

Quality Control

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Over the past few years, the concept of training quality over quantity has become a mantra for endurance athletes. The definition of quality training however has been something of a riddle, leading to a belief that high intensity training is High quality training.

Quality training should be defined as “How well you execute the specific skills of training that allow you to develop the highest degree of proficiency in your chosen activity.” For example, if you are doing an endurance bike ride for training, several factors affect the quality of that workout. This includes things like cadence, pedaling skill, climbing, cornering and descending techniques and keeping your heart rate and or wattage in the ranges appropriate for that workout.

Intensity on the other hand is best described as the effort and or the type of metabolism or work output that is required to perform a specific training task. For example, you can go out and run intervals at 95% of your max heart rate for 3-4 minutes. The intensity and effort are both very high in this example. But if you did this with poor skill, I.e. you ran with a heavy heel strike, you ran with a excessive bounce or leap in your stride, you ran with excess trunk rotation, you did not breath well, etc. then you were training with poor quality and teaching yourself to work very hard to go slow.

On the other hand if you ran with quick, soft forefoot landings, your stride landed under your center of mass, your foot moved vertically, and you ran with a sense of ease while maintaining a fast pace, then you were training with high skill and high intensity, the result of this is a high quality training session teaching you to run fast with the least possible effort.

This concept would also hold true at all other training intensity intensities as well. **If you perform training with low skill you are learning to go slow!** On the other hand, if you performed a workout with good skill you would be training to go fast with very little relative effort.

What the examples above show is that you can train with a specific intensity, but poor quality and the result is relatively poor. However, if you train with a specific

intensity and high quality you develop results that are much closer to the optimal. By training quality first, you develop the ability to work with the least effort to go the quickest.

The following list describes several tips to help you improve maximally over the years ahead – by training with amazing quality!

1. Limit your workouts based on how well you are able to perform the skills required. If you are swimming and your stroke falls apart after 5' then stop, regroup and try again with renewed focus. If your stroke does not come together... then end your workout there. Any additional training is teaching you to swim poorly with lots of effort – it is NOT teaching you to swim quickly. The same concept holds true for running, cycling, cross-training, resistance training or any other form of conditioning you participate in. If you cannot perform a task with good skill, then take the time to learn that skill before trying to increase the effort, intensity, or distance that you perform the given activity at. Before you can go fast or long, you must be able to go with high quality!
2. Dedicate specific skill goals to all workouts. If you are doing a threshold interval on your bike the intensity goal is to stay just under your known or estimated anaerobic threshold or maximal lactate steady state (depending on your school of thought) for some prescribed amount of time. This goal should be limited however by a skill goal like maintaining 90+ RPM and a relaxed upper body during the interval. If you see you can no longer hold the skill goal then end the interval, even if the intensity and volume goals of the effort were not achieved. Again, if you cannot complete an effort with good skill then you are not ready to do so yet. BE PATIENT. Over time you will develop far past your friends who slog through sloppy intervals all the time – remember they are working hard to learn how to go slow while you are working smart to learn how to go fast!
3. When in doubt stop. A master's cyclist we work with is a PHENOMINAL racer. He has tremendous motivation, focus and a tremendous amount of patience. If one of his workouts seems off, and he doubts how he feels he stops, and soft pedals at a very low heart rate back home. He has learned that just working hard leads to fatigue and poor performance, he saves his energy and trains with tremendous skill on each outing. The result – tremendous performance enhancement. If you doubt how you feel, you probably need to rest, so rest. Workouts are like vegetables they are best served fresh!
4. Be deliberate. When you start the day at work, you have a general plan – set by you or your boss for what you must do that day. This gives you the “idea” of what, why and how you are trying to accomplish things. As a result you can go about them with a deliberate sense of purpose and do a great job on each – a quality job. If you had no purpose you could not be deliberate in your actions because you would be unclear on what you

were trying to do in the first place – thus your work would be poor quality. Training is the same. Know why you are doing each workout and how you hope to accomplish it. From there execute your workout with the best possible skill – a super workout and personal satisfaction will be the result!

5. Break up your training year by skill development and metabolic development. Specifically, as you design your general training plan for the year, dedicate segments of the plan to developing certain skills like leg/arm speed, swim glide or catch and running/cycling/swimming technique. Then merge in to the plan segments of the year focusing on metabolic variables like threshold, VO2 Max, economy etc. This not only enhances your physical response to training, it also keeps your mind fresh by increasing the number of controllable personal goals you can try to achieve throughout the season.

These five ideas can really help you to perform at your best. Remember that performance enhancement is the result of how well you do things along the path you take to develop. So don't do things hard, do things well!

To learn more about Jason, Will, and Tri-Hard Endurance Sports Coaching:
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