



# ACCELERATE YOUR TECHNICAL MASTERY

## WEEKLY

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NOVEMBER 2014

Athletes often ask me how to fix their squat, deadlift, or bench press, and TSA is actively involved in improving powerlifting athletes' technique on a regular basis. Not everyone is coached by someone looking over their shoulder either in person or online, and we all want to be better technically. If you don't, realize that if being a great powerlifter is a goal, and that becoming more efficient with movement patterns in the constituent lifts will help realize that goal. Bar paths will be more optimal, and more of your total musculature will go towards moving the weight. As powerlifters, all we are really trying to do is get very good at moving a strange (heavy) object a fixed distance. Here are seven tips to help accelerate your process of learning movement.

### Create a process

Watching high level sport of any kind is a learning experience in itself. The Olympics are a joy for this reason, because you get to see masters of their physical craft at work. For individual sports or skills this is even truer. Take a gold medalist archer and watch them use the same setup every single time they nock an arrow to a bow, or an indoor volleyball player jump serving from the end line. Every breath, foot, and hand placement are accounted for. We could lay 5 repetitions on top of each other with minimal variation in the elite of their sport. The same is true of powerlifting. Create a ritual when you approach the bar and set up to squat, bench press, and deadlift the same way every single time. You will find that even the character of the set takes on a different feel. It will become more routine and measured, and less prone to errors. If we expect to finish each repetition the same way, we must learn to start every repetition the same way.

### Approach each training session like practice

Some people use the language that they are going to the gym to "work out". If we are being specific, you really are training. For the powerlifter, your competitive environment is very similar to your practice environment (you train on a bench press, you compete on a bench press). Tennis players work out, because their practice is wholly separate from strength training. Powerlifters train, because our competition involves the same implements we use in training. Semantics aside, treating the very session as practice changes the sessions to be more goal oriented. What am I trying to accomplish in a given training session? Approaching things from this more academic perspective allows you to take the coach's eye from time to time, a perspective that is not afforded to a full degree if you are just working out. Each session is an opportunity to get better—an opportunity to improve SOME aspect of your lifting.



### Use video

Filming various work sets of your training can give you a third person coach's perspective on what you look like during the lift. This is obvious, but it can be an extremely good tool. In fact for the majority of powerlifting's history, actually watching someone perform the lift

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was the only way of providing meaningful corrections. Combine this with viewing past footage as a valuable way of showing your progress over time. Use video from different angles! Something that is clear to see from a side-on angle can be obscured from the back-to-front angle. You don't necessarily need a top of the line video camera because the quality isn't that important. What is important is seeing things like setup, foot, hand, and body placement, bar speed, changes in lifting mechanics, bar path, and knee and elbow tracking. Depending on the lifter's available time and disposition, reviewing the footage immediately after the set or at home the next day are both options. I count review of footage as part of practice, and it can be a valuable way to accelerate the process of learning an efficient squat.

### Give yourself measurable goals

So you've looked at some footage. Great! What next? Depending on the type of inefficiencies you're able to see, or your friends or a coach are able to see, you decide on a change that needs to be made and get back to training. This recursive process of train -> film -> review -> learn -> apply in training can happen as often as every session or as seldom as once per week, and even less for the experienced athlete. The key is to make measurable, achievable goals in small bite-sized chunks. In school, you weren't given the final exam on the first day because you weren't expected to know what you were about to learn. Plus, you were assigned homework, which is nothing more than small, bite-sized practice of a specific skill. Let's transfer that over to training. Maybe you notice in film or by feel that you are learning too far forward in the squat, but you also notice that your elbows are shooting up as soon as you come out of the hole. Start small by working on the elbows and a tight shelf and setup before addressing the global problem. Breaking things down piecemeal give you confidence when you can actually notice change, and gives you concrete goals to check off.

### Program frequent practices

All of this is great, but if you are only practicing once per week or less, you probably aren't taking full advantage of your time spent in the gym (if the goal is to be a powerlifter). In comparison, other sports practice much more frequently, and even high school level team sports practice on average 5 days per week until the competitive season begins. The case can be made quite easily that powerlifting is different, because an element of recovery must be considered that simply isn't there for tennis, or other sports that are high on skill and low on strength needs. Still, meaningful repetition three times a week is still a good idea even for the novice powerlifter. You need not go to failure every session or even approach the session with the goal of volume or hypertrophy. Practicing single repetitions aside from multi-sets once a week will help learn motor patterns.

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### Do Homework

Some of the best technique-based learning I ever did was watching other athletes who were great at what they did. In fact, some of the best learning I've ever done on ANY subject was by watching or listening to an expert on that subject. "Homework" in this case is nothing more than active watching of lifters you respect and whose technical mastery is superior to your own. By active, I mean looking for the small things and watching the athlete, and not the movement as a whole. What do you notice from the very start? Break the footage down

in your mind. If you end up achieving better technique than the person you are watching, congratulations! Go and find someone new and continue watching. One of the most valuable modes of learning is visual. We are lucky to be alive in a time where we don't need to be actually present to see a powerlifter compete or practice. We just access our computers and can re-watch the same clips as many times as needed. High level team sport athletes do this all the time...I think we should too.



### Give it time

Sometimes despite all the above tips, you still aren't satisfied with the way your bench press looks, for example. Give it time. Repetition in training can be one of the most positive factors to your progress in technical mastery. Maybe it takes 1000 repetitions, or maybe it takes 2000 repetitions. But there's a clear quality of motor efficiency in the lifters who have been lifting for powerlifting for a decade, and those who have been training for even longer. Set measurable goals and continue to work, just like you do on the strength side of the puzzle.

### About the Author

*Bryce Lewis is a competitive, drug-free, elite powerlifter in the 181, 198 and 204 pounds weight classes. He holds records in both the USA Powerlifting federation (USAPL) and American Powerlifting Association (APA), and strives to promote the comprehension and love of powerlifting training throughout the world. Through his success as an elite lifter, Bryce's dream is to pass on his knowledge and skills through The Strength Athlete (TSA) powerlifting coaching services online in addition to his popular [YouTube Channel](#) and [Facebook fan page](#). By these efforts, Bryce hopes to help raw, drug-free powerlifting gain more prominence and acceptance internationally.*

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