

Analyzing Groups for Form Faults in Pistol Shooting

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The NRA instructional manual, *The Basics of Pistol Shooting*, is an excellent teaching tool for pistol instructors. Appendix D lists some common shooting errors and illustrates their impact on group location and pattern and suggestions for correcting errors. It refers to right-handed shooters but states that left-handers will show a mirror image of the illustrated error. Some instructors experience difficulty in translating the illustrations. The following chart is written in ambidextrous terms as a supplement to Appendix D. Two-handed shooting adds potential for form faults, although they will often mimic those illustrated.

When working with students, instructors should try to use ambidextrous directions and illustrations when possible. When working with beginning shooters refrain from pointing out errors.

Stress the elements of good shooting form to correct the error. Reinforcing good basic shooting form is a much more effective teaching strategy. It does not clutter the shooter's thoughts with things that must be avoided, but provides a simple set of sound, practiced fundamentals.

The vast majority of the shooting faults and associated group location problems result from difficulties during the follow through. Many involve the shooter anticipating recoil or attempting to control it by grabbing the pistol, pushing it into the recoil, "choking" the grip with excessive pressure or related problems. These problems often result from excessive shooting without adequate breaks, fatigue, shooting big bore pistols with heavy recoil before developing adequate basics, failure to use eye and ear protection (noise,

muzzle flash, or gas blow-back) or poor concentration. Dry firing and ball and dummy exercises are recommended for correcting most of these form faults. Hundreds of dry-fired shots can establish the proper form, making it a habit when live firing is taking place. Air pistols are also excellent tools for correcting form in both pistol and rifle shooters. They are extremely sensitive to form faults and will assist the shooter in correcting many of them. They are noiseless, relatively free of recoil, modest in mass and shoot relatively slow projectiles that demand a strong follow through. They are inexpensive and adaptable to a wide variety of shooting ranges, including boxes stuffed with crumpled newspaper.

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Common form faults in pistol shooting and group locations often associated with them.

Group Location	Form Fault	Correction
No group, shots scattered	Inconsistent shooting basics of sight alignment and trigger control inadequate.	Review and practice basics; use triangulation and trigger control exercises, return to shooting target backs
Diagonally low and to the “off” side	Jerking or snatching the trigger; squeezing with the whole hand during the trigger squeeze	Press with the trigger finger only; dry fire, keeping the sights aligned through the shot; use ball and dummy exercise
Diagonally high and to the “off” side	Anticipating the recoil and “throwing” the pistol into it; improper follow through – releasing the trigger finger upon firing	Repeat dry-firing or ball and dummy exercises; concentrate on follow through
Diagonally low and to the shooting side	Tightening (grabbing) the grip as the pistol is fired; tightening the forearm during the shot	Dry-firing exercise with focus on follow through; use air pistol to reduce recoil anticipation; ball and dummy exercise
Diagonally high to the shooting side	Anticipating the recoil and pushing with the heel of the shooting hand	Ball and dummy or dry-firing exercise with focus on follow through
Horizontally strung to the “off” side	Trigger finger placement wrong, pressed at angle, not straight back	Experiment with finger placement while dry firing; focus on grip and finger position.
Horizontally strung to the shooting side	Pressing with the thumb during the shot; pushing with the support hand; imbalance between hands using the palm- rest grip	Dry fire with focus on pressing only with the trigger finger; repeat trigger control exercise; concentrate on follow through
Strung low with proper windage	Pushing the wrist down at the shot, anticipating recoil; trying to control recoil; relaxing the shoulder at the shot	Dry fire or use ball and dummy exercise; concentrate on follow through; hold position until bullet strikes