



PISTOL
PISTOL



PERFORMANCE CONCEPTS

THE WHAT, HOW, AND WHY OF PERFORMANCE

Fundamentals of Pistol Marksmanship

Ver.1.8

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1.8.0 Preface-

In this document I will be addressing trends in shooting that naturally develop as the craft of defensive pistol shooting evolves. For better or for worse, opinions are as old as humankind. Some may not agree with my take on competent pistol shooting, and that is okay. I prefer to teach that the only absolute in firearms use and instruction, begins and ends with safety. Each one of us are slightly different in our approach, and if your application of fundamentals results in positive outcomes in training or defensive situations, then do that. I will speak to optimal levels of performance, and acceptable levels of performance. Neither is wrong. Strive to practice at the optimal level but allow for human error at the acceptable level.

1.8.1 Safety-

All live fire ammunition **MUST** be removed from your firearm(s), yourself, and the entire training area. Ensure ammunition is placed in a location that cannot be accessed by anyone during your training session. By doing this the possibility of live ammunition being introduced into your sterile training area will be reduced, and hopefully eliminated. Anyone entering your training area should go through the same safety procedures.

During your training session only point your firearm at a backstop that would provide ballistic protection (i.e., cement wall, dirt berm). This will ensure that in the event of a negligent discharge no person or property could be harmed or damaged. Always triple check your firearm(s) to ensure

they are free of ammunition and never assume the loading status of your firearm(s).

Your practice can be performed starting from either a ready position or aimed in position. Utilize an aiming point that you can place or find on your backstop, such as a paper target, light switch, thermostat, picture, etc. The amount of time spent performing each drill is of your choosing. The more time spent performing correct quality repetitions for each skill set will enhance your rote ability to apply these fundamental skills “On Demand.”

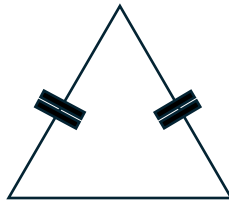
1.8.2 Stance-



Your chosen stance is the foundation of all shooting skill sets to follow. Although stance is your starting point, all fundamentals will work in tandem with each other and prioritizing your fundamentals application will be dictated by your situation and desired outcome. At a minimum your stance should allow you **stability**, **mobility**, and **comfort**. Keeping efficiency in mind please consider a stance that will afford you to the ability to maximize your natural point of aim. By choosing a stance that allows you ease of

target orientation as the muzzle of your pistol presents towards your target you will be directionally aiming using your body position alone.

As an example, I personally utilize a stance with my toes, knees, hips, and shoulders squaring to the target, with perhaps my strong side foot placed slightly to the rear and my upper body weight leaned slightly forward at the waste. There is no one recommended stance technique, as everyone will have different preferences. I like to use the broad descriptor “athletic” for an optimal shooting stance. I prefer to utilize what is called the isoclines stance. This will resemble a triangle with equal sides, if viewed from above.



Keep in mind that we do not always have the time or ability to acquire an optimal stance, often moving in a defensive situation. You may need to shoot in a less optimal stance such as off balance, seated in a car, or in a prone position. This does not mean that we do not strive to practice in the most optimal way. We do. Just understand that urgency and distance can often supersede fundamentals application. This is a common thread throughout your shooting growth and performance.

1.8.3 Grip-



Is grip important? Absolutely. Is it THE most important aspect of your shooting performance? Maybe. Contextually if you were to place your defensive handgun in a benched vice and made sure the mechanically aligned sights were correctly superimposed on a target, and fired at a distance that the selected factory ammunition cartridge was capable of consistent flight trajectory, then **yes** grip is everything. However, this philosophy is short sighted as it relates to broad individual performance and does not account for the common issue of handgun size selection and individual physical abilities.

Proper pistol selection directly correlates with one's hand size and one's physical abilities to grip that pistol aggressively. If your grip cannot replicate a viced bench, then I would say grip it is not as important as some may think. Grip is a great technique of forgiveness, especially if you are still learning how to negotiate trigger management. A locked in grip will indeed give you an edge in consistent accuracy, and that is why proper handgun selection is important.

An optimal grip will allow you to take advantage of both **friction** and **leverage**, against the recoil of your pistol. By applying aggressive and equal pressure around the grip of the pistol on all sides ensuring there are no gaps present you will give the recoil of the pistol no lane of travel. This grip should also be as high as possible, within the backstrap of the pistol. By doing so the slide will actuate in a reciprocal manner, and the energy will follow the path of least resistance.

This movement straight rearward, and then forward during the cycle of operation will create flip. Your grip should eliminate or at least minimize unnecessary movement and travel of the pistol before, during, and after the firing cycle of operation. Any excessive flip of your handgun translates into

wasted time when trying to apply sight management during successive shots. Your trigger finger should be placed along the frame of the pistol, indexed above and outside the trigger guard.

Conversely your thumbs should be pointed forward and resting next to each other, with your support hand wrist in a locked-out position. Again, no gaps should be visible between your two-hands. This is where proper handgun size selection corresponds with your ability to grip correctly. This grip should give you a more consistent return to target and conversely help tighten up your shot groups.

1.8.4 Hold/Presentation-



High-Ready Position

From a holster draw or a ready position of your choosing you should practice presenting your firearm out until you reach the full presentation position. This movement should be practiced slow at first, with the focus on doing minimal body movement to achieve maximum arm extension. Your stopping point should be when your pistol has reached your line of sight, and you have utilized the space available, relative to the distance to the target.



Presentation

At full presentation you may have your elbows locked out or have a slight flex. Focus on bringing the pistol up to your eyes and out, rather than lowering your head to achieve this line of sight. If you are cross eye dominant (ie. right-handed and left eye dominant) you only need to bring the pistol over to your dominant eye. Head movement may be necessary with a shoulder mounted firearm, but it is not necessary movement with a pistol. Dropping or shifting of you head leads to inefficient time management.

Once competent movement is achieved at slow speed you should incrementally speed up your practice. If you notice excess bounce of the pistol upon reaching full presentation, return to a slower presentation until this movement is reduced or eliminated. Continue to keep your trigger finger indexed above and outside the trigger guard during this practice. Trigger preparation and sight acquisition during this hold/presentation should be incorporated once competency is achieved.

1.8.5 Sight Management (Iron Sights)

At the basic marksmanship level optimal sight management is broken down to three distinct skill sets. **Sight Placement**, **Sight Alignment**, and **Sight Focus**. Consideration for **Arc of Movement** must also be negotiated as distance from the target increases.



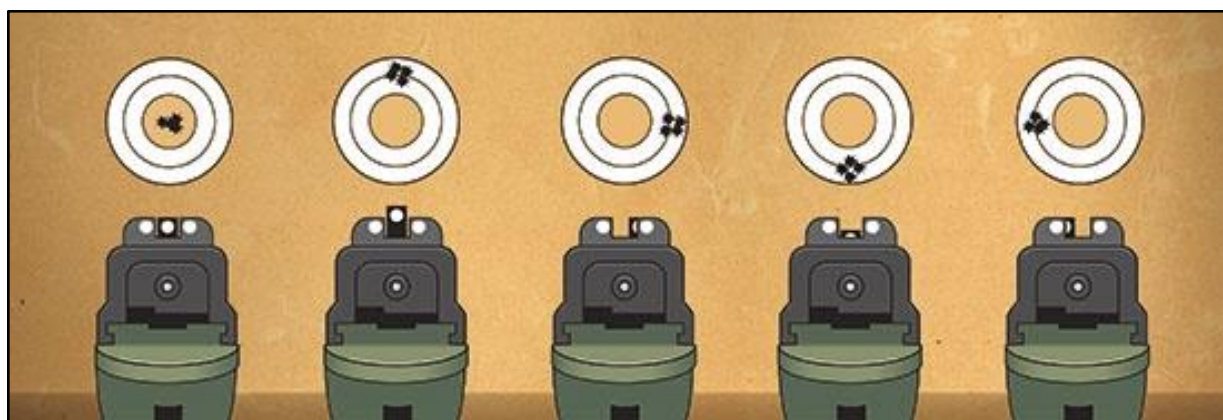
Sight Placement

Visually a person will have a front sight, rear sight, and target to negotiate, while utilizing their dominant eye only. As you practice your draw or hold presentation start incorporating acquisition of your front sight as you push directly towards the center of your selected point of aim. Your rear sight will naturally come into view as you present out.

By utilizing the straight lines of both your front and rear sights together you can refine your alignment by making small adjustments. The top of your front sight should be equal to the height of your rear sight, with an equal amount of space on both sides of your front sight. Place the tip of your front sight so that it cuts your point of aim directly in half (in most pistols). Reference the tops of your rear sight horizontally with both the front sight and the target. Lastly, your visual focus will be your front sight

with both your rear sight and target being blurry. Wow! That's a lot to unpack. If you are a visual learner like me the illustration on the previous page and below should help clarify some of your many questions.

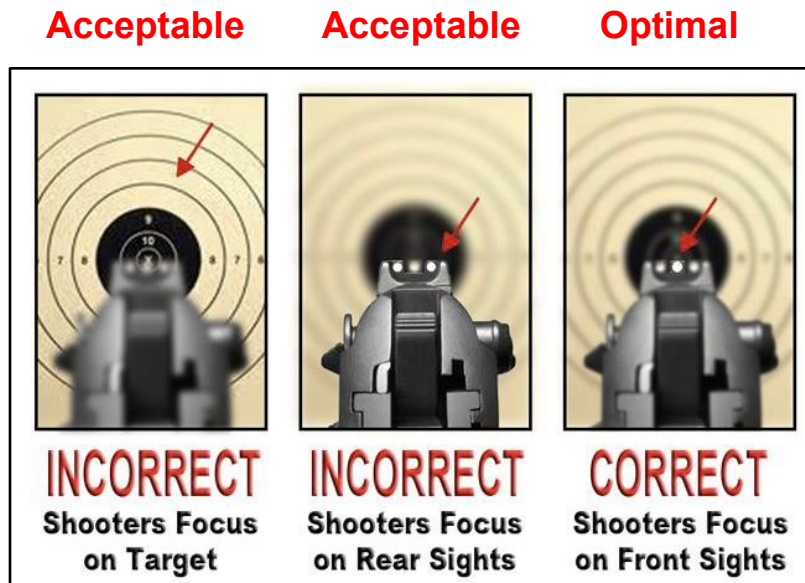
Now let's briefly discuss acceptable vs. optimal sight management. I believe one should almost always strive for optimal sight management and allow for acceptable sight management as the byproduct of human error. It is okay to familiarize yourself with different sighting techniques but spending an abundance of your training time practicing the "slop," in my opinion, is not a good use of your time and energy. Urgency (time) and distance may dictate your ability and need to perform these fine adjustments of your sights. The further you are from the intended target your level of applied accuracy will be more in demand.



Sight Alignment

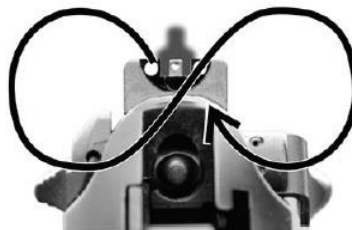
Above we see one example of optimal sight alignment, with four successive examples of acceptable sight alignment. If this sight deviation occurs at a close distance, say 21 feet, the desired shot placement with acceptable sight alignment should meet your defensive accuracy needs. Also, acquiring proper front sight focus may not be time efficient, and you

may be at a distance where sight focus is irrelevant. In this instance acceptable sight alignment, placement, and trigger press will have more value to your shot placement, than sight focus. Let's change the picture below to:



Sight Focus

If you have target focus, rear sight focus, or front sight focus as viewed above and all your other fundamentals are applied correctly and consistently, your shot placement should be acceptable for defensive standards. This is not to say you should no longer strive for an optimal front sight focus. If time and distance allow for “slop”, then this could be a technique of time management where your fundamentals application can be applied on a sliding scale.



Arc of Movement

As distance increases so will your observation of movement in your pistol sights. This may manifest in the shape of a figure eight, with your movement being exacerbated by muscle fatigue and/or lack of oxygen. Breathe naturally, as a pistol is not in contact with your chest thus it is not affected by its rise and fall. Shooting a rifle is another story altogether. If a supported shooting position such as a bench is available, it can assist with minimizing this movement. In the absence of a supported position my advice is for you to ignore this movement. It happens to everyone. If you attempt to capture the best sight picture like a camera, you may apply an overly aggressive trigger press the moment you perceive lack of sight movement. This can affect your shot placement. Reference the outer and top edges of your rear sight with the targets outside edges. This will enable you to better adjust your overall hold on target when you cannot see the finer aiming points of the target's center mass.

Keep in mind that not all sights are made the same and your personal preference will guide you as to which sight manufacturer and model you may select. Stock sight replacement is one of the most common modifications you will find when it comes to defensive handgun selection. Electronic pistol optics are completely different than traditional iron sights and learning the principals and concepts behind these modern sighting tools are a worthy endeavor.

1.8.6 Trigger Management-

How you manipulate the trigger of your pistol often results in unwanted movement of the sights just prior to your shot being taken. To minimize this movement, we must understand the management process of the trigger.

This process is broken down into the following seven subgroups; *Finger Placement, Slack/Prep, Wall, Creep, Break, Over-Travel, and Reset*. For our purposes we will assume the mindset that you have made a conscious decision to shoot. This training guide's focus is on the how and why, and not when of trigger press. This is not use of force training.

Throughout your practice mentally reference your previous performance. Were you aware of the different feel for each of these subgroups? This chunking practice should become more fluid as you become familiar with these movements. The question is often asked, "*Can I realistically perform this task under the stress of a defensive situation?*". My answer is always that you certainly will NOT be able to perform this task under stress, unless you practice this task in a sterile training environment first.

Finger Placement- It is often said that it does not matter where your finger falls on the trigger, and to just let it naturally rest on the trigger. This is true and if your grip is correct, it should eliminate left and right movement of the gun as you press the trigger rearward. However, this is going to be specific to the individual with consideration for varying grip size, hand size, muscular abilities, and pistol selection. Because of this finger placement cannot be discounted for everyone. There are never one size fits all answers.

In general terms you may consider your finger to contact the trigger with the middle of the first pad of your index finger. Wherever your finger falls on the trigger be cognizant that having too much or too little of your finger placed on the trigger, and with a less-than-optimal grip lateral movement of your pistol can manifest as you manipulate the trigger rearward.



Finger Placement

Slack/Prep- Depending on your individual pistol selection slack and preparation of your trigger is the first component to negotiate. For example, a double action (DA) trigger will generally have a long heavy movement. A single action (SA) trigger will generally have a short and light movement. A striker type trigger may have a feel that falls somewhere between these two altogether. Trigger slack/prep can be practiced by physically wiggling the trigger back and forth from its forward most resting point, until you reach the point of first resistance, known as the *Wall*. Further practice this movement from the trigger starting from the index position, and then practice this while incorporating your hold presentation and sight acquisition.



Don't Stomp on the Gas!

When you first learned to drive a car, you may have put your foot on the accelerator and pushed it all the way to the floor. Your car would have shot forward pushing your head backwards into your seat. Your tires may have spun as the front-end of your car lifted and the rear-end dropped. You may have skid out while your car swayed side to side. This sounds fun but equates to a lot of extra movement of your car. In terms of a pistol think of your trigger as this gas pedal, and all this extra movement will manifest within your sight management. You may be able to get away with stomping on the gas or having an aggressive trigger press at close distance, but this extra movement at distance can cause inconsistent shot placement. The speed of your press is dictated by your ability, available time, and distance. In all cases the method of trigger press application should remain consistent and repetitive.

Wall- Once you have become comfortable negotiating the *Slack/Prep* of your trigger you will be ready to identify the initial point of resistance, known as the *Wall*. Once you reach this wall of your trigger it is important to have a moment of pause. This pause will allow you to verify the straight lines of your sight management, as described earlier. This pause can be as long or as short as you need depending on your level of urgency and competency. Keep in mind that pressing the trigger straight through the wall with no pause may result in *acceptable* shot placement but may not result in *optimal* shot placement.

Creep- After becoming comfortable with taking up the *Slack* and finding the *Wall* we then need to negotiate the travel or *Creep* of the trigger, through its point of resistance. Some triggers may have a long and heavy trigger equal to 10-12 lbs. Other triggers may have minimal weight and movement equal to 2-3 lbs. A striker fired pistol will have a different feel

altogether with Glocks having a stock trigger weight of around 5.5 lbs. The movement of this *Creep* can be described as “smooth” in some pistols, or “stacking” in others. Total and instant pressure of your trigger allowing the pistol to fire the exact moment that you apply pressure, is equal to that of stomping on the gas. Rather you should apply smooth, steady, consistent pressure feeling the *Creep* of the trigger moving rearward, until the trigger reaches the fall of the hammer or release of the striker. This is known as the *Break*.

Break- Once you have become comfortable with practicing your *Slack* take-up, finding the *Wall*, and learning the feel of your trigger *Creep*, the next step is for you to become familiar with the *Break* of the trigger. This is when the release and fall of the hammer or striker occurs. It is human nature to have some anxiety in anticipation of the pistol firing. This often manifests in additional movement of the sights as you brace for the recoil of the bullet leaving the barrel. During your dry fire training you will become more aware of how the trigger feels and this will help you overcome some of this anticipation.

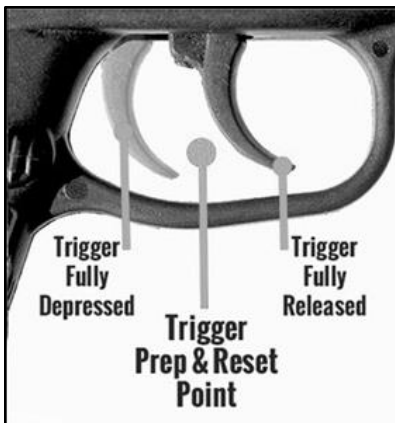
As your training transitions to the live fire range the incorporation of inert training rounds known as dummy rounds can also assist you in identifying and eliminating anticipation. By intermittently placing these dummy rounds mixed in with your live ammunition you will become aware of fine movements of your sights just prior to the pistol being fired. In seeing and feeling this extra movement of the gun and inadvertent misalignment of the sights you will have identified this problem. The continued periodic use of these dummy rounds should assist you with eliminating or reducing your anticipation.



Snap Caps Dummy Rounds

To remove the dummy round from the chamber of your firearm during live fire practice manually cycle the slide of your firearm when it fails to fire. This will eject the dummy round. Allow the dummy round to fall to the ground freely and retrieve it only when it is safe to do so.

Over-Travel- This is the movement and stopping point of the trigger after the pistol has been fired. There are two important aspects of *Over-Travel* to learn and apply during your training. First is the concept of “*Pinning*” or holding the trigger to the rear upon reaching the furthest most rearward point of trigger travel. By holding the trigger to the rear during dry fire you will be able to use your support hand to manipulate the slide to cycling it to the rear. Letting the springs naturally return the slide to the forward position will replicate the cycle of operation that would normally occur during live fire. When performing this cycling action release the slide at the furthest rearward point. The second concept is “*Reset of the Trigger.*”



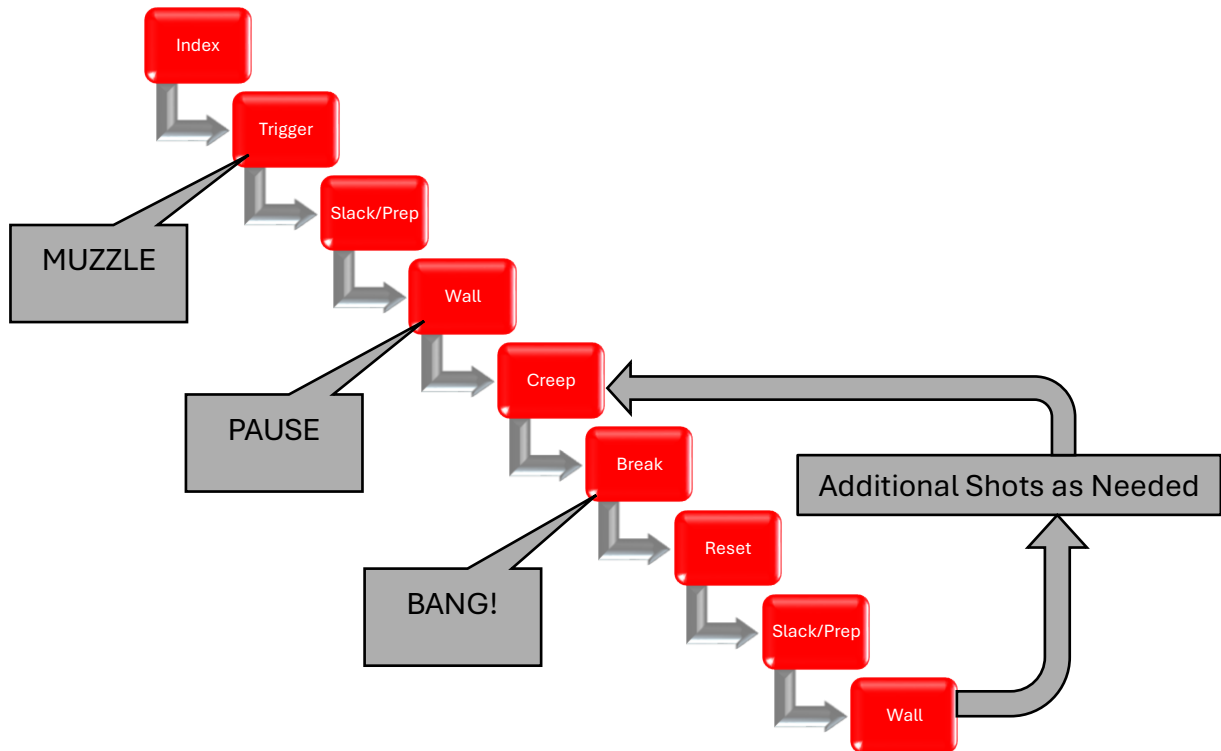
Stages of the Trigger

Reset- The last subgroup of *Trigger Management* is the understanding and practice of the *Reset*. At a basic mechanical level all you would need to do after firing a shot is to fully release the trigger and indexing your trigger finger along the frame of the pistol. This would allow the trigger bar spring to do the work, returning the trigger to the furthest most forward travel point. Although your trigger would now be technically *Reset*, for both efficiency and rote skill development reasons this is NOT the proper technique to accomplish trigger *Reset*.

Proper *Reset* is accomplished by keeping your finger in physical contact with your trigger. This ensures consistent trigger finger placement. When first learning *Reset* you will hold or “Pin” the trigger to the rear, while the pistol cycle of operation is completed. You will then slowly allow the trigger to move forward, until the point of *Reset* is found. This will be recognizable by an audible click of the *Reset*, and then felt resistance rearward to signify your return to the Wall of the trigger. As you practice this technique repeatedly you may speed your *Reset* up.

Your goal is to be able to conduct *Reset* of the trigger during recoil in live fire, or as you manually cycle the slide during dry fire. Trigger *Reset* and *Prep* ultimately finding the Wall of the trigger during recoil is a technique that requires a high amount of training time and commitment. Training for this skill set in both dry and live fire should be continuous throughout all your training sessions. There is no time when you would finish a trigger press without following up with trigger *Reset* and *Prep* during recoil.

- A Conscious Decision to Shoot Has Been Made
- Draw, Presentation, Movement, and Acceptable Sight Acquisition Occurs



- Follow Through is Conducted Using Sights and Trigger
- Threat, Area, and Weapon Condition is Assessed

1.8.7 Follow Through

This is the process of allowing your sights to return to your original point of aim after recoil of the pistol. You will also *Reset* the trigger returning to the point of trigger *Prep*. This is done regardless of your intention to take an additional shot. Once you have performed *Follow Through* you will assess your target while looking through your sights. Once you are satisfied that your target is no longer a threat you will lower your firearm an inch or so. This will allow you to re-assess your target area

while looking over top your pistol. You will remove your finger from the trigger and place it indexed along the frame of the pistol once you have identified positive effects of your shots on target. If you are satisfied there are no immediate threats, you can return your firearm to a ready position and quickly assess your personal condition and that of your pistol.

1.8.8 Conclusion

All the fundamentals discussed within this document are done so in the context of practice within a static training environment. Except for safety, none of these topics are absolutes, and no one can truly quantify the level of importance of one technique over another. In a real-life defensive situation compromise will occur, and your ability to replicate these skill set are going to be predicated on your invested training time and attention to detail. These fundamentals can be applied on a sliding scale of importance for your desired outcome. The realities of deadly use of force application can not be defined easily within a sterile training environment. When you can strive for the optimal, but always allow for the acceptable.