



To Aim or not to Aim? That is the question

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When we learn to shoot a pistol, one of the “fundamental skills” is how to aim it. In most cases the instructor will take a lot of time defining the classic “correct sight alignment and sight picture” such as:

Align the front sight vertically centered in the notch of the rear sight, so that there is an equal amount of light space on either side of the front sight post. The eye / eyes should be focused on the front sight (clearly focused), with the rear sight and the target both out of focus (fuzzy focus). This is in reality a “front sight focus” or a classic “target shooting sighting technique”.

Sound familiar? Of course it does. It is how most new shooters are taught! At the same time eye dominance is most often discussed, grip, stance, how the shooter must look “through” and not over the pistol and so on...All sounds about normal, right? But has anyone ever taken the time to explain to that student what “**aiming**” actually means? What is it in its rawest form? Webster’s dictionary defines it as:

1: To direct a course. Specifically: To point a weapon at an object. Aim carefully before shooting.

1a: **POINT:** To aim a gun. b: To direct toward a specified object or goal. A story aimed at children

2: **ASPIRE, INTEND.** Specifically: She aims to win.

*So according to Merriam-Webster, **aiming is carefully “pointing”**. Now hold that thought, we will come back to it.

Let’s look a little more closely at the difference between Accuracy v Aiming: In reality when we fire a pistol, the bullets travels down the rifled bore. That bore is straight and will give the exact same accuracy regardless to how the gun is aimed (using, open sights, red dot, scope, slide indexed) or point shooting. In other words it is not the aiming device that makes it more accurate, it is the correct aligning of the bore using WHATEVER indexing / aiming system the user is most proficient in... that’ my friends is what makes him / her accurate with that pistol. It is important to understand that the bore / barrel or pistol does NOT become less accurate because of the sights being used or if in fact the sights are missing, but simply because the user has no experience using any other means of “aiming” ...other than the “norm” of using sights.

Why Use Sights: We are taught to use the sights on the pistol because, well... because for one, that’s what is considered the normal, historical and universally accepted way of “aiming” and most importantly of course it is easy to teach! It’s simple, the sights are directly above the bore of the gun, so if the sights are perfectly aligned with the intended target then the bore is aligned with the target and the bullet will strike the intended mark, as long as the gun is not disturbed or moved in the process of pressing the trigger. So what we are in effect saying is that we are using something (in this case a front and rear reference point) on the gun to index the bore’s alignment with the target. In the future (let’s say 20 years from now) whether you like it or not I believe the RMR or pistol red dot system will be the norm, with traditional iron sights being in second place for the average “new” shooter. Technology and science moves forward regardless to our likes and dislikes.

So the fact that open or tradition “iron sights” have become the norm (for now) is neither here nor there. If we did not have “sights” of some kind, we could use the edge of the pistol, the back plate of the slide, firing pin hole, the tip of the slide or some other reference point on the gun to index the bore... right?... Yes, absolutely correct we could and can and that is called **INDEX aiming or INDEXING**.

Understanding Aiming Options:

Front Sight Focus or (the traditional target shooting sighting technique) we have already covered this above.

Subconscious Sight Picture: This is often referred to as Threat Focused or Target Focused. It is JUST as accurate and effective as Front Sight focus at close to intermediate ranges, but not really understood.

As the shooter looks intently at the target, the handgun is presented to where the eyes are focused. At this point the shooter will see the gun sights without focusing on them. The sights will indeed be blurry, but still visible. Unlike front sight-focused shooting where the front sight is clear, with subconscious or threat focused shooting... the target is clearly focused and it's the iron sights that are blurry. By the way...this is in fact the **EXACT same way you aim a RMR / red dot sight** ...Focus on the target, see the red dot on the target.

Indexing the Gun: Again, you can use the side of the slide, the tip of the slide, the back plate etc. Just as if you were using sights. This of course requires that you look at the gun and not the threat / target, the same as you would look at the gun if you were using a classic front sight focus aiming system.

Point Shooting: Most shooters are not trained in point shooting. In fact if you were to ask 10 different “firearms instructors” what point shooting is, you're likely to get 10 different opinions. Most think it's just pointing the gun randomly in the direction of the target and pulling the trigger...That my friends is NOT point shooting.

Point shooting IS in fact an aiming SYSTEM. Yes even as defined by Webster's dictionary* (“a type of carefully pointing”) Once learnt and practiced with thousands of rounds of repetition, a skilled point shooter can become a “Reflexive” shooter. Where the process has become 2nd nature to him and unconscious competency kicks in. Many call this (as we used to) “instinctive” but holding and shooting a gun is not “instinctive” it is learnt skill.

The modern evolved point shooting also uses your body's natural kinesthetic alignment (biomechanics) to get the pistol bore to the intended target, by following proven grip and alignment techniques. It begins with aligning the bore with your forearm bone and eye to hand coordination to get the pistol bore to the intended target.

First, the proper grip on the handgun is crucial. The beaver-tail or tang of the handgun needs to be centered in the middle of the strong hand wrist, so that the bore is aligned with the forearm bone of the dominant hand. The second key ingredient is that the eyes have a laser like focus on the specific point on the intended target. The trigger finger should be STRAIGHT down the frame of the pistol, with the wrist firmly locked in a fist position. As the shooter looks intently at the target the handgun is presented out to exactly where the eyes are focused by pointing the index finger, then locking the body in place, then squeezing the trigger. This allows the shooter to focus on the threat, not the gun which of course is what history has proven you will do in a close quarter gunfight. Once learnt, point shooting is extremely effective and puts bullets on targets very quickly. Please note: NO aiming system will work if the shooter moves the gun when pressing the trigger...

Point Shooting also helps RMR shooters. Learning to point shoot helps with finding your dot faster and gives you confidence in an alternative aiming system should your RMR go down.

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Why is point shooting not more popular? In my experience, many / most instructors are not truly well versed in all 4 of these sighting systems. It's not the fault of the instructor per say, it's that most have not been exposed to or correctly trained / understand or teach the different systems. You cannot teach what you truly do not understand. The Dunning-Kruger effect kicks in. The "you don't know, what you don't know" saying has never been more true in this regard. There are a few notable exceptions of course with my good friend Mr. Mike Janich (founder of Martial Blade Concepts) being one. He in fact studied and co-authored a book "bullseyes don't shoot back" with the late great Col Rex Applegate.

The defacto "use your sights" is the fall back and THE most taught in America and world – wide for pistol shooting. With "point shooting" being bastardized into whatever the instructor of the day "thinks" it is. In other words "his" individual interpretation of what it is, where in reality most instructors have not studied or been schooled in point shooting. Because of this, it is then (normally) INCORRECTLY explained and then sidelined in favor of front sight focused aiming. This in my opinion is a shame as it continues the circle of ignorance, based on lack of understanding and education.

So to recap:

1. **Front Sight focused aiming** (requires starring at gun sights) which means NOT focusing on the imminent threat at the split second you fire the pistol
2. **Subconscious Sight Picture** (requires starring at the target / threat and seeing sights in your peripheral vision)
3. **Indexed Shooting** (requires starring at the a reference point on the gun)
4. **Point shooting** (requires you just stare at the target / threat)

All four of these "aiming" systems have a place in combative pistol shooting and training. Time, distance, immanency of the threat and individual mastery of each of these sighting systems are all that really separate them. Each have benefits depending on what the shooter is trying to achieve, the distance to the target and situation he / she is in etc.

We at Florida Firearms Training teach all 4 of these sighting systems in detail, while defining both the merits and the negatives of each. One thing that should be pointed out (and that thousands of our past force on force and room clearing students can attest to) and all the research on the physiological responses to close quarter gunfights (Ref: "On Killing" and "On Combat" by Col. Grossman) and research by the force science institute amongst others, is that it's virtually impossible to follow the traditionally trained "clear front sight and blurry target" aiming when the brain recognizes a fatal imminent threat...like in a close quarter gun fight.

So to answer the question at the beginning of this article "Aim or not to Aim" the answer is yes! Of course AIM, just understand that HOW you will need to aim will not necessarily be with your traditional sighting system.