


Iron Rich, Time Poor

By [Marsh-P](#) (@discord.1971)

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Accompanying program spreadsheet:

 [Iron Rich, Time Poor](#)

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Principles of the program

This is a two-days-a-week, hybrid strength/hypertrophy program for those with little time to lift and recover. Sessions should last no more than 45 minutes.

Example users would be busy parents, shift workers or students nearing exams. The program won't be a great option for those limited to lifting two days a week but with ample time in the gym on lifting days; they can get more variety and work by lifting for 60 minutes or more.

The time-saving features of the program are:

- Sets across¹ for the main lifts. So we're not messing with plates and arithmetic between work sets.
- Low variety of assistance exercises. So we're not searching, "What comes after the bench press this session?"
- Avoid big setup changes in a session, like putting squat shoes on after deadlifting, or setting up a bench after overhead pressing.
- Stay at the same station, platform or rack in a commercial gym.
- Superset lifts where possible, without violating the principles above.

The program will necessarily be limited in some ways. In the ideal interplay of efficiency, efficacy, variety and balance, we can pick just two. Well, two and a half. We'll be effective, efficient and somewhat balanced. But we're only exposed to the big movements once a week. Rest periods are going to be limited to 60-90 seconds, etc.

If you want to add specific conditioning work - and can make time for it - *Tactical Barbell II: Conditioning* by K. Black is a good resource.

Abbreviations

In what follows, exercise names are shortened in some tables.

SQ - squat

FSQ - front squat

DL - deadlift

RDL - romanian deadlift

SGDL - snatch grip deadlift

OHP - strict barbell overhead press (not a push-press)

BP - bench press

CGBP - close grip bench press

¹ Sets-across = the same weight for all working sets.

The program(me)²

There's an [accompanying spreadsheet](#) to plug in your numbers.

The warmup

Revisit this when you've read the program, because the 5-minute warmup is the place to cram in anything you're desperate to do that's not mentioned below. You need to get limbered up and break a gentle sweat. If you want to foam-roll something, or swing a kettlebell, or hang-clean an empty bar, or whatever, get it in here. Don't go longer than 5 minutes total.

Each main lift should get a sensible 2-3 warmup sets before going heavy for the day.

Main lifts

Table 1: main exercises, sets and reps

Example day	Main exercise	Sets x reps
Mon	Strict press (OHP)	3x5, 3x8-12
Thu	Deadlift (DL)	3x5
Mon	Bench press (BP)	3x5, 3x8-12
Thu	Squat (SQ)	3x5
Mon	Strict press (OHP)	3x3, 3x8-12
Thu	Deadlift (DL)	3x3
Mon	Bench press (BP)	3x3, 3x8-12
Thu	Squat (SQ)	3x3
Mon	Strict press (OHP)	3x1, 3x8-12
Thu	Deadlift (DL)	3x1
Mon	Bench press (BP)	3x1, 3x8-12
Thu	Squat (SQ)	3x1

Completing each rep range - fives, threes, singles - takes 2 weeks.

² I've tried to get used to the ubiquitous use of the U.S spelling in lifting. I can't always manage it.

Squat and deadlift are followed by lighter variants for the backoff/hypertrophy work - see "Assistance", below.

Note that 3x1 (3 sets of 1 rep each) should not feel like 3 maximum singles. Well, not until many weeks have passed, then it'll be time for a break and a reset.

Main lift exercise selection

It's okay to replace any of the main exercises above, or the assistance exercises below, with a reasonable alternative. For example the bench press could be an incline bench or a floor press. The deadlift could be a trap bar lift. The squat could be SSB squat, etc. But keep to the principles that make the lifting sessions brief. Don't alternate exercises week to week. Don't follow a main exercise with an unrelated assistance exercise that requires a different setup.

Starting weights

We start light (Jim Wendler stresses this in his books and I've found it to be wise). To begin, set the one-rep weights to your 5rm or even slightly less. Subtract 10% of that for the 3 reps week, and 20% for the 5 reps week, and 30% for the backoff sets (8-12 reps). Round as needed for your plates.

Example:

Suppose my bench max is 110kg

- My 5RM or 85% is approx. 94kg (3x1)
- 94kg x 90% is approx. 85kg (3x3)
- 94kg x 80% is 75kg (3x5)
- 94kg x 70% is 66kg (3x8-12)

I set starting weights to 3x5@75kg, 3x3@85kg, 3x1@95kg, 3x8-10@65kg

Progression

Each rep range (fives, threes, singles) progresses independently. This important concept is borrowed from Andy Baker, author of *Strength and Mass After 40*.

When?

So for example, when you can get all reps in the deadlift 3x5 session, you add weight the next time you deadlift 3x5. But if you don't make all reps in the 3x3 session, you repeat the weight the next time you deadlift 3x3.

For the 3x8-12 backoff sets, add weight when one set reaches 12 reps and all sets are 8+ reps.

How much?

For the DL and SQ, add 5kg. For the OHP and BP, add 2.5kg

Remember, we add weight only to the specific rep range where you got all reps. As noted above.

Assistance

Here we can make some choices to add interest or strengthen weak points in strength or physique, without breaking our principles for brevity.

Table 2: assistance exercises, sets and reps

Example day	Main exercise	Assistance 1 (3x8-12)	Assistance 2+3 (3x8-12)
Mon	OHP 3x5	OHP	Barbell tricep overhead ext Curl
Thu	DL 3x5	DL variant	Shrugs Barbell row
Mon	BP 3x5	BP	BP assist - see below Curl
Thu	SQ 3x5	FSQ	Calfs Abs and core
Mon	OHP 3x3	OHP	Barbell tricep overhead ext Curl
Thu	DL 3x3	DL variant	Shrugs Barbell row
Mon	BP 3x3	BP	BP assist - see below Curl
Thu	SQ 3x3	FSQ	Calfs Abs and core
Mon	OHP 3x1	OHP	Barbell tricep overhead ext Curl

Thu	DL 3x1	DL variant	Shrugs Barbell row
Mon	BP 3x1	BP	BP assist - see below Curl
Thu	SQ 3x1	FSQ	Calfs Abs and core

Note the final two exercises are superset, and can even be in a giant set with assistance 1 if you like.

Assistance explained

You're unlikely to know your 1RM in these movements and trying to test it would be stupid. But the movements are small enough that you can spend the first session of each movement feeling out a rough 3x8 weight to put in the spreadsheet.

The criteria for adding load to these movements is as above: add weight when one set reaches 12 reps and all sets are 8+ reps. Add 5kg to shrugs, calfs and rows, 2.5kg to triceps, bench work and curls.

For "**deadlift variant**", pick a deadlift variant to meet your needs, and commit to it for several weeks. My suggestions are: if weak off the floor, 2"/5cm deficit deadlift; if weak locking out the hips and knees, romanian deadlift (RDL); if weak standing tall through the upper back, snatch-grip deadlift (SGDL).

Don't be afraid to use straps for any and all pulling work. The idea here is to work your body posterior. If you really want/need to build grip then it's fine to go without straps and even to use fat-grips for lighter sets.

Perform the **front squat** any way you like. Zombie style, California style or with a safety bar.

Perform whatever **curl** you can do at the station where you OHP or BP. Either the same barbell used in the overhead tricep extension, or a loaded EZ bar or dumbbells placed at your feet.

Here's a time-saving tip for all future programs: the **shrug** and **standing barbell calf raises** can be thrown in part way through unloading the bar from deadlift and squat variations, respectively. Do them as 20 reps, or rest-pause style.

The **barbell row** can be ultra-strict like a Pendlay row, or with plenty of momentum like the deadlift row, or anything in between. Just don't say you'll do a strict row then allow it to deteriorate over the weeks as the weight increases. And don't for the love of all that's holy call your barbell row a Pendlay row if it's not. For the reality of the Pendlay row see YouTube

where there's a video of Glenn Pendlay demonstrating the (real, actual) Pendlay row with Max Aita. For the deadlift-row look for an explanation by Cailer Woolam.

For “**BP assist**” pick one of the following to meet your needs and commit to it for several weeks: close grip (CGBP), rolling dumbbell tricep extension, or push-ups (press-ups). Progress push-ups with a plate on your back or by raising your feet.

Abs and core can be important, or it can be nothing-work. If you have a weakness, for example wobbliness in the press, address it properly here with loaded side-planks etc. But if you're thinking of chucking in some sit-up because you feel you should, you're likely getting enough core work in the big lifts. Stop and go home - we're striving for brevity.

De-loading, taking a break

You should be able to go a loooooong time without a deload on this program. It's as brief as can be, and if you're really short of time you're likely to miss some sessions too.

When you miss a session, just continue with the planned session next time. This means planned lifting days will drift in and out of synch with the tables above. Sometimes you'll OHP and deadlift in a week, sometimes you'll DL then BP in a week. It doesn't matter.

When you must deload, you'll know it. It's a grinding fatigue that never goes away, loss of appetite for training (and sometimes for food), and lifts stagnate entirely. Just take a week and a half off, reset the program with your new maxes, then begin again.

You want to specialise a lagging lift (no)

This isn't the program for it. You'd have to repeat one day, like the OHP, and remove another, like the BP. Then to compensate for the loss of a movement you'd take the BP assistance and put it after the OHP. And suddenly you have a different program that's not doing what this one is supposed to - see the principles at the top of the booklet.