

# Periodization: Who Needs It?

Now that we are into a new calendar year, it's time to get serious about your training program for the upcoming year. Many cyclists use some sort of training plan. One of the common elements of any training plan is that it is broken into segments, called periods. 'Periodization' is the process of developing a training schedule which has varying periods of hard work leading to overload or overreaching, followed by a recovery period. Typically the year (the macrocycle) is broken into several large cycles, called mesocycles. Joe Friel, author of the Cyclists Training Bible uses the following names for these mesocycles: Preparation, Base, Build, Peak, Race and Transition. The Build, Peak and Race periods may be multiple several times during the racing season. The type of training during each of these is different depending on the time of year.

Each of these mesocycles may have one or more cycles of 3-5 week segments. For example, your base period may have three sets of 4 weeks where you build up mileage and intensity for three consecutive weeks and then take the fourth week easier to recover from the previous three hard weeks. The purpose of varying the intensity of your training with periods of rest and recovery is to allow you to reach a higher level of fitness than if you just rode at a steady workload throughout the year. It's similar to doing intervals, but on a larger scale.

Almost every cyclist does some sort of periodization in their training whether they realize it or not. If you don't ride on Mondays or Fridays, and ride a lot of weekends, this is a form of periodization. If you ride more in the summer than winter, again this is periodization. One of the reasons for using a training plan is to have systematic variation built into your training routine. These plans can be quite a bit more sophisticated than simply taking Mondays and Fridays off. They can vary the amount and type of training during each week. For example, in the beginning of the season, more emphasis is on endurance and more training volume. As you approach the racing season more emphasis is placed on high intensity aerobic and anaerobic workouts. Another critical aspect of a periodized plan is they build in recovery days and weeks into your training year.

Now, the question is how sophisticated of a periodized training plan do you need? How much variation do you need throughout the year to do your best? These questions depend on the goals of the athlete. My brief answer to these questions is that the fewer, more important races you have, the greater you need to peak for those events and the more sophisticated periodized plan you need. Let's look at two different athletes.

The first is a recreational cyclist who enjoys racing local races on nearly a year-round basis. This cyclist is always very fit and seems to do well regardless of the time of year and type of race, whether it be roller racing, road racing, mountain biking or cyclocross racing. For this athlete, because the goal is to be competitive on a year round basis in a lot of events, this person needs to maintain a fairly constant workload throughout the year. However, this cyclist will still benefit from a periodized plan. It should incorporate times during the year to step up the training volume or intensity and other times to back off and take some recovery time. Obvious times for the recovery periods would be between the roller race and road season, sometime during the summer when there is a lull in racing, then prior to the cross season, and then again after the cross season. It's unlikely that this cyclist will have a very large peak or taper for any given race due to the large

number of races being done. Likewise, the recovery periods will be shorter as well. This athlete needs a periodized plan but the peaks and valleys will be smaller. This cyclist will not likely reach peak fitness for any given race but rather maintain a high level of fitness year round.

On the other hand, take a triathlete who wants to qualify and race the Hawaii Ironman. This athlete will need to really focus on just a couple of very large events during the year. These races are very important goals and will require a lot of work and attention. All races leading up to these key races will simply be to gain racing fitness and experience. The training will include an annual plan to carefully build up base aerobic fitness and then hone it to a well defined peak prior to the major races. Then there will also be a carefully planned taper for a week to 10 days prior to these key events. Then after each major event, a fairly lengthy transition or recovery period of one or more weeks will follow. This athlete's plan will have very exaggerated peaks and valleys and this person should reach close to their maximal fitness going into their Ironman race.

So in summary, every athlete should follow some sort of a periodized training program, but the more important a few key races are, the larger the peak you need to obtain your peak fitness, and the greater the need for a more sophisticated periodized training plan.

For more information on building structured training plans, get my free booklet, Basics of Cycling Training, on my website [www.CyclesportCoaching.com](http://www.CyclesportCoaching.com)

To receive my new cycling training newsletter, you can sign up for it on my website.

Ride on -- David Ertl

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