

## Basic Pistol Handling

Before you can compete you must be familiar with your pistol. It needs to become an extension of your body. Every time you pick up your pistol or draw it from the holster you should hold it the same way. You need to practice obtaining your grip until your pistol feels natural and comfortable in your hand.

**ALL DRY FIRE PRACTICE MUST BE DONE WITH AN EMPTY GUN. DO NOT HAVE ANY LOADED AMMO, INCLUDING LOADED MAGAZINES, IN THE VICINITY.**

STANCE:

I believe the modified isosceles is the best all around stance developed to date. Whenever possible you should use this stance when shooting freestyle. To enter this stance place your feet shoulder width apart or a hair wider. Your weak side foot should be a little ahead of your strong side foot; this is basically a martial arts style ready stance. Your knees should be slightly bent and your upper body is leaning a bit forward. Your pistol is gripped as described below and your arms point out directly in front of you with your elbows slightly bent. If you lock your elbows you will feel more recoil and will not be able to shoot as quickly. Your head should be held in its normal upright position. Don't hunker over.



## GRIP:

Place your gun in your strong hand with your index finger pointing forward alongside of the frame and your thumb pointing up. If your pistol wasn't in your hand you would look like you were playing cops and robbers and your hand is your pistol. Now bring your weak hand to the front of the grip and wrap around it. Your weak hand should be held with your fingers together and your thumb pointing up until your hand meets the grip to wrap around. At this point, the weak hand thumb should be resting alongside the slide and pointing towards your target. After the weak hand has obtained its grip the strong hand thumb comes down on top of the weak hand thumb. If you are using a 1911 type pistol your strong hand thumb would be resting on the safety. Once you have your weak hand on the pistol it should look similar to the following picture. The weak hand should be gripping harder than the strong hand, at least 60% to 40% in favor of the weak hand. I liken it to a weak handshake from the strong hand and a firm handshake from the weak hand. From here on out you should always obtain this grip whenever you are handling the pistol for freestyle practice or competition.

For the first couple of days just get used to holding your pistol in the correct manner. Practice picking it up as much as possible. You need it to feel natural and to be able to obtain your grip quickly and without conscious thought.







#### SIGHT PICTURE:

Your sight picture consists of your target, your front sight and your rear sight. With your gun properly gripped you focus on your target as you swing the gun onto it and then bring your focus to your front sight and make sure it is centered in your rear sight as you break the shot. Again once you see the target your focus should be on your front sight as the shot breaks. When the shot breaks you should see the sight lift and then return to your target if you need to engage it again or you should look to your next target if you have finished with that one. I shot for a few years before I actually saw the front sight lift. I was wondering what the heck these instructors were talking about. I was blinking after each shot fired so I never saw the front sight lift. Once I was aware that I was blinking I was able to get over that problem within a few weeks. It's not that hard to do, it just takes a bunch of shooting. Fire your gun into a berm or other safe backstop and don't worry about hitting a target. Just concentrate on not blinking after each shot. It takes quite a few shots but eventually you will quit blinking. Double ear protection can speed up the process also.

#### BREATHING:

For high accuracy shots breath control is important. On a difficult shot it is a good idea to use standard Bullseye type breath control. This consists of a deep inhale, a partial exhale, hold and then break the shot. But for the vast majority of action type shooting, breath control consists of **BREATHING**. When you are exerting yourself during a stage it is extremely detrimental to hold your breath. Breathe; you would be amazed at how many people will hold their breath while running a stage. You may not think so, but breathing properly takes practice. Whenever practicing a field course, pay attention to your breathing. Are you holding your breath when you are moving from box A to box B? If so run it again with emphasis on breathing.

## TRIGGER CONTROL:

For accurate slow fire shooting there are two things of utmost importance, your sight picture and your application of the trigger. For accurate high speed shooting you have to add your grip and stance in. It is extremely difficult to shoot both fast and accurate without employing all four. To shoot well, proper positioning of your trigger finger is important. For a single action pistol you should activate the trigger using the center of the pad of your index finger. No other part of your finger should be touching the gun. For a revolver or double action semi most people insert their index finger all the way to the first joint. This gives you more leverage for the more difficult pull of the double action. Again no other part of your trigger finger should be touching the gun. OK lets work on the trigger press now. I like the term press for trigger actuation as it is the closest to the actual process. When you have a proper sight picture you should apply pressure against the trigger by pressing directly towards yourself with your trigger finger. You do not want to apply any pressure to the left or the right when you press the trigger as this can cause your pistol to move off of the target. You also do not want to jerk the trigger as this will also cause the pistol to move off of the target. The accuracy needed is directly proportional to how quickly you apply your pressure. For an easy shot you should apply a quick press as soon as your front sight centers on your target. On a very difficult shot you will apply gradual pressure only when your front sight is centered on your target. If your front sights come off the center of the target you will stop, but not release, pressure until your sights are centered on the target again. This gives you the best chance of your gun being properly aligned when the shot breaks. Accurate pistol shooting is extremely simple. Have a proper sight picture and press the trigger. Piece of cake right? One would think so but even the best shooters have times when they fail to perform this “simple” action properly. An excellent means of determining how well you are applying the trigger is to mix in a few dummy rounds in your magazine during your live fire practice. It’s better if you have a friend load them so you have no idea when your hammer will fall on a non firing round. This method is easier with a revolver as you just load a couple of dummies in and spin the cylinder before closing it. Pay attention to your sight picture and trigger press for each shot. When the hammer falls on a dummy, you shouldn’t see any excessive movement in your front sight and you shouldn’t have any physical reactions such as jerks, twitches or eye blinks. This is a good way to determine if you have proper trigger control and whether or not you are flinching or anticipating recoil.

## DRAW:

All right, now that you are comfortable with your grip lets work on drawing your pistol from a holster. We’ll start with the surrender position also known as wrists above shoulder. Your first move is your strong hand dropping to get a grip on your gun while your weak hand drops to just in front of your sternum. The next step is to bring the pistol up to your weak hand and obtain your grip with the pistol relatively close to your body. At this point you depress the safety with your strong thumb, assuming you have a safety, and push the pistol forward toward your target. If done correctly you should see your front sight through your rear sights before your arms are extended to shooting position. As you obtain your sight picture press the trigger until the hammer falls. After you have

completed your dry fire shot return the pistol to the holster by reversing your draw routine. Bring the gun back to the area in front of your sternum and then release your weak hand grip. Re-cock the pistol and holster the gun with your strong hand while your weak hand remains in front of your sternum. Now relax and prepare for your next draw from surrender.

You will need to practice this routine many times before it becomes natural. It is a very good idea to start slowly, as in almost slow motion, until you have done your draw routine enough times that your body knows what you want it to do. Once you have the routine burnt in then you can start speeding up. As you begin to increase your draw speed, be conscious of your movements. You will be tempted to shortcut some of the moves in your desire to gain speed. Except for point blank shooting the technique I have described has proven to be the fastest way to get off an **accurate** shot.

The most common start position in practical shooting today is hands relaxed at sides. The draw technique is the same as a surrender start except for the first move. Simultaneously the strong hand will rise to acquire its grip on the pistol while the weak hand rises to the area just in front of your sternum. From here on out the draw is the same as it is from surrender. I see a lot of competitors with their hands just kind of swinging at their sides while they are waiting for the start signal. I think this is a mistake. It is helpful to always have your hands in the same position when the start signal sounds. To accomplish this I recommend having your long finger of each hand touching the outer seams of your pants.

#### STRONG HAND:

Strong hand and weak hand shooting are also common in action shooting. To be competitive you need to be able to shoot quickly and accurately with either hand. This takes a lot of practice. Boy does this take a lot of practice!

Your body position changes for strong and weak hand shooting. For strong hand shooting it works well to have your strong side foot leading your weak side foot by 8 to 10 inches. The motions for a strong side draw are very similar to a standard draw. Your strong side hand goes for your grip as the weak hand goes to your sternum. You then draw the pistol while pressing your weak hand against your chest. The pistol is then pushed out towards the target and you release the shot as soon as you have your sight picture. When shooting strong hand only you need to increase the strength of your grip over what you use in freestyle shooting.

#### WEAK HAND

The draw to weak hand is obviously different. You start with your weak side foot leading the strong side by 8 to 10 inches. As the draw is initiated you go through the same motions as you do with a regular draw except that when the hands meet you transfer the pistol to the weak hand. After the transfer is completed the strong hand goes to the chest as the pistol is pushed towards the target with the weak hand. After your sight picture is acquired you release the shot. If your target is an easy, close one you can use the normal

sight picture, but if it is a difficult shot you will probably need to change how you aim for weak hand shooting. Most right handed people will shoot to the right of their target if they don't compensate. I prefer to close my right (dominant) eye and shoot left (weak) eyed when engaging difficult targets weak handed. If for some reason you can't close your weak eye you have two options. You can compensate by using windage adjustments or you can cover your dominant eye with your strong hand while you are shooting weak handed. This really takes no more time than a standard draw to weak hand. Instead of bringing your strong hand to your sternum, you cover your dominant eye with it. The reason I prefer to use my weak eye while shooting weak handed is that you don't have to use windage adjustments. It is difficult to know how far you have to adjust for different ranges. When you use your weak eye you should hit exactly where you are aiming. It's a lot easier said than done, but with practice you will be amazed how well you can shoot with either hand.

The transfer to weak hand is something that we need to cover. I have seen a lot of shooters come close to dropping their pistol in the transfer process. Usually this is because they are tossing the pistol from strong to weak hand. The way I recommend the transfer, your strong hand does not lose contact with the pistol until the weak hand grip is obtained. I believe this to be a safer and quicker method as the index finger of the strong hand adds stability which allows you to acquire your weak hand grip in a more efficient manner.

The strong hand dives for the pistol as the weak hand goes to its standard draw position in front of your sternum. Obtain your regular strong hand grip and bring the pistol to your weak hand in the same manner you do on a regular draw routine. As your weak hand grips the pistol your strong hand will release its grip and move towards your sternum. As this is happening your strong hand index finger will slide along the grip of the pistol as it is on its way to your chest. This contact from the index finger helps to insure a proper weak hand grip by keeping pressure against the pistol as you acquire the weak hand grip. If you do not have an ambidextrous safety, assuming you have a safety, you will need to release the safety with your strong hand just prior to your hands coming together. If you do have an ambidextrous safety you will release it after you have obtained your weak hand grip since that is where your weak thumb should be placed anyway.

The strong hand to weak hand transfer needs to be practiced until you are comfortable with the exchange. Again practice slowly until you have it burnt in then increase speed.

#### RELOADS:

After you have become comfortable with your draws you will need to practice magazine changes. Efficient magazine changes are an important part of action shooting. To maximize your efficiency you must practice your reloads often and well. Again, practice does not make perfect, perfect practice makes perfect. Start slow and build speed only after you have ingrained the motions into your body.

To initiate a speed reload your weak hand dives for a magazine as your strong hand thumb, **with your finger out of the trigger guard**, presses the mag release button. With most people this requires a slight twist of the pistol to the left in your grip, assuming a right handed person. Next the weak hand will grab the new magazine with your index finger extended down the front of the mag as shown in the accompanying picture. I like to keep my pistol at almost full extension as I bring the magazine up to the mag well. Just prior to the magazine entering the mag well you should have your eyes focused in the well. As the magazine locks into place your weak hand will roll up and regain your grip as your eyes focus on the next target. As soon as you have acquired your sight picture you release your next shot.

I recommend that you practice only one skill at a time, i.e. do your draws at one practice session, your magazine changes at another and your weak hand transfers at another. In my experience I have found better results when practicing individual skills over practicing a variety of them in the same session. You will be amazed how much you can improve your pistol handling by practicing at home without ever firing a shot. Obviously range time is important also, but dry fire practice can really make a huge difference on how quickly you acquire and then maintain basic competitive skills.

The following are a few competition pistol links. There is a vast array of information available on these sights. I recommend you use them.

<http://www.brianenos.com/>

<http://www.mattburkett.com/>

<http://www.jerrybarnhart.com/>

<http://www.robleatham.com/>

<http://www.uspsa.org>