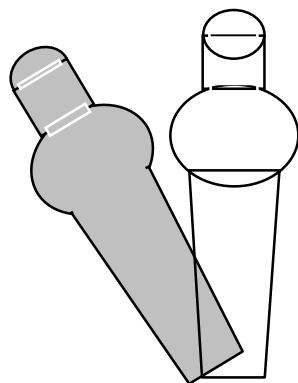


The Safe Handgun Competitor

*A manual for students
and instructors*

**Revised by
Richmond Hotshots**

June 2005



Acknowledgments

This booklet started as an USPSA booklet but has become outdated over the years. Most of the content inside was developed by USPSA. It has been updated and added to by the Richmond Hotshots.

Disclaimer

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

About the Course

Welcome to the safe Handgun Competitor course. This manual is a guide for both instructor and the beginning student. We will make every effort to improve your pistol handling skill so that you can enter Practical Shooting events with confidence and be accepted everywhere as a Safe Competitor. We will provide practice routines that will improve your ability and when you have sufficient skill to satisfy the basic requirements, your instructor will see that you receive the Safe Handgun Competitor (SHC) card.

The National Range Officers Institute of the United States Practical Shooting Association has qualified your instructor. All instructors are current USPSA members, certified Range Officers, and listed with NROI.

USPSA is the organization of IPSC (International Practical Shooting Confederation), which promotes practical shooting in the United States. There are hundreds of clubs and thousands of members enjoying the sport every month who will welcome you to their sport.

Course Overview

The instructor will combine lectures with lots of range practice. You will work on the range to learn the basic skills of handling your pistol, drawing, firing, reloading, and moving with the firearm. Safety will be the instructor's primary focus. Our goal is to make you and your fellow competitors comfortable with your safety skills.

We will describe in some detail the equipment requirements and the instructor will probably make specific recommendations from his own experience. The equipment of practical shooting can be very simple, or extremely specialized. Getting started only requires that you have a pistol of 9mm caliber or larger, shooting glasses and hearing protection, some extra magazines or speed loaders, and an adequate holster that covers the trigger guard of the pistol.

Upon completion of the course you will be given a SHC card. Most clubs require competitors to demonstrate safe shooting skills before you can

enter a match. Practical shooters are some of the friendliest people you'll ever run across at a shooting range. You will also find they are absolute fanatics about safety and won't tolerate the slightest oversight.

What is Practical Shooting?

Practical Shooting is not self-defense training. It is a sport, pure and simple. Some of our competitors do carry pistols in the course of their day-to-day work, and many believe practical shooting hones the skills they hope to never use. If you want home or self-defense training, this course is not completely right for you. It will provide basic skills that will be valuable for that next step of your training if defensive pistol craft is your goal.



Practical Pistol is a competitive target sport designed to simulate close range, reactive, defensive pistol shooting. The motto for practical shooting is D. V. C. (Diligentia, Vis, Celeritas) that stands for accuracy, power and speed. Our principles, which are the underpinning of the rules, require matches to balance all three factors. Accuracy is important, but if you are slow and don't use enough power, you'll not be effective. If you

use a very powerful pistol, but can't get it into action quickly or hit the target, you'll still not be effective.

The pistol is carried in a holster and most matches start with the shooter's pistol loaded, cocked, and in the holster. Spare ammunition is also carried on your belt and you will learn to reload and clear any malfunctions during the timed stages. There are no 'alibis' permitted; once you have begun a course of fire, you are expected to clear any jams and carry on to the end of the stage.



The matches consist of several 'stages.' Each stage is different and can have different requirements for scoring, number of rounds fired, and so on. There should be no match with targets, which are exactly the same from one stage to the next, just as there would be very few reactive situations, which would be repeated. At the start of each stage the competitors are generally given a 'Walk-Through' or an opportunity to understand the stage requirements. Once you understand the course, you are free to solve the 'shooting problem' as you think best. This diversity is one of the features that makes practical shooting exciting.

Practical shooting differs from other forms of competition. The nature of the sport is to be diverse, where each stage of the match is different from any previous stage, using different props, target groups, and starting positions. A stage may have only one target or several. Some of them may be stationary; some may move. The competitor may shoot from only one position or may have to move to several different locations. At each location, the competitor may be required to shoot from some position other than standing, such as kneeling, or shooting prone, from behind or beneath some object. Or perhaps the competitor may be shooting while on the move. Sometimes the target will not be fully in view, it may be obscured by a 'No Shoot' target, or be behind a prop such as a 'car' or 'building'.

Generally the competitor is allowed a great deal of flexibility in choosing his personal strategy for completing the stage. As you gain experience you will learn to plan a strategy for each stage that suits your style. The courses will test your thinking and planning skill and your ability to perform under stress, as well as your shooting.

This sport has a good future because it is fun, challenging, exciting and it has great spectator appeal. That is why it has grown so rapidly in every country in the free world. It has rejuvenated pistol shooting as a competitive sport. The older shooters keep shooting longer and many more young shooters and women are coming into the sport.

The experts in the various other target pistol disciplines may or may not become the experts in this one. There are additional skills required and while it is good to be a crack shot in the traditional sense, more is needed, and every skill has to be in balance with the others.

SAFETY RULES

Owning a firearm does not make you a competitive shooter, and knowing what is safe doesn't make you a safe shooter. It takes knowledge and skill to be safe and to shoot well. There are four safety laws. They are simple and effective. Make these four laws part of your shooting life and they will serve you well.

The Four Laws

1. ALL FIREARMS ARE ALWAYS LOADED.
2. NEVER POINT A FIREARM AT ANYTHING YOU ARE NOT WILLING TO DESTROY.
3. KEEP YOUR FINGER OFF THE TRIGGER UNTIL YOUR SIGHTS ARE ON THE TARGET.
4. MAKE SURE OF YOUR TARGET AND WHAT'S BEHIND IT.

These basic laws apply to all firearms, all places and all times. Never violate any of them. When you adopt these simple laws and apply them every time you handle a firearm, you will begin to be very uncomfortable around someone who has careless firearm-handling practices.

FIREARM SAFETY CHECK

Always ensure the firearm is unloaded and safe. For most 1911 style pistols check for:

- a) The manual safety: With the hammer cocked and the safety on, press the trigger. The hammer should not drop.
- b) The manual safety: With the hammer cocked, and the safety in the "on" position, press the trigger with a strong force. Release the trigger, take the safety to the "off" position, and the hammer should remain cocked.
- c) The half-cock notch: Cock the hammer. Then, holding the hammer, press the trigger, and release the hammer slowly. It should stop in the half cock notch. (The grip safety will have to be depressed while doing this.)
- d) The disconnecter: Check by cocking the hammer, then open the slide, approximately 1/16 inch. Press the trigger. The hammer should remain cocked.
- e) Trigger shoes: Trigger shoes, which protrude outside the trigger guard, on either side, are not allowed.

On the revolver check the following:

- a) The hammer bar or block: With the cylinder open, cock the hammer. Holding the hammer, press the trigger, and ease the hammer forward, about 1/8 inch. Then release the trigger, and ease the hammer down. The firing pin should not protrude through the frame. (To cock the hammer with the cylinder open on a Smith & Wesson or Ruger, you must first release the cylinder release latch.)
- b) Timing: The cylinder should not have excess rotation when the hammer is cocked. The chamber should be held in correct alignment to the barrel. Slowly press the trigger double action, and just prior to the hammer falling, you should detect the cylinder bolt locking into the recesses on the cylinder. When locked, and the trigger fully pulled to the rear, there should be very little rotational movement.
- c) Headspace: There should be very little fore and aft movement of the cylinder.

In all cases for all types of pistols and revolvers it is the shooters responsibility to check and insure the safe operation of the firearm. If you are not sure take your firearm to a reputable gunsmith to perform these safety checks.

Safety on the Range

In addition to the four basic safety laws, there are additional ground rules for safety, which apply specifically at matches. When you arrive at the range, your firearm is generally in your car in a case or shooting bag. To prepare for the match, you are expected to take the bag to a designated safety area to unbag and holster the firearm. All USPSA



Richmond Safety Area Behind Range 4

matches are conducted on “cold ranges”; no loaded firearms are permitted except under the supervision of a Range Officer.

A designated Safety Area should be provided at any range and certainly will be for larger matches. If you are unfamiliar with the range, ask someone before you take out the pistol. No ammunition may be handled in a Safety Area. The area is provided so the shooter may check and holster a firearm without the supervision of an Instructor or Range Officer. There will be a designated safe direction for your muzzle to be pointed. You may practice dry draws, dry firing, inspect the firearm, show it to friends in this area. You uncase the firearm at the Safety Area, check to see it is unloaded and safe, and holster it.

After you have checked your firearm and holstered it, you are free to walk around the range, look over the stages, talk to friends, register for the match and so on. Just don't take your firearm out of the holster until you are on the line and instructed to do so by a Range Officer. If you have made the mistake of holstering your firearm with the hammer cocked, or a magazine installed, chances are you will be asked to return to the safety area to correct it. “Cold ranges” require that all firearms be unloaded behind the firing line. Insisting that magazine wells be empty and hammers down is an easy way to enforce the requirement.

When you want to leave the range, and have been cleared from the line, you may go to the Safety Area, and pointing the firearm in the designated safe direction, you may check to see it is unloaded, then rebag the firearm for the trip home.

Checking for Clear

At the Safety Area, or under the supervision of the Range Officer, you may want to check the firearm.

Follow these steps:

- a) Pointing the firearm in the safe direction, check to see that the magazine well is empty.



- b) Open the cylinder, or pull back and lock open the slide.
- c) Check the chambers of the cylinder to see that they are empty, and the forcing cone of the revolver, to see there is no obstruction. On the pistol, check the chamber and magazine well to see that they are empty.
- d) Close the slide or cylinder.
- e) Pointing the firearm in the safe direction, lower the hammer by pressing the trigger.
- f) Reholster or bag the firearm.

Safety on the Stage

All shooters must wear eye protection and ear protection. This applies to spectators on the range as well. Shooting glasses protect against bullet fragments that bounce off steel targets or stones in the berms. There is also some danger that a case will burst, sending powder residue or brass shards in all directions. Good shooting glasses are cheap insurance against permanent eye damage. Hearing protection preserves hearing and makes the range a much more comfortable place.

When you are on the line or shooting a stage, you will be expected to keep the muzzle pointed downrange at all times. Violating this is referred to a 'breaking the 180' and will result in disqualification from the match. The 180 refers to the angle or field of fire available to the shooter. You are permitted a field of fire 90 degrees to either side of a centerline pointed directly into the backstop of the range. The two 90's add up to 180. This is like a line passing through your shoulders as you face the backstop.

BASIC SKILLS

Loading

While loading a semi-automatic there are a few cautions and tips that will make it an easy, safe process. Always make sure your trigger finger remains out of the trigger guard at all times while loading. First, of course, you must fill the magazine and insert it into the magazine well. Lock the elbow into your side to insure the muzzle points downrange while pulling back the slide. Release the slide so that it strips a round off the top of the magazine and immediately put the safety on.

You should then remove the magazine by pressing the magazine release and holster the firearm. This frees up your hands so that you can top off the magazine with another round. Draw the pistol, reinsert the full magazine, and reholster. You now have a pistol in the holster, which is cocked, locked and loaded to full capacity.

Don't load with the strong and weak elbows bent. If you push the slide back with the weak hand and release it, the muzzle may be covering your weak-side elbow. At all times, the trigger finger is out of the trigger guard.

The USPSA Rulebook states you must keep the finger out of the trigger guard and off the trigger when loading or reloading. The loading or reloading is always done with the pistol pointing in a safe direction downrange.

The double action self-loader is loaded using the same sequence outlined above. When loading, remember that on most double action self-loaders, when the safety is activated, it will drop the hammer. This hammer drop safety is quite safe, just unnerving.

With a revolver, open the cylinder, load the chambers with cartridges, close the cylinder, and reholster.

Each time you come onto the line, and are asked to load and make ready, load to full capacity. This should be a habit no matter how many shots are required in the exercise.

Drawing from the Holster

Drawing from the holster can be safe and efficient, provided that you learn first how to draw correctly. When drawing, you should always try to be standing erect, and allow as little body motion as possible. Only your hands and arms should move, and your head should remain in position so eye-hand contact is as efficient as is possible.

Always strive for economy of motion, drawing as smoothly as possible in all steps of the draw. Begin learning by practicing the steps very slowly. As you repeat the draw sequence over and over at the slow pace, your body learns with 'muscle memory' those actions that you will later do at natural speed.

- 1) Simultaneously bring the strong hand to the grip of the firearm and the weak hand to the area in front of the sternum. The trigger finger

is straight alongside the holster ready to point at the target. The trigger finger must not be in the trigger guard at this time. **DO NOT TAKE THE SAFETY OFF IN THE HOLSTER!**

- 2) Grip and snap the pistol from the holster with the strong hand. The thumb is resting on the safety. The weak hand stays in position about 3 or 4 inches in front of the sternum. The trigger finger is extended alongside the pistol, ready to point at the target.
- 3) The firearm is brought up to the sternum where the weak hand also grips the firearm.
- 4) When the grip is formed with both hands, the pistol is 'punched' toward the target, eyes pick up the sights, the



safety comes off, and the finger moves toward the trigger.

5) As the sights become aligned on the target, the trigger press begins and the pistol fires with a 'surprise break' to the trigger.

As the pistol is punched toward the target, your eyes are initially focused on the target. When the pistol reaches the full extension, your eye focus must shift to the front sight.



This five-point draw sequence is used to clarify what you should be doing at each step of the sequence. As you learn each step, and become more practiced, the draw becomes smoother and steps 3 and 4 combine into one smooth motion towards the target.

Punching out toward the target will allow you to get on target quickly, rather than coming up past the target and pulling the firearm back down into it, which is much slower. Slowing your hands to a smooth stop in the last third of the motion to the target will allow the firearm to have the sights come into alignment smoothly with less bounce.

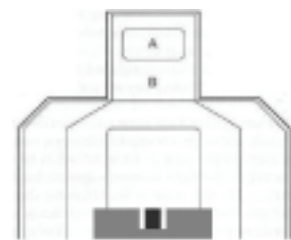
When joining your hands in the draw, the motion should be natural, just as though bringing the hands together to clap. Bring the weak hand into the firearm as soon as possible, so that there is a longer period of time to adjust the grip, if necessary, as the firearm comes up to the target. Care should be taken to not cross your weak hand with the firearm on the draw. This will be avoided if you do not bring the weak hand past the centerline of the body and the hand is kept in close.

Practice the draw slowly at first, doing each step correctly until each step is learned. This will help establish the draw in your subconscious and in your muscle memory. When this is learned and is smooth, begin to draw quicker to develop a more efficient draw. Never allow the draw to be choppy and rushed; always strive for a smooth draw, as this will always be the most efficient. Speed will come with smoothness.

Sight Picture

A correct alignment of the sights on target is achieved in two steps. In step one, the sights are brought into correct alignment. Make sure that the tops of the sights are level with each other, and that there is an equal amount of daylight surrounding the front sight in the rear sight notch. If the front sight is higher than the rear sight, the shot will be high on the target. If the front sight is to the left in the rear sight notch, the shot will be to the left on the target.

The aligned sights are brought onto the target in step two, and the tops of the sights are at the center line, (from top to bottom and side to side), of the target. This is called the “center of mass” hold on the target, and is the most natural way of aligning the sights. The eyesight is always automatically drawn to the center of mass of any object, and it is natural to bring the sights into alignment where the eye is focused. The shooter must remember to



focus on the front sight once the sights are on target to confirm that the sights are aligned properly. This can only be determined by focusing on the front sight, not out at the target or the rear sight.

Trigger Control

The pad of your trigger finger should press the trigger, not by the tip or at the first joint. The pad of the finger has the best combination of sensitivity (finger tip), and strength (first knuckle joint), and therefore gives the best control over the press of the trigger. Place your finger on the trigger at the center of the trigger face (both vertically and horizontally), and do not allow any further contact of the trigger finger and the side of the frame. If there is contact, as the trigger is pressed, pressure could be applied sideways on the frame, and the shot would be off to the side.

Press straight back on the trigger, not up, down, or to the sides. If pressure is applied in any of these directions, the shot could be thrown off, just from the pressure of the finger on the trigger.

Press back with a uniform pressure that is uninterrupted until finally the shot goes off. The shot should seem as a surprise, and in this way, you will not anticipate the recoil and flinch. Also, by pressing back steadily on the trigger, you aren't as likely to jerk the whole firearm, causing it to come off target.

Unloading

To begin the unloading sequence, you will of course have your finger outside the trigger guard. Unload the single action self-loader by releasing the magazine and returning it to its pouch, while keeping the muzzle pointed downrange. Still pointing the firearm downrange, take off the safety, and eject the chambered round by pulling the slide back. Do not place your hand over the ejection port to do this! A high ejector can strike the primer of the round causing it to go off, bursting the case outside the chamber.

Lock the slide open and inspect the chamber for a round that might have slipped off the



extractor. During competition the Range Officer will also inspect the chamber before giving the command, “If clear, hammer down, holster.”

When you are certain the firearm is free of ammunition, pull back on the slide to release the slide stop and lower the slide to its normal position. With the firearm pointed in a safe direction, snap the hammer by pressing the trigger. Do not click off the slide stop to drop the slide, and don't ease the hammer down by holding it back. Dropping the slide without a round being stripped off the magazine damages the sear. By dropping the hammer using the trigger, you can be certain no round remains in the chamber and the firearm is safe.

To “unload and show clear” with a revolver, open the cylinder and dump out the cartridges. Make sure the muzzle doesn't point up past vertical (break the 180) when dumping the spent cases from the cylinder. With the cylinder still open, and the muzzle pointing downrange, present the revolver for inspection. Always make sure you inspect the pistol along with the Range Officer. If you both make a mistake and the firearm discharges, the shooter is disqualified from competition. Always take full responsibility for your firearm and making sure it is safe.



DRY-FIRE PRACTICE

Building Familiarity

Smoothness is the hallmark of well-trained shooters. Every motion is fluid and efficient. Complete elimination of wasted motion will save time and mark you as a ‘pro’. The smoothness of most of the top shooters started with hours of practice ‘dry firing’. The draw, reloading, flash sight picture and trigger control are all basic skills that can be perfected. Ten to thirty minutes a day dry firing can dramatically improve your shooting skill on the range. Practice any drill slowly at first, doing each step correctly, until each step is learned.

Safety at Home

First make a home safety inspection. Most of your house or apartment is unsafe for dry fire practice, particularly if there are people wandering in and out of the rooms around you. Apartment dwellers have a real problem. Wherever they look there are thin walls and people. Floors, ceilings and walls are not bullet proof! Look around until you find a solid wall that will stop an accidental discharge. A basement room below grade would be ideal.

Remember:

- 1) ALL FIREARMS ARE ALWAYS LOADED.
- 2) NEVER POINT A FIREARM AT ANYTHING YOU ARE NOT WILLING TO DESTROY.
- 3) KEEP YOUR FINGER OFF THE TRIGGER UNTIL YOUR SIGHTS ARE ON THE TARGET.
- 4) MAKE SURE OF YOUR TARGET AND WHAT'S BEHIND IT.

Always inspect the weapon before dry firing. Draw, point in a safe direction, ease the slide back to check for a loaded chamber or magazine, ease it forward, aim at a safe impact area, and press the trigger.

Dry Firing

Dry firing does not damage or significantly wear a pistol. Dropping the slide on an empty chamber will eventually damage a trigger job however. If the firearm is empty, ease the slide home, keeping your hand away from the muzzle.

Make yourself a set of miniature targets and no-shoots out of paper bags (6" wide, 8" long and a 2" B zone). Check the stages for the next match and arrange the miniature targets on a SAFE WALL for dry firing.

Now practice smoothly drawing, aiming, pressing the trigger, shifting between targets, and reloading. Top shooters use mental conditioning and visualization techniques to improve their performance. Plan how to shoot that stage. Try a walk-through. Go through the motions. Experiment and refine your movements. It works.

CHAPTER 2 – COMPETITION

PRACTICAL SHOOTING MATCHES

Your first match

Safety is the first concern in practical shooting. The match officers expect you and every other shooter to display the self-control needed to handle your firearm and yourself in a safe manner. These tips will help you understand how a match is run, what your part is, and what is expected of you.

Practical shooting is what you want to make of it. You can shoot a match with your “carry” firearm to develop your firearm-handling skills and test your equipment. You can gear up and become a serious competitor. The choice is yours. The sport recognizes many different aspects of individual excellence.

There is a wide diversity of attitudes among the shooters at a match. For some, the match is part monthly practice, part social occasion. They enjoy the challenge, the fun and social aspects of the sport, and don't take things too seriously. At the other end are the athletes—the serious competitors. They respond to the challenge by employing modern sports training techniques to condition mind and body to peak performance. In between are all sorts of shooters.

Want to be an effective competitor?

Then relax and enjoy the fun. Banish all distracting thoughts of prize and place; you're challenging yourself. Don't try to shoot the other guy's match; set a speed that works for you. The one who makes the least mistakes fastest often wins. Set realistic goals. If you improve 5% each time out, if you learn something new from each match, you're a winner!

The registration process

Once you get parked, find the registration desk. The club member manning the desk will accept your match fee and may give you a registration packet or ask you to fill out the USPSA activity report form. The club uses this form in their match accounting. They need to know

your USPSA number, your home club, your class and if you're a new shooter.

If you are a new shooter at your first match, present your Safe Handgun Competitor card and tell them you're new. They will often mark your scorecards to alert the RO's so they can assist you.

Note the shooter number. That same number must appear on every scorecard. As each scorecard is processed, the final score is written on the registration card with the same number.

You will be given a scorecard for each stage. Make sure that you enter the correct information on each card. Is your name written legibly? Is your shooter number on it? Is your USPSA number on it? Does it accurately state your division? Does it state whether you are shooting minor or major ammunition? The shooters doing stats need that on the card to properly calculate your scores. If you leave it blank, they may score you as minor. If you recently sent your membership application to USPSA Headquarters, write pending or new on the USPSA number line.

Gearing up - at the car or in the safety area?

The safety area is the only area of the match, aside from the firing lines, where firearm handling is allowed. Always keep the muzzle pointed in a safe direction. It's one of the marks of the experienced shooter. Signs should be posted at the safety areas that tell what the conditions of use are.

Some clubs allow dry practice here; some only permit checking of weapons. If your firearm breaks, this is where you take it for field repairs

LOAD MAGAZINES ANYWHERE BUT THE SAFETY AREA!

NO LOADED FIREARMS OR AMMO HANDLING IN THE SAFETY AREA, EVER!!!

In the safety area, uncase the firearm keeping the muzzle pointed in the indicated safe direction. Check to make sure it's unloaded. Do this by racking the slide or opening the cylinder and inspecting; drop the hammer by pressing the trigger; then close the slide or cylinder and reholster. Once holstered, leave it alone. Playing with your firearm behind the lines will get you disqualified for unsafe firearm handling.

At the Stage

Generally two range officers will be running a stage. The chief range officer handles the shooter, watches his firearm, keeps the timer. The range officer (score keeper) runs stage administration; order of shooters, their job assignments, spectators, and target scoring. When you are shooting, the CRO will be watching your firearm while the RO will be to the rear, watching for procedural.

For matches with open squads, wait in the spectator area until there is a break in the action between shooters, and then give your scorecard to the range officer. He will put it on the bottom of the pile. Shooters are called in the order the RO received their cards. If the match has assigned squads, you will be with the same squad throughout the match and the order of shooters will usually be randomized from stage to stage.

You can learn a lot just by watching others handle the “shooting problem”. Watch how they handle their firearms, how they move, where they reload; in other words, all the things that make up their game plan. What worked? What didn't? Study the stage information sheets posted in the waiting area.

The CRO will give a walk-through and briefing to each new squad of shooters. He will explain the course, his safety concerns, and other matters related to shooting the course. Now is the time to ask those questions.

When you have finished shooting and been cleared, the CRO and you will inspect the targets. Stay one yard away from the target unless told different. Do not touch the target unless you want it scored as a zero. If you disagree with the score, you may challenge it. The Range Master will make the final decision. Check the scorecard carefully before you initial it. Once you and the CRO have signed it, it's a definitive document. It's a good idea to keep your own separate record of the score and times so you can catch any errors.

Helping Out

Practical shooting is a cooperative sport. Our range officers are shooters – unpaid volunteers who've paid their entry fee and want to shoot the match, too. They need and expect your full cooperation in helping run the match efficiently. Time saved on any stage means that the overall match ends sooner. You can do your part by understanding the course

of fire before you come to the line, and by doing your share of the jobs on the stage. Job assignments are announced by the RO.

Gather spent brass and discarded magazines when the shooter has finished. Present these to him when he leaves the line. Well-organized shooters have their own brass bags to make your job easier. When the CRO and shooter finish inspecting a target, the CRO will tell you “tape it!”. You then tape all the bullet holes in the target, check the target edges for any grazing shots (usually they leave dark bullet lube marks); tape these, then go onto the next target. If you aren't sure that a target has been scored, ask. If you tape a target before the CRO scores it, the shooter is obligated to reshoot the stage and rarely does one improve a score on a reshoot.

The usual procedure is to break down the stages while the final scores are being calculated. All the shooters help breaking down. All the targets, props and gear are returned to their storage locations under the supervision of the range officers.

When the range equipment is put away and stats crew has finished scoring, the final stage scores will be posted for inspection. This will be your final opportunity to make any corrections. Then stats will calculate the match scores.

The match director will announce the winners and present the awards. If you learned something new, if you improved your skills, if you had fun doing it, you are one of the winners in practical shooting.

Categories of competition

USPSA recognizes several categories of competition. Open, Limited, Limited 10, Production, and Revolver are the categories you may pick from. Refer to the USPSA Handgun Competition Rule Book for the most up to date descriptions and specifications of these firearm categories.

Open category pistols are very popular. There are very few limitations on the firearms and equipment. Magazines must not exceed 170mm in length, and the firearm must be safe, of course. There is an 'Open Nationals' event; the match to determine the overall National Champion. The dominant firearms in this category are custom hi-capacity .38 Super, 9mm, or other wildcat caliber's, with compensators and optical sighting systems.

Limited category firearms are basically production models, which may be modified in 'limited' ways. There may be no optical or electronic sighting systems and no ports, compensators or similar recoil reduction devices.

Limited 10 category is basically the same as Limited but the competitor is restricted to 10 rounds in any magazine at the time the timer buzzer goes off. In other words you may have 10 rounds in all your mags including the one in the pistol with the addition of 1 round chambered prior to starting the stage.

Production category is an ever popular division and can be one of the cheapest ways to enter the sport. Production pistols are double action pistols with very few modifications allowed. They, like Limited 10, are also limited to 10 rounds in the mag.

The Revolver category allows any revolver of 9mm caliber or larger to be used with a maximum of 6 rounds fired before a reload is required. You may use an 8 round cylinder revolver but you must reload after 6 shots are fired.

Shooter Classifications

In addition to the competition categories, USPSA members may become classified according to their skill. Classifications start with D, going on up to C, B, A, Master and Grand Master for those who are exceptionally skilled. A shooter's classification is based on his performance on specific classification stages set up at many affiliated club matches as well as state or Area Championships. The classification system is explained more fully in the appendix.

EQUIPMENT FOR COMPETITION

Firearms

Most IPSC competitors use either the 1911-style semi-automatic in .45 ACP, .40 S&W, .38 Super, or 9mm. Other styles



include the Glock, CZ-75, Sig-Sauer, Heckler and Koch, Browning Hi Power, or Smith Wesson pistols which can be carried in the single action mode. Hi-capacity equipment from Para-Ordnance,



Caspian Arms, STI and Strayer-Voigt are also very popular. Less often



seen are the double action revolvers, usually from Smith & Wesson, Ruger, or Colt. Any safe, reliable pistol or revolver in 9mm or



larger is suitable for competition.

It is highly recommended that new shooters take some time deciding on modifications.

competitors will their firearms, learning the basic Practical Shooting, serve. It is always and customize later shown what will best suit your style.



Although most eventually customize when a new shooter is skills specific to any safe pistol will best to practice first, after experience has specific improvements

The choice of pistol is generally a personal one depending on the use the owner intends. Common modifications are listed in the Appendix for firearms that are used solely or primarily for competition. If more information is needed, any of the books listed in the appendix will serve the reader well.

Holster

Appropriate holster will consist of a good quality holster, belt, and magazine pouches, or speed loader pouches if using a revolver.



The holster should be constructed in such a manner that it will retain the firearm correctly during vigorous activity, yet allow an unimpeded draw. The trigger guard must be covered to meet the rules, and the holster must keep the firearm close to the shooter's body. Depending on where the holster is positioned (in front, beside, or behind the hip), the

holster will have a different rake or angle at which the firearm butt is

held. When positioned in front of the hip, the butt will be angled back slightly, when at the side, the butt will be nearly flat, and when carried behind the hip, the butt will be angled forward.

The holster must cover the trigger but allow the second finger to be



placed on the grip when you grasp the pistol as part of the draw. The holster should be such that you can get



a firm firing grip on the pistol with the strong hand without moving the pistol in the holster. You should not have to change your grip after the pistol has started to move.

The pistol should fit snugly into the holster so that no movement within the holster occurs. It should be stressed that the holster is one of the most effective safety devices you have. Nothing can happen to the pistol while it is in the holster and you are not handling it.

Other IPSC rules, which are relevant, are:

- 1) No tie down rigs.
- 2) Only one belt at waist level. (Duel belting systems with a Velcro under-belt are OK)
- 3) Women may move the belt loops and the belt carrying their holster and magazines to hipbone level.
- 4) The grip of the pistol must not be below the top of the belt.

It is better to try a number of holsters to see which one suits you. This is particularly true with respect to women, who may try several holsters and discover only one that suits them.

The belt should be stiff so there is no flex in it; some belts even have steel strips to make them even less flexible. A good belt will aid in the draw. The holster will be held absolutely still when drawing. The belt must be worn at the waist. Women may lower their belt loops to hipbone level.

Magazine pouches are also worn on the belt, usually on the opposite side from the holster. As with the holster, the pouch must hold the magazine securely, yet allow access to them when needed. It is quite common to

see a shooter with at least one single pouch, worn in front of the hip, and one double pouch, usually worn at the side of the hip. As with the holster, the pouches are usually angled, depending on where they are worn.

Pouches should be cut low enough to ensure that the shooter can get a proper grip on the magazine. The magazine should not be buried too deeply into the pouch. The front of all magazines should be facing forward.

Other Related Equipment

As a competitor you will need to carry extra magazines or speed loaders sufficient to hold about 30 to 40 rounds. Magazines are the heart of the system of the semi-auto, and without good quality, properly cared for magazines; the firearm is doomed to fail to feed sooner or later. When not using the magazines, unload then and



put them away where they will be well protected, so that they do not get deformed or bent. Check to see that the feed lips are not cracked, and clean the magazines when you clean the firearm.

A good shooting bag will allow you to carry accessories, ammunition, and firearms, and will have compartments that will keep these items separate. Included in a complete kit bag would be items such as cleaning equipment, spare parts, sight black, a rag or towel, firearm oil, eye and ear protection, and scoring overlays. When going out to practice

you may add a timer, targets, tape, target stands, staple gun, staples, chronograph, practice record book, sunscreen and insect repellent.

AMMUNITION

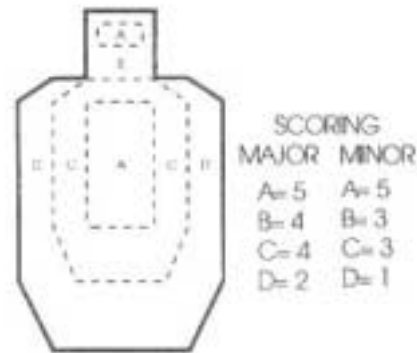
Power Factor

The minimum power factor (PF), which will be scored in practical shooting, is 125. If your ammunition falls below 125 PF, you may shoot the match, but no score is recorded. The best scores are obtained by using 'Major Factor' ammunition which is 165 PF or greater.

The power factor is determined by multiplying the weight of the bullet in grains times the velocity in feet per second and dividing by 1000. A 180 grain bullet with a velocity of 945 feet per second has a power factor of 170.

There are two scoring levels referred to as 'Minor' and 'Major'. To score Minor, the ammunition must be at least 125 power factor. Major requires a minimum 165 power factor and scores more points for the same hit on the target.

The IPSC targets are divided into A, B, C and D zones. Minor hits score 5 points for A, 3 for B or C hits, and 1 point for a D zone hit. Major hits score 5 for A (the same as minor), but 4 points for B or C hits and 2 points for D's. Although a shooter who makes all A hits with minor power factor ammunition will score as many points as a major caliber shooter, nearly all competitors maintain major power factors with their ammunition.



Reloading

Reloading ammunition for practice and competition is almost a necessity. Comparing the cost of factory ammunition to the component cost of reloaded rounds will prove this. Reloading is safe and fun if you learn the necessary precautions and use quality equipment. Many new shooters get started by asking other shooters for help. Watching experienced reloaders and listening to their advice is a good place to

start. Everyone should also get the reloading manuals that are published by powder manufacturers and follow them.

When traveling around to matches in different locations, changes in atmosphere, humidity, temperature, or elevation can cause differences in the Power Factor that was established when developing the match load. That is why the load should be slightly higher than the required Power Factor. If, however, the load far exceeds the Power Factor, then you are being subjected to far more recoil than is required, and the firearm will suffer in the long run.

Unsafe Ammunition

Ammunition, which is determined to be unsafe, must be removed from the range. Unsafe pressures are indicated by excessively flattened primers, blown primers, or pierced or damaged steel targets. Ammunition may also be deemed unsafe if there is an excessive number of 'squib loads', those with no powder. A squib load will make a 'pop' but the bullet may not leave the barrel. If this happens and another round is chambered and fired, the firearm is usually severely damaged. Do not fire another round if you suspect a squib load.

COMPETITION SKILLS

Range Commands and Procedures

When it is your turn to shoot a stage, you will be called to the line or shooting box. The Range Officer will generally ask you if you understand the course of fire. This is your opportunity to ask any final questions you may have. You will be shown every courtesy, but remember there are other shooters waiting behind you. If you feel like you need to take a sight picture before loading, it is a common courtesy to ask the RO first. Some matches do not permit sight pictures, other require they be done only with an unloaded firearm. When you let the RO know you understand what is expected of you, he will give the range commands.

- 1) Load and make ready.
- 2) Are you ready?
- 3) Standby.
- 4) A beep, or other signal to start.
- 5) If you are finished, unload and show clear.
- 6) If clear, hammer down, and holster.

7) Range clear.

On the command “**Load and Make Ready**,” unholster the pistol and load it completely, including topping off the magazine. You will also put on hearing protection and adjust your shooting glasses. When completely ready, assume the start position described in the written course description. The Range Officer will then double check by giving the command:

“**Are you ready?**” If you are ready, you do not have to respond to this question. If you are not ready, indicate by saying, “not ready” in a loud, clear voice. When you appear to be ready, and have assumed the start position, the RO will say:

“**Standby.**” Standby is the signal that the start signal will be given in 1 to 4 seconds.

The start signal. This signal is generally a beep from a timer, the appearance of a moving target, or some other form of visible signal. Alternately, you may have to start yourself, by releasing or pressing a button. With the start signal, the time begins and you are expected to complete the stage. The timer will record your last shot and the time of your run. Relax, you did well and the RO is there to calm you down!

“**If you are finished, unload and show clear.**” With this command the RO is checking to make sure you are satisfied you have completed the course and is commanding you to unload the pistol. Keeping the muzzle down range, drop the magazine, lock the slide back, and check the chamber. When you have done so, hold the open firearm out for the RO to check for an empty chamber. You should get into the habit of double checking it yourself as well.

When the RO is satisfied the firearm looks clear, he will say “**If Clear, Hammer Down, Holster.**” When you hear this, you are clear to lower the slide, point the firearm into the backstop and press the trigger, proving the firearm is clear. Holster it quickly and professionally.

“**Range Clear**” lets the other shooters and range officials know it is safe to go down range with you to score your targets.

Marksmanship Principles

There are four marksmanship principles that must be learned.

1) Focus on the front sight, not the target.

Looking at the target is one of the most common mistakes in pistol shooting. This is especially difficult to master with steel targets that fall. Many think they are looking at the sights when they are looking through them. As you are aiming, you must see the front sight in perfect detail. If you see the steel targets fall, or holes appear in targets, you're looking through the sights. Proper focus on the front sight will allow the most accurate shots.

2) Learn to read the sights.

Learn to see where the sights are at the exact instant the firearm fires. This is 'sight picture'. Shooters never strive to hold the firearm perfectly still. The trigger is pressed as the sights move within an area around the center of the target. As the trigger is pressed, the focus is on the front sight, proper alignment of the front and rear sights is perfect, and the shot will break as a surprise.

3) Focus on the front sight throughout its arc of recoil.

By watching the front sight, you will be able to tell what it's doing during recoil. Is it going straight up and down or is it lifting to the right or left? Many shooters stop the firearm at the height of recoil and look at the target or watch the steel fall. Watch the front sight and bring the firearm back into proper sight alignment at the same speed it recoiled off the target.

4) Prep and press the trigger.

Once you start your trigger pull, continue to smoothly and progressively increase the pressure until the firearm fires. Pressure on the trigger is straight back. Don't try to adjust the pressure on the trigger depending on what you see. This will lead to uneven pressure and 'jerked' shots.

Gripping the Firearm

Drawing from the holster was covered in Chapter 1. The technique described there must be practiced until it is an automatic, smooth motion. Review the steps there and remember to strive for economy of motion, drawing as smoothly as possible in all steps of the draw. Begin learning by tracing the steps very slowly. As you repeat the draw sequence over and over at the slow pace, your body learns with 'muscle memory' those actions that you will later do at natural speed.

When joining the hands in the draw, the motion should be natural. Bring your weak hand into the firearm as soon as possible. Take care not to cross your weak hand with the firearm on the draw. This will be avoided if you do not bring the weak hand past the centerline of the body and keep it in close.

Most people grip the pistol too tightly. The correct grip is with about the same amount of pressure as one would feel when gripping a hammer to drive a nail. The pressure from both hands must be equal.

Normally, when shooting free-style, you will use a two-handed grip on the firearm. When gripped properly, the hands should be as high on the pistol as possible. This will cause the firearm to recoil straight back into your hand, with less muzzle jump or flip, giving you better control over recoil.

The thumb of your shooting hand should rest on top of the safety if your hands are big enough to do this comfortably and the safety can then act as a type of thumb rest.

The supporting hand wraps around the shooting hand. The supporting hand may rest on top of the thumb of the shooting hand, and again, the thumb acts as a rest for this supporting thumb. An alternate place for the thumb is in front of the shooting thumb. This seems a particularly good hold for shooters with smaller hands.

It must also be stressed that there should be as little body movement as possible in the draw. You should remain as erect as possible. If there is to be any shoulder or head movement at all, it will be a slight drop of the weak shoulder so that you can assume the correct position for the first step.

Sight Picture

Proper alignment of the sights on target was covered in an earlier section. You must focus on the front sight to confirm its alignment with the rear sight. This means that you will start looking at the target, and then you will have to bring your focus back to the front sight. To practice this, you can use an empty firearm. Bring the firearm up on to the target, then practice changing focus from the target to the front sight. To help you, the instructor can call out the commands: “target”, pause, “front sight”, repeating this command several times.

Once you have learned to focus on the front sight, you will now have to learn how to do this in as short a time as you can. You start with the firearm lowered in the ready position, then raise the firearm and, as quickly as possible, focus on the front sight to confirm the sights are aligned. Lower the firearm as soon as you get the flash sight picture.

Trigger Control

Each time you press the trigger the firearm should go off as a surprise. When you are shooting slowly and deliberately you can press the trigger over a long period of time, say three to five seconds, and each time the firearm fires it will be a surprise. Now you must compress this time frame, shooting in progressively quicker times, but the shot should still surprise you. Practice bringing the empty firearm up onto the target ready to fire. As you focus on the front sight, press the shot off. There should be no noticeable movement in the sight alignment. Practice doing this exercise until you press the shot off as fast as you get the sights aligned, yet the sight alignment is not disturbed.

Stance

In practical shooting you will only occasionally be able to get the perfect stance. We will lead you through several 'stances' but it is important to know that balance is the key to moving quickly from target to target and from shooting box to shooting box. Most top shooters today use a variance of the isosceles stance with the shoulders square to the targets with an aggressive posture that absorbs the recoil. This posture requires that your shoulders be slightly in front of your ankles, your ears slightly in front of the shoulders.

In the Isosceles stance, you start facing the target; feet shoulder width apart, standing erect and natural. Both hands grip the firearm and are pushed out toward the target, with both arms straight.



The back, hips, and feet are perpendicular to the target, and all should be in a straight line, without indication of twisting. When engaging multiple targets, pivot at the hips, keeping the eye-hand relationship intact.

In the Weaver stance, start standing erect, with the weak-side foot four to six inches in front of the strong-side foot. If you are a right-handed shooter, the left foot should be slightly in front of the right, with the right toe about even with the instep of the left foot. Stand about 45 degrees to the target with the heels and shoulders parallel. Both feet are parallel, and facing slightly to the side of the target. The strong arm is thrust out toward the target, and is locked at the elbow. The weak hand catches the strong hand, and grips hand and firearm, interlacing the fingers over the fingers, parallel to each other. As the firearm comes up onto the target, the elbow of the weak hand bends in and down, toward the chest. The left hand is pulling backwards to hold the pistol down during recoil. The right hand is pushing forward.



Strong hand only

From time to time it will be necessary to shoot with the weak hand disabled using only the strong hand. This might be during a 'Standard' exercise or a stage at a club match that specifies the simulation of a disabled weak hand.



When you practice this, all you have to do is start in the same manner as when shooting free style with your normal stance, facing the target. As you draw, you bring the firearm up in the usual manner. Bring the weak hand up in front on the sternum as in your normal draw. Rather than joining hands, you clench your weak hand into a fist and press it against your chest. Continue straight to the target with the firearm exclusively in the control of your strong hand. As you shoot, lean slightly forward into the recoil of the firearm and keep the weak arm tucked in with the fist pressed into the chest. This will make you more stable and lock up the shoulders so the firearm will not come off target as easy.

Weak hand only

When weak hand shooting, the pistol is drawn with the strong hand then transferred to the weak hand before firing.



Start in your normal stance, facing the target. Draw the firearm as you would normally to the point where the firearm is out of the leather and the weak hand is in front of the

body. Bring the firearm forward, toward the target and 'transfer' the pistol into your weak hand rather than grasping it in the two-handed grip. As your weak hand wraps around the butt, push the firearm up toward the target, wiping the strong hand back into your body clenching the fist against your chest.

If the firearm has an ambidextrous safety, you can make the transfer with the safety on, and take it off with the weak hand. If not, you should take the safety off with the strong hand just prior to transferring the firearm to the weak hand. Be careful when you do this transfer. Start by first practicing the maneuver dry.

Speed Reloading

During the Course of fire, you probably will need to reload while the timer is running. Doing this in the minimum amount of time is a skill that should be practiced as much as the draw. Your dry firing sessions aren't complete without plenty of reloading drills. When reloading in a match, it is to your advantage to be moving to the next shooting position as you do the reload. Doing two things at once in this fashion reduces your overall time. Showing how to do a stationary reload is the simplest way of teaching the reload. Once you can reload smoothly while still, you can practice reloading while moving.

Speed Reloading an Automatic

Speed reloading the semi-automatic is usually broken down into two elements: releasing the spent magazine and re-loading a full magazine back into the firearm.

At step 1 the firearm is up on target. Take your finger out of the trigger guard. Simultaneously release your grip on the firearm with your weak hand and turn the firearm slightly, so that you can reach your magazine button with your strong thumb. (Left handed shooters would activate the magazine button with their trigger finger.) Press the button to release the magazine. Keep the pistol upright so the magazine falls cleanly. You will bend your strong elbow as you do this and bring the firearm in closer to the sternum. If the magazine doesn't fall, don't worry about it just yet.



As you release the magazine, your weak hand continues down to your first magazine pouch and grips the magazine with the thumb and three fingers wrapping around the body of the magazine. The index finger stays straight along the front side of the magazine. Grasp the magazine as deeply as possible into the palm of the hand. This will allow the index finger to come into contact with the bullet nose of the first cartridge. This finger pointing to the first round is going to guide the magazine to the magazine well of the firearm.



Step 2 requires you to draw the magazine from its pouch keeping the grip outlined above, the index finger tip now touching the bullet nose. The pistol should be within five or six inches of the sternum. Twist the pistol in the strong hand slightly and look into the magazine well where the fresh rounds are going to go. Many shooters fail to look into the magazine well and miss the reload all together.

Bring the magazine into contact with the butt of the firearm quickly, then smoothly insert the magazine and push it into place with the heel of the palm of the weak hand. As the magazine is seated, wrap the supporting hand back around the strong hand and reestablish your two-handed grip. Bring the firearm back up on target and move your trigger finger back to the trigger.

If the magazine did not drop immediately, but sticks part of the way out, use the little finger of your weak hand to whisk out the magazine. You will have the fresh magazine in your hand at the same time, so you will not have to change your grip.

Throughout the entire magazine change sequence, your trigger finger must remain outside of the trigger guard. If you must reload with the slide locked back, simply change magazines in the normal way. Release the slide with your left thumb on the slide release catch, not by racking the slide.

Speed Reloading a Revolver

There are two common ways to reload the revolver depending on the style of reloaders used. One style uses a twisting action to release the rounds into the cylinder; the other uses a mechanism that automatically releases the rounds when they are pushed into the cylinder. While you still see the twist type speed loaders from time to time, most revolver shooters now use the more common moon clip.



The first way, using speed loaders that do not require a twist, is to begin with the firearm full of empty cartridges, holding it out, pointed at the target as if shooting. Bring the firearm back slightly by bending the elbows and simultaneously release the cylinder and swing it open. Angle the muzzle up, and with the cylinder open, strike the ejector rod with the palm of the weak hand to release the spent cartridges. Hold the firearm firmly in the strong hand as you do this. Watch the muzzle so it does not come up too high.



Once you have struck the ejector rod and the spent cartridges are ejected, bring the firearm and weak hand down to the ready position. The weak hand will continue to retrieve the speed loader from its pouch. Reload the cylinder with the cartridges and push the speed



loader to release them, letting gravity help to seat them into the cylinder. Close the cylinder with the weak hand and the speed loader should be wiped clear to fall to the floor. Do not waste time picking the speed loader off the cylinder and throwing it aside.

As the cylinder is closed, start to bring the firearm back up on target, and as you do this, reestablish your grip on the firearm with the weak hand. Bring the trigger finger back onto the trigger as the firearm comes back on target and establish the proper finger placement on the trigger. You are now ready to continue firing.

This is another method for the revolver and speed loaders that require a push to release the cartridges. The shooter should wear the speed loader pouch on the right side just forward of the hip. The reloading sequence should be as follows:

- 1) Lower the pistol and bring it in close to the body.
- 2) Simultaneously:
 - a) Tilt the pistol to the left about 30 degrees.
 - b) Pivot the body to the right so that the pistol will continue pointing downrange. The feet should remain in position.
- 3) Rotate the pistol to the right. Cradle the cylinder with the left thumb and second and third fingers. The right thumb operates the cylinder latch. The cylinder is pressed open with the impact being cushioned by the cradle grip.
- 4) Simultaneously:
 - a) Reach up with left hand so that the muzzle is nearly vertical and the brass will drop straight down out of the cylinder. Punch the extractor rod vigorously with the left thumb. The first finger is on the barrel and the fourth finger is on the frame near the hammer. The second and third fingers are holding the cylinder as far as it will go. If the round closest to the frame catches, rotate the cylinder with the left thumb and punch the extractor rod again.
 - b) The right hand reaches for the speed loader.
- 5) Lower the left elbow into the body and point the muzzle as straight down as possible. The left thumb is moved down from the extractor rod back to the cylinder and holds the cylinder fully open. The pistol is controlled at this point by the left thumb and the second and third fingers of the left hand. Apply the speed loader by lining up 2 rounds with 2 chambers. Wiggle the speed loader gently to insert the rounds. Do not force this. Do not push the speed loader release button at this stage. When the rounds have lined up so that the speed loader falls into place, the right hand should be taken away from it. The speed loader release button is then pressed (or twisted with thumb and finger) with the right thumb and then the right thumb knocks the

speed loader off the cylinder onto the ground. Close the cylinder with the left hand.

6) Raise the pistol and assume the shooting stance.

All of these steps are fast except the wiggling of the rounds into the chambers. That is the careful part. If that is rushed and the speed loader release button is pressed too soon; both the rounds and the speed loader will jam.

RANGE WORK

Singles, from the "Ready" Position

Under supervision of the instructor, start with the firearm loaded, held out at the "ready" position. Bring the firearm up onto the target. As soon as the sights are aligned, fire the shot. Put the safety back on, if applicable, and return the firearm to the "ready" position. This motion must be learned in order to enhance the draw, but also to get you used to presenting the firearm to the target from the "ready" position.

Singles, from the Holster

Once you have acquired the skill to shoot single shots in control from the "ready" position, you are ready to draw and fire singles from the holster. This will incorporate using the draw as outlined earlier and firing the shot using the flash sight picture and the compressed surprise break. Once the shot is fired, let the firearm recoil back onto the target as though you were going to fire again. Confirm that the sights return to the center of the target. If the sights are off, move your feet slightly, until the sights are in the center. Apply the safety and with the finger outside the trigger guard, return the firearm to the holster. Repeat the exercise, shooting a group in the center of the target. The group size at seven meters should not be bigger than the size of a golf ball.

Doubles from the Holster, Single Target

Controlling the firearm to deliver two aimed shots is achieved by having a good firm grip and a balanced stance. If you can control the firearm for a repeat shot then, with practice, the firearm can be controlled for a complete string of shots.

Practice bringing the firearm up from the "ready" position and firing one shot. As soon as the firearm returns to the target, fire a second shot. Be sure the sights are aligned on the target as you do this. This will result in two aimed shots. Put the safety back on and return the firearm to the "ready" position. If the target is still at seven meters, the group size should be no bigger than when you fired singles at this distance. If the group size is significantly bigger, you are not watching the sights before you fire the second shot. Have the instructor watch you fire to see what you are doing wrong.

Once you have achieved the desired result, practice this exercise again, drawing the firearm from the holster. The group size should not get any bigger.

Doubles from the Holster, Multiple Targets

Once you have gotten used to firing doubles from the "ready" position and from the holster, the next thing you want to achieve is to be able to shoot doubles on multiple targets.

Again, it is a good idea to start this exercise from the "ready" position. You will need two targets hanging at ten meters for this exercise. Starting from the "ready" position, raise your firearm and sight on the first target, then fire two rounds as quickly as you can while in control. Let the firearm swing onto the second target and again, fire two rounds: in control, as fast as you can. Apply the safety, and then lower the firearm to the "ready" position. Reload when necessary, and then repeat the exercise. The group size on each target should be the same, and they should be the size of the groups you shot when doing doubles on a single target.

180 Degree Turns

The most effective ways of turning to face the targets will require you to pivot on your strong leg, keeping the firearm and holster as still as possible. You can choose to pivot in a forward rotation, pushing off with the weak foot to complete the turn, ending up in the correct stance facing the first target. As the turn is started, address the firearm in the holster with the strong hand. When you have turned far enough for the firearm to be drawn safely, draw the firearm while simultaneously completing your shooting stance.

If you wish to turn toward the weak side, then you will have to step back with your weak foot, crossing it behind your strong foot as you start your turn. The weak foot should land in position so that as you pivot toward the target, it will be in the correct position for a balanced shooting stance. As before, draw your firearm when it is safe to do so, and simultaneously bring it onto the target, as you complete your stance.

Dry practicing these turns will quickly point out to you which way feels the most comfortable.

Strong Hand Only

From time to time, it will be necessary to shoot with the weak hand disabled, using only the strong hand.

When you practice this, all you have to do is start in the same manner as when shooting free style with your normal stance, facing the target. As you draw, bring the firearm up in the usual manner, along with bending the elbow of the weak hand as in your normal draw. Rather than joining hands, though, you bring your weak hand into your body, anchoring it and your weak arm at your side, much as though wrapped in a sling. Continue straight to the target with the firearm exclusively in control of your strong hand. As you shoot, lean slightly forward into the recoil of the firearm and keep the weak arm tucked in. This will make you more stable and lock up the shoulders so the firearm will not come off target as easily.

Weak Hand Only

Weak-hand shooting is handled exactly like strong-hand shooting; only you must first draw the firearm with the strong hand, and then transfer it to the weak hand.

Start in your normal stance. Draw the firearm as you would normally to where the firearm is out of the holster and the weak hand is in front of the body. Bring the firearm forward, toward the target and at the point that you would normally join hands, begin to transfer the firearm to the weak hand. Have the weak hand open, and as the firearm is transferred into the palm of the weak hand, release your grip on the butt of the firearm with your strong hand. As your weak hand wraps around the butt, push the firearm up toward the target, sliding the strong hand off the grip.

Another technique is to draw the pistol with the strong hand gripping only the end of the grip, leaving an inch or so available to grip with the weak hand. As the pistol is brought up in line with the target, grasp it with the weak hand above the strong. The weak hand continues the motion toward the target, and the strong hand moves to the chest to anchor it.

Bring your firearm up to the target, and as you do this, pull your strong hand back into your body the same way your weak hand was held when firing with the strong hand. How you take the safety off will depend on whether your firearm is equipped with an ambidextrous safety or not. If there is one, you can make the transfer with the safety on, and take it off with the weak hand. If there is no ambidextrous safety, then you should take the safety off with the strong hand as normally done, just prior to transferring the firearm to the weak hand. Be careful when you do this transfer. Start first by practicing this maneuver dry.

The steps are as follows:

- 1) Load and make ready.
- 2) Draw.
- 3) When the pistol is pointing downrange with the safety off, you anchor your trigger finger along the frame and then pass the pistol to the weak hand. The last parts of the strong hand to leave the firearm are the three fingers off the front of the grip and the index finger off the side of the frame. The last part of the exchange involves the weak hand trigger finger going into the trigger guard.
- 4) Finger inside trigger guard.
- 5) Take up the slack.
- 6) Front sight.
- 7) Press.
- 8) Front sight.

Stress pressing the trigger with the finger instead of pulling. Trigger slack should be taken up before the final press for more control.

Try to make the transfer right after the draw, while your hands are in close to the body, but watch the direction of the pistol.

Movement Box to Box

When moving from one shooting box to another, the principle things to keep in mind are to move safely with your finger outside the trigger guard, the muzzle pointed safely downrange, and to move as efficiently as possible.

Breaking down the steps involved into their basic elements will allow you to get from one point to another, and be ready to continue firing when you get to that next position. If the exercise calls for drawing and firing two shots, then moving to a new shooting point and firing two shots again on each of two targets, then you should think through the exercise in the same sequence that will be required to execute the stage. In this scenario, the thought sequence should be: draw and fire two shots, safety on, move to the new position, controlling the muzzle while moving, stopping and establishing a good shooting stance while simultaneously bringing the firearm to bear on the first target, taking the safety off, then fire two shots on the first target, and swing smoothly onto the second target, and fire two aimed shots into it. The thought process should be, draw, shoot two, safety and finger, movement, stopping, safety and shoot two, switch to the last target and shoot two.

When moving, move as quickly as possible to the next box, and watch where you want to land in the box. Land smoothly, bringing the firearm to bear on the target as you step down into your stance, with your weak foot. Economy of motion is important, along with safety, if you want to do well on the stage.

Kneeling

When practicing shooting from the kneeling position, draw the firearm before kneeling and keep the muzzle pointed in a safe direction. You can begin your kneeling motion as you draw to be more efficient, but you want to make sure the firearm is clear and pointing downrange before you complete your change of position. As always, the trigger finger is outside the trigger guard and safety on until your sights are on the target.



There are four kneeling positions commonly used by competitors. Choosing which way you kneel is a matter of preference and circumstance. Some shooters shoot much better from the two-leg kneeling position, while others feel quite capable of firing from the one-

leg kneeling position. It usually takes longer to get back up after firing from the two-leg kneeling position, so if further movement is required, most shooters will elect to fire from one knee.

Prone Shooting

There are two prone positions commonly employed in practical shooting. They are the Chapman rollover and the military prone positions.



Different variations of each are used. Take care when going prone so that the pistol does not sweep the weak-side arm.

To use the rollover prone position, start standing, facing the targets, as when preparing to shoot from the kneeling position. Again, this practice can be done dry until the shooter feels comfortable in his ability to do the exercise. On the start signal, draw your firearm and bring your weak foot forward, keeping the strong foot in position. As you step forward, bend the knees until the strong knee comes into contact with the ground. With the firearm in your strong hand, keep the firearm in control, pointing downrange and in front of your body. Lower yourself down and forward, using your weak hand to break your fall, as though you were doing a one-handed pushup. As you fall to the ground, push your strong hand out straight in front so when you land you are on your strong side; the fall should not be broken by dropping onto your strong elbow. As you drop onto your side, hook your weak foot instep into the back of your strong leg knee and, using it as a lever, you can prop yourself up on your strong side. This will allow you to be able to breath easier, as you will not be laying flat on your diaphragm. The weak hand now joins the strong hand and the head comes to rest on the biceps of the strong arm. You are now in position to shoot, once the safety is taken off.

The military prone position is performed by drawing the firearm into the strong hand as you step forward with the weak foot, then bending at the waist until you touch the ground with the weak hand. Punch the firearm forward in front of you and kick your legs straight out behind. Spread

your feet as you kick back and use your toes to land on your body, prone, as if doing a one-handed pushup. Drop straight down onto your stomach and bring the weak hand up to form your grip. Take the safety off and you are ready to shoot.

The reason shooters use this position, rather than the roll over prone, is that it is quicker and easier to get in and out of, and that may be critical to the success of the shooter on the stage. Also, if there is no requirement for the shooter to have to remain in this position for an extended period of time, the fact that it may be less comfortable, or that breathing while in this position may be more difficult, is of little consequence.

Barricade Shooting

Barricade shooting can be simplified greatly if the shooter takes the attitude that there is no barricade to rest against. The only time a shooter should use a barricade for support is when there is a difficult shot to be made. Then its use is warranted, providing the barricade may offer support.

Neither the slide of the self-loader, nor the cylinder of the revolver should touch the barricade.

When shooting around a barricade from the strong side, stand in your normal shooting stance or with your feet



perpendicular to the targets, parallel to the face of the barricade. As you draw your firearm, bend the strong knee slightly as you bring the firearm up to the target. Do not lean into the barricade. Stand as straight and in balance as you would if no barricade was in front of you.



When you must shoot around the weak side of the barricade, you must watch

your muzzle direction closely so that you do not sweep yourself. Shoot with the firearm in the strong hand because it is quicker than transferring the firearm, and you will have better control. Bend the weak knee this time to be able to bring the firearm up around the barricade, yet still be on balance. Again, do not lean against the barricade if possible, and do not let the firearm come into contact with the barricade. Keep back so you are not crowding the barricade, and if you lean into it, remember not to lean so far forward that you are out of balance.

Malfunctions

There are three common malfunctions that occur on the semi-auto pistol and knowing how to clear them quickly will help. If you get a malfunction, you are expected to clear the problem and continue to shoot while the timer continues to run. This reflects the practical nature of the sport. The three malfunctions in order of difficulty are: a failure to feed, a "stovepipe" jam, and a double feed. You should know how to clear these malfunctions. They can be simulated and clearing them should be practiced.

1) Failure to Feed.

If the magazine has not been completely inserted, or the magazine release button is accidentally pressed it will not hold the rounds high enough into the pistol to be fed into the chamber. You fire a round, and the next press results in a click instead of a shot. Immediately think, "Tap, Rack, Bang." To quickly clear the jam, 'Tap' the bottom of the magazine to lock it into place, 'Rack' the slide to strip a round into the chamber, and 'Bang' off the next shot after re-acquiring the sight picture. This malfunction most often occurs in the shooting box at the start signal and is very embarrassing. Always make sure the magazine is fully seated and locked into place.

The malfunction can be simulated by pressing the magazine release button while the firearm is holstered but otherwise ready to fire. On the draw, you may fire one shot, the next should be on an empty chamber. Practice the Tap, Rack, Bang drill under safe conditions.

2) Stovepipe

A "stovepipe" occurs when the spent brass fails to clear the ejection port and is caught by the slide as it returns to battery. It's obvious because an empty case is sticking up in the way of the sight (you are focusing on the front sight, right?)

A stovepipe can be cleared in an instant by simply wiping the brass away with your weak hand. When this motion is finished, the slide returns into battery you are ready to fire. Since there is generally a cartridge already in the chamber, the slide should never be brushed back far enough to pick up another cartridge or else you will have a double feed malfunction.

Simulate this malfunction by carefully inserting a live round into the chamber and an empty case behind it as the slide is eased down. Insert a full magazine and the simulation is ready to clear by wiping the brass away.

3) Double Feed

This malfunction can be identified by the fact there are two cartridges attempting to go into the chamber at the same time. Some call this a "class 3" malfunction, others call it an "Oh, S&^!" because it requires more time to clear.

First raise the pistol muzzle about 45 degrees to look into the breech.

- 1) Lock the slide back.
- 2) Drop the magazine.
- 3) Work the slide twice to get rid of the cartridge or cartridges causing the malfunction.
- 4) Insert a magazine.
- 5) Work the slide once to strip a cartridge off the magazine.
- 6) Fire.

This malfunction can be simulated by: (Use dummy rounds!)

1. Drawing.
2. Locking the slide back.
3. Inserting a cartridge in the chamber.
4. Inserting the magazine.
5. Gently releasing the slide.

Then clear the malfunction and fire by:

1. Looking.
2. Locking.
3. Dropping the magazine.
4. Racking.
5. Racking.
6. Magazine in.
7. Racking.
8. Firing.

You should practice these clearing drills to stay familiar with them. When you get a malfunction, clear it as quickly as possible, and if you encounter a malfunction during the course that you cannot clear, put your hand up and stand fast. As you practice these clearing drills, it might become quite apparent that you have some sharp edges on the firearm or sights that may need to be rounded.

Practice builds skill

In building the skills for Practical Shooting, there is no substitute for practice. If you cannot manage an hour a day on the range, try for 30 minutes of dry firing. Establish a practice routine and write it down in a personal notebook. Keep notes about what you wanted to accomplish on that practice day, and what seemed to work and what didn't. When things in a match seem to go wrong, refer to the notebook and go back to the practice sessions focusing on those skills that need work. With diligent practice you should expect to be reasonably proficient and safe in a few weeks. Within a year the trophies from the local matches may begin to occasionally grace your mantle, but learning never stops. Techniques and equipment change. As you explore all the coming developments and skills, you will be participating in the most exciting shooting sport in the world.

CHAPTER 3 -TIPS FOR INSTRUCTORS

SAFETY -SET THE EXAMPLE

As the instructor, you will most likely be the first person the students will watch who is a true expert at safely handling a pistol. The care you take to demonstrate safe firearm handling practices will teach more than words. Wear your pistol in the class and use it to demonstrate what you are talking about. Always check it, check it, check it -every time you draw it -never sweep the class or another person. You may feel you are exaggerating the motions and care, but it will make a lasting, positive impression on the students.

Make a poster of the four basic safety laws and go over them until every student can repeat them by heart. Hold 'choir practice' and have them repeat the laws as a group - and refer to them throughout the weekend. If they learn nothing else, make sure they understand these safety laws. They are simple, elegant, and they work!

TWO DAY COURSE OUTLINE

The following is a suggested outline for the instructors teaching a class of 8 to 12 students over two days.

DAY 1:

Plan to spend the morning in the classroom; the afternoon on the range. Registration and handout of materials.

Introductions. Lecture and demonstrations: Course Overview, Safety Rules, and Basic Skills.

BREAK

Demonstration and lecture: Basic skills continued: sight picture, trigger control, grip, stance, draw, range commands and procedures.

LUNCH BREAK

Range work. Instructor should take students to the range and make sure all firearms are unloaded. Check each pistol for safe operation. Acquaint students with how you expect them to work on the range as a group. Dry fire practice on the line. Live firing, single shots, one student at a time.

Practice loading, unloading, firing single shots. Instructor checking for reasonably careful firearm handling, corrects problems as they appear, basic accuracy skill, ability to follow instructions.

Watch for safe muzzle control, smooth draw, correct grip and stance, grouping on target.

Emphasize a smooth draw and good grip. Stress focusing on the front sight.

DAY 2

Plan to spend an hour in the classroom, the rest of the day on the range demonstrating techniques and skills, and letting the students practice what you've shown them. Return to the class at the end of the day to talk about equipment for competition, questions, and feedback.

Lecture and demonstrations covering competition categories, classes, and match behavior.

BREAK

Range Work -Competition Skills: Speed reloading, marksmanship principles, malfunctions, stance, one hand only, and positions. Have students practice dry first. Emphasize a rhythmic, smooth reload. Lecture malfunction-clearing drills.

Lecture and demonstrate turns, have students practice dry, with two or three live attempts. Stress muzzle direction and control while turning, reloading.

LUNCH BREAK -1 HOUR

Lecture and demonstrate movement, negotiating obstacles.

Stress safety, trigger finger, muzzle direction.

Lecture and demonstrate positions, barricades, and one hand shooting. Emphasize muzzle control.

Demonstrate transfer, placement of non-shooting hand. Stress watching sights, compressed surprise break.

BREAK

Demonstrate moving across range, shooting on the move. Class room: Congratulations, questions, sign SHC cards.

SHOOTING EXERCISES

The Flash Sight Picture

The shooter only looks at the sight long enough to identify it as being in position. A good exercise to get used to the principle of the flash picture is to quickly raise the pistol, look at the front sight, and then lower the pistol.

Up, front sight, down. Up, front sight, down.

The shooter should lower the pistol as soon as he gets the flash sight picture during the exercise. The shooter can further practice dry firing by pressing the trigger as soon as he gets the flash sight picture.

The Compressed Surprise Break

The instructor should stress that the shooter must always have a surprise break. In all pistol shooting, the discharge should occur as a result of a surprise break, otherwise there will not be an accurate shot. A good drill for this is to dry-fire and watch for 'follow-through', or maintaining the sight picture after the hammer falls.

The shooter should attempt to master the compressed surprise break as opposed to an open-end surprise break. An open-end surprise break is where the break could take place during any period of time; say over 4 or 5 seconds. The shooter can gradually reduce the time within which the surprise break can take place. He can work that time period down until he gets a surprise break in a very short period of time. It must still be a surprise break as opposed to pulling, jerking, or yanking the trigger. If the shooter squeezes his whole hand when he presses the trigger, he is not doing it right. The whole hand should have been squeezed as part of the grip before the trigger press. Inspect the shooter's targets to determine if group size indicates a smooth trigger press and surprise break.

Front Sight Focus. Target Focus

This is not a shooting sequence, so don't have the shooters cock and lock. Simply have them raise their pistols and sight them on the target. Then alternate the focus as follows:

Front Sight -Target -Front Sight -Target -Front Sight -Target

Make sure that each shooter goes through this until he grasps the difference between focusing on the front sight and focusing on the target. The instructor should stress to the shooter at this point that until the sights are on target, the shooter is focusing on the target. He then instantly focuses on the front sight as it comes into view and presses the trigger.

Sight Picture

One technique to emphasize the importance of sight picture over holding the muzzle perfectly still, is to fire shots two ways. First tell the students you are going to maintain a perfect sight picture, but let the muzzle visibly move about. Then tell them you will maintain an imperfect sight picture but hold the pistol very steady. The resultant groups will show the difference. Prove it to yourself before you teach the class!

Dummy Rounds

If the shooter appears to be having trouble with the sight picture and he appears to be jerking the trigger (or flinching), it can be useful to have the shooter shoot a dummy round somewhere in his string. He should know there is a dummy round in his magazine, but he should not know where it is.

After the "load and make ready" remove the shooter's magazine, insert a dummy round at some point in his magazine and replace the magazine in his pistol. When he shoots, watch him carefully and both of you will see his problem when he presses on the dummy. Don't let the shooter become embarrassed, it happens to the best of us from time to time.

Another technique for curing a flinch is to have the students shoot steel IPSC-sized targets at 40 or 50 yards. As they hear the clang of bullet on steel, they get immediate feedback when the sight picture is good and they have not jerked the trigger.

Also make sure the students have adequate hearing protection. Double up with plugs under the muffs if necessary. Ear pain can cause flinching!

Practice on the Target Range

New shooters, with very little previous target pistol experience, often have difficulty with the 15 meter distances of the course. It is a matter of control of the stance, the grip, the focus on the front sight and the compressed surprise break. The instructor should remind those shooters that they could take advantage of shooting from the bench of the standard target line to master this. They will have trouble with most of the rest of the course until they can handle this. It is a matter of constant, disciplined practice.

Instruction on the Line

If the instructor has more than one line of new shooters, he must make sure that both lines are forward to hear any lectures and see any demonstrations so that he will not have to repeat it for each line.

The instructor should then keep both lines working so that the second line does not get bored while the first line goes through too many strings. It is better to have a maximum of two strings per line and keep the lines moving than to run into a boredom problem.

When the available shooters are divided into two lines, the instructor should make sure that each shooter knows whether he is a part of the first line or the second line for that day, so that when he calls for one line or the other, they can immediately present themselves.

There should be enough assistant instructors to keep a close individual watch on each new shooter so that mistakes in techniques can be picked up and corrected immediately. The instructor himself should try to do as much of this as he can. He can do this by delegating the range officer responsibilities to one of the assistant instructors. The instructor should use his assistant instructors to the fullest by having them watch individual new shooters, supervise the "unload and show clear" and the "firearm clear, hammer down, holster" and actually run the range. In addition, the assistant instructors should move to different parts of the line so that they are not always dealing with the same new shooter. This will give each shooter the benefit of help from as wide a range of assistant instructors and instructors as possible.

Dry Shooting on the Line

A very effective way to coach new shooters on their techniques is to have the whole line doing the techniques. If each shooter practices the technique at his own pace, the instructors can be back and forth along the line and observe and coach where needed. That way, a new shooter can be given individual attention without holding up the rest of the shooters, as they can continue to practice at their own pace.

When coaching on technique is required, coaching while the shooter is dry firing is generally far more effective than coaching while real shooting is taking place.

Timing

This is best done with an electronic timer. Use the timer only as a starting signal. Don't let the shooters know what their times are to avoid competition and suggesting the students speed up while they are in the early learning phases.

Low Walls -Ports

If you are shooting on a stage that requires you to shoot through a window or other form of shooting port, remember to stay far enough back from the port so the muzzle of the firearm does not go in the port. Sticking your muzzle into a port causes several problems. First, it takes longer to go in and come out of the port than staying back from it. This means that you will lose time on the stage. Secondly, the slide could hit the port on recoil causing the firearm to jam, and thirdly, firearms that have had the muzzle shoved into a port have an amazing tendency to lose their front sight.

Suggested Qualification Criteria

Follows directions quickly and accurately.

Able to load and unload without fumbling or losing control of the muzzle direction.

Holsters and draws without sweeping weak hand.

Maintains safe muzzle direction at all times. Does not sweep other students, instructor or break the 180 while shooting, loading, holstering, etc.

Able to reload while moving (walking) through a course of fire.

Able to shoot a 10-inch group at 10 yards; gets most hits at 25 yards.
Does an el Presidente in 12 seconds with at least 40 points, no
procedurals or safety violations.
Is someone you'd be comfortable shooting with?



APPENDIX

CUSTOMIZING FOR COMPETITION

Sights

Often factory sights are too small to pick up quickly. The shooter would do better with fixed or adjustable, high visibility sights. Whether the front sight should be ramped depends on the type of holster used.

Trigger

Most triggers out of the box are about 9 pounds and mushy. The trigger should be modified so that it is crisp with a 3-1/2 to 4 pound pull.

Adjustable Sights

These could be Bo-Mar low profile or low mount Micro sights, both of which are good. Adjustable sights allow you to change the point of aim as you change ammunition or the firearm wears.

Dehorning

This is rounding all of the sharp edges on a pistol, which will catch your clothing, holster, or your hands. The edges of the rear sight may also be rounded.

Enlarged Ejection Port

This will prevent brass from being deformed on ejection and may help with stovepipe problems.

Beveled Magazine well

The magazine well should be beveled to get rid of the ledge, but too much metal should not be taken off. This is to assist in changing magazines. Some after-market magazine well units come with a main spring housing and most shooters can fit them to their pistols without a gunsmith.

Extended Thumb Safety

This allows much more positive control of the safety. The shooter should try a pistol with an extended thumb safety to see whether he thinks it better and easier to use than the standard safety. Extended safeties usually require some fitting by a gunsmith.

Throated Barrel and Polished Feed Ramp

This modification is very useful to increase the functional reliability of the pistol, particularly with semi-wadcutter bullets. It may not be necessary if the shooter's pistol functions perfectly.

Spring Modification to Magazine Release

Most magazine release buttons are too stiff for rapid magazine changing. Gradual modification by clipping off small parts of the spring can bring it down to proper tension.

Extractor

Sometimes there is improper extraction of the fired cases. If this occurs with the shooter's pistol, the extractor hook should be checked carefully. The extractor itself should have a slight bend in it so that it is under tension in the slide. The extractor should be able to hold a round against the breach face. To test this, remove the slide from the frame and insert a round under the extractor.

Trigger Stop

A trigger stop is used to stop backlash after the hammer falls. Bear in mind, however, that a trigger stop may not really be needed and sometimes gives trouble. On 1911 pistols a trigger stop is often a feature of after market triggers.

Beavertail Grip Safety

A shooter can sometimes get 'hammer bite' when the hammer pinches the skin over the beavertail. If he does, a drop-in beavertail grip safety will be a useful item and will also allow the shooter to get a quick grip on the pistol.

Flat/Arched Mainspring Housing

The mainspring housing affects the natural alignment of the sights in the shooter's hand. A flat housing will normally cause the shooter to point somewhat lower than an arched one. Have the shooter use an unloaded pistol and point at the target with eyes closed. When his eyes are opened, he may find the sight picture slightly too high or too low. If the sight picture is consistently too high when trying this drill several times, the shooter might try a flat housing. If it's too low, try an arched one.

Accuracy Job

This would involve a slight tightening of the slide, a solid bushing, and fitting a match barrel. An accuracy of 3 to 4 inch groups at 50 yards should be achieved. Your pistol smith should not give up any reliability for improved accuracy.

Bobbed Hammer

A certain relieving of the hammer will sometimes prevent hammer bite and avoid the necessity of installing a beavertail grip safety. This may

also be accomplished by installing a Commander hammer on a Government model.

Magazine Pads

Magazine base pads are very useful, particularly when the shooter is doing fast magazine changes or is using a pistol with an extended magazine well. Without the pad there is a tendency not to seat the magazine in all the way.

Barrel Bushings

Shooters with Gold Cup or Government model Mark IV's with four-finger bushings should consider a solid bushing, either a Micro or Clark. This is because the four-finger bushing in the Mark IV series is subject to breakage. There are also 'spherical' bushings, which are claimed to be more accurate.

Springs

Generally, factory standard spring weights are sufficient. Shock buffs may be added to decrease the battering the pistols take over many years of use. Make sure the firing-pin spring is replaced every 5000 rounds or so. Be sure your pistol smith doesn't do a shortcut trigger job by using a light main spring.

Compensators

These are an effective way of reducing muzzle flip on a pistol. They work best at higher velocities.

Optics

Optical 'red-dot' sights are very popular in Open competition. The shooter is advised to learn the principles of marksmanship before venturing into optical systems. Once the shooter can master the basics of recoil control, optical sights will speed target acquisition. No magnification is necessary, or desirable.

USPSA CLASSIFICATION SYSTEM

What it is and how it works

The USPSA classification system provides a grading of shooters so that they can compete against shooters of more or less the same skill level. The USPSA classification system as of June manages almost 10,000 classified shooters, with over 590,000 individual scores on file. Many of our shooters do not have a full understanding of the system and how it works. We hope that this will answer some of the questions.

Classification Percentages

Grand Master	95 to 100%
Master	85 to 94.9%
A	75 to 84.9%
B	60 to 74.9%
C	40 to 59.9%
D	39.9% and Below

Shooters are awarded a class based on a series of percentages that are calculated for them. Each percentage is the score (hit factor) they shot on a specific stage divided by the maximum hit factor used for that stage. The stage maximums are calculated from scores of the top shooters and are themselves 'averages' of the very best shooters on that stage. Generally, the top 10 scores are averaged to find the maximum hit factor used in the calculation. Since these top shooters can and sometimes do, make quantum changes in their equipment or technique, the maximum hit factor has to change as well. A particular shooter's hit factor of, say 5.64 may represent 63% of the stage maximum at one time, and sometime later may represent only 62% if the top shooters have forced a change in the stage maximum.

To initially become classified, a shooter must have four valid scores submitted. Continuing reclassification is based on the most recent eight unduplicated classifier stages. The two lowest of these eight are dropped and the remaining 6 are averaged. Most of the scores will come from affiliated club match classifiers specifically set up from the published list of authorized classification stages. The clubs are responsible for setting up these stages according to exact specifications and for administering them uniformly. They are part of the club's monthly match and are included in the calculation of the match results, as well as being submitted for national classification of the shooter. By Board policy, shooters participating in matches that contain a classifier stage are allowed to repeat that stage at the convenience of match officials for

classification purposes only. The first score of the classification stage must be used to calculate match standings, but the best single run of the classification stage may be sent in for classification.

The clubs must send in a classification report, which can be generated automatically by the USPSA Easy Score program, and \$5 per shooter to cover costs of the classification system. Some clubs allow competitors to go through the stage with multiple division firearms so two classification scores can be generated at one match. The scoring program must be run twice and two classification reports submitted. The new version of EasyWin-Score will allow the shooter to be entered in two 'events' so that the stats officer won't have to enter two separate matches. The two required classification reports may then be generated from one set of match entries.

The Range Officer on the stage is responsible for signing the score sheets to certify that the shooter's score represents his true skill. If the shooter has had unusual firearm problems or penalties, the RO is expected to cross out the statement that the score represents the shooter's best effort and not sign it. Only scores representative of the shooter's ability are to be sent in. This is the front line of 'quality assurance' and is often the weakest link. Once a score sheet is signed by the RO and submitted, there is no possible way the staff entering the information into the computer can tell if it is inaccurate or not.

A shooter who is attempting to gain a higher class will sometimes advise the RO that the run was not representative of his true skill and request that the score sheet not be sent in. This is an appropriate request, but it must be emphasized that the final decision is up to the Range Officer.

See the classification system on line at www.uspsa.org and see the "USAGE Flag Character Explained" chart to see what classification scores will be used and why.

An exception is made for a shooter who is not yet classified, and any score over the minimum 2% will be entered for that shooter. 3) If all of the scores from a classifier seem to be unusually high or low, it may indicate the stage was set up incorrectly. In this case the club officers are contacted to check the details of the setup. 4) If the shooter's USPSA number is invalid or missing, or if his membership has expired, the score cannot be entered.

All valid classification scores received at Nationals Headquarters by the tenth of the month are entered for that month. After the scores are entered and reports are run and checked, the computer calculates the shooter's new percentage for those who have become eligible for a

classification and generates a classification card. These cards are mailed out around the 15th of the month.

While new classifications are calculated and cards sent monthly, previously classified shooters have their classifications calculated quarterly. This is an average of the highest six of the most recent eight valid scores and the 'current average' is changed to reflect this information. Once the percentage reaches the next higher classification, the shooter is moved to that class. Even if a shooter's quarterly percentage drops, the classification will remain the same. Once a shooter earns a classification, he cannot lose it unless he specifically petitions to go down in class. A classified shooter may also petition to be moved up in class, except to Grand Master.

After each quarterly calculation, a new book of classifications is printed and sent to the clubs and Section Coordinators. It contains a list of all classified shooters with their high and current average percentages for Open and Limited. Shooters needing to verify classifications may call the national office or the USPSA computer bulletin board (BBS) to get a list of scores or the classification on record. Match directors needing to verify the classifications of a large number of shooters are advised to fax the match registration list to the national office at least three days in advance.

A shooter's performance in larger matches and tournaments may also be used to help establish classification. If the competitor shoots an Area Championship or major tournament and wins first or second of a class higher than his current classification, he will be promoted to that higher class, except for Master and Grand Master. In order for scores from a Sanctioned Match or Tournament to be entered, the match director must apply through the proper route and specifically request that the scores be used for classification. Once the match is over, the scores and shooter list is reviewed in the home office to see that the match was shot by at least three Grand Masters. If this is the case, and the GM's appear to have done as well as expected, the final score of the match may be entered as a classification score for each shooter.

Tournaments, Sanctioned Matches, and club 'Specials' also may contain classification stages (those specifically a part of the classification system). Special classification matches are put on from time to time by the clubs with prior authorization from the home office, and may include up to three classification stages. All these stage scores are individually entered as classification scores for each of the shooters. The match director does, however, need to submit the classification report, which is generated by the EasyWin Score program.

If a member loses his classification by dropping USPSA membership or by not shooting enough classifiers to maintain classification (two scores per year are required) he may have his classification reinstated if the club president or section coordinator submits a request. These requests for 'classification by known ability' have to be signed by the club president or SC and must include proof of the previous class. A copy of a page from the quarterly classification book showing the classification or a copy of the shooter's previous classification card will be sufficient. The national office will review the request and the shooter will be notified in writing. If a request is not submitted, the shooter must begin again and accumulate the minimum of four qualified scores to regain a classification.

A classified shooter may also petition to go down in class for a good reason such as a permanent physical disability due to an accident. The written request must be sent to the National Office and has to have a letter from the club president or Section Coordinator endorsing the request. The shooter's scores on record are reviewed and if there are no current scores on record that indicate he should remain in the assigned class, he may be moved down.

Many shooters use the classification system as if it were a huge postal match. Their goal is to obtain an A card or Master card, and they can get discouraged when they find their percentage changing from time to time. As explained in the early paragraphs, the shooter's percentage will change if the top shooters force a recalculation of the maximum hit factor for a stage in the shooter's "top six of the most recent eight." It will also change if the shooter has a new score submitted which bumps an older one out of the most recent eight. This may cause a different 'top six' to be averaged, and thus the shooter's percentage changes. The USPSA classification system provides a grading of shooters so that they can compete against shooters of their own relative skill level. It adds to the fun and excitement of Practical Shooting; the greatest shooting sport going!

PRACTICE ROUTINES

This practice routine is similar to that recommended by J. Michael Plaxco in his book, Shooting From Within. Many shooters find it valuable. It is also instructive to keep a "Shooting Journal" of your efforts. Use a bound notebook so you won't lose the record of your trials and errors. Before the practice session, note your planned drills for that day. Afterwards, note any discoveries, thoughts about equipment and an appraisal of the session.

Tape the targets after each drill. Use the same targets for the entire practice session and check the tape patterns for consistency. You will want to shoot 90% A's! Tape patterns that are consistently low, high or off to one side may indicate the pistol is not sighted in correctly. Shots that are scattered beyond 90% A's indicate you are going too fast and not getting a proper sight picture followed by a compressed, surprise break.

Precision Drills

Two targets at 25 yards (move to 50 as skill improves). Paint a golf-ball-sized dot on one of the targets. Fire shots one at a time from the ready position. Try to be as accurate as possible. Fire six round groups at each target. Total of 12 rounds.

Precision Drills II

Two targets, 25 yards. Draw and fire one shot, six times at each target. This will show you if your draw is affecting group size. Use the same two targets as above, but tape over the painted dot. Total of 12 rounds.

Double Tap Drill

Two targets, 25 yards (may be varied from ten to 50 yards). Double tap drill. Draw and fire one round at one target, ten times. Then draw and fire 2 rounds at the other target, five times. Both targets should have similar groups. Double taps are two separate shots fired as quickly as accuracy permits. Total of 20 rounds.

Multiple target drill

Three targets at seven yards, space them one target width apart. Draw and fire one round at each target as quickly as accuracy permits (90% A's). Next, shoot each target twice alternating left to right, then right to left. Remember to work for 90% A's! Total of 15 rounds.

Bill Drills

One target at 7 yards. Draw and fire 6 rounds as fast as accuracy permits. Repeat 4 times. Bill Drills (named after their creator Bill Wilson) don't count unless they are all A's; 100%. These drills are done to learn recoil control and improve concentration over a long string of fire. Master Bill Drills are done in 2 seconds, but set your goal at whatever level you can maintain accuracy. Total of 24 rounds.

The total round count is 170 shots for this practice session. As you learn and develop skill, you will want to establish a pattern of disciplined practice. You will design drills to build one skill or another. Movement training, barricades, positions and multiple targets at various distances are all necessary. We highly recommend Mr. Plaxco's book for additional information about your training routine.

INSTRUCTOR QUALIFICATIONS

Instructors for the Safe Handgun Competitor program must be experienced shooters who are recommended by their club President or Section Coordinator. Only two instructors per club are allowed in order to maintain quality of instruction. The National Range Officer Institute (NROI) must also certify them Range Officers.

All qualified instructors are listed with NROI. For a list of currently qualified instructors, write USPSA/NROI, PO Box 811, Sedro Woolley, Washington, 98284



RECOMMENDED READING

Practical Shooting Handbook
US Practical Shooting Association
P.O. Box 811
Sedro Woolley W A 98284

Shooting from Within
J Michael Plaxco
1444 US Rt. 42, Rd. 11
Mansfield OH 44903

The Custom Government Model Pistol
Layne Simpson
Wolfe Publishing Company
6471 Airpark Drive
Prescott AZ 86301

Practical Shooting, Beyond Fundamentals
Brian Enos
Zediker Publishing
P.O. Box 1497
Oxford MS 38655

The Combat Auto
Bill Wilson Innovative Products
PO Box 609
Berryville AR 72616

ABOUT USPSA

Who We Are

The United States Practical Shooting Association (USPSA) is a non-profit corporation whose purpose is to promote Practical Shooting in the United States. It is the regional affiliate of the International Practical Shooting Confederation (IPSC). As a member of USPSA you become an 'IPSC Shooter' and may participate in practical matches in any of the over 45 countries.

There are over 400 affiliated clubs in the United States. Each of these clubs hosts Practical Shooting events that you may be able to participate in. To find a club in an area you might be traveling to, call or write the national headquarters anytime during normal business hours. An application for individual membership follows on the next page.

United States Practical Shooting Association
P.O. Box 811
Sedro Woolley, Washington, 98284

Phone: (360) 855-2245

Fax: (360) 855-0380

<http://www.uspsa.org/>

The National Range Officer Institute (NROI) is a part of USPSA, which provides range official certification through seminars hosted by affiliated clubs.

Benefits of Membership

FRONT SIGHT magazine is published every other month. It is a member-supported publication with articles of interest to Practical Shooters. Suppliers of all types of equipment advertise in FRONT SIGHT, making the magazine the only place to easily locate everything you need.

IN TOUCH is a newsletter sent to each US member alternating with FRONT SIGHT to keep you up to date and 'In Touch' with the USPSA Board of Directors.

A USPSA Handbook with the complete rules and fundamental information is provided to each member free.
USPSA/IPSC membership card and embroidered patch.

A National Classification card will be sent to you when you have four classification stages on record at the USPSA office. This will allow you to compete in Sectional or State Championships and larger Area Tournaments as a classified shooter. You will compete against shooters of your own relative skill for class trophies and prizes. Classes are also recognized at the National Championships.

Members are eligible for discounts on many shooting supplies and equipment for competitors.

You become eligible to attend seminars conducted by the National Range Officer Institute to become a certified Range Officer, Chief Range Officer or Range Master.

As a member, you may access the USPSA computer bulletin board to locate clubs, check your classification scores, keep in touch with USPSA officers and members, and share in hundreds of files and programs tailored for Practical Shooters.

You will lend your support to the only organization dedicated to the development of Practical Shooting in the United States.

The price of membership is less than a box of ammunition for most pistols.

Notes:

APPLICATION FOR INDIVIDUAL MEMBERSHIP
USPSA/IPSC

Name _____

Address _____

City, State Zip _____

I am applying for the following type of membership. If you are renewing, please note your USPSA number to avoid being given a new one:

USPSA Number _____ (leave blank if currently a member)

- | | | | |
|--------------------------------------|-------|---------------------------------------|--------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Annual | \$40 | <input type="checkbox"/> Foreign | \$50 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 3 Year U.S. | \$105 | <input type="checkbox"/> Foreign Life | \$600 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 5 Year U.S. | \$175 | <input type="checkbox"/> Benefactor | \$1000 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Life U.S. | \$500 | | |

Note: Life and higher may be paid in four equal installments over a one year period. Life member credentials will be issued on completion of payments.

VISA Mastercard Exp Date _____

Card Number: _____

I am a member of a USPSA-affiliated club: Yes No

If so, Club Name: _____

Club Location: _____

According to the legal requirements of the United States, I am able to purchase and possess firearms.

Signature _____

Daytime Phone number: _____

Mail to:
USPSA/IPSC
PO Box 811
Sedro Woolley Washington, 98284