



## Periodize Your Training to Maximize Cycling Success© (Part 1 of a 3 Part Series)

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*Varying the intensity and focus of your training over time is key to reaching your cycling goals. This article, the first in a three-part series, shows you how to divvy up your training plan.*

### Part 1

#### **What is Periodization**

Every cyclist needs a goal. Levi Leipheimer, the American captain of the Gerolsteiner cycling team, stated recently that his goal was “to get on the podium at the Tour de France.” Your cycling objectives may not be quite so lofty, but whatever your goal, the training methodology known as *periodization* is the best way to get there. If you’re a weekend rider who cycles for health and enjoyment, periodization will help you increase your fitness and cycling skills. If you’re planning a bike tour of Provence next year, periodization will have you riding your way to the Brie and Bordeaux, and if you’re heading for a big race several months down the road, periodization is your ticket to peaking at just the right time.

#### **What is periodization?**

Periodizing your training plan means dividing up your long-term training program into discreet blocks of time and varying both training intensity and skill set from one block to the next. Working at different levels of intensity over time improves your overall fitness, teaches you to cope with fatigue both physically and mentally, makes training more enjoyable, lowers your risk of injury, and helps you avoid the dangers of overtraining.

Periodization introduces structure and efficiency to your training plan, allowing you to make the most of each ride or workout session. There’s no wasting time on rides that don’t help you reach your goal—better performance on event day.

Periodizing your training plan involves two concepts: First, figuring out a workable timetable that fits you and your schedule, and second, selecting the appropriate rides for each time period that will help you achieve your cycling goals.

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### **Macrocycle, mesocycle, and microcycle: The building blocks of a training plan**

Like most scientifically-minded people, exercise physiologists are fond of multi-syllabic labels for relatively simple things. Fortunately, the meanings of the three time divisions in a periodized training plan aren't too difficult to discern. The macrocycle ("macro"—large) is the biggest increment of time in your training plan, lasting from several months to one year in length. A mesocycle ("meso" means middle) is the intermediate increment of time between the largest and the smallest; there are several mesocycles in a macrocycle, and each mesocycle lasts anywhere from several weeks to several months. Lastly, a microcycle ("micro"—small) is the smallest increment of time in the training plan, usually lasting from seven to 14 days. As you might imagine, two or more microcycles make up a mesocycle.

Wondering where actual workout sessions fit into this scheme? Think of a workout session as the basic building block of the training plan; several workout sessions occur in each microcycle.

### **Calendaring your goal**

To construct the outline of your training plan—your macrocycle—it's best to get out a calendar and work backwards from the date of the event for which you are training. So the first question is, how long is your training period preceding the event going to be?

**Example:** As an "event rider," Teresa would like to achieve her best time yet in a local benefit bike race on March 10. Teresa lives in Florida, where she can train all winter. She would like to start training after the school year ends on June 22. So, she has about eight months (37 weeks, to be exact) to train for the event.

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## Defining your training cycles

Isn't it great how life comes full circle? You started out with training wheels, and now you're ready for training cycles—macro-, meso-, and microcycles, that is! Mapping out a periodized training plan involves five basic steps:

1. Put your goal event on the calendar and work backwards.
2. Determine your macrocycle.
3. Divide your macrocycle into mesocycles.
4. Divide your mesocycles into microcycles.
5. Plug workout details into your microcycles.

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Begin training June 23									3/10 Event
June	July	August	September	October	November	December	January	February	March

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## The 10-25-65 Rule: Figuring out macrocycles and mesocycles

A macrocycle is divided into four distinct blocks of time in which to focus on different aspects of your training: Preparation 1, Preparation 2, Event Training, and Transition. Each of these blocks is a mesocycle. Preparation 1 is devoted to general conditioning and building your endurance base. Preparation 2 begins your event-specific training and continues to build endurance, speed, and strength; Preparation 2 is the mesocycle in which your training hits its highest intensity level. Event Training is the mesocycle in which you focus on event-specific skills while building toward peak performance. Transition, the shortest of the mesocycles, is devoted to regeneration, both mentally and physically.

That's all fine and dandy, you might be saying, but faced with putting pencil to paper, how do you actually put together the training plan? If only there was some easy formula! Unfortunately, to get the length of each mesocycle just right takes a pinch of art, a dash of science, and a good deal of trial and error. However, if this is the first time you're putting together a periodized plan, you need some place to start, so try the **10-25-65 rule**:

- **10 for Transition:** Determine the number of weeks between the date you will start to train and the date of the event. Then calculate 10 percent of that number to determine how many weeks your transition mesocycle should be. Round up if necessary. Example: You have 36 weeks between your training start date and your event. 10 percent of 36 is 3.6, or 4 weeks, if you round up. So, your transition mesocycle is 4 weeks.

Add your Transition Mesocycle weeks to the number of weeks between your start-training date and your event date. The sum is the number of weeks in your entire macrocycle. Example: 36 weeks from start of training to event plus 4 weeks of Transition comes to a complete macrocycle of 40 weeks.

- **25 for Preparation:** Figure out how many weeks is equal to about 25 percent of your complete macrocycle, then divide that number in half to determine Preparation 1 and Preparation 2
- **65 for Event Training:** The remainder of your macrocycle, after you account for the preparation mesocycles and the transition mesocycles, is devoted to training for your event.

Go into your planning with the understanding that there's a big "fudge factor" here; you may feel comfortable with only eight weeks of preparation, or you might want to stretch it out to twelve weeks. Adjust the rest of your plan accordingly.

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When thinking about the transition mesocycle, remember the following:

- The purpose of the transition mesocycle is to allow for the regeneration of your body and your mind. It is a time of recovery, but not of total rest.
- The intensity of workouts is low, and the distances traveled are small.
- During the transition mesocycle, enjoy the ride!

## Finishing details

Filling in the details of each microcycle is the fun part, where you get to decide each day what kind of ride to take. Do you need a high intensity ride that emphasizes hills? Or, does your microcycle call for a focus on sprints? As you work out the details of your plan, be flexible, and introduce lots of variation into your training regimen. Keep careful logs of everything you do, observe, and measure as you prepare for your event, and refer back to your logs often.

Whether you want to ride to the company picnic at the city park without getting winded or win the next "double century," periodization is the key to reaching your maximum potential as a cyclist. Break your training into manageable units of time, vary the intensity and skill set during each interval of training, and reap the rewards of a periodized training program.

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