



Handgun shooting guide

THIS HANDGUN SHOOTING guide will assist you in receiving initial training covering the safe handling and use of target handguns. Along with safety and shooting fundamentals, the training will include some of the legal responsibilities of target handgun ownership, basic description of parts and operation as well as range procedures.

Proper initial training will enhance your enjoyment of the sport, by giving you the knowledge and confidence required to build a set of fundamental skills and with practice, the confidence to participate in the activities of your club. This program addresses the basic knowledge needed for you to be a safety-conscious member of our Association.

From the start, it must be made clear that this manual is not designed as a coaching manual to assist in gaining better competitive scores or higher levels of accuracy, although some topics may assist in these aims. It is a plain English guide that has been developed as a resource to assist you during your initial safety training, as a new target handgun club member. It is in a simple format and only covers the basics in introductory form. Its purpose is to set some guidelines that can easily be referred to by you.

Safety

As with all firearms, safety must always be the first concern when handling or using any form of handgun. The need for safety exists wherever handguns are located or used, at home while cleaning, on the shooting range and during transportation from and to home.

The cause of all accidents involving firearms can be traced to ignorance or carelessness. Ignorance is a lack of knowledge being displayed by a person when they handle a firearm without knowing the safety rules or how the firearm operates and can be classed as a dangerous lack of knowledge. Equally dangerous is the person

Be sure the gun is safe to operate. Just like other sporting equipment, handguns need regular maintenance to remain operable and safe.

who, although knowing the correct firearm operation and safety rules, becomes careless in properly applying that knowledge. In both of these cases, accidents can easily happen. But when people practise responsible ownership and use of firearms, accidents do not happen.

Three fundamental safety rules

1. It is important that you are always aware of the direction the muzzle (front end of the barrel) is pointing in, which, while on the range, should be at an angle of 45° downwards, facing the target area. In this position, even if it were unintentionally discharged, it would not cause any injury or damage. This general safety rule may have additional restrictions if at an indoor range and as a shooter, you should make yourself aware of these if visiting an indoor range. Regardless of this, you are responsible for being aware at all times of where your muzzle is pointing. You should never point a handgun at another person, even when you know it is unloaded. Don't forget, a handgun has a very short barrel and a little movement can move the muzzle through a large arc.

2. Always keep your finger off the trigger until you are ready to shoot. When holding a handgun, a person has a natural tendency to place their index finger through the triggerguard and onto the trigger. When holding a handgun, you must consciously remember to straighten your index finger and rest it along the outside of the

triggerguard. With practice, this will become an automatic action. Do not touch the trigger until the range officer has given the command to fire and you are actually ready to fire at the target.

3. You must always keep the handgun unloaded until instructed to load by the range officer. When picking up a handgun, keep it pointed in a safe direction, with your finger outside the triggerguard and immediately remove the magazine, if fitted, and open the action if a handgun, or swing out the cylinder if a revolver. Then look into the chamber and magazine or cylinders to ensure all are clear of ammunition and therefore unloaded. If you are not sure how to open the action and unload the handgun, leave it alone and get help from a competent person. No handgun should be stored in a loaded condition and you must treat every handgun as if it were loaded.

General safety rules

The following safety rules should be observed when using or storing a handgun.

1. Be sure the gun is safe to operate. Just like other sporting equipment, handguns need regular maintenance to remain operable and safe. Regular cleaning and proper storage is essential. Have a gunsmith or the club armourer inspect it if you are not sure of the handgun's condition.

2. Know how to use the handgun safely before using it. Read the instruction manual or get a competent person, range officer or club instructor to show you how it

operates, its basic parts, how to safely open the handgun to see if it's loaded and how to remove ammunition from chambers and/or magazines. Nothing can replace safe firearms handling. Don't rely on a handgun's safety mechanism. Like any mechanical device, it can fail. Use it, but don't let it be a substitute for correct safe handling and observance of the three fundamental rules for firearms safety. A defective safety or firing mechanism could result in an accident. Don't play with the safety by changing its position constantly; if the safety is used leave it in the 'on' position until you have been instructed to fire.

3. Use only the correct ammunition for the handgun. Most handguns have the ammunition type stamped on the barrel. If in doubt, ask!

4. Wear eye and ear protection to protect yourself against the noise and debris that can be emitted from handguns. Appropriate footwear is also recommended.

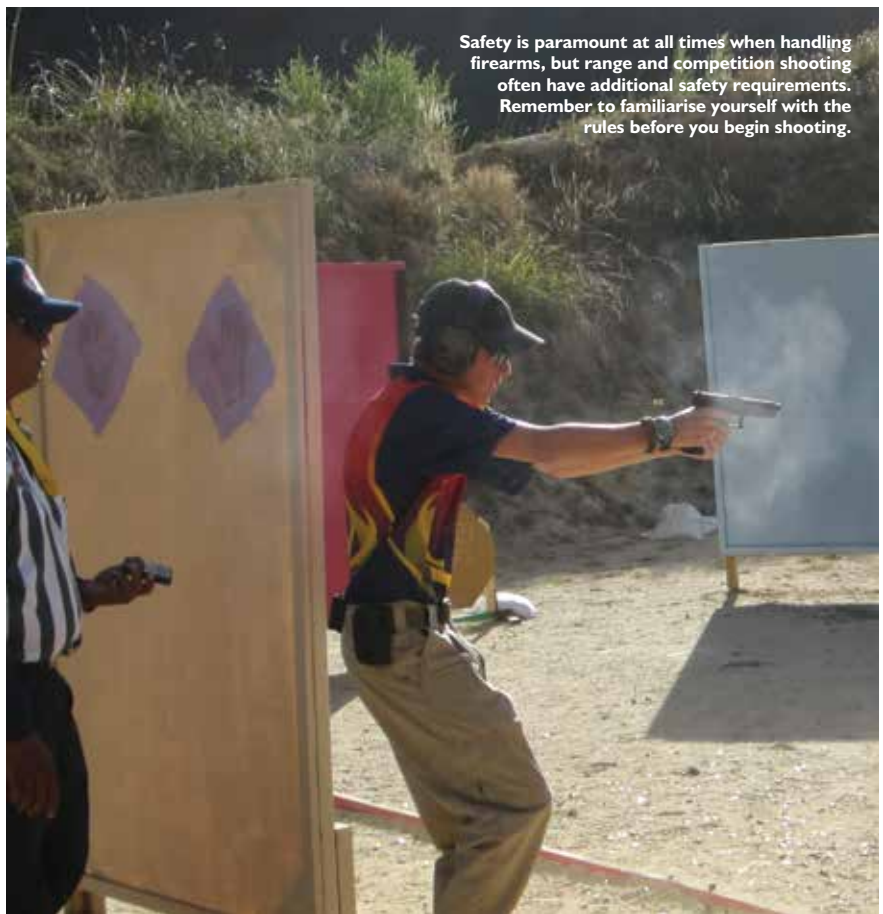
5. Remember that alcohol and firearms do not mix.

6. Store handguns so they are not accessible to unauthorised persons. Many factors must be considered when deciding where and how to store handguns. At all times you must follow and comply with your state's Firearms Registry requirements. This also applies to the transportation of handguns to the range or a firearms dealer or gunsmith. Ammunition must also be stored in accordance with manufacturers' recommendations and the requirements of the Police Firearms Registry guidelines.

7. Be aware that some types of handguns and shooting matches require additional safety precautions, especially when shooting at targets other than paper targets.

8. Carry out all safety checks of the handgun and any magazines prior to cleaning and always ensure no ammunition is present while cleaning your handgun. While cleaning your handgun use the opportunity to check it for correct function and damaged or broken parts. If a problem is discovered, don't try to fix it; take it to a gunsmith or return it to the manufacturer for repair.

9. Always be sure the barrel is free from obstructions, as a blocked barrel can cause a serious accident by bursting the barrel or action if a round is fired with the barrel in this condition. Before checking this, carry out the correct safety checks to ensure that



Safety is paramount at all times when handling firearms, but range and competition shooting often have additional safety requirements. Remember to familiarise yourself with the rules before you begin shooting.

the handgun is unloaded and pointed in a safe direction.

10. When handing a handgun to another person, always be sure that the muzzle is pointed in a safe direction, your finger is off the trigger, the action is open and the magazine is unloaded and removed, or in the case of a revolver, the cylinder is open and empty. If you are passed a handgun that is not in this condition, then carry out the correct safety checks to satisfy yourself that the handgun is unloaded and in a safe condition.

Handgun types, parts and operation

A handgun is a mechanical device and as with any machine, it is necessary to understand how it works before it can be safely used and its operation mastered. In the hands of a responsible, knowledgeable and safety-conscious person, a handgun is safe. In order to begin to understand how a handgun functions, the names and definition of various handgun types and main components must first be identified.

The two main types of handguns in use

are the revolver and self-loading handgun. They consist of three major components: the frame, the barrel, and the action. Although both revolvers and self-loaders have these three main parts, some of these components have a slightly different function between the two.

Revolver

A revolver is a handgun that has a rotating cylinder designed to contain cartridges. The action of the trigger and/or hammer will rotate the cylinder and fire a cartridge. To understand how this firing process occurs and how to safely load and unload cartridges, it is necessary to first become familiar with the names and functions of the various parts of a revolver. These are:

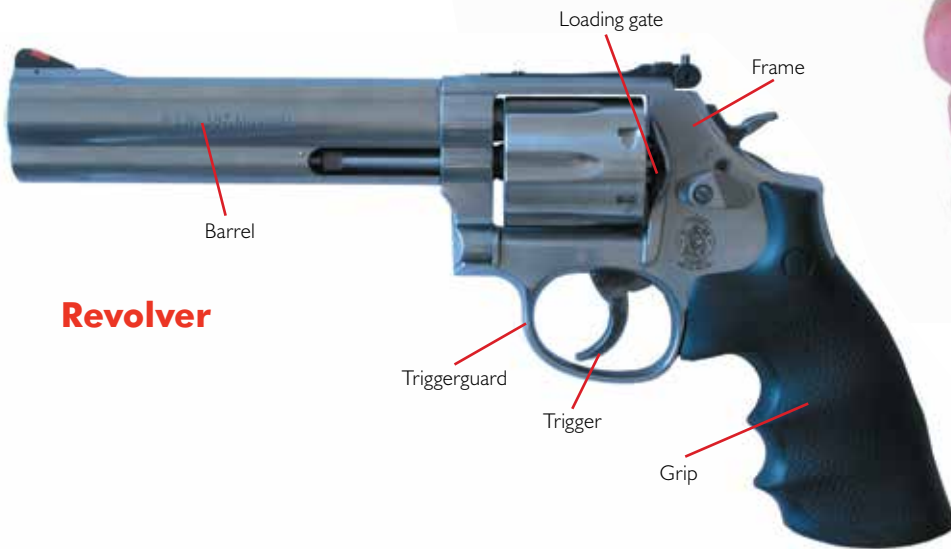
Frame: The revolver chassis to which all other parts are attached.

Grip panels: Are attached to the lower rear portion of the frame. Grip panels are usually composed of wood, rubber or moulded plastic and are attached to the frame with screws. These form the grip (handle) by which the shooter holds the revolver.

Revolver action open



Revolver



Self-loading handgun





The basics of good shooting include determining the best shooting hand, adopting a comfortable position and grip, properly aligning the sights, controlling your breathing, smoothly squeezing the trigger and following through on the shot.

Backstrap: The rear vertical portion of the frame that lies between the grip panels.

Triggerguard: Located on the underside of the frame and is designed to protect the trigger in order to reduce the possibility of an unintended firing.

Trigger: Located on the underside of the frame within the triggerguard. There is a 'hammer' attached to the rear of the frame. When the trigger is pulled it activates the hammer, which in turn causes the 'firing pin' to strike and fire the cartridge. In some revolvers, the firing pin is attached to the hammer; in others, it is located inside the frame.

In 'single-action' revolvers, the trigger performs only one action - releasing the hammer. The trigger does not 'cock' the hammer. The hammer must be cocked with the thumb and will stay in a cocked position until the trigger is pulled to release it.

In 'double-action' revolvers, the trigger performs two tasks. When it is pulled, it will cock and release the hammer, firing the revolver. Most double-action revolvers can also be fired in single-action mode by manually cocking the hammer with the thumb. The hammer will stay in the cocked position until released by pulling the trigger.

Barrel: The metal tube through which a bullet passes on its way to a target. The inside of the barrel is called the 'bore'. The bore has spiral grooves cut into it. The ridges of metal between these grooves are called the 'lands'. Together, the grooves and lands make up what is known as 'rifling'. Rifling makes the bullet spin as it leaves the barrel so that it will be more stable in flight and travel more accurately. The internal diameter of the barrel measured between the lands determines the calibre of the handgun. This distance is measured in hundredths of an inch (such as .22-calibre or .45-calibre) or in millimetres (such as 7.65mm or 9mm). The front end of the barrel where the bullet exits is called the 'muzzle'.

Sights: There is a rear-sight located on top of the rear of the frame and a front-sight located on top of the barrel at the muzzle end. These are used for aiming the revolver.

Action: The action comprises the moving parts used to load, fire and unload a handgun. The action of a revolver is made up of parts attached to or within the frame including the cylinder.

Cylinder: Holds individual cartridges, which are arranged in a circular pattern. Cylinders usually contain five or six

'chambers' into which the cartridges are placed. Each time the hammer moves to the rear, the cylinder rotates and brings a new chamber in line with the barrel and the firing pin, which fires the cartridge.

Cylinder release latch: Found on most revolvers, it releases the cylinder and allows it to swing out so cartridges can be loaded and unloaded. Most revolvers have an 'ejector' (also known as an 'extractor') and/or an 'ejector rod'. Although the operation and location of ejectors and ejector rods may vary, the purpose is the same - to remove cartridges from the cylinder.

Self-loading handguns

A self-loading (also known as a semi-automatic) handgun differs significantly from a revolver in its operation. After a cartridge is fired by pulling the trigger, the empty 'case' is extracted and ejected and a new cartridge is inserted into the chamber. Because a new cartridge is automatically 'loaded' or placed into the chamber, this type of handgun is sometimes referred to as an 'autoloader'.

Although the basic operation of a self-loading handgun differs from that of a revolver (one of the reasons for the name 'pistol' as opposed to the 'revolving' operation of a revolver), it still has all the same major components of the revolver, except for the cylinder. There are also some additional components on a self-loading handgun, as well as some differences in the operation of some components. These are:

Safety: Operated by a lever located on the handgun's frame. The safety is a mechanical device designed to reduce the chance of an accidental discharge by, in most cases, blocking the movement of the firing pin or action or both. Since safeties, like all mechanical devices, can malfunction, the prevention of an accident is ultimately the responsibility of the individual who is handling the handgun.

Slide: Located on top of the frame, at the rear of the barrel. It moves back and forth to chamber a cartridge, cock the action, fire, extract and eject an empty case after firing and reloading a new cartridge into the chamber. It also incorporates the firing pin. In some self-loading handguns, the slide also envelops the barrel or can be enclosed inside a fixed outer frame, in which case you may hear it referred to as the 'breechblock' or 'block'.



Good sight alignment, sight-picture and trigger control are critical to good handgun accuracy.

Slide stop: Also known as a 'slide lock' or 'slide release', the slide stop is designed to hold the slide of the self-loading handgun to the rear. Some self-loaders also have a part known as a 'decocking lever', which is used to lower the hammer and/or uncock the handgun.

Action: As can be seen by the description of the slide (which, in many cases, can also be referred to as the 'action') a large number of different mechanical designs exist for self-loaders and the actions can vary greatly. Some self-loaders have a hammer that strikes the firing pin; in others, the firing mechanism may be designed without a hammer. Those models that do not have a visible hammer are commonly referred to as 'hammerless', even though the hammer may actually be part of an internal firing mechanism. In all self-loading handguns, the first round (cartridge) must always be manually cycled into the chamber by retracting and then releasing the slide. As the slide returns to

the closed position, it removes a round of ammunition from the top of the magazine and inserts it into the chamber.

Magazine: A storage device designed to hold cartridges ready for insertion into the chamber. It replaces the cylinder of the revolver, but unlike the revolver cylinder, does not contain the chambers in which the firing process takes place. The chamber in a self-loader is located in the action end of the barrel. The cartridges in a magazine are forced upwards by the magazine spring to be picked up by the slide as it returns under pressure from a 'recoil' or 'slide spring' to the closed position after being pulled back to cock the handgun.

There are three different types of self-loading handguns: single-action, double-action, and double-action only. These actions rely on the function of the trigger for their different operations.

In a single-action self-loading handgun, the trigger performs a single task, releasing the

hammer or the firing mechanism so that the firing pin hits the cartridge.

In a double-action self-loading handgun, the trigger performs two tasks. It cocks and releases the hammer or internal firing mechanism for the first shot. After the first shot is fired, the movement of the slide will cock the hammer or internal firing mechanism for all successive shots and the trigger will be used only to release the hammer or internal firing mechanism. It then returns to a single-action function.

The trigger of a double-action-only self-loading handgun will cock and release the hammer or internal firing mechanism on the first and all successive shots. The slide will chamber a new cartridge after each shot, as it does for the other types of self-loaders, but it will not cock the firing mechanism. The cock-and-release action is accomplished by pulling the trigger for each shot. In this way, the action of the trigger is similar to that of a double-action revolver. However, in most

double-action-only self-loaders, the hammer cannot be manually cocked to a single-action position as it can in a double-action revolver.

Some self-loading handguns may vary from the above descriptions due to the large variety of mechanical designs available today. Always be sure to carefully read and understand the instruction manual for each handgun. If you are unsure or questions still exist, be sure to consult a knowledgeable person.

The fundamentals of handgun shooting

To shoot a handgun accurately, it is first necessary to learn and understand the fundamentals or basic essential components of handgun shooting. These fundamentals include determining the best shooting hand, shooting positions, grip, breathing control, sight alignment, trigger squeeze and follow-through. These fundamentals must be properly performed every time a handgun is fired.

Shooting hand

Before any practice can be carried out, or indeed a shot fired, the shooter must first determine which hand will be used to grip and fire the handgun. As a general rule of thumb it is recommended that a shooter use the hand which is on the same side of the body as the dominant eye.

Position

Proper body position is essential in order to shoot a good accurate shot. When learning any shooting position, the following basic steps must be followed:

- Carefully study and practise adopting the correct body position that will be shown to you by the instructor.
- Practise the position without holding a handgun.
- Practise the position with a handgun.
- Practise obtaining and maintaining the correct grip.
- Adjust your body position so that the handgun points naturally at the target when you raise your arm to take a sight-picture.

A variety of positions can be used when shooting a handgun. The three basic handgun positions will be examined after you have an understanding of the fundamentals. These are the bench rest position, two-handed standing and one-handed standing.

Grip

To achieve a proper grip:

- Keep the handgun pointed in a safe direction and your fingers away from the trigger.
- Using the non-shooting hand, place the handgun in the grip of the shooting hand.

- Fit the 'V' formed by the thumb and finger of the shooting hand as high as possible on the backstrap of the frame.
- Align the handgun so that it forms an imaginary straight line from the muzzle, along the barrel through the wrist and forearm.
- Grip the handgun using the base of the thumb and the lower three fingers of the shooting hand.
- The pressure of the grip should be directed straight to the rear.
- Hold the handgun firmly, but without exerting so much pressure that you are straining or causing your hand to shake.
- Your index finger should be placed along the outside of the triggerguard or frame of the handgun, not on the trigger. Always keep the index finger off the trigger until ready to shoot.
- The thumb should lie relaxed along the side of the frame at a level above that of the index finger.
- Uniformity is the most important feature of a proper grip. The grip should be the same each time the handgun is handled. This knowledge should be applied when practising the basic handgun positions.

Spread the hand and push the 'V' as high as possible into the back of the grip.



When holding a self-loader, keep your hands clear of the slide upon recoil.



Cocking a single-action revolver with the thumb of the left hand.

The trigger finger should be clear of the grip and should not touch the handgun (not shown) anywhere except at the trigger. The thumb and fingertips should be relaxed.



The trigger should be pulled straight back with the pressure on the first half of the pad of the finger.





This handgunner is shooting from the prone position, with only his elbow and the butt of the handgun for support.

Breathing control

In order to minimise body movement, your breath must be held while firing. Before each shot, take a breath, let out enough air to be comfortable and hold the remaining breath while firing the shot. Because firing will usually occur within a few seconds, there should be no difficulty from lack of oxygen.

However, if the breath is held too long, muscle tremors may start. If tremors begin to occur, take the index finger off the trigger while keeping the muzzle pointed in a safe direction, lower the gun to 45 degrees, relax briefly, take a few breaths and begin the firing cycle again.

Sight alignment

Sight alignment is the relationship of the front and rear sights. The eye must be lined up with the front and rear sights and the sights positioned so that their alignment is correct. Proper alignment of the two sights means that the top of the front-sight is even with the top of the rear-sight. The front-sight must also be centred in the notch of the rear-sight so that there is an equal amount of space on each side of the front-sight. Correct sight alignment is the key to accurate shooting. Angular misalignment of the front-sight with the rear-sight introduces an error that is multiplied with distance.

To fire an accurate shot, it is essential to concentrate on the front-sight while squeezing the trigger. The eye is capable of focusing clearly on only one object at a time. It cannot keep the rear-sight, the front-sight and the target in focus at the same time. When the eye is focused properly for a shot, the front-sight should appear sharp and clear, the rear-sight should appear a little less sharp and the target should look blurred.

No shooter, no matter how expert, can hold a handgun in a firing position without some movement. This movement is called the 'arc of movement'. The very best that any shooter can do is to keep the arc of movement at a minimum; it cannot be eliminated. While maintaining a correct sight-picture, the shooter should gently squeeze the trigger while concentrating on minimising the arc of movement.

'Dry-firing' is the 'shooting' of an unloaded firearm. It is useful in practising marksmanship skills and allows a new shooter to concentrate on sight alignment and trigger squeeze without being distracted by the noise or recoil of live ammunition. Dry-firing is a good training exercise and can be practised at home by picking out a point on the wall and going through a firing sequence. Dry-firing practice will provide an opportunity to the new shooter to become

familiar with properly applying good shooting fundamentals, especially trigger squeeze and sight alignment.

Always be absolutely certain that the handgun is unloaded and that it never points in the direction of any other person. Don't forget, you must obey all firearm safety rules whenever handling a handgun, even when dry-firing.

Trigger squeeze

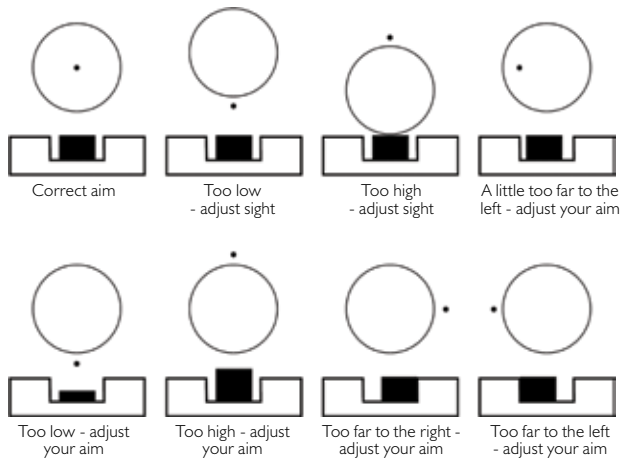
To properly squeeze the trigger, start to apply pressure to the trigger as soon as the sights come down into the white aiming area of the target. You should continue to apply steady pressure with the trigger finger while you concentrate on the sight-picture and wait for the shot to break. If the shot does not break within eight to 10 seconds, you should lower the handgun, relax and breathe, then try again.

Follow-through

As the shot breaks, remember to continue to focus on the sight-picture. After the recoil, the sights should return to the position held before the release of the shot. Hold this sight-picture for one to two seconds before lowering your arm. The sight-picture at the instant of the shot breaking will indicate the probable position of the shot on the target.

The sight-picture

Correct sight alignment is the key to accurate shooting. The following eight figures show how to identify alignment problems in the sight-picture.



Common shooting errors

Most shooters' problems result from the failure to properly apply the two most important shooting fundamentals: sight alignment and trigger squeeze. However, other factors may also cause a shooter to have problems in properly delivering a shot to the target.

Illustrated in this section are eight common errors committed by many handgun shooters. Study the 'Target errors' guide carefully, for the solution to a troublesome shooting problem might be found here. Be aware, however, that explanations other than the ones suggested here may also apply to the illustrated problem. Shooters who are having problems should seek advice from a handgun instructor or coach.

The shooting situations pictured assume that the handgun and ammunition are functioning correctly, that the handgun sights are adjusted properly and that the shooter is right-handed. The shot groups for a left-handed shooter will appear on the opposite side from the shot groups illustrated.

1. The shooter has 'heeled' the shots high on the target. This error is caused by anticipating the shot and, at the last moment before firing, giving the handgun a slight push with the heel of the hand. The front-sight moves up to the right and the bullets strike the target in the 1 to 2.30 o'clock zone.

2. The shots are strung over to the 2.30 to 3 o'clock zone and are caused when the shooter 'thumbs' the handgun. Just as the shot begins, the shooter pushes the right

thumb against the side of the frame, causing the aligned sights to move to the right.

3. This is what happens when a shooter's grip tightens as the trigger is squeezed. This target area is known as the 'lobster' area - just as a lobster's claw clamps together, the shooter's hand clamps or snatches at the last second. This movement caused the front-sight to dip low and to the right, pushing the shots to the 3.30 to 5 o'clock zone.

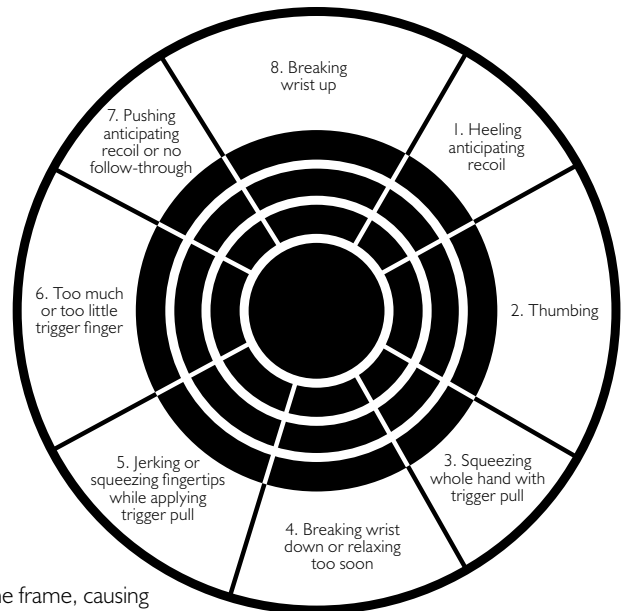
4. The shot string in the 5 to 6.30 o'clock area is caused when the shooter 'breaks' the wrist - another form of anticipation. The shooter expects the handgun to recoil at a known instant and tries to fight or control this anticipated recoil by cocking the wrist downward. The shooter may subconsciously believe that the recoil can be lessened by holding the wrist down. This shot group can also be caused by a shooter who relaxes too soon. The opposite of this can also occur whereby the shooter 'breaks' the wrist up instead of down; this is shown as example 8.

5. This pattern is caused when the shooter jerks the trigger, causing the front-sight to dip low and to the left before the bullet leaves the barrel. To correct this type of error, the trigger must be slowly squeezed until the shot fires, being careful while squeezing not to disturb the sight alignment and sight-picture.

6. This pattern is created when the shooter does not properly place the index

Target errors

This target can be used as a quick reference guide to determine the probable cause of an ill-placed shot. The target applies to right-handed shooters, so would be reversed for left-handed shooters.



finger on the trigger. In such cases, the shooter has a tendency to squeeze the trigger at an angle instead of straight to the rear. This improper squeeze causes the muzzle to shift to the left, with the shots striking in the 8.30 to 9.30 o'clock zone.

7. This pattern shows the effect of 'riding the recoil', where the shooter anticipates the recoil and makes the handgun recoil before it really happens. This type of pattern can also be caused by improper follow-through, in that the shooter releases the trigger finger too soon and may flip the finger forward, causing the front-sight to rise to the left. Errors of this nature will usually produce shots in the 9.30 to 12 o'clock zone.

While not shown in the 'Target errors' guide, beginner shooters can often commit many different errors, resulting in a target with shots scattered in many places. Such a target may be caused by the shooter's inconsistency, including changing the grip between shots, focusing on the target instead of the front-sight on some shots, failing to align the sights properly and so on. The pattern could also be caused by a new shooter's lack of holding strength and a resultant large arc of movement. To improve handgun skills, shooters should carefully and periodically review the fundamentals of handgun shooting to determine if they are missing any basic principles.

Handgun choices

For new target shooters, the best handgun with which to learn the fundamentals is a .22-calibre target handgun. The fundamentals are the same for all handguns, but the .22-calibre handgun offers many advantages. It has minimal recoil and noise and the ammunition is inexpensive, which allows for greater practice. Most .22s are very accurate and they are relatively cheap to purchase.

Either a revolver or self-loading handgun may be used during basic marksmanship training, although a self-loading handgun offers more versatility and is easier to master. If a revolver is chosen, it would be preferable to choose a double-action over a single-action, but it should be fired in single-action mode whenever possible. By shooting in single-action mode, less pressure will be needed to pull the trigger and it will be easier to concentrate on sight alignment and trigger squeeze.

Once your competency levels, accuracy and confidence have improved, you can then start to look and inquire with other shooters as to other types of handguns and their suitability for various matches and competition.

Handgun shooting positions

A variety of positions can be used when shooting a handgun. The three basic handgun positions are the bench rest position, two-handed standing and one-handed standing.

Bench rest

The fundamentals that have been explained can best be applied by using the bench rest position as the introduction to handgun shooting. This position permits the use of a sandbag or other object to support the hands and the handgun at the proper height and allows the shooter to concentrate on proper sight alignment and trigger squeeze.

The following guidelines for gripping and operating the handgun are for a right-handed shooter; left-handed shooters should make appropriate adjustments to these guidelines.

- Sit behind a bench or table and face the target.
- Keeping the handgun pointed downrange, with your finger off the trigger, place the handgun in your right hand while taking a proper grip on the handgun as previously explained and practised.

- After correctly gripping the handgun in the right hand, place the heel of the left hand against the heel of the right hand.
- Rest the left thumb on top of the right thumb and wrap the fingers of the left hand firmly around the fingers of the right hand. Caution: To avoid injury when using a self-loader, be careful not to place the left thumb in the path that will be taken by the slide when it recoils after a shot is fired.
- Fully extend both arms in front of the body with the hands (not the handgun) resting on the sandbags.
- Position the handgun so that it points naturally at the target.

Two-handed standing

The two-handed standing position is perhaps the easiest position for a new shooter. Both hands will be used to support the handgun when shooting, making it easier to hold the handgun steady.

While keeping the handgun pointed downrange and your finger off the trigger and using the proper grip, take the handgun in your right hand as previously outlined.



Shooting in the two-handed standing position. Note how even after the shot, the shooter maintains a stable stance and firm grip for good follow-through.



Some events require the shooter to move quickly through stations, shoot beside barricades or adopt different shooting positions. Understanding and obeying the commands spoken by a range officer is even more important in these situations.

After correctly gripping the handgun in the right hand, there are two different methods that can be used to support the right hand.

1. Rest the bottom of the grip portion of the frame and the heel of the right hand in the palm of the left hand. Hold the fingers of the left hand firmly up along the side of the right hand.

2. Place the heel of the left hand against the heel of the right hand. Rest the thumb on top of the right hand. Wrap the fingers of the left hand firmly around the fingers of the right hand.

- Face the target squarely with the body directly in front of the target. Place your feet shoulder-width apart with body weight distributed evenly. Keep your legs straight, back bent slightly backward, head erect and arms fully extended.
- After taking the above position and while using a proper two-handed grip, bring the handgun up to eye level. The handgun should point naturally at the centre of the target.

One-handed standing

The one-handed standing position is used in many competitive handgun shooting matches. Because only one hand is used when holding the weight of the handgun, there is not as much support as with a two-handed standing position. The one-handed position is required in these competitive events because it is more challenging than the two-handed position. However, this position can be easily mastered with practice and the use of the correct technique and position.

- Keeping the handgun pointed downrange at 45 degrees with the finger outside the triggerguard, hold the handgun using the correct grip in the right hand.
- To establish a natural point of aim, position the body at an angle of approximately 45 degrees to the target with the right side of the body closest to the target.
- To find if you are in the best position, raise the right arm in line with the target then turning your head away, rotate the

arm in a small circular pattern. Stop the motion when you feel your arm is in a comfortable, 'natural' position.

- Turn your head back towards the target. Look at the target and if your hand is pointing towards the centre of the target area, a natural point of aim has been established.
- If the hand is not pointing at the centre of the target area, move the left foot and pivot the right foot until the hand is pointing correctly. Turn the head away and repeat the arm rotation and pointing steps again. Keep repeating these steps until a natural point of aim has been achieved.
- Once you have confirmed a natural point of aim, ensure your body is positioned with your feet shoulder-width apart, weight evenly distributed and legs straight, but not tense. Your body and head should be erect, but comfortable.
- When raised, the right arm should be fully extended with the wrist and elbow locked in place.

- The left hand should be relaxed and placed in a pocket, or hooked in a belt or waistband. If the left hand is left hanging by the side it can become a distraction and can also affect the stability of your shooting position.
- You are now ready to bring the handgun up to eye level and commence a firing sequence.

Other shooting positions can be used successfully in addition to those described in this section and with experience you will become familiar with them. However, the one-handed and two-handed standing positions are the ones more commonly used.

Safety at the range

An approved SSAA range is one of the safest places to enjoy shooting. Standard SSAA range commands are used to control the shooting and maintain uniform safety practices.

The overall person in charge of the range is known as the 'range captain'. They have people assisting them called 'range officers'. These people's primary duty is the control of all shooting and associated activities on the range. They are responsible for ensuring that shooters obey all safety rules and that the range operates in a safe manner for the benefit of all shooters.

The range officer is generally the person who conducts the matches at the range and is the one who gives the verbal instructions, or 'range commands', to shooters on the firing line and during the course of a match. The purpose of these range commands is to provide clear, concise instructions, in a standardised form to all shooters. These commands must be obeyed by all shooters on the range in order to ensure the safety of all personnel on the range.

Each shooter is responsible for knowing, understanding and obeying all of the commands spoken by the range officer. Commonly used commands are:

"Load": When the range officer gives this command to shooters on the firing line, the handgun may be loaded. Ammunition is placed into the cylinders or the magazine and the cylinder closed or the magazine fitted to the pistol. The handgun must be held pointing downrange at 45 degrees. Prior to this command the pistol or revolver should

be placed on the bench with either cylinder swung open, or magazine removed and empty and action open.

"Are you ready?": When this command is given by the range officer, shooters may cock the hammer on revolvers, or work the slide to place a round of ammunition into the chamber of pistols. The shooter must still hold the firearm pointing downrange at an angle of 45 degrees towards the ground.

"Fire": The signal to commence firing may be a verbal command such as "Fire" or "Commence firing", or another signal such as a whistle blast or the action of the targets turning towards the shooters. As the signal to fire may change due to the type of match to be shot, you should ask the range officer prior to the match if unsure. When the command to fire is given, shooters may commence firing the sequence.

"Cease fire": May also be signalled by the range officer calling "Cease firing", "Stop", a whistle blast, the targets turning away from the shooters, or one of a number of other means. Once again, if you are unsure, seek clarification from the range officer. When the command "Cease fire" is given, shooters must stop firing immediately; even if in the process of pulling the trigger the shot must be stopped. Fingers must be removed from the trigger, the handgun held at 45 degrees to the ground pointing towards the

target. The shooter must wait for further instructions from the range officer.

Don't assume that the range officer is just calling the completion of that particular sequence of fire. The range officer may have seen a situation that you are not aware of that could lead to a breach of safety if left to continue, or some other activity that calls for the immediate cessation of shooting.

"Unload": With the firearm pointing downrange, swing out the cylinder and remove all cartridges from the chambers if a revolver, or remove and unload the magazine and pull and lock open the slide, clearing the chamber of any ammunition if a pistol.

"Show clear": Still keeping the muzzle pointing downrange, hold the firearm so that the range officer can look into and inspect the chambers of the cylinders for a revolver, or the magazine and chamber if a pistol.

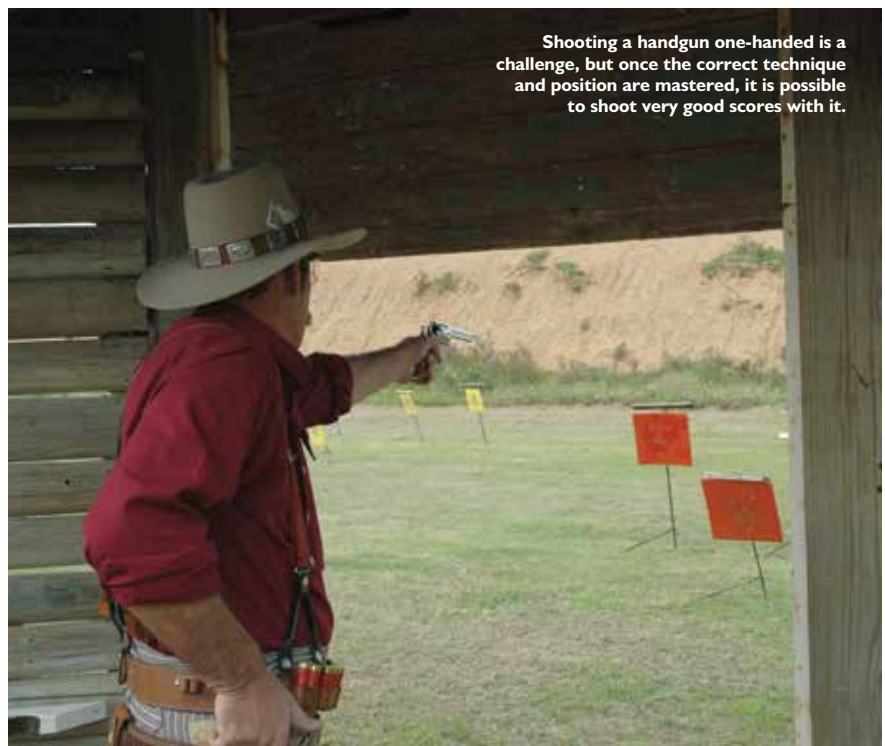
When visiting a new range, ensure you report to the range officer and make yourself aware of the range commands in use.

Exercises

There are many exercises you can do to help perfect your shooting technique. Some exercises are:

Single-shot exercise

Loading and firing off one shot at a time at the centre area of a blank target. A total



Shooting a handgun one-handed is a challenge, but once the correct technique and position are mastered, it is possible to shoot very good scores with it.



Some events permit shooters to adopt a shooting position they are most comfortable in. Practise shooting one- and two-handed and from various stances and positions until you find what works best for you.

of five shots will be fired. For a revolver, load only one round into the cylinder. Remember that the cylinder will rotate when the hammer is cocked. In order to load the chamber that will be rotated into the firing position when the hammer is cocked, it is necessary to know in which direction the cylinder will turn. This direction is not the same for all revolvers. Use single-action mode by cocking the hammer. Don't use double-action mode for this practice.

For a self-loading handgun, load only one round into the magazine. Don't try to bypass the magazine by manually inserting a round directly into the chamber. If the cartridge is not seated properly in the chamber, it is possible for the slide to hit and ignite the primer and hence the powder as the slide returns to its forward position.

Relax and don't rush. Concentrate on keeping the sights aligned while squeezing the trigger slowly to the rear. Remember that the firing of the shot should come as a surprise. Fire the total of five shots under the control of the trainer and/or range officer. When you are finished, carry out the correct unloading and clearance procedure and when directed by the range officer inspect the target.

Five-shot precision exercise

This exercise will involve the loading and firing of five rounds in the handgun. All five rounds will be fired at the centre area of a blank target. If using a revolver that has more than five chambers, be sure to close the cylinder with an empty chamber under the hammer.

As in the single-shot exercise, be sure that when the cylinder rotates that a loaded chamber will rotate into the firing position when the hammer is cocked. If using a self-loading handgun, load all five rounds into the magazine.

Once again, fire all five shots onto the target with the blank side facing you, relaxing between shots and concentrating on trigger and sight control. To be a good shot you must be consistent and always perform the fundamentals correctly, the same way and in the same length of time.

By using this consistent technique, good rhythm can be achieved. The rhythm pattern that is used in slow-fire shooting is achieved through practice and this will be the same pattern that will be used in rapid-fire shooting. The pace will quicken, but the pattern will remain the same.

When the exercise is finished, carry out

the same safety checks as you did in the previous exercise.

Rapid-fire exercise

Load and fire five more rounds in quick sequence, once again onto a blank target. The exercise is completed when all five shots have been fired. When you are finished, carry out the correct unloading and safety checks.

Sight adjustment

If shots are consistently grouping away from the centre of the target, it may be necessary to adjust the sights so that the bullets will hit the centre of the target.

Always move the rear-sight in the same direction that the bullet impact on the target should move to be on the point of aim. For example, if the shots are hitting to the right, move the rear-sight to the left. If the shots are hitting high, move the rear-sight down. After making the adjustments, fire five more shots to see where the bullets are hitting. If necessary, make further adjustments to the sights and repeat the grouping shots until the bullets are hitting at the point of aim.

Practice

The exercises will provide a basic initiation to handgun shooting. However, to improve or maintain shooting skills, it is necessary to practise on a regular basis. Shooting at a bullseye target is a good way to practise marksmanship skills and the scores that are shot can be recorded and monitored for improvement.

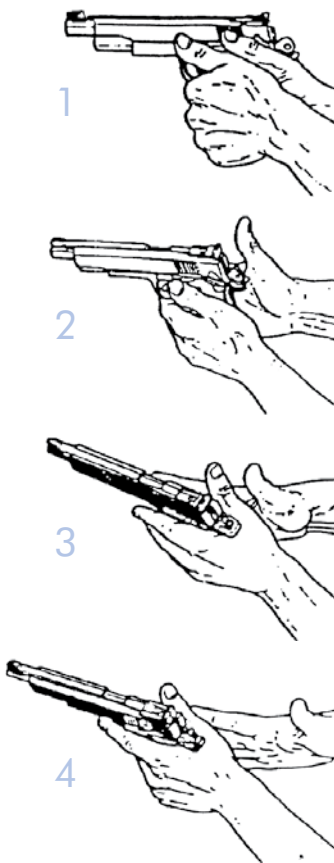
You should now have a level of competence and confidence that will allow you to commence improving your skill levels through practice and continue to enhance your knowledge and enjoyment of the sport of target handgun shooting.

Master tips - the switchover

The solid grip is essential in practical shooting disciplines and it's especially important when shooting with the weak hand only. This right-handed technique allows for a quick, safe switchover and gives maximum control over recoil. The process is reversed for left-handed shooters.

1. From the draw, as soon as the muzzle is pointing safely downrange, disengage the safety with the right thumb.

2. Tilt the left palm slightly upward while moving the thumbs and trigger finger away from the handgun.



3. Rock the gun into the web of the left hand, thumb replacing thumb around the grip safety.

4. Wipe it off; that is, draw the right hand sharply to the rear, along the plane created by the extended fingers.

5. The elbow points downward and the arm and wrist are locked. Keep the left shoulder lower than the right in order to get more weight over the gun and thereby dampen the vertical recoil.

Master tips - going prone

This right-handed technique shows you how to 'go prone' during competition. The process is reversed for left-handed shooters.

1. Position your mat at about a 30-degree angle to the target. This automatically places you diagonally to the line of fire, which, in turn, forces you to lie on your side, rather than on your chest. On the start signal, get a firm grip and draw the handgun from the holster.

2. Drop to your knees as soon as the handgun has cleared leather. The trigger finger is not in the triggerguard at this stage, but the safety catch is on. The muzzle is pointing downrange.

3. As your knees hit the ground, reach out with your left hand as far as possible and plant it on the mat.

4. Extend your gun arm fully, keeping it parallel to the ground; that way, you'll already have the full extension when you hit the ground. Your trigger finger goes in. The safety catch is released.

5. Let the right side of your body collapse onto the mat, then bring in your weak hand and you're ready to shoot.

