

New Shooter Drills

Drills

The mistake many new shooters make is thinking the goal is to fire a cylinder or magazine full of ammunition and evaluate the results. Think about each shot. It's not a string six rounds, but rather six separate shots. During each, you should have rallied all your gun-handling and marksmanship skills to deliver as good a shot as you could.

There are hundreds of training drills you can use to develop, improve and maintain your skills. What we want to focus on is your first trip to the range and that first box of 50 rounds you fire. During that first trip, you'll have several goals: become further familiarized with your pistol, establish your pistol's reliability and determine the next step in your training.

DRY FIRE

For starters, dry-fire practice for a minute or two. Put up a 1-or 2-inch sticker target on a larger target with a clean background, like a cardboard IPSC target. Work through about 30 trigger presses while keeping the sights on target. If they look good-with minimal sight movement-stand about 5 yards from the target. If you were a bit shaky during dry-fire practice, start closer.

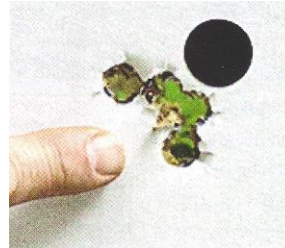


Now, load one-and only one-round. Check your grip, your stance and then bring the handgun up on target. As you're aligning the sights, place your finger on the trigger and when the sights look right, press. Do this nine more times, loading one round at a time. This will help you fully concentrate on each shot and become more familiar with the operation of your handgun. If you can cover your 10-shot group with one hand, you're ready for step two. If not, more dry-firing is in order. For step two, load five rounds and shoot at another dot at the same distance. This time, lower the handgun to the low-ready position after each shot. Don't rush. Give every shot its due. If you can cover these shots with your hand, smile and take five minutes to revel in your glory-you're ready for step three.

Ten shot groups you can cover with your hand are an indication you are doing things right. Now, work to shrink those groups.

Step three will be sustained fire at another dot at the same distance. With five more rounds, concentrate on trigger reset and follow-through by picking up the front sight during recoil so you can guide it back to the target. This is not a speed drill. Take your time, maintain your grip and stance and keep the handgun orientated on the target throughout the drill. If you can cover all these shots with your hand, you're doing well and can move on. If not, go back to step two.

Your goal should be to shoot groups like this during slow, sustained fire out to about seven yards.



Now, it's time to concentrate on shrinking your group size. Ideally, at between 3 and 7 yards, you should be able to make one ragged hole in the target. Repeat the sustained-fire drill with a ragged hole as a goal. If at any time your groups start to widen, conduct remedial training, firing as you did in step one or two, or even doing more dry-fire practice. Keep a record of your performance and after you've fired 50 rounds, quit and go home. For most new shooters, anything more will result in diminishing returns.

Learning to shoot is important, but so is learning how to properly manipulate, load and unload your handgun.

Future Training

What's next? It's time for more dry-fire practice. You cannot do too much of it. When you do return to the range, pick up where you left off. If you're making ragged holes, increase the distance, if not, conduct remedial training. When you're shooting sustained-fire groups at 15 yards that you can cover with your hand, you're ready to start working from the holster and performing other advanced drills. Hopefully by then you'll have saved up enough cash to go to a reputable shooting school or maybe met someone to train with at the range.

Sights, Triggers & Lasers

The relationship between sight alignment and trigger control is the most important duo in shooting. You can tip the odds in your favor in two ways. First, the same reason the 24/7 Big Dot Sights from XS Sight Systems are good for tactical drills makes them good for new shooters. That lack of the notch-and-post sight picture let's shooters concentrate on what's really important-the front sight. That big bold dot, in combination with the shallow V-shaped rear sight, helps shooters guard against target panic by fighting off the amateur desire for perfect sight alignment.

Second, a good trigger helps, too. Trying to maintain a sight picture while pulling a bad trigger is like playing a song on a guitar that's out of tune. The trigger on your handgun should be smooth, consistent and not too heavy. Factory triggers are getting better all the time, and good gunsmiths can fix most

handgun triggers. Depending on the type of handgun, a smooth trigger with a pull weight of between 2.5 to 6 pounds is optimal.

Lastly, don't overlook the benefit a handgun-mounted laser can bring to your training. During dry-fire practice it can show you if you are flinching, help you learn muzzle discipline and also help guide your handgun to the target when you are first learning to work from a holster. Good ones from LaserMax® and Crimson Trace Lasergrips®, are not gimmicks.



Learning to manipulate and shoot a handgun safely and effectively is important if you are going to rely on it for protection. Learning to shoot is important, but so is learning how to properly manipulate, load and unload your pistol.

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