



A dummy gun allows shooters to practice drawing from concealment without any risk.

In addition to timing your drills as a benchmark for your own skill levels, shot timers can be used to provide a random start signal and a little stress.



On ranges that don't allow human silhouette targets, you can use paper plates and plain 8-1/2 x 11 copy paper to simulate the same idea.



HOW WAS YOUR RANGE

TIME TO

[BY DON LARSON]

How was your range time today?

Did you have any results in mind when you loaded up and launched a few, or were you just sending 'em downrange? In my years of instructing and shooting, I've found that most shooting falls into one of three categories, whether we're at a range that's open to the public, a private club, or on our own property.

First, there are the "Plinkers," the casual shooters. These folks are out for fun, with nothing specific in mind. They just want to put some holes in a target. This type of shooting is just fine, and a great way to spend your time if that's what you're out to do.

Next, there's the "Practice" group. They have goals in mind. Maybe it's the reloader who's testing out that new bullet weight or powder, the trap shooter getting ready for the next competition, or the rifle shooter getting ready for hunting season. I also put folks who keep a handgun in their home for self defense, or those who are fortunate enough to live in a state where they can get a carry permit, in the "practice" group.

How about the carry permit holders who carry for self defense? I believe they fall into two groups. Some practice to keep current skill levels. They get to

the range often and challenge themselves with drills when they're there. Others seek instruction to improve and to learn new skills.

Let's look at what we can do to make practice time more effective. Many ranges don't allow shooters to draw from a holster and shoot. If that's your situation, consider doing your holster practice at home—following ALL the safety rules, of course (see "Is Dry Fire Safe?", CCM May/June 2008, www.USConcealedCarry.com/members/1108.cfm). Triple check for an empty chamber, and point your gun in a safe direction. I prefer to use a dummy gun.



DAY?

Then at the range, start from a low ready position to practice. I've found this to be quite effective, and when the opportunity arises to combine the two, they come together with just a few minor adjustments. Some ranges don't allow human silhouette targets. Do you have any paper plates at home or plain old 8-1/2 x 11 copy paper? Either can become the center of mass, and, combined with a smaller paper plate placed about ten inches above your COM target, you're ready to go! Get good with those, and when you do get a chance to shoot on a silhouette target, you'll feel like there's all the room in the world on it.

Do you use a timer when you practice? I recommend it. In addition to timing your drills (only as a benchmark for your own skill levels), it's great for giving you a random signal to start, and putting a little stress on you. I get folks in my Permit to Carry class who have years of shooting experience, and are great shooters, yet when that timer comes out, they get visibly nervous. In a way, practicing with a timer takes some of the stress *off*, as the timer signals you when to start, instead of deciding for yourself. If you don't have a timer, a partner with a whistle or giving range commands can work, too.

Have you practiced clearing a malfunction lately, or shooting strong hand only, or with support hand only? Have you practiced a speed load when you've shot your gun dry? There are ranges in some parts of the country that have a rule of three seconds between shots. What a great time to practice a speed load! Some of these drills aren't fun, and if you're putting a lot of effort into them, they may even feel like work. That's the difference between practice and plinking. At some of the ranges in my area, I see shooters who do the exact same thing every visit to the range. They use the same targets, do some

easy shooting, and then leave with the thought that they put in a good day at the range.

How can you get the most out of your time and shooting supplies? Challenge yourself! You'll feel a sense of accomplishment when it works, and discover what skills need more practice. Wherever your skill levels are, you can build on them. I believe that league shooting such as IPSC and IDPA belong in the Practice category as well.

The last category I call "Training and Instruction." These are people who want to sharpen their skills in a particular area. They might work in law enforcement and need continuing instruction for their job. They might be people who have never touched a firearm or who have just completed the basic pistol class and want to learn more. They could be carry permit holders sharpening their skills or competition shooters looking to move up into the next level. People in this group might be instructors looking for new methods of instructing, or experienced shooters interested in becoming instructors.



There's a saying I heard on a golf course a while back that I believe carries over to shooting sports and self defense: "If you have to choose between equipment and lessons, choose lessons." A while back, I was golfing with a relative and a few of his friends. One guy was struggling with his drives, and was getting quite frustrated. When I asked him if he had ever taken golf lessons,

Good firearms instructors provide information in the classroom setting, and physical training on the range. Both aspects are important for those who wish to improve their shooting skills.

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he answered, "Nah, I'll just get another new driver and figure it out myself." He did that, and is frustrated that his game remains the same. You can spend a lot on new equipment, yet if you have no instruction in its use it's not going to do you a lot of good. You may fumble around and get marginal results, but how could those results be better?

What about your equipment? How dependable is it? One of my instructors made the comment: "When you need it, you're really going to need it, and chances are that I won't be there." I have people coming through my 300-round Defensive Handgun course with a \$2000 custom gun that gives them a lot of trouble with misfeeds because of ammunition sensitivity, and others with something "plain, stock, and out of the box" that does just fine. Other equipment problems I see are holsters or magazine pouches not working out, sharp edges on firearms, and reloaded ammunition failing to fire. A class is a much better place to find out how your gear is going to perform than in the middle of a competition or in the

midst of a life-threatening situation!

We all have different levels of experience. I recommend taking advantage of any training opportunity you can: classes, books, CDs, whatever your schedule and budget will allow. If you can, travel to one of the nationally known schools. They have the instructors and the facilities. You can improve the skills you have, and learn new ones. If that's not in your budget, some of the nationally known instructors also travel and teach classes at local ranges throughout the country, making them more available and affordable. There could also be instructors in your area with some impressive backgrounds and skill levels. Books and videos are as close as your mailbox. When possible, cross train by working with different instructors. The more instructors you work with, the more backgrounds and training methods you'll be exposed to. That's more tools for your toolbox. You may not agree with everything that any one instructor or school teaches, but if you come away with a new technique, or a new idea, it's worth it. As your skill

level grows, you'll outgrow some instructors. Find new ones and continue your training.

So, how WAS your range time today? Which category would you put it in? With a slight change in mindset, your range time can work towards improving your skills, and reinforcing the ones you have. Who might have to depend on those skills? You? Your family? It's something to think about, isn't it? ■

[Don Larson is the Owner/Lead Instructor of Frontline Firearms Training in Minnesota, where he instructs Carry Permit, Basic, Intermediate, and Advanced classes. In addition to being an NRA Training Counselor and Instructor, Don has taken multiple classes at Gunsite, Thunder Ranch, Blackwater Training Center, and the Firearms Academy of Seattle. He twice qualified as a FAS Handgun Master.]

CREDIT:

Thank you to Terrie Williams for her help preparing this article.

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