

DON'T UNDERESTIMATE THE VALUE OF DRY FIRING:

It's simple, convenient and inexpensive but many rifle shooters don't realize the value of dry fire.

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The simplest, most convenient means of rifle practice is dry-firing; since no recoil or muzzle blast is present to mask the shooter's reaction, dry-firing enables you to diagnose tiny problems with jerking, breathing and so on, and overcome them.



There's quite a variety of dry-firing techniques:

The Conventional Technique

Assume your shooting position -- usually prone -- place your reticle on a tiny target and squeeze the trigger so smoothly that the reticle doesn't move after the shot breaks. For this and all dry-fire that simulates taking a shot, ensure you follow through, then, rebolt the weapon, and reacquire the target. Only then have you completed your shot.

Educating Your Trigger Finger I

My secret for shooting someone else's rifle well is dry-firing before taking my complimentary shot. For this 'familiarization,' close your eyes and concentrate only on your trigger finger and its interplay with the trigger. Relax and don't be analytical --just let your finger adopt so it's comfortable with the trigger.

Educating Your Trigger Finger II

When it comes to your own rifle, mere 'familiarization' is not sufficient -- you want to give your finger an 'advanced degree.' Therefore, close your eyes and see how long you can take to break a shot -- purposely take as long as possible. Practicing this technique, it's not unusual to squeeze the trigger 20 seconds or more before breaking the shot, smoothly and consistently but ever so slowly taking up the slack. Again, focus your mind on your trigger finger, and let your mind float free.

Coin-on-the-Barrel Technique

This is a variation on the Conventional Technique cited above, and it's designed to keep you honest -- if your mind's fooling you about how steady you're holding the rifle, you'll soon find out. To do this, take up a solid position and have your coach or shooting buddy balance a coin on the barrel, just behind the muzzle. If your dry-fire release is smooth and solid, the coin won't fall -- if you're really solid, it won't move a bit. To make it more difficult, use smaller coins.

Watch the Reticle for Vertical Movement

As you're preparing to take the shot, you can't help but breathe which imparts some movement on the rifle, which in turn can be seen through your scope. This breathing movement should make your reticle rise and fall vertically across and above your target; if it's not, if there's any lateral or horizontal movement, readjust your body position and reposition the rifle on its support. (Of course, at the instant you fire, when you're in the natural respiratory pause, there's NO reticle movement!)

Coach Watches Shooter's Finger

While you dry-fire, the coach watches your trigger finger for a momentary pause immediately after breaking the shot. What's happening mechanically is that your finger has reached the trigger stop, and pauses there rock-solid for a second or so, which means you're correctly in follow through. If that finger quivers or moves or lifts away, it means you've allowed the sound of the shot/firing pin release, to break your concentration. You're not thinking about this shot, but already thinking about the next shot, rebolting your rifle, etc.

Coach Watches Shooter's Eye

The eye is the window to the mind, and for this dry-fire we watch the shooter's eye to ensure proper concentration. Lying prone beside the shooter, the coach faces him so he can clearly see his shooting eye. Watch only the pupil -- if it dilates or contracts at any point during dry-fire, follow through or rebolting the rifle, let him know. If his mind is truly locked-on the target -- he's in his 'bubble' as Carlos Hathcock terms it -- his eye should stay focused on the target.

Coach Switches Live and Dummy Rounds

I've used this technique to help students overcome jerking problems induced by recoil and muzzle blast and it works great. For best results, first have the shooter dry-fire about ten times, so his mind is setup for dry-firing. Then, have him close his eyes while you bolt his weapon and perhaps load a live round, perhaps load a dummy round (or leave the chamber empty). Usually, I'll not insert a second live round for about another five dry-fires, just to knock down the shooter's psychological anticipation; only when he seems relaxed and ready for yet another dummy round do I insert a live one, and after that it's a ratio of about four dummy ones for each live round. This is the best technique I've found for helping a shooter apply what he has learned in dry-fire to his live-fire shooting. While he fires, watch his eye, his trigger finger, etc., to diagnose continuing problems, let him practice them dry-fire, the switch to live-fire again. These are but a few dry-fire techniques we use in the Gunsite Tactical Rifle Course; use your imagination and ingenuity to develop some more that fit your shooting environment.