

The 5% solution Modified Hoerbel.

Plus : The four percent solution/broad flat pyramid system combination

By Charles Poliquin

There are a lot of very effective sets and reps schemes, but the fact is, they're only as good as the time it takes you to adapt to them. For beginners, a particular workout, coupled with a particular rep scheme, might guarantee progress for 4 to 6 weeks, and in some instances up to 8 weeks in the less gifted.

Advanced athletes, on the other hand, might have to change their programs every week. Some even have to change their program every single workout, like Pierre Lueders who became the first non-European Olympic Gold medalist in 2-Man bobsleigh.

There is no such thing as a routine that can bring you continuous results for eternity even though some so-called experts propagate ever lasting results using their training methodology. Using the same routine over and over is like expecting to master a foreign language by repeating over and over the first ten pages of a phrase book. One of those irrational experts contends that there is only one way to train : his. He is referred in strength training circles as « His Pomposity ». He advocates minute training volume and frequency. To recognize users of this training system, they generally share these traits :

They are mentally disturbed

They have elevated cortisol levels which is caused by their failure to make gains on a consistent basis, thus their constant irritability, pissing and moaning, and of course their idiosyncratic fatty deposits on the umbilical wall.

They are addicted to pre-workout stimulants in order to put up the required increase in overload

They have a host of muscle tears, one of the proponents of this system is a former Mr. Olympia, whose career was short-changed after tearing one or more of the following lats, quads, biceps and triceps.

Even though I am a strong proponent of training variety, I have found over the years that some rep/sets schemes work better than others because of their stimulating effects both on training adaptation and on the mind. In this training I will make use a combined use of two of my favorite ones : The 4% Solution and the Broad Flat Pyramid. The combination of rep/sets scheme will propulse your arm growth pursuit to a new height.

Lets take a closer look at two sets/ reps schemes :

The 4% solution

The Four Percent Solution involves a set pattern of progression. In a nutshell, you'll increase the amount of resistance by 4 to 5% each workout, while simultaneously reducing the number of reps by one each time. After you recover from the sixth workout, you will have increased your strength in each lift by approximately 10%!

Many in the field of strength training such as my colleagues William Kraemer, Ian King and others realize that the number of reps is the loading parameter to which an individual adapts the fastest, and the Five Percent Solution takes advantage of this fact The Five Percent Solution is based on the principle, "success breeds success".

Whenever people achieve goals, whether it's in business or athletics, testosterone levels rise. When the levels of this precious androgen levels rise, your recovery ability improves. And, because you recover more quickly, you make more gains. Because you have more gains, you have more success and you make more testosterone, and so on and so on.

Before I give examples of the workout, let's talk about the loading parameters of the Five Percent Solution.

Overload Mechanism for the 5% solution

Do your initial workouts with the chosen number of reps and the predetermined weight. You'll then increase the load by 4 to 5% every workout for two workouts in a row. Concurrently, you'll also reduce the target reps by one rep for every weight increase. Then, after the third workout, you'll reduce the weight 4 to 5% but bring the number of reps back to the original starting point. If you've done things correctly, you'll have increased your strength by 5%.

If you're confused, I don't blame you, so let me offer an example:

The Five Percent Solution

Let's say you have a weak brachialis muscle and you want to improve your reverse curl strength. And, for the sake of this example, we'll say your best performance for the reverse curl is 100 pounds for 7 reps.

This is what your rep/set cycle would look like:

Workout 1:

4-5 sets x 7 reps @ 100 pounds

Workout 2:

Increase the weight from the last workout by 4-5 percent and do 1 rep less per set:

4-5 sets x 6 reps @ 105 pounds

Workout 3:

Increase the weight from the last workout by 4-5 percent and do 1 rep less per set:

4-5 sets x 5 reps @ 110 pounds

Workout 4:

Use the load you used in workout #2 for the workout #1 rep target. In this case, you're shooting for:

4-5 sets x 7 reps @ 105 pounds

NOTE: If you achieve your goal, it means you're already 5 percent stronger!

Workout 5:

Use the load used in workout #3 for the workout #2 rep target:

4-5 sets x 6 reps @ 110 pounds

Workout 6:

Increase the weight from the last workout by 4-5 percent and do 1 rep less per set:

4-5 sets x 5 reps @ 115 pounds

By logical extension, if you did workout 7, you'd now be able to do 7 RM (repetitions maximum) with 110 pounds! That's a 10% percent increase in strength over 6 workouts, and that's excellent! (I don't actually map out the seventh workout because it would just be an exercise in vanity-the nervous system typically adapts to any workout program in 6 workouts and after that, it's time to move on to another type of program.)

Obviously, because of neuromuscular fatigue, you won't be able to achieve your rep target every set, but as long as you hit your goal on the first set of every workout, you're doing fine.

Tips for the Four Percent Solution

In order to perform this program properly, I strongly urge you to keep a detailed journal of the exact number of sets and reps performed, load used, and rest interval taken. Furthermore, only count the reps done in strict form. Go ahead and do forced reps for the last rep of every third workout, but don't count them as complete reps.

The broad flat pyramid rep/set scheme

The pyramid system is a classical training system which has been shot down by strength expert like Vladimir Zatiorski of the former Soviet Union.

A classical pyramid scheme, as most of us would know would look like

12 x 70%
10 x 75%
8 x 80%
5 x 85%
3 x 90%
2 x 95 %
1 x 100%

Critics of the classical pyramid argue that the intensity zone spread of 70 to 100% of maximum is far to great, and the body has a hard time figuring out what exactly is the training stimulus. That 30% intensity spread crosses too many intensity borders to be truly efficient. Critics of this system will argue for a rep/set scheme that obeys the law of repeated efforts at a given intensity, for example, 6 sets of 3 reps at 90% of maximum..

Romanian born and trained strength expert Tudor Bompa does not shoot down entirely the pyramid system, but rather argues for using a pyramid system within a 20% intensity spread i.e. 60-80%, 70-90% or 80-100%. Following that line of thought I would argue that limiting the intensity spread to 10% works even better, while keeping the minimal intensity at a threshold 70% of maximum.

This is agreement with the lign of thought of my colleagues Hartmann and Tunnemann from the former East Germany. So possible intensity spreads would be for example be 70-80%, 75-80% etc. By keeping the intensity spread at 10-12% , one can make use of the law of repeated efforts and yet keep the training interesting and challenging. Furthermore the body does not get confused by too great variations in training intensities.

There many possible variations of the broad flat pyramids depending on the training objective, so here are some samples :

For hypertrophy training :

8,6,4,4,6,8; in other words

78% - 82% - 87.5% - 87.5% - 82% -78%

For relative strength training :

5,3,2,2,2,2,3,5 ; in other words

85% - 90% - 95% - 95% - 95% - 95% - 90% - 85%

The broad flat pyramid system has been a staple in strength routines of many of the German speaking nations. I have seen being in the make up of bobsledders, throwers, jumpers, strongmen, powerlifters, and weightlifters. I have used my self quite successfully with a wide array of athletes competing in short-term power events and with hockey defenseman. It would particularly well when combined with the 4% solution which I have for over 15 years.

Putting the two principles together.

The arm routine for this cycle would look like this

A-1 One arm Scott-Zottmann Dumbbell Curls tempo 5010, rest interval 120 seconds

Workout 1 8,6,4,4,6,8

Workout 2 7,5,3,3,5,7

Workout 3 6,4,2,2,4,6

Workout 4 8,6,4,4,6,8

Workout 5 7,5,3,3,5,7

Workout 6 6,4,2,2,4,6

A-2 Decline 10 degrees Close Grip Bench Presses tempo 3110, rest interval 120 seconds

Workout 1 8,6,4,4,6,8
Workout 2 7,5,3,3,5,7
Workout 3 6,4,2,2,4,6
Workout 4 8,6,4,4,6,8
Workout 5 7,5,3,3,5,7
Workout 6 6,4,2,2,4,6

B-1 Paused Seated Off-Set Dumbbell Curls tempo 3210, rest interval 100 seconds

Workout 1 8,6,4,4,6,8
Workout 2 7,5,3,3,5,7
Workout 3 6,4,2,2,4,6
Workout 4 8,6,4,4,6,8
Workout 5 7,5,3,3,5,7
Workout 6 6,4,2,2,4,6

B-2 Incline Pronated Grip Barbell Triceps Extensions, tempo 4020 rest interval 100 seconds

Workout 1 8,6,4,4,6,8
Workout 2 7,5,3,3,5,7
Workout 3 6,4,2,2,4,6
Workout 4 8,6,4,4,6,8
Workout 5 7,5,3,3,5,7
Workout 6 6,4,2,2,4,6

Overloading tips

To eliminate some confusion on how to apply the five percent solution to the broad flat pyramid system, here is what a sample training for the decline 10 degree close grip bench press would look like

Workout 1

8 @ 200 lbs
6 @ 210 lbs
4 @ 220 lbs
4 @ 220 lbs
6 @ 210 lbs
8 @ 200 lbs

Workout 2

7 @ 210 lbs
5 @ 220 lbs
3 @ 230 lbs
3 @ 230 lbs
5 @ 220 lbs
7 @ 210 lbs

Workout 3

6 @ 220 lbs
4 @ 230 lbs
2 @ 240 lbs
2 @ 240 lbs
4 @ 230 lbs
6 @ 220 lbs

Workout 4

8 @ 210 lbs
6 @ 220 lbs
4 @ 230 lbs
4 @ 230 lbs

6 @ 220 lbs

8 @ 210 lbs

Workout 5

7 @ 220 lbs

5 @ 230 lbs

3 @ 240 lbs

3 @ 240 lbs

5 @ 230 lbs

7 @ 220 lbs

Workout 6

6 @ 230 lbs

4 @ 240 lbs

2 @ 252,5 lbs

2 @ 252,5 lbs

4 @ 240 lbs

6 @ 230 lbs

Of course, unless you are of those genetic mutants, you can do 100 lbs for 8 reps on the One arm dumbbell Scott Curl, you will need the Plate Mates to accomplish the 4-5% overload. Or if you use an adjustable dumbbell, you will need an assortment of small plates.

How to Perform the Exercises Correctly

A-1 One-Arm Scott-Zottmann dumbbell curls.

I prefer to use a seated Scott bench for this one, as cheating opportunity is minimized. I prefer to either use the Atlantis bench or the Nebula one. Preferably have a partner hand you over the dumbbell which you will grasp with a supinated grip.

Curl the dumbbell with a supinated grip (palms facing the ceiling) to the point just before tension on the elbow flexors is lost. At this point, pronate the

forearm completely, now at this point the palm is facing the ground and the biceps brachii have an ineffective line of pull to share the load in the eccentric lowering. Thus, the load is picked up by the underlying brachialis and the brachioradialis.

Make sure that the elbows are fully stretched in the bottom position of the eccentric movement before you pronate the forearm. To be sure of that, the forearms should come in contact with the padded upholstered surface of the Scott bench. at that bottom point of the eccentric range of motion.

A-2 Decline Close Grip Bench Pressing

From a supine position lying on a decline bench that should be set between 10 and 25 degrees of declination. The barbell is lifted off the rack and held at arms length. The bar is brought to a point about two inches above the nipples. and the elbows extend just short of lock out during the pressing movement .

Most prefer in most individuals a 14 inch grip. I do not believe in the very narrow grip (4 to 6 inches) that you see all the around the country as it creates enormous strain on the wrists and elbows.

Go to 95 % of lock-out so that the tension stays on the triceps. Locking out the elbows will take away the precious muscle building tension out of your triceps.

As soon as the bar is 4 to 6 inches above the chest, one should concentrate on pushing the bar back towards the uprights and move the elbows under the bar to have a more effective biomechanical advantage.

Of course, besides the obvious safety reasons, I suggest having a partner help you for the unracking and racking of the barbell to insure the longevity of your rotator cuff muscles.

B-2 Paused Seated Off-set dumbbell curls

For this exercise, sit at the end of a flat bench or a 80 degree incline bench that provides a foot rest to lock your lower back into position. Hold the dumbbells with an offset grip--that is, an asymmetrical grip where the thumb side of your hand rests against the inside plate of the dumbbell. This will increase the involvement of the short head of the biceps. Start the exercise with a semi-supinated grip (hammer grip), and curl the weight to about 60 degrees of elbow flexion. At this point, pause for a count of two seconds. Then turn your palms up (supinate) and complete the elbow flexion movement. Since you are holding the dumbbells in a asymmetrical fashion, you will be forced to activate the short-head of the biceps to complete the supination

movement. Since the movement is done at after a pause tempo, expect high-intramuscular tension.

B-2 Incline Pronated Grip Barbell Extensions

Lie on an incline bench, unrack the pre-loaded barbell at arms' length. Make sure that the seat is low enough in relation to the uprights so that when you lower the barbell it does not come in contact with them. Lower the barbell under control until the barbell makes very light contact with forehead and pause at that point for a count of one second.

Make sure that the wrists stay in a neutral position throughout the movement.

Don't get too anal about wanting the tips of the elbows as close as possible, as it creates a lot of strain on the supportive structures of the elbow.