

# 6 Simple Steps to Building Beginner Workout Programs

The Focus System is a simple, straightforward 6-step system specifically designed to create effective workouts for beginner clients.



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# Overview

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# Programming for Beginner Clients

Every new client is different. They come from different backgrounds, have different challenges, and therefore have different needs.

As a trainer developing your clientele, the goal is to make your clients feel comfortable and safe with exercise as quick as possible. In addition, it's important as a trainer to stay consistent with your programming in order to establish your reputation.

A common problem for new and experienced trainers is that they don't know how to program for beginner clients. You have likely been working out for years and therefore may have a difficult time putting yourself in the client's shoes.

A "make or break" period exists with new clients where the trainer has to get them to buy-into their program quickly. Usually introductory packages are small and the trainer might only have 2-3 weeks to impress the client and entice them to commit.

The Focus System is a simple, straightforward system specifically designed to create effective workouts for beginner clients. With this program you will be able to cover all the bases and design a great program easily and quickly. By following the 6 steps below you will be able to program an effective beginner routine in less than 30 minutes.

# 6 Steps

## Step 1: Rep Range (The Great Decider)

In the Focus System rep range is the deciding factor. As soon as you have established your client's goals you should know what rep range they need to be working in. For example, if they want to train for power their rep range is 1-5, [muscle endurance](#) is 12-15, and [hypertrophy](#) is 6-10.

The rep range dictates the number of sets and exercises in a workout. If a client is training in the 1-5 rep range, their sets are going to be higher than in the 12-15 rep range.

To take this point one step farther, if the client is doing multiple sets in the 1-5 rep range they will be completing fewer sets over the course of the workout. Faster more dedicated/focused sets are more important when improving power. In the 12-15 reps range fewer sets per exercise will be involved, therefore more exercises will be included in the workout. Efficiency of movement is also less important when working muscular endurance.

There will be less of a focus on perfect form and neurological fatigue isn't as much of an issue as it is with the power workout.

Rep range will also dictate the type of exercise that you will include. For a workout where the exercises sit in the 1-5 reps range, you probably will not include biceps curls. You would opt for power-exercises; perhaps a deadlift or squat variation. Although you may need to perform power training on isolated muscle groups for certain sports, it's just not the norm for the average client.

Tempo to a degree is also determined by rep range. A power exercise may include a 1-0-1 (1s eccentric – 0s pause – 1s concentric). When trying to improve muscle endurance there are a number of different tempos that can be useful. Pausing under tension will increase the stress on the muscle and is a good way to push the client that extra 10%. The most common tempo that's used is the 3-0-1 for muscle gain during hypertrophy workouts (6-10 reps).

Lastly, you can easily determine what rest intervals are appropriate based on rep range. A power reps range of 1-5 reps will require 2-3 minutes to replenish the creatine phosphate system. Your goal is to train the client efficiently. If the client is fatigued the training will be counterproductive. Muscle endurance, on the other hand, requires much shorter rest intervals. The goal is to improve the client's

recovery so that's the system that you need to stress.

## Step 2: Primary Exercises

The primary exercises are the focus of the workout. They are what you expect the client to get gains from. Therefore progression is measured based on the client's performance on the primary exercises. I

If they're getting stronger at the front squat then watching for progression on the leg extension becomes a moot point. That having been said you should still track all the sets and reps of each workout.

To pick the primary exercises I use a combination of intuition and knowledge. I do an analysis of the client's body type and, in combination, with their goals and assessment decide on the MOST IMPORTANT exercises. These exercises are exclusively large multi-joint exercise and are usually some variation of the squat, deadlift, lunge, chin up, row, or chest press.

The reason for so much emphasis on the primary exercises in the Focus System is two-fold:

- 1. Beginner clients cannot get good at more than 2-4 exercises at one time.** Writing a workout containing 16-20 exercises that you want the client to get better at is not practical. The client will not learn the form effectively and won't build up the supporting structures to continually progress.
- 2. It's much easier to sell a client on 2 exercises than 20.**

Here's an example using the reps schemes described above:

In a power workout where the client would be working within the 1-5 reps range two primary exercises might be the sumo deadlift and bench press. In the 12-15 muscle endurance reps range two primary exercises might be the Goblet squat and alternating row.

## Step 3: Secondary Exercises

The secondary movements are where you can have the greatest flexibility and the most fun. These can be programmed as supersets or circuits. Although form is important, it is not necessary to be as picky as with the primary exercises. At this point in the workout the client will be mentally and physically tired since the primary exercises demand constant focus.

The exercise selection here has the biggest variance. Remember that your purpose

with secondary exercises is to support the primary and take the client one step closer to his or her goal. This is where you can include things like single joint movements, abdominal work (rotation, flexion, anti-rotation), and single-leg exercises.

In a power workout where the primary exercises are the sumo deadlift and bench press you might choose barbell glute bridges and dumbbell skull crushers as secondary exercises. For the muscle endurance workout the example primary exercises were the goblet squat and alternating row. The secondary exercises could be a single-leg squat and dumbbell cross-body hammer curl.

### **Step 4: Tertiary Exercises**

Tertiary exercises can be built into one of two different spots in the Focus System. They can either be used as active rest in between sets or after the secondary exercises if there is time left in the workout. Also, have some prehab exercises on hand ready to go if time allows.

When I originally designed the Focus System, the tertiary exercises were purely rehabilitative in nature. I've now expanded the term to include prehab. Some clients will need enough [rehabilitation](#) that prehab will have to wait. Rehab does not necessarily mean that the client has an injury; it could be an imbalance that needs to be addressed.

The unique aspect of the tertiary exercise is that it won't change depending on the type of workout. If the client needs rehab exercises or to fix an imbalance it doesn't matter whether they're training power or muscle endurance. Prehab exercises vary depending on the different stresses that primary exercises place on the body.

### **Step 5: Cardio**

I am not a big proponent of cardio. Like any aspect of fitness, it has a time and place but usually sufficient cardio can be programmed into a resistance training routine with appropriate attention to rest intervals. That said, steady state cardio is meditative and can be very beneficial for the mind. For a client with a stressful job unloading on the treadmill, bike or elliptical for 30 minutes at a medium pace can be the perfect medicine.

The cardio protocol that you prescribe for your client has to fall in line with their goals. Cardio can be counterproductive if improperly programmed. For example a

hypertrophy workout should not have much if any steady state cardio. You can be good at putting on muscle and cardio at the same time but you can't be great at both, something's gotta give!

A sample cardio protocol for a power program might be 1-2 days/week of HIIT (high intensity interval training). For muscle endurance training, try a combination of steady state running with hill or interval training.

## **Step 6: Dynamic Warm Up and Myofascial Release**

The dynamic warm up depends on the client's comfort and skill level in the gym and the nature of the workout. For example, a power workout will likely have more hip and shoulder mobility drills. In addition, since movement efficiency is of the utmost importance, include more [myofascial release](#).

The warm up for a muscle endurance workout will include more movement prep work and less individual dynamic stretches. In addition, you might opt to do the myofascial release at the end of the workout.

A beginner client with [low efficacy](#) will be reluctant to do a long, dynamic warm-up by without you there. If this is the case, perform the warm up with the client for as long as needed until he or she becomes more confident in the gym. I found that doing the warm up with my client during their initial anatomical adaptation phases was a good guideline.

If the client is more confident then they can handle a warm up with dynamic stretching and myofascial release. Go through the warm up once with them, provide them with a handout reviewing each exercise, and communicate your expectation that the full warm up be completed before each session so you can maximize your time together.

# The System in Action

Here is a sample workout that may be appropriate for an intermediate client with no injuries but bad posture due to a desk job. Their goal is fat loss and to improve core strength.

Please note that this program is not meant to teach you what exercises to include. It wasn't designed for a specific client. Rather it is meant to illustrate the Focus System. The following section breaks down the workout in order to showcase each of the 6 steps.

## Day 1 (full body push)

1. Squat (Primary) 4\*8-10 superset no money drill to help with external rotation (tertiary)
2. Bench Press (Primary) 4\*8-10 superset lat stretch (tertiary)
3. Speed interval 1.5min at 80-95%MHR
- 4a. [Tight Pushup](#) (secondary) 2\*15-20
- 4b. [Abs Plank - Fast Hands](#) (secondary) 2\*5 superset chest stretch (tertiary)
5. Speed interval 1.5min at 80-95%MHR
- 6a. [Dumbbell skull crushers](#) (secondary) 2\* 10-12
- 6b. [Single leg squats](#) (secondary) 2\*6-8
7. Scaption (tertiary) 2\*8-10

## Day 2 (full body pull)

1. Dead Lift (primary) 4\*8-10 superset hip stretches (tertiary)
2. Chin up (Primary) 4\*8-10 superset chest stretch (tertiary)
3. Speed interval 1.5min at 80-95%MHR
- 4a. [Glute thrust](#) 2\*6-8 (secondary)

4b. Side bridge with minor twist 2\*12-15 (secondary)

5. Speed interval 1.5min at 80-95%MHR

6a. 1 arm bent over row 2\*8-10 (secondary)

6b. [Glute ham raise](#) 2\*6-8 (secondary)

7. [Pallof press](#) 2\*25s holds

Cardio guidelines – 2x/week. One day perform a 30min job at 70-80%MHR. The second day perform 45s speed intervals at a 6:1 rest : work ratio.

Note: 4\*8-10 denotes 4 sets of 8-10 reps. If I have a ‘1.’ before the exercise then all sets are to be completed before moving onto the next exercise. If, for example, I have a 1a and 1b then the exercises are meant to be done in a superset.

## **The Workout Broken Down**

### **Step 1: Rep Range.**

The client is working throughout a variety of rep ranges. Since the primary goal is fat loss, the client needs to build up some muscle so have them working within hypertrophy ranges mostly. The workout shifts to becoming more metabolic when the client gets to the secondary exercises. The reps increase and speed intervals are placed throughout.

### **Step 2: Primary exercises.**

I wanted to make both days full body so split the workout into push and pull. In choosing the primary exercises I also wanted the rep range to be in the hypertrophy range so I chose large multi-joint exercises and not power movements. Since the client is intermediate they would be able to handle 4 primary exercises. The squat, bench press, chin up and dead lift are all done by themselves so the client can focus on performing these movements well.

### **Step 3: Secondary exercises.**

This is where the most variance takes place and you can be very creative. In choosing these exercises I wanted to stay true to the push/pull split and put a special focus on core strength. Lastly I included some exercises that will improve the client’s performance within the primary movements. The single leg squat is a good example as it increases knee, ankle, and hip stability.

### **Step 4: Tertiary exercises.**

I opted to include the tertiary exercises within the workout as opposed to doing them at the end. Reason being, this client is an intermediate so will have performed most of these movements before. I also want the workout to be metabolic in nature and the addition of active rest periods in between sets is an added benefit. For this client I would also have a list prepared of tertiary exercises to throw in the workout in an unorganized manner.

#### **Step 5: Cardio guidelines.**

Since I wanted the workout to be metabolic in nature I added sprint intervals throughout. In addition, I added two cardio days for the client to perform throughout the week. This is because the primary goal is fat loss.

#### **Step 6: Dynamic warm up.**

Again, the client is at the intermediate level so he would be comfortable performing the warm up by himself. I therefore would provide them with the dynamic warm up handout package and show them through it once. Beyond that, their job is to have the warm up completed before they see me.

# Avoid Overwhelming Your Client

Beginner clients often are overwhelmed by the whole experience of joining a fitness club and working with a trainer. By designing a complicated program, you make the experience even more overwhelming, and set the client up for frustration and failure.

*The key to the Focus System is to 'Focus' on 1-2 of the most important things in your client's program.*

Get them excited about the couple exercises that are specifically going to help them, make the workout relevant, and base your progression on the important aspects as they won't get better at everything.

No matter whom your clients are or what your own background is you have to grow your clients step by step to their goals. Follow The Focus System and you will have your bases covered. Make sure not to get caught up in trying to do too much.

# Resources Mentioned

I linked to a ton of stuff throughout this article. I hope that you keep it, print off a copy, and use it as a guide moving forward. To make it easier for you, I've listed all of the resources linked throughout below. Some are free, and others are paid. In full disclosure, I might get financial compensation if you purchase a paid resource through my link below. Assume that I get paid, receive gifts, pats on the back, or sexual favours in exchange for referring you to any of the links below.

## **Paid Resources Mentioned (Ebooks / Video-based Courses)**

**Post Rehab Essentials** - Dean Somerset ([theptdc.com/postrehab](http://theptdc.com/postrehab))

## **Free Resources Mentioned (Articles / Free Ebooks)**

**Top 10 Tips for Hypertrophy Programming - Dan Trink** ([theptdc.com/2012/03/top-10-personal-trainer-tips-for-hypertrophy-programming/](http://theptdc.com/2012/03/top-10-personal-trainer-tips-for-hypertrophy-programming/))

**Top 10 Tips for Metabolic / Fat loss Programming - Dan Trink** ([theptdc.com/2012/04/top-10-personal-trainer-tips-for-metabolicfat-loss-programming/](http://theptdc.com/2012/04/top-10-personal-trainer-tips-for-metabolicfat-loss-programming/))

**Self-Myofascial Release, Purpose, Methods and Techniques** - Mike Robertson (Mike's site is [robertsontrainingsystems.com](http://robertsontrainingsystems.com). This book is great for quick reference and for providing handouts for clients - ([theptdc.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/Self-Myofascial-Release-Purpose-Methods-and-Techniques.pdf](http://theptdc.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/Self-Myofascial-Release-Purpose-Methods-and-Techniques.pdf))

**Client Behavior Change (Understanding the Transtheoretical Model)** - Mark Young ([theptdc.com/2012/04/client-behavior-change-a-key-to-personal-trainer-success/](http://theptdc.com/2012/04/client-behavior-change-a-key-to-personal-trainer-success/))

**Abs Plank - Fast Hands** - Nick Tumminello ([youtu.be/bJxomm2idAI](http://youtu.be/bJxomm2idAI))

**Skull Crushers** - Dan Trink ([youtu.be/Fta448I3CI4](http://youtu.be/Fta448I3CI4))

**Tight Pushup** - Dean Somerset ([youtu.be/7ngnZDQ3gIg](http://youtu.be/7ngnZDQ3gIg))

**Single Leg Squats** - Neghar Fonooni ([youtu.be/xYD-jESwBUA](https://youtu.be/xYD-jESwBUA))

**Glute Thrust** - Bret Contreras ([youtu.be/hCm-70-9\\_XE](https://youtu.be/hCm-70-9_XE))

**Pallof Press** - Nick Tumminello ([youtu.be/0UeD7T0U1gY](https://youtu.be/0UeD7T0U1gY))

**Glute Ham Raise** - Ben Bruno ([youtu.be/MgnQoO72Vw8](https://youtu.be/MgnQoO72Vw8))