



The PRS™ 6-POINT RPE DESCRIPTOR SYSTEM



Developed to help athletes, coaches, and clinicians progressively integrate rating of perceived exertion into strength training to optimize exercise prescription and response for injury risk reduction and long-term goal attainment.

The PRS 6-POINT RPE DESCRIPTOR SYSTEM

progressiverehabandstrength.com

Table of Contents

1. An Introduction to Rating Of Perceived Exertion.....pages 2-4
2. The Problem.....page 6
3. 6-Point RPE Descriptor Scale.....page 6-7
4. The RPE Learning Process.....page 8
5. Integrating RPE Into Practice.....page 9

Hi! I'm Dr. Rori Alter, PT, SSC, PRSCC and I feel strongly about helping athletes, coaches, and clinicians optimize movement and programming to achieve goals, reduce injury risk and support longevity in the sport of barbell strength training, powerlifting and life. I've designed this guide to help you integrate **the most important tool for injury risk reduction** into your practice - Rating Of Perceived Exertion.

So I want you to master it.

Let's dive in!



An Introduction To Rating Of Perceived Exertion

progressiverehabandstrength.com

The Importance Of RPE For Barbell Trainees

Rating of Perceived Exertion (RPE) is a subjective measurement and communication tool used by intermediate and advanced barbell trainees to autoregulate or make programming decisions within a barbell training session.

Typically, RPE is not recommended for beginner or novice barbell trainees because of the inexperience and lack of awareness of what a legitimate heavy weight feels like.

Within the PRS™ Method, RPE is an extremely valuable tool for intermediate and advanced trainees and **should be introduced to beginner trainees**. This is essential so that when the time comes for the meaningful use of RPE to assist in dynamic programming, it's an already familiar training tool.

RPE is a subjective measure of how you perceive exercise intensity to be in the moment.

Basically, how hard you feel like you're working. RPE considers your heart rate, body temperature, breathing rate, sweating, and muscle fatigue perceptions. The RPE scale ranges from 1 to 10 and was popularized in barbell training by world-class lifter and programmer Mike Tuchscherer. It's now widely used in the strength training world in many capacities. While the scale ranges from 1 to 10, values less than 5 are not super important for strength or hypertrophy training. RPEs less than 5 are considered a warm-up, so they aren't discussed much in strength training.

We typically see RPE used in two ways:

Prescriptive RPE: the program is written, so the lifter works up to a load and or/volume that matches the RPE indicator. In prescriptive scenarios, the lifter does not know what loads they will hit on that day. However, they may have some indication of what load to hit based on the prior week's performance. This is often a guessing game and can lead to longer workouts or more volume and intensity than the lifter is actually prepared for.

Descriptive RPE: the lifter uses RPE only to describe what predetermined loads and volume felt like. Coaches and lifters can use descriptive RPE to adjust within the training session and future training sessions. Additionally, descriptive RPE helps control large spikes in volume and intensity that would be too much, too soon, or too fast for the individual even if they "feel great" on that day.

An Introduction To Rating Of Perceived Exertion

progressiverehabandstrength.com

The Importance Of Descriptive RPE

We recommend taking a descriptive approach with RPE allowing for more steady progress without spikes in:

- ✓Tonnage
- ✓Volume
- ✓Intensity
- ✓Fatigue accumulation
- ✓Soreness
- ✓Injury risk

Two ways we can use descriptive RPE to fine-tune training and maximize outcomes include:

1 Monitor 4 Specific RPE Trends Within & Across Sessions

- *Exercise RPE:* This is the RPE assignment for each individual set.
- *Differential RPE:* This is the change in RPE across sets from the first set to the last set.
- *Average RPE:* This is the average RPE for a particular exercise/lift within one training session. It can be monitored from session to session.
- *Session RPE:* Valuable information about the total session stress of the training session found by taking the average of the Average RPEs.
- *Outlier RPE:* Outlier RPEs are set RPEs that do not align with the other Exercise RPEs in that session. Outliers indicate an external influence was present, and a programming response may not be necessary.

2 Track Estimated 1 Repetition Maximum trends as a reflection of recovery.

An Introduction To Rating Of Perceived Exertion

progressiverehabandstrength.com

Calculating Estimated 1 Rep Max

EIRM is calculated by:

Weight Lifted x 100 / Percentage of 1RM per reps lifted

E.g. 225 x 5 reps @ RPE 8 = 225 x 100/ 81 = 277 EIRM

		Number of Reps									
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Rating of Perceived Exertion	10	100%	95.5%	92.2%	89.2%	86.3%	83.7%	81.1%	78.6%	76.2%	73.9%
	9.5	97.8%	93.9%	90.7%	87.8%	85%	82.4%	79.9%	77.4%	75.1%	72.3%
	9	95.5%	92.2%	89.2%	86.3%	83.7%	81.1%	78.6%	76.2%	73.9%	70.7%
	8.5	93.9%	90.7%	87.8%	85%	82.4%	79.9%	77.4%	75.1%	72.3%	69.4%
	8	92.2%	89.2%	86.3%	83.7%	81.1%	78.6%	76.2%	73.9%	70.7%	68%
	7.5	90.7%	87.8%	85%	82.4%	79.9%	77.4%	75.1%	72.3%	69.4%	66.7%
	7	89.2%	86.3%	83.7%	81.1%	78.6%	76.2%	73.9%	70.7%	68.0%	65.3%
	6.5	87.8%	85%	82.4%	79.9%	77.4%	75.1%	72.3%	69.4%	66.7%	64%

Percentage of Estimated 1 Rep Max

The Problem

progressiverehabandstrength.com

The Beginner Trainee

RPE & EIRM are fantastic tools for:

- ✓ Athletes to communicate with coaches as well as adjust their training independently in real-time
- ✓ Coaches to communicate with their lifters, set conditions so lifters can auto adjust the program if needed, and monitor fatigue and adjust the program so things don't go awry
- ✓ Clinicians to help lifters rehab from injury by keeping the relative intensity in specific ranges to promote tissue healing, desensitization, and appropriate recovery

The Problem Is:

We can't just expect someone to understand RPE and use it as descriptive or prescriptive without spending some time learning.

Similar to the experience of learning and becoming proficient at the barbell lifts, there is a learning or coaching period associated with becoming proficient at using RPE.

The process of understanding and learning RPE goes like this:

- ✓ You need to learn about what RPE is and why it's important.
- ✓ You need a system or method for communicating what "reps left in the tank" means.
- ✓ You need to practice and review your skills with inputs from videos, other people, and coaches.
- ✓ Eventually, the descriptive language filters down to a few words and feelings, and eventually, numbers.
- ✓ Over time, perceived efforts can be communicated by numbers or reps left in the tank instead of other descriptive languages.

The PRS™ Method uses 6 unique descriptors to help our clients learn about RPE so by the time they need it, they've mastered it.

The PRS 6-Point Descriptor Scale can be found on the following pages so you or your clients can master it too!

THE PROGRESSIVE REHAB & STRENGTH

6-POINT RPE DESCRIPTOR SCALE

progressiverehabandstrength.com

NOVICE DESCRIPTOR	Speed	REPS LEFT IN THE TANK	RPE
Max Effort	Super slow, may stop, ugly	None, all out grind failed rep	10
Very Hard	Super slow, has a sticking point, ugly	Maybe 1 rep	9.5
Hard	Super slow, has a sticking point, ugly	Definitely 1 rep	9
Sort of Hard	Slows down on last 2 reps, may stick on last rep	Definitely 1 rep, maybe 2	8.5
Moderate	Slows down on last 2 reps	Definitely 2 reps	8
Moderately Easy	Slows down on last 1-2 reps	Definitely 2 reps, maybe 3	7.5
Easy	Slows down slightly on last rep	Definitely 3 reps	7
Sort of Easy	All reps speedy	Definitely 3 reps, maybe 4	6.5
Very Easy	All reps speedy	Definitely 4 reps	6

THE PROGRESSIVE REHAB & STRENGTH

6-POINT RPE DESCRIPTOR SCALE

progressiverehabandstrength.com

TECHNIQUE	PHYSIOLOGICAL SIGNS	SOUND	RPE
Significant form deviation on most reps	Red, eyes bulging, hands blanching on most reps	Grunting on all reps, heavy breathing after set	10
Moderate form deviation on last 2-3 reps	Red, eyes bulging, hands blanching on last 2-3 reps	Grunting on last 2-3 reps, heavy breathing after set	9-9.5
Mild form deviation on last 1-2 reps	Face starts to get red on last 1-2 reps	May grunt on last 1-2 reps, moderate breathing	8-8.5
May get mild form deviation on last rep	Face may turn red on last 1-2 reps	May grunt on last rep, mild increase in breathing	7-7.5
Perfect form	Face usually does not get red	Breathing is usually not impaired	6-6.5

The RPE Learning Process

progressiverehabandstrength.com

4 Top Tips To Learn RPE:

Tip One

Learn from others by watching their effort and making a guess.

Head into our free Facebook group (or any other barbell training group) and watch the videos people post for form checks. Frequently people will include an RPE for the set in the post or in the comments. See if your guess matches up with their report.

Tip Two

Watch videos of your own lifts.

Similarly, take videos of yourself lifting and watch them back right after you finish a training set. Before looking at the video, say what you thought the RPE was. Then watch the video and use the 6-point scale above to determine an RPE visually. Keep challenging your inner feelings with what you see on video until they start to consistently match.

Tip Three

Get input from a coach.

Coaches should regularly review their remote clients' videos for quality, technique, and intensity control. If you're unsure of your RPE or still learning, they should be providing their perception of the effort when they provide you feedback. Read their feedback.

Tip Four

Get input from gym buddies.

your buddies will tell it like it is. Let them support you in exploring what hard really feels like.

When & How Should You Begin Using RPE?

As A Barbell Trainee

- ✓ *Begin using RPE after 2-3 sessions even if you're not good at it.*
- ✓ Print this Guide or save it to your phone so you can refer to the 6-Point Descriptor Scale during your training sessions.
- ✓ Use the 4 tips on page 7 to help you begin to articulate how the weights you're moving feel.
- ✓ Keep a pen-and-paper training journal and jot down an RPE for every work set you perform.
- ✓ During your training sessions compare your RPEs to prior sessions to see how it evolves over time

As A Coach

- ✓ *Introduce RPE to your trainees as soon as possible.*
- ✓ Share this Guide as a resource with them by saving the PDF to your Google Drive and including it in your New Client Onboarding Process.
- ✓ Always ask in-person trainees "How did that set feel?" And have a discussion with them about how it looked to you.
- ✓ Have a video sharing/check-in process with your online clients to review their videos and logged RPE. Follow up with your "coach RPE" until you feel like their reported RPE matches what you're seeing in the videos.

As A Clinician

- ✓ *Introduce RPE to your clients about 8 weeks after surgery or 2-3 weeks into non-operative rehabilitation.*
- ✓ Use RPE + VAS pain scales to limit the relative intensity in combination with symptoms
- ✓ Provide RPE guidelines to your clients (and even their coaches) as you begin to reintegrate them into training on their own/with a coach before you discharge them from rehab.

To get personalized support with RPE as an athlete, coach, or clinician, please join our [free Facebook group](#) to attend or Weekly Live Q&A every Thursday at 1PM ET!