4-WAY LOADING

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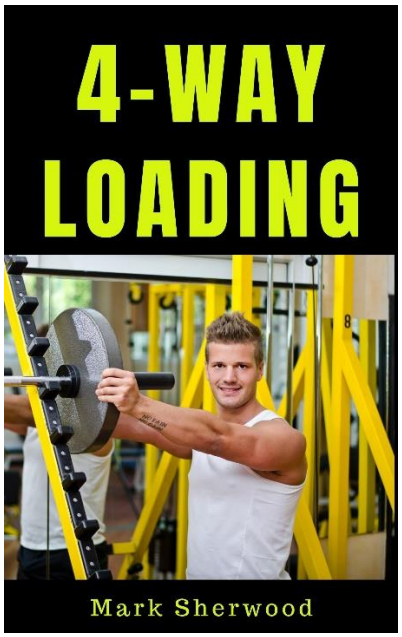

Mark Sherwood

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4-Way Loading

By Mark Sherwood

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Introduction

4-Way Loading is a strength training concept that provides a systematic loading method for adding weight to your lifts over a 21-week training period. The method is based on four different aspects of loading which consist of loading from workout to workout, week to week, block to block, and cycle to cycle. To be more specific:

1. There are three workouts within the same week, and each workout will grow heavier than the previous workout

2. There are three weeks within a training block, and each week will grow heavier than the previous week.

3. There are three blocks within a cycle, and each block will grow heavier than the previous block. The exception is the last cycle, which is only one block of three weeks.

4. There are three cycles, and each cycle will grow heavier than the previous cycle.

It takes a 21 week training period to complete all three cycles. The goal is to gain 10 to 20 pounds of strength by the end of 21 weeks of systematic loading. The details of how to accomplish this will be explained as you read through the rest of the book.

Chapter 1

Constant Variation With 4-Way Loading

Many of you who are reading this are familiar with linear periodization. It simply means to start with 60% to 70% of your single rep max at the start of a training cycle, and to add weight to your lifts in fairly even increments from week to week. As you continue to do this, you will eventually reach a week where you are lifting the heaviest weight that you can possibly lift for a single rep. The obvious goal is to be able to lift more weight for a single rep by the end of the cycle than you were able to lift at the end of the previous cycle. There are powerlifters who have become exceedingly strong to the point of breaking world records using this method.

As good as linear periodization works for some lifters, others can't seem to make long term progress with it. These lifters often experience a decrease of strength towards the end of the cycle when the heavier weights force them to drop below 5 reps per set for several consecutive weeks. The low amount of reps per set is insufficient to sustain progress at the end of the cycle. Of course, this is also the exact time when lifters are scheduled to lift the heaviest weights, which is the absolute worst time to suffer a loss of strength. Such lifters need a different approach to training that includes more volume at the end of the cycle, and more variation throughout the training cycle.

Those who require more volume at the end of a cycle, and respond better to more variation throughout a training cycle, can use the 4-way loading strategy. When using this system, I recommend that you choose just three exercises per workout consisting of a squatting exercise, a pressing exercise, and a pulling exercise for each workout. Those who are focused on powerlifting should include deadlifts in your pulling exercises a minimum of once per week, and a maximum of twice per week. On days when you are not deadlifting, do other pulling exercises such as bent-over barbell rows, T-bar rows, seated pulley rows, or lat pulldowns.

If you prefer plenty of exercise variety, then I recommend that you do several variations of squats, presses, and pulling exercises. Do the variations as often as you prefer while progressing through each training cycle. Even if you keep using the same exercises, the 4-way loading system provides a substantial amount of training variety because of the variations of weight. This occurs in four ways as the variations include changes of weight within a one-week period, a three-week period, a nine-week period, and a twenty-one-week period. Each of these periods will be explained in greater detail as you read through the next four chapters.

Chapter 2

Loading Within A One Week Period

When using the 4-way loading system, each exercise is trained three times per week including a squatting movement, a pressing movement, and a pulling movement. The lifts are scheduled to increase by 2% to 3% every time you progress to the next workout within the same week. For example, week one of the training system is made up of three workouts consisting of the following sets, reps, and weight for each workout:

Workout 1

5 sets x 10 reps using 62% of your single rep max for each exercise

Workout 2

4 sets x 10 reps using 65% of your single rep max for each exercise

Workout 3

3 sets x 10 reps using 67% of your single rep max for each exercise

The important thing to notice when looking at the three workouts listed above is that the percentages progressively increase as they consist of 62%, 65%, and 67% across three workouts.

You may also notice that more sets are performed at the start of the week, and the number of sets is decreased by one set per workout as you move from workout to workout. The number of sets is greater at the start of the week because the weights are lighter, and lighter weights will allow you to perform more sets without overtraining.

After completing a week of loading, you will proceed to the next week and use a similar loading strategy, but the weight and number of sets will be slightly altered. This will be explained in greater detail in the next chapter which deals with training blocks.

Chapter 3

Loading Within Training Blocks

A training block is based on the number of reps that are performed for each set. Each training block will last three weeks. When using the 4-way loading system, you will use the same rep scheme for a three-week block before switching to a new rep scheme for the next three-week block.

An example of how many reps to perform for each set throughout three training blocks is shown below:

Block 1 = 10 reps

For the first block, you will be doing 10 reps per set for each workout throughout the entire three-week block.

Block 2 = 7 reps

When starting the second block, you will switch to 7 reps per set for each workout throughout the entire three week-block.

Block 3 = 10 Reps – 7 reps – 4 reps

The third block consists of a combination of three different amounts of reps, but the **same combination of reps will be used each week** throughout the three-week block. The combination of reps that will be used each week for block three is shown below:

1st workout each week = 10 reps per set

2nd workout each week = 7 reps per set

3rd workout each week = 4 reps per set

Each Week Grows Heavier Within The Same Block

Each week within a block will be 2% to 3% heavier than the previous week. For example, the table on the next page presents a training block consisting of three weeks. Each week consists of three workouts, and a percentage is listed for each workout. The percentages listed are based on how much weight you should be using in relationship to your single rep max. For example, if your max squat is 300 pounds for a single rep, and the percentage listed for a specified workout is 70%, then you would use 70% of 300 pounds. When you calculate the percentage in this example, it would come to 210 pounds, which is the amount of weight that you should use for each set of each exercise for your workout. As you look at the percentages from week to week, be aware that the percentages increase by 2% to 3% each week.

Weight Increases by 2% to 3% Each Week			
	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3
Workout 1	5 x 10 62%	4 x 10 65%	3 x 10 67%
Workout 2	4 x 10 65%	3 x 10 67%	2 x 10 70%
Workout 3	3 x 10 67%	2 x 10 70%	1 x 10 72%

The Structure Of Sets Within A Block

If you look at the table from the previous chapter, you will notice that the number of sets per exercise changes within each week, and it also changes from week to week. Every block will be patterned with the same organizational structure in regard to the number of sets. The structure of how many sets are performed will vary from workout to workout, and week to week, but it will always be the same for each three-week block. This structure is shown below:

Number of Sets For Each Workout of Each Block			
	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3
Workout 1	5 sets per exercise	4 sets per exercise	3 sets per exercise
Workout 2	4 sets per exercise	3 sets per exercise	2 sets per exercise
Workout 3	3 sets per exercise	2 sets per exercise	1 set per exercise

You will see this same structure for the number of sets per workout throughout every block of every cycle.

Chapter 4

Loading Within Training Cycles

You now know that each block is made up of three weeks. If we shift our focus to the length of a training cycle, it takes three blocks to make up a nine-week training cycle. This is true of the first two cycles, but the third and final cycle is an exception as it consists of only one block of three weeks.

Cycle 1

The first cycle is made up of the following three blocks:

Block 1 = 10 reps for three weeks

Block 2 = 7 reps for three weeks

Block 3 = 10 reps – 7 reps – 4 reps for three weeks

The notation for the reps in block three needs clarification. When doing block three, 10 reps per set are performed for the first workout of each week, 7 reps are performed for the second workout of each week, and 4 reps are performed for the third workout of each week. This will be done for three weeks.

Cycle 2

The second cycle is made up of the following three blocks

Block 1 = 8 reps for three weeks

Block 2 = 5 reps for three weeks

Block 3 = 8 reps - 5 reps – 2 reps for three weeks

Just to clarify block three, 8 reps per set are performed for the first workout of each week, 5 reps per set are performed for the second workout of each week, and 2 reps per set are performed for the third workout of each week. This will be done for three weeks.

Cycle 3

The third and final cycle is made up of just one block of three weeks as follows:

Block 1 = 5 reps – 3 reps – 1 rep

Just to be clear in regard to this three-week block, which is also a three-week cycle, 5 reps per set are performed for the first workout of each week, 3 reps per set are performed for the second workout of each week, and 1 rep per set is performed for the third workout of each week. This will be done for three weeks.

If you look closely at each of the three cycles, you will notice that the combination of reps in the first cycle consists of higher reps than the other cycles. As you proceed from cycle to cycle, the combination of reps grows increasingly lower with the lowest combination of reps occurring in the last cycle. This is because

you will be loading from cycle to cycle until you complete your third cycle with the maximum weight that you can lift for a single rep.

Chapter 5

The Entire 21-Week Loading Period

When you consider the summation of all the workouts that make up the three cycles that have been presented so far, they combine to make up a 21-week loading period. The sets, reps, and percentages for each workout of the 21-week loading period are presented on the next three pages with one cycle on each page:

Cycle 1 The 10 – 7 – 4 Cycle 9 Weeks		
Perform each exercise using the sets, reps, and percentages listed. The exercises performed should consist of a squatting exercise, a pressing exercise, and a pulling exercise.		
10 Rep Block		
Week 1 Workout 1: 5 x 10 62% Workout 2: 4 x 10 65% Workout 3: 3 x 10 67%	**Week 2** Workout 1: 4 x 10 65% Workout 2: 3 x 10 67% Workout 3: 2 x 10 70%	**Week 3** Workout 1: 3 x 10 67% Workout 2: 2 x 10 70% Workout 3: 1 x 10 72%
7 Rep Block		
Week 4 Workout 1: 5 x 7 72% Workout 2: 4 x 7 75% Workout 3: 3 x 7 77%	**Week 5** Workout 1: 4 x 7 75% Workout 2: 3 x 7 77% Workout 3: 2 x 7 80%	**Week 6** Workout 1: 3 x 7 77% Workout 2: 2 x 7 80% Workout 3: 1 x 7 82%
Mixed Block: 10 reps – 7 reps – 4 reps		
Week 7 Workout 1: 5 x 10 62% Workout 2: 4 x 7 72% Workout 3: 3 x 4 82%	**Week 8** Workout 1: 4 x 10 65% Workout 2: 3 x 7 75% Workout 3: 2 x 4 85%	**Week 9** Workout 1: 3 x 10 67% Workout 2: 2 x 7 77% Workout 3: 1 x 4 87%

Cycle 2 The 8 – 5 – 2 Cycle 9 Weeks		
8 Rep Block		
Perform each exercise using the sets, reps, and percentages listed. The exercises performed should consist of a squatting exercise, a pressing exercise, and a pulling exercise.		
Week 1 Workout 1: 5 x 8 67% Workout 2: 4 x 8 70% Workout 3: 3 x 8 72%	**Week 2** Workout 1: 4 x 8 70% Workout 2: 3 x 8 72% Workout 3: 2 x 8 75%	**Week 3** Workout 1: 3 x 8 72% Workout 2: 2 x 8 75% Workout 3: 1 x 8 77%
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Cycle 3 The 5 – 3 – 1 Cycle 3 Weeks		
Mixed Block: 5 reps – 3 reps – 1 rep		
Perform each exercise using the sets, reps, and percentages listed. The exercises performed should consist of a squatting exercise, a pressing exercise, and a pulling exercise.		
Week 1 Workout 1: 5 x 5 75% Workout 2: 4 x 3 82% Workout 3: 3 x 1 90%	**Week 2** Workout 1: 4 x 5 77% Workout 2: 3 x 3 85% Workout 3: 2 x 1 95%	**Week 3** Workout 1: 3 x 5 80% Workout 2: 2 x 3 87% Workout 3: 1 x 1 Max out

Chapter 6

Training State

One of the most important contributing factors to the success of any strength training program is to achieve the correct training state. The correct training state is based on performing an optimum amount of volume, intensity, and frequency based on your personal capacities. For this reason, the various aspects of training may need to be adjusted according to your capacities. The adjustments may pertain to training factors such as, the number of sets, the percentages, and the number of training sessions per week that are listed for your workouts in the previous chapter.

Understand that the program listed is a starting place to see how your body responds. After progressing through a week, a block, or a training cycle, it may be evident to you that one or more aspects of the program need to be adjusted. Even so, it is important that you also understand that there is an intentional variation in volume, intensity, and load throughout the program. If you don't understand the purpose and design of these variations, you may start to panic and rush to make adjustments before knowing how your body will respond when you reach the end of a cycle.

Purposeful Variations In Load and Intensity

For those who prefer low volume, you should understand that the number of sets is higher at the start of each week on purpose. The same is true of each training block. The sections of the workout that contain more sets are designed to stimulate your recovery ability to improve. An improvement in recovery will help you respond better when you progress towards heavier weights and less sets.

For those who prefer high volume, you should understand that the number of sets is purposely lower at the end of each week. The volume is also lower at the end of each training block on purpose. The lower number of sets is combined with heavier weights and more intensity. The increase in load and intensity is good for stimulating strength and size, but only if you fully recover after the workouts. The reason for the lower number of sets is that it will make it easier to recover when you increase the load and intensity.

How intensity Relates to the Number of Sets

Hopefully you understand that the greatest number of sets are performed with the least amount of weight, and the smallest number of sets are performed with the most amount of weight within each block. The information on the next page will provide you with the intended relationship between the number of sets and the percentages that determine the intensity of the sets as you proceed through each training block:

When performing 5 sets, leave 5 reps in the tank

When performing 4 sets, leave 4 reps in the tank

When performing 3 sets, leave 3 reps in the tank

When performing 2 sets, leave 2 reps in the tank

When performing 1 set, leave 1 rep in the tank

Reps In The Tank

If you are not familiar with the term, "reps in the tank," it simply refers to the number of reps you should still be able to perform when you stop a set. For example, if you leave 5 reps in the tank, it means that you are stopping 5 reps short of failure, and you would still be able to perform 5 more reps when you stop your set.

The number of reps in the tank refers specifically to the first set of each exercise, not necessarily the last set. For example, you might do 5 sets of 10 reps with 62% for an exercise. When doing this, you may leave 5 reps in the tank at the end of your first set. However, if you continue to repeat sets, you may grow fatigued to the point where you only have 3 reps left in the tank for your fifth set.

If The Training Seems Too Easy

Even though the cycle is designed to help you avoid overtraining, you may proceed through a block or a cycle and come to the conclusion that you need to increase the volume or the percentage of weight for some or all of the workouts. If you reach the end of a training block, and feel as though you have lost strength because the training was not challenging enough, you have three basic options that you can implement in order to make the workouts more challenging:

1. You can add more sets to the numbers listed for the workouts in chapter 5. Those of you who choose to add sets may only need to add one set, or you may benefit even more from adding two or three sets. I would be cautious about adding more than three sets to the numbers listed.

2. You can increase the percentages listed by 2% to 5% in order to make loads more challenging to lift.

3. You can decrease the rest time between sets to the point where you are challenged enough to stimulate a positive training effect.

Ideal Training Volume and Intensity

In my opinion, the ideal training volume and intensity will allow you to maintain a steady even rep pace for every rep of every set. Every set within a workout should look the same in terms of form, rep speed, and the ability to maintain the same steady even rep pace. You may reach the point where the last rep of your last set starts to slow down. This is ok, but your rep speed should not slow down until the very end of your last set. If you need to adjust your poundages or the amount of time that you rest between sets in order to achieve this ideal, feel free to do so.

Chapter 7

Ideal Training Frequency

The 4-way loading system that is outlined in this book consists of three workouts per week for each exercise. For some lifters, this is the ideal, but for others, a different training frequency would be the ideal. The ideal frequency will provide you with enough rest time between workouts to fully recover for your next workout. At the same time, it will provide enough workout days to stimulate an increase in strength. If you need to cut down to two training sessions per week for each exercise because it works better than three sessions per week, you should do so. The plan presented on the next three pages is for those who choose this option:

Cycle 1 The 10 – 7 – 4 Cycle 2 Workouts per Week For 9 Weeks		
Perform each exercise using the sets, reps, and percentages listed. The exercises performed should consist of a squatting exercise, a pressing exercise, and a pulling exercise.		
10 Rep Block		
Week 1 Workout 1: 5 x 10 62% Workout 2: 4 x 10 65%	**Week 2** Workout 1: 4 x 10 65% Workout 2: 3 x 10 67%	**Week 3** Workout 1: 2 x 10 70% Workout 2: 1 x 10 72%
7 Rep Block		
Week 4 Workout 1: 5 x 7 72% Workout 2: 4 x 7 75%	**Week 5** Workout 1: 4 x 7 75% Workout 2: 3 x 7 77%	**Week 6** Workout 1: 2 x 7 80% Workout 2: 1 x 7 82%
Mixed Block: 7 reps – 4 reps		
Week 7 Workout 1: 5 x 7 72% Workout 2: 4 x 4 82%	**Week 8** Workout 1: 4 x 7 75% Workout 2: 3 x 4 85%	**Week 9** Workout 1: 2 x 7 77% Workout 2: 1 x 4 87%

Cycle 2 The 8 – 5 – 2 Cycle 2 Workouts per Week For 9 Weeks		
8 Rep Block		
Perform each exercise using the sets, reps, and percentages listed. The exercises performed should consist of a squatting exercise, a pressing exercise, and a pulling exercise.		
Week 1 Workout 1: 5 x 8 67% Workout 2: 4 x 8 70%	**Week 2** Workout 1: 4 x 8 70% Workout 2: 3 x 8 72%	**Week 3** Workout 1: 2 x 8 75% Workout 2: 1 x 8 77%
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Cycle 3 The 5 – 3 – 1 Cycle 2 Workouts per Week For 3 Weeks		
Mixed Block: 5 reps – 1 rep		
Perform each exercise using the sets, reps, and percentages listed. The exercises performed should consist of a squatting exercise, a pressing exercise, and a pulling exercise.		
Week 1 Workout 1: 5 x 5 75% Workout 2: 3 x 1 90%	**Week 2** Workout 1: 4 x 5 77% Workout 2: 2 x 1 95%	**Week 3** Workout 1: 3 x 5 80% Workout 2: 1 x 1 Max out

Option: Recovery Workouts Once per Week

When considering recovery and training frequency, there are still more options. One of those options is to work out three times per week, but to always **make the second workout of each week a recovery workout**. Recovery workouts are only moderately hard and supply enough stimulation to keep you from going into a state of strength loss and atrophy that may occur if you were to only do two workouts per week and rest a full 96 hours between workouts. At the same time, the recovery workout for the second workout of the week is not so hard that it takes away from the third workout of the week, which is always the heaviest workout of the week.

A recovery workout can be done by performing 3 sets of 8 reps with 60% of your single rep max for each exercise. Once again, you would make this the second workout out of three workouts within each week of training.

High Frequency Training

Some of you may also respond exceptionally well to high frequency training. If you know this to be true about yourself, you can increase your frequency to train each exercise, four, five, or six times per week. You can do this by doing one or more of the workouts listed twice within the same week.

Chapter 8

The 4-Way Loading Challenge

4-Way loading is for those who enjoy increasing their weights from workout to workout and from week to week throughout a training cycle. It's also for those who prefer to gradually work their way up to a heavy single over several months.

Another thing that you should understand about the 4-way loading system is that it is intended to be flexible. In other words, you can adjust the length of the blocks and cycles according to your preference. For example, you can do two-week blocks and six-week cycles if it fits your training goals better. The rep scheme can also be adjusted. For example, you can substitute 12 reps for 10 reps, or you can substitute 8 reps for 7 reps. The idea is to use the 4-way loading strategy in conjunction with a frequency, cycle length, and rep scheme that fits your goals and proves to produce the best results.

My hope is that you will be able to implement the information presented in this book in a way that leads to a better training experience and more strength gains. 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

Precision Responsive Lifters

Quick Workouts For Quick Muscles

Ramp Up Your Strength

Rest-Pause Training

Self Adjusting Linear Periodization

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

4-Way Loading

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