



10 TIPS TO BECOME A BETTER SHOOTER



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10 TIPS TO BECOME A BETTER SHOOTER

By ERNEST LANGDON

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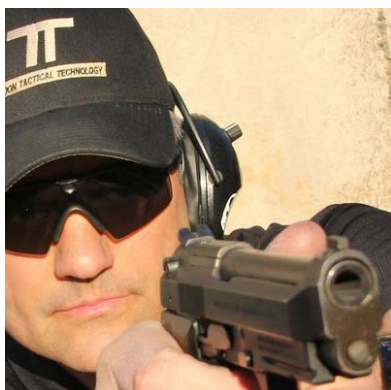
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ernest Langdon is a 12-year veteran as a U.S. Marine. His duties in the Marine Corps include participation in military operations all over the world. He served as the Chief Instructor of the Second Marine Division Scout Sniper School and the High Risk Personnel Course as well as the Platoon Sergeant of a Close Quarters Battle (CQB) and Designated Marksman (DM) teams and a Scout Sniper Platoon. Ernest is a graduate of 30 formal shooting schools and 4 anti-terrorism schools with instructor certifications from the FBI, NRA, US Army and US Marine Corps.

He has been shooting competitively for over 20 years and has acquired a Grand Master Class rating from the United States Practical Shooting Association and has 10 National Championship Shooting titles and 2 World Speed Shooting titles under his belt. He is a published author with several articles in print in major industry magazines on firearms techniques and tactics.

INTRODUCTION

If you want to improve your shooting skills, you need to make and follow a deliberate plan. Here are ten tips that will provide structure to your skill development and practice. Follow these tips and notice the improvement in your shooting.

1 GET QUALITY TRAINING

To get the best bang for your buck (pun intended), you need training from a qualified instructor. Not only will professional training help you improve your skills, but it will also accelerate the rate at which you learn new skills.



Early instruction will help you practice with correct technique from the start so that you don't have to worry about fixing bad habits in the future. Often, you don't know the things you're doing wrong until someone points them out to you.

There are a number of key fundamental techniques that are important to shooting

well. A good instructor can help you quickly implement good fundamentals, where figuring it out on your own might take years. I have talked to many people over the years about what gun, tool, or gun modification should be made in order to make an individual shoot better. While equipment can make it easier to shoot quickly and accurately, the fact of the matter is, training

will get you farther than any money you could spend on your equipment.

Keep Getting Training! No matter where you are in your shooting progression, you never know what you might pick up from a shooting class with a different instructor. Everyone teaches and understands things differently. A new instructor may explain or articulate something differently that triggers a light bulb for you, making you understand something differently - and that might help you get to the next level as a shooter. You can also learn new drills, range set-ups, or target configurations that help you vary your practice. Some people think that once you reach a certain level, you don't need to attend shooting classes anymore. False. Whether you have shot for one day, or you are a national champion with years of

experience, there is always more to learn. **Some Day You Will Teach!** As you progress as a shooter, you will find yourself, at some point, teaching someone else how to shoot. Learning from other instructors can be critical in your development as an instructor as well. You will not only learn better ways to analyze other shooters, but you will also learn how to help students with issues they may be having while they shoot. I cannot overemphasize how important this is in your development as an instructor. You never know, it might just make you a better shooter as well. For example, a problem a student may have that is obvious to another instructor may be the same problem that you are having on a much smaller scale. When you see him point it out to a student and explain how to improve upon that issue, it could make all the difference for you too.

2 DRY FIRE

The time you spend away from the range is just as important as the time you spend on the range. Many shooters are not able to go to the range three or four times a week, but everyone can make time to dry fire almost every day.



! Before you dry fire, make sure that you are following safety protocols:

For those of you that are not familiar, dry fire is simply the act of pulling the trigger and operating the fire control of your handgun, rifle or shotgun without the use of live ammunition.

1. Unload your gun.
2. Check again to make sure your gun is not loaded.
3. Did I mention, confirm that your gun is not loaded?
4. Remove all live ammunition from the dry fire area.
5. Make sure you have a safe direction to point the gun during your dry fire practice.

Not Just For Trigger Control! Many top shooters think that you should do all of your fundamental practice using dry fire practice. Dry fire is the best place to learn trigger control. Recoil and muzzle blast in live fire will cover up mistakes in trigger control that become obvious in dry fire practice. Gun handling skills, including draw stroke, reloads, shooting on the move, and multiple targets should be worked during your dry fire practice. You can even use a shot timer to set par times and see how you are progressing with your speed.

Be Honest With Yourself! It is easy to start letting yourself get away with things in dry fire. People often fall into the trap of not executing their technique in dry fire like they would in live fire.

It is far too easy to fall into the habit of:

- Not seeing the correct sight picture or sight alignment on a given target.
- Not gripping the gun with the pressure required to correctly control recoil.
- Just pulling the trigger to make a par time even though you did not see the sights correctly, or not at all.

All of these mistakes can creep into your dry fire sessions and hurt the next time you go to the range to practice. Be honest with yourself, take the time to practice and be aware of the differences between live firing and dry firing.

Use Proper Dry Fire Techniques! Make sure you are pulling the trigger in practice like you would in live fire. People often make the mistake of thinking they can learn to reset the trigger quickly in dry fire practice, and you can, but not by working the reset. You want to avoid creating the habit of pulling the trigger, pinning it back to the rear and cycling the slide, then quickly resetting the trigger to pull it again. You are not training yourself to reset the trigger quickly; you are actually doing the opposite. Always practice in dry fire by moving your finger back forward as if you are resetting the trigger after you dry fire a shot.

Bottom line: dry fire is a very important tool in your progression as a shooter. You will be surprised of what 15 minutes a day dry firing can do for your shooting.

3 HAVE A PLAN

*When you do get to the range, have a plan!
Don't just show up and shoot.*



If you do, you will likely end up doing the fun stuff and the shooting you are good at instead of working on the areas where you need improvement. Sit down and write out a plan of how you are going to spend your time on the range. Be specific. How many rounds are you going to fire? How many targets are you going to use? What is the distance to the targets? Writing a plan will

make for a more efficient range session and help you reach your goals faster. Take enough ammo to complete this plan and no more. My recommendation would be to shoot 200 to 300 rounds to keep the level of focus required to really improve on your skills. If you have a full day of shooting planned, make sure you take breaks and stay focused – it is the key to improvement.

4 **KEEP TRACK OF YOUR PROGRESS**

Tracking your progress means keeping a detailed shooters notebook. Everyone that is serious about their sport keeps track of their routines, strengths, weaknesses and goals.



Find a high power rifle shooter without a notebook, and it will be a shooter that is not very successful. The same logic applies to runners, swimmers, bodybuilders, and athletes in general. You can't keep track of everything in your head, so write it down so that you can see how you are progressing. Recognize your weaknesses and determine where you need to focus next. Often, your notebook can be your range planning log as

well. It will allow you to keep track of times and scores for a given drill and document your success. I often go back to read my notebooks from years ago to remind myself of the things I learned 'way back when' that I still need to work on today. Keeping your notebook positive about what you did well and what you need to improve upon, versus what you did wrong, will help you develop and maintain a strong mental game.

5 PICK A GUN AND STICK WITH IT

At least for a little while if you are just getting started or trying to make big improvements. Little mistakes in gun handling can cost you lots of time and affect your speed in practical/defensive style shooting.



Remember, that you should be trying to develop the ability to use the gun at the sub-conscious level. You cannot learn to do that if you are changing guns all the time, as that will affect your technique and your practice.

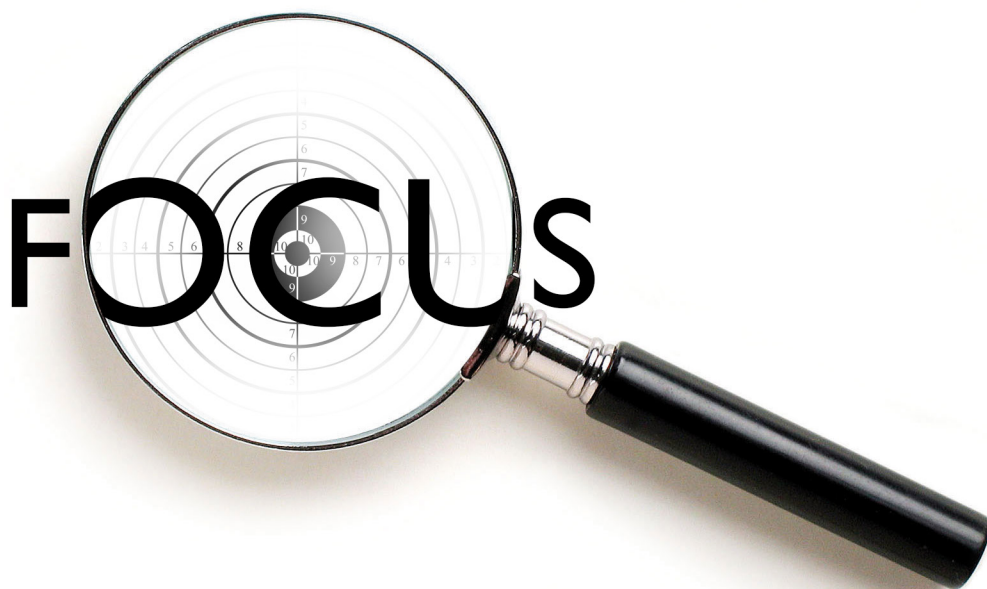
Now, I am not saying that you should never try another gun. Trying new guns is part of why we all like to shoot. I am cautioning you to be careful of becoming a member of the “gun of the month” club when you are trying to improve as a shooter. You can buy

a new gun every month if you want, I'm just suggesting that you not switch to a new gun every month while you're trying to learn and improve on your shooting technique. Service Pistols are a good place to start. You will be well served by picking a handgun that is a solid service pistol. Service pistols, the kind that military and law enforcement personnel commonly use, are built to be

reliable and durable over a long period of time. They are built to be easy to work on and clean. Learning how to shoot well does not mean you need to learn to be a gunsmith. Keeping with a fairly stock service pistol will help you stay focused on the task at hand; not wasting your time clearing malfunctions or replacing broken parts.

6 WORK ON YOUR MENTAL GAME

The mental game is by far the biggest part of shooting. Most competitive shooters would say that 85 to 90 percent of shooting is mental. Maybe more than that!



Keep your head in the game when you are shooting. Focus on the positive, not the negative. Know what you do well and recognize your errors, but don't focus on them. Most shooters I see have issues with a lack of confidence in their skills. While becoming over-confident with a gun is not a good thing, it is important that you become

confident in your abilities and techniques. It is hard to do anything well if you don't believe that you can. Focus on what you did well during your range practice and work on correcting the errors in a mentally positive way. There are always areas for improvement and the reason you keep going back to the range for practice. The

time you spend thinking about, talking about, and focusing on the mistakes is equivalent to mentally rehearsing of how to do things wrong and will make it hard for you to get better. Stay positive. Stay focused.

Perfect Practice Makes Perfect. When you are training, strive for perfect execution all the time. Every time you get sloppy in practice, you are training to be sloppy in your performance. “Practice doesn’t make perfect. Perfect practice makes perfect”. That does not mean you don’t push yourself

in practice. You should push yourself in practice to find that edge.

Learn the Mental Game. There are several good books available on the mental game of shooting as well as other sports that can be very helpful. I have read quite a few books on this over the years. Some were specific to shooting; others were books on other sports like golf and tennis. They were all helpful and have helped my mental game along the way.

Tip: Read “**With Winning in Mind**”

by Lanny Bassham and “**Choke**” by Sian Beilock

7 USE SELF-CORRECTION AS MUCH AS YOU CAN

You may not know it, but you can be your best coach. Use a mirror to watch yourself dry fire while drawing the gun from a holster. A mirror is a great tool as it allows for you to see what you are doing in real time so that you can make corrections on the very next draw.



The camera does not lie! Videotaping dry fire and live range sessions will help you see what you do **EXACTLY** as **YOU** do it. It is best to use a camera with a viewing screen so that you can take a look while you are on the range. It will provide you with immediate feedback and enable you to make corrections in your shooting before

you form bad habits. This works particularly well when working on movement, reloads, draw stroke, etc. Direct feedback will help you to make positive changes in your technique much faster than someone trying to tell you what you are doing wrong or how to fine tune your technique. With the quality of video cameras on smartphones, along with the size of the screen that they

have, there is almost no excuse not to do this. When I am teaching a class, I will often video a student or have someone else video a student to show them what they are doing and allow them to study themselves and know what to do differently. Often, watching yourself makes the words from the instructor and your actions come together in a way you would never understand otherwise.

Tip: *Hand your phone to one of your shooting buddies and have them take a video for you. You can then turn around, watch yourself and make corrections for the next drill or stage that you shoot.*

8 PUSH YOURSELF IN TRAINING

If you only work on what you excel in, you will not improve. If you get good at a certain drill, make it harder! Back up and shoot the drill from farther away, shoot it faster, shoot it one-handed or shoot it on the move.



Whatever you do, make it harder. Make the training harder so the shooting is easy when you have to perform under stress. Our natural tendency is to do the things we excel in to make us feel good about ourselves. While we want to stay positive in our training and strive for perfect execution, just doing what you're already good at will not lead to improvement. Challenge yourself to be uncomfortable to practice what you don't know or can't do.

Tip: Go the internet and find drills on YouTube that professional shooters are posting as shooting drills. There are some good forums out there with a ton of training tips for shooting as well – do your research to find what's right for you or visit my website, www.langdontacticaltraining.com for recommendations.



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9 GET IN SHAPE

No matter what sport you are in, being in better physical condition will make you a better performer. You should strive to be in good all-around physical condition.



Run, walk, ride a bike and get your heart pumping. Lift some weights, do pushups, pull-ups, sit-ups, etc. Stretch and become more flexible. All of these things will help you become a better, faster shooter, and

help you stay energized and strong during a match. You don't have to be in Olympic sports shape, but the better shape you are in, the better you will be able to perform.

10 GO SHOOT A MATCH

As often as you can, get in a shooting competition. Knowing that you have a match coming up the next weekend or even the next month is a great motivator to make you want to get to the range to practice.



The pressure of the upcoming competition will also help motivate you to get in those dry fire practice sessions at home. Even if you're more interested in the tactical reasons for shooting, competition will make you better. Competition and spectators

add a level of stress that is hard to come by in everyday range practice. If you are interested in the practical use of your handgun, then use the same gun and gear that you carry concealed or while on-duty. Local practical and defensive shooting

matches are very hard to beat for the price. For \$15 to \$25 you get to show up and shoot four to seven shooting stages that you have probably never seen before. Knock-down steel targets, moving targets, swinging targets, you name it, you are likely to see it at a local club match. It is well worth the price and may be more fun than you expect. It may also be much harder than you might think and a match can be a humbling experience. I guarantee you will leave knowing things that you need to work on for the next match.

Cross-train. Are you already a competitive shooter? Don't be afraid to branch out to

try something new. If you normally shoot International Defensive Pistol Association (IDPA) matches, it's not going to hurt you to shoot an International Practical Shooting Confederation (IPSC) match or something different every once in a while. Back to point number 5, use the same gun if you can. Find the division that your gun fits in and go shoot it the best you can. Your stock carry or duty gun will more than likely fit in nicely in one of the production type division.

Most of all, have fun and be safe out there on the range!

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

To continue staying in contact with us and for additional tips, make sure you follow our blog, Facebook, Twitter or YouTube accounts, or visit our website. To check out our complete line of firearms and accessories personally, visit a Beretta authorized dealer in your area.



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