chinups – 1, 2, 3 reps

A2) Dips – 1, 2, 3 reps

Repeat for 10 minutes, resting as little as possible but as much as necessary.

You will slowly creep your way up higher and higher and by the time test day rolls around, it’s not uncommon to double (or nearly double) your rep max in a short period of time. The more reps you can do in a row, the more ready you are to add weight and repeat.

Make sense?

There are other great strategies out there that I won’t go into too much detail on, but will give a brief overview of:

Daily Undulating Periodization – Change the rep range each workout to develop your skill in a given movement more in-depth. For example, let’s say you’re doing DUP with squats. Your workouts might be laid out as such:

Day 1: STRENGTH – 3x5 front squats

Day 2: HYPERTROPHY – 3x10 lighter front squats

Day 3: ENDURANCE – 2x20 goblet squats

The next week you would add sets or reps and continue.

Greasing the Groove. In my humble opinion, this is the single best way to build freaky, unreal levels of strength and skill no matter who you are. I don't know why people don't do it more often. The best part is that it works even if you're already on a program – you simply pick two things that need some attention (let's say your grip and core strength) and do EASY sets throughout the day, never working to failure, and never even working past half of what you could do in an all-out effort.

Likewise, you could go the traditional GTG route and pick two bodyweight exercises – say, pistols and one-arm pushups – and do them in easy, focused sets throughout the day.

Or, you could go the meta-skills route and do tension and relaxation practice and watch as it transforms ALL your skills.

The possibilities are endless.

You don't need to have a lot of equipment. You just need to have priorities, principles, a plan, and some patience.

I hope this course has put you on the right track to getting all of that.

Go forth and apply what you've learned here and watch as your strength blossoms in ways you never thought possible.

Have fun and happy training!

- Aleks