

Tips for Improving your Handgun Accuracy:

A day at the range should be fun, safe, and productive. You should come away from the range feeling like you have improved your shooting skills and also have some goals in mind for your next range visit. The shooting sports offer a variety of challenges for every skill level! As any experienced shooter will tell you, there is always room for improvement. Getting there is the fun part! A few tips for your next range visit will serve to improve your accuracy. The fun level definitely goes up when you can consistently hit what you are aiming at.

A .22 caliber target pistol is an excellent pistol to improve your shooting skills. I recommend owning at least one .22 caliber pistol, preferably one that has the controls in the same configuration as your concealed carry pistol. The advantages of this is that the .22 uses less expensive ammunition, has less recoil, has adjustable sights, and can be an excellent way to improve your shooting skills so that when you are ready to practice with your higher caliber firearm, you will discover that you are much more accurate and proficient without using a lot of the more expensive ammunition.

If you have taken an NRA basic pistol course, find your original handbook and reread the fundamentals of shooting before going to the range. Reviewing the basic fundamentals will allow you to practice at home and then concentrate on improving your techniques. Dry fire practice is using an unloaded pistol to practice the fundamentals of pistol shooting. Dry firing at home can build your pistol skills without the cost of ammunition. First, be sure to check your owner's manual to be sure that your firearm manufacturer approves of dry firing your particular handgun. Dry fire practice allows you to learn how to acquire a proper grip on the pistol. A consistent proper grip can go a long way to accurate shooting. If you keep re-adjusting your grip, shifting it between each shot, or if you are just not properly gripping the pistol, you cannot improve your accuracy.

Proper finger placement on the trigger is important. Improper finger placement can cause you to pull your aim off target while squeezing the trigger. Proper trigger placement is placing your finger on the trigger halfway between the end of your finger and your first joint. You can practice your trigger squeeze using a common household item, a ball point pen. Using a retractable type of ball point pen, try squeezing the button (trigger) holding it back for just a moment, then releasing it just until it "clicks". This is your trigger sequence and follow thru. Unless you are hearing and feeling the "click" in between each shot, you are not achieving proper trigger squeeze and follow thru. Trigger pressure should be a slow, steady pressure on the trigger until the gun fires. Then, momentarily hold the trigger to the rear, and slowly release the trigger until you feel, and hear the click. The click tells you that the trigger has re-set, and that you are ready for your next shot. Jumping off the trigger or removing your finger from the trigger between each shot is a bad habit that will not help accuracy. Now you are ready to go to the range.

First, review the 3 basic safety rules:

1. **ALWAYS** keep the gun pointed in a safe direction.
2. **ALWAYS** keep your finger **OFF** the trigger until you are ready to shoot (i.e. when your sights are on the target)
3. **ALWAYS** keep the gun unloaded until ready to shoot.

Now, you can begin setting up your shooting station. Don't forget your eye protection and hearing protection! I always suggest using a shooting rest to begin your session. This allows you to determine (1) that the gun is functioning correctly, (2) that your ammunition is functioning correctly. (3) That YOU are functioning correctly, and that you are following the fundamentals of shooting and the firing sequence correctly. By using a shooting rest, you are able to concentrate on the fundamentals without also having to think about holding the pistol steady.

Set the target at a distance of about 15 feet to begin with. Too often shooters will post their target 50 feet away and wonder why they are unable to hit the target. Start close, and as you develop your skill level, you can gradually move the target further out.

I like using the Birchwood Casey Shoot-N-C targets, they are reactive, turning colors when you impact them, and it is easy to see when you are on (or off) the target. I bring a few sizes of the Shoot-N-C targets to the range. The larger 8" size is good for rapid fire standing, the smaller 3" size is perfect for benchrest shooting. Use the smaller "paster" target ones to increase the degree of difficulty as you improve.

Get in a comfortable seated position, practice your position with an unloaded handgun and make adjustments to your position. Now you can add the handgun to the position. Remember to focus on the **FRONT** sight. Your eye cannot focus on the front sight, the rear sight, and the target all at the same time! By focusing on the FRONT sight, you can then position the front sight so it lines up correctly with the rear sight, and then place the properly aligned sights on the target. Start by loading just 3-5 rounds of ammo for your first "group". Check to make SURE the gun is unloaded before making any sight adjustments. The rule for sight adjustment is: Always move the **REAR** sight in the **SAME** direction that the hits on the target should move. So, if your shot group is low and to the left, adjust the rear sight to the right, and up. Confirm the sight adjustment with another 3-5 shot group.

Remember to hold your breath while firing the shot. You cannot breathe and accurately shoot at the same time.

So, your shooting sequence is:

- (1) Assume a proper grip on the pistol.
- (2) Align the front and rear sights, and place the aligned sights on the target, while concentrating on the **FRONT** sight.
- (3) Place your finger on the trigger (proper trigger placement) breathe in, slowly let out half your breath, then hold your breath while slowly squeezing the trigger without causing any movement to the aligned sights!
- (4) When the pistol fires, hold the trigger to the rear for just a moment, this is your follow thru, and helps to keep you from jumping off the trigger and pulling your aim off the target.
- (5) Slowly release the trigger (taking in your next breath) until you hear a distinctive "click", letting you know that the trigger has re-set and you are ready for the next shot. Begin the firing sequence again.

Once you have improved your group, you can increase the degree of difficulty by moving the target farther away, assume a standing position, try a rapid fire sequence, etc. Keeping a log book of your day at the range will allow you to study what you need to work on at your next range session and allow you to see improvement.

Common errors I see are:

- (A) Bobbing the head to see where each shot impacts. Bang! Head bobbles around trying to see where shot impacted. Now, the shooter has to re-assume the correct position to begin the firing sequence again! Frustrating and unnecessary! Learn to adjust your eye from the front sight, to the target, back to the front sight again without moving your head.
- (B) No follow thru. Shooter jerks trigger, then jumps the trigger finger off the trigger and often outside the trigger guard. Now the shooter has to find the proper trigger finger placement, get back in position, and resume the firing sequence. Less movement = better accuracy!
- (C) Closing their eyes or flinching while firing the shot. Often a shooter doesn't realize they are doing this, it is just a bad habit. You cannot shoot accurately if you are not looking at the front sight, lining it up with the rear sight, and then placing the sights on the target. Having a partner mix dummy rounds with live rounds is a good way to test to see if you are committing either of these errors.
- (D) An improper grip on the pistol that can allow the pistol to shift during the recoil and change the shot impact with each shot.

Having a partner watch you shoot can help you improve your skill level. Many times you are concentrating on one aspect of the fundamentals, and don't realize that your grip is not correct; you are not doing proper follow thru, etc. Having someone videotape you shooting is an excellent idea! You can review the tape and see what errors you might be committing.

The internet can be a wonderful tool also. There are videos available at the National Shooting Sports Foundation website (www.nssf.org) and also on YouTube (www.youtube.com). You can even learn how to disassemble, reassemble, and clean your particular firearm, watch reviews of a firearm you are considering purchasing, and watch videos on how to do sight adjustments. Midway USA also has a variety of videos on shooting techniques (www.MidwayUSA.com).

I hope you have found this article helpful, now, lets go to the range!

-SUBMITTED BY

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