

BY SHANNON GRIFFITHS

# Indoor Cycling Sample Class: Explore Your Zones

Integrate various intensity levels for a productive cardiovascular workout.

A properly designed indoor cycling program can enhance cardiovascular health, regardless of age or ability level. But you must integrate various intensity levels to get the most from participants. Ideally, cardiovascular training should provide a mix of the following intensity zones (as used in the Schwinn® Indoor Cycling Program):

## **ZONE 1** (easy/comfortable)

50%–65% of heart rate maximum (HRmax)

5–6 rating of perceived exertion (RPE)

## **ZONE 2** (challenging but comfortable)

65%–75% HRmax

6–7 RPE

## **ZONE 3** (challenging and uncomfortable)

75%–85% HRmax

7–8 RPE

## **ZONE 4** (breathless—not maximum, but winded)

85%–90% HRmax

8–9 RPE

There are some hurdles to overcome prior to using this system in class. You must convince participants why *all* the zones are important. Each zone has a physiological as well as a psychological benefit, but participants are conditioned to go “all out.” Educate yourself on the benefits of all four zones and then pass that information on.

As mentioned, indoor cycling regulars are used to intense workouts. You live up to their expectations with rockin’ music and high-energy instruction. The thought of pulling back sends up red flags. Instructors and participants falsely presume that a lower intensity level means easy riding and a light workload. It doesn’t have to be this way! Your class may not even know what different intensities feel like. All they know are *easy* and *hard*. You must train them.

The following class design uses mixed

terrain (some hills and some flats) in a predictable pattern. The format and goal allow participants to compare and contrast zones as they explore them. Once people can feel the different zones and determine how their bodies react within each of them, they’ll be able to use the zones for cardiovascular training in other classes and situations.

## **EXPLORE YOUR ZONES: DETAILS**

**FORMAT:** a mixed-intensity, mixed-terrain indoor cycling class for as many participants as your room can hold

**TOTAL TIME:** approximately 60 minutes

**EQUIPMENT NEEDED:** one bike per participant

**MUSIC:** any music you enjoy (a sample playlist is included)

## **WARM-UP (8–10 MINUTES)**

Use the warm-up strategically. Warm up participants slowly so they can fully appreciate all intensity zones. Spend the first 2–6 minutes describing the appropriate amount of resistance to start with, rehearsing proper pedal stroke and establishing a cadence. Use the last minutes to explain exactly what will happen during the rest of the class. In this way you mentally prepare participants; they know where they will need to push, hold back, etc.

## **FINDING THE EDGE (5–7 MINUTES)**

Establish a steady-paced hill climb (60–80 revolutions per minute [rpm]) in the saddle. Allow participants to turn the resistance knob at their leisure while maintaining a consistent pace. Coach them to search for “the edge” (top of Zone 3). Describe this feeling in vivid terms (e.g., “Your legs are starting to talk loudly,” “You would rather slow down and give in to the hill than continue,” “You are on the verge of going breathless”). Instruct participants to find the edge *slowly* for the best results. Encourage your class to go in and

out of the saddle during this hill climb whenever necessary.

*Note:* This is the most important part of the workout. This drill will establish a baseline you can then encourage participants to work beyond (Zone 4); right around (Zone 3); or below (Zone 2). Riders will have a frame of reference for this workout and workouts to come.

## **RECOVERY (2–3 MINUTES)**

After reaching the top of the hill, descend for as long as necessary to get back to Zone 2. If participants get there in less time than you allotted, encourage them to “get back on the road” (appropriate amount of resistance, proper cadence, 70–90 rpm) and focus on the next set.

## **EXPLORING THE ZONES (APPROXIMATELY 30–34 MINUTES)**

Now put it all together. There are three parts to “Exploring the Zones”:

1. Hill climb to the edge.
2. Flatten out to go breathless.
3. Descend to recover.

Set up part one, the hill climb (approximately 3:30 minutes), as you did in “Finding the Edge” above. One difference: Encourage the same feeling *without* getting out of the saddle on the hill. During the second part (approximately 2 minutes), encourage participants to keep the resistance they have, transition to a flat (standing) and pick up the pace to go breathless, which is Zone 4. In part three (approximately 2–2:30 minutes), allow participants to descend and recover to Zone 2 (much as in “Recovery,” above). As soon as they are able, tell them to get back on the road and prepare for the next “round.”

Repeat this cycle two to three more times, depending on the length of your class.

## **COOLDOWN AND STRETCH (8–10 MINUTES)**

Use the first 3–4 minutes to travel down a flat road with a little less resistance at approximately 70–90 rpm. Encourage

# Schwinn® cycling class design worksheet

SET	TECHNIQUE/TERRAIN	INTENSITY	TIME	SONG
Warm-Up	SF	Zone 1 to Zone 2	Total: 9:38 1. 3:43 2. 5:55	1. "Wings of the Dawn," Maher Shalal Hash Baz 2. "The Glass Bead Game," Thievery Corporation
Finding the Edge	CH	Up to top of Zone 3	3. 5:00	3. "Never Gonna Come Back Down," BT
Recovery	SF	Down to Zone 2	4. 2:49	4. "Hash Driven," Ultra Chilled, Vol. 2, Disc 2, Timo Maas
Exploring the Zones, Round 1	SH/CF/SF	Zone 3 Zone 4 Zone 2	Total: 8:04 5. 3:33 6. 4:31	5. "Drift Away," Uncle Kracker 6. "I Think Of . . .," Afro Celt Sound System
Exploring the Zones, Round 2	SH/CF/SF	Zone 3 Zone 4 Zone 2	Total: 7:30 7. 5:58 8. 1:32	7. "Lady" (remix), Modjo 8. "Infinite Tamboura," Rusted Root
Exploring the Zones, Round 3	SF/CF/SF	Zone 3 Zone 4 Zone 2	9. 7:25	9. "Never Tear Us Apart" (remix), INXS
Exploring the Zones, Round 4	SH/CF/SF	Zone 3 Zone 4 Zone 2	Total: 8:22 10. 5:02 11. 3:20	10. "Just Can't Wait," DJ Sharaz 11. "It Ain't Over Till It's Over," Lenny Kravitz
Cooldown	SF	Zone 2 Zone 1	12. 4:18	12. "Into the Stars," Ultra Chilled, Vol. 2, Disc 2, Alphawezen
Stretch	SF	N/A	13. 4:06	13. "I Wanna Stay Home," Jellyfish

**KEY:** **SF:** seated flat, 70–90 rpm **SH:** seated hill, 60–80 rpm **CF:** combination flat (in and out of saddle), 70–90 rpm  
**CH:** combination hill (in and out of saddle), 60–80 rpm

breathing to maintain Zone 2. At this point, cue participants to begin decreasing speed and resistance until they are in Zone 1. Use the rest of your time to stretch off the bike (include exercises for chest, anterior shoulder, neck, hamstrings, quads, calves and hip flexors).

*Shannon Griffiths is a master trainer and presenter for The Nautilus Health & Fitness Group®. For more information on the Schwinn Indoor Cycling Program, visit [www.fitnessacademy.com](http://www.fitnessacademy.com) or e-mail the author at [Shannon@SFResources.com](mailto:Shannon@SFResources.com).*

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