

Take it from the top

To improve your shooting it is best to analyse your technique from head to toe, says **Malcolm Plant**

A holistic and logical approach to your physical engagement with your gun will help hone your shooting skills. First up, the eyes.

Eyes

If you are right-handed it is crucial that your right eye controls the direction in which the gun is pointing. Or your left eye, for the left-handers who shoot with the gun in the left shoulder. When the opposing eye takes over control of the pointing activity, the shot pattern will be placed yards away from the intended place, when the target is out at a distance of 30 or 40 yards from the gun.

There are many ways of doing an initial check on eye dominance, but the better processes involve pointing either a finger or ideally an unloaded gun at a distant test object. Your coach will be able to identify any pointing error by standing behind your shoulder.

In fact, you can check your gun pointing capability for yourself. For a right-hander, mount an unloaded gun to your right shoulder and with both eyes open, point at a distant twig on a tree. Close your left eye. If the gun



Checking your eye dominance is an important first step

is still firmly pointing at the intended twig, your right eye is controlling the gun and you are right-eye dominant. Any hint that the gun is pointing to the left of the intended twig indicates that your left eye might be misdirecting the gun. If the gun appears markedly out of line, to the left, you are probably strongly left-eye dominant.

Associated with this interference by an “unhelpful” opposite eye is the sensation that with both eyes open, you are seeing the left side of the gun or seeing two guns, getting a confused picture.

To successfully direct the shotgun you will need to close your left eye or render it non-

“Lifting the head from the stock is a very common error and results in a shot too high”

operational by putting a small patch on your shooting glasses. The patch should be placed on the left lens so that when you have the gun mounted properly, your left eye cannot see either the end of your gun or the test target.

Cheek

Mount the gun to your cheek so that your line of sight grazes the top rib of the gun. In other words, the gun is pointing where you are looking — with your right eye, for right-handers. If your eye is too high, the top rib will look like a motorway stretching out before you. The shot pattern will be placed too high when you shoot. With your eye too low, you

will be looking into the back of the top lever of the gun and may well lose sight of the target.

Practise your gun mount so that when you bring the gun to your cheek, you remember the touch position as the stock of the gun contacts your cheek, reasonably firmly. As the gun touches your cheek, it should also reach your shoulder at the same time; and if the gun fits you properly this simultaneous placement for the stock will happen automatically.

There should be no hint at all of getting the gun to your shoulder and then lowering your head to align your eye. Your coach can provide advice on gun fit.

To help with this efficient gun mount, imagine a laser coming out of a barrel of the gun and point it at the target, as you bring the gun to your cheek. During the mounting process keep the laser pointing at the target, by moving both of your hands in unison.

The gun and target are now therefore moving at the same angular speed across the sky. As the stock of the gun meets your cheek and shoulder, pull ahead of the target to give the appropriate forward allowance, in front of the target and pull the trigger.

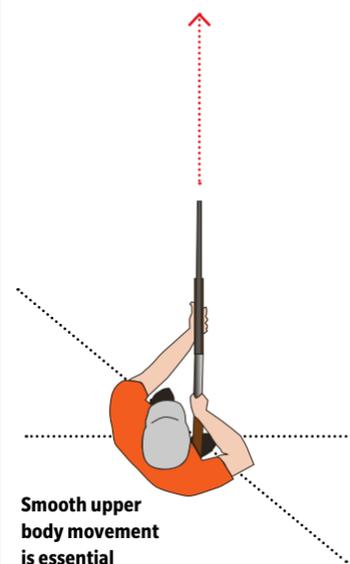
Keep the gun moving until you see the target has been hit. Always make sure you keep your head down and cheek on the stock throughout the shot, and remember you may need a second barrel.

Lifting the head from the stock is a very common error and is a natural reaction to give your brain more information about the target or a clearer view. The result is a shot placed too high, over the target. When the stock is on the cheek touch position, keep it there during the shot.

Upper body movement

Successful shotgun shooting depends on the smooth and controlled movement of your torso and arms to cover the area of the sky, or ground, where you are going to shoot the target. It is important to emphasise where

Target break zone



Smooth upper body movement is essential

you are going to shoot the target, not where the target has come from or indeed where it is going. Set up your feet and therefore the position of your upper body to allow two barrels in the optimum area of the sky.

A line through your toes will be at approximately 45° to the target contact area. Your feet should be approximately shoulder width apart. Any wider and your hips start to lock up earlier in the gun swing; any closer and you lose vertical stability. This component of shotgun shooting mirrors the need for correct foot placement in golf, cricket and tennis, for example.

The test of whether your feet are in a good position is to move your upper body and your mounted gun in the area of the sky where you anticipate shooting the target. Where you intend to shoot the target. Where you intend to shoot the target. »



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Shotgun shooting

Your feet should be approximately shoulder width apart



target should be at the most comfortable and controllable area of your body and gun movement. The most extreme upper body position is for the “true driven” target directly above your head.

Traditional shotgun coaching for this type of target centred on two differing techniques — one with weight principally on the forward, left foot (for the right hander) and the other method where weight was placed on the back, right foot. To some extent, the chosen technique will depend on your upper body flexibility — and the age of your spinal column.

Don't be constrained by using just one technique; if it is more controllable for you as a right-hander to let your weight come back on to your right rear foot, do so. If you are comfortable on the front foot and with a curled torso, do that. It may depend to some degree on the type of driven target, its speed, height and curl.

Self-diagnosis

Things may go wrong. Rarely, let's say, but they can. If they do, go through the pre- and post-shot checklist:

- Any eye problems?
- Did I close my offending dominant eye for the shot?
- Did I mount the gun properly to my well-practised touch position on my cheek and was the gun simultaneously in my shoulder?
- Did I lift my head to “look for” the target, resulting in a shot over the top?
- Did I have my feet in the right position and shoot the target in the expected position in the sky or was I caught out a bit?
- Did I read the flightline of the target correctly and establish a good gun-and-target relationship during my gun mount?

If all of these variables were performed correctly, the only reason for missing must be an incorrect forward allowance, or lead,

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The Institute of Clay Shooting Instructors was formed in the 1980s to provide qualified coaches with opportunities for further professional development, by the provision of seminars, workshops, practical activities and educational visits. ICSI coaches can be found at www.ICSI.org.uk



Safety quiz

Taking precedence over all of this and written on tablets of stone is “safety”. So here are some questions for you to consider. No prizes for the answers, just quiet confidence that you are on track if you do get them right.

1. On the majority of guns why isn't the safety catch truly a safety catch?
2. And what should we do about it in everyday gun handling?
3. Of the most common shotgun cartridges used what combination of bores are potentially dangerous: 12-bore, 16-bore, 20-bore, 28-bore and 410.
4. And why?



in front of the target. It may be that you simply got the gap wrong or, in the overwhelming desire for success, you tried to consciously measure the forward allowance and looked from the target back to the gun. Have confidence in your technique, focus keenly on the target and your brain will know where the gun is pointing. ■