

## *Marksmanship Fundamentals*

The primary use of a defensive pistol, whether it be a semi-automatic or a revolver is to engage an enemy at close range with quick, accurate fire. Accurate shooting results from the knowledge and correct application of the fundamentals of marksmanship. The six elements of pistol marksmanship are:

- Grip
- Stance
- Sight Picture
- Breath Control
- Trigger Squeeze
- Follow-through

### **GRIP**

Your pistol must become an extension of your hand and arm. It should replace your finger in pointing at an object. A consistent, firm, uniform grip *must* be used. Proper grip is one of the most important factors in being able to place multiple shots on your target, quickly.

#### **One-hand grip**



To establish a good grip, form a "V" with the thumb and index finger of your firing hand. Place the pistol in the "V" with the front and rear sights in line with your firing arm. Wrap the lower three fingers of your firing hand around the pistol grip, putting equal pressure with all three fingers to the rear. Allow the thumb of the firing hand to rest alongside the pistol without pressure. Grip the pistol tightly, with the same pressure you would use for a firm hand shake: Too tight and your muscles will begin to tremble. Too light, the pistol can fly out of your hand from the recoil. At this point, you have applied the necessary pressure for a proper grip. Place your trigger finger on the trigger between the tip and first joint so that it can be squeezed rearward. When firing, your trigger finger must work independently of the other fingers.

#### **Two-hand grip**



Using both hands allows the shooter to steady the firing hand and provide maximum support during firing. Two-handed grips are recommended whenever possible for all pistol firing. To use a two-handed grip, first put your firing hand on your pistol as described above. Then put the thumb of your support hand together with the thumb of your firing hand and wrap the fingers of your support hand,

around the fingers of your firing hand. This is the grip for a semi-automatic pistol.



Another popular pistol platform is the revolver. While the revolver grip is similar, the main difference between gripping a revolver and gripping a semi-automatic is that the support thumb is crossed over the strong-side thumb. This not only permits the support thumb to be used to cock the hammer in order to make a steady, single action shot, it also keeps the support thumb from being placed at the front of the cylinder during the firing sequence of the cartridge.

## STANCE

Most people use one of two stances for two-handed handgun firing: **isosceles** or **Weaver**. For both stances, begin by standing with your feet shoulder-width apart, support foot 2-8" in front of strong-side foot.

### Isosceles stance

Both arms are extended outward, with the elbows at their natural extension. This puts the axis of recoil more or less along the centerline of the body. The stance is so named because a path drawn along your extended arms and connecting your shoulders forms an isosceles triangle.



**Weaver stance** The Weaver stance is named after Jack Weaver, who came up with it as a way to utilize isometric tension to control recoil. The supporting arm is bent with the elbow pointed downward. The firing arm is extended with the elbow and wrist locked. Then, apply forward pressure with the firing hand and rearward pressure with the support hand. This is isometric tension. Again, do not apply so much pressure that it causes trembling.



## SIGHT PICTURE

Aiming is a combination of sight alignment and sight placement. Sight alignment is the centering of the front sight in the rear sight. The top of the front sight must be level with the top of the rear sight. To align your sights, first center the front sight and then raise or lower the pistol to bring up or down the rear sight to make the front and rear sights level.



Sight placement is correctly placing the front sight on the target where you wish to hit the target, without disturbing your sight alignment. For defensive shooting, your point-of-aim will generally be your point-of-impact. In other words, after properly aligning your sights, cover the point you wish to hit with the front sight.

The eye can only focus on one distance at a time. Your *point of focus* should be the front sight: not the rear sight, and not the target. This will result in the rear sight and target appearing hazy, but it is the only way to maintain proper sight alignment.

## BREATH CONTROL

In order to achieve maximum accuracy, a shooter must learn to hold his breath properly. The procedure is simple but requires practice.

Take a breath, and then exhale. Right after you exhale, do you have to take another breath right away? This momentary stop in breathing is called the *natural respiratory pause*.

Do the following to adapt this knowledge to shooting. Take aim at your target, breathing as normal. When you are ready to take the shot, wait for the natural respiratory pause and then hold your breath. When you start holding your breath, you will also start pressing the trigger. The shot must then be fired before you feel any discomfort from not breathing.

When multiple targets are presented, you will have to hold your breath at any part of the breathing cycle. Breath control can be practiced using dry-fire exercises until it becomes second-natured.

## TRIGGER SQUEEZE

Improper trigger squeeze causes more misses than any other step of marksmanship. Poor shooting is caused by the aim being disturbed before the bullet leaves the barrel of the pistol. This is usually the result of the shooter jerking the trigger or flinching. A slight off-center pressure of the trigger finger on the trigger is all it takes to move the pistol off-target. Jerking is an effort to fire the pistol at the precise time when the sights align with the target, and flinching is a reflex caused by anticipating recoil.

Trigger squeeze is the independent rearward movement of the trigger finger without disturbance of the sight alignment until the pistol fires. First, the slack in the trigger is taken up. You will then hit the break point of the trigger. Continue applying steadily increasing pressure until the cartridge fires. If the trigger is squeezed properly, you will not know exactly when the pistol will fire; thus, you will tend not to flinch or jerk. This is called letting the trigger surprise you or a surprise trigger break. Beginners must work hard to overcome the urge to anticipate recoil, which usually results in low shots (as you attempt to counter the upward movement of the muzzle after firing). Another common beginner error is moving more fingers than just the trigger finger. The trigger finger should apply rearward pressure and the thumb should apply forward pressure. That's it. Applying pressure with the other fingers will tend to disturb the sight alignment. A good shooter holds the sights of her/his pistol as nearly on the center of the target as possible while squeezing the trigger with increasing pressure until the cartridge fires.



## Follow-through

Follow-through is the continued effort of the shooter to maintain a proper sight picture before, during, and after the firing of the cartridge. The shooter must continue the rearward movement of the trigger finger even after the round has been fired. Releasing the trigger too soon after the cartridge has fired results in an uncontrolled shot, causing a missed target.

## Firearm Safety Begins With You!

- ALWAYS keep the firearm pointed in a safe direction!
- ALWAYS keep your finger off the trigger until you have aligned your sights on the target!
- ALWAYS know your target and what is beyond!

