

Trigger Squeeze

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Proper trigger control involves moving the trigger mechanism to fire a shot without disturbing sight alignment or sight picture. Rifle and pistol shooters commonly refer to this process as “squeezing the trigger.” Although “squeeze” may imply a prolonged pressure rather than a swift movement, it may carry some unintended messages for the shooter. Squeezing a rifle or pistol trigger must be an isolated action. It requires that pressure be exerted straight back on the trigger by the trigger finger alone. Squeezing with the rest of the hand or attempting to force the shot into the desired area by snatching or jerking the trigger is a serious form fault that may be difficult to cure. Using the entire hand or the thumb in the trigger squeezing process can have a serious impact on group size and location. Although it affects both rifle and pistol shooting, its impact on pistol marksmanship is much more evident. The coach or instructor must be conscious of the potential problem and be prepared to treat it.

Thumbing or squeezing the grips can be diagnosed by reviewing the location of groups on the target. Dry-firing or ball and dummy exercises may reveal the problem more graphically. Practice can cure the tendency to grab, grasp or thumb; but the problem is easier to prevent than to cure.

Be sure to explain what trigger squeeze is and is not to naïve shooters. It may help to use other terms for the process. Many coaches like to use “press” since it conveys the same sense of prolonged pressure but does not imply action by the remainder of the hand. Caution former military shooters to avoid using the analogy of squeezing a lemon or other item with the entire hand. The amount of grip pressure should remain consistent from shot to shot and during the shot.

A simple exercise can help in teaching trigger control. Have each shooter hold their shooting hand in a relaxed manner but in the position, it would assume to hold a pistol. Ask them to practice removing the tip of their trigger finger back toward the wrist without moving the thumb or the other fingers. This exercise helps to develop a smooth trigger squeeze while avoiding extra muscular activity and tiny disturbances in sight alignment and sight picture. It has the advantage of requiring absolutely no equipment.

The more traditional, eye dropper technique is also excellent if thumb movement is carefully avoided during the squeeze. The eye dropper could even be mounted in a pine stock if desired.

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