

Strong for the Mat: Strength Training That Supports Your Martial Art

Mat Manual companion guide to "Strong, Not Sore: Strength Training for Martial Artists." Print it. The article explains why strength work belongs in a martial artist's week. This guide gives you the exercises, the exact weekly templates, the scheduling matrices, and the twelve-week log to run it without guessing.

Name: _____ Gym: _____ Art: _____

SAFETY, BEFORE ANYTHING ELSE ☐ If you are new to lifting, get qualified instruction on the main lifts before you load them — in person, from a coach who can see your positions. A printed guide teaches structure and dose; it cannot watch your back, knees, or shoulders. ☐ Soreness is dull, in the muscle, and eases as you warm up. Sharp pain, joint pain, pain that changes how you move, numbness, or pain that travels down an arm or leg is a stop signal for that exercise that day. Stop the set, do not test it with another set. ☐ Never chase a failed rep. If form breaks, the set is over at the last good rep. ☐ Keep two or three good reps in reserve on almost every working set. Sets to failure are not part of this program. ☐ Collars on bars, pins set in racks, and a clear floor for carries. Check a bench, chair, table, or step before you trust it with your weight plus a load. ☐ A test week, tournament, grading, injury, or illness outranks this guide. When in doubt, do less, and ask your instructor or a qualified professional.

Part 1: How This Guide Works

Pick one setup — full gym, dumbbell only, or bodyweight only — and one template — two days or three days. Stay with both for at least six weeks. The guide is built on six patterns: squat, hinge, push, pull, carry, and trunk, and every template covers all six across the week. Do not add exercises because a session felt short, and do not remove pulls, carries, or trunk work because they feel less important than squats and presses. The unglamorous patterns are often the point.

Effort: RPE and Reps in Reserve

Loads in this guide are never given as weights everyone should lift. A load that is light for a judoka who has lifted for ten years may be far too heavy for a beginner in the same class. Instead, every prescription uses

effort.

Term	What it means	How it feels
RPE 6	Rate of perceived exertion 6 out of 10	You could have done about 4 more good reps
RPE 7	Moderate-hard	You could have done about 3 more good reps
RPE 8	Hard, the default for main lifts here	You could have done about 2 more good reps
RPE 9	Very hard, used rarely here	About 1 more good rep
RIR	Reps in reserve	The same idea counted backward: RPE 8 is about 2 RIR
Working set	A set at the listed effort	Warm-up sets do not count
Top of range	The highest reps in a listed range, all sets, good form	The signal to add the smallest load next time

Judge effort by the last good rep, not the first. If the fifth rep moves well and the sixth bends your form out of shape, the set was five reps. Record five.

The Form Standard for Every Lift

Check	The standard
Position first	Set feet, grip, and trunk before the rep starts
Full control down	Lower every rep under control; a drop is not a rep
Same path back	Return along the path you came; drifting and bouncing are load problems, not effort
Breath	Breathe in before a heavy rep, brace, finish, then breathe out
Both sides match	Start single-side work with the weaker side and match its reps on the stronger side
Stop rule	Pain from the safety block, or two form faults in one set, ends the exercise for the day

What a Week Owes You

Item	Two-day template	Three-day template
Sessions	2 full-body sessions	3 shorter full-body sessions
Time per session	45 to 60 minutes	35 to 50 minutes
Patterns per week	All six, push and pull at least twice	All six, push and pull three times at lower volume
Best for	Most students; 3 to 4 class days a week	Lighter class weeks; short-session preference

Part 2: Exercise Selection — Full Gym

Pick one exercise per row as your main choice. The alternate is for a busy gym, a joint that tolerates it better, or the next six-week block — not the same session.

Squat and Hinge

Pattern	Main choice	Alternate	Sets and reps used in templates	Form cue
Squat	Goblet squat	Box squat	3 x 6-10	Chest tall, whole foot down, knees track over toes
Squat (experienced)	Back squat or safety-bar squat	Front squat	3 x 5-8	Brace before you unrack; sit between your heels
Single-leg squat	Split squat	Step-up to a low box	2-3 x 6-8 per side	Most weight on the front leg; torso tall
Hinge	Romanian deadlift	Trap-bar deadlift	3 x 6-10	Push the hips back; weights stay close to the legs
Hinge (heavy)	Deadlift from the floor	Block or rack pull	3 x 4-6	Flat back, push the floor away, stand tall
Hip extension	Hip thrust	Cable pull-through	2-3 x 8-12	Ribs down, glutes squeezed, no back arch

Push and Pull

Pattern	Main choice	Alternate	Sets and reps	Form cue
Horizontal push	Bench press	Dumbbell bench press	3 x 6-10	Feet planted, shoulder blades set, consistent touch point
Vertical push	Overhead press	Landmine press	2-3 x 6-10	Ribs down, press straight, arm by the ear at the top
Bodyweight push	Push-up	Incline push-up	3 x 6-15	One straight line from head to heels
Vertical pull	Pull-up or assisted pull-up	Lat pulldown	3 x 5-10	Straight arms at the bottom; no swinging
Horizontal pull	One-arm dumbbell row	Chest-supported row	3 x 8-12 per side	Elbow to the hip; pause a second at the top

Carry and Trunk

Pattern	Main choice	Alternate	Dose	Form cue
Carry, both hands	Farmer's carry	Trap-bar carry	3-4 x 30-45 seconds	Tall posture, normal steps, grip hard
Carry, one hand	Suitcase carry	One-arm carry in place (march)	3 x 30 seconds per side	Stay level; do not lean away from the weight
Carry, front	Rack carry	Goblet carry	3 x 30 seconds	Elbows down, breathe behind the brace
Trunk, anti-extension	Dead bug	Plank	3 x 6-8 per side, or 3 x 30 seconds	Lower back stays heavy on the floor
Trunk, anti-rotation	Pallof press	Cable or band hold	3 x 8-10 per side	Ribs down, hips and chest face forward
Trunk, side	Side plank	Suitcase hold	3 x 20-40 seconds per side	Straight line, feet stacked or staggered

Part 3: Exercise Selection — Dumbbell Only

One pair of dumbbells covers every pattern. If yours are light for squats and hinges, use the single-leg and slow-lowering options in the right-hand column. If they are heavy for pressing, use the floor press and half-kneeling press, which are more forgiving alone.

Pattern	Main choice	How to run it	Sets and reps	If it is too easy	If it is too hard
Squat	Goblet squat	One dumbbell at the chest, sit to a chair or below knee height as form allows	3 x 8-12	Slow the lowering to 3 seconds, pause at the bottom	Squat to a chair; shorten the depth
Single-leg squat	Split squat	One dumbbell in the opposite hand or one in each hand	3 x 6-10 per side	Rear-foot-elevated split squat on a low step	Hold a wall or chair for balance; bodyweight only
Hinge	Dumbbell Romanian deadlift	One dumbbell in each hand, hips back, weights along the thighs	3 x 8-12	Single-leg Romanian deadlift, lighter, hand on a wall	Two legs, shorter range, slower
Horizontal push	Floor press	On your back, upper arms touch the floor lightly each rep	3 x 8-12	One-arm floor press	Push-up with hands on a chair
Vertical push	Half-kneeling press	One knee down, press the dumbbell on the kneeling side	2-3 x 6-10 per side	Standing press, strict	Seated press with back support
Pull	One-arm row	Free hand and knee on a chair or bench, row to the hip	3 x 8-12 per side	Add a 1-second pause at the top	Bent-over row with both dumbbells, lighter effort
Carry	Farmer's and suitcase carry	Walk a hallway, yard, or in-place march if space is short	3-4 x 30-45 seconds	One-arm rack carry	Shorter walks, more rests

Pattern	Main choice	How to run it	Sets and reps	If it is too easy	If it is too hard
Trunk	Dead bug, side plank, Pallof press with a band if owned	As in Part 2	3 sets each as listed	Add a light dumbbell held in the dead bug	Smaller range; knees bent in the dead bug

The one-dumbbell rule. With a single dumbbell: goblet squat, suitcase Romanian deadlift, presses and rows one arm at a time, suitcase carry. Sessions take longer; nothing else changes.

Part 4: Exercise Selection — Bodyweight Only

No equipment is a real setup, provided the pull pattern is solved honestly. Rows under a sturdy table are the home standard: test the table with a hard pull before you put your weight under it, and stop if anything shifts. If no table or band is safe for rows, use the prone work below — and know that pulling is where a band or strap, bought later, changes the program most.

Pattern	Main choice	Progression ladder (easiest to hardest)	Sets and reps	The standard
Squat	Bodyweight squat to a chair	Sit-to-stand, squat below chair height, full squat, pause squat	3 x 8-15	Whole foot down; stand fully between reps
Single-leg squat	Split squat	Split squat, reverse lunge, rear-foot-elevated split squat, assisted skater squat	3 x 6-10 per side	Weaker side first; match reps, not effort, on the strong side
Hinge	Single-leg hinge (hip airplane pattern without load)	Two-leg good morning, single-leg hinge with a wall touch, single-leg hinge free	3 x 6-10 per side	Hips fold, back stays flat, standing knee soft
Hip extension	Glute bridge	Bridge, bridge march, single-leg bridge, foot-elevated bridge	3 x 10-15	Finish with glutes, not lower back

Pattern	Main choice	Progression ladder (easiest to hardest)	Sets and reps	The standard
Push	Push-up	Wall push-up, incline push-up, floor push-up, feet-elevated push-up, archer push-up	3 x 5-15	Pick the rung where the last reps are RPE 7-8 with a straight body line
Pull	Table row	Bent-knee row, straight-leg row, feet-elevated row, one-arm assisted row	3 x 6-12	Chest to the edge, straight arms at the bottom
Pull, floor	Prone Y-T-W raises	Prone press-up hold, Y raises, T raises, W pulls, slow swimmers	2-3 x 8-12	Small, slow, and strict; this is posture work, not a row substitute at full load
Carry substitute	Loaded-backpack carry	Backpack with books: two-hand front carry, one-hand suitcase carry, overhead walk only if the load is light and control is total	3 x 30-45 seconds	The backpack is the dumbbell here; load it gradually and pad anything sharp
Trunk	Dead bug and side plank	Bent-knee dead bug, full dead bug, hollow hold progressions; side plank from knees, then feet	3 sets as in Part 2	Range you control beats range you visit briefly

Part 5: The 2-Day Templates

Run Day A and Day B each week, at least one day apart where your class schedule allows. Every exercise below is a slot: fill it from your setup's selection table (Part 2, 3, or 4). Sets, reps, rest, and effort do not change with the setup.

Day A: Squat, Push, Pull, Carry

Order	Slot	Sets x reps	Rest	Effort	Notes
A1	Squat (main)	3 x 6-10	2-3 min	RPE 7-8	Part 11 warm-up sets first

Order	Slot	Sets x reps	Rest	Effort	Notes
A2	Horizontal push	3 x 6-10	90 sec-2 min	RPE 7-8	Do not rush
A3	Horizontal pull (row)	3 x 8-12	90 sec-2 min	RPE 7-8	Pause 1 sec at the top, last set
A4	Trunk: dead bug or Pallof press	3 x 6-10 per side	60 sec	RPE 6-7	Slow control work
A5	Carry: farmer's or backpack	3-4 x 30-45 sec	60-90 sec	Hard grip, tall posture	Stop when posture breaks

Day B: Hinge, Push, Pull, Single-Leg

Order	Slot	Sets x reps	Rest	Effort	Notes
B1	Hinge (main)	3 x 6-10	2-3 min	RPE 7-8	Romanian pattern for most; floor deadlift only with coaching
B2	Vertical push	2-3 x 6-10	90 sec	RPE 7	Landmine or half-kneeling press if shoulders dislike overhead
B3	Vertical pull (pull-up, pulldown, or table row)	3 x 5-10	90 sec-2 min	RPE 7-8	Full range at the bottom
B4	Single-leg squat (split squat or step-up)	2 x 6-8 per side	60-90 sec	RPE 7	Weaker side first
B5	Trunk: side plank or suitcase carry	3 x 20-40 sec per side	60 sec	RPE 6-7	Suitcase carry here also counts as grip work

Session time. About 45 to 60 minutes including the Part 11 warm-up. If a session runs past an hour, cut A4/B5 to two sets before cutting A1 or B1.

The first two weeks. Run both days at RPE 6-7, two working sets on the main lifts, and stop every set with form you would show your instructor. Weeks one and two buy the positions; load them from week three using Part 12.

Part 6: The 3-Day Templates

The three-day version spreads the same work thinner. Each day is shorter, and total hard lower-body work stays close to the two-day version — students with heavy class schedules do not automatically gain by moving to three days. Choose three days if you like short sessions, recover well, and have a lighter class season. Choose two if class is hard, sleep is short, or you are new.

Day 1: Squat Focus

Order	Slot	Sets x reps	Rest	Effort
1	Squat (main)	3 x 5-8	2-3 min	RPE 7-8
2	Horizontal push	3 x 6-10	90 sec	RPE 7
3	Horizontal pull	3 x 8-12	90 sec	RPE 7
4	Trunk: dead bug	2 x 6-8 per side	60 sec	RPE 6

Day 2: Hinge Focus

Order	Slot	Sets x reps	Rest	Effort
1	Hinge (main)	3 x 5-8	2-3 min	RPE 7-8
2	Vertical push	2 x 6-10	90 sec	RPE 7
3	Vertical pull	3 x 5-10	90 sec-2 min	RPE 7-8
4	Carry: suitcase	3 x 30 sec per side	60 sec	Hard grip, level posture

Day 3: Single-Leg and Accessories

Order	Slot	Sets x reps	Rest	Effort
1	Single-leg squat (main for the day)	3 x 6-8 per side	90 sec-2 min	RPE 7
2	Hip thrust or glute bridge pattern	2 x 8-12	90 sec	RPE 7
3	Push, your weaker direction (horizontal or vertical)	2 x 8-12	90 sec	RPE 6-7

Order	Slot	Sets x reps	Rest	Effort
4	Pull, upper-back (face pull or prone Y-T-W)	2 x 10-15	60 sec	RPE 6-7
5	Carry: farmer's or rack	3 x 30-45 sec	60-90 sec	Tall, normal steps
6	Trunk: Pallof press or side plank	2 x 8-10 per side	60 sec	RPE 6

Spacing. Keep a day between Day 1 and Day 2 where you can; both carry a hard lower-body lift. Day 3 is the lightest day and can share a day with an easy class. If the week collapses, drop Day 3 and keep Days 1 and 2.

What not to add. No extra arm day, no fourth conditioning day, and no finishers. If you finish Day 3 feeling fresh, that is the design working.

Part 7: Grip Priority

Grip fails quietly. The throw was there and the hand opened. The guard was closed and the wrist gave out. Train grip three ways: holding (carries and hangs), pulling (rows and pull-ups, already in the templates), and wrist control (the wrist holds position while the hand grips).

Add one grip block at the end of two sessions a week. Pick two rows per block.

Exercise	How it runs	Dose	Effort and standard
Farmer's carry, heavy for you	Walk until posture or grip is about to fail, then set the weights down under control	3-4 x 30-45 sec	RPE 8 for grip; posture never sacrificed to finish a walk
Suitcase carry	One side at a time, ribs down, level shoulders	3 x 30 sec per side	The trunk works as hard as the hand; lean means too heavy
Dead hang from a bar	Straight arms, shoulders active, breathe	3 x 20-40 sec	Stop before you slip; never drop off a bar you cannot control — and skip this if shoulders dislike hanging, and use carries instead
Towel or gi-top hang / row hold	Drape a towel or old gi top over a bar, grip the cloth, hang	3 x 15-30 sec	The cloth grip your art actually uses; inspect the cloth and bar before every set

Exercise	How it runs	Dose	Effort and standard
	or hold a row position		

Grip rules. Train grip at the end of a session, never before rows, pulls, or hinges that need the same hands. Two blocks a week are enough. Sore elbows mean too much, too soon: cut the hangs first, keep the carries, and rebuild over two weeks. Straps are not used for main lifts here, because the grip is part of what you are training.

Part 8: Hip Priority

The hips turn throws, drive kicks, hold stances, and get you up off the floor. Hip priority work trains three things together: the hinge, one-leg strength, and control at the edges of your range. Use one block twice weekly, after the main lift.

Exercise	How it runs	Dose	The standard
Romanian deadlift, pause version	Hinge, pause 2 seconds where the hamstrings load, stand	3 x 6-8, RPE 7	The pause kills momentum; back stays flat
Single-leg Romanian deadlift	Light load, wall touch allowed, hinge on one leg	2-3 x 6-8 per side	Hips stay level and face the floor
Hip thrust or glute bridge	Full hip extension, 1-second squeeze at the top	3 x 8-12, RPE 7-8	Ribs down at the top; no back-bend finish
Split squat, full range you own	As in the selection tables	3 x 6-8 per side	Front leg does the work; depth is what you control, not what gravity gives you
90/90 hip transitions, loaded lightly	Seated rotations as mobility, with a light weight held at the chest only if unloaded form is clean	2 x 5 transitions per direction	Control at the switch; no pain or pinch — a pinch stops this exercise, per the safety block

Hip rules. A pinch at the front of the hip is a stop for that exercise, not a range to push through. Train the worse side first on single-leg work and match — never exceed — its reps on the better side. Hip work should be felt in the glutes and upper hamstrings. If your lower back feels most of it on hinge work, the load is too heavy or the range too long that day: shorten it, lighten it, and note it.

Part 9: Trunk Priority

Trunk training here is not crunches for time. It is keeping the ribs and pelvis stacked while your arms and legs move, while a partner pushes you, and while you carry a load on one side — the trunk work of throws, frames, guards, and stances. One trunk exercise is already in every session. Swap library exercises between blocks every six weeks, not every week.

Family	Exercise	Dose	Progression	Regression
Anti-extension	Dead bug	3 x 6-8 per side	Add a light weight in the hands; slow the leg to 4 seconds out	Bent knees; smaller leg range
Anti-extension	Body saw plank	2-3 x 6-10 small slides	Slide further as control allows	Plain plank, 3 x 30 sec
Anti-rotation	Palof press	3 x 8-10 per side	Split stance; slower press	Half-kneeling, lighter band or cable
Anti-rotation	One-arm carry hold / suitcase carry	3 x 30 sec per side	Walk further before posture fails	Two-hand carry
Side support	Side plank	3 x 20-40 sec per side	Top foot forward; add slow top-leg lifts	From the knees

Trunk rules. You should be able to breathe behind the brace in every row. A trunk exercise you can only do while holding your breath for the whole set is too hard that day; regress it one step. Trunk work goes last, because a tired trunk makes every lift after it worse. No trunk exercise here is done to exhaustion.

Part 10: Scheduling Around Class

Lifting and class are one training week. Mark your hardest class session — hard sparring, hard rolling, randori, test preparation — then place lifting where it does the least damage to it. Below, L is lifting, C is class, H is the hardest class day, and a dash is rest or easy movement.

Two Class Days a Week

Day	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
Example A	C	—	L (Day A)	C (H)	—	L (Day B)	—
Example B	L (Day A)	C	—	L (Day B)	C (H)	—	—

Example B lifts the day before class twice, so those sessions stay at RPE 7 with a moderate hinge. Example A is the better default when recovery is limited.

Three Class Days a Week

Day	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
Example A	C	L (Day A)	C	—	C (H)	L (Day B, light hinge)	—
Example B	C + L (short, after class)	—	C	L (Day B)	—	C (H)	—

Keep 48 hours between a heavy hinge or squat and the hardest class day where the calendar allows. If it does not allow it, the lift gets lighter, not the class.

Four Class Days a Week

Day	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
Example A	C	C + L (Day A, 2 sets on main lift)	—	C	C (H)	L (Day B, moderate)	—
Example B	C + L (Day A)	C	—	C + L (Day B)	—	C (H)	—

With four class days, use the two-day template only, cut one set from each main lift in heavy weeks, and treat any third lifting idea as a scheduling error.

Competition and Test Weeks: The Deload

When	What to do	What to cut
7 to 5 days before	One normal session, RPE capped at 7	No new exercises from this point on
4 to 2 days before	One light session: main lifts 2 x 5 at RPE 6, carries easy, or skip	All RPE 8 work, grip blocks, and single-leg work to fatigue
Day before	No lifting. Walk, mobility you already know, early night	Everything in this guide

When	What to do	What to cut
Day of	No lifting before the event	Warm up only as your instructor directs
2 to 3 days after	Resume at the previous week's loads, RPE 6-7 first session back	Do not make up missed sessions or volume

The deload is not lost training. Students who arrive fresh test at the level they actually built; students who lift hard into the week test at the level fatigue allows.

Part 11: Warm-Up Sets and the Lifting Warm-Up

Two warm-ups happen before the first working set. First, five minutes to raise temperature: easy cycling, rowing, brisk walking, or skipping, then the sequence below. Second, warm-up sets on the first lift itself, building to the working load in steps given as percentages of that day's working weight — your own chosen load for the day.

The Five-Minute General Warm-Up

Minute	Work
0 to 2	Easy bike, row, walk uphill, or skip: breathing rises, no fatigue
2 to 3	Bodyweight squats x 8, unloaded hinges x 8, band pull-aparts x 10 if a band is available
3 to 4	The day's pattern at bodyweight, x 6: split squats, raised push-ups, or easy rows
4 to 5	Two or three easy reps of the first lift at the lightest load you will use, checking position

Warm-Up Sets by First Lift

Rest a minute or so between warm-up sets — long enough to add load and breathe, not long enough to cool down.

First lift	Warm-up set 1	Warm-up set 2	Warm-up set 3	Warm-up set 4	Then
Squat pattern	5 reps at about 40% of working load	4 reps at about 60%	2-3 reps at about 75%	1-2 reps at about 90% if the load is heavy for you	Working sets

First lift	Warm-up set 1	Warm-up set 2	Warm-up set 3	Warm-up set 4	Then
Hinge pattern	5 reps at about 40% (or an unloaded hinge drill)	4 reps at about 60%	2-3 reps at about 75%	1-2 reps at about 90% if needed	Working sets
Bench or floor press	8 reps, lightest load	5 reps at about 60%	3 reps at about 80%	—	Working sets
Overhead or landmine press	8 reps, lightest load	5 reps at about 70%	—	—	Working sets; shoulders warm up fast and tire fast
Row or pulldown	8 reps, light	5 reps at about 70%	—	—	Working sets
Split squat or step-up	Bodyweight x 5 per side	Light load x 4 per side	—	—	Working sets
Pull-up	Pulldown warm-up as above, plus 1-2 easy reps of your training version	—	—	—	Working sets

For dumbbell and bodyweight setups, translate the percentages into your ladder: empty hands, easiest rung, middle rung, working rung. Never make your first hard set your first set.

Later lifts need less: one easy set at about half the working load, then work. Carries and trunk work need no warm-up sets.

Part 12: Progression, Holding, and Backing Off

The Main Rule: Add Reps, Then Load

Step	What you do
1	Choose a rep range from your template, for example 6-10, and a load you can lift for the bottom of the range at RPE 7-8
2	Each week, add reps where you can with good form: 6, 6, 6 becomes 7, 6, 6, then 7, 7, 6, and so on

Step	What you do
3	When every working set reaches the top of the range at RPE 8 or below, add the smallest load available next session
4	With the new load, drop back toward the bottom of the range and build again
5	Record every step in the log in Part 13. A progression you did not write down is a guess next week

Carries progress by time first (30 to 45 seconds), then by the smallest load step. Holds progress by time to the top of their range, then by the harder version in Part 9. Single-side exercises progress per side: the weaker side sets the reps, and load rises only when it reaches the top of its range.

When to Hold

Signal	The action
Top of the range, but the last set was RPE 9	Hold the load one more week; earn the increase at RPE 8
Class was unusually hard, or sleep was short two nights running	Hold loads; cut one accessory set if needed
A new exercise replaces an old one	Hold effort at RPE 6-7 for the first week
You are in the two weeks before a test or competition	Hold everything; the deload in Part 10 takes over at seven days out

When to Back Off

Signal	The action
Reps fall two sessions in a row at the same load	Drop the load by about 5 to 10 percent — a small step down in your own loading — and rebuild by reps
Form breaks at a load that was clean last week, confirmed by a warm-up set	End the main lift there; finish the session light
Soreness from a lift still limits class after 48 hours, two weeks running	Cut one set from that lift; cap it at RPE 7 for two weeks

Signal	The action
Joint pain, sharp pain, or pain that changes movement	Stop that exercise that day, per the safety block. Do not back off and continue; stop, substitute a pain-free pattern, and note it
Illness, or a week missed	Repeat the last logged week at RPE 6-7. Miss two weeks: step loads down one increment. Miss a month: restart at Part 5's first-two-weeks doses

Backing off is a tool, not a verdict. A twelve-week climb that ends higher than it started contains plenty of small steps down. The students who stall for months are usually the ones who refuse the step down.

Part 13: Tracking Sheets and the 12-Week Log

The Session Sheet (Copy One Per Session)

Date: _____	Template day: A / B / 1 / 2 / 3	Class today? Y / N, hard? Y / N
Exercise	Load (yours)	Sets x reps done
Main lift	_____	_____
Push	_____	_____
Pull	_____	_____
Single-leg / hip / accessory	_____	_____
Carry	_____	_____
Trunk / grip block	_____	_____

Sleep last night (hours): _____ Soreness before session (0-3): _____ Soreness 24 hours later (0-3): _____

Read the soreness columns together with the class columns. That pairing is how you learn your own dose — information no general program can give you in advance.

The 12-Week Log

One row per week. Record the main lifts only; the session sheets hold the detail.

Week	Sessions done (of 2 or 3)	Squat: load x best set	Hinge: load x best set	Push: load x best set	Pull: load x best set	Carry: load x time	Hardest class day felt (good / flat / buried)	One change for next week
1								
2								
3								
4								
5								
6								
7								
8								
9								
10								
11								
12								

Reading the log at week 12. Progress is a main lift finishing at a higher load for the same reps and effort, a carry held longer at the same posture, or the same numbers as week 1 with the hardest-class-day column reading better. That third outcome is real progress, and a gym-only log would miss it.

Part 14: Logging Lifting in the Mat Manual Training Journal

If you keep your record in the Mat Manual Training Journal, log lifting there the same day, while the numbers are still in your head. Enter the exercise, load, sets and reps actually finished, and the effort of the last set. One short note is enough: the form fault you are fixing, the side that lagged, or the soreness left behind.

Log your martial arts classes in the same Journal record of the week, because the value is the pairing: lifting dose beside class load. That view tells you whether a hard week was a lifting problem, a class problem, or simply a hard week. The Part 13 paper sheets remain useful on the gym floor — copy them into the Journal later that day and keep one record, not two half-records.

The Journal is a free tool, with paid Pro features that widen what you can track and how far back the history runs. This guide works fully on paper without it. It works better with any single, consistent log — paper kept faithfully beats an app opened sporadically.

Part 15: Optional Testing Standards

Testing is optional, not a contest. Test at most once every twelve weeks, never in a test or competition week for your art, and never when sore, ill, or returning from a layoff. Every test is submaximal: you stop with

good reps in reserve, and the number recorded is a working number for planning, not a maximum. A coach should supervise any barbell test.

Test	How it runs	Stop rule	What you record	A useful working standard
Five-rep strength check (squat, hinge, or press)	Warm up by Part 11, then build in small steps to a set of 5 at RPE 8	Stop at RPE 8, at any form fault, or when the next step would need a spotter you do not have	Load, reps, RPE	Next block's working loads sit visibly below this load
Push-up check	One set of strict push-ups, straight body, chest to a fist height from the floor	Stop with 2 good reps left in reserve	Reps, and the rung used (floor, incline, feet up)	More strict reps at the same rung than last block
Pull check	Pull-ups, assisted pull-ups, pulldown, or table rows: one set at your training version	Stop with 1-2 good reps in reserve; full range throughout	Version, reps, assistance or load	Reps up, or the same reps with less assistance
Carry check	Farmer's or suitcase carry at your usual training load	Stop when posture breaks or grip is about to fail	Load, time or distance	Longer or steadier at the same load
Single-leg check	Split squat, bodyweight or light load	Stop at RPE 8 on the weaker side	Reps per side	The side gap is 0-1 reps, not 3-4
Trunk check	Dead bug at your current version, or side plank	Stop when position is lost	Reps or seconds per side, version used	Same version, cleaner form, even sides

Record a test, set the next block's starting loads from Part 12, and go back to training. If a test goes badly on a tired day, write "tired day" beside it and retest nothing: the twelve-week trend is worth more than one day's number.

Questions Students Ask

How heavy should I start? With a load that lets you finish the first session at RPE 6-7 with form you are proud of. Wondering whether it was too light means it was about right for week one. Part 12 corrects a light

start within three weeks; it cannot correct a month of buried class sessions caused by a heavy one.

Can I lift on a class day? Yes, with Part 10's matrices. Lift after class, or earlier with hours between, keep it moderate, and never put a heavy squat or hinge the day before your hardest class day if the week gives you another choice.

I only have 30 minutes. What survives? The main lift, one push, one pull, two sets each at RPE 7. Cut accessories, not warm-up sets. A short honest session keeps the habit and most of the strength.

Should women, older students, or smaller students use different templates? No. The templates are built on effort, not fixed weights, which is why they fit different bodies. Older beginners should take the longer rests, extend the first-two-weeks phase to three or four weeks, and be stricter about Part 12's hold rules. Troubleshooting covers the older beginner in more detail.

Do I need supplements for this to work? This guide programs training, not supplements, and makes no claims for any product. Eat regular meals with a protein source, sleep as well as your life allows, and run the twelve weeks before concluding anything is missing.

My art already does conditioning circuits. Is this instead, or as well? As well, but count them honestly: a hard conditioning circuit is hard training. In heavy weeks, use the hold rules and, if the log shows class suffering, cut lifting accessories before your art's own work.

Can I do this during heavy grading preparation? Yes at reduced dose: two-day template, main lifts at RPE 7, no grip blocks, full deload in the final week. Grading is the peak; lifting stays in the background.

Troubleshooting

Always Sore

Work the rows in order.

Check	The usual finding	The correction
Is one lift always the cause?	The log names the same exercise every week	Cut one set from that lift, cap it at RPE 7 for two weeks, or swap it for its alternate in Parts 2 to 4
Did volume jump?	Three-day template, hard class weeks, and a new exercise in the same fortnight	Return to the two-day template for two weeks; re-add one thing at a time

Check	The usual finding	The correction
Are you training to failure?	Last sets logged as RPE 9-10 when the template says 7-8	Re-read Part 1. Leave 2-3 reps in reserve for a full block and compare the soreness columns
Is it new-exercise soreness?	The sore weeks follow exercise changes	Keep main lifts fixed for six weeks; novelty is the soreness, not weakness
Sleep and food	Short nights and skipped meals cluster on the sore weeks	Fix the week, not the program: earlier night, real meals, same training

Stalled Lifts

A stall is three weeks with no added rep or load on a main lift, trained honestly. First check the log for unglamorous causes: missed sessions, harder class weeks, a load increase that was not the smallest step available. Then use one lever at a time: add a set at the same load for three weeks; drop the load about 10 percent and rebuild by reps; or swap the lift for its alternate for the next six-week block. Do not use all three in the same week; you will not know which one worked.

No Equipment

Run Part 4 as written, with a loaded backpack for carries and any pattern where bodyweight has become too easy at the top of its range. Solve the pull with a tested, sturdy table, a band, or the prone work, in that order. Accept the one real limit: heavy squat and hinge loading is hard to replace at home, so home progress shows first in single-leg strength, push-ups, rows, carries, and trunk work. That is still a strong twelve weeks, and a pair of dumbbells, when they arrive, changes the program more than any other single purchase.

Older Beginners

Start with the two-day template, the longest rests, and RPE 6-7 for the first three to four weeks. Choose the most forgiving version of each pattern first: goblet squat to a chair, Romanian deadlift rather than from the floor, landmine or half-kneeling press, chest-supported or table rows, and carries you can set down safely anywhere. Get qualified instruction for the main lifts, and treat balance support — a hand on a chair for split squats and single-leg hinges — as standard equipment. Progress by reps for longer before adding load, hold more often, and judge the block by the Part 13 record: strength up a little, class feeling no worse, soreness clearing inside a day or two.