

EYEING UP THE TARGET

Whether your favourite pigeon is made of clay or feather, both your mental and visual focus should be on the target, and nothing but the target, says Malcolm Plant

Unfortunately for shooters, there seems to be no direct link between a person's hand and eye dominance



In no way should you be looking at the gun once it is at your cheek and shoulder, as your brain is aware of its position relative to the target in your peripheral vision. All of your attention must be on the target as you pull the trigger.

As we have discussed before, mount the shotgun to your cheek and eye, not to your shoulder. If you are standing correctly with a well-practised gun mount and the shotgun fits you, it will naturally assume the right place in your shoulder pocket.

Try to keep your eyes as horizontal as possible and avoid canting your head over on to the stock.

Dominant or master eye

Most people have a master hand, the one which they prefer to write or hold a tennis racquet with. They may be right-handed or left-handed, and some lucky souls might even drift towards being ambidextrous. Similarly, most individuals have a dominant right or left eye. Unfortunately for shotgun shooters, there seems to be no direct link between a person's hand and eye dominance. A right-handed shotgun shooter may find that their left eye is controlling the gun. We will explore the consequences of this shortly. In addition, the equivalent of being ambidextrous occurs, where either eye might do the job. Fatigue, light »



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



Dr Malcolm Plant is chairman of the Institute of Clay Shooting Instructors and a Clay Pigeon Shooting Association senior coach.



Clay pigeon shooting

conditions, or even where the target is first seen can all influence this effect.

All of this has nothing to do with having something wrong with your eyes, it is simply the way the messages are sent from our eyes to the brain.

One interesting point to make is that a much greater percentage of females have a mismatch between hand and eye dominance when compared with the male population. Also the eye dominance of youngsters goes through some sort of development phase, so don't jump to conclusions too young.

Testing eye dominance

There are several ways to do this, but three will do, in increasing degrees of sensitivity:

- 1 The hole in a card method.
- 2 Pointing a finger.
- 3 Pointing an unloaded gun.

The last two of these are more helpful if done in the presence of a coach, as quite subtle effects can be seen by a trained eye.

1 The hole in card method

With both eyes wide open, look through a half-inch diameter hole in a postcard held at arms length. Look at a distant object through the hole, then bring the card back to your face. It will come back to your dominant eye, or possibly to the end of your nose if you have ambidextrous eyes.



2 Pointing a finger

When you point at an object you are actually trying to line up your dominant eye, the end of your finger, and the distant object. For a right-hander, I like the client to point with their left hand, because that is the body shape when shooting. The left hand points the gun. So, point at a distant object and by closing each eye in turn, see which eye is guiding your finger. If a coach gets a client to point directly at one of his eyes (rude, but the coach doesn't mind!) it is also possible to see which eye is dominant or, if there is any hint of uncertainty caused by ambidextrous eyes creeping into the client's pointing abilities.

3 Pointing an unloaded gun

A similar pointing exercise can be done with an unloaded gun. Having all of the metalwork of the gun in front of your face can influence eye dominance. In particular, if the gun does not fit you. For example if the stock is too low, the eye will look at the back of the gun's top-lever, encouraging the other eye to take over.



Eye dominance consequences

If you are right-handed and right eye dominant or left-handed and left eye dominant, you can shoot with both eyes open, secure in the knowledge that the dominant eye will let your brain know how the gun is positioned in relation to the target. Even in this situation, some shooters do like to close the other eye. However, if the wrong eye is dominant the gun will be pointing in the wrong direction. The right-hander with a left dominant eye will line up the left eye, the muzzles of the gun and the target, thus placing the shot pattern way to the left of the target. Out at about 40 yards the miss is three to four yards to the left!



A small opaque spot on the lens of shooting glasses can help

these small, semi-opaque, plastic film circles. The opaque spot must be placed on the shooting glasses so that when the shotgun is properly mounted, the offending dominant eye cannot see the end of the gun or the target.

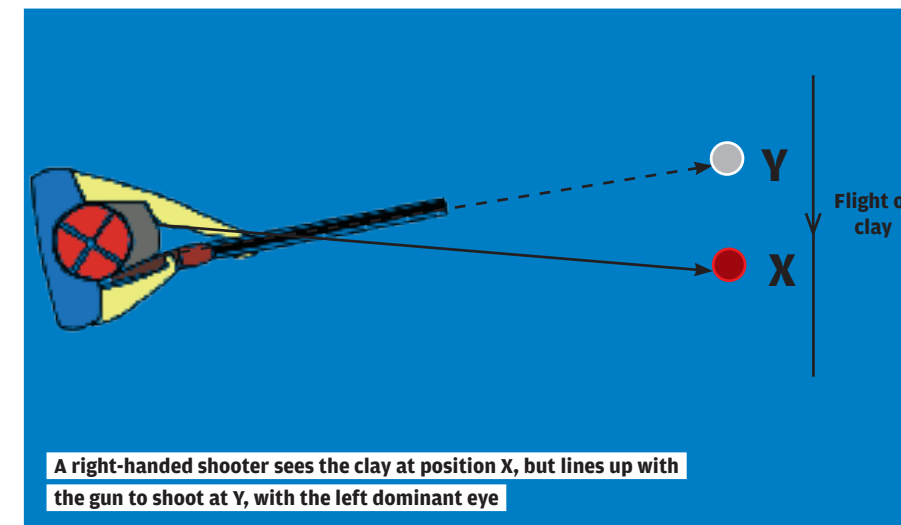
So, if your shooting is falling apart

“If your shooting is falling apart or you're just getting started, think about eye dominance”

The solution is to stop the left eye taking over by closing it, most shooters do this by closing or partially closing (dimming) the eye as the shotgun comes to their cheek.

When coaching, I prefer to advise the use of a small opaque spot on the lens of the client's shooting glasses. The benefit of this solution is that the dominant eye can remain open but ineffective, which avoids any tension in the muscles of the eyelids. There are several suppliers of

or if you are just getting started with a shotgun, think about your eye dominance. A qualified coach can help. One interesting challenge for a coach is the client who exhibits matching hand and eye dominance in the more relaxed environment of the practice or training ground, but whose dominance changes under the pressure of clay competition or the excitement of stratospheric pheasants. But that's another story. **SG**



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