

How to Shoot a Pistol Accurately [Ultimate Guide]

Shooting pistols accurately is hard! So, buff up on basics, easy exercises at home, range tips, and gear. Next time you hit the range you'll see all bullseyes.

BY [Eric Hung](#) , Updated June 21, 2021 [106 Comments](#)

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Want to shoot better? Don't we all!

Well, you've come to the right place. We've all been shooting awhile here at Pew Pew Tactical so we have a pretty good grasp on what to do (and not to do).

Today, we're going to help you improve your shots!

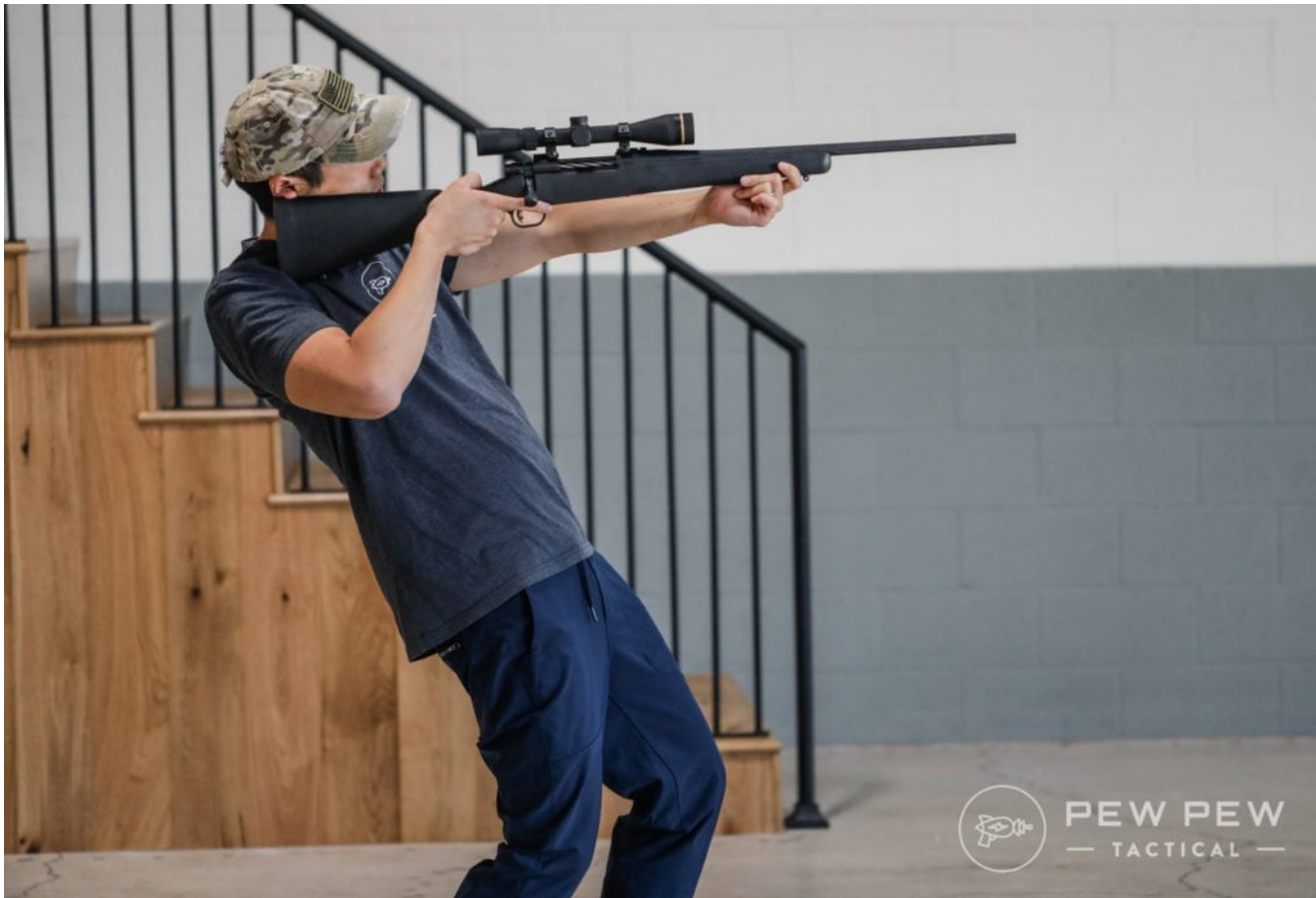


We love to shoot!

Learn how to shoot more accurately with your pistol/handgun through:

- Review of fundamentals
- Easy to do exercises at home
- Proper range practice tips
- Helpful gear

All with tons of pictures and videos. Some of which will include what **NOT** to do.



Yeah, don't do that.

We also cover everything in our video [Beginner Handgun Course](#)...perfect if you're completely new or have no formal training and want more hand-holding.

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Introduction

If you're here, you probably realize that...shooting pistols is actually **pretty hard!**

At the beginning of my shooting experience, I had a lot of sympathy with the Stormtroopers missing everything too. At least they had the excuse of a stressful situation!



Yes, I know they shot blasters

Now I'm not some professional competitive shooter or instructor, but take that as a **positive**...I still remember how it felt when I couldn't hit anything and the differences each tip/exercise made in my development.

It's going to take you a while, but let's get started in making you a more accurate pistol shot beginning with fundamentals.

Shooting Stance

Some of you might scoff at the idea that how you stand has anything to do with how you shoot.

But think of it as the foundation of everything.

If you have a wobbly base, chances are it doesn't take much to mess up whatever is on top. And loud explosions and recoil have a way of messing stuff up.



Did we mention...don't do this!

The main thing is to have a stable/comfortable stance that tilts you a little forward to manage recoil. Don't worry if you've done that newbie lean (back), we've all been there.

Now's the time to correct it, though!

If you want to get more technical, there are the three main types of stances: Isosceles, Weaver, and Modified Weaver (Chapman).



sosceles Shooting Stance, Front

These are just variations on foot placement and which arm is flexed a little more. But take a look the picture below and see just how stable I look. Also, notice the slight lean **forward**.



Isosceles Shooting Stance, Side

Can you guess why it's call Isosceles?? Thanks high school trigonometry class!



Isosceles Shooting Stance, Top

My favorite (Chapman) is geared towards right handed but left-eye dominant shooters.



Chapman Shooting Stance, Side

Ultimately, choose what feels most comfortable for you...but I go through all three stances more in-depth in our [Stances article](#).

Handgun Grip

The first piece of advice I received about handgun grip was from the salesman at my local gun shop. He asked me to grip his hand with the same strength I planned on griping my future 1911.

I gave him a nice firm handshake while he proceeded to **crush** my hand.

A dick move, but a great lesson.



Handgun Grip

I'm now an advocate of gripping as hard as you can — but not so much that you have tremors. I've found that a crushing grip on the gun reduces the movement of your non-trigger-fingers, which is a good thing.

And how you **hold** the gun also has a huge effect on your accuracy.

You want the web between your trigger finger and thumb to rest as high as possible on the grip. This helps contain the recoil of the slide moving back and forth.



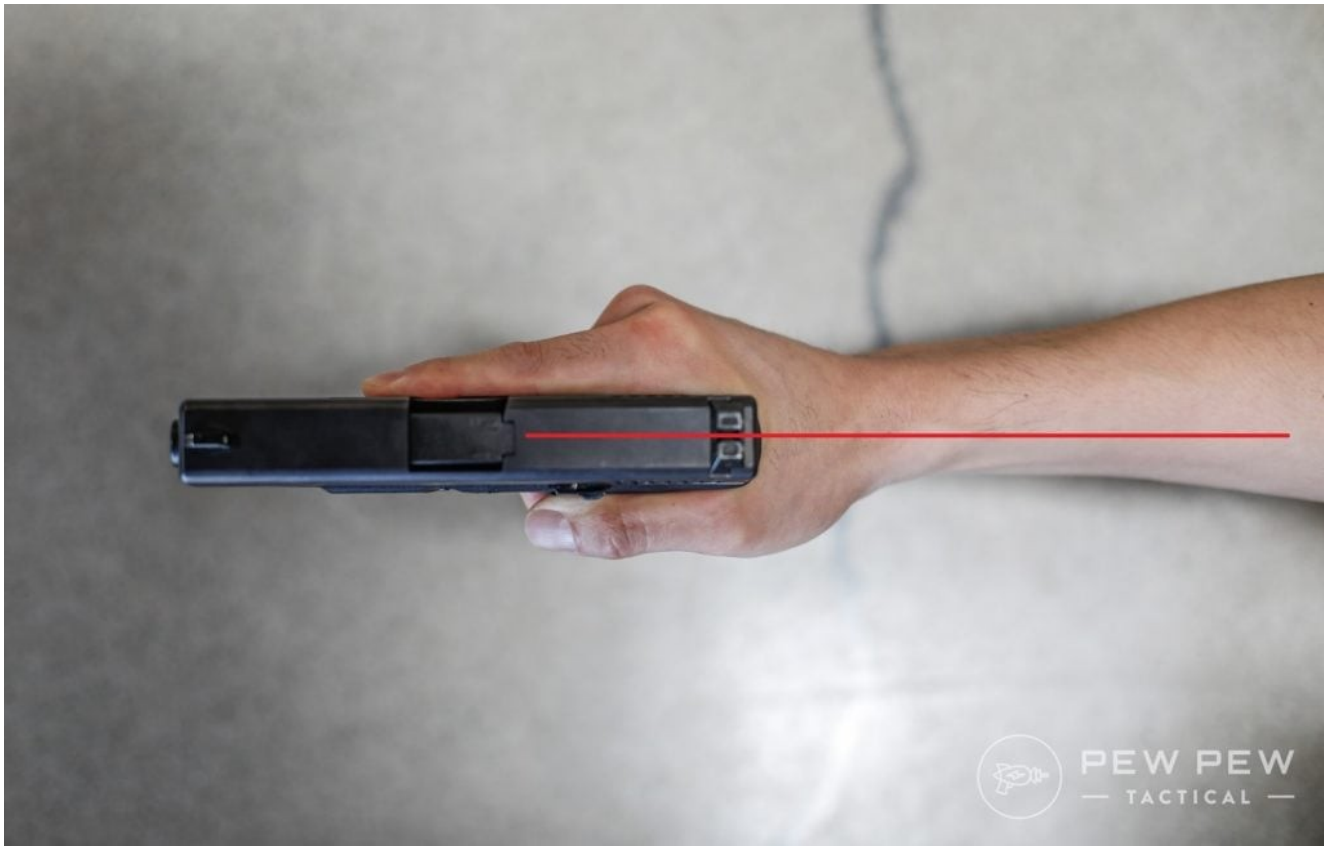
Handgun Low Grip

A low grip would cause the gun to do a lot more flipping. So, you'll want to almost jam your hand/web into the backstrap to get a high grip.



Handgun High Grip

And because there's this piece of metal moving back and forth, you want your forearm in line with the gun to absorb more recoil.



Handgun and Wrist Alignment

You'll be tempted to first hold it at a slight angle since it feels more natural...but resist!



Incorrect Handgun and Wrist Alignment

Now that you've got your shooting hand grip correct, let's take a look at the empty space for your non-dominant hand.



Handgun Grip Empty Left Side

You want to fill it completely up with the other hand so you maximize grip. I like to double-check by making sure there's a 45-degree angle between my left hand and the handgun slide.



Handgun Grip Wrist Angle

Thumb placement of your dominant hand is personal preference.



Handgun Grip, Thumb Up

You'll see both up in the air or pointed towards the target.



Handgun Grip, Thumb Down

Experiment to see what you like or just go with what feels more natural. The non-dominant thumb will run along the frame.

If you're [running a 1911](#) or something else with a manual safety...



STI Trojan 1911, Safety Disengaged

I like to rest my right thumb on it, since it was already there when I disengaged the safety.



Handgun Grip, 1911 Safety Shelf

And although it might feel a little weird at first, I like to set my wrist at an angle when I punch out both my arms.

This keeps everything steady and helps prevent [limp wristing](#) — floppy wrists that don't allow proper ejection and loading of the next round.



Handgun Grip Set Wrist

Want to learn more about grip? We cover revolvers and semi-auto grips in more detail in [How to Grip a Pistol](#).

Sight Picture

You've probably heard it before...focus on the front sight!

Well, it really does help. In the beginning, I squinted hard and struggled to focus with just one eye open on the target.



Glock Night Sights View

BONUS: Shoot better. [Download our exclusive shooting targets for FREE \(\\$47 value\)](#)

Remember that you want to match the **top of the front sight** with the **top of the rear sight**.

The top and middle of the front post is where your rounds should end up...not the actual front dot.

Same for **fiber optic sights**...



Fiber Optic Sights View

And more standard iron sights.



Revolver Ramp Sights View

I've found it immensely helpful to keep both eyes open.

It will be very difficult at first depending on how long you've been shooting with one eye open. But once you master it, it makes everything so much faster with less eye fatigue.

And now you get more situational awareness.

First thing is to figure out which eye is dominant.

If you're like me, you'll be seeing some double-vision because both eyes are open.

I've found adjusting your sights closer to your dominant eye (left to right, not closing the distance to your face) makes it a lot easier to figure out which image to use.



Weaver Shooting Stance, Side

This might be just a little shift if you're using Isosceles, or it might already be perfect with Weaver.

Since I'm left-eye dominant but right-hand dominant, I like the Chapman stance as it puts the sights more in line with my left eye.



Chapman Shooting Stance, Side

Trigger Pull

Might be the most important part of everything, and what dry-firing practice is all about below.

The best advice is to **squeeze** super slowly that you're almost **surprised** when the shot breaks.

You're not yanking on it since that will result in jerking the trigger and sending the shot off. The **slower** you pull the **better** your shot will be.

How about where to [place your trigger finger?](#)



Trigger Finger Position

It's a **personal preference** and something to do with your finger length too. But I would suggest somewhere between the top quarter of your fingertip to before the first joint crease.

Keep in mind that the ideal pull would be completely straight back with nothing else moving except the first two joints of your trigger finger. Take a look at your gun and fingers to see what looks/feels the best.

I find that I shoot better when I'm closer to the first joint. This length gives me good leverage and isolates the third section of my trigger finger (closest to hand) so only the first two joints are moving.

Less is more here!

Breathing

One thing I always forget to do when I'm shooting.

Holding in your breath messes you up after a while and so I just try to breath naturally.



Precision Shooting

You're pistol shooting, not sniping 1,000-yards, so you don't have to plan your breaths (and heartbeats).

Trigger Reset

An easy mistake is to immediately lift your finger off the trigger after each shot and look at the target.

But trust me, the hole will always be there so **take your time**.

Whenever you lift your finger off quickly, you're likely shooting too fast and jerking the trigger, or introducing excess movement to the gun.

You're also making it harder for yourself the next shot since you'll have to pull the first part of the trigger again (also known as the slack).

Proper trigger reset is:

- Holding the trigger all the way at the end until after the shot breaks.
- Releasing it only until the point it resets (you'll feel or hear the click).
- If you're firing again, start at the reset point — not all the way at the beginning of the trigger pull.

Dry-Firing Practice

What is Dry Firing?

Dry firing is pulling the trigger on a cocked gun and allowing the hammer/striker to drop on an empty chamber or dummy round.

It's probably the most effective way of improving pistol accuracy. And you can [do it at home!](#)

Is Dry Firing Safe for My Gun?

If your handgun/pistol shoots [centerfire](#) rounds (9mm, .40 S&W, .45 ACP, etc) instead of rimfire rounds (such as .22 LR), then you can dry fire all you want since the firing pin is not actually hitting anything.

Rimfire firing pins hit the mouth of the chamber when there's no cartridge, so you should practice with [snap caps](#) that take the hit.



Various Snap Caps

Still...my advice is to consult your owner's manual to double-check.

There are a lot of snap caps and dummy rounds on the market, so be sure to take a look at the [Best Dummy Rounds & Snap Caps For Dry-Fire Practice!](#)

Why Dry Firing?

The main point of dry fire practice is to **develop muscle memory** so you consistently produce an awesome trigger pull and don't flinch when it's time for real shooting.

And if you've developed some bad habits along the way, it does a great job of **rewiring** you back over time.

At least for me, I find that after a week or two of dry firing a few minutes a day, I become "one" with my trigger and grip.



The One

My grip just feels right, and I can sense all the little nuances in the trigger pull. And when I focus on the front sight and pull the trigger, the front sight stays super steady.

It takes a lot of practice (and perfect practice) to reach that point. And it's a diminishing skill that needs to be kept up to date too. Even after just a few days of not practicing, I can feel some differences the next time I dry fire or shoot.

Best Way to Dry Fire

First, always make sure your gun is unloaded and follow the [4 Rules of Safety](#).

- Guns are always loaded (treat them as such and don't have live ammo in the room).
- Never let the muzzle cover anything you don't want to destroy (point it in a safe direction).
- Keep your fingers off the trigger until you're ready to shoot.
- Be aware of your target and what is beyond.

I **always** check if my gun is empty every time I pick it up — even if it's between strings of dry firing. It just gets you into a good habit.

I also like to set up targets or at least small things that are safe to "shoot," as a light switch or doorknob.

I focus on the front sight (both eyes!) and remember to **squeeze** so slowly that I'm surprised when the gun clicks.



Fiber Optic Sights View

I sometimes actually say “squeeze” out loud to make sure I do it. Once you can do it slowly, you can speed it up a little, as long as the front sight still doesn’t move.

One great way, in the beginning, to make sure the sight doesn’t move is to physically place a small coin on top of the front sight during your exercise. If it doesn’t fall off, you’re probably doing a **great job**.



Dry-Firing with a Coin

Finally, remember to practice both **full trigger pulls** (with the slack) and trigger reset pulls. To do a trigger reset pull, leave your trigger finger depressed at the end of the first shot, and rack your slide with your non-dominant hand.

For some guns you don't have to **rack it all the way back**, sometimes just a half-inch or so is enough. Get back into your two-handed grip, let the trigger reset (listen for the click), and shoot.



Slide Rack

For the longest time, I only practiced full trigger pulls and got great at those. But, when I had follow-up shots, I started jerking the trigger. You'll likely be firing both ways so be prepared for anything!

Check out more in our [Safe & Effective Dry-Fire Training](#) article.

Range Practice

Too much range practice, in the beginning, is sometimes detrimental. That's because you haven't built up good muscle memory. Instead, you build up a **flinch reaction**.

Don't worry if that's you...with some quality [dry firing at home](#) you can overcome it.



Angeles Shooting Range Stations

I like to always have some dry firing sessions at home in between range days. And when I get to the range, I always dry fire **a couple of shots** before loading up real ammo.

I start off at short distances since there might be a lot of effects that come into play at 25-yards (wind, ammo, etc) but it's all me at 3- to 5-yards.

To learn more about zones and what shooting at different distances does in a defensive situation, check out the Brownells Daily Defense video below.

Sometimes if it's a new gun or if I'm doing really poorly, I'll start shooting with a supported position first to get some confidence and set a baseline accuracy.

You can do this by sitting down and placing your elbows on the bench, or leaning into the counter.



table helps stabilize you.

I also found this graphic to be immensely helpful in diagnosing my shooting errors.



Shooting Diagnostic

Have a target, shoot a couple shots at it, and see where they land in relation to the chart.

If you're a lefty, you will have to mirror image the findings. And if there's no overt grouping (your shots are all over the place), it's likely your grip is not consistent.

I usually start off pretty strong and as I get more comfortable I forget some of my lessons, such as remembering to squeeze. That's when I start telling myself "squeeze" every shot again.

Lastly, there's a great drill to run once in a while if you have a buddy. Have them help you load a magazine with both live ammo and snap caps, so you don't know what's next in your stack.



Walther P1 Mag with Snap Caps

The point is to see if you have a natural flinch during shooting which will show up when you reach the snap caps. It's a great visual moment to see how you actually deal with the recoil.

It's one thing to be dry firing and shoot perfectly, but another once real recoil is entered into the equation. My own natural flinch was a pretty pronounced pull-down and to the left.



Practice makes perfect!

Check out our article on some of the [best range training drills](#).

Shooting Gear

Here are some shooting gear and accessories that I've found to help me become a better pistol shot.

Snap Caps: Essential if you're shooting rimfire such as .22LR, but also great for other calibers if you want to work on reloads in the future, or do the drill I just mentioned above.



Used Pistol Snap Caps

Laserlyte: Awesome tool to visually see where your shots hit. It's a device that fits into your handgun as a dummy round but shoots a laser when the firing pin hits it. Pair it with randomized **targets** that detect the lasers to work on target transitions and future competitive shooting moves.



Laser Training Targets

It's also a great tool for getting non-shooters interested in going with you to the range! Kind of expensive but think of all the ammo you'll save.

Find our complete roundup of the best [Laser Cartridges and Targets](#).

Shoot N' C: Sticker targets you can put on paper targets at the range which show a splash of color whenever you hit it.



PSA .223 Wylde Accuracy

Makes it much easier to figure out where you're shooting when the target is farther out.

Talon Grips: Essentially sandpaper/rubber stickers that are cut for your specific gun. Drastically increases the amount of grip on your gun.



Glock 19 with Light and Talon Grip

Or you can be really obsessed about grip like me and just [stipple](#) your polymer gun.

Dry Fire Training Cards: Simple idea but great for both beginners and advanced shooters. It gets boring sometimes to raise your gun and shoot at a target. Maybe it's a little better with laser targets or a timer, but now you have a couple of dozen variations to choose from.

I've started training with my set so I'll report back to see if I make it higher in the competition standings.



Dry Fire Training Cards

MantisX: Now we're going hi-tech! This training module attaches to your front rail and gives feedback to your phone through Bluetooth.



MantisX on 1911

I've had my hands on one for a few months and it's definitely much better than simply looking at if your front sight moved when dry-firing. Instead of simply feeling like you messed up...it tells you where it moved, how much it moved, and how to correct it.

Full review [HERE](#).

I'd say if you're really serious about upping your shooting game...try it out. It works with both dry and live fire. Plus, it's fun to compete with your friends.

Conclusion

And that's it...now you'll be able to work on your fundamentals, dry-firing, and range shooting to become a more accurate pistol shooter. Remember, you won't become a pro in a few days.



Keep practicing!

The guy next to you at the range nailing all the steel targets probably has dozens of hours of dry firing and thousands of rounds under his belt.

And in case we didn't say it enough...don't do this!



Leaning Back Shooting Stance

How to Determine Your Shooting Eye Dominance in Under 1 Minute



Target Quick Fix Guide: How to Shoot the Bullseye



[Guide] How to Grip a Pistol: Pictures & Video



How to Shoot a Handgun/Pistol



Safe and Effective Dry-Fire Training at Home [Guide]

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Written By [Eric Hung](#)

Hi, I'm Eric Hung and I got into guns when I was around 25 and started with YouTube videos, scouring

forums, and eventually taking a bunch of classes. I soaked up as much information as I could online, at competitions, and from tinkering in my workshop. I became my group's "gun guy" and everyone who had questions came to me. And now I hope to answer some of yours! Learn more at [About Us](#).