

How do you set up a training plan? What is training, anyway?

Training is a learning process both for your mind and your body (anyone out there think you can separate them?). **Learning theory is pretty well established and basically says that short sessions and lots of them is the most efficient way to learn anything.**

The U.S. Shooting Team shotgun coach, Lloyd Woodhouse, has the most rational plans that I have heard. He defines "training" as that time spent perfecting each element of the technique (sometimes called "the fundamentals"), this should consume about 80% of your learning time. "Practice" should take about 15% of your learning time and is defined as simulating match conditions as closely as possible, but being able to stop in the middle of or at the end of a series of shots, making an adjustment to come closer to the perfect technique, and then repeating the series or continuing as needed. You'll notice that there is 5% left - and that is the time spent at actual matches. Basically, a shooter that spends an hour at a range "live firing", should have completed 5 hours training with "dry firing" exercises. To take that concept a little further, the competition shooter should be expecting to use the match time as the measure of training required for the next match.

Three sessions a week for about 3-4 hours per session is a pretty heavy learning load, but it is about what is required on the range for those seeking to become elite shooters.

Alternate days should be spent in physical or mental "training" to maintain good physical condition or increase strength, and/or to work on visualization techniques. Remember 3-4 hours match time on a range equals 15 to 20 hours of "dry" training. The Service Pistol match has a total shooting time of 4 minutes and 33 seconds. This translates to approximately 30 minutes dry training per session, with a minimum 4 sessions per week.

For Service Pistol shooters it is not necessary to limit oneself to the Service gun. An excellent training aid is an Air Pistol or .22 Standard Pistol.

Since Service is largely a precision shot, released 6 times in varying times the sight alignment and shot release of a precision shot with an Air Pistol or Standard gun is great training. In fact the dry or live firing of an Air Pistol will aid in training for most types of pistol shooting.

One important aspect not commonly recognized is to schedule uninterrupted time and concentrate on a single element. New studies show that if you try to learn more than one thing in a day, your learning efficiency goes down!

It seems that it takes the mind/body combo some significant time to integrate what it is trying to learn. So, when you "train", pick one element of the technique, focus on it, work to perform it perfectly and don't try to do anything else in that session. Then take a break, and finally repeat the element for a final time.

This is especially important, as it is just as easy to train-in an error as correct technique. Repetition of the sequence until it is perfect, and then knowing what a perfect sequence feels like is an essential part of training and mental discipline.

I suggest that in Service pistol it is best to break the match up into the 50 yard sequences, 25 yard barricade sequences, 6 second multiples, 10 yard sequences and finally 7 yards. The 5 parts of the match can be dry trained as well as live trained.

The 25 yard training will have a strengthening effect for 50 yards and vice-versa.

Train 50 yards on Monday, 25 yard barricades on Tuesday, 6 second multiples on Thursday, 10 yards on Friday, live fire on Saturday, 7 yard training can be incorporated.

On Sunday you can either have a day off or shoot a match or two. If you shoot a match, set a realistic goal for each section AND NOT FOR THE WHOLE MATCH.

The odd Air match or Standard Match will also add an exposure to competition and assist in match hardening the competitor. Practice mental discipline for ALL shooting, not just Service. It will make you a much better and more consistent performer.

HOW MUCH IS NOT ENOUGH

Even 20 minutes a night – 4 nights a week will make an improvement.

It will just take longer than if 60 minutes - 5 nights a week is done. I recommend that training time should roughly equal the time that it takes to complete the whole match.

Take breaks of a few minutes every 10 minutes or so, this is an excellent time to make a few notes of the number of dry fires done, how you are feeling and to re-read your goal for the training session. A break of two or three minutes is long enough to allow muscles to relax, and breathing to settle down.

The main point here is that for Service Pistol there is no real need to limit training to the Service match. It is possible to do a couple of 60 shot air matches a week (say two hours total time) and get the same benefit as two hours of dryfire training (especially if Barricade and 50 yards are considered). The best part is that the benefit is cumulative, it will aid across all your shooting. I consider that 10 hours per week of combined dry and live fire training, equates roughly to producing 25 minutes of quality shooting. While that may seem a lot of training, it is really an hour a day 6 days a week and 4 hours at the range. This formula works – it also helps with confidence and match fitness.

The decision is yours.