

Courses of Fire

Remember, it's not what you did once, but what you can do on demand that counts.



For 99+% of the shooters out there, what they really need from their SHOOTING training is to master the fundamentals. Master. Not acquire. Not practice. Not reinforce. Master.

This requires a great deal of work, ongoing practice, and instruction from someone that knows how to teach the fundamentals. Why do I say 99+%? Because I think less than 1% of shooters ever get to the point of mastering the fundamentals. Anyone that thinks you have to have a spec ops background to teach fundamentals is clueless. I wouldn't want to have him teach me. I don't even want him beside me on the firing line.

Now, there are a lot of other things besides shooting that one must learn if one is serious about self defense. Once one gets to the point that one can execute the fundamentals reflexively (this is a significantly lower level than mastery), working on other gun related skills may be worthwhile. Some of those skills may be most used by different parts of the community, and they MAY be better taught by different parts of the community... but truthfully, I've found teaching skill to be a rarer commodity than any tactical skill.

The question often arises among shooters, "Just how good are you?" While lots of folks *claim* to be great shots there are several courses of fire for the rifle, pistol, and shotgun that can give a pretty good indication of the shooter's overall skill level with their arms. These are general skill tests that are applicable to both the hunter and the defensive shooter (They are also fun to shoot for practice too.) While *almost* anyone can shoot well off of a bench, there are few benches out in the wild. Anyone who does well on any of these courses on two different days without any warm ups or sighters probably has a pretty good grasp of what their firearm is all about. The par times/scores listed are for people in normal good physical condition. If you can do it faster, fine. Someone suffering from

"mature body syndrome" or other disability may not be able to make the times purely for physical reasons so ***remember that hits, as quickly as one can make them, are what counts***. I'm indebted to the Gunsite Alumni Email Group for suggesting these courses.

While steel reactive targets are expensive to set up they are extremely useful with rifle courses and are well worth the effort and expense. Even if locked in position they give a very clear indication of whether they have been hit or not. The Gunsite "clanger" is particularly nifty as it can be set up in a horizontal or vertical position.

There are also several different paper silhouette targets available commercially including the IDPA and IPSC targets. However, the original IPSC "option" target with its 10" and 8" center rings is easily made locally from sheet cardboard and it's design lends itself especially well to the basic training scenario. Just remember that the scoring rings should not be visible to the shooter. [Click here](#) for some target information.

One doesn't need a zillion dollar tack driver to excel on these courses. I've seen them cleaned by folks using stock M94 Winchesters, old surplus military rifles with open sights, and stock GI M1911s and S&W M19s.

Things to remember. Sight picture, trigger control, good solid position, and breathing. Aim small, miss small!

And, lest you think that "training" will give you all the skills you need, remember that ...

- Paper and steel don't bleed.
- Paper and steel don't startle and run away if you are inept.
- Paper and steel don't attack and kill you when only wounded and you stand down too soon.
- Paper and steel are USUALLY set mostly directly in front of you with areas around them that you don't need to keep aware of.

The two classic rifle tests are the Rifle Ten and the Rifle Bounce. When either is combined with a snap shot drill they constitute a pretty complete test of one's skill. With these courses, unless indicated otherwise, the shooter starts with the rifle loaded and slung on the shoulder or at port arms, with the bipod, if any, closed.

Rifle Ten

This is one of the classic drills used by Jeff Cooper. A single IPSC "option" target is placed at 300 yards. There are five firing points, one each at 300, 275, 250, 225, and 200. The shooter stands clear of his firing point at 300 yards.

On signal the shooter moves to the firing point, assumes any position he chooses and engages the 300 yard target with two rounds. He immediately moves to the 275 yard position firing two more shots, then advances to the 250 yard position, fires two more rounds, and then to the 225 yard position where a 2 foot high baffle precludes prone or supine position and fires two more rounds. He

the moves to the 200 yard position where a 3 foot high screen eliminates any position but off hand or standing and fires two rounds.

Score is based upon the hit values divide by your time in minutes, with a par time of 2 minutes. To prevent someone throwing away the two 200 yard shots you can use a separate target for the 200 yard stage. The option target is scored 5, 4, 2. A score of 40 in two minutes is considered *very good*.

Snap Shot Test

Target used is the IPSC "option" target at 25 yards. Shooter stands ready in condition 1, with butt on hip and is allowed 1.5 seconds to make a head shot. This is repeated for a total of 5 shots. Shooter then moves back to 50 yards where the exercise is repeated with the same time limits but this time shooting for the center of mass 10" ring. You can also try this at 100 yards allowing 2 seconds. Misses score -10.

Rifle Bounce

This course is best run using steel reactive targets like the "pepper popper" with a 8" center. The shooter is limited to firing a total of 6 rounds.

Three firing points are set up side by side about between 2 and 3 yards apart, with the targets placed at 100, 200, and 300 yards. The shooter starts at the first firing point and on signal engages the 100 yard target until it is knocked down. He then moves to the 200 yard firing point and engages the target until it is knocked down, and then moves to the 300 yard position and engages the target until it is knocked down. Any shooting positions may be utilized (or alternatively a different position may be required at each firing point), but the shooter is limited to firing *only* 6 rounds total. The score is the time it takes to hit all 3 targets. If all three targets are not hit, no score is given. An excellent score is all hits in 20 seconds or less with the current record being about 11 seconds.

The Plate Test

Here is a quick and easy to run test. As with all these tests it should be run cold, that is no sighters, and no warm-up. Just load and start shooting.

Put a 10" paper plate (if you have access to a 10" steel plate that's even better) at 100 yards. Start from standing with the rifle in "Condition 1" and slung. On signal fire 10 rounds from any position at the paper plate. Time limit is 2 minutes. For rifles with a magazine capacity of over 5 rounds only load 5 initially.

For every miss the shooter has to give your tester a dollar. (Incentive not to miss!) A variation is to use 2 paper plates, one at 100 yards and one at 200 yards. Fire 5 rounds at 100 yards and the 5 rounds at 200 yards, in the same 2 minute time limit.

Scoring goes like this

1 to 2 hits - Have your eyes, ammo and gun checked; in that order.

3 to 4 hits - You need more time at the range.

5 to 6 hits - You're an average shooter but keep trying.

7 to 8 hits - You're better than most.

9 to 10 hits - You've been to a "270" haven't you?

For the real braggarts in your group place the paper plate at 300 yards. Have the shooter stand with the rifle in "Condition 1." and slung. On signal have them engage the paper plate from any position with 1 shot. Time limit is 7 seconds. If the shooter misses, lunch is on him.

For those of you who are wondering, "270" is the designation for the Gunsite Basic Rifle Course.

Pistol Courses

The shooter starts with the pistol holstered, with hands hanging loosely at their sides-- no "cocked" starts. The original course of fire specified "discrete" carry. (That's "concealed" for you folks.)

El Presidente

The El Presidente is probably the classic test of pistol skill. While the speed loading requirement can be faulted, anyone who does well on it is probably a pretty good handgunner.

Three IPSC "option" targets are placed 3 feet apart, 7 to 10 yards from the shooter. The shooter starts with his back to the targets and on signal, pivots and engages each target twice, reloads, and engages each target two more times. Score is hit value minus 10 points per miss, divided by the time in seconds. Par time is 10 seconds with all center hits.

For a very useful modification try replacing the second set of pairs (after the reload) with single head shots to emphasize precision using the same time frame for par.

Dozier Drill

This is best run with steel reactive targets. Five targets are placed in front of the firing position at ranges from 7 to 15 yards. Shooter starts with back to targets and on signal engages each target. Score is 5 points for each target knocked down, -10 points for any missed target, divided by the time in seconds. Par time is about 5 seconds.

A useful modification is to have a sixth target at 50 yards and require a tactical reload behind cover before engaging it.

The Way-Out

This is best run with steel reactive targets. Two targets are used, one at 15 yards and 1 at 100 yards. On signal draw and fire two rounds at the 15 yard target and then engage the 100 yard target with two rounds from any position. I don't have a par time for this but in my "young and foolish (and limber)" days I cleaned it in about 7.5 seconds.

The Cooper Drills

These drills were related in Jeff's "C Stories" as what he believes a good pistol shot should be able to do. All hits must be in the "5" zone of the target. All stages shot from a condition of discrete carry.

7 yards - 1 target. Draw and fire 1 round (1 sec) Repeat 5 times.

10 yards - 3 targets. Facing away from the targets, pivot, draw, and fire 1 round on each target. (3 seconds). Repeat for a total of six rounds.

50 yards - 1 target. Draw and fire 1 round. (3 seconds) Repeat 5 times.

As an alternative, shoot each stage only once on a given day, and shoot it on 3 different days--cold. No practice allowed.

Cooper Cup

Shot on Gunsite Option target.

3 yards, 1 head shot primary target, 1.0 secs, x5

7 yards, 1 head shot primary target, 1.5 secs, x5

10 yards, 2 COM shots primary target, 2.0 secs, x5

15 yards, 2 COM primary target-reload-2 COM secondary target, 6 secs, x3

25 yards, 2 COM primary target, 4.0 secs, x4

Simplified Marksmanship Index (By Jim Higginbotham)

Quantifying the balance of Accuracy, Power and Speed. As you likely know, defensive marksmanship consists of an equal balance of Accuracy, Speed and Power (no one is more important than the other). While not perfect, most people simply will not go to the range and perform complex drills. This simple test is offered as an easy to perform measure of marksmanship skill. You will need a piece of typing paper, a timer (or friend with a stopwatch) and a good estimate of the bullet weight and velocity, in your gun, of the load(s) you are shooting.

Target

A sheet of typing paper with a 4.2" X 5.5" center zone (note this is the size of a piece of 8.5 X 11" paper folded vertically then horizontally).

Range

5 yards standard (all ranges may be used and are scored automatically).

Procedure

Point in on the target and fire 5 rounds as fast as you can hit. Time first to last shot. (if you are using an electronic timer, "interview" the timer and subtract the first shot from the last, giving the total time for the shots). If a friend is using a stopwatch have him start the time on your first shot and stop on your last (his reaction time should equal out being probably ¼ second late on both – however this is far less accurate than a timer). Score

each hit in the center zone 8 and outside but on the paper 4 Pt., each miss is -10, Total the points (40 is possible).

Scoring

Total Points X Range (in yards) / Time X Power Factor*.

Example: 9mm Win. S.T., 40 points in 2 seconds = 73, same points in 1.5 seconds =97.3

(the Power Factor is figured in this example as 132/180 or .73)*

Ratings

This index is primarily meant for the user to compare different firearms/loads under identical circumstances. However as a rudimentary skills test one can say that a score of 100 is very good. At the same time a score of 50 is not terrible and scores much higher can be achieved.

* - Jim modified this test to allow the shooter to use whatever version of power comparison he chooses. If one believes that all calibers are equal then a factor of 1 is used and the score stands as it is calculated above. Not many people believe that a .22 is as effective as a .44 magnum so there should probably be some factoring. Simply choose the scale you wish (IPSC Power Factor, Taylor TKO, Hatcher RSP, Marshall "One Shot Stop %", etc. Divide the rating of the cartridge under test by that of the .357 magnum 125 gr. JHP from a 4" barrel and you have the Power Factor.

San Bernadino Drill

3 Targets with 2 spaced 1 foot apart and one 4 ft off to the side. Requirement is 2 A zone hits on the pair and a body hit on the third target. Two stages. One at 5 yards and the second at 25 yards. Time limits 2 seconds at 5 yards, 3 seconds at 25

Shotgun Courses

Dozier Drill

This is best run with steel reactive targets. 5 targets are placed in front of the firing position at ranges from 7 to 15 yards. On signal the shooter engages each target with buckshot. Score is 5 points for each target knocked down, -10 points for any missed target, divided by the time in seconds. Par time is about 5 - 6 seconds

A useful modification is to have a sixth target at 50 - 75 yards and require a "select slug" drill to hit it.

If you combine this with a round of skeet you'll have a pretty good index of overall skill.

Quick and Dirty

If you don't have the time or inclination to set up the above courses of fire try this really quick test. Use a standard paper plate (nominally 10"). For rifle set it up at 100 yards or preferably 200 yards, for pistol use 25 yards, and for shotgun use 50 yards and use slugs. Use five rounds of ammunition with no warm up or sighters.

For rifle allow a maximum of 5 seconds for each shot shot from any position starting from standing at "port arms."

For pistol allow 2.5 second per shot starting from a holstered condition.

For shotgun allow 2 seconds per shot

If there are no misses the shooter is pretty good. If even one miss they buy you lunch.

The Gunsite "Clanger"



Gunsite "clanger" (front)
Main piece is about 14" x 24" and
the hole is 6"



Gunsite "clanger" (rear)
