

Periodization - What Is It and Why Should I Use It?

by: Peter Cummings, MHP, NNP

Periodization is a methodology of training in which an athlete structures their annual training plan in blocks or phases, each focused on the complete development of a specific energy system. The goal is to steadily increase fitness to reach optimal performance in time for priority events.

What Is Periodization

Simply put, periodization involves dividing your training year into phases, each designed to develop a particular aspect of fitness. These phases are sequenced to build on each other, ensuring that the athlete peaks at the right time. This method of training is scientifically proven to produce better improvements in performance than non-periodized training programs.

The Importance of Energy Systems

One key aspect of periodization is the development of different energy systems in the body. Athletes must understand which energy systems are being targeted, the correct order in which they should be developed, and how to recognize when they are fully developed.

Developing Your Annual Training Plan

Creating an annual training plan requires considering factors like experience level, available training time, current fitness, goals, strengths, and weaknesses. Each athlete's plan should be tailored to these variables. Reaching any fitness goal requires work and time, and it's crucial to account for the time needed to complete the total training volume. The plan must also consider whether the athlete has ever handled a similar workload and whether they have the time to achieve it.

Phases of Periodization

1. Transition Phase/Testing (2-8 weeks)

This phase marks the end of one season and the beginning of the next. Fitness is relatively high, and athletes should be tested to establish baseline numbers (e.g., Lactate Threshold, body composition, maximum wattage). Active recovery through cross-training is the goal, along with addressing any physical aches, pains, and injuries. Mental rejuvenation is also crucial during this phase.

2. Preparation Phase (2-4 weeks)

This phase prepares the body for the upcoming training load. It involves high-volume, low-intensity weight training and low-intensity cycling, focusing on form and recovery. The goal is to familiarize the muscles with strength training, avoiding excessive Delayed Onset Muscle Soreness (DOMS).

3. Aerobic Base Phase (10-24 weeks)

The aerobic system is the most important and takes the longest to develop, making this the longest phase. Cycling volume increases progressively, and intensity builds

throughout. The focus is on building functional strength and improving stroke efficiency. This phase is complete when aerobic power and endurance are significantly developed.

4. Build Phase (8-12 weeks)

This phase involves maintaining strength gains while introducing short, intense, race-like efforts on the bike. The anaerobic system is prioritized, and lactate threshold efforts are emphasized. This phase is complete when anaerobic endurance and lactate threshold power are maximized.

5. Tapering Phase (2-6 weeks)

The tapering phase involves reducing training volume while maintaining or slightly increasing intensity. This allows the body to fully recover and complete the training response, leading to peak fitness. The duration of tapering varies based on individual needs, and athletes will know the phase is complete when their performance and desire to race are at their peak.

6. Race or Peak (2-6 weeks)

Peak fitness can only be maintained for a limited time, making the timing of this phase critical. Once peak fitness is achieved, athletes should focus on racing and enjoying the results of their hard work.

Why Periodization Matters

Many athletes follow a basic weekly training plan, which works to some extent but often leads to limited results. Periodization, however, ensures that each energy system is developed fully, allowing for maximum training response. Properly timed rest and

recovery are essential to achieving the full benefits of each training session. Without sufficient recovery, athletes cannot apply maximum effort, leading to suboptimal results. Periodization allows athletes to prioritize their goals and structure their training to achieve peak performance at the right time.

At Plan2Peak, I provide more than just a training plan—I actively monitor athletes' daily workout data to compare their responses to expectations. This enables me to make precise adjustments to optimize each workout, ensuring that the training aligns with their capacities, expectations, and lifestyle. Unlike other coaches, who may lack the expertise to assess and respond to this data effectively, I offer a truly customized approach that maximizes athletic potential.