

THOUGHTS ON DEFENSIVE PISTOL SHOOTING

Philosophy

Defensive pistol shooting, whether for match or practice for real-world application, is fast, fun, and challenging. Here are some thoughts to consider for your practice and participation.

1. **One Thing at a Time!**

To shoot effectively, you must do three things - move, shoot, and reload. If you try to combine two or even all three things, the results will most likely be that you will miss the target, tangle your feet and stumble or trip, and drop your full magazine in the only mud puddle on the range!

Remember, SHOOT from a solid stance, feet firmly planted and proper form in your technique. MOVE with the gun pointed in a safe direction, finger OUT of the trigger guard, so you can watch where you're going and avoid a display of terminal clumsiness. RELOAD **after** you get to cover, it's actually faster than trying to fumble with magazines while moving.

2. **NEVER practice speed!**

When you practice, you are trying to improve your technique. Smoothness and absolute confidence in yourself and your equipment will allow you to function at the pace your body and mind find most comfortable.

Always remember that **Accuracy comes from consistency, speed comes from familiarity**. Practice often, practice basic moves and drills, and speed will happen.

Trying to practice speed will lead to your ability to make mistakes rapidly!

3. **Analyze the course of fire at each stage!**

Map out your moves in advance - which foot do you want forward at the end of the movement? Will you shoot around the left or right side of a barrier? How many rounds will you have left in your magazine after you service the (first, second, third, etc.) target? Where will you move to perform your reload?

The better you plan your actions, the less mistakes you're likely to make.

4. **Slow down and win!**

The most likely match winner is not the one who shoots the fastest, runs the fastest, or reloads the fastest. The winner is usually the person who made the LEAST mistakes!

Your score/performance is based on how well you followed directions, how precisely you hit what you were aiming at, and ONLY then on your time. Do it right and you won't have to worry about penalty points and procedural errors.

5. **It's NOT Important!**

Practice sessions, and to a large degree matches, are where you go to try your skill and to MAKE MISTAKES. People learn from their mistakes - I know, I've learned a LOT over the years! Even if you consider the skill set you are practicing as essential for real-world use, it's still not important whether you win or lose a match.

Important is when people, yourself possibly included, will live or die based on what you do and how well you do it. Anything else is just entertainment. This leads us directly to the next point:

6. **Don't get overly competitive!**

The quickest way I know to leach all the fun out of any activity is to stress yourself out over inconsequential stuff. Enjoy the company, enjoy the shooting, watch the best shooters to see how they do what they do, and DON'T beat yourself up when you make a mistake.

The really good shooters have been doing this for a long time, they know the routines and they know exactly what they're going to do when the buzzer goes off. We beginners still have to figure all that stuff out. Nobody is an instant expert, there's too much to learn.

Lighten up and have fun.

7. **In the end, it's only a game.**

Children play to have fun - adults play to win! Personally, I'd rather have fun.

The attitude to strive for is to ignore the other player's scores, concentrating only on your own. Your goal at each match is to do better than the last one, not beat everybody else. Your only competition is yourself, the best achievement you can hope for is to improve your skill. Try it, you'll enjoy the match a lot more.

8. **And finally, BEEEEEEEEEEEEEE the bullet!**

Some Specifics

MOVE:

1. Steps add seconds. Look for the most efficient path through the stage. Listen to the "old pro's" for hints on little details to improve your efficiency. Try to end each movement in the position/stance you will shoot the next target from. The less time you have to spend making last-minute adjustments to position and stance, the quicker and smoother you will move through each stage.
2. Use cover effectively - In point of fact, from a military point of view what the match directors call cover is really concealment. Concealment hides your body - cover stops bullets. The distinction is of little importance in a match, but can be critical on the street!

Get and study some movies of defensive pistol training sessions. There are techniques for clearing corners, entering rooms that may contain bad guys, engaging multiple targets, etc. Adopt/adapt what you want to suit what you will do. Even if you don't use the information, the movies are interesting to watch.

RELOAD:

1. Work on your equipment! Magazines should drop free when you press the release. Let it fall on the ground, you can blow the dust out of it later! Your mag pouches should be in the same place on your belt every time you wear them. Index the magazines in the pouch so that the movement to reload is smooth and natural (pointy ends to the front as it goes in the gun!). And, most of all, **PRACTICE**.

SHOOT:

1. Your holster should be in a position where reaching for the grip is instinctive. Unfortunately, if you follow the rules you are required to wear it in a specified location on the strong-side hip. Personally, I much prefer a cross-draw but the powers-that-be have decreed cross-draw rigs to be unsafe on the range. End of preference! In order to insure my holster is solidly in place, I run my belt through the back loop of the holster, then

through the side loop on my Levi's, then through the holsters' front loop. Your holster should (must?) retain the pistol by either friction or some sort of lock, so it will probably take some effort to draw the pistol. Giving yourself a wedgie while trying to draw is considered grounds for hilarity on the part of the people watching you!

2. Know your weapon and load! Be sure that a good hold and a clean break will **GAURANTEE** a center hit. The only way to be really sure is to practice, usually on paper targets with clearly defined aiming points. This is where shooting gets to be a lot like work, since the willpower, concentration, and control you must exercise will quickly wear you out! Again, nothing comes immediately. It takes time to get good, but it's well worth the effort. Try different brands/types of ammunition (NO, it's NOT all the same!) until you find the combination that works best for you and then shoot **THAT** load **EXCLUSIVELY!** You're striving for consistency - changing ammo depending on what's on sale isn't consistent! In the same vein, **practice with the gun you will use!** Switching will confuse your muscle memory, causing your to fingers to do the wrong thing at the wrong time - guaranteed!
3. **PRACTICE!** Strong hand, both hands, and weak hand! You'll need them all.
4. When starting from a holster, there are 4 distinct steps to to the shot:

Grip
Draw
Present
Fire

Grip: In order not to embarrass yourself by throwing your pistol on the ground in front of you, it's important to **Get A Grip!** Take a little extra time to insure that your hand position is correct, your fingers are **FIRMLY** wrapped around the butt, and your trigger finger is extended and pointed along the axis of the bore - actually, your trigger finger will lay along the outside of the holster until you actually draw, and then will be extended along with the gun to point at the target - most natural quick alignment aid you've got!

Draw: Most holsters will resist removal of the pistol if you try to twist the gun out. Besides, it adds an additional adjustment you must make to get on target (Hollywood notwithstanding, it is almost impossible to hit a target consistently with the pistol held horizontal!). Practice lifting the pistol firmly straight up and out of the holster - note that I did not say **VERTICALLY** up! Holsters can hold the gun vertically or with forward or rearward cant. The pistol, however, should come straight out of the holster regardless of the

angle. Practice!

Present: As the pistol clears the holster, the weak hand moves to the grip in your choice of stance - Isosceles, Weaver, or Whatever. The trigger finger (extended along the side of the frame) leads the gun to the target as the arms are extended. If the pistol was correctly gripped and drawn, the sights will be close to correct alignment as the gun comes into the field of view (you were concentrating on the target, right?). AT THIS POINT focus shifts to the front sight and, maintaining sight alignment, the front sight is locked into the target.

Fire: Here's where it all pays off. You've been practicing, you know your gun and load, so TURN OFF YOUR MIND and shoot. Each shot is the ONLY shot that counts, there is no previous miss, there is no "... soon I'll have to run ...", there is ONLY the shot to be made.

The pistol shooters mantra: FRONT SIGHT, PRESS STRAIGHT BACK ON THE TRIGGER, FRONT SIGHT! Repeat as necessary.