Fundamentals of Handgun Shooting

By: Tom Perroni

I have been a Firearms Instructor for about 20 years now. I try to keep up on current trends, new training and consider myself well versed in firearms. I also believe in order to be a good Instructor you must first be a good student. I have read many articles in handgun magazines as well as LE magazines, and have taken training from a lot of different instructors some with names you would instantly know and some you would not; good Instructors and some not so good. But I have always learned something from each and every one of them.

As we have progressed after the incidents of 9/11, I believe the average citizen has become more aware of the need to be able to defend themselves. A handgun is the tool most often utilized. However please note it is my firm belief that the handgun is not a "man stopper". It is simply a tool; a tool to fight your way back to the shotgun or long rifle you should have had if you new you were going to be in a fight.

I should also note that I firmly believe in 3 principals of handgun training *Mindset*, *Tactics* and *Training.* And that when training there is a big difference between Qualification or "Target" Accuracy and Combat Accuracy. I remember my father telling me that when training for the fight keep in mind paper targets often do not move and do not shoot back. So having said all of that where does one start with their handgun training? At Perroni's Tactical Training Academy we feel the fundamentals are the foundation of your training. Without a good foundation nothing else will work. It's the idea that you have to crawl before you walk and walk before you run.

There are (7) Fundamentals of Handgun Shooting and in my opinion they are all equally import. The goal should always be to shoot to stop the threat. So lets examine them one at a time. They are:

1. Stance
2. Grip
3. Sight Alignment
4. Sight Picture
5. Trigger Control
6. Breathing
7. Follow Through

1. **Stance** The Stance is the base for the shooting platform. Not only does a proper stance assist in controlling recoil, it also allows you to move and react

quickly and to draw your weapon with minimal movement. The proper stance consists of:

a. Shoulders square to the target.
b. Feet shoulder width apart.
c. Weight slightly forward on the balls of the feet.
d. Head remains high and still with chin pointing at the target.
e. Ears in front of shoulders, shoulders in front of hips.
f. Be Comfortable.

Types of Stances:

Weaver
Isosceles
Modified Weaver
Modified Isosceles
Dynamic

The shooting stance is basically a support or shooting platform. The quality of the stance is a major determining factor in creating conditions for maximum control and accuracy for shooting. A high degree of control is necessary to deliver a rapid, accurate shot. Every individual is unique and possess characteristics that are their's alone. These characteristics include height, weight, muscular and skeletal development, degree of flexibility and more. Therefore, there can be no universal shooting stance that can be utilized by all people.

Each shooter, under the guidance of the Firearms Instructor, and consistent with safety must find the shooting stance which is best suited to them and provides the greatest degree of stability and accuracy for shooting. The shooter must be able to assume their stance instinctively, as a reflex action with minimal effort or conscious manipulation of their body.

2. **Grip** A proper grip aids in controlling recoil and muzzle flip. It also allows the shooter to obtain a second sight picture more rapidly. Hands must have a 360 degree grip around the weapon. This allows the shooter to engage more rapidly.

Ideally, the weapon should be placed in the hand so a straight line is formed with the barrel of the weapon and the forearm. The webbing of the hand should be fully under the tang of the back-strap. The weapon must initially be gripped with sufficient force to cause shaking and gradually released until the shaking stops. The support hand applies pressure in exactly the same fashion. The idea behind the two hand grip is to completely encircle the grip of the gun in order to be in control of recoil. The support hand thumb will be on the same side of the gun as the weapon hand thumb.

- The Grip must be consistent for each shot
- a good grip enhances accuracy
- high on the back strap
- finger must reach the trigger
- will reduce muzzle rise
- lends to faster recoil recovery
- just as firm as a handshake, no firmer
- weak side fingers should be wrapped around the strong hand
- wrists should be close together
- supporting hand heel should be in contact with the weapon grip
- Thumbs should rest on top of another.
- Fingers over Fingers Thumb over Thumb

Grip is acquired in the holster, prior to draw and presentation. The web of the shooting hand must be in the top of tang on the back-strap and no higher. If you are too high the slide will bite your hand. If you are to low with your grip you allow the gun to move more with recoil making sight recovery and follow-on shots more difficult and time-consuming.

A key point is to have both thumbs pointing at the target. The heal of your non-shooting hand should cover the area on the grip that is exposed.

3. Sight Alignment

Sight alignment is the relationship between the shooter's eye, the rear sight aperture, and the front sight. The front sight blade is centered and flush with the rear sight aperture. "Equal Height; Equal Light".

In order for the bullet to hit the center of the target, the shooter must aim the pistol and give the barrel a definite direction relative to the target. In theory, accurate aiming is achieved when the shooter places In exact alignment the rear

sight with the top and sides of the front sight and holds them In alignment in the aiming area. A requisite for correct aiming is the ability to maintain the relationship between the front and rear sights. When aiming the front sight is positioned in the middle of the rear sight notch with an equal light space on each side. The horizontal top surface of front sight is on the same level as the top horizontal surface of the rear sight notch (Figure above) A. RELATIONSHIP OF SIGHTS. It is necessary to be acutely aware of the relationship of the rear sight to the clearly defined front sight. Normal vision is such that the rear sight of the pistol will be as nearly In focus as the front sight. Some shooters may be able to see only the notch of the rear sight In sharp focus; the outer extremities may become slightly blurred.

“The top of the front sight is even with the top of the rear sight and there is an equal amount of space separating the front sight post from the sides of the rear sight notch.”

Sight Alignment

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4. **Sight Picture** Sight picture is the placement of the sights on the target while maintaining proper sight alignment.

Sight picture is the relationship of the target, the front and rear sights and the eye. Emphasis here is on the front sight. Inside combat distance, 7 yards and closer, if the front sight is on the target, the target will be hit when the weapon is fired. In combat shooting, this is the most important fundamental. “The eye can only focus on one object at a time. It can not keep the rear sight, the front sight and the target in focus simultaneously. The shooter must concentrate on the front sight.

Your eye can only focus on one thing at a time….You must focus on the front sight while keeping good sight alignment. When you pull the trigger you do not want to disrupt sight alignment.

1. The Target should be blurry.
2. The rear sight should be blurry.
3. The front sight should be sharp.

"Remember Point of Aim is Point of Impact"

WRONG **RIGHT**

Where ever the front sight is pointed is where the bullet will go once it leaves the Muzzle of the Gun.

5. **Trigger Control** in either double action or single action mode, it is defined as steady pressure exerted on the trigger straight to the rear to release the hammer and fire the weapon and immediately allowing the trigger

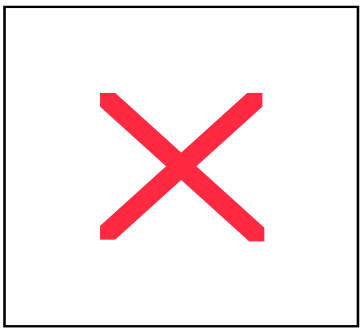
to return so the weapon can be fired again. Descriptive term here is a press and not a squeeze. Note the trigger finger continually maintains contact with the trigger.

When pressing the trigger, the shooter should use the tip of the index finger. This should be accomplished by utilizing a smooth movement isolating the trigger finger only. All other fingers must remain still during the trigger press. Another important part of trigger control is trigger reset. Once the trigger has been fired, slowly release pressure on the trigger until an audible click is heard and felt. At this point, the shooter need not release any more pressure on the trigger to fire again. This maintains a proper sight alignment and sight picture more easily.

Trigger Manipulation

- Speed at which the trigger is pulled – a single gear, one smooth continuous motion at a single speed… not increasing as you apply pressure.
- Motion in which the trigger is pulled – a smooth continuous motion, not a jerk, not a little at the time.
- Always remember that you press or pull a trigger, you never squeeze or jerk the trigger.

The finger is placed so that the trigger is halfway between the tip of the finger and the first joint. “The trigger is squeezed straight to the rear in a smooth continuous manner without disturbing sight alignment.” You should not be able to predict the instant the gun will fire. **Each shot should come as a surprise**. Note the trigger finger continually maintains contact with the trigger.



To begin proper trigger control, the shooter must first properly place the index finger on the trigger. The index finger is placed in the middle of the trigger at the most rearward curved portion, to apply pressure to the trigger. The trigger should cross the finger approximately halfway between the tip of the finger and the first joint, over the swirl of the fingerprint.

Trigger Squeeze. After attaining proper placement of the finger on the trigger, proper trigger pressure can be applied to the trigger. There are three parts of trigger pressure each time the weapon is fired. They are **slack, squeeze,** and **follow through**.

All three parts are important to proper trigger control.

1.Slack. The shooter must first take up the slack at the beginning of the trigger movement by applying slight pressure to the trigger. The trigger will move slightly to the rear until the internal parts of the trigger mechanism come into full contact with each other, and the “softness” in the tip of the finger is eliminated.

2.Squeeze. The trigger is then in the squeeze portion of its movement, which is when the internal parts of the weapon are being disengaged from each other to allow the hammer to fall. The pressure should be a smooth, constant, and even pressure, applied straight to the rear so that the sights are not misaligned at the instant the hammer falls. Once the hammer begins to fall, the follow through portion of trigger control begins.

3.Follow Through. Follow through is the continued steady pressure applied to the trigger until the trigger reaches its most rearward point of travel. If the shooter does not continue to apply the constant, even pressure during follow through, it is possible that the impact of the round could move on the target, thus spoiling an otherwise good shot.

6. **Breathing** is an important factor that impacts the accuracy of your shot. One can practice sight picture, sight alignment, natural point of aim, and optimum shooting positions, but if one does not breathe properly, one may never engage the target as accurately as possible. Also, the further away the target is, the more important breathing comes into play.

- Don't try to hold your breath while you shoot.
- Don't Shoot on a natural respiratory pause – on the inhale or on the exhale.
- We recommend a "half-breath," inhale, let some of the air out, then fire. (B.R.A.S.S. – see below)
- Vertical tracking is sometimes noticed in long range shooting when the shooter fires on the inhale, then the exhale causing the muzzle to move up and down.

In order to maintain body movement, your **breath** must be held while firing a shot. "Before each shot take a breath, let enough air out so you are comfortable; hold the remaining breath while firing the shot. If you hold your breath for more than **8 seconds** muscle tremors may start. The breathing process provides the body with oxygen and eliminates waste elements from the blood. Correct breathing while shooting is essential to proper body functions. A complete respiratory cycle last for 4-5 seconds (inhaling and exhaling) and between each cycle, there is a pause of 2-3 seconds.

Proper **breath control** allows the shooter to remain steady once a good sight picture is attained. The shooter should inhale while bringing the pistol to eye level. When the weapon is at eye level, the shooter should exhale approximately half of a breath. By allowing some air to remain in the lungs, the shooter will not fight to exhale or inhale. The optimum time to fire the round during slow fire is four to seven seconds. During slow fire, if the round has not been fired after ten seconds, the shooter should relax and begin again. This allows the weapon to remain steady until the weapon is fired. The acronym for proper breath control is

"B.R.A.S.S."

(1) **B**reathe.
(2) **R**elease halfway and hold.
(3) **A**im.
(4) **S**queeze.
(5) **S**hoot.

7. **Follow Through** is the end of the cycle the fundamentals of shooting. It is at this point, after you have fired a round, that the fundamentals begin all over again. Resetting the trigger; obtain a proper

sight alignment and sight picture, and begin asking yourself these important questions:

- Do I need to take another shot?
- If I do, will I hit my target?

Continuing to do everything that was being done at the time the shot was fired. "**Follow through** prevents any unnecessary movement before the bullet exits the barrel.

Follow through is the continued steady pressure applied to the trigger until the trigger reaches its most rearward point of travel. If the shooter does not continue to apply the constant, even pressure during follow through, it is possible that the impact of the round could move on the target, thus spoiling an otherwise good shot. The key elements we teach at Perroni's Tactical Training Academy are:

- Always finish the shot, never quit the shot.
- Keep the gun at eye level doing the exact same thing as the shot breaks that you were doing prior to the shot… aligning the sights, maintaining target acquisition.
- Maintain the gun in front of the eyes long enough to ask two questions:

    a. Did I hit the target?
    b. Did it work?

Well there you have it. I think this would be a solid foundation for any shooter. You can learn a great deal from a Basic Class it's the foundation of your shooting skills. So before you take that "ADVANCED HANDGUN COURSE" make sure you have a solid understanding of the Fundamentals of Handgun Shooting. Remember you have to crawl before you walk and walk before you run.

Stay Safe & Shoot Straight!