



A LADIES PRIMER BY
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You raised your hand. You made the choice to go from spectator to actuator. Now what? The next step is mentorship. Find a person or persons willing to come alongside you, listen to your goals and help you find the tools to take on this new adventure.

The difference between just taking a lesson and finding a mentor is huge. As a woman just joining the sport of shotgunning, your “why” is most likely different than a long-time registered shooter looking to pick up those last three

targets or conquer those sneaky score-crushing birds. You need to carefully select your sources of information because he or she has the ability to make or break your perception and practice of shotgunning.

Here are a few questions to keep in mind when finding your first mentor:

❶ Do I have access to a club/facility/range where I feel comfortable and at ease? Do my prospective instructors have

teaching privileges there?

❷ What traits or characteristics are really important to me when it comes to mentors? I.E. Communication, accessibility/availability, listening, personality etc.

❸ Can this person provide a variety of guns for me to try so I can figure out what I want?

❹ Any other question that weighs on your mind when it comes to

selecting a mentor on this new venture! The smallest details can be the biggest gamechangers.

Be Teachable

So, you found an instructor and the day arrives for your first lesson. The number one thing to remember is be teachable. Be open, listen carefully and ask questions, no matter how mundane they may seem.

I recently photographed an all-



women's whitetail deer hunt in Northern Wisconsin for a women's hunting apparel company that illustrated this. One night around the fire after the day's hunt, the lodge owner commented how amazed he was by the uniqueness of our hunt. Six women, six gorgeous mature deer, no tracking, great shots and all in under 36 hours.

In his 25 years as a guide/owner, he had never experienced that. "You all came in open, asking questions, willing to learn and receptive to the entire experience, regardless of capability level. We don't see that with guys."

Women in the hunting/shooting world, are generally more teachable than their male counterparts. We don't have decades of preconceptions, social mores, bad habits and false expectations of our competency. As an NSCA instructor of nearly 20 years, I have seen this demonstrated countless times.

The majority of the time, my female clients come to me with one of two narratives:

First, "I've never done this before, and have no idea where to start!"

Or, "my dad/brother/husband/boyfriend gave me a 12

gauge (or insert other large caliber/gauge) to shoot and laughed when it knocked me over. I never tried it again."

I feel so blessed when either scenario finds its way to my field. I cherish the opportunity to build a woman up in her shooting journey as well as re-engineer a negative past experience. My experiences with firearms were consistently positive and progressive from the very beginning, leading to immense surprise when I realized most women weren't so fortunate. Hearing these stories has given me passion and empathy for the mission behind this series. Let me tell you a little story about my "why."

I was the youngest NSCA instructor at 18 years and three months old in 2001. I will never forget what my instructor told me when I walked into the class that first day. "Your father may have brought you here to become an instructor, but I can't promise you'll leave here an instructor. That's on you."

At 18 years old, I looked in the unwavering blue eyes of that level 3 instructor and dropped all presuppositions of skill, competence, expectation and previously learned behaviors.

Instead, I worked harder, asked more questions, and kept my mouth shut when tempted to relate irrelevant anecdotal information. I left there with my instructor certification. Most important, I came away with a lifelong friend and mentor.

The point? I wanted to learn. I wanted to be taught. I wanted a mentor...

Next Steps

You found a good fit to mentor your first stages of this journey. Now what?

Some instructors will push the immediate purchase of a brand-new gun and a swift trip to a gun fitter before taking another shot. There are a few schools of thought on this. Sure, you can go out and buy a brand-new shotgun after putting maybe 50 to 100 rounds down the barrel. Then, you can go for a fitting and invest lots of time and money getting a gun fit to a shooting form that hasn't evolved yet.

Here's what I mean by that. As a brand-new shooter, you're still working on how to hold the gun, muzzle awareness, keeping your

finger outside of the trigger guard, learning your body's weight distribution preferences and building the necessary muscle groups to shoot smoothly and effectively. Yes, a properly fit gun will make many of these things easier and more intuitive, but you will be fitting to a form that is evolving with each trip to the range.

A good option is to find a fit that is close and functional. For example, if you need a shorter stock, evaluate a thinner recoil pad to accommodate the length of pull requirement without sacrificing recoil comfort. Do you need a little more comb height? Temporary, external comb adjustment materials are a great option. You can play with different heights and configurations as your gun mount becomes more consistent.

So, find your mentor. Also, think about these things until we chat next:

FIT, FORM, FUNCTION AND FIREPOWER

FIT - Find a decent fit and enjoy the early stages; these days are precious, fun and full of growth. Find a fit that will grow with you.





FORM - Learn consistent, repeatable and effective form. It will evolve, I promise.

FUNCTION – Find what you like. Do you enjoy the iconic beauty of a break-barrel shotgun? Or, do you



prefer the technology behind the recoil-efficient semi-auto shotguns of today? You won't know until you try!

FIREPOWER – If you can, schedule a lesson for a crisp morning sometime. There is nothing quite

like the smell of freshly burnt gunpowder in the morning! Who knows? Maybe there will be a Yankee Candle some day for it. In the meantime, happy shooting! ■

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