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PISTOL DRY FIRE TRAINING



The key to success in competitive pistol shooting, as with any sport, is training. An athlete's training determines the rate and degree of improvement. Too often shooters believe the only way to improve is to spend more time at the range shooting bullets. Unfortunately, unlimited range time is a luxury that most of us cannot afford, and live firing alone seldom results in maximum improvement.

It's common at training sessions and major competitions to see elite pistol shooters performing holding drills and dry fire exercises, often a dozen athletes sequestered in a designated hallway pointing at a wall.

So if live shooting is not the key to improvement, then what is? The answer is dry fire training.

Training with real bullets, on a real target, and at the full distance is an absolute necessity for successful pistol shooting, but those elements are just small pieces of the puzzle. Dry fire is a pistol shooter's primary training tool. In dry fire training there is no recoil to hide your mistakes, which allows you to find them and correct them.

There are several types of dry fire training and each type helps you focus on perfecting particular fundamentals. Let's discuss four types of dry-fire training:

1) **Holding Drills:** Holding drills help build your position and grip, critically important to the physical aspect of pistol shooting. Holding drills help you develop a consistent natural point of aim by building muscle memory. Effective holding drills occur when you dry fire, then hold your follow-through for 30 to 130 seconds. During this time your primary goal is to maintain consistency in your position and grip. Your sight alignment and the feel of your hand indicates your grip consistency. Your sight picture indicates your position consistency. It is helpful, if not completely necessary, to have someone watch you to ensure that your body remains in the same position as you become fatigued. You can also use smaller targets to help you develop a smaller hold. Here is a holding drill routine that I use to build my position:

Dry fire on a target, blank face, or a vertical and horizontal line. Hold your follow-through for 60 seconds. During that time keep your sights aligned and pointed at the same spot. Keep every joint at exactly the same angle. Don't allow your position to change at all as you tire. Hold for 60 seconds then relax for 120 seconds. Do this six to eight times, three to five times a week.

2) **Eyes Closed:** Dry firing with your eyes closed allows you to work on your trigger control without visual distractions. For your trigger control to be truly uninterrupted, it must be completely independent of sight alignment and sight picture. Dry firing with your eyes closed is the best way to work on your trigger control because it isolates what you see from what you feel and do. This exercise also allows you to zero in on your grip, ensuring that it is absolutely consistent throughout your shot-process.

3) **Blank Target:** Dry firing on a blank target is firing on a light colored background, and not on an actual target. A white wall is a great example of a blank target. This exercise forces you to focus on your sights. Sight

alignment is the primary goal. Make sure that when you release the trigger there is no movement in the front sight or its relationship to the rear sight notch.

4) **Reduced Target and Match Target:** Dry firing on a match target is firing on a real target at the appropriate distance for the event for which you are training. If you are unable to train at the full distance, you can use a reduced target at a reduced distance. Training on a target allows you work on and perfect your shot process, fundamentals and sight picture. In Men's Rapid Fire, target training helps develop the muscle memory to move to each target.

Follow-through is incredibly important for both live fire and dry fire training. Dry fire training allows you to concentrate on follow-through without the distraction and masking effect of recoil. Exaggerate your follow-through in training and maintain focus and continue the application of the fundamentals for an extended period of time after the dry fire shot. The goal is to keep your position exactly the same, your grip perfectly constant and to continue aligning the sights without interruption. This will polish your technique and correct most mistakes. This "polishing action" makes dry fire extremely important for pre-match warm-up.

There are times that high volume training is necessary to elevate your performance or to prepare for a long match. There is a certain point in training when shooting more bullets will just damage your technique because recoil will cover up your mistakes, effectively turning your training into negative training. Before you reach this point, you should replace actual shooting with dry fire. Dry fire allows you to continue to train without developing bad habits as long as you maintain your mental intensity and stay focused on the fundamentals. With this type of smart training you can have both quantity and quality training.