

Westside Barbell Template

Working With the Standard Template

By Jim Wendler

For www.EliteFTS.com

The Standard Template

There is a great story from Dave about how the Standard Template originated. I've heard it 435 different times and it never gets old. But that's because Dave signs my checks and I have to nod and laugh whenever he says anything. All kidding aside, the Standard Template was really first introduced in Dave's article, The Periodization Bible, Part I and is gone over extensively in The Periodization Bible, Part II. This was a two part series that made things easier for me and really broke things down. Remember, that I was in your shoes not too long ago, so I understand your frustration with some of this stuff. This is probably the most used template that people follow. Here is the general breakdown of the Standard Template. For many of you this is review, so bear with me.

Sunday – Dynamic Effort Bench

Dynamic Bench Press

Triceps

Shoulders

Lats/Upper Back

Monday – Max Effort Squat/DL

Max Effort Exercise

Hamstrings

Low Back

Abs

Wednesday – Max Effort Bench Press

Max Effort Exercise

Triceps

Shoulders

Lats/Upper Back

Friday – Dynamic Squat/DL

Dynamic Squat

Hamstrings

Low Back

Abs

Review of the Standard Template

2 days devoted to the bench press

2 days devoted to the squat/deadlift

2 days devoted to dynamic training

2 days devoted to max effort training

4 days devoted to repetition training

Now let's review some of the training parameters within this template. For the sake of simplicity, I'm going to leave out chains and bands. Everything is going to be done with straight weight so there will be no confusion about percentages. Plus, I am going to leave out stance, grip changes, rest periods, etc. In reality, most of this stuff is inconsequential once you grasp the big picture.

Bench Press Parameters for the Standard Template (dynamic, max effort and repetition)

Dynamic bench press – 8 sets of 3 repetitions; all sets done are done with 55% of raw 1RM. Rest periods are approximately 60 seconds, but have never really seen the purpose of this, personally. The whole goal of speed day is to move the bar quickly on the concentric. If you need to take an extra minute to accomplish the goal of the day, then by all means, do so. Also, don't get too hung up on changing your grips. The only reason why I changed my grip on this day was to keep track of the number of sets I was doing. Again, remember why you are doing what you are doing.

Max effort bench press – this includes a variety of exercises, but the most used are the floor press, 2 board press, 3 board press, incline press and close grip bench press. On max effort bench press day, you pick one of these exercises and work to a 1RM. Most will switch to a different exercise every 1-2 weeks and simply try to break their record. On this day, based on your 1RM for THAT day, you will try to do 3 lifts at or above 90%. You can take as much rest as you want, but I would probably say around 3-5 minutes between your heaviest sets.

Triceps – one day is devoted to high intensity/low volume triceps work, the other is devoted to low intensity/high volume triceps. For example, high intensity triceps training would consist of 4 or 5 board presses or rack lockouts. The low intensity training will be geared to triceps extensions and pushdowns. On what day to put each of these is entirely up to you. In my experience, I've always had good results

putting the high intensity day on dynamic bench day.

Shoulders – this is similar to the triceps in that there is a high intensity and low intensity day. The high intensity day is technically not high intensity, but high stress. In this category, I would put dumbbell bench press, dumbbell incline presses, military presses (with dumbbells or a straight bar) and dumbbell floor presses. In the low stress category, front raises, side raises and rear raises are good choices. Again, you can choose which day to put them on, but I liked putting the high stress shoulder training on dynamic bench day.

Lats/Upper back – Both days are devoted to lats and upper back and both are done with low intensity, high volume. The way that I worked this is that on Sunday, I would do lat work (usually a row or a pull-up) and no upper back work. On Wednesday, I would do another lat workout (but with a different exercise) and my low stress shoulder work would consist of a rear raise, face pull or a seated dumbbell power clean. So essentially, on the low stress shoulder day, I would kill two birds with one stone: an upper back exercise with a low stress shoulder movement. I did this because I never did front raises or side raises and felt that I got enough stimulation from my other work. It's not gospel, but it's something to think about.

Squat and Deadlift Parameters for the Standard Template

Dynamic Squat – All sets done on a parallel box. A three week wave is used using the following sets and reps.

Week 1 – 10x2 @ 50%

Week 2 – 10x2 @ 55%

Week 3 – 10x2 @ 60%

Upon completion of the 3rd week, you simply start the wave over again. All %'s are based on your best squat. Let's disregard equipment at this point and say it's based on your best 1RM of your box squat wearing whatever you usually wear on this day. Again, refer to my commentary on dynamic bench training regarding rest periods. This is not conditioning, this is speed work. Save your conditioning for another time.

Max Effort Squat and Deadlift – Similar to the max effort bench press, one exercise is used per week and worked up to a 1RM. Because most people have eliminated good mornings as a max effort exercise, I will choose the following for your exercises. I understand that many do not have these bars that I list, but this is the list, nonetheless:

Safety squat bar squat

Cambered bar squat

Manta Ray squat

(All squats are done on a low (1-2" below parallel), parallel or high (1-2" above parallel) box. As you can tell, there is a great many variations with these three exercises.

Rack deadlifts (or pin pulls)

Deadlifts while standing on elevated platform

Reverse band deadlifts

Again, you want to hit around 3 lifts at or above 90% of your 1RM for that day. Most people switch exercises every week or every 2 weeks. Try to break your PR from your previous effort. To make things easier, simply switch between a squat movement and a deadlift movement. Rest 3-5 minutes between your heaviest sets.

Hamstrings – now here is where things get tricky. Unlike the shoulders/triceps routine of high intensity/low intensity, many people are weak at such exercises as the glute ham raise that they simply need to do the exercise and not worry so much about sets/reps. If you don't fall into this category, you can do bodyweight glute ham raises on one day, and on the other day, you can add a band or a plate for resistance.

Low Back – Again, we cannot really isolate the lower back without hitting the glutes and hamstrings. But you can pick from exercises such as back raises, 45 degree back raises, Reverse Hyperextensions, pull-throughs and good mornings. Depending on how you do some of these exercises (i.e. with a great amount of intensity) you can use ONE of these for your hamstring and low back exercise. For example, good mornings can be done for both. If you were to pick reverse hyperextensions or pull-throughs, then you can get away with doing an extra hamstring exercise. Some people can train their lower back twice a week, others cannot. A good way to do this is to pick one "easy" exercise (R.H., pull-throughs, un-weighted back raises or band good mornings) on one day and pick a heavier exercise on the second lower body training day.

Abdominals – These are usually trained heavy twice a week in the standard template. Some good exercises to choose from weighted sit ups, Roman Chair sit-ups, stability ball, hanging leg raises, side bends. This is not very complicated but you just need to do them; that's usually the hardest part.

So let's go over the pro's and con's of the standard template:

Pro's of the Standard Template:

Variation: Because you are doing a variety of exercises on max effort day, it helps keep things fresh and keeps you motivated. Plus most people have never done board presses, floor presses or box squats before trying the standard template, so there are a lot of new exercises being utilized.

Record Breaking – You are doing two max effort days a week, so you have the ability to break a lot of personal records. This can keep motivation high and give you tangible results NOW. This is one of the best things about this template.

Easy: I never thought I would say this but if you actually think about it, the standard template is pretty easy to follow IF YOU THINK ABOUT IT. You have one slow and heavy day and one fast and light day for

the squat and bench press. After each of those days, you train the muscles that involve those lifts. You try to be fast on one day, try to lift heavy on the other day and get huge afterward.

Combo of Max Effort, Dynamic Effort and Repetition Training: If done correctly, this combo is incredible. You can get fast, big and strong. These are three qualities that most people really want.

Flexibility with Supplemental/Accessory lifts – If you are doing the correct loading on max effort and dynamic day, then you can really play around with the volume with your training on these lifts. Let me explain: With the dynamic training, you are almost always operating within 50-60% and no matter what max effort exercise you choose, you are still operating around 90-100%. Now your volume can be raised and lowered by your assistance lifts. This can give you a lot of room to play around with and allow you to pick and choose exercises and volume based on how you feel that day.

Con's of the Standard Template:

Variation: Now stay with me on this one. Training for a big squat, bench and deadlift is not easy. But if you don't have good form on these three lifts, then things can start to go down hill. You can counter me and say, "Your form is trained on dynamic day." And to you I respond, "Fool! It's easy to lift correctly with light weight." While a safety squat bar can help increase your squat and deadlift, it won't teach you correct form. This is because the variation of the bar will throw your form off. Then you throw this nugget at me, "Well, I will work up on dynamic day to 90%" and to you I respond, "Are you now doing two max effort workouts a week?" Remember that if you are going to throw in a new wrinkle, then you are going to have to smooth something else out. You can't just add without taking away. (And this will be discussed in a future article).

Record Breaking: Now I've got two of the same things for pro and con. While record breaking is a good thing, it can also lead to a mentality of "testing" versus "training". Too many people try to break a record and will not fall within the 3-5 lifts at or above 90% of their max. All of their focus is devoted to breaking a PR rather than training to get stronger.

Too Heavy on Dynamic – I would say that the vast majority of questions about the squat revolve around dynamic squat day. Now if you take a step back and look, the PURPOSE of dynamic day (and again, I fall victim to trying to make things too simple) is to basically move the weight from point A to point B as fast as possible. Now for the bench, that is to move the bar from your chest to lockout; in the squat (or box squat) that is to move from off the box to standing. So now that we've established that, the problem that I've seen is that most people, when you add up the band tension and bar weight (and factor in that they are basing the percentages on a full-meet squat with equipment and they are doing an un suited box squat (different lifts!)): they are actually not even close to doing a dynamic workout. This is not so much a con of the program, but a con of the interpretation of the program. This wouldn't be a horrible thing if the max effort work and supplemental work was cut back, but 99% of the time, it's not. This was really driven home a couple of weeks ago in a conversation with Mark McLaughlin. To quote Mark, "The reason I think people sometimes bash DE work is because they do not execute it properly."

For the Standard Template to work properly here is a list of things that must be done:

All dynamic work must be as DYNAMIC. Focus on speed, not weight. If you are slow, then you are missing the purpose of this day. If the bar % is not exactly 55% or whatever, don't worry. Because you are doing a standard max effort day, I would rather have you focus on erring on the side of too light. Remember that bench shirts can skew percentages quite a bit, so if you are going to use %'s as guidelines, use your raw bench press as a guide.

Max effort work must fall within 3-5 lifts at or above 90% of that day. If you go below this, you are not getting the benefit of max effort training. If you go above this, then you are going to compromise other areas of your training.

Because you need form work on the main lifts, it would be advisable to work up on dynamic effort day. When you do this, the max effort workout must be tailored as such. For example, if you were going to work up on Sunday and hit 3 lifts at or above 90% on the bench press, the max effort workout on Wednesday would consist of accessory and supplemental work only. But you need to do the appropriate amount of max training on DE day. So instead of doing 8x3 on dynamic day, you can cut that to 5 sets and start working up. There is no set guideline for the amount of sets, but 5 seems about right. Now if you are going to work up on dynamic squat day, cut out the Monday max effort work PRIOR to that session. So that would be on Monday before the Friday squatting session. The Monday after the Friday session (I'm starting to get confused now) you can still do max effort work, but you may want to cut some of the assistance work. You don't have to, but it may help.

So when do you do all of this? For the bench training, it's a bit easier. This is because you don't have to pre-plan it. If you are feeling unusually strong on Sunday, then let it out and see what happens. A good estimate would be to try to do this every 3rd workout. For squatting, it may require a little more work and would stick to the every 3rd workout guideline. But (you knew it was coming) if you do feel a bug up your ass to go heavy on dynamic squat day, even if it wasn't planned, then the Monday workout after should be nothing but assistance and supplemental work. Just make sure that your heavy is "heavy". If you are going to do it, then commit and do it.

In regards to picking supplemental and accessory work – to make things simple:

Choose one high intensity/low volume triceps (lockout) movement per week.

Choose one low intensity/high volume triceps movement per week; remember this – if you are doing a lot of dumbbell work (which is essentially a close grip movement) you may not need a lot of volume on this exercise.

Choose one high stress shoulder movement per week.

Choose one low stress shoulder movement per week. Remember my example in the beginning of the article – I used this movement as an upper back exercise on my max effort bench press day.

Choose two lat movements a week; preferably one horizontal row and one vertical pull.

Choose one high stress low back/hamstring movement per week: good mornings, Romanian deadlifts, weighted back raises, weighted 45 degree back raises, glute ham raises with added resistance (band or weight plate).

Choose one low stress low back/hamstring movement per week: band good mornings, Reverse Hyperextensions, body weight back raises and 45 degree back raises.

Choose two abdominal exercises per week.

This is not in the template, but I would also choose some kind of quad movement per week. You can do it on either day, but I would probably pick dynamic effort squat day. Or you can do it the scientific way; flip a coin.