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My name is Matt Schifferle, and I've been training and working out in some form or another for the past twenty years. Out of those two decades, I would guess that I've probably made progress for maybe half of that time. That means I've spent well over ten years working hard without receiving any benefit or additional result for my efforts.

Thankfully those days are long gone. I can confidently say I've been making progress in some way consistently over the past five years. Much of the reason is a simple tool I call the Scoreboard Progression Log. It's nothing fancy, which is exactly why it works. It's a proven way to ensure every workout is as effective as possible.

Why you need to keep a workout log

I used to believe I didn't need to keep a workout log, that it couldn't possibly be that important. Now I know that to train without record keeping is akin to driving a car at night with the headlights turned off. Here are a few points to illustrate why this is the case:

#1 Results come from progression, not just hard work

When I was younger, I always thought the path to results was through pushing myself as hard as possible. After all, that was how I made my initial gains for the first few months whenever I tried a new exercise or program. If I wanted to make more progress, I simply double down and did more work.

While this plan is effective in the short term, it's a very poor long-term strategy. You can only invest so much time and energy before running out of resources. As I quickly discovered, I found myself exhausted and stressed over never-ending workouts and programs that would consume my time. Before too long, I was working my tail off and not making any progress.

It took a while to learn that results don't come just from working harder but from working *better* and improving my capacity to do an exercise. Even though I had been working very hard, I was still doing things the same way and not improving how I was exercising. Once I started to understand that progression was the root of success I was able to break through plateaus and make continuous progress even though I wasn't working any harder.

#2 The human mind can be highly unreliable

I was once told by a mentor to never trust my success to my memory. If something is truly important to you, you owe it to yourself to write it down. This is because the human brain, as incredible as it is, operates very much like a computer with limited storage and energy to retain information. When you write something down, you don't have to rely on the cognitive abilities of your mind to ensure that progress happens.

#3 Remembering your last workout is a big red flag

I used to believe that I didn't need to write anything down because I would always remember what I had done in my previous workout. While this may seem like a good thing, it's a very bad thing. The human mind best remembers things through repetition and consistency. The reason why I always remembered what I had done in my previous workout was that I had done the same thing in the workout before that and the workout before that. In other words, my workouts were the same, and nothing was changing or advancing.

Ideally, you want to progress in at least some small way from one workout to the next. If you advance something but fail to remember it you won't retain the information that will make you stronger, and you will keep regressing to where you have always been.

#4 Writing down and looking at your workout on paper causes you to reflect

All progress and results start in your mind. If your mind isn't thinking about what you are doing, it won't have any new information to send throughout your body, and therefore your body will never change.

The best way to ensure your mental signals progress is to simply reflect on your previous workout and consider what you should do differently in your next workout. It's a simple habit yet it can mean the difference between gaining 10 pounds of muscle or gaining nothing. Your workout log will give you a mental anchor point, something you can focus your thoughts on so they can be directed towards progressing your exercise instead of just going through the motions one week to the next.

I could continue to give you more reasons, but I think it's sufficient to say that your entire future and the results you want to rest upon your ability to progress, and progression is a very tricky thing to do without some sort of record-keeping system.

Problems with conventional workout logs

You may ask yourself if keeping a workout log is so darn important, then why don't most people do it regularly?

I believe the reason most people is keeping a workout log is a tedious habit to keep. It means you have to constantly interrupt your workout to fill in little boxes with a pen as you are out of breath and sweating all over the paper.

It's not just keeping a workout log that's difficult but also reading the log can be a bit of a pain in the neck as well. I can't think of many things I'd rather do less than flip through pages of spreadsheets while trying to decipher it all like some sort of secret code. I also didn't like having to always remember to keep a notebook on hand or to remember to go through it at least once a week to understand what I needed to do to progress. These are the primary reasons I didn't keep a workout log for many years. It was these challenges, combined with the understanding of how important a workout log can be that led me to create the Scoreboard Progression Log.

The Scoreboard Progression Log combines the benefits of keeping a log without the tedious recordkeeping or reading found with many book-style logs. It doesn't involve writing down everything you do nor do you even need multiple pages to carry around. All you need is a single sheet of paper or a whiteboard up on the wall. You can even keep a single screen of notes on a smartphone or tablet.

How the scoreboard progression log works

The progression log is simply a single sheet of paper with the exercises you perform written on the left. Underneath each exercise, you write down the details of how you do the exercise, including technique, weight, or equipment used. To the right of that, all you do is record your personal best performance of that technique.

Pull-ups

w/ 50# assist 10 10 8

Squats

Goblet with 30# KB 20 20 15

Push-ups

Close hands 12 12 12

Leg raises

15 14 14

In this example I'm doing pull-ups on an assistance machine with 50 pounds of assistance, and I'm getting two sets of 10 and one set of 8. The squats are done goblet style with a 30-pound kettlebell and I'm getting two sets of 20 reps and 15 reps on the third set. I finish the workout with close-hand push-ups for 3 sets of 12 and a few sets of leg raises.

Setting up for circuits or supersets

I keep exercises bunched together if I'm doing them in a circuit and ones with a space between are done individually.

Push-ups

Gymnastics rings 15 15 15

Rows

Gymnastics rings 12 12 12

Lunges

BW length of basketball court 1t 1t 1t

Jump squats

10 at each end of the court.

In this example, I'm super setting push-ups and rows on a set of gymnastics rings for 3 sets. After that, I combine lunges and jump squats on a basketball court.

Tracking technical progress

Most of your progress won't come from doing more reps or lifting more weight, but rather how you technically improve an exercise. This is especially the case with Progressive Calisthenics. It's easy to account for this in the Scoreboard. Under each exercise I put any technical considerations I need to keep in mind which are marked with a - or * as you can see in this example:

Push ups

Gymnastics rings 15 15 15

- Keep shoulders down and back

Rows

Gymnastics rings 12 12 12

Lunges

BW length of basketball court 1t 1t 1t

- Maintain tension in glutes at the bottom of each step

Jump squats

10 at each end of the court.

- Keep a smooth rhythm and land softly on the balls of the feet.

Use one sheet or multiple sheets for various workouts

Usually I just have one sheet for all of my workouts, but some folks like to make a separate log for each individual workout with maybe one for leg day, one for push day, and so on.

Push day

Dips

Gymnastics rings 12 12 10

Push-ups

3-minute test 34

Triceps extensions

On floor 13 13 14

Handstands

Holding for 20s 15s 14s

Pull day

Rows

3-minute test 43

- Keep legs straight and hamstrings tight

Pull-ups

5 5 4

Strap curls

12 12 12

- Keep elbows turned in and forearms tense

Rear fly

10 10 10

Front lever

Holding for 10 count

This is also a great way to track workouts in a periodization format. You can have an individual scoreboard for each microphase of your training and keep them together for each macrophase.

What about change over time?

One of the benefits of keeping multiple sheets is you can see a change in performance over time. Personally, I've always come from the idea that it's not so much about where I've been but where I'm going sort of mindset. Even so, I know it can be helpful to record when you've made a change or made some progress. In this case, I just put the date for the latest change.

Push-ups

Gymnastics rings 15 15 15

- Keep shoulders down and back 1/12/16

Rows

Gymnastics rings 2/9/15 12 12 12

Lunges

BW length of basketball court 1t 1t 1t

- Maintain tension in glutes at the bottom of each step

Jump squats

10 at each end of the court. 12/23/15

- Keep a smooth rhythm and land softly on the balls of the feet.

Building a workout menu

Some folks like to do something different each workout. This is one of the reasons why they might shy away from keeping a log because a log usually requires following a strict routine.

The Scoreboard is the perfect solution because it allows you to record multiple exercises and variations at the same time. This gives you a sort of workout menu where you can pick and choose something different from each category to create new workouts. This gives you both the freedom to keep changing things up, yet you'll still have enough structure to ensure progression.

Push-ups

As many as possible in 3 minutes 37

Close 12 13 14

Wide 15 15 15

Rings 17 10 10

Pull-ups

18 17 17

W/ 20# 10 9 9

- Touch chest to hands

3 minutes 23

Squats

Single leg 8 8 5 each leg

Jumping 20 20

Bulgarian squats 20 DBs 10/ side 10 10

With all of these examples, the only time you make a change is if you make a progression. So if you have 3 sets of pull-ups (12 10 10) written down, but you do (11 10 9) in your next workout, you wouldn't change anything. However, if you do (12 11 10) then you would simply change the middle number to reflect your new level of performance.

Resetting your scores.

Sometimes you might make a progressive change in your technique which will greatly change how much work you can do. For example, let's say you can do 3 sets of 15 pull-ups.

Pull-ups

15 15 15

You're making progress, but one weekend you attend a pull-up seminar and learn you're only coming halfway down with each rep. When you use a full range of motion, you suddenly find even 10 pull-ups to be a big challenge. Now your previous numbers are greatly inflated from your new advanced technique. Rather than keeping your old numbers, I recommend resetting your pullup numbers to reflect your new technique. This way you won't spend a lot of time chasing your old performance, which doesn't relate well to your new technique.

Pull-ups 10 9 7 - Use full ROM at bottom of each rep

Avoid excessive entries in your scoreboard

Be careful not to include too many exercises and variations in each section. Adding too many options can quickly bloat your scoreboard. I recommend maintaining only a handful of basic exercises that you find most productive for your training goals.

For example, you may have a dozen push-up variations in your log, but you may only focus on two or three exercises. If that's the case, delete some of the ones you rarely practice, so you stay focused on the ones that are the most effective for you. You can still play around with the other variations for fun and variety, but there's no need to log exercises you rarely practice.

You can also delete entries for exercises you rarely change. Single-joint exercises, like lateral raises or biceps curls, are common examples of exercises that may stay fairly static for long periods of time. It's much more common to make adjustments to basic compound exercises, like pull-ups and squats. Such exercises are typically more technical as well so you may need to make more notes about technique.

I will sometimes log an exercise initially, just to remind myself that it's part of my program. I might write something like "suspension biceps curls 8-12 reps" at the bottom of the pull chain section of the log so I don't forget about it. I'll then delete it once I feel confident that I know it's a finishing move for my back workout so it's not taking up too much space at attention.

Lastly, don't be afraid to delete easier exercises and variations that you are no longer practicing. If you haven't been doing knee push-ups in a while, go ahead and erase that exercise from your log. You generally want just to record the primary exercises you're

using to keep challenging your muscles. You don't need to include easier variations you use for warm-ups or drop sets.

Keeping a digital scoreboard

Smartphone apps like simple note-taking programs work great for creating your scoreboard. I use a basic Google Docs word file. The Google doc. Allows gives you access to your scoreboard on any device connected to the internet. It also logs changes so you can check your past updates if you want to go back and see how much progress you've made.

The screenshot shows a Google Docs interface. The main document content is a workout log with the following sections:

- Goals**
Strength and mobility.
- Considerations**
- Warm up**
Scap rows pull-up
Cat cow
- Push**
Push-ups 5 5 5
Strap push ups 12 12
 - start hard
 - Bar 1) 9-9-9
- Pike push ups 2) 9-10 10 10
- Triceps. Shoulder Flexion
- Pull**
Rows 48
 - 45 degree banda

The right sidebar shows the 'Version history' for the document. It lists several versions:

- YESTERDAY
 - ▶ November 1, 7:57 AM (Current version, by Matt Schifferle)
- THURSDAY
 - ▶ October 27, 7:57 AM (by Matt Schifferle)
- OCTOBER
 - ▶ October 20, 12:53 PM (highlighted, by Matt Schifferle)
 - ▶ October 6, 7:51 AM (by Matt Schifferle)
 - ▶ October 4, 7:51 AM (by Matt Schifferle)
- SEPTEMBER

At the bottom of the sidebar, there is a checked box labeled 'Show changes'.

Use whatever platform you like. The key is to use something you have easy access to while training, and preferably something you do view and change at a moments notice.

Just as with working out, the important thing is to keep your workout log simple and easy to use. Complexity and redundancy can quickly waste your time and energy. You don't have to stick exclusively to the way I have mine set up. Be creative and make any changes you want to make it work for you.

If you have any questions or concerns feel free to contact me at RedDeltaProoject@gmail.com.

Be Fit & Live Free,

-Matt Schifferle