**The General Rules of Exercise Order**

**Resistance work**

For *most* people, *most* of the time, the best exercise order can be summed up as follows:

**More demanding exercises should be performed before less demanding exercises**.

Here are the most common examples of what this means…

1. **Exercises for large muscles should come before exercises for smaller muscles (to manage energy requirements and fatigue and ensure skill levels are high)**  
   Examples:

* Chest or back before shoulders, biceps or triceps.
* Shoulders before biceps or triceps.
* Quads or hamstrings before calves or abs.

1. **Compound exercises should come before isolation exercises.** Compound exercises are the ones that involve multiple joints and large areas of muscle mass. For example, the bench press is a compound exercise because there's movement at the shoulder and the elbow joints. Multiple muscles are strongly involved - not just the chest, but also the deltoids and triceps.

Examples:

* Bench press before dumbbell flyes.
* Overhead press before lateral raises.
* Squats before leg extensions.
* Romanian deadlifts before leg curls.

1. **Free weight/body weight exercises should come before machines.**

* Squats or deadlifts before leg presses.
* Barbell bench press before incline machine press.
* Pull-ups before chest supported machine rows.

Technically speaking, no muscles work in complete isolation, only relative isolation, but for categorising and naming purposes, isolation exercises are usually the ones that isolate movement to a single joint. For example, the triceps pushdown is considered an isolation exercise. In the pulling exercises, rows and pullups are considered the compound exercises, while bicep curls are the isolation exercises.

Triceps are usually trained after the larger chest and shoulder muscles and biceps after the larger back muscles. Why? Because if you work your biceps before your back, then your fatigued biceps become the weak link or limiting factor in the performance of your back exercises.

If you do bicep curls first, then do a back exercise like wide grip pullups or some type of rows, your biceps will give out first, causing failure in the back exercise before your back gets a good workout.

It's the same with pushing exercises for chest and deltoids. If you train triceps first, and then follow that with chest or deltoids, your triceps, being an assisting muscle, will be fatigued first. Then when you do your pushing movement like an overhead press or flat bench press, your triceps could become the limiting factor as they'll give out before your larger chest and deltoid muscles give out. This will compromise your chest or shoulder workout.

For example a squat, a lunge and a leg extension is a typical quad workout for bodybuilding. You would do the compound leg exercises (squat or possible the lunge) first, and then the isolation leg exercise (leg extension) last.

In one study squat performance was decreased by 22% when leg extensions were done first and bench press performance was reduced by 75% when flyes were done first.