

Chinook Country Shooters Club Junior Program



Purpose - The Chinook Country Shooters Club (CCSC) would like to expose young people to the fun, safe and exciting sport of handgun shooting. To determine if this sport may be of interest to you, they are offering a free trial with a qualified CCSC instructor in a safe environment to those who are 21 years of age or younger.

One-on-one instruction will include some basic safety instruction relative to all firearms, how to operate a specific revolver or semi-automatic pistol, and some practical experience. You (and your parent or guardian if you are under 18) will be required to provide identification. The instructor reserves the right to refuse this experience to anyone if he or she is not certain they will act in a safe and responsible manner.

Overview – The Chinook Country Shooters Club Junior Program is intended to be flexible in order to adapt to the varying age, abilities, maturity levels and physical capacity of the junior participant. The intent is that the initial firearm experience for the junior participant will be a one-on-one with the CCSC instructor and the junior participant (for a junior participant under 18 years of age their parent or guardian must attend and observe). Once the initial session is completed, the junior participant (and their parent or guardian if applicable) can determine whether they wish to continue.

So long as the junior participant is capable (as judged by the instructor(s)) of handling the firearm in a safe manner, the sessions become progressively more challenging. The initial experience(s) will be standing in one position with a firearm that was loaded by the instructor at a single stationary target. With continued coaching and instruction, the junior participant may improve to the point where he or she is moving with the firearm, reloading while moving and shooting while moving at multiple styles of targets (stationary paper, stationary steel, moving paper, moving steel, disappearing target, spinning targets etc). The progression of the junior participant varies substantially from participant to participant and their willingness to learn and prove their safe handling skills under more challenging situations.

Safety- All sessions, including the initial session will focus on the safe use of firearms. The initial session will first review the injury or damage that a firearm can cause, compare rim-fire and centre-fire cartridges, and focus on the key safe handling practices, muzzle control, keeping your finger off the trigger, safe grip and stance. In the initial session, the instructor will load, unload and handle the firearm for all aspects except when the junior participant actually fires the firearm. The instructor will generally only load 1 cartridge in the firearm initially and will generally start off with a rim fire firearm before proceeding to a center-fire handgun. Subsequent sessions will expand on safe handling practices by incorporating safe area practices, range commands, charging magazines, inserting, releasing and changing magazines, holster use and drawing from a holster.

The general safety points that will be addressed are;

Never point a pistol at any person, or handle the pistol in such a way as to appear to be pointing it at someone.

You may only load the pistol on the range, at the firing point, under instruction.

All new shooters, visitors, and children, must be kept under strict supervision while on the range.

Anyone participating, or acting, as a spectator in pistol shooting must wear ear protection and eye protection.

All junior participants must be directly supervised. This is defined as being close enough to allow physical restraint in the event of dangerous behavior.

These specific Rules of Firearm Safety will be addressed;

1. TREAT EVERY FIREARM AS LOADED

- Don't take it for granted - check it yourself.
- Keep your finger off the trigger until you are ready to shoot
- If you don't know how to prove it is safe - leave it alone
- Don't touch anyone else's pistol without permission

2. ALWAYS POINT FIREARMS IN A SAFE DIRECTION

- Even if you are sure it is unloaded - ALWAYS point a firearm in a safe direction (i.e. down range)

3. LOAD A FIREARM ONLY WHEN YOU ARE GIVEN THE INSTRUCTION TO DO SO BY A RANGE OFFICER

- Don't load the magazine or the pistol until you are at the firing line and are under the supervision of a range officer.
- Keep your finger off the trigger until you are ready to shoot

4. IDENTIFY YOUR TARGET

- Make sure that you know exactly what you are shooting at.

5. CHECK YOUR FIRING ZONE

• Even at the most regulated pistol ranges, unexpected things can happen. Animals may walk in front of the target, people may stray into the safety zone. Make sure your firing zone is clear before you shoot.

6. STORE FIREARMS AND AMMUNITION SAFELY

- There are special legal requirements for the storage of pistols. Make sure that you are aware of these.
- Store your firearms and ammunition separately.
- Check that the gun is not loaded before you put it away in your safe.

7. AVOID ALCOHOL AND DRUGS WHEN HANDLING FIREARMS

- Make sure that you do not take alcohol prior to or during shooting.
- Don't allow others to drink before or during shooting.
- **Avoid shooting *when you are tired or ill - this reduces your concentration***

Role of the Range Officer

For purposes of the Chinook Country Shooters Club Junior Program, the qualified CCSC instructor and The Range Officer are one and the same. This person controls the shooting on the particular range, and his/her instructions must be obeyed immediately and without question. Range Staff are here for your safety – make sure you follow their instructions.

The Range Officer will usually be able to answer general questions about shooting and pistols, and will also be able to answer questions that you may have on the particular discipline that is being shot on a particular range. All shooting must be under the control of a Range Officer. This person shall issue the instructions before shooting.

- ◆ You must have your pistol (and magazines) checked (cleared) by the RO as being unloaded.
- ◆ If you want to show someone a pistol, or before you hand them a pistol, make sure that it is unloaded, and prove this to the other person. This is done by
 - ◆ pointing the pistol in a safe direction, then
 - ◆ for a single shot - opening the action;
 - ◆ for a revolver - swinging out the cylinder;
 - ◆ for a semi auto - removing the magazine, opening the slide and locking it back,
 - ◆ THEN showing the other person that the pistol [and the magazine, if any] is empty.
- ◆ If someone is about to hand you a pistol, ask him or her to prove it to you. If you need to handle a pistol that has not been cleared by someone else, make sure that you clear it before you handle it further. The pistol should be left open while being handled, as far as possible.
- ◆ Never pull the trigger on another person's pistol without asking.

- ◆ If you have a misfire and need another person's (for example, the RO's) assistance, take your finger off the trigger, and keep the muzzle pointed down range (resting the barrel if you need to). Then signal for the other person's attention, by raising the non-shooting arm above shoulder level, so that it is a clearly visible signal. Keep the muzzle pointed safely down range at all times.

- ◆ Only the RO may touch any pistol without the owner's consent.

- ◆ Avoid disturbing other shooters by talking or making undue noise. Spectators should be encouraged, but must remain within the area designated for them, and not distract the shooters in any way, by talking or making other disturbances.

Junior participants who continue to receive instruction may be invited to participate in Action shooting and /or Three gun matches.

Action shooting as a class includes the use of Center-fire pistols, usually fired quite quickly. The RO to shooter ratio is high to reflect this, and there are a number of safety and pistol handling items that are specific to Action shooting.

If the junior participant is not holster trained, the following restrictions apply;

- ◆ They must hold the pistol in the 45° Ready position to start
- ◆ They may only shoot from a fixed position (ie no movement)

For individuals who have been trained and proven competent with holsters, the following rules apply;

- ◆ All pistols are considered to be in a permanently cleared condition, as they should have been cleared before being holstered, and always after being used. Nevertheless, it is still sensible to assume any gun is loaded until proved otherwise. Note that pistols are not allowed to be carried around a range with a magazine in, loaded or not.

- ◆ While not actually shooting or at a firing point a pistol must either be kept in a closed bag or box, or in a holster worn on the person, and not handled except in a Safety Zone or when instructed by the Range Officer.

- ◆ Holsters must only be worn on the strong side, and the holster must cover the trigger. The gun butt must not be below the belt. The holster must be serviceable and safe and must retain the pistol during movement, and during a retention test if applied.

- ◆ Magazines may be loaded at any time, and may be worn on the holster belt, or carried in a bag, or pocket. The youth participant should arrive at the Firing Point with enough ammunition for the whole stage. All magazines needed should be loaded and easily available.

- ◆ Once a shooter has been called to the Firing Point, he/she will follow the Range Officers instructions and commands for undertaking the course of fire.

Range Commands for Action matches

All Action Matches now use common basic commands (with minor variations), and these are:

Range in use. This warns all present that the range has been declared safe for shooting, which will start shortly.

Load and Make Ready: This means to load the pistol, make it ready to fire and place in the holster. The shooter then adopts the Ready Position applicable to the match. For a non holster-trained shooter this is always the 45° Ready position.

The ready conditions for the pistols used are:

- Double action Revolver - hammer down on loaded chamber
- Single action Revolver - hammer down on unloaded chamber
- Single action semi-automatic pistol - loaded, hammer cocked, safety engaged
- Double action semi-automatic pistol - loaded, hammer down or decocked

Ready position: This is the position which the shooter must adopt before the stage can start. For IPSC matches it is commonly standing with the hands relaxed at the sides. For all other matches, with rare exceptions, it is to stand with both hands raised above shoulder level. Adoption of, and remaining in, the ready position is a signal from the shooter to the Range Officer that he/she is ready to start.

Are You Ready? When the Range Officer sees the shooter(s) adopt the ready position he/she asks **Are you ready?** If the shooter does not call **Not Ready** quickly, the RO will prepare to start.

Standby This is the command given by the Range Officer to tell the shooter that the timing cycle will start within a few seconds. The Range Officer will start the timer within 5 seconds, and this will give a sound signal to show the time has started.

Unload and Show Clear In a fixed time match the timer will give a stop signal. In all matches when the shooter has finished shooting the RO gives this command. The command means to unload and demonstrate that the pistol is empty.

Gun Clear, Hammer Down, Holster

When the Range Officer is satisfied that the pistol contains no ammunition, this command instructs the shooter to test fire the gun, and holster it. A semi-auto pistol must have the hammer dropped as if it were fired. This means to point the pistol towards the backstop and to allow the hammer to fall by pulling the trigger in the normal way. For a revolver, the cylinder is closed and the gun holstered, with the hammer down. It is not necessary for a revolver to have the hammer dropped.

Range is clear When he/she has cleared the shooter's pistol and it has been replaced in the holster, the Range Officer announces that the range is clear and that range staff may go forward.

Shooting Tips

Basics

Pistol shooting, or the art of getting a good shot every time, can be broken down into the simple statement: **Align the sights correctly, on the correct part of the target, and allow the shot to break without altering that alignment!**

Simple, but not necessarily easy!

There are a number of basic techniques that go into making this alignment happen, and they are part of any kind of pistol shooting. Your coach will be able to go through these with you, but as a guide, there is a summary below.

Stance

Your stance has a lot to do with how well you shoot. Human beings are not actually well designed for pistol shooting, so we need to make an effort to produce a good stable shooting platform.

For shooting one handed in a standing position, a good stance to start with is with your feet about shoulder width apart, the toes turned slightly out, and with all of you turned at about 45° to a line coming directly at you from the target.

In general for one-handed shooting your leading foot will be the same as the hand with which you are holding the pistol; right foot if you are right-handed; left foot if you are left-handed.

You may need to adjust this to suit yourself (and your stance will probably need to change slightly over the course of a day). To do this, try this simple test:

Set yourself up in the starting stance. Close your eyes. Lift your shooting arm (and gun if you can) toward the target. Open your eyes and check where you are pointing. Are you pointing at the centre of your target? The centre of

someone else's?? If you need to change your stance, move the BACK foot around, by a very small amount, until your arm is pointed directly at the centerline. Then repeat the procedure. Keep doing the test until your arm

comes smoothly up the centerline of the target! It is a good idea to check your stance for each series you shoot. For shooting two handed in Action matches there are two basic positions- the Weaver Stance and the Isoceles Stance. In the first the non-shooting foot is forward; the shooting arm is straight out and braced by the bent non-shooting arm. In the latter stance, you stand with feet apart, on a line parallel with the targets, both arms in a similar position, bracing each other. The main purpose of either is to make sure you have a steady platform for the pistol.

Grip

A good consistent grip is essential to firing accurate shots. Your grip will determine how the sights are presented to your eye and how good your sight alignment will be, which along with good stance, provides the base for accurate shooting.

Holding the gun by the barrel in your non-shooting hand, fit the gun into the web of your shooting hand. Wrap your fingers around the grip and allow your trigger finger to sit in the trigger guard. Your thumb should be relaxed, either just touching the grip, or sitting slightly away from it. Your fingertips should be loose - if the tips of your fingers are white - you are holding the gun too tightly!!

You should hold onto the pistol firmly and evenly, with the pressure being applied between the web of the hand/base of the thumb area, and the joints of the second and third fingers. This is called a fore and aft grip.

To **test** your grip ; take up your normal stance, fit the gun into your hand, lower your arm to the 45° degree position, and then raise the gun up to the target. You should see the front sight neatly bracketed by the rear sight. If the front sight is to the right or left of where it should be, adjust the gun in your grip, using your non-shooting hand, and do the test again. Keep doing this until you get a consistent sight alignment (see below). For a two handed hold; punch the shooting hand into the other hand and check your sight position as above. If the front sight is too high or too low, you will need to adjust the angle of your wrist!

Sight Alignment

For almost all pistols you will ever come across, the front and rear sights should be aligned so that the sight blades are all level across the top and the front sight is bracketed by the rear sight with equal amounts of light on either side.

This will make sure that your shots are centred in your aiming area.

Sight Picture

This includes what you see when you are looking at the sights and the target. There are three things to look at; 1) the rear sight, 2) the front sight and 3) the target. When you are young you may be able to see all three clearly at once. As you get older this becomes increasingly difficult, and you will get to the point where you can only focus on one thing at once. Don't worry - as long as you can focus on the front sight, that is what matters. If you can't do that, you should think about getting glasses that let you do so.

The front sight is the most important feature of your sight picture, and therefore it should appear very clearly in your vision. The white bits between the rear sight and the front sight blades (what **isn't** there!) are also important.

The target is least important of all - your stance should make sure that you are on target. However, you need to make sure that you are aiming at the right part of the target. It is recommended that you use an area (rather than a point) to aim at, and that this area should be centered about half way between the bottom of the black area on the target, and the bottom of the target. (If your sights are too close to the black area of the target [this is commonly called six o'clock hold], an optical illusion may make it difficult to see the sights clearly.) As it is physically impossible for any person to hold a pistol absolutely still, you must accept that there will be some movement. [Don't try to concentrate on a point, let the sights move within the area of aim.] The target and the rear sight should both be out of focus, and thus be rather fuzzy.

Master Eye Most people have one eye which appears dominant, commonly called the Master Eye. In fact this is a mental effect not an optical one. This eye governs the alignment of objects with your eyes. For most purposes it doesn't matter which it is, and most people don't know which is their master eye. As soon as

you do directional things with your eyes, like shooting, it is important. Most people find that they need to use their master eye to shoot with, even if it means using the eye different to the strong hand. A simple test will determine which eye is which for you. Punch a hole of 10-15mm in a piece of paper. Look at a moderately distant object in the room with both eyes open, through the hole. Then shut or cover each eye in turn. The eye for which the object is still visible is your dominant eye.

If you are right-handed and left-eyed, as quite a few people are, you should use your left eye for sighting with (unless you shoot with both eyes open), but still hold the pistol with your right hand. Vice versa if you are right-eyed and left-handed of course! This is definitely better than forcing yourself to use the wrong hand or the wrong eye. (Which you do *have* to do when shooting a rifle).

You may find that the dominant eye is the one which you can keep open on its own anyway.

Trigger Control

The next basic technique to master is control of the trigger. This is one of the major factors in whether you are able to allow the shot to break without messing up the perfectly good alignment that you have worked so hard to develop!

There are two parts to this:

- You need to have the right part of your finger on the trigger
- You need to be able to move the trigger **straight** back into the area of support (in your grip!)

In order to test whether your finger is on the right part of the trigger, take up your grip, hold the pistol out in your normal shooting position, watch your sights and carefully bring your finger back until it just touches the trigger surface. If the **front sight** moves one way or the other, your finger isn't in the right place. If the front sight stays put, everything is great!

This is where things differ for left and right-handers. For **right handed people** the front sight moves to the left, you do not have enough finger on the trigger. Move your finger through the trigger guard a bit, and try again! If the front sight moves to the right, you have too much finger on the trigger, and need to pull your finger back a bit.

For **left-handed people**, it is exactly the opposite. If the sight moves to the left, you have too much finger on the trigger. If it moves right, then you need to put your finger a bit farther into the trigger guard.

Remember to control your trigger after each shot, too. When you are practicing, or shooting individual precision shots, keep the pressure on the trigger even after the shot has gone and as you follow through (see below). As you lower your arm to the 45°, release the trigger. **Don't take your finger completely off the trigger** though otherwise you will lose the position that you have just carefully set up!!

Breathing

Breath control is also important. Your breathing basically moves all the bones and muscles in the top half of your body each time you breath. This does not make it any easier to hold the sight picture or control your trigger. The recommended way of dealing with breathing is to continue breathing normally as you prepare for the shot

(like doing all the tests outlined above). As you lift your arm to take aim, breathe in (in your usual way). When your arm is pointing at the target, let out a small amount of air, then hold your breath until the shot is fired!!

Follow through

Once you have fired the shot, let the pistol settle back into your grip from its recoil position. If your grip is steady, the position of the sights in the follow through will give you a pretty good idea of where the sights were when you triggered the shot. Look at the sights and see where they are! Then lower your arm and release the pressure on the trigger!! Be prepared to realign the sights for the next shot if they are not pretty well on the target.

Additional Tips

Like any other sport, the skills that you need to be a good shot, in whatever discipline, must be learned thoroughly and then practiced. The amount of practice that you need to do depends on your ultimate goal. If you wish to shoot for relaxation, then your only practice may be your trips to the range. If, however, you decide that you wish to be a serious competitor, then your practice commitment will reflect this, not only in your time at the range, but through "dry firing" at home or even working out at the gym.

Shooting is rather unusual in that, unless you have a physical limitation, the level that you achieve is limited only by your drive to succeed. If you set a goal to shoot at the Olympics - you can! - *as long as* you are prepared to put in the time. The only thing that can hold you back is your own willingness to put in the *effort* required.

- Keep a notebook, and note down anything that you have learned during your coaching or practice sessions, any questions that you want to ask, and a record of how your shooting is progressing. At first, you might only want to note down the **size** of each 5-shot group and the group's position on the target. Once your group is consistently centred on the middle of the target, then note down your score
- Every month or so, shoot a group of 20 shots, without checking the target or looking through your scope. When you have fired all of the shots, check the target. Ignore the 3 shots that are farthest from the center of group. Check the group of the other 17 shots, and take a note of it in your shooting notebook. This is your current group.
- Now and then, set yourself up in your stance, bring your arm and the gun up onto the correct area of the target, and then close your eyes. Count to 20, and then open your eyes again. Where is the gun pointing? How are the sights aligned?
Hint: It helps to visualize what you expect to see when you open your eyes again!
- Don't be surprised if your group size or your score sometimes slips back a bit. It is quite normal for new shooters to increase their ability for a while, then for

things to go backwards, then start getting better again. At first, there is so much to learn that concentration on one thing may disturb your concentration on other things causing shots to go astray. Once you get used to what you are doing, things will come back into line.

- Any time that you plateau, when you don't appear to be getting better, go back to concentrating on the Basics. Chances are that you have skipped something.
- Celebrate your successes!! As a generalization, we don't really allow ourselves to take credit for something we have done well. About the most we will ever admit to is "That wasn't too bad". Well, now is the time to give yourself a break. If you shoot well, tell yourself "That was great!". Enjoy the feeling when it goes just right, then remember what it felt like to shoot the shot, and do it again!

Definitions

Like any other sport, we use a fair amount of jargon. Some of the more basic terms are defined below.

Muzzle -The business end of any firearm (the end of the barrel from which the bullet exits)

Front sight -The sight element above the muzzle

Rear Sight-The sight element nearest your hand (and eye)

Cartridge - A loaded round of ammunition

Projectile/Bullet - The bit that flies to the target

Ready position - The position from which all timed events must start.

Power factor - The momentum of the bullet - measured by weight times speed and used to determine your class in some Action matches.

Gauge - A device to assist in assessing the value of a shot hole.

Skid - An oblong hole in a target caused by the bullet hitting it at an angle. In most matches, there is a maximum width allowed for this before it is scored as a miss.

Malfunction - When the pistol does not fire after one pull of the trigger.

Advanced / Alternative shooting Tips

You can get the most of your handgun's intrinsic accuracy by simply performing

marksmanship basics correctly. If the gun is aimed at the target, and the trigger is pressed and the shot released without moving the gun, then the bullet will strike the mark. That simple. We need a few building blocks to construct this perfect shot, however. Let's build the structure brick by brick.

I teach my students a five-point "pre-flight check list" to go through before they fire the shot. As with any structure, you start from the bottom up. Those points are: 1) Strong stance. 2) High hand grasp. 3) Hard grip. 4) Front sight. 5) Smooth rearward roll of the trigger.



This student demonstrates a strong Weaver stance at an LFI class. Feet are in proper pyramidal base, upper body is forward, and he is firmly grasping his .40 caliber Walther P99.

The "power stance"

I've found that stance is the one thing I'm likely to have to correct first, even when teaching the experienced shooter. The edgeways stance of the duelist is necessary for skateboarding or surfing, but counter-productive to good shooting. If one heel is behind the other, the body does not have good lateral balance and will tend to sway sideways. (The miss will most commonly go toward the strong hand side.) If the feet are squared off parallel, in the old "police academy position" so often seen on TV, the body does not have good front to back balance, and the shots will tend to miss either high or low, most commonly the latter.

You want to be in a fighter's stance, a boxer's stance, what a karate practitioner would call a "front stance." The lower body needs a pyramidal base, a triangle with depth. If you are right handed and firing with your strong hand only, the pelvis wants to be at about a 45 degree angle vis-à-vis the target, with your left leg to the rear. If you are shooting two-handed and are right hand dominant, the hips still want that 45-degree angle

but the left leg should now be forward and the right leg back. Now you're balanced forward and balanced back, balanced left and balanced right. It'll be easier to hold the gun on target.

In rapid fire, the shoulders want to be forward. This will get body weight in behind the gun and help control recoil. For very precise slow fire, some shooters like to cantilever the shoulders to the rear. This may make the gun seem to hang steadier with less effort, but it will cause the gun to jump up sharply upon recoil. This not only slows down your rate of sustained fire, but subconsciously, the more the muzzle jumped at the last shot, the more likely you are to jerk the trigger on the next one. Personally, I use the power stance with the shoulders at least slightly forward even in slow fire. Master shooters have a phrase that helps them remember this principle more easily: "Nose over toes."

High Hand Grasp

On a semiautomatic pistol, you want the web of the hand so high that a ripple of flesh is seen to bunch up behind the backstrap of the grip at the top edge, where the grip safety would be

on a 1911 style pistol.

The higher the hand, the lower the bore axis. This means much better control of muzzle jump and less movement of the pistol upon recoil. Since most handguns, particularly semiautomatics, are designed to be shot this way, it means that you will find it easier to press the trigger straight back as you make each shot. If your hand is too low on the “handle,” a straight rearward pressure on the trigger will tend to pull the muzzle down, placing the shot low.

A semi-auto is designed to operate as the slide moves against the abutment of a firmly held frame. A low grasp allows the muzzle to whipsaw upward from recoil as the mechanism is automatically cycling, diverting momentum from the slide through the frame. Now the slide can run out of momentum before it has completed its work. This is why holding a pistol too low can cause it to jam.



With a proper high hand grip on an auto pistol such as this Wilson Custom CQB .45, you'll see this "ripple of flesh" behind the grip tang.

All these problems are cured with the high hand grasp.

The harder we hold them, the less they kick and jump. The less they kick and jump, the more efficiently we can shoot them.

This writer strongly recommends the “crush grip.” How hard do you hold the handgun? As hard as you can. It was once advised to intensify your grip until tremors set in, and then back off until they stopped. Hold the gun as tightly as you can and let it tremor.

The key is this: keep the sights straight in line. If the sights are in line, and the hand is quivering, the sights will quiver in the center of the target. When the shot breaks, the bullet will strike the center of the target.

Any marksmanship expert will tell you that consistency of grasp is a key to consistent accuracy. As stress levels change during shooting, which is really a multi-tasking exercise that gives you a lot to think about, the consistency of grasp can change too. If you think about it, there are only two ways to grasp the pistol with uniformity.



Traditional grasp of the .45 autoloader. Thumb rests on manual safety, pad of index finger is in contact with trigger.



Author prefers this grasp: thumb curled down for more gripping strength, trigger finger inserted to distal joint for more leverage.



One reason author recommends a very firm grasp. Imagine yourself holding a pistol, and grasp it thus with fingers relaxed...

One is to hold it with virtually no pressure at all. This will give you poor control of recoil.

The other is to hold it as hard as you can, for each shot and every shot.

The hard hold has some other benefits.

If you have accustomed yourself to always hold a pistol with maximum grip strength, you are much less likely to ever drop it. Moreover, you now have the ultimate cure for a handgunner's malady known as "milking."



... and notice that when you "press the trigger," the other fingers close reflexively. This is called "milking," and is conducive to bad shots. The cure...

"Milking," taken from the hand's movement when milking a cow's udder, occurs when the index finger closes on the trigger and the other fingers sympathetically close with it, changing the grasp and pulling the sights off target. Most commonly, this will pull the shot low and to the side of what you were aiming at. It is a function called "interlimb response." When one finger closes, the other fingers want to close with it.

Do this simple exercise. Relax your hand, and pretend to be holding a handgun. Now, move the index finger as if rapidly firing a handgun with a heavy trigger pull. You will see the other fingers reflexively contracting along with it. You have just seen and experienced milking in action.



... is to grasp firmly with everything but the trigger finger. Now, when trigger finger is flexed...

Now do the same, but this time with all but the index finger closed as tightly as you can hold them. As you run the index finger, you'll feel the tendons trying to tighten the grasp of the other fingers, but you'll see that they actually can't. That's because the tight grip has already hyperflexed the fingers, and they can't tighten any more. The milking action has now been eliminated.



... the other fingers can't sympathetically close, because they're already closed as tight as they can get.

Thumb position is negotiable. Generations of shooters with the GI 1911 .45 learned to shoot with the thumb high, resting on the manual safety. Many competitive target shooters prefer to point the thumb straight at the target. This straight thumb position seems to align the skeleto-muscular structure of the hand in a way that allows the index finger its straightest rearward movement. With powerful guns, curling the thumb down to add grasping strength and enhance control is a valid technique. A lot of it depends on how the gun fits your hand. The controls may also be a factor. With a

conventional double action auto that has a safety catch mounted on the slide (Beretta, S&W, and Ruger to name just a few), I like my thumb to be where it can not only push the lever into the “fire” position, but verify that the lever is in fact in the position it should be in.

Trigger finger contact? The old time marksmen liked the very tip of the finger, on the theory that it offered more sensitivity. With a handgun that has a very light trigger pull, there may be some validity to that. Still others use the pad of the finger, which is basically the point at which you find the whorl of the fingerprint.

Personally, I've learned that contacting the trigger at the crease of the distal joint, the spot old time revolver masters called “the power crease,” gives me much more leverage and therefore more control. This is particularly true on guns whose trigger pulls may be long and/or heavy: the double action handgun, the Glock, etc. A lot of this will depend on hand size and shape in relation to gun size and shape. There are many variables in the interface between human and machine.

Front sight

The conventional sight picture with conventional handgun sights is the one you see in the marksmanship manuals. The front sight is centered in the notch of the rear sight. The top of the front sight is level with the top of the rear sight, and there is an equal amount of light on either side.

Human vision being what it is, you can't focus on the sights and the target at the same time. Actually, you can't focus on both the front and the rear sight at the same time, either. Once the target has been identified as something you need to shoot, you no longer need your primary visual focus on it. Primary focus now goes to the aiming indicator, the front sight. Think of it as a fighter pilot would: “enemy craft sighted, lock missiles on target.” The way we lock the handgun's missiles onto the target is by focusing on its front sight.

Failing to properly focus on the front sight is a widespread problem among shooters. Every good shooter with iron sights (as opposed to red-dot optics or telescopic sights) whom you know can probably remember when he or she experienced “the epiphany of the front sight.” The realization, “So that's what the coach meant when she said to watch the front sight!”

Watch the front sight hard. Apply your primary visual focus there. Look at it until you can see every little scratch in the machining on its surface. If it has a dot on it, focus on it until the dot looks like a soccer ball. Then you, too, will experience the epiphany of the front sight, and will see your shot groups tighten as if by magic.



With a slide mounted safety as on S&W Model 457 compact .45, shown, author prefers this grasp, with thumb at upward angle to guarantee release of safety catch.

Smoothly roll the trigger

Remember the prime directive: once the gun is aimed at the target, the trigger must be pulled

in a way that does not pull the muzzle off target before the shot is fired. This means that the trigger must come straight back.

You want a smooth, even, uninterrupted pull. You can say to yourself, “press the trigger.” You can say to yourself, “sque-e-eze the trigger.” I say to myself, “roll the trigger,” because that connotes the smooth, consistent, uniform pressure I’m trying to apply. You don’t want the shot to truly surprise you, of course, because that would be an unintentional discharge. Rather, you want the exact instant of the shot to surprise you, so you don’t anticipate it and convulsively jerk the shot off target.

Experts agree that the best way to get the trigger pull down, once you know what it’s supposed to be, is to practice it. Dry-fire, or “clicking” the empty gun, is the best practice. The position of the sights when the gun goes “click” will tell you whether the shot would have been on target or not. The more thousands of these repetitions you perform, the more the proper trigger pull will be hard-wired into your mind and body to the point where you can do it perfectly without consciously thinking about the details.

The best way to learn it is with what I dubbed the “exemplar drill.” Find an accomplished pistol shooter to assist you. Take a strong stance and firm grasp, and hold the gun on target. Let your index finger barely touch the trigger, and let that finger go limp. Ask the seasoned shooter to place his gun hand over yours, and his trigger finger over yours, and let his finger press yours straight back against the trigger. After several repetitions, you’ll be feeling what he feels when he makes the perfect shot. This is the easiest way to learn what a good trigger pull feels like.

Now progress to the two of you pulling the trigger together at the same pace. After some of that, you’re ready for the third stage. Now it’s your finger pulling the trigger, his lightly touching yours to monitor its progress. Once you’ve got that down, let the coach sit back and watch as you “fly solo,” making corrections as necessary.

Some suggestions

Observe all rules of safe shooting and safe gun handling, of course. Start with paper or cardboard targets in close, at three to seven yards. If your shot is off the mark by three inches at 25 yards, it might have been just the natural limits of the gun’s accuracy. It might have been the ammo. It might even have been the wind. But if you’re off by three inches at four yards, you’ll know exactly what it is. The closer you are, the easier it is to correct whatever caused the bad hit on the target. Once you’re hitting in tight groups at close range, move back incrementally. As the distance increases, so does the challenge.

The world champion was right when he said it was simple, it just wasn’t easy. The “not easy” part is taken care of in repetition. Fortunately, repetition means shooting, and shooting is fun.