



A common challenge that I run into with athletes at all levels is hesitation and over-holding. Over-holding can be defined as continuing to hold past the prime of your hold, before executing the shot. The prime of your hold can be when you are at your most stable; all your body systems are at their best window to produce a good shot within the movement you have.

Our sport attracts the “perfectionist” personality trait athletes on a regular basis. Often, athletes will struggle trying to constantly be “perfect” in the result (i.e., shoot a 10) and simply hesitate beyond their ability to shoot a perfect shot. They will wait for the perfect or motionless hold or a perfect timing of the hold they have. The perfectionist trait is not the problem; what they are trying to make “perfect” is the issue.

One of my junior coaches who mentored me when I was competing in my teenage years, watched me at a competition use every minute of the time allowed, holding and hesitating, until I literally had to throw the shots down range in a panic to finish within the time allotted. I shot poorly but I thought I had “worked hard.” He took me aside and said “shoot the hold you have—shoot YOUR quality hold, stop waiting and fooling around waiting for something else!” He was right—I was trying to shoot a motionless hold in standing that I didn’t have instead of executing the shot cleanly in my hold. (Ray Anti, USMC (Ret.) still works with shooters today).

If you are an athlete or a coach reading this and have the over-holding challenge as an issue, try the following technique to create better execution:

Be “perfect” in the PROCESS: Do the steps correctly to set up your best hold and execution without fail, every time.

Holding and Working Hard— or Overholding?

Evaluate yourself on your consistency of doing this and the score will follow.

Example in Standing:

- Pick up the rifle and mount your position without looking through the sights. Look over the top of the sights. Important—if you go directly to your sights and start working your sight picture while you are stabilizing your body you will achieve neither—do one thing at a time.
- Focus on your body and stability from the feet up.
- Make sure you set your support elbow in exactly the same place as you have trained.
- Make sure your support hand is placed correctly for what you have trained.
- Take three relaxing deep breaths as you settle in to your position, still looking over the top of your sights or even just to the side.
- When your inner position feels stable and correct, then go to the sights.
- If your hold looks normal (YOUR quality hold for whatever skill level you have built so far) execute the shot. As a rule of thumb, at this point you have about 7-10 seconds after you stop breathing to shoot within your prime physical window before lack of oxygen starts degrading your visual acuity and relaxed state.
- If you go beyond 10 seconds, stop and restart. The whole process from mounting the gun to shooting the shot or rejecting the shot can be about a minute.

Use your coach! Ask the coach to run a timer on you when you are setting up and executing. Do this over many shots to evaluate the time you are actually spending in the process and look for ways to be efficient and consistent. Compare training and matches.

How do I evaluate my hold? No matter what skill level you are at in develop-

ment, beginner or Olympic Champion, your best hold and execution occurs when you can accurately call your shot—not just when you shoot a ten as a result. Your coach can help you evaluate your hold and execution just by taking your scope from you and making you call the shot each time you shoot.

“Laser” or optical trainers: Systems such as SCATT and NOPTTEL can be good tools for evaluating hold and execution. They also have built in feedback tools such as sound that can help you gain confidence in knowing the actual quality of your hold. Most athletes hold much better than they perceive they are. Laser systems can often show athletes holding very well in the center and simply, watching and waiting for something “better” to occur. This feedback and playback with your coach can help you gain confidence and understanding into your actual holding.

Training drills: Use time and quantity drills to test and train your efficiency in your process. Example: Give yourself 10 minutes preparation time, followed by 10 minutes to shoot eight shots. Have your coach watch and time you. When you can shoot eight quality shots in 10 minutes, reduce the time or increase the shots to help challenge your efficiency and quality. One minute to execute a quality process and shot in standing indoors is a reasonable goal and measure for efficiency. Coaches can help you adjust this guideline to fit your process—some are faster, some can be a little slower.

The one thing you can control absolutely in any setting, match or training, pressure situations or in relaxed atmospheres, is your process. If you are a beginner or a veteran, focus on the process of setting up your position and hold and make your consistency in this effort “perfect.” You will then execute the hold you have very well. Your hold will improve with training and work over time—and so will your scores if you make your process ready to take advantage of it.