

At Home Shotgun Drills

Before you practice any of these drills at home: 1) have your parents' permission first, and 2) always be sure your shotgun is unloaded before you start the drill.

Vision

- **Remember:** Because we spend a lot of time on computers, smart phones, and other devices, most of the time looking down, we neglect the parts of our eyes that are used when wing shooting. Exercising your eyes at home and as a warm up before practice can help improve your focus and ability to lock on and track a moving target.
- **Thumb Figure Eights Drill:** Form your hand into a fist, but with your thumb sticking out, pointing up. Extend your arm with your hand held above the shoulders (so that you are looking up), move your hand in a figure eight motion, focusing on your thumbnail; *move only your eyes*. You can also use a marker to make a dot on your thumbnail for something smaller to focus your eyes on. You should do this at home and as a warm up at practice before it is your turn to shoot; 1-3 minutes, several times a week.

It is also very important to shoot with both eyes open; your focus, ability to track the target and see it clearly, and your brain's ability to calculate lead will all be improved, plus you will have better balance and a wider field of view.

- **3 Bullet Drill:** Set three shotgun shells (three shell boxes, three soup cans, three of anything) 8 to 10 inches apart on a table. Standing 2-3 feet back, mount your shotgun so that it is pointing toward the right hand bullet while your eyes are looking at the center bullet; both eyes should be looking to the left hand side of the barrel to see the center bullet. Lower the shotgun, and then remount it so that it is pointing toward the left hand bullet while both eyes are looking at the center bullet; they should be looking over the top of the barrel to see the center bullet. Lower the shotgun and repeat, 3-5 minutes, several times a week.

Mount

- **Remember:** Having a correct and consistent mount are important parts of proper wing shooting technique that helps give you a solid starting point each time you move on a target. The head should stay erect, with the comb held against the cheek and the butt pressed into the shoulder. *Move the gun to your face; DO NOT move your face to the gun (this includes "nestling" into the comb).*
- **Mirror Mount Drill:** In front of a mirror, *slowly* mount the gun; focus more on doing the mount correctly, less on the speed. Move the gun to your cheek; the comb should come into contact with your cheek before the butt touches your shoulder. Now check the mirror: is the bead lined up directly over your dominant eye?* If not, move the shotgun, while keeping your head still, until the bead and dominant eye are lined up. Hold this mount for a count of 5 seconds, and then slowly lower the gun. Repeat for 2-3 minutes, several times a week.

*If the bead of the shotgun does not line up with pupil of the dominant eye, the *cast* and *comb height* may need to be adjusted for the firearm to attain consistent alignment when mounted. Thinking of the dominant eye as the back sight, *cast* is the left-to-right adjustment (windage) and *comb height* is the up-down adjustment (elevation). At a bare minimum, the shooter should be looking flat down the rib of the shotgun. *Cast* and *comb height* can be adjusting using several commercially available products or by employing services of a professional gun fitter.

Movement

- **Remember:** Correct movement involves moving the torso at the hips, with the arms locked in position after the gun has been mounted. However, many shooters will move the gun with their arms, pulling it out of the proper alignment they had when they mounted the gun.
- **Flashlight Drill:** You will need a Mini Mag Light for this drill; the AA flashlight for 12ga, and the AAA flashlight for 20ga. You may need to remove the choke from your shotgun and/or wrap the flashlight with electrical tape to ensure a good fit.

Focus the flashlight beam to the smallest setting. Without mounting the gun, hold the shotgun at the ready with both hands; place the light on the seam between a wall and the ceiling. Focus your eyes on the light; mount the shotgun *as you move the light* down the seam to the corner. *You should move from the hips to make the light move down the seam, not your arms.* When the light reaches the corner, the gun should be mounted correctly. Dismount the shotgun and return to your starting point at the midpoint of the wall. Now repeat the process, moving to the opposite corner. Repeat for 3-5 minutes, several times a week.

This drill simulates a “low gun” mount, where the shotgun moves to intercept the target and is mounted where at the target breakpoint (where the target is shot; in this case, the corner).

An added component of this drill is that it is also a practice for focusing on the target (the light) and not the gun. *Remember that our eyes can only focus on one thing at a time; if you focus on the gun you are more than likely going to miss the target.* Practice focusing on the light as you practice gun movement, seeing the barrel and the bead with your peripheral vision.

Mental Training

Below are several ways of preparing for practices and competitions mentally. It is important to keep a good attitude and think constructively about performances at practice and competitions, as well as learn to focus mentally and shut out distractions. Incorporating these suggestions into home and team practices can help prepare your mind for the stress of competition and for achieving the goals you have set for yourself.

- **Pre Shot Routine:** Developing a pre shot routine to help your mind focus and shut out distractions can help improve your ability to compete and shoot well under pressure. A pre shot routine varies from person to person and can be anything you want it to be; a word, a phrase, a verse, stretching, etc. It is up to you to decide on what will help to focus your mind on the task at hand; it is also up to you to practice getting your mind focused when you use your pre shot routine. When doing any of the at home drills, practice working your pre shot routine into them so that you are more accustomed to it when you go to live fire practices and competitions.
- **Shooter's Journal:** A shooter's journal is a tool used by Olympic shooters to help them record their progress and thoughts, from both practices and competitions. When using the journal, record your pre shot routine, the goals you have for this season, when and how long you practiced any of the home drills, what weather conditions were at practices and competitions, your scores, and your personal thoughts. It is important that entries in the journal are constructive and positive. *Reading over negative thoughts before a practice or competition will in turn cause you to think negatively; all too often, what we think becomes reality.* So get in the habit of viewing your practices and performances constructively and write these thoughts down in the journal.
- **Visualization:** When you are unable to physically practice, or right before you mount your shotgun and call for a target, get in the habit of visualizing yourself at competition. Throw in as many details as you can to make it life like; the weather, the sounds, the smells. Visualize yourself seeing the target emerge, its flight path, etc. See yourself using the correct technique, locking onto and busting the target. Even visualize the tiny pieces falling to the ground, or the target being turned to powder! Remember that what we think and feel have a direct impact on what we do, so visualize yourself positively, performing techniques correctly at practice or competitions, as part of your mental training.