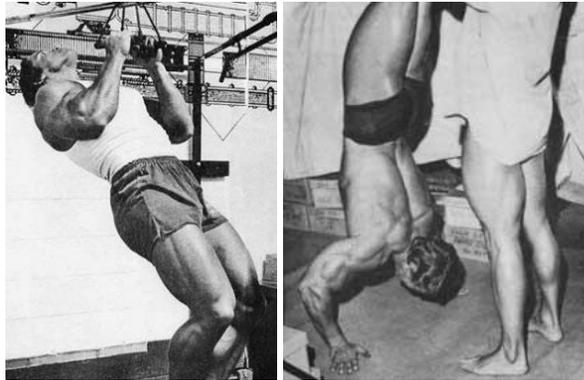


## Strength Hacking Course Day 8: Order of Operations and “smart stacking” your exercises to elicit more strength



*“Ya gotta walk before you can run”*

- *Foghorn Leghorn*

I always hated math growing up, but one of the things that really stuck with me from all my years in class was the Order of Operations. In math, it’s the process by which you approach solving math problems. It’s also a good acknowledgement that some things just need to be done before others.

This, by itself, is not a major revelation. We all know it instinctively. For example, you eat your dinner BEFORE you have dessert, you wait to talk until the other person has finished, you don’t try to kiss the pretty girl until you’ve first asked her on a date (and even then I hope you wait until at least the end of the date before you make your hasty move). One foot in front of the other is the way the world works, and has worked, since the dawn of time.

Believe it or not, the same thing applies to strength training. I’m not just talking about, say, waiting to learn clean and jerks until you can do a decent set of deadlifts with an empty bar, but that’s still a good idea.

No, what I’m talking about is first and foremost, training certain qualities before others. A great example is the Foghorn Leghorn quote above: walking and running are the same basic pattern, except the latter requires speed, and you need to be able to move slowly before you can move quickly.

Looked at another way, when it comes to training certain qualities before others, we can look at it two ways:

1) **Chronologically, i.e. “learn how to walk, THEN learn how to run”**

or

## 2) An in-session hierarchy, i.e. “do your warm up first, THEN do your workout”

The above are oversimplifications, as you can see, but they give you the right idea.

Because there are various ideas and best practices for both of these, let’s take a look at one reliable and effective approach from none other than Paul Chek.

Chek hierarchized training qualities as follows:

- ***Flexibility***
- ***Stability***
- ***Strength***
- ***Endurance***
- ***Power***

The first three at least should look pretty familiar (I designed the course to make sure you got your flexibility and stability work in before you start getting into the nitty-gritty of strength training for a reason – I’m looking out for you!)

Don’t take this as Gospel, but rather as some pretty solid best practices.

Now, for an in-session hierarchy of things to focus on, Chek would recommend that you focus on anything requiring technique, speed, or skill FIRST in your workout (after your thorough warm up, obviously), THEN focus on strength, endurance, etc.

For example: Let’s say you want to nail a free-standing handstand, but still need to work against the wall. Before your regular workout, make sure you do your handstand technique work first, and as your form starts to deteriorate, call it a day and get started with your regular strength work.

Make sense? Great.

To recap, the Order of Operations we want to do in general (or chronologically) is:

**Flexibility → Stability → Strength → Endurance → Power**

Within your workouts it is:

**Technique/speed/skill → Strength**

With that out of the way, let’s take a look at some “smart stacking”.

## **‘Smart stacking’ your exercises to build more strength**

“Smart stacking” is a term I invented (patent pending!) and is essentially a micro version of the Order of Operations applied to the order of the moves you do within your workouts.

Time and experience through different strength disciplines have shown that certain movement patterns and exercise selections pair well with others – like red meat and red wine, peanut butter and chocolate, or cinnamon buns and chili (if you grew up outside of Nebraska you wouldn’t understand).

Powerlifters, bodybuilders, Olympic lifters, and gymnasts don’t agree on much, but they do seem to agree on two key strength combos for crushing weakness:

### **1) Upper Body push + pull**

### **2) Leg exercise + core exercise**

For example gymnasts are known to use dips or handstand pushups in conjunction with pullups to carve their cut, uncompromisingly powerful upper bodies.

Bodybuilders have been known to do pullups in between their sets of bench presses to beef up their upper bodies.

Olympic lifters pair their overhead presses with cleans and reap the benefits of a back and shoulders that look like granite and move with incredible speed and power.

Why is this pairing so important?

I won’t talk your ear off about it, but Pavel Tsatsouline explains it very well in his landmark book [The Naked Warrior](#):

*“In multijoint, high-resistance exercises, the ‘brakes’ become ‘engines’. It’s an elite skill that takes time to finesse.”*

What he’s referring to here is using opposing muscle groups to make you stronger at an exercise – such as using the lats in your pressing movements to help improve your press. In the case of the press (any press, in fact), the lats (a pulling muscle) can be recruited to help by 1) providing a platform to press from, 2) providing shoulder stability, 3) creating space in the shoulder joint for enhanced pressing (hat tip to Kenneth Jay and his book [Perfecting the Press](#) for these points)

As for the lower body, leg exercises paired with a core exercise are extremely common among gymnasts (who sport the most powerful, ripped midsections on the planet) and also find regular use among powerlifters and bodybuilders.

For example:

Old school bodybuilder Armand Tanny used to do hanging leg raises in between sets of deadlifts.

Siberian powerlifting champ Igor Shestakov – a man who can squat nearly 850 lbs at a bodyweight of 180 – begins his squat workouts with 2x20 hanging leg raises...and does another 2x20 to end them!

And the benefits of it for the recreational strength athlete are great. Mark Reinke, a personal trainer in my *Inner Circle* (my monthly training newsletter) wrote me a rundown of his experience with the program I wrote in *Inner Circle* #18 and said that “pairing an ab exercise with a leg exercise was magical for me”. Heady praise for a man who can do single leg deadlifts on either leg with 225 lbs!

The reasons why are similar to those regarding the press and the pull, so I won't repeat myself too much here.

The big idea of why this helps so much can be explained with an old neurology axiom: “What fires together wires together”.

Because your agonists and antagonists (i.e. prime movers and opposing muscle groups) actually work together on compound, multi-joint lifts, training movements of opposing patterns (such as push and pull) back to back helps to improve how well the antagonists help the agonists – i.e. how much the pulling muscles help the pushing muscles while you're doing pushing movements, and vice versa.

To give you a further example, Mark Reinke (the aforementioned personal trainer in my *Inner Circle*) doubled the number of chin-ups and dips he could do in 4 weeks simply because the program I wrote for that month's issue had my students practicing those moves together (there was one other variable that helped him tremendously, but we'll get to that in a few more sessions). Double the reps in a month is especially impressive since he was limited due to long-standing elbow problems that kept him from fully expressing his strength.

Stacking your strength really is that powerful.