

Laws of *physi*ques

***How the Weider Principles can
turn training into a science***

*By Jeff Everson, '92 NPC Masters Bodybuilding Champion,
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The Weider Training Principles are the building blocks of bodybuilding success. Sixty years ago Joe Weider saw the need for bodybuilders to have a common training language, and since then he has developed and labeled many training principles to direct bodybuilders of all levels toward their common goal of developing an awesome physique.

Whether you're a beginner, intermediate or advanced bodybuilder, these principles can help you build the amount of muscle you desire. Use them as tools to help you plan your training cycle, arrange your workouts and perform each exercise.

Beginners: Basic Training

"Bodybuilding is such a refined sport, you ought to look to the Weider Principles for guidance when you first start," says 1999 Ms. International Vickie Gates, who used them to help her transition from running track to lifting weights. The concepts that you can master during the first 6-9 months of training set the foundation that you'll continually build upon as you progress.

For beginning bodybuilders, understanding the **Set System Training Principle** is crucial in arranging their workout. Years ago, bodybuilders typically worked a bodypart with one set of about 12 reps for each exercise. Not coincidentally, growth was slow. The Set System Training

Principle suggests performing multiple sets of each exercise, therefore giving each muscle a more thorough workout for optimal growth. For beginners, the Weider System recommends 2-4 sets each of 1-4 exercises per bodypart (for instance, the bench press and dumbbell flye for chest).

As you grow stronger, follow the **Progressive-Overload Principle** and increase the amount of weight you use. If you always lifted the same amount of weight, your progress would plateau; to continue making gains, your muscles need to work harder in a progressive manner. During most of your training cycle, try to either increase your weights each session, do more reps or sets, or decrease your rest period between sets. Says Joe, "The overload concept underlies all physical training and is the solid base of the Weider System."

The **Isolation Training Principle** can be misunderstood to mean you'll attack only one muscle in an exercise. This is hardly possible, as *any* exercise you do will involve many muscles beyond the targeted one. What this principle really refers to is that certain exercises are better for a given bodypart. Though your triceps are used in the bench press, pressdowns are considered a better "isolation" exercise for this muscle than benches.

Every bodybuilder wants to continue making gains, but what's the best way to do so? "You should change your program constantly to make progress," says Larry Scott,

Years before a youthful Arnold Schwarzenegger and Frank Zane (third and second from right, respectively) went on to win a cumulative 10 Mr. Olympia titles, bodybuilders would gather to hear Joe speak on his theories of training. This impromptu gathering took place in the early 1970s in the hills above Los Angeles. Frank's wife Christine, at left, appears to be more interested in catching a few rays.





Six-time Mr. Olympia Dorian Yates is seen here using the Weider Forced Reps Principle with an assist from training partner Leroy Davis.

1965–66 Mr. Olympia. He's talking about the **Muscle-Confusion Training Principle**, which advises you to constantly vary something, anything, in your workout — number of sets, number of reps, exercise choice, order of exercises, even the length of your rest periods — to avoid your body getting in a rut and slowing down the growth process.

Vickie used this principle to overcome her weakest area — her legs. "The first day of leg training my foot stance might be close, and the next time I train legs I'll take a much wider foot stance. This way my muscles are hit at slightly different angles and I make sure that I'm not missing anything."

Intermediates: Time to Grow

Beginning principles do more than get you started; they form the fundamentals of all training routines. After nine months to a year of training, try a few intermediate-level principles on for size.

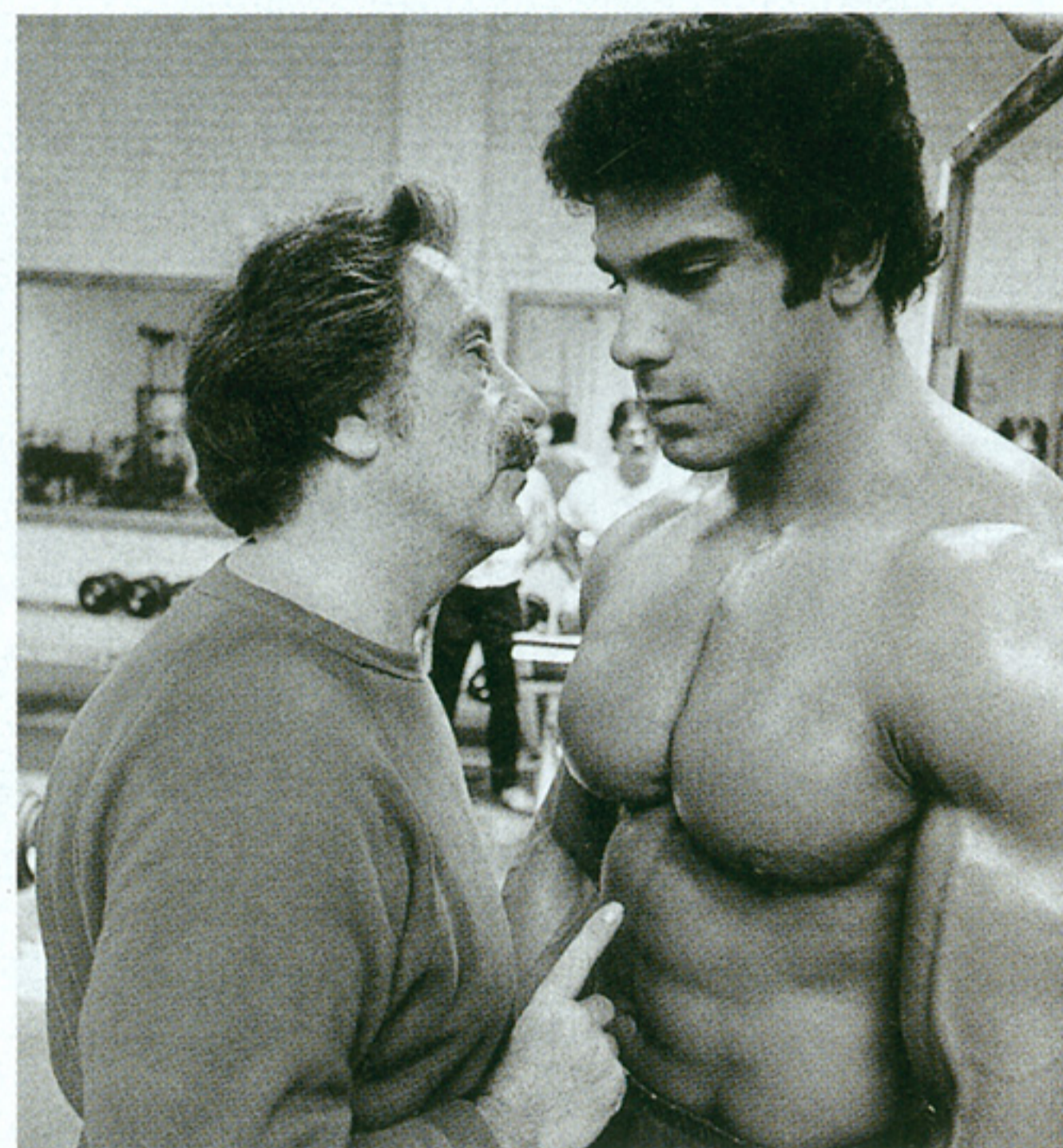
Joe chronicled how bodybuilders trained more intensely and grew bigger when they split their workouts instead of training their whole body in one session. The **Split-System Training Principle** divides your body so you can train individual muscle groups more completely and perform each workout with more intensity. When you work your chest, shoulders and triceps in one session, for example, you can focus more energy onto just those bodyparts, do more sets and push heavier weights. That means you'll grow faster!

Don't get discouraged if you hit a roadblock once in a while — everyone plateaus. One solution is the **Cycle Training Principle**, where you devote portions of your training year to specific goals for strength, mass or getting cut. This can help decrease your risk of injury and add variety to your routine, once again spurring progress.

Using the **Superset Training Principle** is another way many bodybuilders break through plateaus. One of the better-known Weider Principles, it suggests performing sets of

two opposing muscle-group exercises back to back. This principle can also aid muscle recovery. How? If you were to superset biceps curls and triceps pressdowns, your biceps will tend to recover better while you do the pressdowns because they're forced to relax as your tri's contract.

The **Compound Sets Principle**, a kissin' cousin to



Joe is forever working with the champions, giving them advice on the latest Weider Principles. Here he explains one to future two-time Mr. Universe Lou Ferrigno.

supersets, can pump a muscle group beyond belief when you do sets of two exercises for the same muscle back to back. When you train shoulders, for example, you might do a set of standing dumbbell presses followed by a set of lateral raises with no rest in between. Vickie uses this principle close to contests when she veers away from heavy weights. "I may do 30–40 leg extensions, then 30–40 plate squats."

To help prevent plateaus, try some of the following concepts in your workouts:

A base for strength and size, the **Pyramid Training Principle** incorporates a range of lighter to heavier weights in each exercise. Start light with higher reps, then gradually increase the weight in each successive set while lowering your reps. You could also reverse the procedure — moving from high weight and low reps to low weight and high reps — to get the most out of varying your repetitions and weights.

The **Holistic Training Principle** suggests using numerous types of training techniques (low and high reps, faster and slower speeds, and alternate exercises) to stimulate maximum muscle fibers. This is important because your muscles are composed of different types of fibers, and training in only one way won't stress all of them. Training holistically helps cover your bases.

Use the **Muscle-Priority Training Principle** to pump up a slow-growing muscle group. "Every bodybuilder should use priority training," says Larry. By hitting your weakest bodypart first in a workout or bodypart split, you can train it with more intensity because your energy level is higher.

The **Flushing Training Principle** is really just bodypart training — you train one bodypart with multiple exercises before you train another. Basically, your body sends a maximum of blood to that area to best stimulate growth.

Used most commonly by competitive bodybuilders because it enhances their ability to pose, the **Iso-Tension Training Principle** is all about muscle control. Lou Ferrigno, two-time Mr. Universe, holds a muscle at peak contraction for 3–6 seconds between sets because the constant isometric flexing allows for added muscle control, an important aspect during a posing routine.

Vickie finds using this principle while practicing posing absolutely key. "You need to hold those muscles as long as possible," she says. "You never know how many people you're going to be compared to. Usually, I'm sore after a competition."

Advanced: Serious Bodybuilding

Advanced principles are no cakewalk; use them sparingly and cautiously. **Double-** and **Triple-Split Training Principles**, where you train twice and three times a day, for example, are used by only a very few competitive bodybuilders. They keep their workouts short, train 1–2 bodyparts per session and do just a few heavy sets. Workouts may be brief and intense, but are performed multiple times a day.

Lou calls the **Tri-Sets Training Principle** grueling and warns that you must build an endurance for them. He frequently did tri-sets — performing three exercises for one muscle group linked in nonstop sequence — to train his legs and chest in pursuit of the '94 Masters Olympia. He likes the intensity because it helps him develop muscularity and muscle quality.

The **Giant Sets Training Principle** is another step up the ladder of intensity. Lou uses giant sets in the off-season, saying these four or more back-to-back exercises for one



Elite bodybuilders like 1998 Mr. Olympia Ronnie Coleman and 1999 Ms. International Vickie Gates use isolation movements as well as multijoint exercises to fully work their muscles.



Joe checks out two-time Mr. Olympia Larry Scott squeezing out a peak contraction at the top of a reverse preacher curl (sometimes called a reverse Scott curl).

Pause Training Principle. Here's what you do: Load the bar with a weight you can lift for 2–3 reps, rest 35–40 seconds, then try to squeeze out another 2–3 reps. Rest 40–60 seconds before you go at it again, for as many reps as you can handle. Give yourself 60–90 seconds of rest and hit it hard again. The completed set will have taken longer because of the extended rest periods, but you still accomplished one intense set of around eight reps. That's what I call intensity!

Using the **Speed Training Principle** breaks up the normal rhythm of your training. Exploding through the movement may selectively grow part of your fast-twitch muscle fiber complex, the fibers that contribute most to overall muscle size.

Unlike speed training, the **Continuous-Tension Training Principle** accommodates the theory that the amount of weight you can lift is much less with controlled exercise motion, yet because momentum is ruled out, you're forced to maintain maximum muscle tension. Since speed training and continuous tension can be equally productive, view them as complementary. You only end up with less effect if you train with just one of these principles.

The **Peak-Contraction Training Principle** fits in well with controlled exercise motion as a way to further maximize muscle tension. You can practice this by squeezing your contracted muscle isometrically at the finish of a motion, which will help you learn to control your muscles and develop faster.

Many bodybuilders are unfamiliar with the meaning of the **Eclectic Training Principle** but use it often. This is really a form of muscle confusion since advanced bodybuilders don't generally repeat the same set-rep-weight system con-

secutively. Construct each bodypart routine with some mass-building, multijoint movements and several single-joint exercises to help build an aesthetic physique.

How you decide to mix and match exercises, sets, reps and bodyparts falls right into the **Instinctive Training Principle**. Basically, you follow your own instinct in designing your training and, from day to day, you simply choose those principles that seem best, without being forced into a given training convention. "You need to do what works for you," says Larry. "If you know what works for you, it's easier for you to continue to develop instead of getting stuck in a plateau."

Advanced training means intensity, and we saved the most intense principles for last — **Forced Reps** and **Reverse-Gravity Training Principles**. With forced reps, you enlist the aid of a spotter as you start failing on a normal set to help you finish a couple of more reps with assistance through the sticking-point areas. Reverse-gravity training means resisting the downward motion of a very heavy weight, sometimes 100%–130% of your maximum single. It can cause a great deal of soreness and should be used judiciously.

Becoming a champion bodybuilder or reaching your maximum potential means using and understanding these training principles. You don't have to use them all, but understanding them means you have the option to use the best methods available, at the right times, to continually progress toward your fitness goals. **M&F**

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muscle group are “good for the heart, endurance and stamina, not to mention growth.”

The **Staggered Sets Training Principle** is a form of priority training reserved for smaller muscle groups like your calves, forearms and traps. Advanced bodybuilders might alternate sets for these smaller bodyparts while they train a major bodypart; for example, doing a couple of sets of donkey calf raises in between heavy sets of chest work.

You might see beginners in the gym cheat a weight up because they’re trying to remove stress. Advanced bodybuilders, however, use the **Cheating Training Principle** to increase stress, working beyond momentary muscle failure to recruit additional muscle to assist in overloading the prime mover. Basically, you could cheat out another rep or two after you’re too tired to perform strict reps.

Imagine exhausting your quads by doing leg extensions followed by a set of squats. This pre-exhausts your quads with a single-joint exercise, thus making the multijoint squat even more difficult. The name of this principle that combines a single-joint followed by a compound movement? You guessed it: the **Pre-Exhaustion Training Principle**.

After an exhaustion set, some bodybuilders push the pain barrier even further with the **Burns Training Principle**. Here you’d continue with a series of partial reps as long as your muscles can move the weight, even if it’s only a few inches!

The **Partial Reps Training Principle** allows you to lift

Between sets: Joe tested his training theories with bodybuilders including Manny Perry, far left, and Lou Ferrigno, far right, using their feedback to fine-tune his principles.

heavier weight using a shortened range of motion than if you were to perform the full-range movement, which develops the muscularity that assists that motion. Partial reps are best done in a power rack where you can do many exercises and use many pin settings. This principle helps you improve a weak area or overload the motion where you’re strong.

Another brutally advanced method is the **Descending Sets Training Principle**. After completing your reps in a maximum set, have two spotters quickly and evenly strip off an equal amount of weight from the bar. Continue to do reps until you fail, then again have them strip more weight off to allow you to complete more reps.

Exercise scientists believe that if you could train often at an absolute intensity and still not suffer overtraining or injuries, you’d develop quickly. This is the basis for the **Rest-**

Isolation exercises require absolutely strict form, as Joe demonstrates to Arnold.

