

Race Preparation Strategies

Training programs should be designed to optimize your race performance. Training errors often result from not following the Principle of Specificity of Training, which simply holds that your body adapts very specifically to the types of training that you do. If you do not prepare your body for the demands of racing, then you cannot expect it to be ready to handle those demands. Therefore, the more specific you can make your training to the terrain, pace, environmental conditions, etc. of your key competitions, the more effective your race preparation will be.

Beginner triathletes will improve by doing almost any type of training, and they benefit from the general aerobic fitness provided by cross-training activities. Specificity of training becomes increasingly important as you become more fit because the potential incremental gains from training are so much smaller. Here are six strategies for applying the Principle of Specificity of Training.

1) Simulate the course: Although it should be an obvious training strategy, many athletes do not bother to prepare for the idiosyncrasies of the courses they race. If you train exclusively on flat terrain, then you will not be ready to handle uphill's in a race. Alternatively, if you train specifically on hills then you will not be as effective on long flat race courses that require a consistent steady state output. With a bit of creativity, you can design workouts to mimic almost any race course but regardless of the course always use a mix of terrain as your training ground. If the course is on the hilly side focus more attention to your hills training but if the course is flat then focus more training on flat terrain.

2) Prepare for heat and humidity: Heat acclimation is crucial for successful racing. That is why 80 degrees in April is brutal but the same conditions feel relatively manageable during August. Studies have found that 3 weeks is enough time to adapt to moderately hot conditions. The ability to perform well in the heat is specific to the level of humidity, however, so if you have trained in hot and dry conditions, you will not be prepared to handle the stress caused by high humidity. One way to simulate heat and/or humidity is to train wearing extra clothing, reducing evaporative cooling.



3) Simulate the pace and distance: Many triathletes focus their training around long, slow distance and or just steady state mid distance training, neither of which will optimally prepare you for a triathlon.. Your training should include a variety of paces and distances, even if you may only be racing one distance. However, it is useful to step back and check that you are focusing your hard workouts on sessions that will prepare you specifically for your goal race. A sprint distance race requires a different set of hard workouts than does an ironman distance race.

4) Get used to training at the time of day you will race: Your body gets used to training at a specific time of the day. Athletes who train in the morning tend to perform better in the morning, and athletes who train in the evening tend to perform better in the evening. If you train after work every day, then your body will not be optimally prepared for an 8 a.m. race. Getting used to training at approximately the same time of day as your goal race can help you to optimize your performance. This does not mean all your workouts need to coincide with your race time but at least 2 workouts a week should be in the morning when most triathlons occur.

5) Train on your race surface: Since most races occur on paved road, it is wise to do a significant portion of your training on the road to prepare your body for those conditions. There are a variety of biomechanical differences between, training, primarily running, on hard regular surfaces and soft uneven surfaces, such as how your Achilles tendon and foot work together to return stored elastic energy into your next stride. Training specifically for the surface you will race on will prepare your body to handle the biomechanical demands of your goal race, in particularly for a 70.3 and ironman distance races.

6) Use tune-up races to prepare for your goal race: A tune-up race is a race of lesser importance that you use to help prepare for your goal race. Tune-up races are essential to help you prepare both physically and mentally for your “A” race. A tune up race helps you to improve your efficiency, especially in transitions, and reduce your anxiety before your goal race. Furthermore, given the intensity of racing, it can also toughen you mentally and physically by taking you to your limit. Even the toughest workout does not demand the same level of commitment as a race. When you are wondering whether you can hang on during your goal race, recent experience in tune-up races is invaluable for your self-confidence.

