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# VIII

# Practice and Training



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## VIII. Practice And Training

### A. Training Basics

#### Hot Versus Cold Shooting

There has been quite a bit written on hot versus cold shooting. There really is no “cold” Practical Shooting; you almost always get to look at the course, plan it out, and do some dry draws with sight pictures. Cold shooting is real life — like grabbing your gun out of a dresser drawer in the middle of the night when you hear a strange noise. That will really get your adrenaline moving!

#### Improving Your Cold Shooting

If there is a serious difference between when you shoot a match and practice, start treating your practice like a match. Set up a course of fire. Don your gear, mentally rehearse it and shoot it for score. Note time and points. Now shoot several more times and see how much you improve. If your mental game is well-developed, you most likely won't improve too much unless you really blew the first run.

Every other club match, hang it out on the edge. Burn the stages as hard as you can. The next match, hang back and see what is happening. Watch your times and scores and find out how much of a difference there is. If you are on the edge and still hitting everything, why not shoot there all the time?

Here is a basic training and shooting schedule. Use this to start with and then develop your own. This is based on someone that wants to go all the way.

#### Practice

You should try to get in 20 to 30 minutes of dry fire practice daily one day off per week, and two to three live fire practice sessions per week using 300 rounds minimum each. All practice performance needs to be tracked. Use sheets at the end of this Manual or develop your own.

#### Perfect Practice = No Reason To Make Mistakes

There is no reason to make mistakes in practice or in a match. The only reason an error occurs is because of a poor mental game.

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## **Club Matches**

Shoot only the ones that you think will help you improve. Don't waste your valuable time on poor matches, spend it practicing instead. Shoot to win all of them. You have to pay attention and focus just like the world title is on the line. Every shot has to count. If you are screwing around not paying attention in a club match, you are going to screw around in a major match and it will cost you money. When you focus every time at a club match a major match is the same and won't negatively affect your performance just because you're in the "big show."

## **Major Matches**

Shoot every one that you can. I would set a minimum at fifteen a year if you want to be a serious competitor. This match experience will add up fast. You will learn what it takes to be competitive on a national level.

## **Get Out And Do It!**

Let's eliminate some excuses. Your goal is to excel at Practical Shooting, so here are some things to think about when planning your practices.

### **Quality Counts**

Make every round worth something. Use your Timer wisely, keep track of your progress religiously, and learn from each trip to the range. You're spending money to do this, make sure that you're getting what you pay for. This is one of the few sports that offers you total control over that aspect.

### **Time Off Counts**

Being dedicated is one thing, but don't push yourself into "Burnoutville." Use this suggestion wisely, because it's an easy-out that can be abused.

Two Truths and a Lie: There are many things that you can do instead of practicing. Some of them are more fun. Winning isn't all that much fun, but will occur naturally with no sweat.

Take the time off from practice that you need to maintain perspective and keep your goals clearly in sight. Don't skip practice and go to a movie just because you feel like it.

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### **Shoot At Different Times**

You'll probably find that there are ranges open very early in the morning or late at night in your area. Make use of this flexibility, since it will help keep things "fresh" by avoiding the same-old-same-old syndrome. Don't let your practices become a chore; they're supposed to be a growth experience.

### **Shoot At Different Places**

Whenever possible, vary your location — within reason. Shooting at different ranges will accomplish a couple of things. It will give you some experience in dealing with different layouts and locale rules, and it will get you accustomed to traveling and playing "away games." This is crucial to successful competition in this sport, since almost every important match will require you to travel and compete out of your normal environment.

### **Dry Fire Goodies**

You can shoot at different times easily. It's called dry fire, and requires a minimum of equipment, expense and preparation, and basically no travel. Discipline does not change, and you have to do some homework — literally. Make sure that there is an area in your home that you can safely handle and dry fire a gun, and you've got it.

You need to triple-check your gun for emptiness every time you pick it up to dry fire. Skipping this step once can lead to tragedy.

You need to make sure that your home dry fire area has a bullet-proof backstop, because the gun is always loaded. Your local gun shop, range, or club can help you find or design one.

You need to make sure that friends and family are aware of this area and the times you are going to be using it.

### **Set Goals**

This has been covered in several places throughout this Manual, but it is so important that stressing it again makes sense. Improvement occurs when you compare a benchmark to a new achievement. Setting goals and keeping track of your improvement establishes the benchmark and makes it possible for you to spot and appreciate new achievements.

### **Make It Fun**

Practical Shooting is an odd combination of severe self-discipline, physics and camaraderie. I have had some really "golden" times at matches and practices. The key to this is keeping perspective — you're in this sport to excel and have fun. Maintain that viewpoint, and it will happen.

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## **Dry Fire Practice**

### **Skill Building Benefits**

Dry fire practice is as important, if not more important, than live fire. Dry fire is how I personally learned to shoot. When I was starting out I couldn't afford to practice all the time. Dry fire practice makes the difference when you need to burn in a new skill or can't get out to the range. You can improve all of the shooting basic skills in dry fire or at least maintain you current level. Dry fire and live fire are separate activities in a shooting program.

Tests have shown that shooters that are trained by dry firing first have fewer bad habits and score better than shooters that just practiced on the range. Obtain the benefits of both and you will enjoy the best training program.

Dry fire can get boring and old. Change it around, practice different skills, and come up with new exercises to keep it interesting. There are many different ways to practice in your own home that don't cost any money. Try all the exercises in this book and work on them until they are second nature.

### **When?**

If you dry fire every day for at least 15 minutes you will enjoy improvement in your overall shooting. I don't know anyone that can't find 15 minutes in their schedule. Do it when you wake up before breakfast or before you go to bed. The morning is better as that is normally when the matches happen. If you get your body in the groove of handling a gun every day, next thing you know, the gun will feel like an extension of your body.

### **How?**

Here are a few tips for making dry fire more enjoyable and easier. Trace out the sample targets onto cardboard and make cut-outs. This will let you set up specific arrays. The distances of each are included on the targets. (Sample targets included in book)

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## **Getting Started**

When starting to dry fire, work on a skill ten or twenty times in slow motion. Do it absolutely perfect. Now speed up slightly and get in the groove. After it starts feeling comfortable, push it as hard as you can. Now go back and the whole process again. Repeat this process over and over. This is the best way to learn a new skill and improve a current one.

### **Here Are A Few Exercises To Try Out.**

#### Draws:

Draws to a position: Kneeling, prone, around barricade, around a door, et cetera

Draws from a position: Seated, out of a box, out of a drawer, tool box

Turning draws

Weak hand and strong hand draws

Weak hand and strong hand transfers

Target transfers

Eye speed exercises

#### Reloads:

Reload to strong or weak hand

Reload to kneeling and prone

Reload around door or barricade

Movement around the house — practice going down a hallway, entering doors, et cetera

Make up your own. Just make sure that your are practicing a specific skill and are performing that skill right.

### **Great Time To Practice Visualization**

Dry fire practice is the perfect time to work on visualization. Go through each skill mentally prior to performing it. This will familiarize you to the skill and help you focus on the activity at hand.

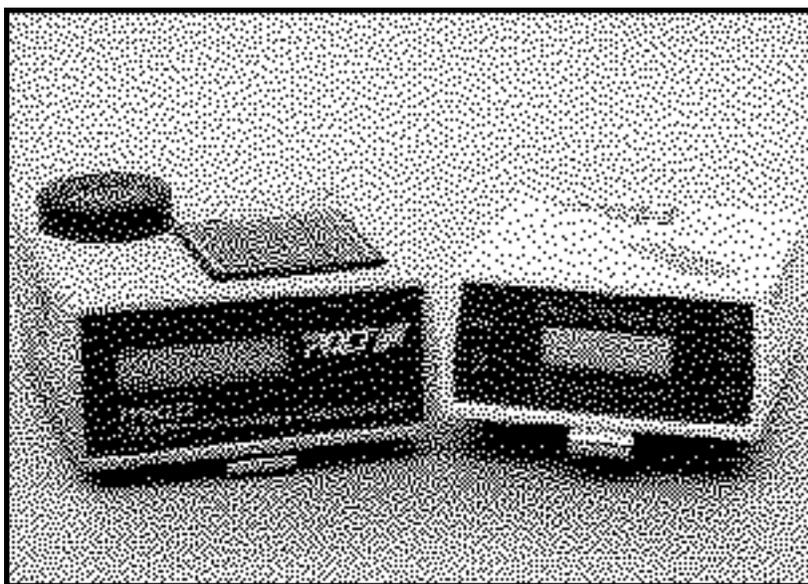
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## Live Fire Practice

When you go out to the range, grab your gear and be mentally prepared to work on your shooting skills. When you are practicing focus on it, not the problems of everyday life. You have work to do.

Track your performance using the tracking sheets included in this Manual. This will give you reference material. You will know exactly how much you are improving and if you are stagnating or have reached a plateau on a particular skill. Check several skills in each practice session. That way if you sustain an injury or can't shoot for a month you will be able to look back and check what your performance level was.

## Timers And How To Use Them Effectively



A timer is just that. It tells you what you did right then. It doesn't predict what you will do in a match. Don't get tied-down by a timer. Sometimes, just go to the range and shoot. Watch what happens and learn.

If you bought a timer that has the ability easily check first shot and transition times it will tell you where your current performance level is.

Shoot with someone that is above your skill level and note their times. Work on your skills until you're better than them.

A printer helps when tracking performance as you can transfer the data to a tracking sheet later. If you don't have a printer, write down your times immediately. Otherwise they might change by the time they get on paper.

When practicing alone, always set the timer for random delay times. This way you never know exactly when the beep will go off and become accustomed to reacting to it. In Practical Shooting the start signal can come from one to five seconds after standby. Five seconds on the line can seem like an eternity. Don't let them catch you off guard by delaying a start signal. Keep focused and turn up your auditory awareness.

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## Stages

When setting up stages to practice on, try to set up things that are going to be thrown at you in a major match. The first time you shoot a stage in practice, treat it as if it were a major match. Figure it out, visualize it, and shoot it for score. Then go back and review what problems you had and what you can improve. Shoot it again on the edge and see what happens. What is the score difference? Now go and work on the specific skills that you found need help.

Here are a few sample stages that are easily set up. You need a minimum of nine target stands, four shooting boxes and a chair.

## Standards

Here are some time fire standards to practice. Two of them are at fifty yards and the other two are at 25. Always try to get in as much practice as possible at fifty yards.

Once again use the tracking sheets to check your points on the standards.

## Exercise

### Exercise Schedule

You should exercise about three times a week — cardio one hour and light weights one hour. (Get checked by a doctor prior to exercising and get a personal trainer to set a schedule for you.)

Off days, practice sprinting.

Track your fitness level.

### General Health Benefits

Working out will not only lengthen your life but improve your shooting. You will be able to get moving faster, into positions quicker, and be more steady while shooting. There is no good reason not to do some type of workout, except for medical limitations. I don't know of anyone that can't work in at least 15 minutes a day to go for a walk. If you want to be the best you can be in life and shooting, working out will improve your attitude and performance. The following is a basic exercise regimen that will develop the necessary muscles for the sport.

Warm up and stretch out for five minutes. (Some basic stretching exercises are included in the stretching section.)

One-half to one hour of weight training. Light weights, lots of repetitions.

One-half to one hour of cardiovascular training. Either biking, stair stepper, walking

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or jogging.

Cool down period of five to ten minutes.

Do this at least three times per week. Add in a good diet and you will soon be in the best shape of your life.

### **Cross-Training**

One way to assist a training program and help out your shooting is to cross-train with other sports. The requirements for a sport to cross train in are cardio activity, speed, agility, and mental game. These are some sports that help with shooting.

Racquetball: Probably the best speed builder.

Golf: Great for the mental game.

Mountain Biking: Great cardio builder.

There are many others also, but the important part is to do something.

### **Nutrition**

Your diet affects your shooting. Just like a car, bad fuel = poor performance. A low fat, high-carbohydrate, high-protein diet is the way to go. When you are working out you will need to increase your caloric intake.

### **Eating And Drinking “On-Site”**

Remember that part of your performance depends on your comfort. Make sure that you take enough water to see you through the day’s competition; avoid carbonated and caffeinated drinks as much as possible. If you prefer, drink the sport replenishment drinks. These replace vital elements without adding unwanted caffeine or sugar to your system. If you’re taking water, freeze the bottles first — they’ll slowly melt, and stay cool until you use them.

Watch what you eat — the stuff from the roach-coaches, local snack bars, et cetera can have a negative impact on your performance. You can’t compete if you’re worried about food poisoning or Montezuma’s Revenge. It’s better to provide your own food and know that you’re getting good nutrition without any surprises.

