

PERIODIZATION

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Periodization has been around for decades. It's used by all sorts of coaches throughout all types of sports. Basically, periodization is breaking down a season into different parts. It gives organization to a plan and it brings change. Studies show that a periodized plan gives much better results than a plan that has an athlete do the same thing over and over again. There are two main types of periodization: classical/linear and undulating/non-linear. I'm going to talk about classical periodization in this article and how it can be used in a runner's plan.

Classical periodization breaks the plan up into a macrocycle, a mesocycle, and a microcycle. The macrocycle is basically the big plan in a nutshell. It breaks up the entire year. A macrocycle might have 5 different sections: build (base), strength, speed, peak, recover. All of the cycles will equal a year. This cycle should be set based on how a runner's season unfolds, and naturally the peak should come when the runner wants his/her peak race to occur. Each of these cycles is referred to as a mesocycle. The mesocycle does not have to be equal in length. Maybe the "build" or "base" is 2-3 months in duration, but the peak is for only 3 weeks. Sitting down and figuring this out for serious athletes is worth the time. There are other names for the cycles. It really depends on the sport. But most macrocycles are full of mesocycles that have a build component, a strength component, and a speed component, with a peak and recovery. Each cycle builds on the next. For strength cycles, naturally the focus will be more on power and not speed, but the concept is the same. I use this for both cardio and strength programs with the athletes I train.

The mesocycle, as you saw above, is part of the macrocycle. It is roughly 20-25% of the year broken up. Most mesocycles are 3 months or so in duration, but can be as short as 1 month. I like to use 1 month mesocycles, using a slightly different variety of it that will equal 3-4 months. Within each mesocycle you have a microcycle, and the microcycle is essentially a week long. So the microcycle is the weekly workout. A mesocycle in the "build" stage for example may say week one 25 miles, week two 27.5 miles, week three 30 miles, and week four back to 26 miles per week as an example. This again helps you have some direction as your weeks progress.

The microcycle is the weekly workout. So as an example again, the mesocycle will tell you how many miles you're running each week, but the microcycle is where you plan what day you're doing what. It helps you breakdown your week so you have an appropriate work and rest ratio. During the "build" phase, the week may look like this: Monday off, Tuesday run 4 moderate, Wednesday run 3 easy, Thursday run 5 moderate, Friday off, Saturday run 7 easy and long, Sunday run 3 easy. Then the following week, during build, you would add some miles to some key days. The above is just an example of a microcycle in periodization.

Do's and Don'ts of planning. DO: Do it! Planning really helps. It helps you to peak for bigger races, but most importantly, I think, it helps you stay injury free. If you work in the proper work-to-rest ratio you are more likely to stay uninjured. Running hard or even moderate day in and day out is a good recipe

for injury. Do focus on the planning process. Maybe the most important part of planning is thinking about the plan. In other words, maybe the planning is more important than the plan?

Don't... Stick to the plan when it doesn't make sense to. In other words, let's say the perfect world scenario didn't pan out. During the build you picked up an overuse injury. It's probably not the best time to go right into the "strength" phase where tempo runs will become critical. Instead, maybe do a recovery month or do whatever you have to do to get well, and then get back into your plan following a good build up.

The idea was to introduce you a little to what periodization is. You may hear the term a lot. There are several good books out on it to help explain it to the layperson. I hope you take this information and start to plan a little. As they say, to get anywhere, you need a road map, right?