

“The basics of marksmanship skills – the start of a remedial firearms training program”

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When personnel fails to attain the minimum passing score on a requalification program there has to be a backup plan for remedial instruction. Reinforcement pursuant to the basics of marksmanship skills are the building blocks on which the program must be founded. Without the fundamentals firmly set into place, there is no chance of ever grasping the ability to shoot accurately on the range or on the street.

Remedial firearms instruction is usually a program set into motion by a deficiency in one or both of the two following areas. A lack of understanding of the basics of marksmanship skills from a classroom/lecture perspective and or an inability to execute the skill from a physical standpoint. Failure to execute from a physical standpoint, many times, is a combination of things. The stress of being held to a testing standard, mental mindset, prior physical injury or prior physical and or mental trauma experienced during use of firearms, weapons with barrels less than four inches in length, and sighting systems which are non-adjustable and or low profile.

The fundamentals of basic marksmanship skills must first be preference by the general safety rules that must be present in order for any range facility to be operated in a safe and coordinated environment. You should assume nothing about the shooter, and even realize that the lack of knowledge and skill documented thus far in any given requalification program must put safety concerns at even a higher level than normal.

The most important of all safety rules are the following ones: never anticipate commands, don't do anything on the line until you are told to do so - including even bending over to pick up something up off the range floor, barrel of the weapon pointed downrange at all times when out of the holster, never putting any part of the body in front of the muzzle of the barrel and any time for any reason, and finger outside of the trigger guard and off the trigger until the weapon is on target and the shooter is decided to shoot. The last safety aspect is ultimately important when drawing and holstering the weapon.

With the safety issues taken care of the class can proceed to the lecture portion. The lecture portion is of importance due to the fact shooter(s) many not understand the theory behind the techniques and thus lack applicable confidence in physically demonstrating them. Understanding of theory eliminates certain fears. Confidence is paramount to shooting, and when reinforced in the classroom, fundamental skills can only be expected to excel on the range.

The fundamentals of marksmanship skills can be categorized into the following separate sections: stance, grip, draw, presentation, sight alignment, sight picture, trigger control, follow through, breathing and concentration. Although they can be listed and taught as separate and distinct from one another, the shooter must realize that all of the fundamentals are an integrated and interdependent system that must work together in smooth, uninterrupted flowing movements.

Stance:

The shooting stance is the firing platform for the rest of the body. If it is not solid and sure, the rest of the fundamentals will suffer greatly. If shooting fundamentals are placed upon an unsteady foundation they will be unsteady themselves. There are two basic shooting stances and many variations. The two basic ones are the isosceles stance and the Weaver stance. Two common denominators, which differentiate good stances from bad ones, are the placement of the feet and the distribution of upper body weight. The feet should be slightly wider than shoulder width and the knees slightly bend in a convertible and solid position. In order to get the shooter weight forward the shoulders of the body must be in front of the hips.

Grip:

The grip must be established in the holster. The weapon does not come out of the holster unless the grip is firmly established in the holster first. A good practice to start with is to have the shooter place the shooting hand on the handle of the weapon and seat the weapon into the holster thus pressing the hand into and around the handle. Once this has taken place the weapon can be removed and the non-shooting hand used to formulate the two handed strong hand shooting grip.

Draw:

The drawing of the weapon will start the process of formulating the two handed grip. The draw must be conducted in a smooth and uninterrupted movement. The non-shooting hand should already be strategically placed approximately four inches in front of the body at mid chest level. It is placed there for two reasons. The first is to be ready to perform any control/defensive tactics option needed and the second it to anticipate the arrival of the weapon in the strong hand and speed the process of presentation.

The draw starts from the holster and finishes with the joining of the shooting and non-shooting hand. The line from the holster to the non-shooting hand is a straight one. There should be no twisting or circular movement from the holster to the non-shooting hand. The shortest distance between two points is a straight line, and wasted movement is wasted time. This will be applicable to the draw and to the presentation of the weapon as well.

Presentation:

As with the draw, the presentation of the weapon must be conducted in a controlled but quick manner. It must be done smoothly to achieve this. Smoothness of movement must be the dictator of speed. If this is not case, then control will be lost and drastically diminish the effectiveness of all that follows. From mid chest level where the two handed grip is completed, the rest of the presentation of both hands with the weapon is done in the same movement as a hand strike. One straight movement from mid chest level to eye level.

Sight Alignment:

The formula for sight alignment is a simple one. Although it is simple, many shooters have a difficult time understanding it. Explain it in the simplest terms possible and the shooters will have the greatest chance of understanding it.

The top of the front sight must be even with the two tops of the two blades of the rear site. If a carpenter's level were placed on top of them all the bubbles would register even. The front sight must be in the middle of the rear sight. This can be seen with the shooting eye as the front site having equal amounts of space, or equal amounts of light, on both sides of the front sight. When this is seen, the front site is guaranteed to be in the middle of the rear site. The light example will help shooter to visualize this.

With out proper sight alignment sight picture is not possible. It is the formulation of light alignment, which make the sight picture attainable. Sight alignment leads to sight picture. Sight alignment must be established first.

Sight picture:

Sight picture is one of the two most important fundamentals, along with trigger control. Sight picture is attained by shifting the focus of the shooting eye to the front sight. The rear sight is used as a window. The shooter must look through rear site to the front site with the shooting eye (dominant eye). Sight picture is the relationship between four things: the shooting eye, the rear site, the front site, and the target.

The focus of the shooting eye must be on the front site only. The front site is the projectiles directional device. If rounds are to be placed accurately it must be used. This is more and more important as distance increases. Wherever the front site is when the round detonates is where the bullet will impact the target, as long as the weapon has been sighted in properly.

The shooting eye should see the front site as clear. The rear site should appear out of focus, or slightly hazy, and the target itself should appear the same - out of focus and slightly hazy. This will make some shooters uneasy in the beginning, but this formula is essential to accurate shooting. The crystal clear front site should be in the center of the hazy target.

As distance increases between the weapon and the target there is one factor which will change. The greater the distance to the target the more room on the target the front site will physically occupy. As distance decreases the front site will physically take up less space on the target. As distance increases the more the front site must remain steady. As distance decreases there is more room for front site movement.

This change will dictate the speed at which rounds can be accurately placed on the target. The closer the target is to the shooter the faster rounds can be accurately deployed. The greater the distance to the target the slower the shooter must discharge rounds in order to assure accurate shot placement.

Trigger control

Trigger control is a main factor that determines the movement of the front site during shooting. This is also dictated to a large degree by the shooters grip on the weapon as well. The better the trigger control the steadier the front site can be held. The steadier the front site can be held the greater the accuracy of the rounds discharged. All of the shooting fundamentals play an integrated role in diminishing front site movement, but trigger control is the most important of them.

Proper trigger control is the physical movement of the trigger, by the trigger finger, in one uninterrupted, even, smooth movement straight to the rear from start to finish. There should be only one movement of the trigger. Once a series of starts and stops begins, the integrity of the movement of the trigger has been undermined.

The movement of the trigger is accomplished by pressure applied by the trigger finger only. No other portion of the hands or wrists should initiate the pressure, or in any way be involved. The trigger finger is an independent contractor.

The area of the trigger finger that is placed on the trigger will also be a factor in accuracy and control of the trigger. This will change from individual to individual and will also change from revolver to semiautomatic pistol.

Trigger control should allow rounds to detonate as a surprise to the shooter. Once this is accomplished the weapon is being allowed to function as it is designed, and is not being bullied by the shooter. Attempting to force or strong arm the weapon into functioning by snapping or jerking the trigger will invariably result in shots being put down range in an uncontrolled manner and thus accuracy will be slim to none.

Follow through

Follow through is the discharging of a round and then starting the process of shooting another one all over again. Once the round is discharge many things can hamper this process. Recoil, noise, and muzzle flash are three of the most important of many.

Once recoil is experienced the muzzle of the weapon will elevate instantaneously. Once the recoil has been suppressed, the entire process of shooting starts over again and does not deviate. The sight picture must again be attained and the manipulation of the trigger must begin the same way as it did with the first shot, and there should be no change in the solid properly positioned original grip. The process should start over again without hesitation or variation on the shooting fundamentals.

Breathing

As distance to the target increases the more important breathing becomes, as it decreases the less important it becomes. Any movement of the body will directly correlate to front site movement.

The front site will never be truly motionless. Even if a shooter employs all of the shooting fundamentals appropriately, there will always be some movement. We do all we can to reduce this, but nonetheless there will be some finite movement of the front site.

One of the physical realities of respiration is the movement of the chest and abdomen. This physical movement will also have some effect on the movement of the front site. When the shooter is holding the front site as steady as possible when the process of breathing is taking place there is an arc of movement to the front site.

This arc of movement can be reduced or a minimum arc of movement can be established. A minimum arc of movement can be established by integrating the process of breathing into the formula of shooting. The weapon should be allowed to discharge while the body is not moving, as in not breathing, by letting the shot break when the shooter is at approximately half breath.

This window of opportunity to have the least motion of the front site will obviously not last for an indefinite period of time. The opportunity will present itself for approximately five seconds or so depending on the physical fitness level of the shooter and level of physical stress the shooter is under. After this period is over the body will have to oxygenate itself again. The process should again begin by the shooter taking almost a full breath and then letting about half of it out and letting the shot break while the front site is as motionless as possible.

Concentration

The last of the shooting fundamentals is overall concentration of the shooter. When on the firing line there should be total focus concerning the task at hand. The mind should not be allowed to wander on to other subjects. Focus keeps a shooter sharp and will promote the best of technical efforts resulting in the highest degree of accuracy possible.