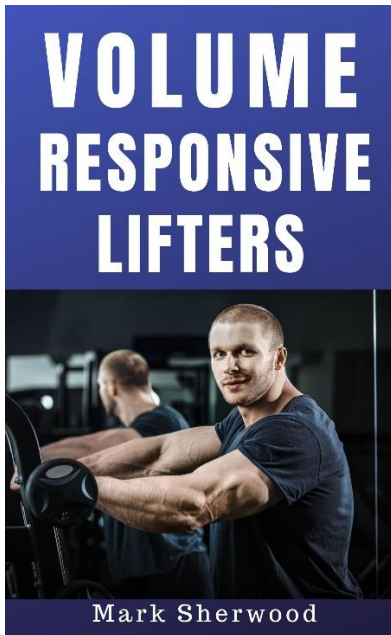


VOLUME RESPONSIVE LIFTERS



Mark Sherwood

Volume Responsive Lifters



Mark Sherwood

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Volume Responsive Lifters

By Mark Sherwood

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Introduction

The majority of elite bodybuilders over the past five decades have utilized high-volume workouts to develop their exceptional physiques. These bodybuilders are volume responsive lifters who respond especially well to workouts consisting of a lot of sets and a lot of reps.

You could ask which of the top bodybuilders utilized high-volume workouts, but a more appropriate question would be to ask if there are any high-level bodybuilders who have not used high volume workouts. Other than a few notable exceptions, the vast majority of top bodybuilders do workouts consisting of at least 10 sets per muscle group.

Every Mr. Olympia except for Dorian Yates did high volume workouts. In spite of this fact, I am of the opinion that the majority of people who train with weights do not respond best to high volume workouts, but the best bodybuilders often do. It seems there are bodybuilders and powerlifters who respond best when they do much more training than what is optimum for most people. Leroy Colbert is an example of this type of bodybuilder.

Leroy is often recognized as the first bodybuilder to develop 21 inch arms. He did this in the 1950's before steroids were available. According to Leroy, most of the people he trained with believed that each muscle group should only be trained with three hard sets. They believed that doing more than this would lead to overtraining and cause a loss of muscle size. Because of this widespread belief, Leroy was initially afraid to do any more than three sets for his biceps and triceps, however, he eventually became curious and wondered what would happen if he did more.

When Leroy increased to five or six sets per workout, he was amazed to find out that it worked better than three. As he gained size and strength, he gradually added to his training until he was doing 16 to 20 sets for both his biceps and triceps. He responded wonderfully to an increase in training volume and it led to the biggest set of arms of any bodybuilder at that time in history. Leroy's story is a classic example of how a volume responsive lifter will respond to weight training when they systematically increase from low-volume to high-volume training. This type of story is more common among bodybuilders than powerlifters, but there are also some powerlifters who are volume responsive.

It is possible that you are like Leroy and others who respond best to high-volume training. The only way you can know is to try it. This book is designed to provide examples of high-volume training, and to help you understand how you can implement it into your own workouts to determine whether or not you are a volume responsive lifter.

Chapter 1

Defining High-Volume

When discussing high-volume training, different lifters may have different ideas as to what constitutes high-volume training. For simplicity sake, volume will be defined according to how many sets are done for the muscle groups being trained within a given workout. With this in mind, I am defining a high-volume workout as ten sets or more per muscle group. Of course, some lifters do much more than ten sets per muscle group, so I will divide high-volume into three categories as follows:

1. High Volume = 10 to 14 sets per muscle group
2. Very High Volume = 15 to 19 sets per muscle group
3. Super high Volume = 20 sets or more per muscle group

Bodybuilders such as Lee Haney and Ronnie Coleman primarily fit into the first high-volume category. Shawn Rhoden is a top bodybuilder who generally fits into the second category of very high-volume. Arnold Schwarzenegger, Serge Nubret, Jay Cutler, and Phil Heath are examples of bodybuilders who primarily fit into the category of super high-volume.

There are no rules in regard to the exact manner in which a high-volume workout must be carried out, however, there are common practices that most high-volume bodybuilders follow. These practices form the guidelines that are discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 2

Basic Guidelines For High Volume Bodybuilders

Most bodybuilders who engage in high-volume training will do workouts that fit within the guidelines listed below. Please do not feel as though you are confined to these guidelines as they are not unalterable rules for high-volume training. If you make adjustments that take you outside of the guidelines listed and it leads to success, then stick with what works best. The basic guidelines that apply to most bodybuilders are listed below:

1. Train each body part at least once per week, and as many as three times per week. At the current time, hitting each muscle group three times per week is considered a lot for high volume training, but many bodybuilders including Arnold Schwarzenegger did this in the 1970's. The current trend is to train each muscle group only once or twice per week, or twice every eight to twelve days when using high volume training.
2. Do 3 to 5 exercises for each body part.
3. Do 3 to 5 sets of each exercise which will result in 10 to 25 sets per body part.
4. Do 5 to 15 reps per set.
5. Start each exercise with a moderate intensity, and increase the intensity from set to set until you reach a high degree of intensity by the last set of each exercise. This can be done by using the pyramid method in which weight is added to each successive set of an exercise, or by using a rapid training pace with the same weight for each set.
6. When pyramiding up from lighter to heavier poundages of an exercise, you may only need to rest a minute or less after lighter sets that are less intense. As the sets become heavier and harder, you may need 2 to 3 minutes between sets.
7. A fairly rapid training pace is often used in conjunction with high-volume training, but is not a requirement. One advantage of a rapid training pace is that it decreases the time it takes to complete the large amount of sets that are required when doing high-volume training. A second advantage is that a rapid training pace often promotes a better pump. There are several forms of rapid paced training, but the two most common forms are rapid paced straight sets, and super-sets which are explained below:
 - **Rapid paced straight sets** are performed when the same exercise is repeated with a minute or less of rest between sets. It can be done in conjunction with increasing the weight for each set, or by using the same weight from set to set.
 - **Super-setting** is done by doing two different exercises back to back with no rest between the two exercises. The two exercises are most often done for opposing muscle groups such as chest and back, or biceps and triceps, or quads and hamstrings. After completing a super-set of two exercises, rest one to two minutes before doing the next super-set.
 - Some bodybuilders may do two exercises for the same muscle group with no rest between exercises. This type of **super-set** is sometimes referred to as a **compound set**, and if a single-joint isolation exercise (such as dumbbell flies) is performed first, and is immediately followed by a multi-joint exercise (such as bench presses) for the same muscle group, the super-set may be referred to as a **pre-exhaust super-set**, or the **pre-exhaust method**.

Chapter 3

Work Your Way Up To High-Volume

In the three chapters that follow this chapter, I will be giving examples of high-volume workouts that you can try to see how you respond. Remember that the first category of high-volume training consists of 10 to 14 sets per muscle group. This is still a substantial amount of training, even though it is the least amount of work for a high-volume workout listed in this book. This being the case, I recommend that you work your way up to high-volume training instead of jumping into it. It is not uncommon for lifters to try high-volume training and experience poor results because they rush into it before they are ready instead of working their way up to it. If you are new to high-volume training, I would suggest the following procedure for working your way up in training volume:

Step 1: Weeks 1-8

Start with just 1 exercise per muscle group and do it for 3 to 4 sets. Give your body eight weeks to get used to this basic workout.

Step 2: Weeks 9-12

Over the course of the next four weeks, you can increase to 2 exercises per muscle group and do 3 sets per exercise.

Step 3: Weeks 13-16

Keep doing 2 exercises per muscle group and increase to 4 sets per exercise for the next four weeks.

Step 4: Weeks 17-20

Increase to 3 exercises per muscle group and do 3 sets per exercise for four weeks.

Step 5: Week 21 and Beyond

Step 5 means that you are ready for the demands of the high-volume workouts that are listed in the next chapter. If you progress through the steps at the rate listed, you will reach step 5 within about 21 weeks. It is possible that you try to progress through the steps but reach a step where the training starts to feel overwhelming and becomes counterproductive. If this happens, return to a step that you feel you can handle and gradually progress through the steps as your body feels ready. Eventually you will reach step five.

If you still don't feel ready for the workouts listed in the next chapter after 18 months of training, high-volume training is probably not for you. Do not be discouraged if you find this to be the case, as there are other types of training that you can utilize that will be based on the right number of sets for your capacity. If you find that high-volume training is not for you, please know that many people have developed a tremendous amount of size and strength without using high-volume training.

Chapter 4

High Volume Workouts: 10 to 14 Sets

For those who are ready to try high-volume training, the workouts listed in this chapter consist of 10 to 14 sets per muscle group. These workouts resemble the amount of training volume that Lee Haney and Ronnie Coleman preferred. Both of these men won the Mr. Olympia several times.

The first example is based on hitting each muscle group twice per week. This is accomplished by dividing up the muscle groups of your body into three different workouts so that the whole body will be trained once over the course of Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday. Each muscle group will then be trained a second time over the course of the next three days which will include Thursday, Friday, and Saturday. The number of sets for the first three days is similar to the training volume for the second three days, but the exercises are different to provide for plenty of exercise variety. The workout is presented on the next page.

**10 to 14 Sets per Muscle Group
Hit Each Muscle Group Twice per Week**

Monday

Work up from 12 reps to 6 reps for deadlifts and do 8 reps for all other exercises.

<p align="center">Back</p> <p>Deadlifts: 4 sets:12-10-8-6 reps Barbell Rows: 3 sets T-bar Rows: 3 sets One Arm DB Rows: 3 sets</p>	<p align="center">Biceps</p> <p>Barbell curls: 4 sets Seated DB curls: 3 sets Preacher curls: 3 sets</p>	<p align="center">Shoulders</p> <p>Military press, 4 sets Seated DB press: 4 sets Front DB press: 4 sets</p>
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Tuesday

<p align="center">Legs</p> <p>Squats: 5 sets: 12-10-8-6-5 reps Leg Presses 3 sets: 8 reps Stiff-leg Deadlifts: 3 sets: 8 reps Seated Hamstring Curls: 3 sets: 8 reps</p>	<p align="center">Calves</p> <p>Donkey raises: 5 sets 12 reps Seated raises: 5 sets 12 reps</p> <p align="center">Abs</p> <p>Crunches: 3 sets to failure</p>
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Wednesday

<p align="center">Chest</p> <p>Bench Press: 5 sets: 12-10-8-6-5 reps Incline Barbell Press: 3 sets: 8 reps Flat Bench Dumbbell Press: 3 sets: 8 reps Flat Bench Flies: 3 sets: 12 reps</p>	<p align="center">Triceps</p> <p>Seated Cambered-Bar Extensions: 3 sets: 8 reps Seated Dumbbell Extensions: 4 sets: 8 reps Close-Grip Bench Press: 4 sets: 8 reps</p>
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Thursday

Do 12 reps per set

<p align="center">Back</p> <p>Back Barbell Rows: 5 sets Low Pulley Rows: 3 sets Lat machine pulldowns: 3 sets Front lat pulldowns: 3 sets</p>	<p align="center">Biceps</p> <p>Incline Alternate DB Curl: 4 sets Machine Curls: 3 sets (superset with) Standing Cable Curls, 4 sets</p>	<p align="center">Shoulders</p> <p>Seated DB Press, 4 sets Front lateral DB Raises, 3 sets Machine raises, 3 sets</p>
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Friday

<p align="center">Legs</p> <p>Leg Extensions: 4 sets: 15 reps Front Squats: 4 sets: 12 reps Hack Squats: 3 sets: 12 reps Standing leg curls: 3 sets: 15 reps</p>	<p align="center">Calves</p> <p>Donkey raises: 4 sets: 15 reps Seated raises: 4 sets: 15 reps</p> <p align="center">Abs</p> <p>Crunches: 3 sets to failure</p>
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Saturday

Do 10 reps per set

<p align="center">Chest</p> <p>Incline DB Press: 4 sets Decline barbell press: 3 sets Incline DB Flies: 3 sets Decline DB Press: 3 sets</p>	<p align="center">Triceps</p> <p>Skullcrushers: 4 sets (superset with) Machine Pressdown Dips: 4 sets Standing Cable Triceps Extensions: 4 sets</p>
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The next workout is similar to the first in that the muscle groups are divided into three workouts. However, you can add in rest days wherever you want between workout days. If you want to take a rest day after each workout, you can. This would amount to working each muscle group once per week. If you want to work out two days in a row and rest every third day, it would translate into working each muscle group twice every twelve days. Lee Haney liked to work out three days in a row and rest every fourth day which amounts to training each muscle group twice every eight days. If you train three days in a row and follow it with another three days in a row before resting the seventh day, you will be working each muscle group twice per week. The workouts are shown on the next page.

**10 to 14 Sets per Muscle Group
Three Day Split**

Day 1

Chest

Bench Press: 4 sets x 6-8 reps
 Wide Grip Dips: 3 sets x 8-10 reps
 Incline Bench Press: 3 sets x 6-8 reps
 Incline DB Bench Press: 3 sets x 8-10 reps

Biceps

Barbell Curl: 5 sets x 8-10 rep
 Preacher Curl: 5 sets x 8-10 reps

Triceps

Triceps Pressdowns.: 5 sets x 10-12 reps
 Skullcrushers: 5 sets x 6-8 reps

Day 2

Legs

Leg Extension: 4 sets x 12-15 reps
 Squats: 4 sets x 8-10 reps
 Leg Curl: 4 sets x 8-10 reps

Calves

Standing Calf Raise: 4 sets x 15 reps
 Seated Calf Raise: 4 sets x 15 reps
 Donkey Calf Raises: 4 sets x 15 reps

Abs

Vertical Leg Raise: 4 sets x 15-20 reps
 Curl Ups: 3 sets x 15-20 reps
 Hammer Strength Ab Machine:
 3 sets x 15 reps

Day 3

Back

Front Lat Pull Down: 4 sets x 8-10 reps
 Barbell or T-Bar Row: 4 sets x 6-8 reps
 Cable Rows: 4 sets x 8-10 reps

Shoulders

Military Press: 4 sets x 6-8 reps
 DB Side Lateral: 4 sets x 8-10 reps
 Upright Row: 4 sets x 6-8 reps

Chapter 5

Very High Training Volume

In this chapter, a sample workout that ranges from 15 to 19 sets per muscle group is listed. I should add that this mostly pertains to the biggest muscle groups consisting of the legs, chest and back. You will notice that the arms do not receive as many sets because the triceps receive a lot of work when exercising the chest with pushing movements, and the biceps receive a lot of work when exercising the back with pulling movements. You will also notice that the example given is based on a 4-day split in which the body parts are divided into 4 separate workouts. This split allows you to insert three rest days as needed between workouts in order to hit each muscle group once per week. You can also do a four day on, one day off schedule which means that you would train each muscle group twice every ten days. The very high training volume workout is shown below:

Very High Training Volume	
15 To 19 Sets per Muscle Group On A 4-Day Split	
Day 1	
Pyramid your poundages using 12 – 10 – 8 – 6 reps across 4 sets for each exercise.	
Chest Bench Press Incline Dumbbell Press Dumbbell Flyes Cable Crossovers	Triceps Close Grip Bench Press Triceps Pressdowns Overhead Triceps Extensions
Day 2	
Legs Squats: 4 sets x 12 – 10 – 8 – 6 reps Leg Press: 4 sets x 12 – 10 – 8 – 6 reps Leg Extensions: 4 sets x 10 reps Leg Curls: 4 sets x 10 reps	Calves Seated Calf Raises: 4 sets x 15 reps Standing Calf Raises: 4 sets x 12 reps Single Leg Calf Raises: 4 sets x 12 reps Donkey Calf Raises: 4 sets x 10 reps
Day 3	
Deltoids and Traps Military Press: 4 sets x 12 – 10 – 8 – 6 reps Dumbbell Lateral Raises: 4 sets x 10 reps Bent Over DB Lateral Raises: 4 sets x 10 reps Shrugs: 4 sets x 10 reps	Abs Crunches: 4 sets x 15 reps Reverse Crunches: 4 sets x 12 reps Hammer Strength Ab Machine: 4 sets x 10 reps
Day 4	
Back Do 4 sets x 12 – 10 – 8 -6 for each exercise Lat Pulldowns: 4 sets Seated Pulley Rows Single Arm DB Rows Bent Over Barbell Rows	Biceps Barbell Curls: 4 sets x 6 to 8 reps Seated DB Curls: 4 sets x 10 reps Concentration Curls: 4 sets x 8 reps

Chapter 6

Super High Volume

Super high-volume training boils down to the survival of the fittest. Many people will find that it is way too much, but those who respond to it turn out to be some of the best bodybuilders. The workout listed below is the type of training that Arnold Schwarzenegger and Robbie Robinson did along with many other bodybuilders during the 1970's. It was actually a fairly common way to train at Gold's Gym during a time period that is often referred to as the Golden Era of Bodybuilding. Not only was each workout very high in volume, but the weekly volume is sky-rocket high, as each muscle group is trained three times per week. Some bodybuilders still do an enormous amount of sets today, but it is currently much less common to train each muscle group three times per week with tons of sets. It is more common to train each muscle group once or twice per week. The number of workouts per week that you choose to do for each muscle group should be based on what you find works best. A super high-volume workout schedule is shown on the next page.

**Super High Volume
Train Each Muscle Group 3 Times per Week**

Monday – Wednesday – Friday	Tuesday – Thursday - Saturday
<p style="text-align: center;">Chest</p> <p>Bench Press: 5 sets as follows: Pyramid 12-10-8-6-6 reps DB Flyes: 5 sets x 10 reps Incline Press: 5 sets x 8 reps Dips: 5 sets x 8 to 10 reps DB Pullovers: 5 sets x 10 reps</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Back</p> <p>Lat Pulldowns: 5 sets x 10 reps T-bar Rows: 5 sets as follows Pyramid 12-10-8-6-6 reps Seated Pulley Rows: 5 sets x 8 reps One Arm DB Rows: 5 sets x 10 reps Hyperextensions: 5 sets x 12 reps</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Legs</p> <p>Squats: 5 Sets as follows: Pyramid 12-10-8-6-6 reps Leg Extensions: 5 sets x 10 reps Leg Curls: 5 sets x 10 reps Leg Press: 5 sets x 8 reps Lunges: 5 sets x 8 reps</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Shoulders</p> <p>Shoulder Press: 5 sets as follows: Pyramid 12-10-8-6-6 reps Lateral Raises: 5 sets x 10 reps DB Front Raises: 5 sets x 10 reps Bent Over DB Raises: 5 sets x 10 reps Upright Rows: 5 sets x 10 reps</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Biceps</p> <p>Barbell Curls: 5 sets x 8 to 10 reps Seated Incline DB Curls: 5 sets x 10 reps Concentration Curls: 5 sets x 8 reps</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Triceps</p> <p>Triceps Pushdowns: 5 sets x 10 reps Overhead Triceps Ext: 5 sets x 10 reps Narrow Grip Dips: 5 sets x 10 reps</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Calves</p> <p>Standing Calf Raises: 5 sets x 12 reps Seated Calf Raises: 5 sets x 10 reps Donkey Calf Raises: 5 sets x 15 reps</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Abs</p> <p>Curls ups: 5 sets x 15 reps Hammer Strength Ab Machine: 5 sets x 10 reps Vertical Leg Raises: 5 sets x 10 reps</p>
<p>When doing the workouts listed, I recommend starting with a moderately heavy weight that is fairly easy to lift for the first set of each exercise. Then gradually add weight to each set until you are pushing close to failure by the last set of each exercise. If you push hard on every set, you will burn out unless you have the capacity of Arnold Schwarzenegger. Another thing to consider is that lifters who do this type of high-volume training often train twice per day in order to tolerate the volume.</p>	

Chapter 7

Balancing Volume With Intensity

Not all high-volume lifters are the same in terms of the amount of intensity they apply to their workouts. Arnold Schwarzenegger did tons of sets and reps for each muscle group and generally trained with a lot of intensity by frequently pushing for max reps to failure on his sets. John DeFendis and Steve Michalik were even more extreme and did an enormous amount of high intensity sets in each workout. The ability to benefit from combining high volume training with high intensity training on almost every set is very rare.

My personal opinion is that the vast majority of volume responsive lifters are better off when they adjust the amount of intensity to a level that would be compatible with high-volume training. This was Bill Pearl's philosophy as he was an outstanding high-volume bodybuilder who never pushed to failure. He trained many, many people over the course of his life, including top bodybuilders. His advice to those who followed his programs was to avoid pushing to failure. Likewise, Russian powerlifters who are trained by Boris Sheiko do a lot of sets, but they rarely push to the point of max reps to failure.

Most lifters understand that they can't go all out with max reps to failure on every set for 10 to 20 plus sets for the same muscle group. Doing so would lead to overtraining. At the same time, they understand that intensity is an important factor that contributes to effective training. In order to include both volume and intensity without overtraining, it is a common practice for high volume lifters to increase the intensity across three to five sets for a given exercise. A moderate intensity is often used for the first set of each exercise. Each successive set is adjusted to get a little harder until the highest intensity is achieved on the last set of the exercise. There are a few variations of how to escalate the intensity of an exercise from set to set. This will be discussed in the next four chapters.

Chapter 8

The Pyramid Method For Bodybuilders

Lifters who utilize high-volume training often employ what I refer to as escalating intensity within each exercise. This simply means that there is a progression from moderate intensity to high intensity when moving from set to set of an exercise. The easier sets allow for the accumulation of volume without overtraining, and the hard sets provide the inclusion of intensity for a better overall training effect. Perhaps the most common way to start an exercise with moderate intensity while working up to a high intensity is the pyramid method.

The Pyramid Method

The pyramid method is typically carried out by starting with a relatively light weight for your first set of an exercise. Weight is added to each set as you “pyramid” up in weight. A concurrent decrease in the number of reps occurs as you “pyramid” down in reps from set to set. For example, when performing a pyramid of four sets of an exercise, the first set may consist of 12 reps. Weight is then added to the bar and 10 reps would be performed for the second set. More weight is added to the bar and 8 reps would be performed for the third set. More weight is added to the bar and 6 reps is performed for the fourth and final set. In this example, the pyramid consisted of four sets, but you could design a pyramid consisting of as little as three sets, and there are some powerlifters who pyramid up in weight for as many as ten sets.

The key to the pyramid method is to make sure that the first set is only moderately hard. You should leave at least 8 reps in the tank, which means that you use a weight that allows you to stop your set 8 reps short of failure when you hit your twelfth rep. When performing your second set with 10 reps, use a weight that allows you to stop 5 to 6 reps short of failure. When performing your third set with 8 reps, use a weight that allows you to stop 3 to 4 reps short of failure. When performing your fourth set with 6 reps, either push to failure, or stop 1 to 2 reps short of failure. As I mentioned before, some lifters never push to failure and prefer to always leave 1 to 2 reps in the tank. When you include the sets, reps, and amount of intensity for each set, a workout based on a pyramid of escalating intensity would be written as follows:

1 set x 12 reps. Stop 8 reps short of failure

1 set x 10 reps. Stop 5 to 6 reps short of failure

1 set x 8 reps. Stop 3 to 4 reps short of failure

1 set x 6 reps. Push to failure, or stop 1 to 2 reps short of failure

The pyramid method is most often used in conjunction with basic power exercises such as squats, deadlifts, pressing movements, and heavy pulling movements, but it can be used with any exercise according to a lifter’s preference.

Chapter 9

Pyramids With The Same Reps

Some lifters utilize a slightly different type of pyramid in which they use the same amount of reps for each set, but they increase the weight for each set. Once again, this is an escalating intensity method in which each set grows in intensity until the final set is pushed close to failure, or even all the way to failure. An example of how this would be written for a workout is shown below:

1 x 8 reps 135 pounds

1 x 8 reps 185 pounds

1 x 8 reps 225 pounds

1 x 8 reps 275 pounds

Back-off Sets

After completing a pyramid, a lifter can move on to a different exercise, however, some lifters may prefer to follow the last set of their pyramid with one or more **back-off sets**. When performing a single **back off set**, the weight is usually decreased enough to do another set of 12 to 15 reps of the same exercise. A similar strategy is to decrease the weight enough to follow the pyramid with an additional 3 to 4 **back-off sets** of 8 reps. The purpose of back-off sets is to increase the volume of the workout and to amplify the pump.

Back-off Sets for Powerlifters

Back-off sets are also commonly used by powerlifters, although they may use lower reps for their back-off sets than bodybuilders. For example, a powerlifter may work up to a heavy set consisting of anywhere between 1 to 5 reps, and then do a few back off sets using lighter weights with 5 reps.

Chapter 10

How Do You Count Sets?

I think it is important to point out that not all lifters count their sets the same way. The examples of the pyramids in the previous two chapters consisted of 4 sets. The majority of bodybuilders who perform this type of pyramid would say that they performed 4 sets. In contrast, you may find that powerlifters and bodybuilders who prefer high-intensity training only count the last set as a work-set, and the rest of the sets would not be counted as they are only considered to be “warm up sets.” This means that it is possible that two different lifters who did the exact same workout could be asked how many sets they performed, and one would say 4 sets, and the other would say 1 set.

Dorian Yates was a high intensity bodybuilder who often claimed that he only did one set per exercise. This is generally considered low volume training. However, when you consider that he did three to four exercises for each muscle group, and he did three to four warm up sets for each exercise, he could suddenly be considered a high-volume lifter by counting his warm up sets the way many bodybuilders do.

For the purposes of this book, when references are made in regard to how many sets are performed within a workout, all sets will be counted, including warm up sets.

Chapter 11

Rapid Paced Straight Sets

The pyramid method is based on adding weight from set to set. The increase in weight is the primary factor that leads to an increase in intensity for each set. This method can be used in conjunction with a slow training pace to avoid fatigue and maximize the amount of weight used for each set, but there are some bodybuilders who combine pyramid training with a fast training pace. They may not be able to use as much weight as they can when training at a slower pace, but the fast pace produces a rapid build up of fatigue. This forces them to exert just as much intensity of effort to lift lighter weights as when using a slower pace with more weight. This is especially useful as an alternative if your joints are sore from using heavy weights.

Some bodybuilders rarely pyramid with an increase in weight from set to set, but they understand how to increase the intensity from set to set even though they use the same weight and reps for each set. How is this possible? Because they utilize a rapid training pace and do not wait until they fully recover between sets. This causes a rapid build up of fatigue so that each successive set becomes harder than the previous set. When using this method, the first set of an exercise may not feel that hard, but the intensity of effort will escalate from set to set until the last set is very hard. You must do a minimum of four sets in order to accumulate fatigue and trigger an increase of intensity as you proceed from set to set. This type of training is sometimes referred to as density training, or high-density training. It simply means that a lot of sets are condensed into a short amount of time.

Mohamed Makkawy is an example of a bodybuilder who relied upon high density training when preparing for his contests. He often did several different exercises for the same muscle group and would do 5 sets of 8 reps for each exercise with less than a minute rest between sets. This often amounted to well over 20 sets per muscle group in conjunction with a fast training pace. This type of training resulted in Mohamed becoming one of the best bodybuilders in professional competition during the early 1980's

Phil Heath is a seven-time Mr. Olympia who tends to move from set to set at a fast pace whether he adds weight to each set, or uses the same weight for each set. When using the same weight for each set, the fast pace is especially important because the pace of the workout serves as the primary stressor to the muscles instead of always trying to increase the weight.

Use Intensity Wisely

At this point, you should realize that high intensity training for every set of a high-volume workout is counterproductive for the majority of lifters. It would be wiser to start each exercise with a comfortable amount of weight and reps. You can then increase the intensity from set to set by adding weight to each set, or by moving quickly from set to set with the same weight. This allows you to accumulate plenty of volume without over training, and it also allows you to include enough training intensity to stimulate strength and muscle size.

Chapter 12

Basic Guidelines For High Volume Powerlifters

Top bodybuilders are much more likely to utilize high volume training than top powerlifters, however, there are definitely top powerlifters who reach the high-volume threshold of 10 sets for a given exercise or muscle group. The five basic methods that high volume powerlifters use to accumulate training volume consist of *giant pyramids*, *back-off sets*, *speed training*, *performing at least 10 low rep sets*, and *assistance exercises*. Each of these methods is briefly explained below:

1. Giant Pyramids

High volume powerlifters often start out with light weights and may increase the weight across as many as ten sets before reaching their heaviest weight for the bench press, squat, or deadlift. I refer to this as a **giant pyramid**. Volume is accumulated by doing a lot of warm up sets while working up to the heaviest set of an exercise.

2. Back-Off Sets

A second method that some powerlifters employ for accumulating a substantial amount of training volume is to do what are often referred to as **back-off sets**. Those who use this method start with a pyramid by working their way up to their heaviest set across several sets. After completing the heaviest set of the pyramid, they reduce the weight in order to do several more sets with higher reps. The lighter sets that follow the heaviest set of the pyramid are called, **back-off sets**. Bodybuilders often use this method as well.

3. Speed Training: 8 to 12 sets of 3 Reps

A third method that powerlifters use for accumulating substantial training volume is to do speed work consisting of 8 to 12 sets for basic powerlifting exercises including bench presses, squats, and deadlifts. Some programs call for as many as 16 sets of speed work for each exercise. When performing speed work, each rep of each set is performed with explosive speed and power. The most common weight range for speed work among powerlifters is to use 50% to 60% of their single rep max. Only 3 reps per set are generally used to avoid fatigue and insure maximum rep speed. Some do not consider this to be volume training because the reps per set are so low. However, speed training is often designed to be used in conjunction with assistance exercises which will be explained in method five. When speed work and assistance exercises are combined together, it often adds up to a substantial amount of training volume.

4. A High Volume of Low Rep Sets

Workouts based on a high volume of low rep sets may appear to be similar to speed workouts in terms of the amount of sets and reps performed, but the training is somewhat different. For example, at least 10 sets are performed with 2 to 5 reps which is similar to a speed workout. However, there isn't an emphasis on speed, and the amount of weight used is generally 60% to 80% of a lifter's single rep max which is heavier than what is normally used for speed work.

The low reps per set help lifters to avoid pushing their sets anywhere close to failure. This allows them to focus on form and to do more sets before fatigue interferes with the quality of the workout. This type of workout is usually followed with assistance exercises to accumulate even more training volume. Some of the elite powerlifters from Russia utilize this type of training.

5. Assistance Exercises

A fifth method that high volume powerlifters utilize for accumulating a substantial amount of training is to do **assistance exercises** that complement the main powerlifts. For example, a lifter may either work up to a heavy set of bench presses for 5 reps. This portion of the workout focuses on a powerlifting exercise. The powerlifting exercise is then followed with several sets of assistance exercises such as incline dumbbell presses and dips for 6 to 10 reps. It would also be a common practice to do the same assistance exercises following 8 to 12 sets of speed work for a powerlifting exercise.

Rest Between Sets

Powerlifters are more likely to take more rest time between sets than bodybuilders. They must be fully recovered between sets in order to be at full strength for every set. This being the case, they often rest at least 3 minutes between sets. They may take shorter rests between warm up sets, but they will never rush the pace to the point where it compromises their strength when they reach the heaviest part of their workout.

Even though powerlifters are more likely to train at a slower pace than bodybuilders, there are some instances where a fast pace is considered appropriate. One instance would be when doing speed work with fairly light weights for 8 to 12 sets and 3 reps per set. Many powerlifters rest only 45 seconds between speed sets. Some may also prefer a fast training pace when doing assistance exercises. However, when performing bench presses, squats, and deadlifts, the pace will tend to be slow enough to allow full recovery between each set.

Chapter 13

Giant Pyramids

Within the powerlifting world, Richard Hawthorne is a world record holder for the deadlift. He does high-volume workouts by using giant pyramids when working up to a heavy lift. The giant pyramid that Richard Hawthorne and other powerlifters use is often organized a little differently than the typical pyramids that bodybuilders use. When using a giant pyramid, the lifter will work his way up in weight and down in reps to a single rep over the course of several warm up sets. The last warm up set is a fairly easy single rep because it is still a part of the warm up process. Weight is then added and the lifter may increase the reps back up to three to six reps for the last three sets of the pyramid. In this case, the last three sets would be considered the actual work-sets.

Once again, if you ask a bodybuilder how many sets a power lifter performed when doing a giant pyramid, he may say ten sets because bodybuilders tend to count every set. If you ask a powerlifter how many sets the same lifter performed when doing a giant pyramid, he may say 3 because powerlifters tend to only count the heaviest work-sets as part of their workouts.

You will find it easier to understand the concept of a giant pyramid by looking at one of Richard Hawthorne's deadlift workouts.

Richard Hawthorne's Giant Pyramid Deadlift Workout

Set 1: 20 reps x 135 pounds (21% of his single rep max)

Set 2: 20 reps x 135 pounds (21%)

Set 3: 10 reps x 225 pounds (35%)

Set 4: 10 reps x 225 pounds (35%)

Set 5: 10 reps x 315 pounds (48%)

Set 6: 6 reps x 315 pounds (48%)

Set 7: 6 reps x 405 pounds (62%)

Set 8: 3 reps x 405 pounds (62%)

Set 9: 1 rep x 500 pounds (77%)

Set 10: 3 reps x 515 pounds (79%)

Set 11: 3 reps x 545 pounds (84%)

Set 12: 3 reps x 570 pounds (88%)

Richard does not usually do any assistance exercises, but even without assistance exercises, he generates a huge amount of training volume from his giant pyramid. It is important to note that Richard gives himself plenty of time to recover from this type of workout as he trains each powerlift just once per week.

Chapter 14

Giant Pyramids Plus Assistance Work

Eric Spoto is a powerlifter who packs a staggering amount of training volume into a single bench press workout. He does this by combining a giant pyramid with a ton of assistance work. The amount of training volume in the workout listed may be too much for most lifters, but not for Eric Spoto. His style of high-volume training enabled him to achieve the biggest raw bench in the history of powerlifting with a bench of 722 pounds until his record was broken in 2015. All of this is evidence that Eric Spoto is a classic volume responsive lifter if there ever was one. An example of one of his bench press workouts is listed below:

Giant Pyramid For The Bench Press

Set 1: 18 reps x 135 pounds (19% of his single rep max)

Set 2: 12 reps x 225 pounds (32%)

Set 3: 10 reps x 315 pounds (44%)

Set 4: 10 reps x 405 pounds (56%)

Set 5: 10 reps x 495 pounds (69%)

Set 6: 3 reps x 585 pounds (82%)

Set 7: 1 rep x 635 pounds (88%)

Set 8: 1 rep x 675 pounds (94%)

Set 9: 1 rep x 705 pounds (98%)

Assistance Exercises

3 sets of close grip bench press: 8 reps, 12 reps, 20 reps, decrease weight each set.

4 sets of dips: 25 reps, 15 reps, 13 reps, 9 reps, increase weight each set.

5 sets of seated shoulder presses: 15 reps, 15 reps, 8 reps, 4 reps, 7 reps, increase weight for the first four sets, decrease weight for the last set.

5 sets of triceps extensions: 20 reps, 20 reps, 12 reps, 12 reps, 8 reps, increase weight each set.

2 sets of push-ups with a narrow hand spacing: Do up to 40 reps per set.

Chapter 15

Multiple Low Reps Sets Plus Assistance Work

Speed Work

Powerlifters tend to use a lower rep range than bodybuilders. Less reps per set generally means less training volume unless a lot of sets are performed, which is exactly what some powerlifters do. Within the realm of powerlifting, low rep sets often come in the form of speed work where only three reps are performed for every set. However, when you consider the fact that 8 to 12 sets are usually performed in conjunction with speed work, the lifter will accumulate a significant amount of volume.

Most lifters do the main powerlifts including bench presses, squats, and deadlifts for their speed work sets. The weights are fairly light and generally consist of 50% to 60% of a lifter's single rep max. If heavier weights are used, rep speed will start to slow down and it will cease to be speed work. The main goal of speed work is to exert maximum force and speed into every rep of every set. This type of forceful lifting often contributes to the development of strength. It is important to note that most powerlifters who do speed workouts also do heavy workouts by dividing the week into two workouts consisting of a heavy workout and a speed workout for each lift.

Assistance Exercises After Speed Sets

When 8 to 12 speed sets have been completed for a powerlifting exercise, the speed sets are usually followed with one to three assistance exercises. Each assistance exercise is usually performed for two to four sets, and 6 to 10 reps are commonly used for each set (please note that these numbers are just guidelines that point to a norm, not unchangeable rules). The assistance exercises are designed to enhance the development of the muscles that were used during the speed sets. The combination of speed work plus assistance exercises allows lifters to accumulate more training volume, which often translates into an increase in strength.

There are exercises that are commonly used to develop the muscles that assist with the bench press, squat, and deadlift. Examples of assistance exercises are presented on the next page.

Assistance Exercises For The Powerlifts

Select 1 to 3 assistance exercises for each powerlift. Do 2 to 4 sets of 6 to 10 reps for each exercise selected.

Bench Press	Squats	Deadlifts
<p style="text-align: center;">Chest Exercises</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Flat Bench Press with DB Incline Press Incline DB Press Overhead Press Flyes Dips</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Triceps Exercises</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Close Grip Bench Press Triceps Pressdowns Overhead Triceps Extensions Lying Triceps Extensions Close Grip Dips</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Exercises</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Front Squats Goblet Squats Belt Squats Leg Presses Leg Extensions Leg Curls Ham/glute Raises</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Exercises</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Romanian Deadlifts Still Leg Deadlifts Good Mornings Hyperextensions Revers Hyperextensions Shrugs</p>

Russian Powerlifters

Boris Sheiko is a Russian powerlifting coach who is considered to be one of the top coaches in the world. His training methods may resemble giant pyramids because his lifters work up to fairly heavy weights over the course of a lot of sets, but the difference is that the sets all consist of low reps. In addition, Sheiko's method may look similar to speed training workouts in terms of the number of sets and reps, but the weights are heavier than what would be used for speed workouts.

One of the hallmarks of Sheiko is that he believes in individualizing workouts to fit the needs and capacities of each lifter, but he generally prescribes more training volume than most American lifters use. It seems that Sheiko would rather have a lifter do 5 sets of 5 reps with 70% to 75% of his single rep max than to do one all-out set of 5 reps to failure with 85% to 90% of his single rep max. He also believes that perfect form is vitally important, and the high training volume gives lifters plenty of opportunity to perfect their form for each lift.

Attempting to provide an example of the type of training that Sheiko might prescribe is somewhat difficult because he generally plans out a progression of many different workouts that also vary according to the individual lifter, but I will still provide a possible example of a bench press workout that he might prescribe:

1 set x 5 reps with 50% of a lifter's single rep max

2 sets x 4 reps 60%

2 sets x 3 reps 70%

5 sets x 4 reps 75%

2 sets x 4 reps 65%

Assistance Exercises for Bench Press

5 sets x 10 reps of dumbbell flyes or dips

Sheiko will tend to prescribe even more sets as a lifter advances in strength, but it all depends on what he finds to be the optimum number of sets and reps for the individual lifter. It is important to understand that one of the reasons the Russian lifters can withstand a lot of training volume is that they start as teenagers and slowly work their way up to high volume training over the course of several years. And remember, they rarely do high intensity sets where they push to failure. Slow strenuous reps and grinder reps are considered bad reps. Sheiko prefers a smooth nonstop lifting motion on every rep, and perfect form on every rep of every workout.

Chapter 16

Workout Volume Versus Weekly Volume

When considering the topic of high-volume training, most of the emphasis has been on the amount of training volume that is accumulated within a workout. For example, Richard Hawthorne includes a substantial amount of training volume within each workout. The only problem with this is that some powerlifters would argue that he is not a high-volume lifter because his weekly volume is not high. This is because Richard only trains each lift once per week.

There is no rule in regard to the number of workouts that should be done for each muscle group within a week. Some powerlifters train each lift three times per week. The individual workouts may not provide a lot of training volume, but when you add up the sets at the end of each week, they may be doing as much or more work than Richard does once per week for his workouts. If a lifter only does half as much work as Richard in each workout, but he trains each lift three times per week, his weekly volume will still be 50% higher than Richard's weekly volume.

Eric Spoto trains his bench press twice per week, but one workout is a hard workout, and the other workout is a lighter, easier workout. Most of his training volume comes from his hard workout.

High Weekly Volume

The advanced Russian lifters tend to include a lot of training volume in each workout, and amplify the weekly volume by benching four times per week, squatting twice per week, and deadlifting twice per week. As you can imagine, when high volume workouts are combined with a lot of workouts throughout each week, the weekly training volume is very high. One reason the high-volume approach works for the Russians is because they understand how to work their way up to it, and they understand how to use the right amount of training intensity that corresponds well with high volume training.

The Right Balance

When it comes to your own training, keep in mind that you will need to find the right balance between workout volume, weekly volume, intensity, and frequency. The right balance is an individual matter, and the best lifters are willing to explore each training factor until they find a formula that results in consistent progress.

Chapter 17

The High-Volume Training Option

High-volume training has produced some of the best physiques and strongest bodies on the earth. It is undeniably the most common type of training among top bodybuilders, and is also used by some of the best powerlifters. Will it work for you? The only way to know is to try it out. If it works, your willingness to try it will prove to be beneficial. If it doesn't work, there are several other types of training that you can try until you find what works best.

My hope is that the information in this book brings you a step closer to discovering the type of training that works best for the unique characteristics of your own body. Those who are willing to learn, experiment, and form an accurate interpretation of the results of their training are going to make the greatest progress in the end. Be patient, consistent, and systematic in your efforts, as these are the keys to maximizing your potential. I wish you much success and the best of training.

About The Author

Mark Sherwood is a long-time fitness enthusiast who has pursued weight training and other fitness activities for over thirty years. His educational and professional background include a B.S. degree as an exercise specialist in physical education from the University of Wisconsin Madison, and positions as a fitness instructor and physical education teacher.

One of Mark's passions is to distinguish between strength training concepts that are consistently effective as opposed to those that are effective for a short time period. Through his education, research, and personal trial and error, he has endeavored to gain the necessary knowledge to share effective training strategies with those who desire to maximize their training results.

Mark resides with his family in Southern California. For more training resources from Mark, you can visit www.precisionpointtraining.com. In addition, you can view more books on strength training that he has authored on the next page.

Additional Resources

A Quick Guide To Strength

Beginning Strength Training

Boom!

Bottom Up Loading

Cluster Set Training

Density Responsive Lifters

Developing A Feel For Effective Workouts

Easy Progression With Mini Sets

Force And Frequency Training

Frequency Responsive Lifters

Frequent Training Preparation

Fusion 3: Book 1

Giant Pyramid Training

High Frequency Strength Training

High Volume 5's

Heavy Frequency Training

Individualized Workouts For Hardgainers

Intensity Ratios

Intensity Responsive Lifters

Marker Rep Training

Minimalist Responsive Lifters

Never Miss A Lift

Overcoming Strength Training Plateaus

Phase Potentiation

Quick Workouts For Quick Muscles

Rest-Pause Training

Short Cycle Mastery

Speed Responsive Lifters

Strength Challenge 20/20

Strength Training Capacity

Strength Training Thresholds

Strength To The Max

Strength To The Max And Beyond

The 1 x 100 Challenge

The High Frequency Training Pyramid

The Peak Strength Principle

The Redistribution Principle

12-10-8-6: A Workout Plan For Building Size And Strength