

Marathon Tempo

There are a lot of different definitions for tempo runs. For marathon training, a tempo run is a run at goal marathon pace.

There is not a lot to adjust for most marathoners. For most people I would continue to build from 5 miles to 10 miles at pace for their progression. However, there are a few tweaks that could be made for certain populations.

Under 30 miles/week:

Introduce tempo's early in the segment.

Start with 3 miles and build to 4 miles after a few weeks. From there, continue with normal progression of 5-10 miles of tempo.

High Mileage: 80+ miles/week

With you folks, you can consider starting at 6 mile tempos and progressing to 10 mile tempos, especially if your training block is in the 12-14 weeks range.

There is the possibility of running a longer tempo run, say 11-12 miles. However, I would not do them in consecutive weeks like the other tempo run distances. These are something that can be done once every few weeks. I don't prescribe a ton of these because of the time factor. Many people are already barely squeezing in a 10 mile tempo (plus warm up/and cool down). One option is to do a longer tempo in place of a Sunday run. It can be on a weekend when you aren't doing a true long run. This then makes your Thursday and open day. I would do a medium long run in this case. Something in the range of 14 miles (at least 90 minutes) and then do your long tempo on Saturday or Sunday.

At this mileage, you can also consider doing a cutdown. This is best suited early in a training block when just starting to do some harder workouts and/or later in a segment if you are truly fatigued but still need a solid workout to get in. For instance, the Hanson's-Brooks Distance Project do a 10 mile cutdown. I'll give you the guys' version because I know the paces off the top of my head. Here's what the mile splits look like in a traditional cutdown: 6:00, 6:00, 5:50, 5:50, 5:40, 5:30, 5:20, 5:10, 5:00, 4:50 (Sometimes we'll stay at 5:00). From a pace standpoint, we are starting at about 40-50 seconds slower than marathon pace and getting down to about half marathon pace with these runs. I do like these workouts because they start out pretty easy, and then it sneaks up on you and all of a sudden it's hard the last few miles. This is a great representation of the marathon. These can be 6-10 miles in length. The end pace should always be about the same, but the beginning pace can become faster as the length of the cutdown shortens.

Implementing the cutdown is key. I like these as a first workout back from a running break. They are also good to do as a last workout before a race (say a tune up race during marathon training), and if you are really on the verge of going over that training edge, but don't want complete rest.

The tempo fartlek: This something that I have only implanted recently, but it is great for a couple of different running groups- those who are terrible at running marathon pace tempos and those who struggle with wrapping their head around their marathon pace.

So, instead of a traditional tempo run, start with something like 20x1 minute at your goal marathon pace with 30 seconds to 1 minute jog in between. With a 1-2 mile warm up and then an additional 1-2 mile cool down, you have a nice little run with some intensity. Each week, increase the time, but leave the recovery the same. Here's a sample progression:

Week 1	20x1 min w/ 1 min jog
Week 2	15x2 min w/ 1 min jog
Week 3	10x3 min w/ 1 min jog
Week 4	8x4 min w/ 1 min jog
Week 5	6x5 min w/ 1 min jog
Week 6	5x6 min w/ 1 min jog
Week 7	4x8 min w/ 1 min jog
Week 8	3x10 min w/ 1 min jog

If you are doing a marathon and think this is what you would like to try first, then start ASAP, even if it is before you are actually training for your marathon. The goal later is to be running full traditional marathon tempo runs.

If you still have trouble and need to break up the runs, then consider these variations:

Weeks 1-2	5x1 mile (@ goal MP) with 2 minute jog
Weeks 3-4	3x2 mile (@ goal MP) with 2 minute jog
Weeks 4-5	2x3 miles (@ goal MP) with 2 minute jog
Weeks 5-6	2x4 miles (@ goal MP) with 2 minute jog
Weeks 7-8	2x5 miles (@ goal MP) with 2 minute jog

Don't pay too much attention to how the weeks are numbered. You may do the first 8 weeks of your training using the first chart and then follow a modified structure of the second chart. As a coach, I'd like to see you be running longer tempos without a break during the last 4-6 weeks of your training block. That may mean doing some of the first column before they even begin training for their goal marathon just so that they can get used to running marathon pace.

High Mileage Runners:

For this group, I am referring to those at 80 plus miles per week. I have looked over a lot of the higher level plans of legendary coaches like Joe Vigil, Jack Daniels, and Renato Canova. All three incorporate runs at marathon pace (they don't call them tempos) up to 18-20 miles. That's a huge run at marathon pace. Granted, these higher numbers are for their elite runners, but there should be a bridge to those runners who are putting in 80-110 miles per week. I don't see why they shouldn't engage in some runs that are 12-16 miles at goal marathon pace.

Sample Progression:

Week	Tempo
Week 10	10-12 mile tempo
Week 11	10-12 mile tempo
Week 12	12-14 tempo OR Tempo during week and a fast finish long run.
Week 13	14-16 miles @ pace. 20-22 miles total (depending on mileage and warm up and cool down) Should be a continual run. For most people, this would take the place of a long run
Week 14	10 mile tempo
Week 15	6 mile tempo OR a 2x3 or 2x4 @ pace early in week
Week 16	RACE

With our program we already spend a lot of time doing work at goal marathon pace, so I feel like some of these things are optional. You may be better off by simply adjusting your long runs to incorporate more marathon pace work, rather than trying to force more marathon pace work during the week. This is especially true if you aren't looking to increase your mileage, just break up your traditional routine.