



Periodization: The BIG Picture
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Periodization is a training strategy normally associated with strength training but it should really apply to *all* training. Periodization is a training format, that allows fitness specialists to plan for bigger goals and more ambitious fitness gains. It forces trainers to take a step back and look at the big picture (i.e. 8-week session) instead of a single pixel (i.e. today's class). **By taking the time to plan weeks at a time versus planning for a single class, exercise progression can be more systematic, purposeful and effective.**

Consider this, when a person first begins working out, it is recommended that they begin with shorter, less intense sessions. As these sessions become easier, they are instructed to increase the time or intensity or both. This is progressive overload. As the body adapts, we challenge it to do more so that it will further adapt.

So why can't we just continually overload the body? In order for all of the fitness gains to be realized, the body needs rest. Rest, or recovery is a very important component of periodization that should not be forgotten. Without recovery, clients can become injured or over trained.

Periodization incorporates a specific type of progressive overload. It is the process of applying systematic progression and variability to physical conditioning. Varying the intensity, volume and complexity of the movement in a progressive way allows the body to adapt in order to become more fit or obtain personal goals more readily. For application to group exercise we'll think of periodization in four phases: Prep, Base, Build and Transition.

Prep Phase. Prior to beginning any official training, the body should be prepared for what is to come. This is termed the prep phase. During this phase of training, instructors should plan workouts that prepare participants for more challenging programming that will follow. **This is the ideal time to introduce new movement patterns, teach clients how to use the intensity scale, and begin building some of the basic components of fitness.** This phase may be a few class sessions or a few weeks.

Base Phase. Characterized by lower intensity and higher volume exercise sessions that work to build the basic components of fitness (muscular endurance, muscular strength, cardiovascular endurance, neuromotor performance, and flexibility). **Class planning should focus on incorporating one or many of these 5 fitness components into the session.** There should always be a purpose and focus to each session. For example, it may be that aerobic endurance is the classes primary focus but components of strength and muscular endurance are also brought in for some components of the session.

Build Phase. Workouts should begin incorporating more skill related components of fitness (balance, agility, speed, power, reaction time, and coordination). Focus on goals of the participants and the fitness components necessary to achieve those goals. **Intensity should increase during this phase of training, creating a new training stimulus that will further physiological adaptation of the participants.**

Power Phase. This can be considered a continuation of the build phase with the caveat that intensity increases even more. The focus is the same, the goals are similar, but the intensity is amplified. With an increase in intensity, recovery rates will also need to increase. Plan to include some very high intensity segments paired with very low intensity segments.

Transition Phase. This is the final stage of periodization where active rest is employed. It is important to note that recovery sessions should be incorporated following each phase of training. The recovery phase, can be an entire week or even longer depending on the needs of the group. This phase should still have purpose and provide challenge to participants, just not in the means of intensity. **Focus on lower intensity aerobic endurance, muscular endurance, range of motion, balance, and coordination.**

With the basic understanding of the phases of periodization, now we can focus on how to build a program using this concept to create more effective group exercise classes.

Article is adapted from originally published article in Akwa magazine June 2020