



# SAGA Snippets

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## Defensive Learning

by Sheriff Jim Wilson

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The first two tasks for the new defensive shooter are to learn to shoot accurately and quickly. The principles involved in accurately placing a bullet are the same, whether we are shooting a formal bullseye match, handgun hunting, plinking or fighting or our lives. Sight picture, trigger press and breath control are involved regardless of the reason for firing the shot.

The next challenge for the defensive shooter is to learn to deliver that accurate shot as quickly as possible. This involves the presentation of the pistol from the holster, the acquisition of the sights and a trigger press that doesn't disturb that sight picture.

The principles involved in quick, accurate shooting can be learned through reading and practice. An even quicker way to learn these skills is by taking professional training. A good instructor won't let us get away with the natural tendency to ignore our mistakes and we can learn shortcuts to accomplish our goal.

The most difficult task for the new defensive shooter is to learn to fight, whether with a firearm, another defensive tool or the hands. Keep in mind that the average criminal has actual experience at fighting, while the armed citizen usually only has ideas about fighting. It's an uneven

match and when your life is at stake, learning to fight is not a good place for on-the-job training.

Learning to fight well enough to have a chance for saving your life requires professional training. Your best bet is to work with an instructor who has been there and done that. He can talk about the importance of little nuances such as watching their body language, watching their hands, and locating the closest cover because he has been there and knows the importance of this and many other skills.

Just about any shooting school can be an enjoyable experience and we most always learn something. But the defensive shooter should keep in mind what his goal is: Learning to survive a deadly encounter and select a school or instructor based upon that goal. Don't be afraid to ask questions and be sure you are signing up for a fighting school before plunking down your hard-earned money.

[https://www.shootingillustrated.com/content/defensive-learning/?utm\\_source=newsletter&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=042623email&utm\\_id=042623email](https://www.shootingillustrated.com/content/defensive-learning/?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=042623email&utm_id=042623email)

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### Special points of interest:

- *Defensive Learning*
- *Gun Skills: A Better Trigger Press*
- *SAGA Membership*
- *Basics of Shooting: Breath Control*
- *Gauging your Progress*
- *4 Ways to Save Money on Firearm Practice*

## Gun Skills: The Edge – A Better Trigger Press



<https://www.americas1stfreedom.org/content/gun-skills-the-edge-a-better-trigger-press/>

By Frank Melloni

5 June 2023

One of the hardest things to teach a new shooter is the proper trigger press for a slow, precise pistol shot. The process begins with demonstrating its importance, introducing students to the intricacies of their personal equipment and, finally, overcoming involuntary movements. The procedure can be lengthy, but it is worth the time because nothing can rob you of accuracy faster than a poor trigger press.

I've used this drill with great success to train students on how to properly actuate the bang switch, as well as how to stave off the natural human tendency to abruptly force it to the rear or push the gun away during the process. Overall, it is a simple technique that involves elements of both live and dry practice, making it low on the round count as well.

### **Phase One: Learning Your Trigger**

Surprisingly, most shooters that need help in this department simply aren't familiar with the

individual stages of their trigger. These shooters typically start their press from outside of the trigger guard and execute the shot in one exaggerated yank.

Nearly every trigger has these three distinct elements to its movement: free travel (also called slack), a wall and, finally, a breaking point (or let-off).

Free travel is at the very beginning of the trigger stroke and is the portion that requires the least amount of pressure to overcome.

Next will come a stage where we feel the mechanical parts start to engage until, eventually, the trigger gets stiff (this is the wall). If we gradually increase pressure after hitting the wall, we will find the breaking point, which is the very moment the gun fires. This phase of the drill is designed to help one identify and separate each stage. It can be conducted at the range with live ammunition, but I find it most beneficial as dry practice to eliminate noise and recoil for this portion.

1. Position a bullseye target at seven yards.
2. Develop a sight picture.
3. Press your trigger through the slack and stop; repeat five times.
4. Press your trigger through the slack, stop and then press until you reach the wall; repeat five times.
5. Bring your trigger to the wall and gradually press through the breaking point in one slow, elongated motion. Do not allow yourself to stop. Repeat five times.

### **Phase Two: Finding the Edge**

Once you are familiar with these stages of your trigger, I can begin to describe a fourth and crucial area of the stroke: the edge. I describe the edge as the absolute last portion of the movement in between the wall and the breaking point. This is where all the magic happens, as this point is where a shooter typically reverts to an aggressive yank. This is usually a function of reasoning that wants to get the subconsciously unpleasant experience of firing a shot "over with."

It's also where a shooter might see a premature flinch, but only if reached slowly. The key is to get



## Continued...A Better Trigger Press

your trigger past the wall and play a game of getting the trigger as close to the breaking point as possible without going over. By design, it's a game that you will invariably lose, and through the process, you'll quell any poor habits that crept in from powering through this stage previously.

This drill can also be conducted in a dry-practice environment; however, it's important to realize that you probably won't see any involuntary motion creep in because you know the gun isn't actually going to fire. To that end, I highly recommend trying this drill at the range with a firearm that produces moderate recoil.

1. Position a bullseye target at seven yards.
2. Develop a sight picture.
3. Without pausing your breathing, get as close to the breaking point as possible until you eventually ride into it and the gun discharges; repeat five times.
4. Press your trigger to the wall while breathing normally. Enter your natural respiratory pause and attempt to get as close to the breaking point as possible until you eventually ride into it and the gun discharges; repeat five times.

After learning that their trigger is more complex than it seems, a shooter is poised for better manipulation as well as the beginning of working through any flinching that has gone unchecked.

Through the first phase, we learn that a trigger has about as much personality as the gun itself, helping us to attack the problem from a mechanical perspective. The second phase helps us to relax and address any psychological responses that might be disturbing our precision. Knowing your exact breaking point will make for easier follow-up shots, too. Together, these skills will increase your slow-fire accuracy and prepare you for more-efficient fire under stress.



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## Basics of Shooting: Breath Control

By Larry Quandahl

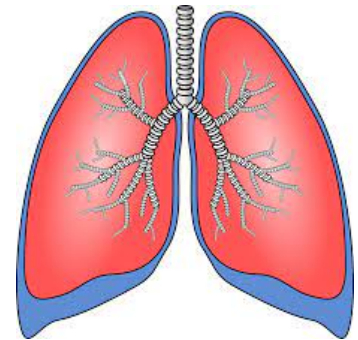
30 May 2023

Thousands of words have been written about how to breathe when shooting, but you can boil it all down to using the Keep It Short & Simple (KISS) method. The KISS method of breath control is to stop breathing while you aim and fire the shot. Of course, the million-dollar question is what is the best way for you to control your breathing (by which we mean interrupting the natural breathing cycle) while aiming and firing the shot. Should the lungs be full? Two-thirds full? As close to empty as possible?

Before we answer these questions, we should remember a few basic facts:

1. Breathing is automatic. We breathe without conscious effort. Our bodies will inhale and exhale no matter how hard we try to temporarily halt the process.
2. The body has a natural breathing cycle:
  - a. The chest and diaphragm expand, pulling air into the lungs;
  - b. The chest and diaphragm relax, pushing air out of the lungs.
3. Breathing while firing the shot hurts accuracy because it increases the movement of the aligned sights on the target (wobble area).

The best time to control the breathing cycle is during what's called the "respiratory pause." This is when you're done exhaling, but it isn't something you should have to think about. Don't force air out, because forcing air out makes you contract your chest muscles... which is the last thing you want. During the respiratory pause, your chest muscles are relaxed, and you can stop breathing longer without feeling uncomfortable. If you try to stop breathing while your lungs are filled with air, you'll begin to experience muscle discomfort sooner than if your lungs are mostly empty and the muscles involved with breathing are relaxed.



How long can you extend the respiratory pause? That depends on your physical condition and state of mind. Under normal circumstances, a shooter can extend a respiratory pause for eight seconds, 10 at the most. Problems begin to occur in several areas when breathing is stopped for longer than that period. Visual acuity is the first victim of the lack of oxygen. Instead of a true image of sight alignment and sight picture, we see a burned-in image of what existed at the time vision began to fail. Another concern with overextending the respiratory pause is your body starts crying for air, which makes you stop paying attention to your sight alignment/sight picture and start paying attention to your need to breathe.

Depending on your shooting discipline, you can modify your use of the respiratory pause. Some air can be retained in your lungs to help establish your natural point of aim. For example, the amount of air retained in the lungs affects the vertical natural point of aim. When developing a shooting position, remember that bone support is the goal. Bones do not fatigue or stretch like muscles do.

An exception to the use of the respiratory pause technique for breath control occurs when physical stress is present (as in running, or some international pistol disciplines). For example, a hunter has just run up a small hill and dropped into position to shoot the largest buck she has ever seen. She stops her breathing during a respiratory pause, and the crosshairs are jumping all over the place. This



## Continued...Basics of Shooting: Breath Control

movement is due to her heart pounding and lungs demanding air. She does not have time to relax and let her heart and breathing slow down. What does she do? She takes a full breath and holds it. This will steady the position and allow for a quick shot. Remember, this technique only works for a very short period of time.

Another example in which the respiratory pause is not used to control breathing is in international pistol disciplines. The technique used by these shooters is to inhale as the pistol is raised from the “ready position”—with the muzzle pointed downward at a 45-degree angle—to the target, then hold air in the lungs while the shot or string is fired. Twenty seconds is the time limit for timed fire, which is a long time to hold one’s breath. One option is to shoot the string faster, before breathing becomes a problem.

Remember when we mentioned the KISS method earlier? Here are some short, simple exercises that will help you learn what we mean:

### **Exercise 1.**

Ask an instructor, coach or observer to watch you while you hold your breath. If you’re like most beginning shooters, you’ll take a deep breath and hold it. Holding the lungs full requires the chest muscles to work overtime. Fatigue will set in. While you’re doing this, your body is under stress.

### **Exercise 2.**

Exhale all the air from your lungs. If you’re like most beginning shooters, you will push all the air out of your lungs, requiring you to breathe more quickly than normal.

### **Exercise 3.**

Ask your instructor or coach to give you a signal to just stop breathing. You’ll naturally stop breathing right at the respiratory pause!

To integrate breath control into the act of firing and completing the shot, you must stop breathing to check the natural point of aim. During this time, you are using up your air supply. To ensure you have an adequate air supply, you can take a short breath or two to oxygenate the lungs. This restarts your internal time clock for firing the shot. Many techniques modify the breathing cycle to support the firing of the shot.

Experiment and have fun discovering what works best for your shooting discipline.

<https://www.nrafamily.org/content/basics-of-shooting-breath-control/>



## Gauging Your Progress

<https://www.shootingillustrated.com/content/gauging-your-progress/>

By Sheriff Jim Wilson  
4 June 2023

From talking to new shooters, I find that many do not take the time to establish a goal for a particular practice session. They just load up with firearms and ammunition and shoot in whatever manner happens to come to mind. Practice sessions can be far more productive when we determine what our goals are going to be for a particular session.

Essentially, practice sessions should reinforce the basics of defensive marksmanship. We might choose, for instance, to devote this session to working on improving our accuracy, spending time with getting the correct sight picture, controlling our breathing, and improving the trigger press. Here we aren't talking about speed as much as precision.

Other times we might work on delivering two quick shots starting from the holster. Or maybe two quick shots, with a speed reload, and two more quick shots. The possibilities are actually endless, but should be based upon what the individual shooter feels he needs to improve on.

In practice sessions I don't regularly shoot any actual drills, preferring to just identify the basics that need the most work. Periodically, I will use a particular shooting drill to gauge my progress. But I will use the same drill, over and over, to develop accurate data regarding that improvement, or lack of the same.

There many good drills to use. For what it is worth, this is the drill that I use.

3 yards...one shot to the head in 2 seconds.  
Repeat for a total of 2 shots

3 yards...two shots to the body in 2 seconds

7 yards...two shots to the body in 2 seconds

10 yards...two shots to the body in 2.5 seconds

15 yards...two shots to the body in 2.5 seconds

25 yards...two shots to the body in 7 seconds

Each stage starts from the holster. However, if your range does not allow working from the holster just start from the low ready position.

Another value of the shooting drill is when we want to compare a new gun to the one that we have been using. And the same is true if a new holster is being tested.

Again, the best practice session is when we practice the basics and we only use the drill to gauge our progress. It is not even necessary, or a good idea, to shoot a drill during every practice session. Once every fourth or fifth session is plenty.

Decide what you need to practice at a particular range session and work on that. Then, periodically, run your drill to see if you are improving. It's like taking a test once in a while and giving yourself a report card.



## 4 Ways to Save Money on Firearm Practice

by Jo Deering  
1 June 2023

We tell you all the time that it's important to practice with your firearm, and that's true whether it's a hunting rifle, a competition shotgun or your concealed-carry handgun. The more you practice shooting your gun, the more familiar with it you'll become, and familiarity makes you faster, more efficient and more accurate. But we get it: Practice is expensive, and those of us with limited resources only have so much money to devote to ammo and range fees. You can make the most of your time, money and effort with these tips to save money on practice.

### **Dry Fire**

This is the best money saving tip I can offer, because it costs you literally nothing. Most modern center-fire guns can be safely dry-fired with damaging the gun, but I recommend using snap caps or other dummy ammo just to eliminate any potential problems with firing pins and to provide a more realistic experience.

When you dry-fire, **always** triple-check that the gun is unloaded and there are no live rounds anywhere near where you'll be practicing. Follow the rules of safe gun handling and utilize a safe direction for your dry-fire practice.

You can and should practice safely drawing your concealed-carry handgun from its holster and firing, or, if you want to work specifically on your trigger press, try the old trick of holding the gun steady, balancing a coin on the top at the end of the muzzle, and squeezing the trigger without knocking the coin off.

As long as you have a safe direction, you can dry-fire your hunting rifle in much the same way, even practicing field positions. Before a big out-of-state hunt, I will often unload my rifle and get down on the floor to refamiliarize myself with my most comfortable sitting, kneeling and prone shooting positions.

## Practice Matters!

### **Try At-Home Training Systems**

Training systems that pair with an app, such as MantisX, are excellent tools that let you take dry-firing to a totally new level. They do require an initial investment, but the practice is free after that, so the more you use it, the quicker it will pay for itself in ammo savings. Most of these devices include a small piece that attaches to the gun that will record exactly what your muzzle is doing from draw to trigger press, what it's doing at the exact moment of the trigger press, and what it's doing from one shot (or pre-set stop) to another. This lets you clearly see if there's any wasted movement in your draw, if you are dipping your muzzle or pulling your shot to the left or right, or if you're waving your muzzle in a direction you might not have realized.

This kind of intel is hugely valuable, and combining this with your dry-fire practice will put the pieces together in a way that shaves lots of time off your learning curve. You'll be motivated to keep practicing until your draw-to-trigger-pull time shrinks and your movement becomes much more efficient.

### **Be Deliberate**

At some point, you do have to actually pull the trigger on live ammo in order to get the full benefit of practice. When you do, be deliberate and intentional about what you're doing. Going to the range and dumping mag after mag of ammo, or punching holes in paper with your hunting rifle from the bench, is a lot of fun—but if you're doing so aimlessly, you're not learning much and you're not practicing. You're just shooting.

Go into practice with a plan for what you want to work on and how you plan to work it.



## Continued...4 Ways to Save Money

Pick some specific drills you want to shoot, and make each shot count. Focus your energy on what you're doing and on your form rather than just firing off rounds.

If you're practicing for a hunting scenario, get off the bench and make yourself take careful, deliberate shots from field-shooting positions (assuming your range allows it). Then time yourself as if you were rushed to take a shot on an animal that might run off at any moment.

If you're practicing for sporting clays, trap or skeet, don't just shoot a round with your buddies and call it practice. Pick a station or a target presentation that's giving you trouble, make a plan for how to tackle it, and shoot it repeatedly until you feel more comfortable with it, adjusting your plan as needed as you go. Make sure to repeat it a few times in your next practice session to help reinforce what you've trained.

### **Join and Volunteer**

If you shoot frequently, you can usually save money on range fees by joining your local range or gun club rather than paying each time you go. Joining might also come with additional perks like a certain number of targets per month or extended hours or days for members only.

In addition to that, see if your club needs volunteers and if they're willing to trade range time and/or targets for your volunteer hours. If there's a youth team, they might

need coaches or assistants. The range might need volunteer range safety officers on busy days. The shotgun club might need volunteer trappers for their monthly sporting clays shoot—will they let you shoot the course for free the next day if you work the event for them?

### **Bonus Tips**

Many top shooters and athletes of all types use visualization to practice when they can't be on the field or at the range, particularly if they compete. Close your eyes and visualize yourself standing on a particular station of the trap field or shooting a particular stage on a 3-gun course. "See" yourself load the gun, prepare your body, and go through each motion of the station or stage with good technique. This kind of visualization is serious mental work, so don't take it lightly, and be sure to set aside a time and place where you won't be distracted or interrupted.

Finally, consider getting some professional instruction, particularly if you're new or trying to learn something you haven't done before. Paying for instruction might seem to go against our "cheap practice" premise, but learning from a pro can shorten your learning curve so dramatically that you will save money (and time and effort) in the long run. Use the benefit of someone else's experience to learn in a few short lessons what might have taken you years of work to put together on your own.

Extracted from:

<https://www.nrawomen.com/content/4-ways-to-save-money-on-firearm-practice/>