

Hanson's Coaching Services: Understanding Basic Training Periodization Terminology

The purpose of this topic is to make sure all runners understand the idea of periodization and its importance to your own training. This information applies to any training you do, even if it's something that you design yourself.

Let's start with the word periodization. It is safe to say that many runners have read this word in magazines and training books, but never fully understood what it meant. Periodization: The breakup of a set amount of training weeks (or months) that is divided into phases. These phases are then broken up into cycles. So, periodization encompasses other components over time, but the end result is an attempt to reach a singular goal- this could be a time or a competition. A shorter time frame may be a training segment for a single marathon. Let's say Boston. Your time dedicated to the Boston Marathon may be from December to mid-April. This is a period of time that will encompass your training for that single race. A larger time frame may be as long as years. This is the case with an Olympic level athlete. Everything they do between Olympic cycles (different from the cycles we will talk about) is geared towards that one competition. So, they will obviously compete and train throughout that 4 years, but everything they are doing is a periodization geared towards making them better for that point in time in the future.

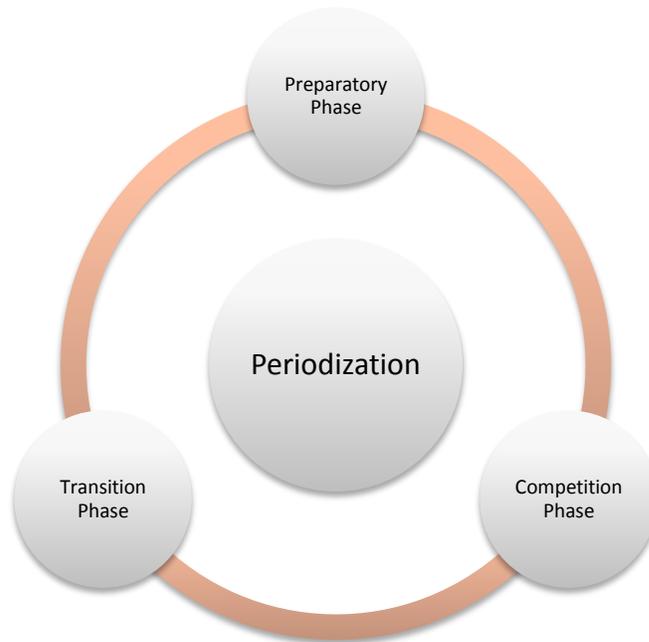
Ok, so hopefully I haven't confused you too much. The periodization is simply breaking up the larger block of time that will be divided up into smaller and smaller chunks, or phases. There are three basic phases of preparation in periodization. These are the aerobic phase (or we could call the preparatory phase), the competition phase, and the transitional phases. You may read of others in magazines and books, but they essentially cover the same grounds of training philosophy.

As mentioned, the first phase is the preparatory phase. In a nutshell, this phase is preparing you for the next phase, the competition phase. This phase will be the longest phase. It will be the phase where the majority of the aerobic development is taking place. So in a marathon, this phase would encompass a runner getting to their peak mileage, doing their speed/strength workouts, and building the length of their tempo runs and long runs. All of this leads to the next phase- the competition phase.

The competition phase is simply that. Using our marathon example, this would mean, well one competition. But it also includes the time that the runner is tapering. In a shorter race distance segment, such as, 5k or 10k summer road racing, this phase may be 6 weeks long and include 4-6 competitions. The phase is spent being race sharp and rested, all while trying to capitalize from the gains made during the preparatory phase.

The Third phase is the transition phase. You may think of this as overlapping. This phase represents winding down/recovering from the competition phase and then the building back up to the preparatory phase. It consists of recovering first, which can mean total time off to light jogging. From there, the runner builds back mileage first and incorporates their ancillary training (weights, drills, stretching, etc).

After several weeks of recovering then rebuilding, the runner is then set to begin the cycle over, starting at the preparatory phase.

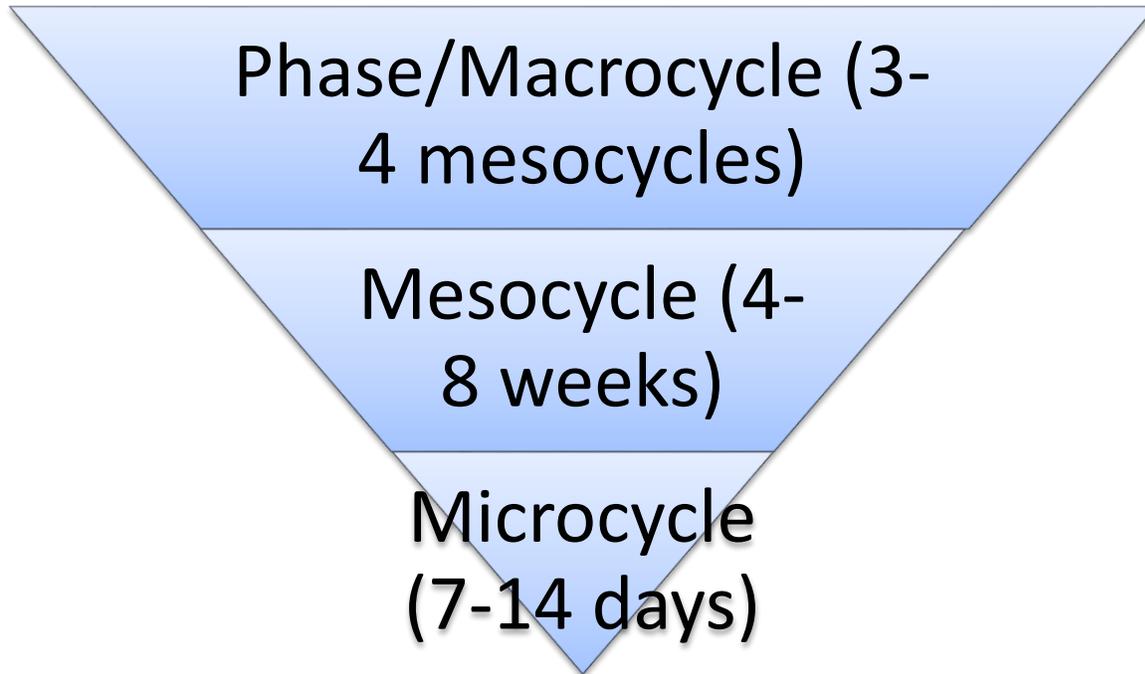


Training phases can then be broken down to terms called cycles. This may get a little confusing as the cycles are intertwined with the phases. To start, we will discuss the three cycles- the macrocycle, the mesocycle, and the microcycle.

The macro cycle will potentially be the most confusing because it is essentially the time of one phase of training. This could represent the entire preparatory phase of training. From a time standpoint, a macro cycle can be 12-24 weeks in length. Or, it can be described as two or three mesocycles.

A mesocycle is a training block of 4-8 weeks. The importance here is that it allows a coach to carve out a set block of time dedicated to focus on one or two training items. In the case of the transition phase, it may be one mesocycle of recovery and one mesocycle of rebuilding. During the Preparatory phase it may mean a mesocycle of speed work followed by a mesocycle of threshold (strength) work. Within the mesocycles are smaller blocks, called microcycles.

A microcycle is typically 7 days in length, but depending on the situation, can be 10 to 14 days. For instance, the Hanson's Brooks DP works on a 10 day microcycle. Within 10 days, we typically do a speed or strength (depending on the mesocycle) a tempo type workout, followed with a long run every 10th day.



What is the practicality of this information?

When I look at a lot of training books, they are geared towards elite athletes or high school/college kids where Fall is cross country and spring is track. However, for many of us, we have the opportunity to run somewhere all year round and this could throw off traditional training build-ups. Knowing this terminology and understanding it allows you to build your own training, regardless of the time of year.

Also, something I tend to see a fair amount is marathon runners tend to train for marathon after marathon. Sometimes, they are training for their next marathon before they have even competed in the original! I say marathoners because that's who I work with on a regular basis, but the same can be said for a number of groups. High school athletes, college athletes, and short race competitors all tend to do it. They are continually bouncing from segment to segment doing the same thing and then wonder why performance stagnates or even decreases. If you know how to block your training off and, more importantly, no what kind of time frames you are trying to fit races into, then you can see if you are truly achieving training balance. It is this balance that will allow us to develop, regardless of event.

Some keys to remember:

- 1) The more experienced you are, the less time you need to allow for a training phase. For example, a beginner marathon runner may need 24 weeks to really prepare well for the race. Meanwhile, a runner looking to complete their 10th marathon may only need 12 weeks.
- 2) In addition to experience, the volume of training is important in blocking off segments/phases. For example, that same beginner may need the 24 weeks to maximize physiological adaptations

because they are running have the weekly mileage that an experienced marathoner may be running.

- 3) It takes several weeks of training at a given level to adapt to that level. Traditionally, 4-6 weeks at a certain level ensures training adaptations.
- 4) A certain type of workout should be completed once every 1-2 weeks to ensure workout variety. For example, if you run two speed workouts a week, you would be better suited to trade one of those in for a strength style workout.
- 5) The shorter the race distance, the shorter the segment. While marathon buildups may require 24 weeks, a 5k build up would require half of that time. The higher intensities associated with shorter races stress the body more than larger volumes of lower intensity.

This is the very basic of terms and understanding. Within these phases and cycles there is much more detail to add, but we will add these at a later date.