All the pro's say you should track your progress at the gym, but I frequently found myself without my notepad, pen, or both. I transitioned to my phone's "Notes" app for a while, but the file soon became large and unorganized.

Enter Reminder App

I never really found a use for the "Reminder" app. Doesn't everyone use Calendar to remind them of stuff? After digging it out of the "maybe I'll use it one day but probably not" discard folder I tried using it to log my workouts. After establishing a logging system, it turns out to be an effective way to track progress. There's hundreds of exercise apps that can do something similar, but why give away your personal information, hard drive space, and/or money? Here's my system that, depending on the complexity of your routine, shouldn't take more than a few minutes to set up and almost no time to use.

Creation

Step 1: Create a new "List" by pushing the "+" symbol at the top right corner. If you do not see the "+" symbol, you might have to swipe down (it appears next to the search feature). Name it something descriptive and (optionally) give it a color code in ROYGBIV order. For example, I color coded my "Legs" workout Red because it is my first exercise of the week. Next comes "Chest" in Orange, then "Back" in yellow, and so on.

Step 2: Write in the different exercises for that day. For example "Squat 3x5 135" represents 3 sets of 5 reps at 135 lbs. Then on the next line, "Leg Curl 4x8 140," and so on until you have set up every exercise for that routine.

Step 3: Before you go onto the next routine (list), add a new list item with the date you plan on doing this routine OR write the date in once you're at the gym. It is important to keep track of dates otherwise you will have trouble remembering when you started this routine.I recommend keeping the dates as a separate list item to keep it clean.

Repeat Steps 1-3 for all of your routines. For example if you have five different routines, you should have five lists.

Ticking off boxes

Reminders makes it easy to track what you have left because you literally 'tick' off the exercises as you complete them. After you finish your sets you can also write a note to yourself for next week. For example, if I found the set easy I will write "easy" so I know to increase the weight next week. If I was not able to complete the exercise I will write "fail" so I know to decrease the weight or attempt it earlier in the routine next time.

Separate by time

I separate my weeks with semicolons, ";", so that it is clear to see the change every week. This works even if you have complex exercises with variable weights, sets, and/or reps because they are still semicolon separated.

After you set up your exercise you should not repeat the title, you just log what you did. For example:

Incline bench press 4x8 135; 4x8 140; 4x6 145; skipped for core work; 4x8 150; ...

And so on. Notice how clearly the different days show up.

I can't emphasize enough how motivating it is to start with 30 or so exercises and tick them off to zero. Well, until the end of the week that is, when you get to uncheck all your routines and start over :)

Why it's important to log progress

No matter how good your memory is, you will forget *some* specifics from the week before. Maybe you skipped the bench press because the line was around the block? Maybe you substituted core work for arm work because you weren't going to the beach anytime soon. Perhaps you hit the treadmill for the first time because you found the confidence to be that guy who flirts at the gym. No matter your level, you need to log your activity otherwise you'll spin your wheels with little progress.