



Teaching 101

Teaching New Shotgun Shooters

Introducing a newcomer or a “newbee” to shotgun shooting starts with a good **“UNDERSTANDING.”**

It’s this understanding that takes a “newbee” to success.

Let’s start with **Understanding Ammunition:** How is it manufactured, how does it work, and which shotgun shell should be used for which task?

Example: Let’s assume you will be introducing the shooter to clay targets.

- Clay targets do not require large shot or lots of powder — known as “lite.”
- Lite has 2¾ drams of powder and one ounce of #8 shot in a twelve gauge.
- Some instructors like to use ammunition marked “low recoil” in 1 ounce of #8 shot.

Understanding How the Shotgun Works

Instructors should cover how the gun is loaded and how it works. Also, how to hold a gun while transporting it to and from the shooting location is VERY important. Hold the muzzle up and carry it higher than your head.

Understanding How to Fit the Gun to the Shooter

Most store-purchased “off-the-shelf” guns come with a 14¼ inch trigger pull, or a measurement from the center of the trigger to the middle of the butt place on the stock. That’s great if you are a 165 pound adult male, but if you are smaller it is not going to be comfortable and will not result in success for the shooter.

A good recommendation, for “newbees” or women or girls of smaller stature, would be guns that have been shortened to 12½ or 13 inches. This puts the face in the proper place on the stock, which means that the form will be more comfortable with better target visibility.

Suggestion: a twelve gauge semi-automatic, such as a Remington 1100 or 1187. They are not really fancy and will do about anything you want to do, either for recreational shooting or hunting.

Understanding the Proper Shooting Position

Proper foot placement is the most important, and most overlooked, element of shooting form. Think of it as the foundation of the house. If the basement walls are not plumb, straight, and erect—everything above it to the chimney will need adjustments. Nothing will fit correctly and no matter what you do—you can’t fix it! So let’s get the feet placement correct!

- For right-handed shooters, picture a clock on the ground. (One with hands, not digital.) The left foot should point at 12 o’clock and the right foot at 2 o’clock with 6 to 8 inches between the heels. Give it a try—12 o’clock points at where you will point the gun and where you will break the target. It is also the center of your “Zone of Fire.” Keep the feet from moving from now on. Next we will position the arms.
- Again, assuming the shooter is a right-handed, right-eye-dominant person, stand erect and hold your arms out in front at shoulder height. Move the left hand to the right elbow and the right hand to the left elbow.
- Take the gun and place it on the right shoulder in the pocket developed when the arms came up. Remember to keep the arms and elbows level with the shoulders. You should place the top of the butt stock at the top of the shoulder with the muzzle elevated to about 45 degrees.
- Next instruct the shooter to place his or her head on the stock and look down the barrel. This should hang the cheekbone on the comb “top” of the gun-

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UNDERSTANDING:

- Ammunition
- How the Shotgun Works
- How to Fit the Gun to the Shooter
- The Proper Shooting Position
- Proper Target Selection

stock and have the head properly placed.

- Place the left hand on the forearm and the right hand on the grip.
- Now slowly lower the gun to horizontal while hunching the right shoulder up a bit, making sure the right elbow remains level with your shoulder.

Instructors should now assist the shooter and ask them to move their body forward without moving their feet. This results in the shooter's left knee barely bending and they will have about 60 percent of their weight on the front or left foot. Now have them move back and forward so that the weight transfer can be felt and learned.

Standing with the weight forward allows swinging to either the left or right smoothly and the pivot can be felt clear to the ankles—as it should be. Each joint of the body from the ankles up can contribute to the smooth swing without straining any muscles to overcome bad foot placement.

Note: Make sure the shooter doesn't spread his or her feet too far apart as in a baseball stance, just six to eight inches will do.

Have the shooter practice this several times until it becomes a natural stance. As you approach the time to actually shoot, you will want each step along the way to be mastered and understood before you go onto the next step.

Proper Target Selection

At this stage, success is everything. The target should be fun to shoot at and easy to hit. More important is the mental picture of the target and the gun muzzle when the shot is taken so that the target breaks. A good selection is to shoot an incoming target. In the field, this would be like a dove coming into a pond, or a duck as it prepares to plop into the decoys.

Use a battery operated, remote-controlled trap for this practice—placed about 60 yards in front of the shooter. They are easy to use, portable, and allow you to practice anywhere safety permits.

- Adjust the trap to toss a target toward the shooter, rising about 20 feet as it travels, to land about 10 feet in front of the shooter. The shot is called a “blot shot.”
- As the target is thrown from the trap, the shooter swings the gun up and under the target until the muzzle “blots” out the target. Then bang it and keep swinging the gun, and pieces fall to the ground.
- Sometimes the shooter wants to ride the target before shooting. Remember the target is coming closer all the time, and the shot pattern is less the closer you shoot. Rule of thumb: As the shot leaves the shotgun muzzle, the shot spreads out about one inch for each yard that it travels. So 3 yards—3 inches, 10 yards—10 inches, 20 yards—20 inches, and 30 yards—30 inches. So don't let the shooter wait until the shot gets “righter.” Get the gun swinging and bang the target—the sooner, the better.

Next, is to shoot the same target twice. “How can we do that if we broke it?” you ask. Well, maybe you did. If so, there are pieces still in the air. The range we desire is in the 30 to 40 yard area, which is where the shot pattern is really working for you, whether it is clay targets, quail or pheasant targets.

Instructors: A good way to get the shooter to do this is in the instruction presented at the first shot. Tell the “newbee,” “If you do the things that you were taught, I guarantee that you will be breaking targets with confidence by the third shot and you will be able to break PIECES by the fifth shot.” It is important to get the eyes searching “out there” for the target or piece, NOT looking down the barrel or, heaven forbid, aiming, but seeing the object then moving the gun until the muzzle touches the target and, bang, success happens. Most “newbees” are eager to do what you ask and will do well if they are not overloaded with details and if what they are asked to do falls within their capabilities.

This is kind of sneaking up on the shooting method called the Swing Through method.

Here is how this works:

If we could hook up a series of cameras and electrical gizmos to the body of a good Swing Through shooter, we would see the following sequence of events.

- As the target is first seen, the shooter starts the gun in motion to come to the proper shooting stance.
- Next the shooter starts swinging the gun along the path of the target, from behind it. The shooter must swing faster as the target is moving in order to catch up to it.
- At that time, the brain sends a signal to the finger to operate the trigger. It responds while the gun is now pointed ahead of the target.
- Now, the mechanical thing happens in the gun causing the shell to perform its function, all the time the gun is still moving.
- Finally the shot leaves the muzzle and flies out at about 1200 feet per second to seek and destroy the target. And, again, the gun and, therefore, the muzzle keep swinging on the same plane as the target, following the bird or target all the way to the ground.

Of course, all this takes place in less than the blink of an eye so we really can't see it happen in real life, but the gizmos we mentioned earlier could and, in fact, have recorded all of this.

This is just a long way of saying, that if we swing to and through the target, lead takes care of itself. Make sense? We hope so because it's the basis for hitting any flying object, be it bird or clay. The faster it flies, the faster you must swing, simple as that!

No coaching please by saying “you are shooting behind it.” Rather, coach by saying, “swing faster.”

Next bring the trap in and place it to throw outgoing targets, again keeping them “hittable.” Don't let them get too high, just nice, and outgoing, like a quail bursting from cover and streaking away. As the shooter gains confidence and is able to pepper these, move the shooter to the left then the right to get an angle shot. Again, the Swing Through method comes into play. Inform your shooters to be prepared to make a serious investment in sporting toys, jacket, shells, bags, re-loaders, etc., because the “understanding” is now complete and satisfaction will follow.

One other thing!

If you have the good fortune to be with a new shooter when he or she breaks their first target—STOP for a moment and retrieve that empty shell, make a big deal about presenting that shell to them—for it is truly a trophy and the first of many happy memories to come! +