

Improving Your Skeet Training

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Imagine the following events. You are at the range shooting a practice round of skeet with your friends. At Station Three you miss the high single. You turn to the puller and say, "Let me have that again." You crush the next one out thinking, "That feels good, now I've got it." Continuing on to Station Four you shoot the low pair and miss the second target. This time it takes three or four repeat pairs until you are able to break both targets. Saying to yourself, "I feel comfortable with those targets now," you finish the round. As you walk from the field someone asks, "How did you do?" Your reply is, "Really good, I've got it figured out now."

Sound familiar? We all do it. It is a way of thinking about our shooting in a positive light. We seemly are focused on how well we perform, not how poorly. We are telling ourselves that we are doing well. No stink'in think'in for us. That's good, right? Well, the truth is we are really doing ourselves a disservice. Yes, we were talking about our shooting in a positive manner, but when we take those extra targets during a round we are weakening our practice and missing a chance to become a better shooter. Why, because we changed the dynamics of the round.

Changing the pressure. Instead of having a chance to struggle to get a good round we took the pressure off. That struggle might have helped us develop the skill and experience we will need when we get behind in a match. By shooting another target, the opportunity to learn how to deal with being down a target with five stations left has been missed. It gives us a false sense of success. It also takes you out of the performance mode and into the evaluation mode and then performance suffers. If you want to work on a certain target presentation, do it. If you are shooting a practice round, do that. Do not mix the two. One or two extra targets in the middle of a round are not going to solve your problem with that specific target. Fix it during a training session where you can devote the entire time to solving those issues. The reason for shooting that practice round is to get the highest score possible, just like at match time. Why change your focus by re-shooting one or two targets?

Anyone can hit them given enough chances. Watch someone re-shooting a pair over and over until they get the timing just right and start breaking both targets. They get a feel for the timing needed at that moment and can *eventually* duplicate the necessary movement. When they stop and come back later, they are plagued with the same problem. They say their timing is now off. The real reason is because their visual and mechanical technique is faulty. Think a minute. Why can we hit a target on the second or third attempt? The answer is related to our ability to evaluate what is happening and to make the necessary corrections. On the later attempts, we know how fast we must move to get ahead of the target. We know the target flight path and where to look for the second target. By

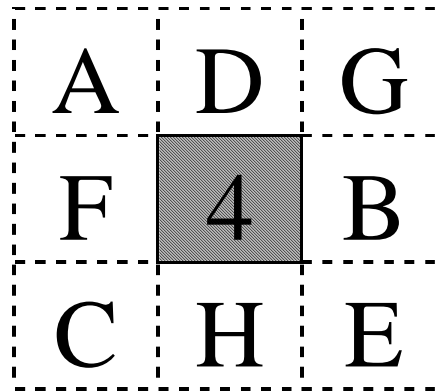
shooting the target over and over we begin to see the necessary movement from the first to the second target. Of course it is going to be easier! It's just like when we do a training drill. Unfortunately, we do not have that chance during an actual match. We need to develop a technique that allows us to recognize what is needed and make the adjustments as we are shooting.

Faulty Timing Techniques. To some shooters timing means pulling the trigger in some rhythm and having the target break, bang, bang. This is very different than pulling the trigger when they see the correct sight picture, bangbang. When we change fields, shoot under different light conditions, in different wind, or later in the day, the timing necessary to break the target changes. We must be able to notice these changes, adjust to them, and still break the target the first time we attempt it. There are no do-overs in a match. We need to have the skills to pull the trigger when the picture is right not just when our timing feels that we must.

At the 2005 World Championship in Lonato, Italy, Todd Graves was in a shoot-off with Abdullah Alrashidi of Kuwait for the Bronze Medal and an Olympic quota place. Alrashidi went first and was stacking the pairs (breaking both targets at the same spot) at Station Four. Graves was breaking his targets later, not rushing the shots. On the sixth pair the Kuwaiti missed the second target but protested that there was a chip. The referee agreed and the shoot-off continued. Alrashidi continued to stack the pairs, but appeared to be getting tense and his movements seemed to be getting tighter. Graves continued to chase the targets until he had the right picture and broke pair after pair. Finally, on the 13th pair the Kuwaiti clearly missed the second target of the high pair. Graves stepped onto the station and broke his pair for the win. While Alrashidi was very impressive in breaking the targets so quickly he was relying on timing to make it happen. He was giving up his ability to make lead corrections if needed. As pressure increased, his muscles tightened and he was unable to maintain the same fluid timing. Graves on the other hand did not rush his shots. By taking a good look at the sight picture before pulling the trigger he was able to make any corrections needed. The moral of the story is that the person who was able to make the small corrections was able to win the day. Are you able to do that?

Seeing vs. Timing Drills. How do we move from depending on timing and ultra fast moves to break the target to learning not to pull the trigger until we recognize the correct picture? Through drills during our training sessions we can develop the necessary skills of realizing which sight picture will break the target. Consider the following drills.

Imagine shooting on Station Four. If you make the actual station the center square of nine equal squares it would look like this.



The square marked 4 would be the actual station and the others, (A – H) would be imaginary stations of equal size adjacent to it. They will become the shooting stations for these drills and can be used around any actual station. There is no need to change your standard chokes for these drills as they will break the targets from any of these positions.

Drill One. The first step is to begin shooting high house singles starting on station A and continuing in order through to H and then ending on the real Station Four. Can you break all nine shots? Can you do this three times in a row for a total of 27 shots? Keep a record of your best performance.

Drill Two. Repeat Drill One, this time shooting the low house target.

The next drills require you to be adept at breaking the first target of the pair. Once you can hit all nine of the targets in each preceding drill with consistency you are ready to move on.

Drill Three. Begin shooting high house doubles starting on station A and continuing in order through to H and then ending on the real Station Four. This time there are 18 targets. How many can you break? Keep records.

Drill Four. Repeat Drill Three this time shooting the low house pair.

Drill Five. Combine Drills One & Three or Two & Four for a total of 27 targets. This makes a good training “round.” Keep a record of your highest score for 27 or 54 targets. Remember, no re-shooting targets until the drills are completed.

By moving in order from stations A to H during these drills you are changing the necessary timing on each target by a small amount. Station A will be different enough from station H that the same timing will not work. It will be frustrating, but you must work to develop the ability to recognize the correct sight picture before you pull the trigger. The transition from the first target to the second must be smooth with a continuous movement. Poking at the second target will not get the job done.

Remember the Two Most Important Points. We have talked about improving two areas of your shooting. First, during practices (playing the game) don't re-shoot targets because it will take you away from the real goal of learning what it takes for you to get through the round with a good score. Secondly, during training (development of the fundamentals) use the above drills to develop your ability to recognize the correct sight picture before you pull the trigger, rather than relying on ultra fast moves and timing. You will have to invest some time in these drills, but with practice the light bulb will come on and your scores will improve. See you on the podium.