

A man with a beard is looking down at a computer screen in a dimly lit room. The background is dark, and the man's face is partially illuminated by the screen's light. The overall mood is focused and professional.

OPEX

HOW TO PROGRAM
**FUNCTIONAL
BODYBUILDING
WORKOUTS**

INTRODUCTION

Functional bodybuilding has taken the fitness world by storm—and rightfully so.

If you or your clients want to look good, feel great, and increase long-term health, then functional bodybuilding may be a great training solution.

However, it's not quite as simple as mixing Power Cleans with Bicep Curls. Designing functional bodybuilding workouts that get results requires understanding key principles of bodybuilding, energy system training, and functional resistance training.

In this guide, you'll learn the most important principles of functional bodybuilding, and see how to apply them with a detailed client avatar, sample program designs, and accompanying video.

WHAT IS FUNCTIONAL BODYBUILDING?

Functional Bodybuilding, or FBB for short, is **an approach to training that prioritizes quality of movement and appropriate contractions over intensity**. By applying bodybuilding principles to functional resistance training, FBB builds a great base of support, without compromising aesthetics, aerobic base, or the individual's goals.

This style of training can be effective for anyone looking to train for health and function, ranging from beginners to advanced trainees. Because FBB training is designed around an individual's function, capabilities, and goals—and does not encourage overreaching—it is supportive of health and longevity.

PRINCIPLES OF FUNCTIONAL BODYBUILDING

FBB may be an exciting and novel way to train, but to get the best results you must follow tried and tested exercise principles.

BODYBUILDING PRINCIPLES

At the heart of FBB program design are bodybuilding principles. Bodybuilders have spent decades practicing and refining the best methods for hypertrophy, that is, increasing muscle mass. This includes how to manipulate reps, sets, tempo, and rest.

REPETITIONS

Reps are the number of times an exercise is completed within a working set.

Reps, when multiplied by tempo, determine the time under tension for any given exercise. Time under tension (TUT) refers to the amount of time that a muscle is under strain during a working set. **For hypertrophy, it is best practice to keep TUT around 40 seconds.**

There is an inverse relationship between reps and intensity (load). When intensity is increased, reps should either decrease or remain static. When intensity is decreased, reps should increase.

When selecting reps, consider that high(er) reps provide a muscle endurance, motor control, or hypertrophy dose-response. Conversely, low(er) reps provide an absolute strength dose-response. While hypertrophy can be achieved through lower reps and higher sets, for example, 5 reps x 10 sets, this approach is more appropriate for advanced trainees.

SETS

There is a direct relationship between reps and sets.

If reps are higher, program fewer sets. For example, 12-15 reps x 2 sets.

If reps are lower, program more sets. For example, 3-4 reps x 6 sets.

When progressing from session to session, sets may be increased in a linear periodization model. For example, Week 1: 8 reps x 3 sets. Week 2: 8 reps x 4 sets.

As mentioned above, if the goal is hypertrophy, keep the time under tension of each set around 40 seconds.

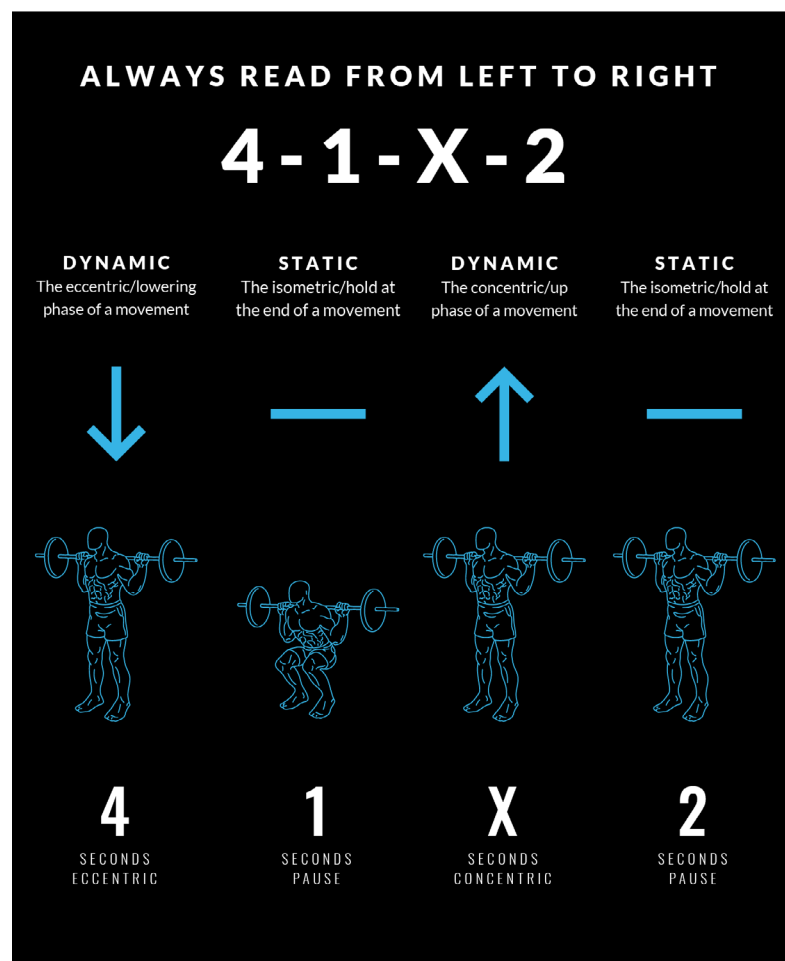
Supersets, where two exercises are paired and performed back to back, can be an efficient way to design a training session. To avoid excess fatigue and a loss of mechanical tension, it is best practice to pair agonist and antagonist movements, for example, a Bench Press (upper push) and a Bent Row (upper pull).

TEMPO

Tempo is used to control the dose-response, movement control, and repeatability of an exercise. It is written as four numbers that correspond to the different contractions within a movement.

Along with reps, tempo determines the time under tension (TUT) for each set. Beginners will need higher TUT, intermediates will need moderate TUT, and Advanced will need lower TUT. Remember, for the goal of hypertrophy, TUT should be around 40 seconds, so high, moderate, and low are relative to this.

Tempo can be manipulated to provide a greater metabolic response via excess post-exercise oxygen consumption (EPOC), meaning the body continues to use energy after training. Slower tempos and increased TUT can also be used to decrease intensity.



REST

Rest, or the time taken between sets, determines the metabolic response from set to set. Intrasets rest periods found in clusters or rest/pause methods can be used to extend sets.

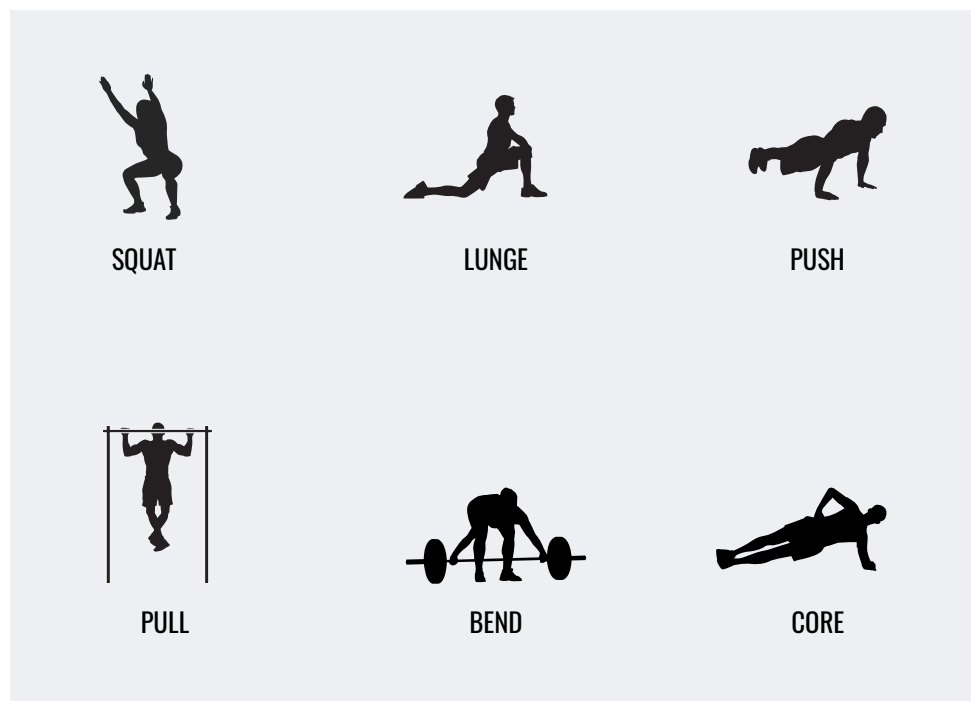
Rest times should be selected relative to training age. Beginners will need shorter rest periods, intermediates will need moderate rest periods, and advanced trainees will need longer rest periods.

Lower rest periods will typically result in greater metabolic fatigue. In comparison, longer rest periods typically lead to better hypertrophy gains. Consider allowing clients to self-select their rest periods based on recovery between sets and available time.

DESIGNING A TRAINING SPLIT

MOVEMENT PATTERNS

When designing a FBB training split, it is best practice to build these based on movement patterns. There are six foundational movement patterns: Squat, Bend, Push, Pull, Lunge, and Core.



ASSESS, DON'T GUESS

Designing a training split starts with an assessment. Every client will have different movement capabilities, which will be identified in a pattern-based movement assessment. This will determine their priorities and how you structure their split.

LEARN THE OPEX MOVE ASSESSMENT IN THIS FREE GUIDE

TRAINING AGE

After conducting an assessment, consider training age when designing a pattern-based split.

Beginners will do a Full-Body Resistance split. They will do all movement patterns in a session.

Intermediates will do an Upper/Lower split. They will alternate between upper body and lower body sessions.

Advanced will do an Isolated pattern split. They will focus on a specific pattern or muscle group within a session.

TRAINING FREQUENCY

It is important to consider the frequency that each movement pattern will be trained based on training days per week. Whether a client has 2 or 5 days to train will determine the appropriate split.

DESIGNING A TRAINING DAY

There are a few key principles to remember when selecting and ordering exercises within a training day.

COMPOUND → ISOLATED

Compound exercises, such as a Squat or a Bench Press, should be programmed at the beginning of a training session. Isolated exercises, such as a Bicep Curl or a Leg Extension, should be programmed later in a training session.

MANAGE VOLUME PER BODY PART

Consider the number of contractions per muscle group in each exercise. Doing too many exercises per body part may result in a big pump and a tough workout, but the accumulated fatigue may result in a sacrifice of mechanical tension and a lack of recovery. Keep the number of exercises per body part low to moderate—around 2-4 each session.

CONTRACTIONS ARE KING

Choose exercises that provide the individual with the intended contraction. Often, this means avoiding the temptation to be too “sexy” with exercise selection. For example, if the goal is quad hypertrophy, a Cyclist Back Squat would be more appropriate than a Zercher Squat (where upper back/core may be the limitation).

COMPLEXITY

FBB programs prioritize movement quality and consistency over intensity. For more advanced trainees, advanced exercises may be programmed to limit intensity and instead provide challenge through the complexity of the exercise.

ENERGY SYSTEM TRAINING AND FBB

FBB programs are characterized by the blending of bodybuilding and [Energy System Training \(EST\)](#). They provide a great base of support through resistance, but without sacrificing aerobic capacity.

RECOVERY

When programming EST, it is important to consider what your client is capable of effectively recovering from. This both applies within their session (keeping the work aerobic and at a sustainable pace), and recovery between sessions.

To know what your client is capable of recovering from start with a simple work capacity assessment.

[LEARN THE OPEX WORK ASSESSMENT HERE](#)

AVOID INTERFERENCE

Stay away from the movement patterns that are a priority in resistance training when designing EST. For example, high-volume bending followed by high-volume rowing intervals.

Instead, keep similar patterns in resistance training and EST separated by at least one day. For example, high-volume bending on Tuesday and high-volume rowing intervals on Friday.

A great method to avoid interference and overtraining is a high/low method. Identify the training priorities that fit inside a “high” (tougher) day, and alternate with “low” (easier) days.

LOWER INTENSITY

Bodybuilding splits are typically characterized as accumulation phases, that is, higher volume and lower intensity. In accumulation, it is best practice to program less intense aerobic work and opt for longer and slower intervals.

PERSONALIZE

You must align the FBB program you're writing with the function of who you are writing it for. This includes considering their priorities and training split when determining exercise selection in mixed modal aerobic work.

As clients progress towards advanced training age, it may be appropriate to use EST intervals to develop muscle endurance and hypertrophy characteristics.

For example:

4 sets @ sustained pace

8 Deadlift @65%

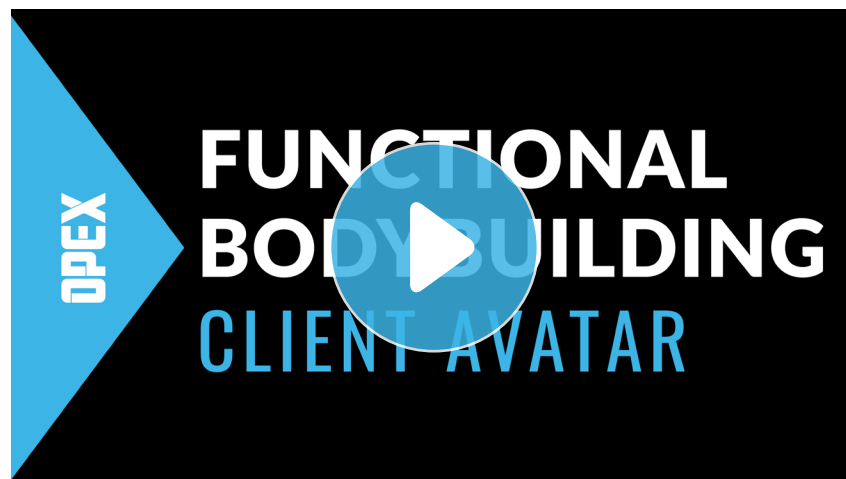
10 Dumbbell Clean + Push Press

50m Farmers Walk, AHAP

rest 2 min

FUNCTIONAL BODYBUILDING PRINCIPLES IN ACTION

Read through the client avatar and watch this video to learn how FBB principles are implemented in a personalized fitness program.



CLIENT AVATAR

Gender: Male

Age: 32

Height: 6'0

Occupation: Teacher

Training Age: Advanced

ASSESSMENT DATA

BODY

- 190#, 15% Body Fat

MOVE

- Failed lunge assessment due to lack of balance and coordination
- Failed side plank assessment due to lack of core endurance

WORK

- 10 minute Assault Bike for max calories = 165 calories

GOALS

- Improve body composition
- Enjoy training again
- Keep strength speed work in for enjoyment
- Increase energy and motivation

PRIORITIES

- Improve core muscle endurance
- Improve motor control in the lunge pattern
- Keep exercise goal-oriented or better connection/motivation

PLANNING/PERIODIZATION

- Garage gym w/ basics for equipment
- 5 sessions per week
- EST: Moderate Aerobic, Slow → Faster
- Resistance: Upper/Lower Split, Volume → Intensity



TRAINING SPLIT

MONDAY

Lower + Core + Mixed Aerobic

- Dynamics - Snatch
- Lunge
- Core
- Bend
- Core
- Mixed Aerobic Chipper (cyclical + squat + core)

TUESDAY

Cyclical Aerobic

WEDNESDAY

Outdoor Movement

THURSDAY

Upper + Mixed Aerobic

- Push (horizontal)
- Pull (vertical)
- Push (vertical)
- Pull (horizontal)
- Mixed Aerobic Circuit (cyclical + bwt push + bwt pull)

FRIDAY

Cyclical Aerobic

SATURDAY

Lower + Core

- Dynamics - Clean - Jerk
- Lunge
- Core
- Squat
- Core
- Bend
- Core

SUNDAY

Rest

| MONDAY | TUESDAY | WEDNESDAY | THURSDAY | FRIDAY | SATURDAY | SUNDAY |
|--|--|--|---|--|---|------------------------------------|
| <div><div></div>Workout<div></div><div>+</div></div> | <div><div></div>Workout<div></div><div>+</div></div> | <div><div></div>Workout<div></div><div>+</div></div> | <div><div></div>Workout<div></div><div>+</div></div> | <div><div></div>Workout<div></div><div>+</div></div> | <div><div></div>Workout<div></div><div>+</div></div> | <div><div></div><div>+</div></div> |
| <div><div>A. Tall Snatch + Overhead Squat, Build to a good load within an 8-minute window starting with an empty bar *keep submaximal and snappy across, no fails!</div><div>B1. RNT Split Squat, @3011, 10 reps/side x 3 sets; rest 90 sec *add DBs in suitcase position if able to control eccentric effectively</div><div>B2. Extended Side Plank, As Many Seconds As Possible (-5)/side x 3 sets; rest 90 sec *5 seconds from failure</div><div>C1. Single Leg KB RDL, @30X1, 10 reps/side x 3 sets; rest 90 sec</div><div>C2. L-Sit Heel Taps on Parallettes, As Many Reps As Possible x 3 sets; rest 90 sec</div><div>D. For Time @ sustained pacing 1000m Bike Erg 30 Goblet Squats, 53# 30 Kipping Knee to Elbow 100 Heavy Double Unders</div></div> | <div><div>4 sets @ sustained pacing 10 min Ski Erg @ 40 min pace -rest walk 5 min-</div></div> | <div><div>30-60 min outdoor activity of choice</div></div> | <div><div>A1. Close Grip Incline Bench Press, @3011, 10 reps x 3 sets; rest 90 sec</div><div>A2. Weighted Rope Pull-Up, @31X1, 8/side x 3 sets; rest 30 sec bt sides/90 sec bt sets</div><div>B1. Half Kneeling Landmine Press, @30X1, 10 reps/side x 3 sets; rest 90 sec</div><div>B2. Banded 2 Point DB Row, @30X2, 8/side x 3 sets; rest 90 sec</div><div>C. 10 min As Many Rounds As Possible @ sustained pacing 250m Ski Erg 10 Ring Dips 1 Legless Rope Climb -rest 5 min- x 2 sets</div></div> | <div><div>4 sets @ sustained pacing 10 min Assault Bike @ 40 min pace -rest 5 min-</div></div> | <div><div>A. Power Clean + Jerk, 1 rep every 60 sec x 10 sets *keep submaximal and fast across</div><div>B1. Step-Up, @3011, 10 reps/side x 3 sets; rest 90 sec *add DBs in suitcase position if able to control eccentric effectively</div><div>B2. 3-Way AbWheel Rollout, @controlled, 5 reps x 3 sets; rest 90 sec</div><div>C1. Cyclist Goblet Squat, @30X1, 10 reps x 3 sets; rest 90 sec</div><div>C2. Contralateral KB Carry, 20m/side x 3 sets; rest 90 sec</div><div>D1. Banded Sumo Deadlift, @31X1, 8 reps x 3 sets; rest 90 sec</div><div>D2. Weighted Side Plank, As Many Seconds As Possible (-5)/side x 3 sets; rest 90 sec *choose a load that you can complete a minimum of 30 sec per set *5 seconds from failure</div></div> | <div><div>Rest</div></div> |

PERSONALIZING FUNCTIONAL BODYBUILDING

While the principles covered in this guide are universal, there is no one-size-fits-all approach to programming functional bodybuilding.

Every individual has different capabilities, priorities, and goals. **To truly be functional, FBB workouts must be personalized.**

That's why the best fitness coaches don't just prescribe templated workouts. They design personalized and comprehensive fitness programs specifically tailored to each client.

For the last 20 years, OPEX Fitness has been educating coaches on how to do just that.

By implementing our systematic method of coaching, including **assessment**, **consultation**, and **program design** for **exercise**, **lifestyle**, and **nutrition**, OPEX coaches match every workout to the function of each client.

In the [OPEX Coaching Certificate Program](#), you'll learn the complete OPEX Method, so you can design smarter programs to get all of your clients the lasting results they deserve. Become the elite coach you've always wanted to be by joining CCP today.

JOIN NOW



READY TO BECOME A CCP COACH?

COACHING CERTIFICATE PROGRAM

An OPEX CCP Coach is a trusted fitness advisor and a partner in delivering results to clients. They are leaders on the front lines, making a real difference in the lives of people in their community. Ultimately, what makes OPEX CCP Coaches stand out is their ability to meet their clients where they are at — regardless of age, training history, lifestyle, or goals — and design a comprehensive personalized fitness program.

ARE YOU READY TO BECOME A LEADING FITNESS PROFESSIONAL?

JOIN NOW

OPEX 