

Hold Still...

Here's something that's incredibly boring and I highly doubt many of my peers actually do anything resembling it: Holding drills.

Holding drills have been around as long as there's been competitive shooting. Biathlon, Small-bore, High Power, International and in just about any other form of competitive shooting, Masters highly suggest holding drills be a part of everyone's training routine regardless of the gun being used or event pursued.

It comes down to two potential benefits: stamina and precision. And by happenstance the benefit of reducing your minimum arc of movement is enhanced as well.

Regardless of the type of shooting one may do, be it gallery, outdoor 2700s or service matches you'll need to finish the course off the same way you started it. That means the shooter needs a hold (lack of wobble, MAM) pretty much the same at the end of the day just like when he or she starts. Without some degree of physical stamina scores can take a nosedive as the day progresses.

For obvious reasons, the precision benefits simply seem to follow those who actually train for this. This type of training, in of itself, may possibly be a related form of dry firing but with an emphasis applied on building up the shooter's physical foundation or platform for the pistol.

After a typical dry firing session try holding the gun on a blank wall, and after settling in, try to obtain a motionless dot or sights for twelve seconds. Take up the weight of the trigger to help settle the sight but don't drop the hammer. For those who have never tried this, *it ain't easy*. Take a break—then repeat the process a total of three times. Your goal is to get an almost motionless sight picture for twelve seconds, during three different attempts, within a fifteen minute window.

For those of you who have never done any holding drills, my guess is the typical shooter who dry fires every other day and adds this to his routine might expect to see positive results after about two to three weeks. Some shooter's might actually get better benefits by alternating their dry fire drills on one day, then use holding drills on a subsequent day.

Assuming you've accomplished the drill above and wanted to progress, a shooter would extend their reps to four, and later on to five, and so on. It's fairly important that you don't actually extend the holding time but progress with ever increasing reps.

During the process you'll be developing the deltoid and triceps muscles in your strong shoulder. This is the source of most shooter's steadiness and fine motor abilities to center a shot. More reps develop these muscles and eventually the process becomes easier.

A slightly different drill is to take the pistol in your strong hand, level the gun and dry fire a shot as soon as the gun becomes steady. Drop the gun to your side and repeat the process. Make a commitment initially to do this ten times. As you become more proficient with this drill extend the number of reps to fifteen or seventeen times. What's occurring here is two fold: you're developing those same arm and shoulder muscles to manage the weight of the gun; and you're also developing a quick release much like one does during an initial sustained fire shot.

The first drill develops your muscles for stamina and weight, while the latter helps with fine motor skills.

While using either drill, what you want to watch out for are typical failures. Avoid developing or ingraining any new physical crutches or bad habits.

Let's be real, if you've never completed any holding drills you'll be amazed at the number of times your wrist will try to compensate for a poor alignment. Don't be surprised that you find yourself looking down the sight(s) that may be out of vertical alignment. Or during extended reps you may start to lean backwards in an attempt to overcome a fatigued arm and shoulder. All of these items are clearly bad for any shooter, but, these are the problems that must be overcome during a prolonged match that elicit poor shot performance later in the day.

I've had more than one coach caution me about the use of free weights. The gun that you shoot in matches should be the only weight used. Why? Apparently when people start to use much heavier weights it has been observed their fine motor skills start to center on the new much heavier weight. Yes, it might be easier to lift the gun but your fine motor skills could be ruined; your body will be expecting a heavier weight and those finesse abilities will be centered there. That's why doing more reps (not additional weight or time) is so important.