

Handgun shooting guide

Training for target handgun shooters

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Introduction

This Basic Training Program is to assist you in receiving initial training covering the safe handling and use of target handguns. Along with safety and shooting fundamentals, the training will include some of the legal responsibilities of target handgun ownership, basic description of parts and operation as well as range procedures.

Proper initial training will enhance your enjoyment of the sport, by giving you the knowledge and confidence required to build a set of fundamental skills and with practice, the confidence to participate in the activities of the club. This program addresses the basic knowledge needed for you to be a safety-conscious member of our club.

Purpose of this manual

From the start it must be made clear that this manual is not designed as a coaching manual to assist in gaining better competitive scores or higher levels of accuracy, although some topics may assist in these aims. It is a plain English guide that has been developed as a resource to assist you during your initial safety training, as a new target handgun club member.

It is in a simple format and only covers the basics in introductory form. Its purpose is to set some guidelines that can easily be referred to by you.

Safety rules

As with all firearms, safety must always be the first concern when handling or using any form of handgun. The need for safety exists wherever handguns are located or used: at home while cleaning, on the shooting range and during transportation from and to home.

Causes of gun accidents

The cause of all accidents involving firearms can be traced to ignorance and/or carelessness. Ignorance is a lack of knowledge being displayed by a person when they handle a firearm without knowing the safety rules or how the firearm operates and can be classed as a dangerous lack of knowledge. Equally dangerous is the person who, although knowing the correct firearm operation and safety rules, becomes careless in properly applying that knowledge. In both of these cases, accidents can easily happen. But when people practise responsible ownership and use of firearms, accidents do not happen.

Three fundamental safety rules

1. Always keep the handgun pointed in a safe direction muzzle at 45° downwards

It is important that you are always aware of the direction the muzzle (front end of the barrel) is pointing in, which, while on the range, should be at an angle of 45° downwards, facing the target area. In this position, even if it were unintentionally discharged, it would not cause any injury or damage. This general safety rule may have additional restrictions if at an indoor range and as a shooter, you should make yourself aware of these if visiting an indoor range.

Regardless of this, you are responsible for being aware at all times of where your muzzle is pointing. You should **never** point a handgun at another person, even when you know it is unloaded. Don't forget, a handgun has a very short barrel and a little movement can move the muzzle through a large arc.

2. Always keep your finger off the trigger until ready to shoot

Always keep your finger off the trigger until you are ready to shoot. When holding a handgun, a person has a natural tendency to place their index finger through the triggerguard and onto the trigger. When holding a handgun, you must consciously remember to straighten your index finger and rest it along the outside of the triggerguard. With practice, this will become an automatic action.

Do not touch the trigger until the Range Officer has give the command to fire and you are actually ready to fire at the target.

3. Never load the handgun until told to do so by the Range Officer

You must always keep the handgun unloaded until instructed to load by the Range Officer. When picking up a handgun, keep it pointed in a safe direction, with your finger outside the triggerguard and immediately remove the magazine, if fitted, and open the action if a handgun, or swing out the cylinder if a revolver. Then look into the chamber and magazine or cylinders to ensure all are clear of ammunition and therefore unloaded.

If you are not sure how to open the action and unload the handgun, leave it alone and get help from a competent person.

No handgun should be stored in a loaded condition and you must treat every handgun as if it were loaded.

General safety rules

The following safety rules should be observed when using or storing a handgun.

1. Be sure the gun is safe to operate. Just like other sporting equipment, handguns need regular maintenance to remain operable and safe. Regular cleaning and proper storage is essential. Have a gunsmith or the club armourer inspect it if you are not sure of the handgun's condition.
2. Know how to use the handgun safely before using it. Read the instruction manual or get a competent person, Range Officer or club instructor to show you how it operates, its basic parts, how to safely open the handgun to see if it's loaded and how to remove ammunition from chambers and/or magazines. Nothing can replace safe firearms handling. Don't rely on a handgun's safety mechanism. Like any mechanical device, it can fail. Use it, but don't let it be a substitute for correct safe handling and observance of the three fundamental rules for firearms safety. A defective safety or firing mechanism could result in an accident. Don't play with the safety by changing its position constantly; if the safety is used leave it in the 'on' position until you have been instructed to fire.
3. Use only the correct ammunition for the handgun. Most handguns have the ammunition type stamped on the barrel. If in doubt, ask!
4. Wear eye and ear protection to protect yourself against the noise and debris that can be emitted from handguns. Appropriate footwear is also recommended.
5. Alcohol or drugs are never to be used prior to or during a shooting match. Some prescription and over-the-counter (non-prescription) medications can also impair judgement and cause undesirable physical side-effects that could contribute to an accident. It is your responsibility to be aware of their effects and if necessary refrain from shooting in these circumstances.
6. Store handguns so they are not accessible to unauthorised persons. Many factors must be considered when deciding where and how to store handguns. At all times you must follow and comply with your state's Firearms Registry requirements. This also applies to the transportation of handguns to the range or a firearms dealer or gunsmith. Ammunition must also be stored in accordance with manufacturers' recommendations and the requirements of the Police Firearms Registry guidelines.
7. Be aware that some types of handguns and shooting matches require additional safety precautions, especially when using other than paper targets.
8. Carry out all safety checks of the handgun and any magazines prior to cleaning and always ensure no ammunition is present while cleaning your handgun. While cleaning your handgun use the opportunity to check it for correct function and damaged or broken parts. If a problem is discovered, don't try to fix it; take it to a gunsmith or return it to the manufacturer for repair.
9. Always be sure the barrel is free from obstructions, as a blocked barrel can cause a serious accident by bursting the barrel or action if a round is fired with the barrel in this condition. Before checking this, carry out the correct safety checks to ensure that the handgun is unloaded and pointed in a safe direction.
10. When handing a handgun to another person, always be sure that the muzzle is pointed in a safe direction, your finger is off the trigger, the action is open and the magazine is unloaded and removed, or in the case of a revolver, the cylinder is open and empty. If you are passed a handgun that is not in this condition, then carry out the correct safety checks to satisfy yourself that the handgun is unloaded and in a safe condition.



Anatomy of the revolver



Handgun parts and operation

A handgun is a mechanical device and as with any machine, it is necessary to understand how it works before it can be safely used and its operation mastered. In the hands of a responsible, knowledgeable and safety-conscious person, a handgun is safe. In order to begin to understand how a handgun functions, the names and definition of various handgun types and main components must first be identified.

Types of handgun

The two main types of handguns in use are the revolver and self-loading handgun. They consist of three major components: the frame, the barrel and the action. Although both revolvers and self-loaders have these three main parts, some of these components have a slightly different function between the two.

Revolver

A revolver is a handgun that has a rotating cylinder designed to contain cartridges. The action of the trigger and/or hammer will rotate the cylinder and fire a cartridge. To understand how this firing process occurs and how to safely load and unload cartridges, it is necessary to first become familiar with the names and functions of the various parts of a revolver. These are:

Frame: The revolver chassis to which all other parts are attached.

Grip panels: Are attached to the lower rear portion of the frame. Grip panels are usually composed of wood, rubber or moulded plastic and are

attached to the frame with screws. These form the grip (handle) by which the shooter holds the revolver.

Backstrap: The rear vertical portion of the frame that lies between the grip panels.

Triggerguard: Located on the underside of the frame and is designed to protect the trigger in order to reduce the possibility of an unintended firing.

Trigger: Located on the underside of the frame within the triggerguard. There is a 'hammer' attached to the rear of the frame. When the trigger is pulled it activates the hammer, which in turn causes the 'firing pin' to strike and fire the cartridge. In some revolvers, the firing pin is attached to the hammer; in others, it is located inside the frame.

In 'single-action' revolvers, the trigger performs only one action - releasing the hammer. The trigger does not 'cock' the hammer. The hammer must be cocked with the thumb and will stay in a cocked position until the trigger is pulled to release it.

In 'double-action' revolvers, the trigger performs two tasks. When it is pulled, it will cock and release the hammer, firing the revolver. Most double-action revolvers can also be fired in single-action mode by manually cocking the hammer with the thumb. The hammer will stay in the cocked position until released by pulling the trigger.

Barrel: The metal tube through which a bullet passes on its way to a target. The inside of the barrel is called the 'bore'. The bore has spiral grooves cut into it. The ridges of metal between these grooves are called the 'lands'. Together, the grooves and lands make up what is known as 'rifling'. Rifling makes the bullet spin as it leaves the barrel so that it will be more stable in flight and travel more accurately. The internal diameter of the barrel

Anatomy of the self-loading handgun



measured between the lands determines the calibre of the handgun. This distance is measured in hundredths of an inch (such as .22-calibre or .45-calibre) or in millimetres (such as 7.65mm or 9mm). The front end of the barrel where the bullet exits is called the 'muzzle'.

Sights: There is a rear-sight located on top of the rear of the frame and a front-sight located on top of the barrel at the muzzle end. These are used for aiming the revolver.

Action: The action comprises the moving parts used to load, fire and unload a handgun. The action of a revolver is made up of parts attached to or within the frame including the cylinder.

Cylinder: Holds individual cartridges, which are arranged in a circular pattern. Cylinders usually contain five or six 'chambers' into which the cartridges are placed. Each time the hammer moves to the rear, the cylinder rotates and brings a new chamber in line with the barrel and the firing pin, which fires the cartridge.

Cylinder release latch: Found on most revolvers, it releases the cylinder and allows it to swing out so cartridges can be loaded and unloaded. Most revolvers have an 'ejector' (also known as an 'extractor') and/or an 'ejector rod'. Although the operation and location of ejectors and ejector rods may vary, the purpose is the same - to remove cartridges from the cylinder.

Self-loading handgun

A self-loading (also known as an automatic) handgun differs significantly from a revolver in its operation. After a cartridge is fired by pulling the trigger, the empty 'case' is extracted and ejected and a new cartridge is inserted into the chamber. Because a new cartridge is automatically 'loaded'

or placed into the chamber, this type of handgun is sometimes referred to as an 'autoloader'.

Although the basic operation of a self-loading handgun differs from that of a revolver (one of the reasons for the name 'pistol' as opposed to the 'revolving' operation of a revolver), it still has all the same major components of the revolver, except for the cylinder. There are also some additional components on a self-loading handgun, as well as some differences in the operation of some components. These are:

Safety: Operated by a lever located on the handgun's frame. The safety is a mechanical device designed to reduce the chance of an accidental discharge by, in most cases, blocking the movement of the firing pin or action or both. Since safeties, like all mechanical devices, can malfunction, the prevention of an accident is ultimately the responsibility of the individual who is handling the handgun.

Slide: Located on top of the frame, at the rear of the barrel. It moves back and forth to chamber a cartridge, cock the action, fire, extract and eject an empty case after firing and reload a new cartridge into the chamber. It also incorporates the firing pin. In some self-loading handguns, the slide also envelops the barrel or can be enclosed inside a fixed outer frame, in which case you may hear it referred to as the 'breech block' or 'block'.

Slide stop: Also known as a 'slide lock' or 'slide release', the slide stop is designed to hold the slide of the self-loading handgun to the rear. Some self-loaders also have a part known as a 'decocking lever', which is used to lower the hammer and/or uncock the handgun.

Action: As can be seen by the description of the slide (which, in many cases, can also be referred to as the 'action'), a large number of different mechanical

designs exist for self-loaders and the actions can vary greatly. Some self-loaders have a hammer that strikes the firing pin; in others, the firing mechanism may be designed without a hammer. Those models that do not have a visible hammer are commonly referred to as 'hammerless', even though the hammer may actually be part of an internal firing mechanism. In all self-loading handguns, the first round (cartridge) must always be manually cycled into the chamber by retracting and then releasing the slide. As the slide returns to the closed position, it removes a round of ammunition from the top of the magazine and inserts it into the chamber.

Magazine: A storage device designed to hold cartridges ready for insertion into the chamber. It replaces the cylinder of the revolver, but unlike the revolver cylinder, does not contain the chambers in which the firing process takes place. The chamber in a self-loader is located in the action end of the barrel. The cartridges in a magazine are forced upwards by the magazine spring to be picked up by the slide as it returns under pressure from a 'recoil' or 'slide spring' to the closed position after being pulled back to cock the handgun.

Types of self-loading handguns

There are three different types of self-loading handguns: single-action, double-action and double-action only. These actions rely on the function of the trigger for their different operations.

Single-action self-loading handgun: The trigger performs a single task, releasing the hammer or the firing mechanism so that the firing pin hits the cartridge.

Double-action self-loading handgun: The trigger performs two tasks. It cocks and releases the hammer or internal firing mechanism for the first shot. After the first shot is fired, the movement of the slide will cock the hammer or internal firing mechanism for all successive shots and the trigger will be used only to release the hammer or internal firing mechanism. It returns to a single-action function.

Double-action only self-loading handgun: The trigger will cock and release the hammer or internal firing mechanism on the first and all successive shots. The slide will chamber a new cartridge after each shot, as it does for the other types of self-loaders, but it will not cock the firing mechanism. The cock-and-release action is accomplished by pulling the trigger for each shot. In this way, the action of the trigger is similar to that of a double-action revolver. However, in most double-action-only self-loaders, the hammer cannot be manually cocked to a single-action position as it can in a double-action revolver.

Some self-loading handguns may vary from the above descriptions due to the large variety of mechanical designs available today. Always be sure to carefully read and understand the instruction manual for each handgun. If you are unsure or questions still exist, be sure to consult a knowledgeable person.

The fundamentals of handgun shooting

To shoot a handgun accurately, it is first necessary to learn and understand the fundamentals or basic essential components of handgun shooting. These fundamentals must be properly performed every time a handgun is fired. The fundamentals are:

- Position
- Grip
- Breathing control
- Sight alignment
- Trigger squeeze
- Follow-through

Determining the best shooting hand

Before any practice can be carried out, or indeed a shot fired, the shooter must first determine which hand will be used to grip and fire the handgun. As a general rule of thumb it is recommended that a shooter use the hand which is on the same side of the body as the dominant eye.

Examining the fundamentals

Each of the above fundamentals must be studied in detail.

Position

Proper body position is essential in order to shoot a good accurate shot. When learning any shooting position, the following basic steps must be followed.

- Carefully study and practise adopting the correct body position that will be shown to you by the instructor.
- Practise the position without holding a handgun.
- Practise the position with a handgun.
- Practise obtaining and maintaining the correct grip.
- Adjust your body position so that the handgun points naturally at the target when you raise your arm to take a sight-picture.

A variety of positions can be used when shooting a handgun. The three basic handgun positions will be examined after you have an understanding of the fundamentals. These are the Bench rest, Two-handed standing and One-handed standing positions.

- Feet should be shoulder-width apart and parallel.
- Non-shooting arm secured close to body.
- Stance should be straight with head held upright.
- Elbow and wrist of shooting arm straight.
- Eyes in line with sights.



- Feet shoulder-width apart.
- Angle between line of shoulders and line of arm is 12° to 20°.

Grip

To achieve a proper grip, the following basic steps must be followed.

- Keep the handgun pointed in a safe direction and your fingers away from the trigger.
- Using the non-shooting hand, place the handgun in the grip of the shooting hand.
- Fit the 'V' formed by the thumb and finger of the shooting hand as high as possible on the backstrap of the frame.
- Align the handgun so that it forms an imaginary straight line from the muzzle, along the barrel through the wrist and forearm.
- Grip the handgun using the base of the thumb and the lower three fingers of the shooting hand.
- The pressure of the grip should be directed straight to the rear.
- Hold the handgun firmly, but without exerting so much pressure that you are straining or causing your hand to shake.
- Your index finger should be placed along the outside of the triggerguard or frame of the handgun, not on the trigger. Always keep the index finger off the trigger until ready to shoot.
- The thumb should lie relaxed along the side of the frame at a level above that of the index finger.

Uniformity is the most important feature of a proper grip. The grip should be the same each time the handgun is handled.

This knowledge should be applied when practising the basic handgun positions.



- Spread the hand and push the 'V' as high as possible into the back of the grip.



- The trigger should be pulled straight back with the pressure on the first half of the pad of the finger.



- The trigger finger should be clear of the grip and should not touch the handgun anywhere except at the trigger.

Breath control

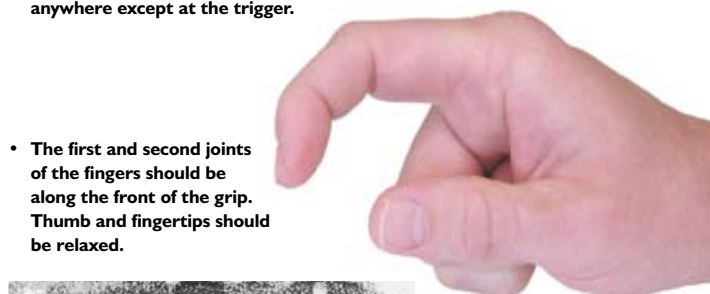
In order to minimise body movement, the breath must be held while firing. As the handgun is lifted towards the target take in a slightly more than average-sized breath.

Before each shot, take a breath, let out enough air to be comfortable and hold the remaining breath while firing the shot. Because firing will usually occur within a few seconds, there should be no difficulty from lack of oxygen. For a single precision shot do not hold for longer than 10 seconds.

However, if the breath is held too long, muscle tremors may start. If tremors begin to occur, take the index finger off the trigger while keeping the muzzle pointed in a safe direction, lower the gun to 45°, relax briefly, take a few breaths and begin the firing cycle again.

Sight alignment

Sight alignment is the relationship of the front and rear sights. The eye must be lined up with the front and rear sights and the sights positioned so that their alignment is correct. Proper alignment of the two sights means that the top of the front-sight is even with the top of the rear-sight. The front-sight must also be centred in the notch of the rear-sight so that there is an equal amount of space on each side of the front-sight. Correct sight alignment is the key to accurate shooting. Angular misalignment of the front-sight with the rear-sight introduces an error that is multiplied with distance.



- The first and second joints of the fingers should be along the front of the grip. Thumb and fingertips should be relaxed.



- Hold in the white area below the black.
- Focus on the front-sight only.
- Maintain a steady, balanced sight-picture.

To fire an accurate shot, it is essential to concentrate on the front-sight while squeezing the trigger. The eye is capable of focusing clearly on only one object at a time. It cannot keep the rear-sight, the front-sight and the target in focus at the same time. When the eye is focused properly for a shot, the front-sight should appear sharp and clear, the rear-sight should appear a little less sharp and the target should look blurred.

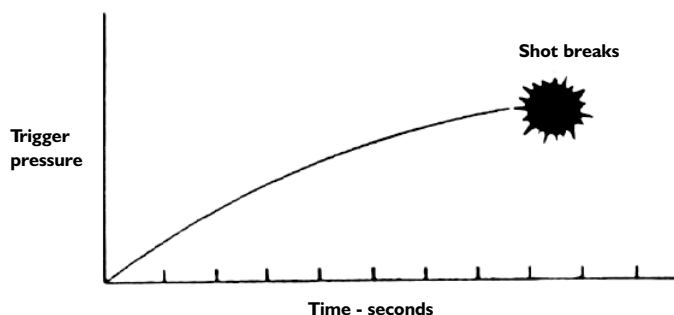
No shooter, no matter how expert, can hold a handgun in a firing position without some movement. This movement is called the 'arc of movement'. The very best that any shooter can do is to keep the arc of movement at a minimum; it cannot be eliminated. While maintaining a correct sight-picture the shooter should gently squeeze the trigger while concentrating on minimising the arc of movement.

'Dry firing' is the 'shooting' of an unloaded firearm. It is useful in practising marksmanship skills and allows a new shooter to concentrate on sight alignment and trigger squeeze without being distracted by the noise or recoil of live ammunition. Dry firing is a good training exercise and can be practised at home by picking out a point on the wall and going through a firing sequence. Dry-firing practice will provide an opportunity to the new shooter to become familiar with properly applying good shooting fundamentals, especially trigger squeeze and sight alignment.

Always be absolutely certain that the handgun is unloaded and that it never points in the direction of any other person. Don't forget, you must obey all firearm safety rules whenever handling a handgun, even when dry firing.

Trigger squeeze

- Start to apply trigger pressure as soon as the sights come down into the white aiming area of the target.
- Trigger finger continues to apply steady pressure while shooter concentrates on sight-picture and waits for shot to break.
- If the shot does not break within 8-10 seconds, lower handgun, relax and breathe, then try again.

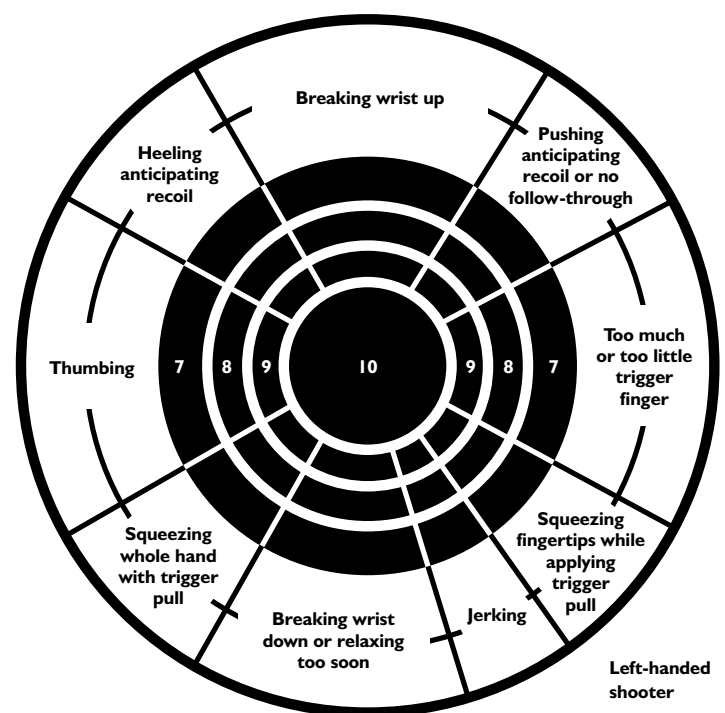
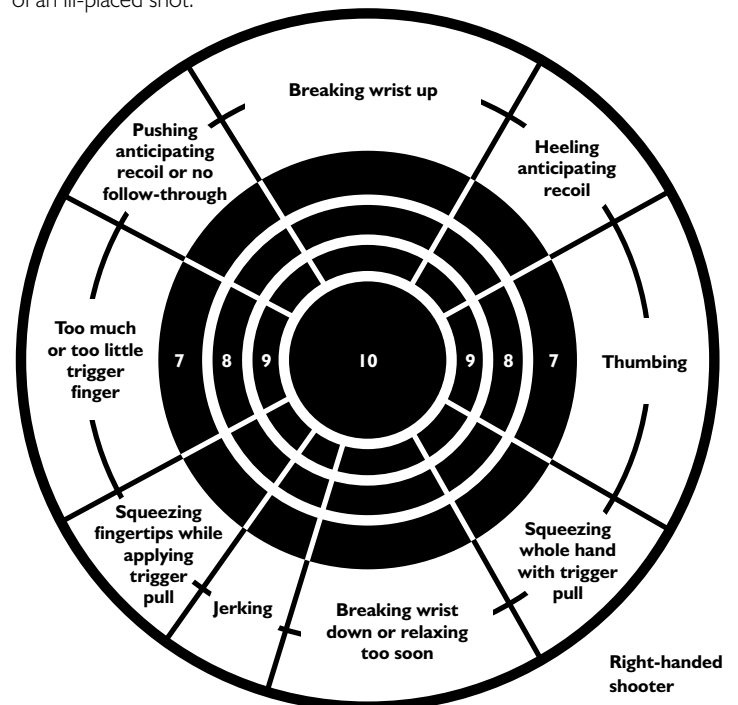


Follow-through

- As shot breaks continue to focus on sight-picture.
- After recoil sights will return to position held before the release of the shot.
- Hold this sight-picture for 1-2 seconds before lowering arm.
- The sight-picture at instant of shot breaking will indicate probable position of shot on target.

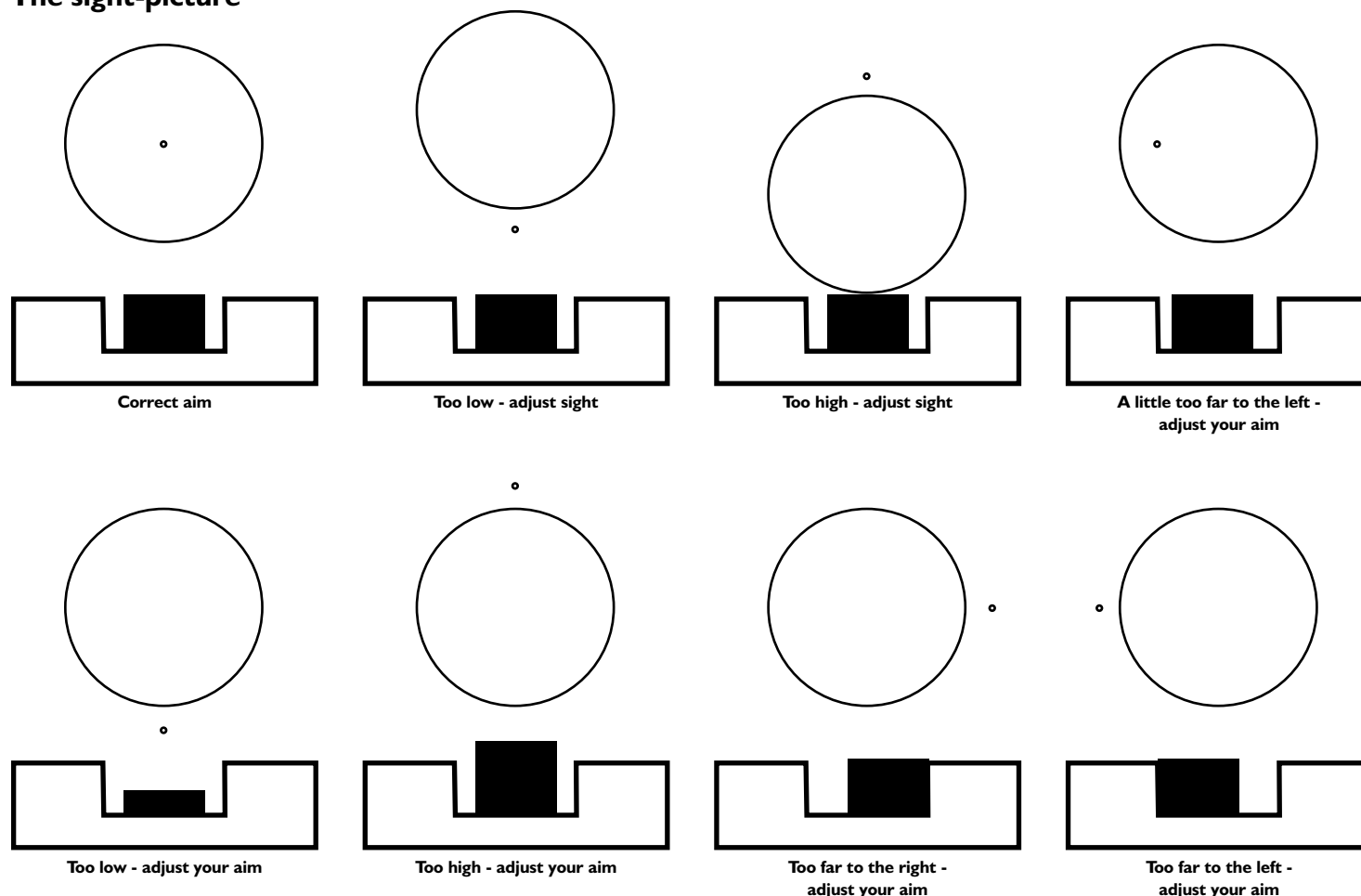
Target analysis guide

These guides may be used as an aid to determine the probable cause of an ill-placed shot.



Queensland Coaching Council
Queensland Amateur Handgun Shooting Association Ltd
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The sight-picture



Handgun choices

For new target shooters, the best handgun with which to learn the fundamentals is a .22-calibre target handgun. The fundamentals are the same for all handguns, but the .22-calibre handgun offers many advantages. It has minimal recoil and noise and the ammunition is inexpensive, which allows for greater practice. Most .22s are very accurate and they are relatively cheap to purchase.

Either a revolver or self-loading handgun may be used during basic marksmanship training, although a self-loading handgun offers more versatility and is easier to master. If a revolver is chosen, it would be preferable to choose a double-action over a single-action, but it should be fired in single-action mode whenever possible. By shooting in single-action mode, less pressure will be needed to pull the trigger and it will be easier to concentrate on sight alignment and trigger squeeze.

Once your competency levels, accuracy and confidence have improved, you can then start to look and inquire with other shooters as to other types of handgun and their suitability for various matches and competition.

Shooting positions

A variety of positions can be used when shooting a handgun. The three basic handgun positions are the Bench rest, two-handed standing and one-handed standing positions.

Bench rest position

The fundamentals that have been explained can best be applied by using the Bench rest position as the introduction to handgun shooting. This position permits the use of a sandbag or other object to support the hands and the handgun at the proper height and allows the shooter to concentrate upon proper sight alignment and trigger squeeze.

The following guidelines for gripping and operating the handgun are for a right-handed shooter; left-handed shooters should make appropriate adjustments to these guidelines.

- Sit behind a bench or table and face the target.
- Keeping the handgun pointed downrange, with your finger off the trigger, place the handgun in your right hand while taking a proper grip on the handgun as previously explained and practised.

- After correctly gripping the handgun in the right hand, place the heel of the left hand against the heel of the right hand.
- Rest the left thumb on top of the right thumb and wrap the fingers of the left hand firmly around the fingers of the right hand. Caution: To avoid injury when using a self-loader, be careful not to place the left thumb in the path that will be taken by the slide when it recoils after a shot is fired.
- Fully extend both arms in front of the body with the hands (not the handgun) resting on the sandbags.
- Position the handgun so that it points naturally at the target.

Two-handed standing position

The Two-handed standing position is perhaps the easiest position for a new shooter. Both hands will be used to support the handgun when shooting, making it easier to hold the handgun steady.

- While keeping the handgun pointed downrange and your finger off the trigger and using the proper grip, take the handgun in your right hand as previously shown.
- After correctly gripping the handgun in the right hand, there are two different methods that can be used to support the right hand.
 1. Rest the bottom of the grip portion of the frame and the heel of the right hand in the palm of the left hand. Hold the fingers of the left hand firmly up along the side of the right hand.
 2. Place the heel of the left hand against the heel of the right hand. Rest the thumb on top of the right hand. Wrap the fingers of the left hand firmly around the fingers of the right hand.
- Face the target squarely with the body directly in front of the target. Place your feet shoulder-width apart with body weight distributed evenly. Keep your legs straight, back bent slightly backward, head erect and arms fully extended.
- After taking the above position and while using a proper two-handed grip, bring the handgun up to eye level. The handgun should point naturally at the centre of the target.



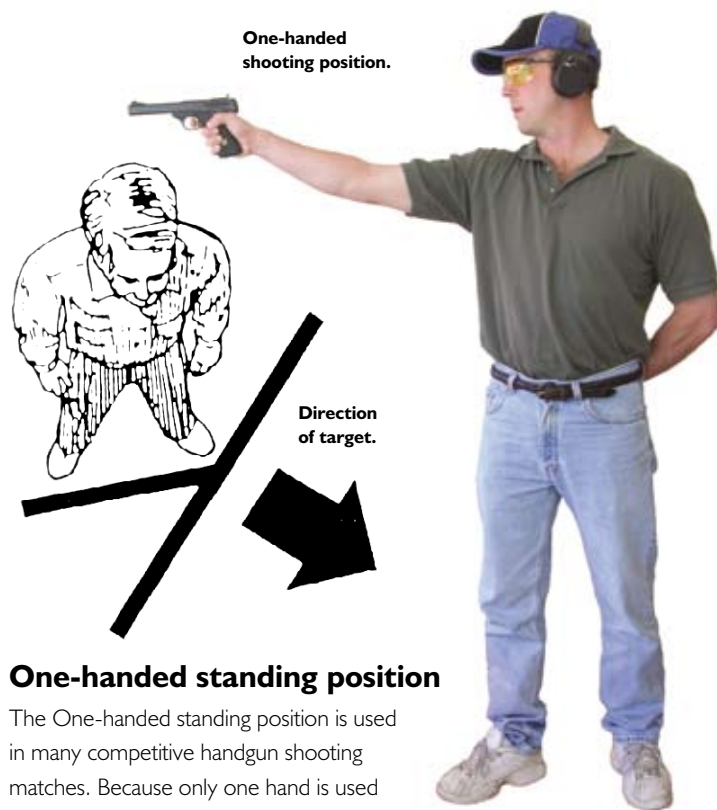
Two-handed shooting position.



One-handed shooting position.



Direction of target.



One-handed standing position

The One-handed standing position is used in many competitive handgun shooting matches. Because only one hand is used when holding the weight of the handgun, there is not as much support as with a Two-handed standing position. The one-handed position is required in these competitive events because it is more challenging than the two-handed position. However, this position can be easily mastered with practice and the use of the correct technique and position.

- Keeping the handgun pointed downrange at 45° with the finger outside the triggerguard, hold the handgun using the correct grip in the right hand.
- To establish a natural point of aim, position the body at an angle of approximately 45° to the target with the right side of the body closest to the target.
- To find if you are in the best position, raise the right arm in line with the target then turn your head away, rotate the arm in a small circular pattern. Stop the motion when you feel your arm is in a comfortable, 'natural' position.
- Turn your head back towards the target. Look at the target and if your hand is pointing towards the centre of the target area, a natural point of aim has been established.
- If the hand is not pointing at the centre of the target area, move the left foot and pivot the right foot until the hand is pointing correctly. Turn the head away and repeat the arm rotation and pointing steps again. Keep repeating these steps until a natural point of aim has been achieved.
- Once you have confirmed a natural point of aim, ensure your body is positioned with your feet shoulder-width apart, weight evenly distributed and legs straight, but not tense. Your body and head should be erect, but comfortable.

- When raised, the right arm should be fully extended with the wrist and elbow locked in place.
- The left hand should be relaxed and placed in a pocket, or hooked in a belt or waistband. If the left hand is left hanging by the side it can become a distraction and can also affect the stability of your shooting position.
- You are now ready to bring the handgun up to eye level and commence a firing sequence.

Other shooting positions can be used successfully in addition to those described in this section and with experience you will become familiar with them. However, the One-handed and Two-handed standing positions are the ones more commonly used.

Holding a revolver



Cocking a single-action revolver with thumb of left hand.

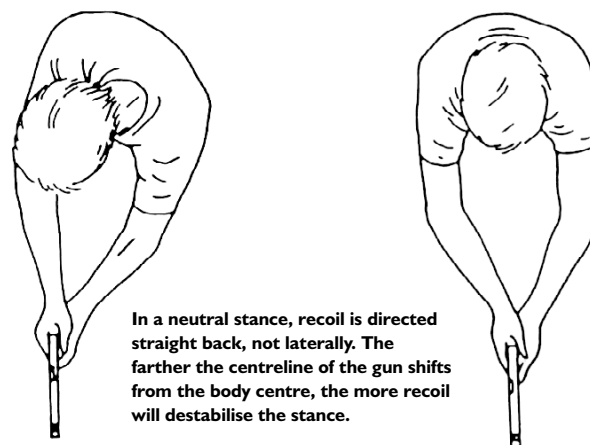


Two-handed grip for a double-action revolver.

Holding a self-loading handgun



Two-handed grip for a self-loading handgun. When holding a self-loader, keep your hands clear of the slide upon recoil.



In a neutral stance, recoil is directed straight back, not laterally. The farther the centreline of the gun shifts from the body centre, the more recoil will destabilise the stance.

Range safety

An approved SSAA range is one of the safest places to enjoy shooting. Standard SSAA range commands are used to control the shooting and maintain uniform safety practices.

The overall person in charge of the range is known as the Range Captain. They have people assisting them called Range Officers. These people's primary duty is the control of all shooting and associated activities on the range. They are responsible for ensuring that shooters obey all safety rules and that the range operates in a safe manner for the benefit of all shooters.

The Range Officer is generally the person who conducts the matches at the range and is the one who gives the verbal instructions, or range commands, to shooters on the firing line and during the course of a match. The purpose of these range commands is to provide clear, concise instructions, in a standardised form to all shooters. These commands must be obeyed by all shooters on the range in order to ensure the safety of all personnel on the range.

Each shooter is responsible for knowing, understanding and obeying all of the commands spoken by the Range Officer. Commonly used commands are:

“Load”: When the Range Officer gives this command to shooters on the firing line, the handgun may be loaded. Ammunition is placed into the cylinders or the magazine and the cylinder closed or the magazine fitted to the pistol. The handgun must be held pointing downrange at 45°. Prior to this command the pistol or revolver should be placed on the bench with either cylinder swung open, or magazine removed and empty and action open.

“Are you ready?”: When this command is given by the Range Officer, shooters may cock the hammer on revolvers, or work the slide to place a round of ammunition into the chamber of pistols. The shooter must still hold the firearm pointing downrange at an angle of 45° towards the ground.

“Fire”: The signal to commence firing may be a verbal command such as “Fire” or “Commence firing”, or another signal such as a whistle blast or the action of the targets turning towards the shooters. As the signal to fire may change due to the type of match to be shot, you should ask the Range Officer prior to the match if unsure. When the command to fire is given, shooters may commence firing the sequence.

“Cease fire”: May also be signalled by the Range Officer calling “Cease firing”, “Stop”, a whistle blast, the targets turning away from the shooters, or one of a number of other means. Once again, if you are unsure, seek clarification from the Range Officer. When the command “Cease fire” is given, shooters must stop firing immediately; even if in the process of pulling the trigger the shot must be stopped. Fingers must be removed from the trigger, the handgun held at 45° to the ground pointing towards the target. The shooter must wait for further instructions from the Range Officer.

Don’t assume that the Range Officer is just calling the completion of that particular sequence of fire. The Range Officer may have seen a situation that you are not aware of that could lead to a breach of safety if left to continue, or some other activity that calls for the immediate cessation of shooting.

“Unload”: With the firearm pointing downrange, swing out the cylinder and remove all cartridges from the chambers if a revolver, or remove and unload the magazine and pull and lock open the slide, clearing the chamber of any ammunition if a pistol.

“Show clear”: Still keeping the muzzle pointing downrange, hold the firearm so that the Range Officer can look into and inspect the chambers of the cylinders for a revolver, or the magazine and chamber if a pistol.

When visiting a new range ensure you report to the Range Officer and make yourself aware of the range commands in use.

Exercises

There are many exercises you can do to help perfect your shooting technique. Some exercises are:

Single-shot exercise

Loading and firing off one shot at a time at the centre area of a blank target. A total of five shots will be fired.

For a revolver, load only one round into the cylinder. Remember that the cylinder will rotate when the hammer is cocked. In order to load the chamber that will be rotated into the firing position when the hammer is cocked, it is necessary to know in which direction the cylinder will turn. This direction is not the same for all revolvers. Use single-action mode by cocking the hammer. Don’t use double-action mode for this practice.

For a self-loading handgun, load only one round into the magazine. Don’t try to bypass the magazine by manually inserting a round directly into the chamber. If the cartridge is not seated properly in the chamber, it is possible for the slide to hit and ignite the primer and hence the powder as the slide returns to its forward position.

Relax and don’t rush. Concentrate on keeping the sights aligned while squeezing the trigger slowly to the rear. Remember that the firing of the shot should come as a surprise. Fire the total of five shots under the control of the trainer and/or Range Officer. When you are finished, carry out the correct unloading and clearance procedure and when directed by the Range Officer inspect the target.

Five-shot precision exercise

This exercise will involve the loading and firing of five rounds in the handgun. All five rounds will be fired at the centre area of a blank target. If using a revolver that has more than five chambers, be sure to close the cylinder with an empty chamber under the hammer.

As in the single-shot exercise, be sure that when the cylinder rotates that a loaded chamber will rotate into the firing position when the hammer is cocked. If using a self-loading handgun, load all five rounds into the magazine.

Once again, fire all five shots onto the target with the blank side facing you, relaxing between shots and concentrating on trigger and sight control. To be a good shot you must be consistent and always perform the fundamentals correctly, the same way and in the same length of time.

By using this consistent technique, good rhythm can be achieved. The rhythm pattern that is used in slow-fire shooting is achieved through practice and this will be the same pattern that will be used in rapid-fire shooting. The pace will quicken, but the pattern will remain the same.

When the exercise is finished, carry out the same safety checks as you did in the previous exercise.

Rapid-fire exercise

Load and fire five more rounds in quick sequence, once again onto a blank target. The exercise is completed when all five shots have been fired. When you are finished, carry out the correct unloading and safety checks.

Sight adjustment

If shots are consistently grouping away from the centre of the target, it may be necessary to adjust the sights so that the bullets will hit the centre of the target.

Always move the rear-sight in the same direction that the bullet impact on the target should move to be on the point of aim. For example, if the shots are hitting to the right, move the rear-sight to the left. If the shots are hitting high, move the rear-sight down. After making the adjustments, fire five more shots to see where the bullets are hitting. If necessary, make further adjustments to the sights and repeat the grouping shots until the bullets are striking at the point of aim.

Practice

The above exercises will provide a basic initiation to handgun shooting. However, to improve or maintain shooting skills, it is necessary to practise on a regular basis. Shooting at a bullseye target is a good way to practise marksmanship skills and the scores that are shot can be recorded and monitored for improvement.

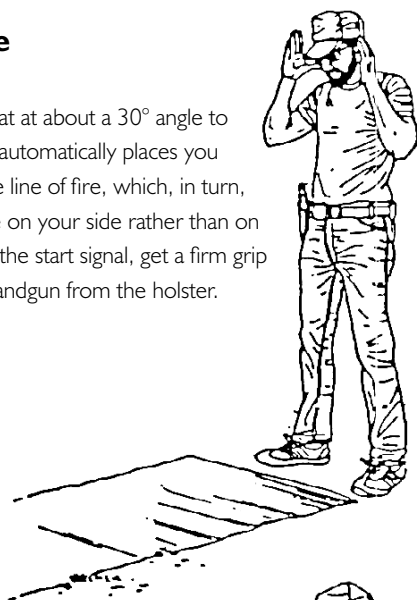
You should now have a level of competence and confidence that will allow you to commence improving your skill levels through practice and continue to enhance your knowledge and enjoyment of the sport of target handgun shooting.

Master tips

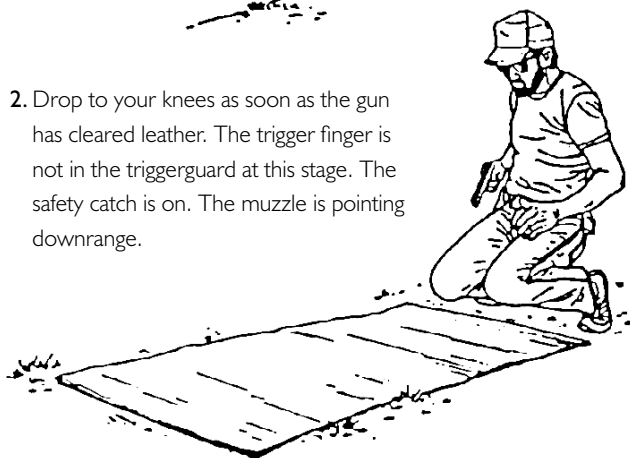
Collected by Jon Winokur

Going prone

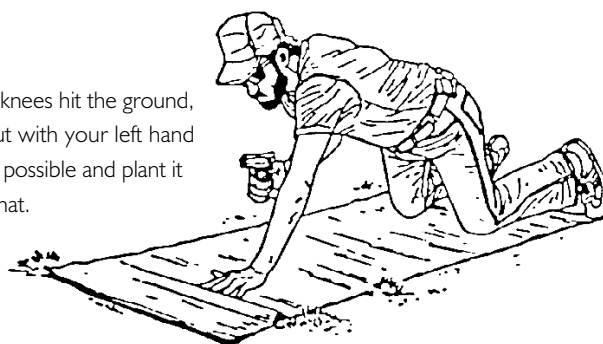
1. Position your mat at about a 30° angle to the target. This automatically places you diagonally to the line of fire, which, in turn, forces you to lie on your side rather than on your chest. On the start signal, get a firm grip and draw the handgun from the holster.



2. Drop to your knees as soon as the gun has cleared leather. The trigger finger is not in the triggerguard at this stage. The safety catch is on. The muzzle is pointing downrange.



3. As your knees hit the ground, reach out with your left hand as far as possible and plant it on the mat.



4. Extend your gun arm fully, keeping it parallel to the ground; that way you'll already have full extension when you hit the ground. Your trigger finger goes in. The safety catch is released.



5. Let the right side of your body collapse onto the mat, then bring in your weak hand and you're ready to shoot.



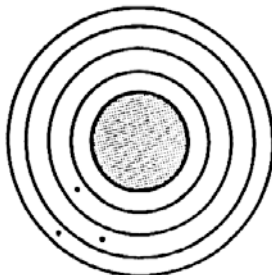
Common shooting errors

Most shooters' problems result from the failure to properly apply the two most important shooting fundamentals: sight alignment and trigger squeeze. However, other factors may also cause a shooter to have problems in properly delivering a shot to the target.

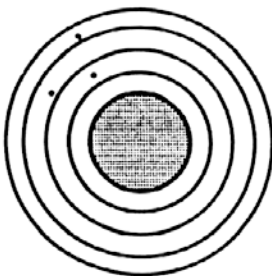
Illustrated in this section are eight common errors committed by many handgun shooters. Study the bullseye target pictures and the accompanying text carefully - the solution to a troublesome shooting problem might be found here. Be aware, however, that explanations other than the ones suggested here may also apply to the illustrated problem. Shooters who are having problems should seek advice from a handgun instructor or coach.

The shooting situations pictured below assume that the handgun and ammunition are functioning correctly, that the handgun sights are adjusted properly and that the shooter is right-handed. The shot groups for a left-handed shooter will appear on the opposite side from the shot groups illustrated.

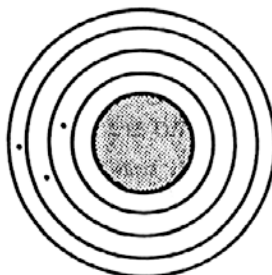
1. This pattern is caused when the shooter jerks the trigger, causing the front-sight to dip low and to the left before the bullet leaves the barrel. To correct this type of error, the trigger must be slowly squeezed until the shot fires, being careful while squeezing not to disturb the sight alignment and sight-picture.



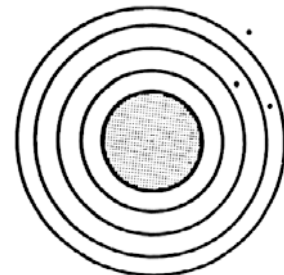
2. This target shows the effect of 'riding the recoil'. This is where the shooter anticipates the recoil and makes the handgun recoil before it really happens. This type of pattern can also be caused by improper follow-through, in that, the shooter releases the trigger finger too soon and may flip the finger forward, causing the front-sight to rise to the left. Errors of this nature will usually produce shots in the 9.30 to 12 o'clock zone.



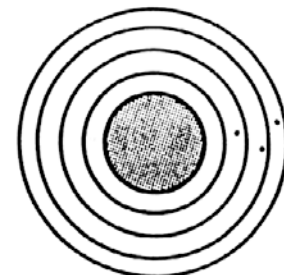
3. This pattern is created when the shooter does not properly place the index finger on the trigger. In such cases, the shooter has a tendency to squeeze the trigger at an angle instead of straight to the rear. This improper squeeze causes the muzzle to shift to the left, with the shots striking in the 8.30 to 9.30 zone.



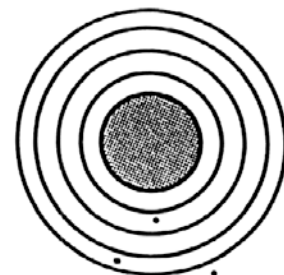
4. In this example, the shooter has 'heeled' the shots high on the target. This error is caused by anticipating the shot and, at the last moment before firing, giving the handgun a slight push with the heel of the hand. The front-sight moves up to the right and the bullets strike the target in the 1 o'clock to 2.30 zone.



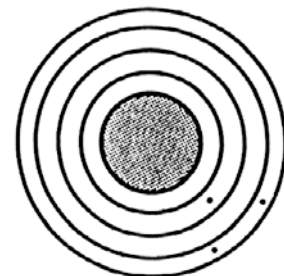
5. The shots in this target are strung over to the 2.30 to 3 o'clock zone and are caused when the shooter 'thumps' the handgun. Just as the shot begins, the shooter pushes the right thumb against the side of the frame, causing the aligned sights to move to the right.



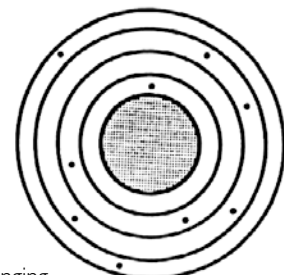
6. The shot string shown here in the 5 o'clock to 6.30 area is caused when the shooter 'breaks' the wrist - another form of anticipation. The shooter expects the handgun to recoil at a known instant and tries to fight or control this anticipated recoil by cocking the wrist downward. The shooter may subconsciously believe that the recoil can be lessened by holding the wrist down. This shot group can also be caused by a shooter who relaxes too soon.



7. This target illustrates what happens when a shooter's grip tightens as the trigger is squeezed. This target area is known as the 'lobster' area - just as a lobster's claw clamps together, the shooter's hand clamps or snatches at the last second. This movement caused the front-sight to dip low and to the right, pushing the shots to the 3.30 to 5 o'clock zone.



8. This pattern is often produced by a beginning shooter. A new shooter usually does not consistently repeat one particular error, but instead commits many different errors. The result is a target with shots scattered in many places. Such a target may be caused by the shooter's inconsistency, including changing the grip between shots, focusing on the target instead of the front-sight on some shots, failing to align the sights properly and so on. This pattern could also be caused by a new shooter's lack of holding strength and a resultant large arc of movement. To improve handgun skills, shooters should carefully and periodically review the fundamentals of handgun shooting to determine if they are missing any basic principles.



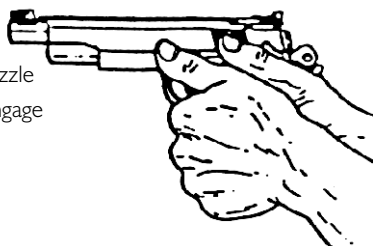
Master tips

Collected by Jon Winokur

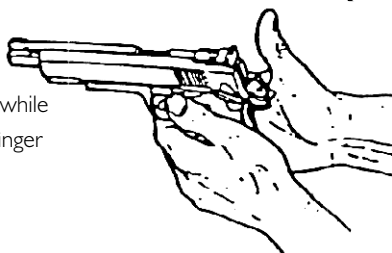
The switchover

A solid grip is essential in practical shooting and it's especially important when shooting with the weak hand only. My technique allows a quick, safe switchover and gives maximum control over recoil.

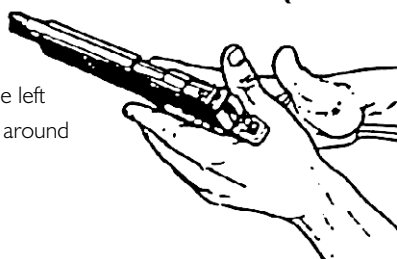
1. From the draw, as soon as the muzzle is pointing safely downrange, disengage the safety with the right thumb.



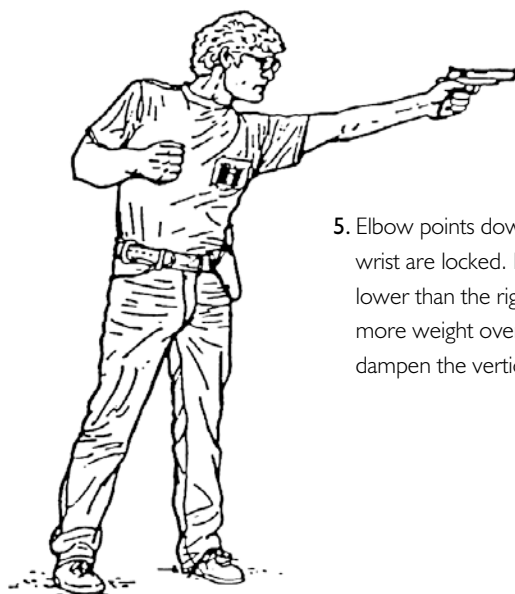
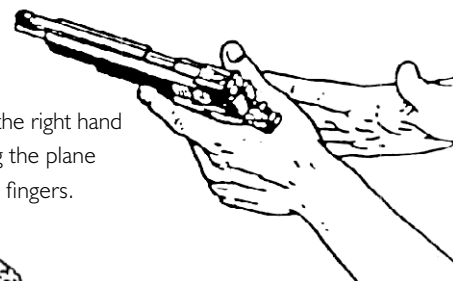
2. Tilt the left palm slightly upward while moving the thumbs and trigger finger away from the handgun.



3. Rock the gun into the web of the left hand, thumbs following thumbs around the grip safety.



4. Wipe it off; that is, draw the right hand sharply to the rear, along the plane created by the extended fingers.



5. Elbow points downward, arm and wrist are locked. Keep the left shoulder lower than the right in order to get more weight over the gun and thereby dampen the vertical recoil.

Safety first

1. Before firing any gun, make certain that your shots will land in a safe place.
2. Be muzzle conscious - know where the handgun is pointing at all times and never point it at anything you don't want to harm or destroy.
3. Make sure your holster does not allow the muzzle to point at any part of your body.
4. Keep your finger out of the triggerguard unless the handgun is pointed downrange and you're ready to fire.
5. Make sure you have a solid grip with the drawing hand before you begin the draw.
6. Keep the weak hand away from the muzzle when drawing and reholstering.
7. Make sure you have both hands on the handgun before you thrust the gun toward the target.
8. Do not disengage the safety or move your finger towards the trigger until you have a proper grip and the muzzle is pointing completely downrange.

Handgun competitions



Free Pistol

This is one of the oldest matches and one that requires very specialised hardware. It consists of shooting 60 shots at bullseye targets, offhand at 50m. The 10-ring is 50mm in diameter. The handguns used are long-barrelled .22 Long Rifle calibre single-shots that are exceptionally accurate and have full wrap-around orthopaedic grips, very light set triggers and high precision sights. Scoring well in this match is very difficult if the shooter has not mastered the elements of accurate handgunning.



Rapid Fire

The Rapid Fire match is also one of the older matches, but it is still very popular. The match is shot on five turning targets, spaced 75cm apart. The match consists of four series of five shots each in 8 seconds, 6 seconds and 4 seconds. The course of fire is in two 30-shot segments of two series in each time sequence. The shooter must wait with the handgun arm at 45° to horizontal until the targets start to turn.

Rapid-fire handguns are highly developed self-loaders designed to fire .22 Short calibre cartridges to minimise recoil. Most rapid-fire handguns have vented barrels to assist in recoil control and triggers are very smooth and light.

The handling characteristics of rapid-fire handguns are perhaps their most important feature. When the handgun is raised to the shooting position, it must point and recover from recoil with a minimum of effort, as the shooter has little time to make corrections in the faster time series. Well fitting orthopaedic grips, adjustable trigger and reliable functioning are characteristics of a good rapid-fire handgun.



Air Pistol

The Air Pistol match is a slow-fire match demanding similar levels of precision to Free Pistol except that it is shot at 10m on a target with a 12mm bullseye. The match consists of 60 shots in the open event and 40 shots for ladies and juniors.

Air Pistol is a great teacher of handgun shooting fundamentals, as the highly accurate handguns with their minimum allowable trigger weight of 500g are easy to control and have no recoil. They are also very economical to shoot and are noiseless compared to cartridge firearms.

There are three types of Air Pistol operating systems used on target air arms: spring and piston, pneumatic and gas powered. All spring and piston handguns have to have some recoil compensating system built into the mechanism to dampen recoil. The pneumatic air arms have a built-in pump that highly compresses air into a pressure chamber, from where it is released with a trigger-operated valve. These types of handguns require more cocking effort than the others. The gas-operated systems use carbon dioxide (CO₂) and are easy to operate, but require a separate gas supply and can be finicky in extreme weather conditions.

All good-quality target air handguns have adjustable grips, sights and triggers and are highly refined shooting tools that leave the shooter in no doubt who is at fault if scores are down.

Most Air Pistol ranges are indoors and this offers shooters the advantage of shooting of an evening and getting plenty of low-cost practice.



Centrefire

The Centrefire match remains one of the most popular events, although it too has been around for a lot of years. The match consists of two separate 30-shot courses of fire. One is the Precision course shot at 25m on a bullseye target (50mm 10-ring), with 6 minutes allowed for each five-shot series. The other is the Duelling course, which is also shot at 25m, but on turning

targets. One shot is fired with each exposure of the target as it turns toward the shooter for 3 seconds and away for 7 seconds, with the shooter lowering their arm to 45° between each exposure of the target.

Any centrefire calibre from .32 to .38 can be used in a revolver or self-loader, provided the barrel is no longer than 150mm and the trigger pull is no lighter than 1360g. Many target-grade revolvers are available for this match, mainly in .38 Special or .357 Magnum, although there are some .32-calibre revolvers also available. The heavier trigger pull specified for Centrefire requires firm control of the handgun in both the Precision and Duelling series and this coupled with the recoil of the centrefire ammunition make this quite a difficult, but popular event for the new shooter.



Ladies Sport Handgun and Junior Sport Pistol

These matches are identical to the Centrefire match except that the handguns are .22 Long Rifle calibre self-loaders that comply with the Standard handgun specifications. Some manufacturers make special lightweight versions of their standard pistols for these matches, among them are Walther and Pardini Fiocchi.



Standard Pistol

The Standard Pistol match is shot at 25m with a .22 Long Rifle calibre self-loader on a standard bullseye target with a 50mm 10-ring, in timed series of five shots on turning targets. Four series, each of 150 seconds, 20 seconds and 10 seconds are fired for a total of 60 shots. Each series starts with the shooter's arm at 45° to the horizontal.

The pistol used in this event must have a barrel no longer than 150mm and trigger pull no lighter than 1000g. Recoil handling characteristics are important in a standard pistol, especially in the 10-seconds series.

The original Standard Pistol match was developed to provide an event in which shooters could use the standard sporting .22-calibre self-loaders that were available. Ruger, Smith & Wesson, High Standard, Browning,

Margolin and other makers of appropriate pistols that fit the original concept are popular for use at club level.

The Standard Pistol match is a challenge to old and new pistol shooters alike, as a momentary lapse in concentration in the faster series can see many points disappear from the score. The Standard Pistol match combines both Precision and Rapid Fire match techniques in its course of fire and the mixture of both in the same match guarantees an interesting match.



Service Pistol

The Service Pistol match was the first of the matches to break away from the conventional one-handed, offhand shooting techniques used in the UIT matches described elsewhere. The course of fire is shot at ranges from 50 yards down to 7 yards and consists of 90 scoring shots. Shooting is done on turning targets and throughout the course of fire, shooters are required to shoot prone, sitting, standing from behind a barricade with both right and left hand, left and right hand only and from the 'crouch' position where the handgun must be held below shoulder level. Time sequences are as short as 4 seconds and several require reloading during the time allowed. As all series are in six-round sequences, revolvers are equally well-suited to the match as self-loaders.

The Service Pistol match has recently been split into Restricted and Unrestricted categories. The course of fire is identical, with the main differences being that the Restricted course requires that the match be shot from a holster rather than from the 45° 'ready' position and that the ammunition used is of a minimum power determined by multiplying the bullet weight in grains and the velocity in feet per second (fps). This power factor must be no less than 120,000. Any calibre up to .38 is permitted, but it is difficult for the smaller calibres to meet the power factor requirements. Double-action revolvers are very popular for this match, as they are highly reliable and once the double-action and speed-loading techniques are mastered, give nothing away to self-loaders.

Service Pistol shooting combines precision, control, speed and timing and can also be shot with a stock standard handgun that meets Centrefire Pistol requirements. The same handgun and ammunition that qualifies for the Restricted course can also be used in the Unrestricted course, but not vice versa.



NRA Action Match

Action Match has been adapted from the Bianchi Cup match that is very popular in the USA. Action Match consists of a series of 12 courses of fire, the rules for each of which are defined. Each organised competition consists of a selection of three or four stages. The most popular stages consist of falling plate matches, moving target matches and a variety of other courses shot on turning targets from barricade position. All matches are shot from the holster and optical sighting equipment is permitted, which has seen a boom in the sales of illuminated dot scopes and specialised handgun scopes.

Double-action revolvers are used because of their reliability and the ease with which they can be fitted with a scope. Ammunition must comply with the 120,000 power factor minimum limit.

Some of the courses are shot in two main elimination courses on falling plates and this provides some high pressure competition as well as entertainment for the spectators. This match is rapidly growing in popularity. It is quite demanding of accuracy in some stages and of speed and coordination in others.



IPSC Practical Pistol

The IPSC (International Practical Shooting Confederation) Practical Pistol match originated in the USA and is a freestyle shooting competition with no set courses of fire. It was originally conceived as a training course for practical-style shooting without the rules and regulations of the more formal handgun

shooting disciplines. IPSC courses are generally divided into two segments: the static course, where the shooter remains stationary and engages a number of nominated targets and the Comstock course, where the shooter moves around the course and engages nominated targets. Not all the targets may be visible at the starting position of the Comstock course. The emphasis in IPSC shooting is power, speed and accuracy, with some matches scored against the clock rather than over a set time.

Self-loaders are the preferred handgun for the match. All shooting is done from the holster and the most stringent requirements applied in the match are the operation of the handgun safety and the security of the holster. There are power factor requirements on the ammunition used for IPSC and outer scoring rings are scored lower if lower powered loads are used. Internationally, the .45 Auto has long been popular for this match, but in recent times, with new national registration laws, the .38 Super autos have been making headway.



Metallic Silhouette

The introduction of Metallic Silhouette competition has allowed Australian shooters to compete with large-calibre handguns, not for the fun of it, but because that is what is needed to effectively shoot the match. The main Metallic Silhouette course is shot at ranges of 50, 100, 150 and 200m on steel targets, including chickens at 50m, pigs at 100m, turkeys at 150m and rams at 200m.

The cartridges used must have enough power to knock these targets over and at 200m, the heavy ram targets require full Magnum loads to work effectively.

There are four divisions in this event: Standing, Revolver, Production and Unlimited. Specialised hardware has been developed for the match, along with a number of special cartridges that are essentially rifle cartridges adapted to heavy-duty handgun use. The .357 Magnum is the absolute minimum-powered handgun cartridge that will work. The .357 Maximum or .41 or .44 Magnums are preferred by most revolver shooters. In the single-shots, there are several 7mm wildcat cartridges, as well as the likes of the .30-30 that provides maximum knockdown power. Many Unlimited handguns use straight .308 rifle cartridges.



Black Powder

There are two Black Powder matches: the Aggregate match and the 50m match. Cap and ball revolvers must be used in the Aggregate match, while single-shot percussion handguns are permitted in the 50m match. The calibre is restricted to .46 maximum and projectiles must be round balls or conical pointed bullets.

The Aggregate match is identical to the Centrefire match except that it consists of 20 precision shots at 25m on a standard bullseye target and 20 shots duelling on a standard rapid-fire target.

The 50m match can be shot with revolvers, but some interesting hybrid single-shots have been put together by Black Powder enthusiasts out of single-shot cartridge handguns such as the Thompson Contender.



Single Action

Single Action shooting is sometimes referred to as a 'concept shooting discipline'. Having evolved more than 25 years ago in the USA, Single Action shooting has become one of the most popular shooting competitions in the world today.

Attracting participants from all walks of life from all age groups, both male and female, young and old alike they all have one thing in common - an interest in the pioneering days of the Old West. This common interest manifests itself in the mastering of skills associated with the use of antique firearms or reproductions of these firearms, but in keen competition underpinned with a sportsmanship sometimes lost in today's sporting activities.

Generally, as interpretive living historians or re-enactors, competitors aim to preserve the spirit of the game by fully participating in what the competition asks. Competitors dress the part, use the appropriate competition tools and respect the traditions of the Old West.

The SSAA is affiliated with the Single Action Shooting Society (SASS), the world governing body. Matches are conducted using the International Rules of Single Action Shooting, as promulgated by SASS.

The firearms used are single-action revolvers, lever-action rifles and side-by-side shotguns without automatic ejectors. Essentially, the firearms and calibres used in competition are those commonly in use in the 19th century up until 1896.

Competitors compete in various categories that dictate the type of firearm and style of shooting. The scoring system most commonly in use today is the 'rank scoring' system where each competitor is ranked against others competing in the same category. Rank scoring is where each competitor is ranked for place over the number of stages that comprise the match.

Matches may be as few as one stage or 'course of fire'; however, most major matches above club level are 10 to 12 courses of fire, each being an individual match in itself.



Colonial Action

This is a very new competition, developed within the SSAA. It is designed to encourage the use of rifles, shotguns and handguns used in Australia's Colonial period. The discipline is dedicated to the remembrance of a historical time period where exploration, mixing of social cultures, settlement and development of new lands took place. The Colonial period has been defined as the years between circa 1850 and 1900.

The rules aim to provide an uncomplicated set of procedures for all participants that will promote a safe, functional shooting sport. The flexibility of the rules allows for a choice of firearms and period costumes, while practising commonly understood procedures of safe range practice.

The clothing and accoutrements should be as close as possible to that worn during the period. Holsters must be of the belt loop or shoulder holster design. Competitors are allowed only one revolver.

The competitor's category is determined by the choice of the revolver and ammunition. Revolvers with competition sights are not permitted, but a revolver can have the rear-sight replaced with a non-adjustable insert that is in keeping within the lines of a revolver. Ammunition belts and pouches were worn and used during the period and are permitted in competition.

For more information and contact details on these handgun disciplines, please visit

www.ssaa.org.au/newssaa/disciplines/disciplines.html