A Simple Handgun Marksmanship Self-assessment Exercise
$Revision: 1.12 $

1. Introduction

For many people, "test anxiety" is inevitable whenever their competence may be called into question. When it comes to carrying a gun for protection, a life-threatening emergency is the ultimate test - a test which most hope will never happen! The Dunning-Kruger effect is a cognitive bias in which one overestimates one's abilities. This exercise is intended to rectify that misperception, should it exist, regarding handgun marksmanship.

 This exercise is NOT a "test"!

Rather it is a simple way to assess your own defensive handgun marksmanship skills and may even suggest a framework to practice and improve those skills. **Note that this exercise does NOT address awareness of what's beyond the target, a very important aspect in any self-defense situation!**

Familiarity is the enemy of anxiety, so use this drill periodically to assess your handgun skills level and practice as often as you like. Make your carry gun your friend.

2. Setup

All you need for this exercise is a safe place to shoot, your carry gun (or an AirSoft analog), some ammo, a couple magazines or speed loaders, some simple targets, and eye/ear protection. A shot timer would be handy, but a stopwatch will do.

If your carry-gun is a 5-shot revolver, adjust the 3 & 7 yard exercises to include a reload before the final component. In the 15 yard exercise (12 shots in 20 seconds), a 5-shot revolver will require 2 reloads.

Each time you run the exercise, record your on-target, timed shots on a copy of page 4. Assess your skill level as described in the "Interpreting The Results" section below.

2.1 Some target ideas

I tape two 8.5x11 paper targets, one above the other, on a large cardboard box so their red centers are about 11" apart. The lower target represents the center-of-mass (COM) target, the upper represents the HEAD target. At the range, I put a rock in the box for stability. Target examples:

1. used copy paper with a 1/2" bright red sticker/dot in the center.

2. free printable NRA silhouette targets, see:

    https://targets4free.com/category/nra-targets/

    If printed in B&W, put a 1/2" red sticker/dot in the center.

3. At 3 Yards - close-order drill

This series of shots may be considered a warm-up, but many self-defense shootings occur within 3 to 7 yards.

1. Load 6 rounds & holster.

2. On the start command or buzzer, fire 2 rounds to the lower (COM) target. (time of 2.5 seconds for score to count)

3. Repeat twice more for a total of 6 rounds.

4. load 6 more rounds.

5. On the start command/buzzer, fire 2 rounds to COM and one round to the upper "HEAD" target. (time of 3 seconds for score to count)

6. Repeat once more for a total of 12 shots at 3 yards.

4. At 7 Yards - if you're practiced and skilled

According to FBI statistics, 7 to 10 yards is the most common distance for self-defense shootings, with 6 shots being fired. Search for "Teuller distance" or "21 foot rule". Note that "the 21 foot rule", does NOT apply if the threat has a gun!

1. Load 6 rounds and holster.

2. At the start command/buzzer, draw and fire 2 rounds to the COM. (time of 2.5 seconds for score to count)

3. Repeat twice more for a total of 6 rounds.

4. Load 6 more rounds.

5. On the start command/buzzer, fire 2 rounds to the COM and one to the HEAD. (time of 3 seconds for score to count)

6. Repeat once more for a total of 12 shots at 7 yards.

5. At 15 Yards - meat & potatoes

This series simulates the likely maximum distance for a self defense shooting. Note that Navy Seals don't bother with "head shots", they simply keep shooting until the threat is on the ground. If there's more than one assailant, the dynamic changes dramatically after the first one goes down!

1. Load up to 12 rounds & holster. If necessary load additional magazines/speed loaders for a total of 12 rounds.

2. At the start command/buzzer, fire 12 rounds to the COM, reloading only when empty. (time of 20 seconds for score to count)

6. At 25 Yards?

It may be hard to justify "self-defense" shooting at someone 25 yards away!

7. Interpreting The Results

Having fired 36 rounds, deduct one hit for each shot fired outside the specified times. An 80% hit rate, i.e.: 25/COM + 3/HEAD timed-shots *on the 8.5x11" paper*, is a "good score". Anything less indicates a need for more practice.

8. Airsoft handgun adaptations

This exercise *can* be done with an AirSoft analog of your carry gun, but that cannot substitute for practice with your carry gun. Recoil and report change everything!

To use a shot timer with an AirSoft gun, it may be necessary to adjust the timer's microphone sensitivity to record the shots. My old CED-6000 shot timer works well.

9. Resources

9.1 Ranges

1. Jefferson National Forest/Blacksburg Shooting Range:

    Craig Creek Road, 1/4 mile west of US 460 Eastern Divide Ranger District contact: 540 552-4641

    https://www.fs.usda.gov/recarea/gwj/recreation/otheractivities/recarea/?recid=73593&actid=106

    Free, open sunrise to sunset, year round, closed Mondays for cleaning.

2. Safeside Tactical:

    1201 Shenandoah Ave. SW, Roanoke, VA, 24017 540-682-8881

    https://www.safesidetactical.com/

    Not free, open Mon-Sat, 12PM to 8PM. Gun sales, handgun/rifle ranges.

9.2 Shot Timers

Your favorite gun shop may be able to recommend, demonstrate and/or provide a quality digital shot timer that can be adjusted to record both AirSoft and "real" gunshots. At Amazon, search for "shot timers". I recommend the Pact Club Timer III ($130) or the Competition Electronics "Pocket Pro Timer" (an update to my old CED-6000 for $150.

9.3 AirSoft

The easiest/best source for AirSoft guns & supplies is probably www.amazon.com. Search for "airsoft green gas blowback". Quality AirSoft pistols run around $90 to $175. Some AirSoft revolvers are available, but long reload times render them impractical for the *12 shots in 20 seconds @ 15 yards* exercise.

Self-assessment Scores

The exercise goal is 80% of 36 shots, e.g.: 25/COM + 3/HEAD
timed shots, on the 8.5x11" paper. Record the number of on-
target shots, deducting 1 for each shot after the specified
time limit.

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  Name _____ Date _____ Gun _____

Series 1: 6 x 2 shots @ 3 yards
      COM/2.5 sec A:_____   B:_____ C:_____   Total _____
     COM+Head/3 sec A:_____   B: _____   Total _____

Series 2: 6 x 2 shots @ 7 yards
      COM/2.5 sec A:_____   B:_____ C:_____   Total _____
     COM+Head/3 sec A:_____   B: _____   Total _____

Series 3:   12 shots to COM @ 15 yards
    COM/20 sec: _____   Total _____

                              Grand Total _____

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  Name _____ Date _____ Gun _____

Series 1: 6 x 2 shots @ 3 yards
      COM/2.5 sec A:_____   B:_____ C:_____   Total _____
     COM+Head/3 sec A:_____   B: _____   Total _____

Series 2: 6 x 2 shots @ 7 yards
      COM/2.5 sec A:_____   B:_____ C:_____   Total _____
     COM+Head/3 sec A:_____   B: _____   Total _____

Series 3:   12 shots to COM @ 15 yards
    COM/20 sec: _____   Total _____

                              Grand Total _____

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