

Session Guidelines

Be it hill reps, terrain intervals or gym work, high intensity sessions are the most important workouts of every week. These are where the most significant improvements to running speed are made; you can do hundreds of easy miles per week, but without faster, more explosive work you will be unlikely to ever progress beyond just that - a long, slow distance runner (see critiques of Joe Henderson's LSD approach to training).

That being said, there are a couple of guidelines you should follow during your sessions to ensure you get the most out of them:

Don't race workouts: A race is a 100% effort, and requires a proper recovery after. A 100% session will have the same constraints, and will lead to you still being fatigued and underperforming in your next session.

The rule of repetitions: Always finish a session knowing you could have done at least one more rep at the same pace if you had to. This will help prevent you going too hard and overtraining in the long term.

Train with the fitness you have: Many runners base their workouts on the level of fitness they'd like to have, not what they currently possess. Training too hard will put you at much higher risk of injury, burnout and illness.

Always warm up and down: I'm planning an entirely separate post on this one, but in short it takes time to prepare your body for harder training, and to avoid seizing up after a session. Never skip these.

The truth is that building your fitness takes time. One workout by itself will never make your season, but it can certainly ruin it if done in the wrong way. It takes dozens of quality workouts to fully reach your potential, and there are no shortcuts.

Training Buildup

Probably the most important consideration when starting a new training block or plan is how quickly to build up both your mileage and intensity (collectively 'volume'). Too slow of an increase will mean you aren't getting the maximum out of your training, however too much is arguably worse; this inevitably leads to burnout, overtraining and injury. A good training plan will account for this and build up in gradual increments, as to ensure the runner is able to adjust to a higher level of training load.

If you search online you will find many references to ideas such as the 'ten percent rule'. This states that a runner should not increase their weekly training volume by more than ten percent each week, and can be a good guideline for training, however as with many more general rules it is often too rigid and doesn't reflect how runners tend to train in real life. At low weekly volumes I have often found that I can increase much faster than this, while during high mileage blocks it is often much too large a jump.

In my opinion, the most important principles for increasing weekly training volume are as follows:

1. Choose distance OR intensity to increase - never both in the same week.
2. Take regular 'rest weeks' - a lower intensity week every month or so allows the body time to recover and adjust to the increased training load.
3. No significant volume increases - going all out one week for a large distance or intensity step-up will only leave you exhausted for the following one. Try to keep distance increases to ~5km per week maximum unless at exceptionally low volume.
4. LISTEN TO YOUR BODY - if you ever find you aren't recovering properly between sessions, back off any increases. Being slightly undertrained is much easier to fix than overtraining.

If you take nothing else at all from this post, remember this: *There are no good workouts, only good training programs.* Make sure your approach to training is sustainable right from the start.

Different Terrains

As orienteers, we often encounter a wide variety of terrains when racing. Therefore it is very important for us to practice running at speed on as many of these as possible (note: it may be difficult to train along a river bed). This has added benefits of helping to reduce injury by changing the type of stress the lower leg and ankle experiences throughout the week. For example, running on the pavement is very easy on the ankles but very harsh on the shins, often resulting in shin splints, while trails and fields are much easier on the calves and ITB but can result in higher ankle stress.

Ideally, you should be doing most of your easy runs on light trails with maybe one run in rougher terrain, in order to build ankle strength and get up to a higher weekly volume with decreased risk of stress injuries such as shin splints or fractures. For your faster sessions, longer threshold workouts can be done on light trails or fields to build strength running over uneven terrain while high intensity work should be done either on a track or on the roads to allow you to reach your top speed without the worry of acute injuries.

Your choice of training terrain should also depend on what your goals are. If you are mainly focussed on urbans, sprints or general road racing you should be doing a lot more of your weekly mileage on roads with less focus on the heavier terrain - note it is still worth running several of your weekly runs off-road to avoid chronic injuries.

Of course your training will always be limited by your local area; you can only train on what you have available. However unless you're living in the middle of a major city you can generally find at least some areas such as local parks where you can get at least some off-road running in, even if it's only running along the verge of a path instead of on the concrete.