



NATIONAL SKEET SHOOTING ASSOCIATION

TRAINING TIPS FROM TOP INSTRUCTORS



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TRAINING TIPS FROM TOP INSTRUCTORS

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The Speed Drill

The key to doubles is to break both targets inside the ideal break zone. The Speed Drill teaches you how to do that.



▲ John D. Shima

I developed the Speed Drill to force clients to shoot doubles outside their current comfort zone and inside the ideal break zone. Someone can tell you to shift your eyes “up to the hoop” after the first shot in doubles, but a lot of times those words don’t compute due to an ingrained prediction habit. My Speed Drill forces you to shoot the first target normally, or a little sooner,

and the second target at or before the hold point of the first target.

My maxim for the Speed Drill is, “Do not give up speed for accuracy.” This gives you permission to miss the first target and allows your peripheral vision to expand and pick up the second target faster, because your conscious mind knows the gun is going off sooner than usual.

In essence, the Speed Drill changes gun movement from a loop or buttonhook to a check mark. Introduction of the “check mark” gun movement temporarily stops the gun barrel so your shooting eye can detect and acquire the second target in much the same manner it acquired the first target. Continuous movement of the gun barrel with the traditional loop or buttonhook technique is essentially akin to “leaving on your call” for the second target unless you are able to exercise extraordinary visual discipline.

The reverse movement of your gun barrel prior to detection and acquisition of the second target will cause your shooting eye to switch your primary visual focus to the end of the rib and create an optical illusion. This is the kiss of death when you intend to shoot sustained lead on both targets of a pair.

I introduce the Speed Drill to shooters in two ways: the one-shell method and the two-shell method. The one-shell method allows you to dry-fire quickly at the first target so you can direct your complete attention to pausing gun movement, making an eye shift to detect and acquire the second target on the opposite side of the rib, centering visual focus on the second target, synchronizing gun movement, and releasing the shot. The one-shell method is helpful when a habit of prediction causes continuous movement of the gun barrel between the first and second targets.

Prediction is one of many tricks your mind uses to improve efficiency and preserve energy. You unconsciously create a

prediction habit as a novice when shooting the outgoing target at or beyond the center stake at stations 2 and 6. After shooting the first target so late, you instinctively swing the gun back toward the skeet house to where you predict the second tar-

The Speed Drill changes gun movement from a loop or buttonhook to a check mark.

get will be. Therefore, you must fire at the first target at the correct time to establish an appropriate look point for your eye shift and detection of the second target. Without a correct eye shift to detect and acquire the second target, the shooting eye will inevitably focus on the end of the rib while the gun searches for the second target.

After you develop confidence and a consistent cadence using the one-shell method, you may progress to the two-shell method. The objective of the two-shell method is to release both shots at the ideal break points, and in the proper

cadence, rather than trying to break the targets. The intention to break the targets usually activates the old habit, which delays release of the first shot and causes predictive gun movement to acquire the second target.

I prefer my Speed Drill to the Report Pair technique because it forces you to break the first target at the ideal break point. The Report Pair method is indicated for beginners to prevent them from developing an unfavorable prediction habit, but it doesn’t help the average shooter break a prediction habit because it doesn’t force you to speed up the process.

The purpose of the Speed Drill is to help you develop the proper break points and cadence that promote consistent success when shooting skeet doubles and true pairs in sporting clays.

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It's All In The Eyes

Where your eyes look and how they focus on the target can make or break your shot.



▲ Paul Giambrone III

Your eyes can be your biggest asset or your biggest liability when it comes to how well you shoot for the day. First off, realize eye dominance can be an issue, so it is important for you to know which eye is your master or dominant eye. In some cases, a shooter is right-handed and right-eye dominant, but for some reason the left eye still wants to peek in every so often, which causes issues. A qualified instructor can guide you here, because this is a case-by-case basis.

Let's dive into the technique when you initially set up for the target and what to do when you go to acquire and shoot the target. When you first set up for your target at your hold point, you need to shift your eyes to the proper look point without moving your head. I see a lot of shooters take their heads off the stock (sometimes without even knowing it) when they shift their eyes back to the look point. This causes the rear sight of the shotgun (your eye) to be misaligned down the gun, causing the point of impact to change without you realizing it. When this happens, the shooter usually makes a good move and feels they visually acquire the target like they want, but the target doesn't break. This shot drives us crazy because everything looks correct when you pull the trigger. This is why it is so important to have your head locked in when shooting



“relaxed” focus. This will improve your peripheral vision and help you relax overall. When you are in soft focus, you'll be able to acquire and pick up the initial “flash” or “streak” of the target. By allowing yourself to pick up the flash more quickly, you will be able to match gun speed with target speed much faster, which will help you break the targets in the proper break zones. Have your break point established

the hard focus just before I get to the break zone. When I shift to the hard focus, I am looking for the front rim of the target, or where the black meets the orange. Once I see the target clearly in my break zone, I pull the trigger without hesitating. Yes, if your eyes are up to date (I see my eye doctor each year to make sure I am seeing properly), you can see the targets this clearly. Next time you are at the gun club, give it a try — look hard for that front edge and enjoy the results!

“This shot drives us crazy because everything looks correct when you pull the trigger.”

skeet — quick crossing shots in particular require a lot of things to happen correctly in a short amount of time.

Once your head is secure and your eyes are back at your look point, relax your eyes into what we call a “soft focus” or

▲ Relax your eyes to improve peripheral vision. When you're in “soft focus” mode, you can acquire the target more quickly.

before stepping on the station so you know when to shift to a hard focus on the target. I usually shift my eyes from being in the softer focus to the harder focus about 10 to 15 feet before my break zone. It takes your eye muscles only a split second to focus hard on the target, which is why I shift to

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Only “Why” Matters

When you miss a target, you might be tempted to ask “where’d I miss it?” That’s the wrong question. Don’t ask “where” you missed it. Instead, ask “why.”



▲ Clayton M. Rue

When a target is missed, almost all shooters, and unfortunately a lot of well-meaning instructors, instantly focus only on where the target was missed, rather than why the target was missed. Where a target was missed is a moot point — the zero is on the score card. Where a target was missed is an outcome — not a process. Where a target was missed cannot be fixed — nothing can be learned. What does matter, and what can be fixed, and what can result in breaking the next target, is *why* the target was missed.

As a Master Class shooter and Level III instructor, I often have squad mates turn to me after a miss and inquire as to where they missed the target. I don’t want to be rude, but I try not to answer that question — because never once have I seen someone miss a target who had accurately read the target, then planned and executed the shot properly. There was always a breakdown, sometimes minor and sometimes major, in their processes that caused the miss.

Similarly, I have had students hire me for a lesson and think that all I need to do to make them a better shooter is to call



▼ MIKE HESSONG

▲ If you missed, it’s because something went wrong in the process of reading the target, planning your shot and executing.

their misses. Nothing could be further from the truth. Calling someone’s misses and walking them in on the target, without correcting the deficiency in their technique, actually does them significant harm. There is absolutely no learning going on, and the student is only reinforcing bad habits. This approach only guarantees the student will never improve and the instructor will sell them a lot of lessons (at least for a while).

Focusing on the *where* will cause a shooter to ask the wrong questions. They might have been unable to focus on the target, but they aren’t questioning their selected focal point. They might have spoiled the line, but they aren’t questioning their selected hold point. They might have been out of rhythm with the target, but they aren’t questioning their setup. They simply ask, “where?” They ask the wrong question and they are frustrated when their solution doesn’t work. They are focused on the *where* and not the *why*.

Alternately, if a student has a problem with a certain presentation, and they seek my help in understanding the why versus the where, I can work with them to develop a process that will consistently produce X’s. Utilizing that process, with

no further help from me or anyone else, they can confidently shoot that presentation from now on. All they have to remember is to refocus on the process whenever a zero shows up on their score card.

The best shooters go to great lengths to perfect the process of shooting. When they miss a target, they focus on their process and not on the outcome. They reevaluate their process and make changes immediately (fixing the *why*). You won’t see them doing the same thing and simply trying to shoot in a different place (fixing the *where*). So, the next time you struggle with a target, make sure you are seeking to understand and correct the *why*. And, should you encounter an instructor who wants to talk the *where*, instead of fixing the *why* — fire him!

► Clayton Rue is an NSCA Level III instructor and the Chief Shooting Instructor for Grouse Ridge Shooting Grounds in Wasilla, Alaska. He has been a professional instructor since 2000 and is heavily involved in youth shooting programs in Alaska. He has hunted birds on four continents and is addicted to side-by-side shotguns. He can be reached at clayton.rue@gmail.com.

BY TODD BENDER

Style vs. Technique

Style has to do with personality, while technique has to do with mechanics and execution.



▲ Todd Bender

There is always much discussion about a shooter's style and technique. But many times these two terms are intermingled without fully understanding the definition of each when dissecting a shooter's game. "Style" refers to a personal characteristic, a manner of execution. It's the way in which something is done; the personality of execution. "Technique," by definition, is the method with reference to practical or formal details, using

basic skills, in carrying out a mechanical operation.

Given these definitions, copying a good shooter's style would be useless unless the underlying technique was understood and assimilated at the same time. It is the technical aspect of one's form that consistently achieves success, while style is simply the surface of execution. We can liken this to a beautiful home that is built on a less-than-solid foundation. It might look good above ground, but it won't stand the test of time.

Therefore, someone with a distinctive style might or might not have good technique. Style is not substance. Conversely, it would be rare that you would find a shooter with good tech-

nique that hasn't developed some sense of personal style during the evolution of learning and implementation of a proper technique.

You will find in many sports a congruency among the top performers — they are using very similar techniques and mechanics. Many of the top shooters also have different styles. Because they might look very different, many will think they shoot completely different. But when an educated eye strips away the surface, the exterior and the style, it's easy to see that the underlying physical mechanics — the technique — is the same.

A friend of mine is IPSC Pistol Champion Doug Koenig. Doug is arguably the best pistol shooter to ever walk the planet. I asked him about the fundamentals of pistol shooting and if most of the top competitors in his discipline used the same approach. Doug said, "Of the top 10 guys (in his sport), if you cut our heads off, we'd all look the same."

So, how do you dissect form to reveal the actual mechanics that are being used? Look for what is driving the move. Are the hands creating gun movement, or is the drive coming from the lower body? Pay attention to how the gun moves with the target. Is there a change in body position or weight distribution at the end of a shot relative to the beginning?

When we watch shooters, we normally look at the target. "He hit that one hard." But how did he do it? How were the shooter's feet positioned in relationship to the field? Where did the gun start? Was his or her hold point high or low? What timing was used? But don't just watch how they shoot each particular target. Try to formulate and define a system that you might see. What do they do every time? How does it compare to other shooters at their level?

Copying the surface without understanding the substance will not deliver the desired result. Mimicking proper form can be a positive, assuming you understand the underlying mechanics and assimilate those mechanics properly — because in the end that is their key to success



MIKE HESSONG

▲ Technique is the foundation of consistent shooting and can be discerned by examining the mechanics a good shooter uses. Try to figure out what they are doing exactly the same way every time.

► Todd Bender was named the first Master Instructor for the NSSA. He has worked alongside Olympic Gold Medalist Lanny Bassham for 10 years and is a Certified Instructor with Bassham's Mental Management Systems in Dallas, Texas. For information about Todd Bender Performance International and for Todd's 2016 clinic schedule, go to toddbenderintl.com or contact Todd Bender at bendershima@aol.com.

The Incomer Drill

Thinking too much? Experiencing target anxiety? This drill can help you break those patterns.



▲ John D. Shima

The Incomer Drill was initially called the “Four Drill,” because it is simply shooting four incoming targets each at stations 1, 2, 3, 5, 6 and 7 on a skeet field. My purpose for developing this drill was to “rewire the brain” of analytical shooters.

The slower incoming targets reduce target anxiety so you can work on programming of new watching

and shooting reflexes. Eventually these new habits can be used to break the faster outgoing targets.

Although the Incomer Drill is relegated to the skeet field, it is equally beneficial for sporting clays enthusiasts because it can be applied to improve mechanical, visual and mental discipline in both clay target sports. Since I developed this simple drill more than 20 years ago, I have introduced a few variations of it to address specific shooting faults.

The basic Incomer Drill is ideal for helping you master the fundamentals of shooting clay targets. The Incomer Drill for a clay target shooter is akin to shooting free throws for a basketball player. It slows everything down and minimizes the potential for distractions so you can direct your attention to the fundamentals.

I often remark that mastery of the clay target sports is more a matter of discipline than shooting skill. Variations of the Incomer Drill can be used to improve your mechanical, visual and mental discipline.

Mechanical Discipline – When I speak about mechanical discipline, I mean that *movement must be initiated from the feet and ankles*, that the rate of movement is a consequence of turning the upper body as a unit about an axis of rotation, and that maintaining balance is necessary to keep the head and eyes level throughout the sequence. These fundamentals apply to every discipline that involves movement, from ballet to ballroom dancing, from boxing to karate.

By slowing down the process, you can focus your attention on specific elements of the movement. After each element has been programmed, they can be integrated into a continuous sequence. Repetition of the sequence programs your adaptive unconscious to create a reliable reflex or habitual pre-planned move. By shooting four incoming targets at each station, you can gradually accelerate and synchronize the pre-planned moves with the speed of the clay target.

Visual Discipline – When I speak about visual discipline,

I mean *the focus of your shooting eye must be above and beyond the barrel of the shotgun*. Since your convergence reflex is very strong and your divergence reflex is very weak, a variation of the Incomer Drill can be used to strengthen your divergence muscles.

“It slows everything down and minimizes the potential for distractions.”

To strengthen your ability to maintain depth of focus out on the path of the target, I recommend you break the first incomer at each station over the center stake. Each of the next three targets are engaged at the same place as the first target, but tracking is increased to delay each subsequent break point 5 to 10 yards closer to your station. “Dragging each target” farther each time forces you to consciously prolong your hyper focus (hard focus).

Mental Discipline – When I speak about mental discipline, I mean *your mind must be quiet and in a state of awareness before you call for the target*. Establishing a

quiet mind by settling your shooting eye in expanded soft focus at the eye hold requires deliberate training.

To strengthen your ability to quiet your mind before calling for the target, I recommend you shoot one incoming target at each station. If you are with a squad that is shooting a regular round of skeet, they will each shoot 25 targets and you will shoot only six targets. This exercise is based upon the *kyudo* principle of “one arrow, one life.” You will release only one shot at each station regardless of the outcome.

In conclusion, the purpose of my Incomer Drill is to use the slow-moving targets to improve your mechanical, visual and mental discipline through deliberate repetition. The emphasis must be on the number of times the specific element of the shot sequence was executed properly. The number of broken targets is not relevant.

► John Shima is a former five-time World Skeet Champion and is a leading authority on detection of visual deceptions and prescribing appropriate visual training to unleash the power of reality for clay target shooters. For more information, email at john@johnshima.com. To view previous articles go to www.johnshima.com/publications.

Aligning Expectations With Goals

No matter what your shooting goal is, be realistic about what it's going to take to get there.



▲ By Paul Giambrone, III

All too often, I see problems when expectations and goals are not aligned for the average shooter. When I am coaching someone, we talk about goals in the beginning of the lesson — short- and long-term goals — and we discuss and work on this topic throughout the lesson. I see shooters get so bent out of shape when they miss. Sometimes it's to the point where they're throwing hulls, slamming their heads

back and looking up to the sky as if they can't believe they just missed a target — sometimes even colorful metaphors follow! Hey, we are all guilty of this, though quite frankly, none of us should show such frustration and disgust in our games on the field. But I often see this out of shooters who think they should be World Champions



▲ Whether your goal is to become a World Champion or just to have fun with friends and stay competitive, make sure the work you're putting in matches the goal you've set — or you'll never get there.

or even State Champions, but who shoot only four boxes of practice each week.

There is nothing wrong with setting high goals. The old saying "Aim for the stars, and if you fall short, you're still at the treetops" certainly applies here. However, if you want to chase

these higher goals, you have to put in a lot of time and effort and dedicate yourself to this sport for a minimum of five years to reach any high goals. One of the best shooters in Louisiana told my father that in order to get to AA across the board (back

"My one and only goal is to take the best possible shot at the next target."

when my father started, AA was the highest class), he had to shoot a minimum of 5,000 registered targets, shoot three times that in practice and have a reliable coach for five straight years to achieve the consistency he needed to reach this goal. Wow!

Don't feel left out if this isn't your mindset. I have several shooters that want to just feel competitive or "not embarrass themselves" when they go shoot with their buddies. There's nothing wrong with these goals. Realize you still need good and sound coaching in order to understand the fundamentals of skeet shooting, and you need

to work those fundamentals in several practice sessions to get them engrained. This doesn't mean you have to take multiple lessons and shoot as much as the guy I mentioned earlier, but you still have to work at it. This game is built around the need to have solid fundamentals and the mental control to execute those fundamentals with minimal flaws to get results.

There are several types of shooters between these two extremes as well. But no matter what your overall goal is with regard to shooting, there is one goal that can be universal. I set this goal each year, and it is applicable to all of the different types of shooters out there. My one and only goal is to take the best possible shot at the next target at that given moment in time. Give that next target your absolute best — 100 percent of your attention and focus — and let what happens, happen. Nothing more, nothing less.

► Paul Giambrone, III is the youngest inductee in the NSSA Hall of Fame and is a 17-time World Champion. Paul specializes in skeet shooting instruction and is an NSSA Master Level Instructor. For more information about Paul and other shooting tips, please visit www.breakmoretargets.com.

Just Relax

Relaxing your muscles — including the one between your ears — positions you to move smoothly and fluidly through your shot.



▲ Clayton M. Rue

When shooting a shotgun, one should always try to have their body in its most natural relaxed position just as the shot is released. Any muscle tightness at that critical point will only restrict the shooter's ability to smoothly and easily execute the shot. Muscle binding can result in a stalled swing, a rolling of the shoulders or several other defects that

can lead to missed targets.

The first step to ensuring a relaxed body is a proper setup. This means the feet are shoulder width apart and properly positioned to provide a totally relaxed body at the selected break point. The upper body should have only a slight forward bias. Any more than that tightens up the muscles in the lower back and impedes a shooter's ability to rotate their upper body. This means you will need to "wind up your spring" a little to allow for proper body movement while the target is in the air. Then when you feel your body totally relax, that is your cue to release the shot. The key muscle group to use as an indicator that you are doing this right is the lower back. Any tightness here (at the break point) is detrimental to your shooting.

The next step to ensuring a relaxed body is to relax the shoulders. Both arms should be very loose throughout the shot. This means both elbows are pointed down at about a 45-degree angle to the upper body and can be easily wiggled



▲ Set up so your body is totally relaxed at the break point, then "wind up" a little to your hold point. The muscle tension will release itself as your body pivots while the target is in the air, and you'll take the shot at the proper point when your muscles are fully relaxed.

by your instructor. When a shooter raises their elbows, it locks all of the muscles from shoulder to shoulder and severely impedes one's ability to smoothly and easily swing a shotgun. The key muscle group to use as an indicator that you are doing this right are the trapezius muscles (which extend over the back of the neck and shoulders). They should be totally relaxed when the target is called for.

"Grip the shotgun no tighter than what is required to consistently control it."

The next step to ensuring a relaxed body is to relax the hands. One should grip the shotgun no tighter than what is required to consistently control it. This is much lighter than most shooters grip their gun. A tight grip on the gun tightens all of the muscles in the forearms and upper arms. This handicaps the hands' ability to make minor corrections in muzzle movement while the target is in the air. The key muscle group to use as an indicator that you are doing this right

are the forearms. If they are tensed, you are gripping the gun too tightly.

Another important muscle group to relax are the facial muscles. Squinting your eyes will result in a reduced depth of field and your ability to focus on the target. Clenching your jaws can affect your gun fit and is a sure sign you are reacting negatively to the pressure of competition. I always recommend facial relaxation as part of a good pre-shot routine.

And most importantly, don't forget to relax that muscle between your ears. The mind must be calm and free from any distractions in order for the subconscious to function at its best. The mind must be able to focus undisturbed on the leading edge of the target. Relax your mind and body to achieve your optimum shooting condition.

► Clayton Rue is an NSCA Level III instructor and the Chief Shooting Instructor for Grouse Ridge Shooting Grounds in Wasilla, Alaska. He has been a professional instructor since 2000 and is heavily involved in youth shooting programs in Alaska. He has hunted birds on four continents and is addicted to side-by-side shotguns. He can be reached at clayton.rue@gmail.com.

Compartmentalize

You know all those nagging thoughts that try to jump in and disrupt your pre-shot routine? Here's how to tuck them away for later.



▲ Gary Walstrom

Do all the top shooters rush to a tournament, unload their carts, load up their gear and rush off to shoot in the preliminary event? How many of us do that? We drive down the morning of the shoot, unload our cart, throw some shells in the back, add a vest and some shooting glasses, throw our gun in a sleeve, and off to registration we go. We register and get our score cards, shooter

number and bag of goodies from the sponsors, and now we are off for a fun afternoon of shooting.

What is going on in our brain? Well, we haven't had the time to close the door on those phone calls we took on the way to the tournament; we haven't put into closed compartments the stuff that stops us from being able to get a strong focus on our afternoon of shooting. What items need to be put into those little compartments and locked away until we are done shooting? Everything!

I recently was at a FITASC event where I shot the first parcours very well and left with a 24. When I went to start my Polaris to proceed to the next parcours, the battery was dead. Fortunately, I jumped in another cart and headed off to the next parcours, while a couple of people were going to jump-start my Polaris and at least get it back to my trailer. On the second parcours I still shot well, but now it was time for questions. I wonder why my battery is dead when the Polaris was only a little over a year old? Did they get it started and was it back at my trailer by now? Where was I going to get a new battery if the current one was dead? How was I going to get through the next four days of the tournament without my ride? With all these questions now popping into the back of my mind, you know what happened on the last two parcours.

We could write a book on what happens to people who are taken out of their comfort zone, so I want to show you what you need to do to get *into* the best comfort zone.

Many people will say you have to have a plan, and they're right. But how do you handle all those little items that can ruin a plan by pushing themselves into the forefront of your mind? Some will advise you to just stick to the plan and insist that nothing else matters — but for 90 percent of shooters, that's not a real solution.

The answer is to compartmentalize the items that are in your

head — extract all the things in your brain that prohibit it from focusing on seeing the target. Even in golf, what is the pro golfer thinking about when he takes the club back for his first swing on hole number 1? Nothing. Just like in shooting, he has already gone through his pre-shot routine, he has already visualized the flight of the ball, and now he's ready to go. In shooting it is the same: You cannot be thinking about any-

You cannot be thinking about anything else other than focusing on the target.

thing else other than focusing on the target.

How then do we compartmentalize all of that “stuff” in our head? Do you want to spend a lot of money on this answer or would you like it stupidly simple? I like simple. Therefore, make a list — just make a written list of all of the stuff in your head, whether it be work, wife, girlfriend, grocery list, or whatever. With the list now written down, the brain knows that at some time it can go back to those and put

them into a proper agenda of priorities and time frames, but for right now, in the present, the brain can think about looking at and focusing on one thing—the target.

I carry a journal in my shooting bag for recording my scores and what target presentations I missed (therefore what needs to be practiced next), but I have also added a page where I can empty my head of the stuff that will now allow me to truly be focused on seeing the target. I use my journal now more than ever as my brain knows where it was stored, so I pull it out after the day's events or the entire tournament and begin to check the items off the list as they are completed.

You will find it truly amazing how effective this is. The factual writing down of the “stuff” and knowing where it is when you need to go back and find all those items is an absolute solution to not letting them leak back into your present, conscious thoughts while in a tournament setting.

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Gearing Up For The Start Of The Season



▲ Ralph Aaron

For most shooters, the off-season is the months of November through February. That's normally the lull in registered tournaments. In March and April, people tend to start getting really serious again. What can you do now to start getting ready for the upcoming season?

First, keep shooting during the off season. I encourage anyone who works with me to shoot at least once a week in the off-season. Even if it's just a couple of rounds, that's okay. If you feel really burned out and are just going through the motions, you might take a month's rest, but I wouldn't go any longer than that without doing some serious shooting.

You need to take a long, hard look back at the previous year, both the good and bad results, and see where you are. Identify some strengths and weaknesses based off your previous season. There's always a reason we don't shoot as well as we'd like to. Of course, you might not always know what those are. One way to go about making the decision is to take a lesson from a certified instructor and see what suggestions he, or she, has for you. You also need to set some goals for the upcoming year. Take a look at your schedule for 2016. What do you want to do this year?

You should have had all of your equipment serviced at the end of your season — if you didn't, now is the time to get it done before shooting season gets started again. A vital part of that that so many look past is getting your eyes examined. After all, your body is your most valuable piece of equipment. If you're tinkering with gun fit, keep in mind that it's still cold in most parts of the country, and equipment fit might be a little different when you're wearing winter clothing. Be conscious of that and do what you have to do to make it work.

Based on the analysis of the previous season, you should focus your practice on what you need to work on. It sounds simple, but so many shooters go out there and just shoot round after round of practice. That's okay, but it's really not the dedicated skills practice you need to do to address those areas you've identified as areas you need to work on for the coming season. For example, if you realized you were having trouble at high 3, why are you shooting at low 7? Focus your practice.

I highly recommend a lot of station practice and I like to

practice common targets. For example, high 2 and low 6 are very good. I'd suggest shooting four at high 2 and then walk over and four at low 6, then back for four

So many shooters just go out there and shoot round after round of practice. That's OK, but it's really not the dedicated skills practice you need.

more at high 2. Shoot the whole box that way.

Each off-season practice should focus on one of the fundamentals, too. Don't just shoot a round of skeet and keep score. If you want to shoot better this year than you did last year, work on eye focal point, kill zone, or any of the other fundamentals. Follow-through is a big one. Anyone can use a little work on follow-through.

One of the biggest mistakes shooters make during the off-season is losing focus

on the fundamentals. Eye focus is a big one. I've seen many shooters bring their gun up to the hold point and yell, "pull." They haven't focused their eyes and they aren't looking where they need to be looking to be really able to lock on that target. The most important thing in skeet shooting is what you do with your eyes.

Look back at your previous season. How were the environmental conditions? Did you shoot better at one club compared to another? Did it have a green background? Try wearing shades of red to offset the green background. Give it a whirl in practice. Was the wind a factor? Then practice on windy days. Were there distractions? Can you recreate that in a practice environment? Invariably, you'll have some friends that maybe aren't as serious as you are that will want to go shoot a round for fun. That's okay and can be good for training yourself to keep your focus. Just let them do their thing. You stay focused and shoot your round. Work on being able to clear your head of all of that, and you'll perform better in the coming season.

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That Pesky High 2

A couple of targets seem to give us all a little more trouble, and High 2 is one of the toughest. Here's how to approach it and break it.



▲ By Paul Giambrone, III

If you have been shooting skeet for a couple of weeks or several years, there are a couple of targets that come up in every discussion. High 2 is one of them. It flashes no more than a few yards right in front of us going at least 45 miles per hour. Naturally, that is difficult to keep up with! However, these few tips I am going to give you will make your life easier when you're getting ready to shoot High 2.

First off, you need a game plan or some kind of pre-station routine. I like to go over five key points before I get on the station:

- 1) Foot position
- 2) Hold point
- 3) Look point
- 4) Break point
- 5) Visualize the shot and sight picture

Let's run through these to give you the proper setup.



▲ When you're setting up for High 2, face the low house window, pick out a hold point and let your eyes go into soft focus.

For High 2, a right-handed shooter should be facing the low house window. A left-handed shooter should be facing the high house window. This sets up your natural point of aim at the break point (two-thirds of the way to the center stake, or

21 feet before center). This allows you to swing freely from start to finish. On station 2, I like to see my shooters stand on the right side of the station and sometimes on the back of the station, which helps open up their peripheral vision so they can pick up the flash sooner.

"Each shooter must find their sweet spot..."

Once you have determined your foot position, pick out something in the background for your hold point, which will be one-third of the way from the house to the center stake (21 feet from the front of station 1 to the center stake). There are several ways to find one-third of the way, but the best way is to mark it off on the practice field with a cone or other object to give you the visual and get used to that distance. Keep in mind, this is not legal at a tournament.

Your muzzle elevation should be at the bottom of the window. From here, you need to look anywhere from straight up above the gun (two to three feet) to halfway back and up in the flight path. Each shooter must find their sweet spot, but mine is about four feet

back and two to three feet up in the target flight path. The most important thing about the look point besides getting your eyes into a soft focus is getting them up high enough at your look point. That way you catch the flash in your far left periphery to help start your swing on time. Matching gun speed with target speed as soon as you catch that flash is crucial. Once you match the speed, focus really hard on the front edge of the target and squeeze the trigger with no hesitation.

Last but not least, I like to visualize all of this information and the shot itself before stepping on the station. This gives me confidence in my game plan and helps settle my nerves before getting up there to shoot one of the more difficult targets on the skeet field.

► Paul Giambrone, III is the youngest inductee in the NSSA Hall of Fame and is a 17-time World Champion. Paul specializes in skeet shooting instruction and is an NSSA Master Level Instructor. He spends time traveling across North America giving lessons and competing. For more information about Paul and other shooting tips, please visit www.breakmoretargets.com