

STAY SHARP: STAY SAFE

Licensed gun carriers need to keep up with training to stay on top of criminals.

Studies have shown that criminals (illustrated here by an actor) regularly practice shooting their weapons, but many licensed gun owners do not, which leaves them at high risk.

Everybody who carries a gun should participate in some type of annual training standards. The training should vary according to need, since the needs of concealed weapon permit holders, armed security guards, corrections officers or police officers would all be different. Being a police trainer, I have seen police officers who have had 20-plus years on the force and yet can not consistently pass the annual firearm qualification from one year to the next. Why do you suppose this is? Could it be that the only time they fire their weapon is once a year, when it's mandatory? I think that if you're going to take the responsibility of carrying a gun, you need to maintain proficiency with it. If not, you're a liability to yourself and to the general public.



“Shooting a handgun is a learned skill and must be practiced to improve or maintain your current level of proficiency, just as basketball is a learned skill.”

Speaking of liability, if you're going to carry a concealed weapon for self protection, then you also need to carry some type of self-defense insurance for protection. I wouldn't recommend that you drive a car without insurance, and I don't recommend that you carry a gun without insurance. The average settlement for an accidental or unjustified shooting is approximately \$250,000. If you cannot consistently keep all of your rounds within a 9-inch circle at 21 feet, while standing in place at the shooting range, with no time limit and hardly any stress, what makes you think that your shooting ability will become any better while you're moving, while you're under stress, or if someone is shooting at you?

Shooting a handgun is a learned skill and must be practiced to improve or maintain your current level of proficiency, just as basketball is a learned skill. For example, if you were to put a professional basketball player on the foul line and ask him to shoot 50 free throws, he could probably make somewhere between 25 to 30 of them. However, if he didn't practice with a basketball at all for the next six years, and then was put on the foul line and given that same challenge, he would be lucky to make any. Don't get me wrong. Sometimes luck is better than skill, but remember that Lady Luck can be fickle and oftentimes changes her mind at will. You can never rely on luck; that's why it's so important to practice.

Training must be repetitious enough to create what is called "muscle memory," so the proper response will become automatic under stress. According to studies, a new skill needs to be rehearsed at least 300 times to develop muscle memory.

In Ohio, you can get a CCW permit to carry a weapon with as little as two hours of range time, with no minimum number of rounds to be fired, and you don't have to fire your gun for the next six years before you are required to take any additional training. There are states that require no range time at all. At the end

of the classroom training, all participants have to do is show that they can handle a weapon safely. The instructor passes around an unloaded gun to all of the students, and if they can handle it without placing their finger on the trigger or inside the trigger guard, and without pointing it at anyone, then they pass. I would not want to be around a person who has only had classroom training if a gunfight should break out. To me that would be like flying with a pilot who has only had classroom training.

It may sound like I'm against carrying concealed weapons, but I'm not. My wife and I not only each have our concealed carry license and carry a concealed weapon on a daily basis, we teach classes on how to carry a concealed weapon. I think that any person who carries a gun should shoot it at least once a year, if not more. I interviewed 10 former students at random who have had their CCW license for at least a year, and I found that none of them had fired their weapons since they took the training more than a year before. I feel that someone who has not practiced or taken some kind of additional training at least once in the 12-month period since they got their license can not be totally committed to protecting himself. You must be fully committed to protecting yourself or it does you no good to carry a gun.

Some people think that just because the state gives them a concealed handgun license that is good for six years before they are required to take any additional training, their shooting skills will be good for six years. This is simply not the case. Even if the state that you live in does not require you to take any additional training until you renew your CCW permit, you need to make a commitment to yourself that you are going to at least fire a minimum of 50 rounds a year. This will give you more self-assurance and a higher level of confidence. If you're ever involved in a gunfight, you'll be glad that you did.

I'm going to give you some ideas on how to practice and how to make it fun. First, practice with a friend because just about anything you do is more fun if you do it with a friend.

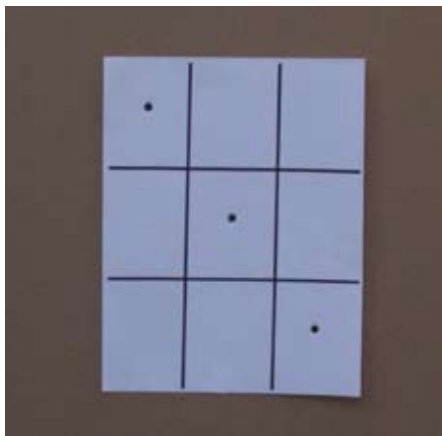
Second, concentrate on one particular thing, and don't try to work on everything in the same day. For example: one time work on nothing but drawing your gun out of your holster; the next time work on nothing but slow, accurate shots; and the next time work on one-handed techniques using both of your [dominate and non-dominate] hands.

Third, don't go out to the range and fire off as many rounds as you can, as fast as you can, causing you to get ankle-deep in brass and think that you're practicing, because you're not. You're doing what is referred to as "spraying and praying," which means spraying as much lead as fast as you possibly can out of your gun and praying that you hit your target. Remember, you have to learn how to crawl before you can walk, and you have to learn how to walk before you can run. So take your time and work on the basic fundamentals, such as sight picture, sight alignment and trigger pull (which is squeezing the trigger without moving the alignment of your sights), and speed will come. An F.B.I. study found that 95 percent of all bad shots were caused by bad trigger pull. I've done my own study and found this to be true.

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Blow up balloons, making them various shapes and sizes, and tape them on a target. Then see who can shoot theirs in the least amount of shots.



Play tick-tack-toe by placing one shot in each square, trying to see who can be the first one to get three in a row horizontally, vertically or diagonally.

Fourth, have fun. You can do this in various ways. One way would be by blowing up balloons, making them various shapes and sizes and taping them on the target to see who can shoot theirs in the least amount of shots. Remember, at this point you should be working on accuracy, not speed. Once you can hit all of the balloons consistently, then try speeding up to see who can hit all of the balloons the fastest.

Next, you could take an 8 ½ by 11 sheet of printer paper and make nine equal squares on it, and play tick-tack-toe by placing one shot in each square,

trying to see who can be the first one to get three in a row horizontally, vertically or diagonally. You alternate back and forth, trying to block each other, and line hits don't count. Or you can take a deck of playing cards, tape them to your cardboard target and play poker. Each person gets to shoot at five cards, and the best five cards win. You will be amazed at how much better you shoot



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when you're having fun. I even once had a student that told me in her testimonial, "The more fun I had, the better I shot." There are dozens of other ways to have fun while you're practicing, so be creative, have fun, and first and foremost, be safe! Remember, every day that you don't practice, someone else does.

About the author:

Steve Farmer is from Lima, Ohio, and has more than 19 years of experience in law enforcement, 10 of which he served as a police chief. He has also been a police trainer for 14 years, training and certifying numerous officers in the use of the revolver, semi-automatic, shotgun, tactical assault rifle, Oleoresin Capsicum, straight baton, expandable baton, side handle baton, Taser, and radar. He has taught at the basic police academies of Lima Technical College and Apollo Career Center. He is Insight Firearms Training and Development's lead instructor for Ohio, training citizens on how to legally carry a concealed weapon in the states of Ohio, Florida and Utah. He can be reached by phone at (419) 302-1516 or by e-mail at: ccwtraining@wcoil.com. For more information, visit the Insight website at: www.insightfirearmstraining.com.

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