

# Training Bible

Every coach coaches differently and not every approach will be right for you. Below is a broad introduction to the training principles and methods that I adhere to as both a coach and an athlete. I don't present this as 'the gold standard' (and it might not be the best way for you), it is simply the approach with which I've seen the most success – both personally and with the athletes I coach.



## Training 'by feel'

I coach (and train myself) 'by feel' (rather than by pace or heart rate). If you aren't used to training by feel, it can take some time to get used to. However, I firmly believe this is the most reliable way of ensuring you are training the correct physiological system during each workout – whether it's an aerobic base run, a lactate threshold session, or an anaerobic interval set.

Other metrics of effort, such as pace and heart rate, are too highly influenced by external factors (such as weather, sleep, caffeine intake, illness, training status, time of day etc) that often cannot be controlled and, more importantly, change from day to day.

Say you train by pace. Running at 05:00/km might feel easy on Monday and you therefore perform the easy run in your schedule effectively (ie you trained your aerobic system). However, on Thursday 5:00/km might feel much harder (perhaps because you slept poorly the night before) and to maintain 5:00/km you end up performing the easy run in your schedule ineffectively (ie you worked too hard to maintain the pace and ended up training your anaerobic zone).

**The most reliable way to ensure you are training the correct system for each session (regardless of whether it is an aerobic, sub-threshold, or anaerobic workout), is to train by feel and ignore the pace or heart rate on your watch.** This might mean you run the easy run in your schedule on Monday at 05:00/km (a genuine RPE of 4) and the easy run in your schedule on Thursday at 05:30/km (still a genuine RPE of 4). That's FINE. The most important factor is that the 'feel' was consistent. Remember WHY you are training. The point of an easy run is to train the aerobic system for the set amount of time scheduled (the distance you cover and pace you maintain is ultimately irrelevant).

## Time vs distance

I also coach (and train myself) by time rather distance. For example, an easy run is more likely to be programmed as a 60 min easy run, rather than a 10km easy run. The reason for this, as with training 'by feel', is to increase training effectiveness and manage progression.

Say you train by distance. On Monday, you have a 10km easy run and it takes you 60 minutes to complete the session (at a genuine RPE of 4). The following week, you have a 12km easy run and it also takes you 60 minutes to complete the session (at a genuine RPE of 4). The RPE was consistent, which is GOOD, well done.

However, due to the multitude of external factors that can impact pace, you completed both the 10km and 12km sessions in 60 minutes, yet the 12km session was intended to be a progression from the 10km session. Therefore, both sessions have had the same training outcome – 60 minutes spent running in the aerobic zone (and therefore no progression).

**Training by time (eg a 60 minute easy run one week, followed by a 70 minute easy run the next week, ensures effective progression, regardless of how fast or far you run during each session** (which, if you are maintaining a genuine RPE, will vary somewhat). You may well run LESS distance during the 70 minute run compared to the 60 minute run. This would still be effective progression, as the time spent in that training zone increased.

*Note: there are a few exceptions to these two principles, for example when you are training for a specific time in an event (such as a marathon PB). During such training programs it may be necessary to perform some sessions at your target race PACE (rather than simply target race EFFORT), to ensure you become adapted to your target race pace and are covering sufficient distance at that pace.*



## Swapping sessions

Aside from the week or so prior to a race (where it might be necessary to complete training sessions on set days and/or in a specific order), the days on which sessions are set is NOT strict. Feel free to swap them around based on what works for your week and how you are feeling. **You can do this by simply dragging and dropping the sessions on the desktop version of Final Surge® or by changing the date in the mobile app.**

## 'Blank' days

'Blank' days which do not have any set training sessions are intended to be recovery days. However, this does not mean you HAVE to rest completely. **If you are feeling good and have the time, there is no maximum amount of recovery runs/cycles that can be completed – as long as (and this is VERY important), they are performed at a genuine recovery effort level (RPE 1-3).** To be clear, it is not necessary to do this – but if you feel like it, you can. Easy cycles especially are normally always OK.

## Scheduled rest days

The only exception to the above is when rest days are scheduled in your training program. **Scheduled rest days mean full rest (not even recovery running/cycling).** Try and stay off your feet as much as possible on these days. Scheduled rest days will typically be programmed in the week prior to (and possibly the week after) a big race or challenge.

## Easy/recovery weeks

The week after a big race or challenge will typically have a note in your training program highlighting this week as an easy/recovery week. I will set easy/recovery sessions. However, don't feel any pressure to complete the set sessions if you aren't feeling it. **The most important thing is to listen to your body during these weeks.** If you feel up to completing all the set sessions, great. If you feel like you need more rest, take more rest.

## Strides

I will often program strides after an easy run (for example, 60 min easy run + 6-8 strides). Strides (or striders/stride-outs/accelerations) are an important way of improving your running economy (which basically means reducing the amount of oxygen you require to maintain a set speed) by reinforcing efficient running form.

Strides involve increasing your pace GRADUALLY. **Starting from a standstill, build up from a jog to around 90% of your max effort, and then gradually slow to a stop. One stride should take around 20-30 seconds. Complete 4-6 strides and take at least 90 seconds walking in between strides to recover.**

When completing strides, exaggerate good running form – ease into it, then drive your arms, keep your head/eyes up, leg turnover and heel lift high. Running strides is NOT a workout so don't rush them (you get zero additional benefit by shortening the recovery period). Think of strides as a speed development workout. Strides are about making a habit of good running form and building comfort at high speeds.



# Hill sprints

Similarly to strides, I will often program hill sprints after an easy run (for example, 60 min easy run + 4-8 hill sprints). Like strides, short hill sprints are a great way of improving running economy but also have the added benefit of developing strength.

**Hill sprints involve sprinting uphill at 100% intensity for 4-8 repetitions lasting 8-15 seconds. The steeper the hill, the shorter the sprints.** Ease into each sprint, then drive your arms, keep your head/eyes up, leg turnover and heel lift high. The purpose of these short hill sprints is to make a habit of good running form whilst working hard. Each rep must have full recovery of 2 minutes or more of very easy jogging/walking. Hill sprints are a STRENGTH exercise, so your nervous system needs full recovery.

# Strength training

Strength work is an important aspect of any endurance training program. In recent years, the discourse on strength training has shifted and the predominant reason athletes are encouraged to do strength work is typically to reduce injury risk (strength training has replaced stretching in this regard).

Whilst great in principle (reducing injury risk is certainly important), this relatively new development has had the unintended consequence of framing strength training as the 'boring-but-necessary' aspect of a training program that is typically only completed when a niggle arises. What has largely been lost or forgotten is that reducing injury risk is only ONE benefit of strength training – and possibly not even the most important.

**If you are struggling to motivate yourself to do strength training, it might help to remember that the primary reason for doing strength training is that it makes you a better runner – just like that lactate threshold or interval workout you enjoy so much.**

Strength training improves your running economy by strengthening connective tissues and muscles, improving neuromuscular coordination, and encouraging stride efficiency. I recommend completing at least two strength workouts a week – even if it's just a few exercises for 20 minutes at lunch or doing a few calf raises every time you go upstairs. Building habits and doing little and often can make a big difference.

# Perceived exertion (RPE)

Most sessions in your training program will have a suggested RPE in the workout description (for example, Easy: Perceived Exertion (RPE) 1-5). If you haven't trained 'by feel' before, it can take a while to get used to. Over time, you will get better at reading your body and understanding your own personal indicators of an RPE 5 versus an RPE 7.

**The below scale offers guidance for getting started, but, ultimately, it is as simple as saying to yourself, "on a scale of 1-10, how hard do I feel like I'm working right now?"**

## Rating of Perceived Exertion (RPE Scale)

1-3	RECOVERY	Hardly any exertion, only slightly more than walking. You aren't training at this pace, just expediting recovery. Think of the Kenyan shuffle.
1-5	EASY	A pace you can maintain for hours. Easy to breathe and carry a conversation. Not pushing the pace at all.
4-6	MODERATE	Comfortably hard. Breathing heavy, but can hold a short conversation. Should never feel out of control or be in danger of 'tying up'.
6-7	LACTATE THRESHOLD	Hard but still under control. Breathing heavy, can only talk in short sentences. Typically at/around marathon effort.
7-8	TEMPO	Borderline uncomfortable. Short of breath. Hard, but not an all-out sprint and still under control. Typically at/around half marathon/10k effort.
9-10	MAX EFFORT	As hard as you can go, without compromising good form. Completely out of breath, can't talk. Difficult to maintain for more than a few minutes.