

Teaching Shot Technique to New Shooters

By Gary Anderson, DCM

target. With a hooded front sight and ring insert in the sight, proper sight picture is obvious. Center the entire bulls-eye in the front sight ring. With a post front sight, position the top of the post at the bottom of the bulls-eye. With open sights and a front sight bead, position the bead over the bulls-eye.

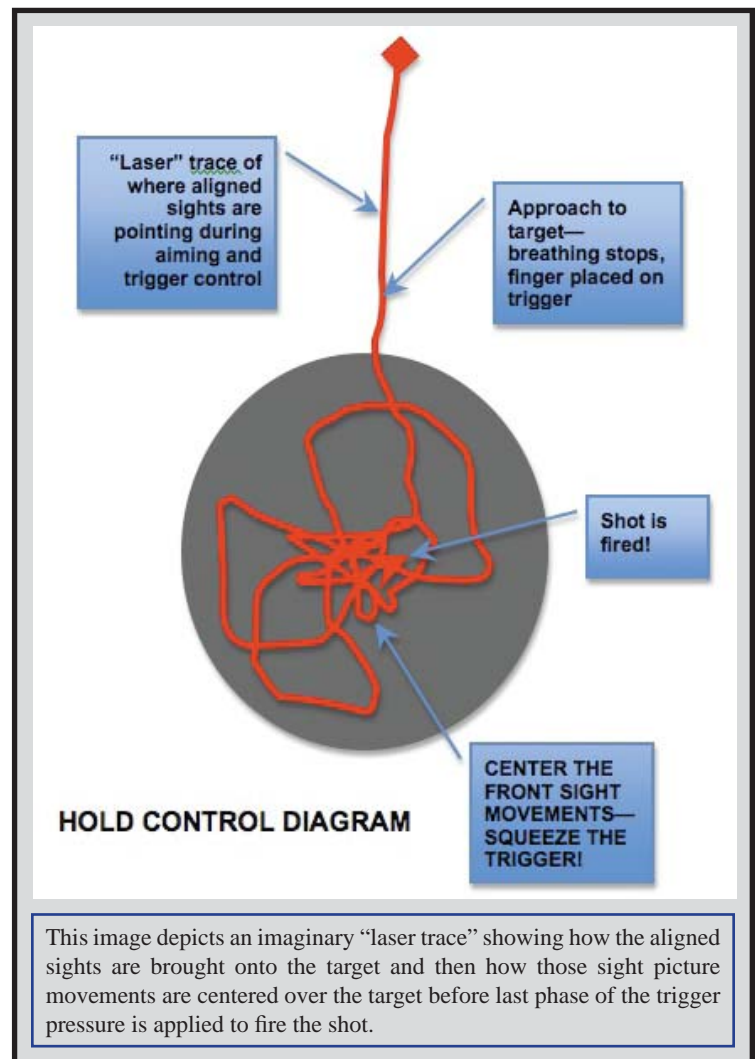
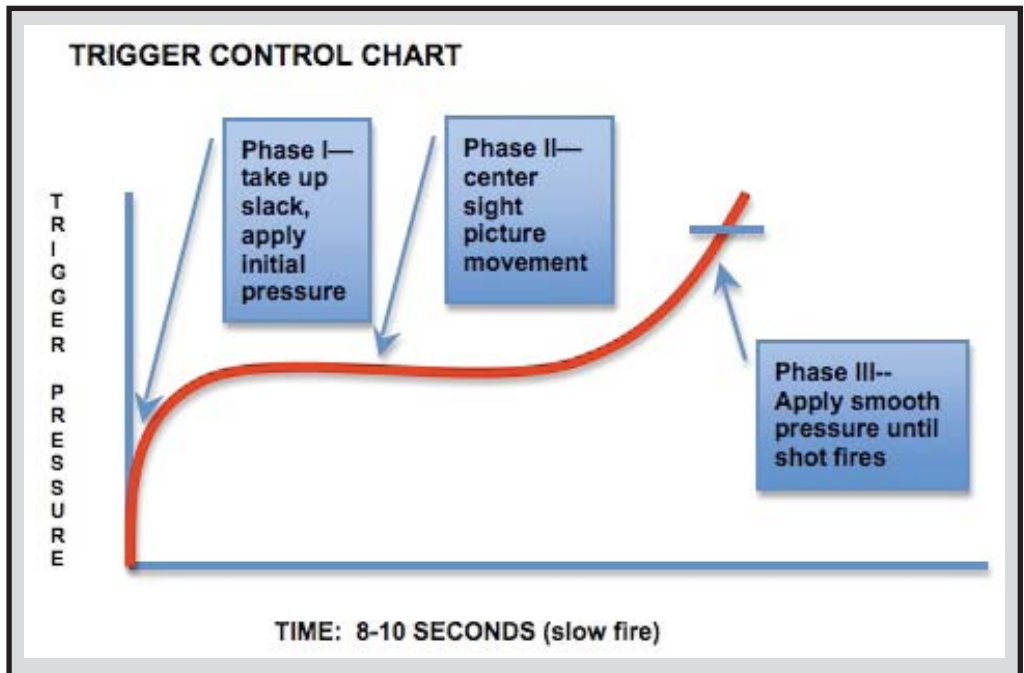
4. **TRIGGER CONTROL.** Good trigger control is to smoothly release the trigger while the aligned sights remain pointed at the center of the target. Proper trigger control actually occurs in three phases that are illustrated in the "Trigger Control Chart" and that smoothly flow from one to the next.

a. **First Stage Pressure.** This first phase must take place at the same time breathing stops and the aligned sights start to point at the target. Move the finger onto the trigger to take up the slack or first stage, if the trigger is a two-stage trigger, or to apply some positive pressure to the trigger, if the trigger is a single stage trigger.

b. **Hold Control.** In the second phase of trigger control, the sight picture must be perfected while keeping pressure on the trigger. New shooters naturally will see quite a bit of front sight movement over the target while they try to do this. The key is to center these front sight movements. The Hold Control Diagram shows what a "laser trace" of where a rifle is pointing on the target would look like as it follows the aligned sights onto the target and then shows a shooter's hold movements that are large at first and then settle down before the shot is fired. Hold control for new shooters is simply centering the movements of the aligned sights over the target. Learning to relax while doing this will greatly aid the development of a steady hold.

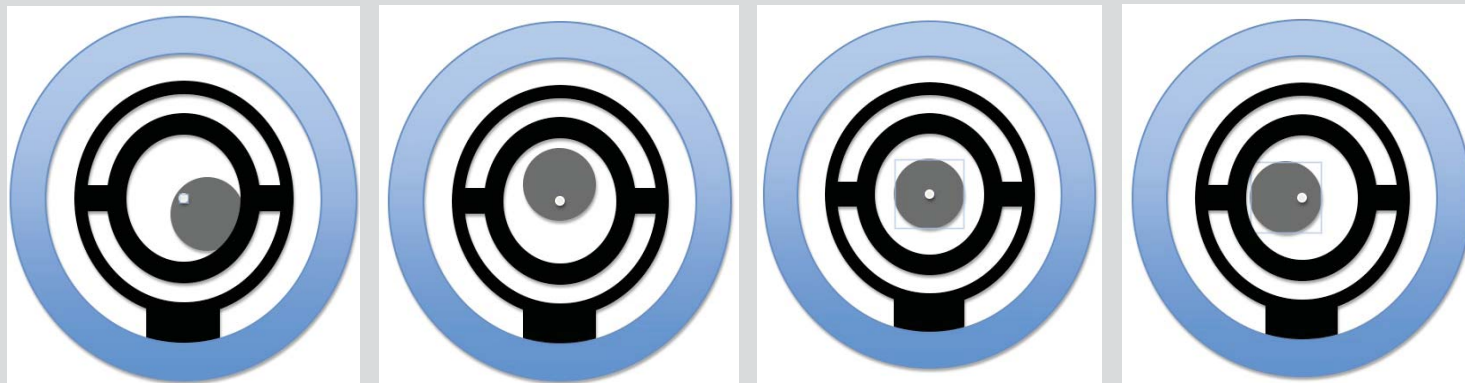
c. **Final Pressure.** The third phase of trigger control begins when the sight picture movements are centered. Then, as long as the sight picture movements remain centered, smooth pressure is applied to the trigger until the shot fires. New shooters should think in terms of taking two to three seconds to apply this final stage of trigger pressure.

5. **FOLLOW-THROUGH.** The last fundamental of shot technique is follow-through. This means continuing to focus on the sight picture and maintaining pressure



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Calling the Shot and Following Through. Here are graphic examples of the mental snapshots or shot calls that shooters should make when they fire a shot. The shooter who fired these shots should be able to say that shot #1 was high-left, shot #2 was low, shot #3 was centered and shot #4 was right.

on the trigger until after the shot is out of the barrel. New shooters must be aware that there is a fraction of a second delay between when the trigger releases and when the projectile leaves the barrel. Closing an eye or starting to move the head from the stock too soon will cause a bad shot. The best way to ensure proper follow-through is to try to form a mental snapshot of the sight picture just as the shot fires. That mental snapshot of the sight picture at the moment of the shot is referred to as “calling the shot.” For a new shooter, staying with the sight picture until you can form that mental picture and see the rifle start to recoil is a good way to ensure that you are actually following through. Later you will learn that accurately calling the shot is the foundation of the analysis process that leads to the next shot.

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

To prepare new shooters to fire their first shots at targets, start with brief instruction on these five fundamentals of firing the shot. With the aid of graphic illustrations or diagrams, these five fundamentals can be covered in 15-20 minutes. This is because much of what the new shooter is expected to do to fire a shot is intuitive. For example, when someone who has never shot before first looks through the rear sight aperture, it does not really take any instruction to understand that they should see the front sight in the center of that opening. Even breathing is semi-instinctive. A new shooter will quickly realize that breathing moves the front sight a lot and that holding the rifle steady is easier if they stop breathing momentarily.

It is vitally important that instruction on shot technique, like the initial instruction for a firing position, be kept simple. Teach only the details that are absolutely necessary to fire accurate shots. Those essential details are covered in the descriptions of shot technique fundamentals in this article.

Finally, it is a good idea to put new shooters on the line and have them get into a firing position for a dry fire session where they can practice putting the instruction in these fundamentals all together before doing any live fire shooting. To put all five fundamentals together in good shot technique, go through this step-by-step sequential process:

Close the action to simulate loading.

1. Shoulder the rifle.
2. Lower the head to the cheek-piece to see through the rear aperture and align the sights.
3. Bring the aligned sights onto the target while continuing to breathe.
4. When the sights are on the target, simultaneously exhale and stop breathing, move the trigger finger onto the trigger and take up the slack/first stage to apply initial pressure on the trigger.
5. Focus on the front sight-- relax and center the front sight movements over the target or aiming point.
6. With the sight picture movements centered, apply smooth pressure on the trigger until the rifle fires.
7. Keep attention on the sight picture to form a mental snapshot of where the sights were pointed when the shot fires.

After some dry fire practice of this sequence, new shooters will be ready to fire live fire shots at the target—and will most likely exceed their expectations regarding how well they can shoot.



New shooters should focus on the front sight as they center front sight movements over the target before adding final pressure to the trigger. (Photo: Gary Anderson)