How To Improve Your Shooting

Don’t Settle For Average...become An Expert

TACTICAL CLASSROOM

ADVANCED SKILLS ARE THE BASICS MASTERED
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Are you one of those people that are always trying to better themselves, always striving for continuous improvement?

Or perhaps you are just frustrated, having spent plenty of time at the range in an attempt to improve your shooting, but without success.

Either way, I hope the advice provided in this short document will give you the knowledge and understanding required to significantly improve your shooting.

Now...this is not an exhaustive manual, however the advice given should provide you with enough information to self-manage your shooting performance and see an increase in your proficiency and overall ability.

Before I go any further I just want to cover a couple of relevant sayings/quotes that I like to use.

I didn’t come up with these sayings, nor am I the only one who uses them but they are relevant which is why they are included.

These sayings are relevant because they describe what the top shooters all have in common or do very well and so I’ll explain a bit about the meaning behind each saying as we go.

The first saying I want to briefly talk about is “Slow is Smooth, Smooth is Fast”.

Being smooth in their drills is something that the top shooters all have in common, whether it be a speed reload, a stoppage drill, or shooting on the move.

Essentially the point being made here is that when you are training a specific drill (speed reload, stoppage etc.), you should start out slowly and methodically to maintain a “smoothness” to the drill.

Over time you’ll get faster and faster as your muscle memory for that drill develops.

Once you have developed sufficient muscle memory for that particular drill, you can begin to speed up the “non-critical” phases of the drill, slowing down only for the “critical” phases.

Breaking the drill into “non-critical” and “critical” phases will further increase your speed.

Here’s a quick example using a “non-critical” and a “critical” phase from the speed/combat reload drill...
One of the “non-critical” phases of the speed/combat reload is when you reach for your new magazine.

This should be done as quickly as physically possible to shave critical milliseconds off your overall reload time.

One of the “critical” phases of the speed/combat reload is when you are inserting the new magazine into the mag well of the weapon.

You need to slow down a little at this point to ensure that the mag slides smoothly into the mag well and doesn’t hang up at any point as this will cost you time.

Slow is smooth, smooth is fast remember, so slowing slightly for the “critical” phase/s of a drill will decrease your overall drill time.

Right…so onto the second saying, which is “Gas on, Gas off”.

This is another thing that the top shooters do really well and it goes hand in hand with “Slow is Smooth, Smooth is Fast”.

It’s all about knowing when to use maximum speed (Gas on) and when to slow things down (Gas off).

The speed reload example used above is a good example of “Gas on, Gas off” and this saying should not require any further explanation.

Now…I do have a third saying and it’s something that the top shooters do VERY, VERY WELL but because it has a lot to do with what I’m going to be talking about in the next section, I’ll cover it then.

So without further ado let’s crack on with my top five tips to improve your shooting.
I’m sure you’ve heard the old adage “Advanced skills are the basics mastered” but if by chance you haven’t, make a mental note because these are very wise words.

In fact, I believe in this saying so much that I’ve included it in the Tactical Classroom logo...and here’s why.

When it comes to firearms, the thing that separates the men from the boys is mastery of the basics.

If you look at the best military, law enforcement, or civilian shooters, there is one thing they have in common.

They all do the basics very, very well which is why when I’m taking a training session, I reinforce to the students the need to master the fundamentals/principles of marksmanship.

Right...so let’s break the marksmanship fundamentals/principles down in more detail.

Now...everyone has an opinion on how many fundamentals of marksmanship there actually are...some say four, some say eight, some say something else entirely but here’s my take.

The reason that there appears to be “no right answer” is because it all depends on the TYPE of shooting you are doing, and of course, the WEAPON you are shooting.

For example, the fundamentals required to shoot the pistol, shotgun, and rifle differ slightly but...
they are similar and there is considerable “cross over”.

A more significant example is target shooting (punching paper) vs. combat shooting where there are significant differences.

When you are punching paper, chances are that you are on a range constructed on level terrain. As such, you have plenty of time to employ all of the fundamentals.

However, if you are combat shooting you can’t always employ all of the fundamentals because you are likely to be shooting on the move or doing something else that limits how many of the fundamentals you can actually employ.

As such, as far as I’m concerned, there are really only two “critical” fundamentals and they are sight alignment and trigger control. The others are “supporting fundamentals”.

This might seem a little extreme but the fact is, if your sights are correctly aligned and you use proper trigger control you WILL hit the target...GUARANTEED.

If either of those two fundamentals are missing, you WILL MISS.

Therefore, they are the “critical” fundamentals.

This leaves the “supporting fundamentals” which are the “nice to haves”. They are not REQUIRED to get rounds on target, but they do make it easier.

But as I said earlier, how many of the fundamentals you can employ will depend on the style of shooting you are doing and what weapon you are shooting. Just remember that as long as you have the “criticals” you will hit your intended target.

So...let’s get to the fundamentals in more detail.

Below is a list of the “general” fundamentals that apply to marksmanship. The “criticals” are highlighted in red. The others are the “supporting” fundamentals.

- Stance/Position
- Grip
- Draw/Presentation of the weapon
- Sight Alignment/Sight Picture
- Breathing
- Trigger Control
- Follow through
- Reassess
Let’s take a closer look at each of the fundamentals starting with Stance/Position.

**Stance/Position:**

The shooting stance or position you adopt is one of the more important supporting fundamentals because it can greatly increase your hit probability.

I’m not going to go into detail about all of the potential firing positions/stances as there are so many, especially when you include alternate positions and variations of the standard positions such as supported and unsupported.

As such, I’m just going to list some of the main categories, from most stable to least stable.

- Prone
- Seated
- Kneeling
- Standing
- Shooting on the move

As previously mentioned, each of these categories of position has multiple variations and each can be used in slightly different ways depending on the weapon being used which is why I’m not going to go into heaps of detail here.

Essentially, the more stable you are, the higher probability you have of hitting the target. The less stable you are, the lower probability you have of hitting the target.

Also, you need to select a position based on your needs.

For example, if you are a long-range competition shooter, one of the various prone positions will work best whereas if you are a combat shooter, you may be moving to a point of cover but be ready to engage on the move if required so a prone position isn’t going to cut it!

Something to be mindful of when shooting prone is setting yourself up so that you get a “natural point of aim” (NPA).

What this means is that your sights rest on your POA without any inference from you as the shooter i.e. muscling the gun.

To check that you have achieved NPA once you are setup on target, close your eyes for a few seconds and let your entire body relax. When you open your eyes, your POA should not have moved.
If it has, it means that you don’t quite have NPA and should adjust your position then repeat the process detailed above.

The take away points from this section are:

1. Your shooting position/stance is a “supporting” fundamental that can increase or decrease your hit percentage depending on which position/stance you choose.

2. Stability is your friend, instability is not. Therefore, choose a position that will allow you to achieve your objective.

Grip:

How you grip your weapon can positively or negatively affect your ability to get rounds on target, depending on your technique.

For example, if you are shooting a pistol and you are gripping it too hard with your master hand, it affects sight alignment and you can end up throwing rounds, increasing the size of your group.

So...if you grip your weapon properly, you increase your hit probability.

Now, what grip you use will depend on several factors but mainly your choice of weapon and your choice of position.

For example, if you are shooting an M4/AR15, you aren’t going to grip it like you would a pistol...
are you with both hands on the pistol grip?

Of course not.

Because there are so many variables, I’m not going to go into a lot of detail here but here are some general guidelines:

Pistol:

- With the pistol, correct grip starts from the holster. The web of your hand (between your thumb and forefinger) should be high and tight in the “tang” (where the rear of the pistol grip curves back towards you and upwards towards the rear of the slide).
- Your master hand only provides approx. 20-30% of the gripping power.
- Your non-master hand should be providing the other 70-80%.
- Your thumbs should rest along the side of the receiver while still allowing you to access the controls (slide lock lever, safety etc.).

Skipping ahead just briefly into trigger control...try this as an exercise.

Ball your master hand into a fist with your trigger finger extended. Now squeeze your fist hard and see what happens.

Your trigger finger bent right!

Now do the same thing but this time squeeze as hard as you can and bend and straighten your trigger finger several times and note how it feels.
Now do the same thing (bend and straighten your trigger finger) while keeping your fist closed but relaxed and note how it feels.

It feels a lot easier and smoother to move your trigger finger when your grip is relaxed doesn’t it! That is why the non-master hand is doing the majority of the work.

Anyway...back to grip.

Rifle:

- Non-master hand should be as far forward on the fore-stock of the rifle as possible and pulling the rifle back into your shoulder.
- Stock firmly seated in your shoulder pocket.
- Master hand gently grips the weapon and manipulates the safety and trigger.

Precision Rifle:

- Assuming you are shooting prone, your non-master hand should be tucked under the rear stock and supporting the rear stock with a sand/rice bag.
- The stock should be firmly seated in the pocket of your shoulder.
- Your master hand should be gently gripping the weapon and in a position where it can manipulate the trigger without affecting sight alignment.

Of note, when you are setting up your position to reach your Natural Point of Aim, your master hand can be used to gently pull the rifle back into your shoulder before you “relax” back forwards, and “load your bipod”.

Once this process is complete, your master hand should only be gripping the weapon lightly.

**Draw/Presentation of the weapon:**

Another of the “supporting” fundamentals, the draw/presentation of the weapon is fairly straightforward but here goes...

Let’s start with the draw as it obviously relates specifically to pistol work and also incorporates “presentation” of the weapon at the target.

Then we will look at presentation of weapons in general.

During the draw is when you establish your grip (one of the other supporting fundamentals) so let’s break it down a little.

- Master hand is pushed down onto the pistol grip to ensure that the web of your hand is
firmly seated in the “tang”. Your non-master hand is either sweeping your primary weapon out of the way or it’s held close to your body.

- The fingers of your master hand close around the pistol grip and you clear the weapon from the holster.
- Assuming you are using a hip mounted holster, once the pistol has cleared the holster you immediately rotate it so the muzzle is pointed at your target (this enables you to shoot from here if required).
- As you begin to push the pistol away from your body, muzzle forward and towards your target, your non-master hand grips the weapon (as previously mentioned in the grip section).
- As the pistol comes up into the aim you should be prepping the trigger (taking up first pressure) so that as soon as your sights are aligned you can depress the trigger and release a shot if required.
- When in the aim (i.e. weapon fully “presented”), you should not have to move your head in order to achieve sight alignment. You should move the weapon to do so.

Presentation is essentially going from a certain state of readiness (such as the low ready) to full “presentation” i.e. aiming the weapon at the target and there isn’t too much to it.

Here’s the gist of it...

- Stick to the “grip” principles covered previously.
- “Snap” the weapon up into the aim. For multiple targets, “snap” the weapon from one target to the next as quickly as possible. This will save you critical milliseconds which you can “put in the bank” to use when doing one of the criticals such as squeezing the trigger.
• Ensure the weapon isn’t canted as this will affect where your rounds impact i.e. off target.
• Bring the weapon up so that the optic/sights are inline with your eye and the target. You shouldn’t need to move your head around to acquire the sights.

So...a couple of quick tips to help “snap” the weapon from one target to the next:

1. When using a carbine or rifle, hold the as far forward on the fore-stock or handguards as possible with your non-master hand (don’t be one of those foolish carbine shooters that hold onto the mag or the front of the receiver).

This will keep your non-master arm relatively straight which will make “snapping” the weapon from target to target a lot easier, reducing the chance of “overshooting the target”.

To give you an example, grab an old broom stick (I’m assuming you aren’t reading this at the range : ) but if you are, there, is as good as anywhere and you can substitute the broom handle for your rifle) and “shoulder it” as you would your rifle/carbine.

Now I want you to keep your non-master hand reasonably close to you (like those mag/receiver huggers I mentioned just before) and identify a couple of “targets” (just something to point your stick at) with a fair amount of separation.

Now “snap” the broom from left to right and then back again as fast as you can, while aiming at your “targets”.

Notice how the broom handle has a tendency to “overshoot” the target and you have to bring it back on target?

Now do the same exercise with your master hand extended, gripping the broom handle further away from you so that your non-master arm is straight.

Notice how you are able to “snap” the broom stick from one target to the other a lot easier without overshooting?

Snapping your weapon from one target to the next shaves milliseconds off your time which you can “put in the bank” to use during one of the critical phases of the drill such as when you are squeezing the trigger to ensure you get the trigger control bit right.

2. When engaging multiple targets, a quick bend of the opposing knee can help you to “snap” from one target to the next as it acts like a pivot.

Assuming you are in a combat stance (you should be because you have multiple targets) just bend the knee furthest away from your intended target slightly and your body will pivot in the direction you want to go.
For example, if you are a right handed shooter engaging a target on your left and then a target appears further to your right, bend your left knee slightly and you will pivot to the right (towards your intended target).

Try it using the broom handle exercise detailed above.

People generally don’t like change, especially if they are comfortable so it might feel a bit weird to start with but if you persevere you will see the benefits.

As a final note on presentation, if you are shooting multiple targets the “Gas on, Gas off” principle definitely applies here...especially if they are REAL threat targets that shoot back!

“Gas on” when snapping between targets, “Gas off” when engaging the target to ensure proper trigger control, then “Gas on” again as you snap to the next target.

That’s it for now on draw/weapon presentation. Next up is Sight Alignment/Sight Picture.

**Sight Alignment/Sight Picture:**

Boom! We have just hit our first of the “criticals”.

Now because it’s one of the criticals you may be expecting heaps of detail here but let’s be honest, this one is pretty self-explanatory.

Also, because there are so many types/styles of weapon sights available I can’t detail the process for each and every one but the principle of sight alignment/sight picture remains the same for all off them.
Essentially, all we are looking to achieve is proper alignment between your eye, the rear sight, the front sight, and of course the target and we are also after the proper “picture”.

As I said earlier, there are various sights available and the sights aren’t always the same.

For example, a standard pillar and post (Patridge style) sight (as seen on carbines) etc. vs. the circular aperture sights seen on competition small-bore rifles.

Whatever sights you are running, as long as you align the sights as specified by the manufacturer, and you focus on the front sight (or reticle) you’ll be fine.

By the way, achieving sight alignment/sight picture is easier with modern optics, especially the reflex/holographic type sights like “Aimpoints and Eotechs”.

With these it’s as simple as eye, reticle (red dot, circle etc.), target.

So...that’s pretty much it for sight alignment/sight picture.

Nothing ground breaking here. Just the basics...but being very good at the basics is what we are striving for remember!

Oh...and just quickly, with regards to alternate shooting positions, sometimes you may be required to cant your rifle (an example would be when using a VTAC shooting board).

In these situations it is critical that you still achieve sight alignment.

The thing to consider though is where the round will impact and this will depend on several factors including your zero distance.

To find out how your particular rifles POA (Point of Aim) correlates to its POI (Point of Impact) when shooting in this manner, my advice is to just get out onto the range and do it.
Oh and note/record your results.

Once you have this info, you know what your POA has to be to ensure the correct POI when you are doing these drills in the future.

Moving on...next up is breathing.

**Breathing:**

A lot of people have differing opinions on breathing when it comes to shooting, even within the same shooting discipline!

The reason breathing is one of the marksmanship fundamentals/principles is because as you breathe, your sights will move which obviously affects your POA.

Because it affects your ability to get rounds on target and can be controlled by you as the shooter, it is included in the fundamentals, albeit one of the supporting ones.

Now, because as far as I’m concerned breathing isn’t a critical, you shouldn’t get too caught up in the whole breathing thing.

Remember, you’ve been breathing since the moment you were born. You do it naturally and will continue to do so until the day you die so don’t try and complicate what happens naturally.

Just go with it.

With regards to “correct breathing” technique, the biggest proponents are usually the long-range competition shooters and there are various methods that are advocated by different people within this discipline.

Some advocate that you should take a couple of deep breaths then hold your breath with a full set of lungs, claiming that because you have plenty of oxygen “in the tank” you can hold your breath for longer to steady your aim.

Others advocate that you should take a couple of deep breaths then hold a “half breath” because you are more relaxed than with the previous method but still have enough oxygen on board to hold your breath for long enough to steady your aim.

I don’t recommend either of the two previous methods.

The most common method that long-range shooters advocate though takes advantage of the “Natural Pause” in your breathing cycle.
Essentially, they recommend that you should take a couple of deep breaths then hold your breath after exhaling, making use of the natural pause in your breathing cycle.

Take a moment now to notice how you breathe.

What you will notice is that when you have finished inhaling your body immediately begins to exhale (unless you prevent it from doing so).

By contrast, when you finish exhaling, your body pauses briefly before starting to inhale again.

This pause can be comfortably extended to 5-8 seconds if required. This makes it an ideal time to release your shot.

Personally, I recommend that shooters make use of the natural pause in their breathing cycle BUT without the two deep breaths. Just breathe normally.

The deeper your breaths, the more the sights move, and you want to keep any movement of your sights to a minimum in case you have to take a snap shot.

As I said, there isn’t too much to the breathing aspect of shooting...just breathe normally and make use of the natural pause in your breathing cycle.

Up next we have the second critical fundamental....Trigger Control.

**Trigger Control:**

As previously discussed, this is a big one...one of the “critica$” and as far as I’m concerned, follow through goes part and parcel with it, especially when firing self-loading weapons.

You’ve probably heard the terms “slapping the trigger” or “jerking the trigger”. Well they are pretty much what you want to avoid.

You want your trigger pull/press to be smooth as silk and when the trigger breaks, it should come as a bit of a surprise.

You should also be using middle of the pad at the end of your finger (where your fingerprint is).

Once the weapon begins to cycle (assuming you are using a self-loading pistol or rifle) you release your finger until you attain trigger reset. You can now release a follow up shot as soon as your sights are realigned.

You’ll notice that once the shot has broken, and you begin releasing the rearward pressure on the trigger to attain trigger reset and realign your sights, you are essentially in the “follow
through” phase which is why I believe that they go hand in hand.

If you are using a bolt gun, you wait until the weapon has finished the recoil phase then you release pressure on the trigger. You are now free to cycle the bolt to chamber a fresh round and realign your sights.

As with the self-loading weapons, once you release the shot you are essentially entering the “follow through” phase.

In the “grip” section I detailed an exercise to show you how the grip can affect your ability to manipulate the trigger correctly.

Feel free to do this exercise again to remind yourself of the significance.

Key points from this section are:

• Squeeze the trigger rearwards smoothly. DO NOT jerk it rearwards.
• Use the centre of the pad on your finger (where you fingerprint is).
• Focus on the sights as you squeeze and the shot release should be a surprise.
• Once the shot has broken, go through the follow through sequence. This will enable you to have a quick follow up shot.

So that’s pretty much it for trigger control.

Let’s take a look at the follow through as it is closely linked to trigger control, so much so that when making multiple shots, it’s pretty much part of the same process.
Follow through:

As previously mentioned, follow through is one of the supporting fundamentals. This is because to achieve a first round hit, it’s not a requirement (unless you are shooting moving targets using one of the tracking methods).

The “follow through” relates to the shooter actions from when the shot “breaks” right through the weapons recoil.

Essentially, your goal as the shooter is to maintain as many of the marksmanship fundamentals as possible when the shot is released and the weapon recoils.

The most common error is seen with follow through is when the shooter tries to see where their round went instead of maintaining their foundation of fundamentals.

“Looking for your round” will usually result in your rounds striking low on the target and will also affect your ability to fire accurate follow up shots as you lose your correct sight picture.

I think I’ve pretty much covered off the part of the follow through process that relates to trigger control in the previous section but there are a couple of other elements to the follow through process that you need to make sure you adhere to.

- As mentioned above, once the shot breaks, don’t try and see where your round went, instead focus on reacquiring correct sight picture as soon as possible so a follow up shot can be made if required.
- Maintain control of the weapon throughout without “muscling” it. It should return to your NPA.

Another situation where follow through is important is when you are shooting moving targets.

When shooting moving targets there are a number of techniques taught including (but not limited to) the ambush method, half speed method, catch up method, and the tracking method.

The follow through is not a critical when using the ambush method but it is when you are using one of the tracking methods (half speed, catch up, tracking).

Essentially, the follow through process when shooting moving targets is the same as previously mentioned except that when you release the shot, you continue to track the target with your sights.

If done correctly you will be able to see the target fall (one can only hope...), but if it doesn’t you should be able to see your fall of shot, make a correction then follow up with a second shot within seconds.
That’s pretty much it for follow through. But before we move on, let's quickly recap the key points of correct follow through:

- Once the shot breaks, release the trigger under control until you achieve trigger reset or with a bolt gun, release the trigger and cycle the bolt while maintaining your check weld.
- As the weapon recoils, focus on reacquiring correct sight picture as soon as possible so a follow up shot can be made if required.
- Maintain control of the weapon throughout without “muscling” it. It should return to your NPA.
- If shooting moving targets using one of the Tracking methods, ensure you continue to track the target.

Right…let’s take a look at the last of the fundamentals, Reassess.

**Reassess:**

The reassess phase of the fundamentals, while not a “critical” is very important if you are dealing with multiple targets or are in a high threat environment.

Now, what do I mean by Reassess?

I mean that once you have taken your shot, you need to check a few things such as:

- Is the target down?
- Are there any more threats or targets that need to be dealt with?
- Is your weapon still good to go (check the breach for stoppages) if you are required to re-engage?
- If you are on a LE or Military team, do your team-mates require assistance?

These are the sorts of things that are part of the Reassess phase.

To do it, just lower your rifle (or pistol) slightly to the low ready position.

This will enable you to look over your sights and turn your head left and right to check your surroundings (and teammates if you have them).

Once you have reassessed the situation /target/threat and are happy to do so, you can holster your pistol, sling your rifle, or adopt another position such as the low ready or Sul.

Right, so that’s the fundamentals out of the way.

Now let’s look at some other ways you can improve your shooting.
Dry Firing

For those that don’t know what Dry Firing is, it is the process of manipulating and firing a weapon WITHOUT ammunition. If you have concerns about damaging your firing pin, use Snap Caps.

Dry firing allows you to practice the majority of your drills at home, without having to go to a range or other such place and without expending a heap of ammo, saving you $$$.

Dry firing is one of the techniques that is often neglected, but it is something that even the top shooters in the world regularly practice.

Be honest with yourself...when was the last time you did some dry fire practice?

The main benefit to dry fire is that it helps to develop your trigger control.

You can also practice speed/combat reloads, stoppages, and other drills to develop your muscle memory.

When you are doing dry firing, the fundamentals of marksmanship must be applied.

There are a couple of things you can do to enhance your experience and ensure you get the most out of your dry firing.

First, fit a visible laser to your weapon because any excessive movement will be easily seen.

Ideally you want someone to assist with this (so you don’t get into the habit of looking over your sights to see what is going on) but if nobody is around, use your phone or a video camera to record the laser. That way you can focus on completing the drill correctly and still be able to get accurate feedback.

The Penny Drill is very good for developing your Trigger Control. Incorrect technique will cause the penny to fall off. (8)
Secondly, you can use a small coin (a penny works well) or an empty 9mm cartridge and place it on your front sight when conducting trigger control drills. If you have any trigger control issues, these will rear their ugly head now because the coin/cartridge will fall off.

Some key points from this section on Dry Firing are:

• The top shooters do it...you should be too.
• They develop your muscle memory for the majority of the drills.
• Focus on correct application of the fundamentals, especially sight alignment and trigger control.
• Use a laser, coin, or empty cartridge to identify any trigger control errors.
• 15 minutes per day is probably all you need.
• Saves you $$$ because you aren’t burning through ammo.

Just one final note...if you wear kit when you shoot (chest rigs, body armor etc.), ensure that you do your dry drills in your kit.
#3 Correct Gear Setup

Your equipment should be set up to support your shooting, not the other way around.

If you have some Gucci bit of kit hanging off your belt that doesn’t improve your ability to shoot then get rid of it. It’s probably slowing you down. It’s certainly adding weight and Pounds equal Pain.

If you have to hump any real distance carrying that kit i.e. a “proper” hunting trip (when you actually walk around instead of setting up hides/blinds), or a LE/Military patrol then you want to pack as lightly as possible.

I see people all the time with unnecessary equipment hanging off them and 9 times out of ten it negatively impacts their shooting.

And almost as bad…is putting necessary equipment in a terrible location on your kit.

You need to be brutal and ask yourself some honest questions such as:

- Does this enhance my ability to shoot quickly and accurately?
- Does it slow me down?
- When was the last time I truly need to use it?
- Is it a TRUE necessity?

Once you’ve asked yourself these questions, it’s time to get rid of the excess. Strip your gear down to the essentials only.

Everything else that you “might need” can go in your rucksack, range bag, or whatever.

Next up is “knowing your equipment”. You need to be so familiar with it that you can literally manipulate it with your eyes closed.

This is so that when you are under time pressure or other stresses (i.e. someone is shooting at you), you can get to all of your necessities without fumbling around, or looking in the wrong pouch for an item.

“Knowing your equipment” also refers to your weapon. You should be able to field strip and reassemble it in the dark and of course how to manipulate it without having to look for things like the safety catch or magazine release.

With regards to slings, a good two point sling is my recommendation, especially for LE, Military,
and 3 gun competitors.

A good two point allows you to cinch it up nice and tight when shooting from unsupported positions to increase your accuracy.

It also lets you sling the weapon firmly behind you if you are required to climb over an obstacle, up a ladder, or if you’re LE/Military and are dealing with a suspect.

Attachments...as in those shiny things that people try to cram as many of as possible onto their weapons. As with the gear you wear, keep it to the essentials. Ditch the bling.

If it doesn’t make you better, it probably slows you down so get rid of it.

Correct gear setup extends to your optics, particularly if you are a long range shooter, competition, hunting, or similar.

With your optic, you want to make sure that you have removed parallax and that you have correct eye relief.

If you get “shadowing” when you are looking through your scope, you have incorrect eye relief.

Because eye relief can change depending on your firing position, set up your eye relief in the position you use the most i.e. prone for long-range shooters.

_I recommend the VTAC two point. It is a great sling and it’s what I use personally._ (9)
To do so, get in behind your gun and rest your cheek on the stock (preferably one with an adjustable cheek piece) and relax fully and close your eyes. When you open them to look through the scope, there should be no “shadowing” or dark crescent moon shapes visible.

If there are, move the scope either forward or backward until these are no longer visible.

To get rid of your parallax, first you have to focus your reticle.

To do so, aim the rifle at an object that has a consistent light color to it that allows you to easily see the crosshairs. An overcast (cloudy) sky works well.

Now close your eyes and relax. Then open them and if the reticle is blurry, adjust the focus ring at the ocular lens end of your scope.

Because the human eye can correct slight errors in focus (a bit like an autofocus function), you may need to close and open your eyes a few times to get it right.

Now set up on your target and adjust your parallax turret until your target is in focus.

If you move your head up and down ever so slightly (and without moving the weapon) the crosshairs should not move when your head moves.

If it does, make slight adjustments to both the ocular focus ring and the parallax turret until the crosshairs remain still when you move your head, while still maintaining a clear reticle and a clear target picture.

Parallax is now set.

Correct Zero...make sure you’ve got one, no matter what you are shooting.

Close enough isn’t good enough especially if you shoot long range, as any error you have at 100m will increase the further you go out.

The exception to the rule here is when zeroing a precision rifle for long range shooting.

If you know what your spindrift value is at 800-1000m, you can work out where your POI needs to be in relation to your POA at 100m so that you don’t have to account for spindrift out to those ranges.

For example, with a .308 shooting 175gr. ammo that has a MV of around 2550fps, you can zero your rifle slightly favoring the left side of your POA so that your MPI (Mean Point of Impact) is 3mm to the left of your POA.
You can now forget about spindrift out to 1000m.

That’s all I’m going to cover for correct gear set up. Live fire is up next.
I've been involved in training where you spend all day on the range and leave feeling like you've achieved very little...but had a great time doing it thanks to the contributions of our taxpayers : )

However, I believe that the quality of the training is more important than the quantity.

The Quality over Quantity mentality also fits with how people actually learn.

If you are hammering a bucket load of drills into people all day, there is only so much that they are going to retain. Some of the drills are going to suffer or be forgotten as a consequence.

If you can break the training up, it keeps the training interesting and the students will learn faster.

So, when you are training, whether you pay for your ammo or not, train smarter and make sure that the training you are doing truly benefits you.

As has been mentioned earlier, a lot of the weapons drills can be pretty much mastered doing dry drills, with live fire supplementing and reinforcing the learning achieved from your dry fire training.

Also, make the training relevant to your needs. If you have limited time or ammunition, don’t train techniques and drills that are the core skills you need for whatever style of shooting you do.

Also, ensure you are using quality ammunition.

Another thing is to ensure you train as you play. By this I mean train in the equipment you’ll be wearing when you are actually shooting.

If you are a civilian, I like to think that the amount of equipment you’ll be required to carry and shoot in is minimal so this tidbit shouldn’t be overly relevant to you (unless you are one of those “in the rear with the gear types”).

However, if you do wear equipment when in your normal shooting role i.e. LE/Military, then you need to shoot in your kit regularly, not just in clean fatigues which I often see, especially with LE (which drives me nuts by the way).

These lads wonder why their shooting falls apart when they are MADE to shoot in their kit.

Perhaps they don’t like shooting in it because it’s hot, or because it’s heavy, or because it makes the
drills more difficult. Whatever the excuse, it isn’t right.

If you can shoot well in kit, shooting in clean fatigues is not going to be an issue.

Now...just to clarify, I’m not saying you should never shoot clean, I’m just saying that you need to spend as much time in kit as you do clean, if not more.

This way, when the day comes for you to perform in kit, you can do so.

Another thing is to train in all conditions.

I’ve seen firearms training cancelled due to crap weather!

If there is a possibility that you may have to shoot in this sort of weather, you need to train to do it so that you can have faith in your ability to perform should be ever be required to do so in these conditions.

It will also identify any issue you may have with your equipment such as optics “flaring” out or fogging due to excess water on the lenses.

With regards to zeroing, if you do wear kit, zero your weapon in your kit as it can (not always) affect your POI if you have zero in clean fatigues (depending on the weapon, the optic, the kit etc.).

That’s all I’ve got for Live Fire. Let’s move on to Consistency.
To achieve accuracy and precision (they are not one and the same), you must achieve consistency.

To do this you need to remove as many potential errors from the equation.

This relates to you as the shooter and to your equipment.

As a shooter, consistency comes from doing the fundamentals very well.

For example, you need to be able to achieve the same cheek-weld each and every time. You need to achieve NPA every time. You need to ensure there is no parallax each and every time. You need to ensure that the weapon isn’t canted (you guessed it)...each and every time.

The list above isn’t exhaustive but it gives you the idea. You will not be accurate and precise without consistency.

This is why the fundamentals are so important.

Yes there are two “critical” fundamentals, but as I’ve previously mentioned, the more of the supporting fundamentals you can employ, the more consistent you can be which translates into accuracy and precision...assuming your equipment is capable of providing a high level of consistency.

Equipment consistency comes from selecting the right ammunition, rifle, and optic.

I’ll use long range shooting equipment as an example because any lack of consistency will become very apparent at long range (you will miss)!

With ammunition you want to use quality...Federal and Black Hills are good places to start if you plan to use “factory” ammo.

However, for long range shooting, a lot of the factory produced ammo usually isn’t quite consistent enough which is why many people reload.

This is because you want ammo that has a SD (Standard Deviation) of 10fps or less which is normally only achievable if reloading.

“Factory” ammo that consistently produces a SD of 10fps or less is rare however the Applied Ballistics range of ammunition does so.
In terms of the rifle, sub MOA (Minute Of Angle) is a pre-requisite. ½ MOA is better and generally, this is quite achievable at relatively low cost.

For example, an inexpensive sub MOA rifle such as the stock Rem700, dropped into a MDT Tac21 chassis, should get you to around ½ MOA.

Getting to ¼ MOA is considerably more difficult (and expensive!!!) and unless you are competing at the World Champs, it’s overkill.

In terms of optics, you want an optic that has a MIL reticle located in the first focal plane (FFP). This ensures that any holds will remain the same whatever the magnification.

The optics magnification should be suitable for your needs...25x is my personal “sweet spot” for long-range stuff.

The optic should also have parallax adjustment and the elevation and windage adjustments should be accurate i.e. 12MILs of elevation should equal 12Mils, not 11MILS.

This adjustment error is not common on the high end scopes produced by the likes of Schmidt & Bender or Night-Force but can occur in the “cheaper” scopes and can lead to misses at long range, depending on the extent of the error.

Now...I know I said that I was only going to give you 5 tips to improve your shooting but I have a few more left up my sleeve (I’m all about over delivering) which I’ll cover off quickly.
Visualization, or “mental rehearsal” is key to taking your shooting to the next level.

Almost every person who is required to perform at the highest level in any sport or activity utilizes visualization techniques. This is because they greatly improve your performance, especially with motor skills.

Harvard University researchers found that people who visualized a task, prior to completing it physically, performed the task with almost 100% accuracy. Those that didn’t visualize the task, prior to completing it physically, only achieved 55% accuracy.

So how can you add visualization to your firearms training?

It’s easy…and you don’t need any equipment or weapons. All you need is your mind.

As I’ve mentioned earlier in this book, all of your firearms drills can be “broken down” into bite size chunks.

With visualization, you take those “broken down” drills and go through them sequentially in your mind…i.e. you rehearse them mentally.

For example, it might be something as simple as a clearance drill on your M4 carbine.

1. Aim the weapon in a safe direction.
2. Ensure your finger is outside the trigger guard and the safety is set to safe.
3. If fitted, remove the magazine from the weapon and secure it on your person.
4. Lock the working parts to the rear and conduct two visual and two physical checks of the magazine well and the chamber to ensure that it is clear.
5. Let the working parts go forward on the empty chamber.
6. Close the dust cover.

It’s up to you how “deep” you delve in to your visualizations but the top athletes will go so far as to include the things their other senses would be feeling i.e. the sounds they would hear while competing (i.e. the crowd), the smells etc.

For example, using the above example you could visualize the sound of the safety being applied, and the working parts going forward and you could visualize the smell of the gun oil.

Visualization, or “mental rehearsals” of your drills will dramatically increase your performance but it isn’t limited to your drills.
Just like performance athletes, you can visualize your performance during a competition.

For example, if you are competing in a 3-gun match, you can “visualize” going through the prescribed course, visualizing your reloads and other drills as you move around the course in your mind.

You can enhance your visualization by including the feel of the weapons recoil and visualizing the sound of gunfire as your rounds are being fired.

I guarantee you that visualization/mental rehearsals will increase your shooting performance.

Like dry fire exercises, just 15 minutes per day is all you need. You can increase this if you are training for something specific like an event.

That’ll do it for visualization...let’s move on to my next tip...random drills.
Random Drills

This section is all about sharpening your drills (increasing your proficiency), making you faster, and ensuring that you are always prepared.

To achieve this, my recommendation is that you develop a stack of drills that truly test your ability and which test your weapon proficiency, and accuracy under time pressure.

20-30 different drills should be enough but make sure they consist of both live fire and dry fire exercises and that they not only test the drills that you use all the time, but also the ones you don’t but should.

A tight (but achievable) time should be allocated to each drill.

If you don’t know where to start, there are plenty of drills available on the Internet. In due course (i.e. at a later stage), I will cover some at the Tactical Classroom website (www.tacticalclassroom.com).

The idea is that you should be able to go to the range, choose 5 exercises at random (draw them from a hat so you can’t just choose the ones you feel comfortable with), and then successfully complete the drills within their allotted times.

You should also record your results. Put them into a spreadsheet or something so you can assess your progress. If you are consistently under the allotted time, lower it.

Put yourself back under pressure to perform at a higher level, which leads me to my final tip... always push yourself to failure.
#8 Push Yourself To Failure

This is my final tip and I think it’s a great way to finish off.

If you always stay/train within your “comfort zone”, you will never become an expert shooter…you will only ever be an “average” shooter.

If you never push yourself to the point of failure, how will you ever know what your limit is?

And if you don’t know what your limit is, how can you try to develop ways and means to overcome your old limitations and set new ones?

So when you are shooting and practicing a certain skill, keep pushing yourself until the wheels fall off.

Then take a step back and start to access the reasons for that particular failure. Ask yourself what caused it, and how could it be remedied.

Once you have asked these questions and identified a solution, test it.

If it works, brilliant! You’ve just extended your limits with that drill. You are now a better shooter.

If your solution didn’t work, go back to the drawing board and identify other solutions until you succeed.

If you do this every time you train, and master the basic skills, you will become a top shooter.

Remember…advanced skills are the basics mastered!
Conclusion

That’s it...for now.

If you want to learn more, pop over to the Tactical Classroom website regularly and see what’s on offer.

I’m sure that you’ll find something you can benefit from.

As for this guide, I hope you have got plenty out of it and that you’ll make use of some of the advice given to improve your shooting.

As I said, none of this stuff is a “secret”.

Shooting coaches have been teaching this stuff for years.

This guide is merely here to remind you of the basics and that when it comes down to it, that’s all good shooting is...it’s about doing the basics really well.

Master them and you are well on your way to becoming a great shooter.

Take care and I hope to see you at Tactical Classroom soon.

Jeremy G.
Owner/Instructor
Tactical Classroom
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About The Author

Jeremy G. has a Law Enforcement background with over ten years experience. Six of which have been as a member of various Tactical Teams specializing in CT (Counter Terrorism), HR (Hostage Rescue), Close Protection, and Covert Surveillance operations.

He is also a qualified Firearms Instructor and regularly delivers training to other Law Enforcement officers.

He is passionate about firearms and firearms training and he considers Tactical Classroom to be a great opportunity to reach and train more people.