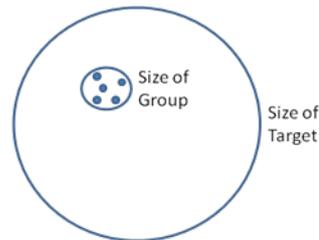


## Some Tips on Shooting Better Silhouette Scores

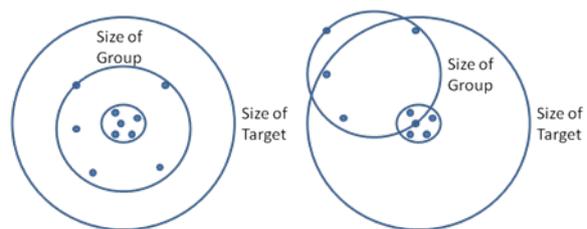
Richard Blayden – Feb'16

Ever wondered why you can shoot some great shots but still not achieve consistent high scores – or even 40's?. This may help – I hope so, because if you can shoot 20% of the targets with near centre hits then you already have the technique required – you just need to polish and maintain that technique for all 40 targets. The first step is to understand where variation in shot by shot performance comes from.

Firstly we have variation in your gun / ammo combination's ability to shoot tight groups. If the gun's group is much smaller than the target then no problem other than to adjust your sight setting (elevation and windage) to centre the group on the target. Work on your ammo to get the best possible performance from your gun.



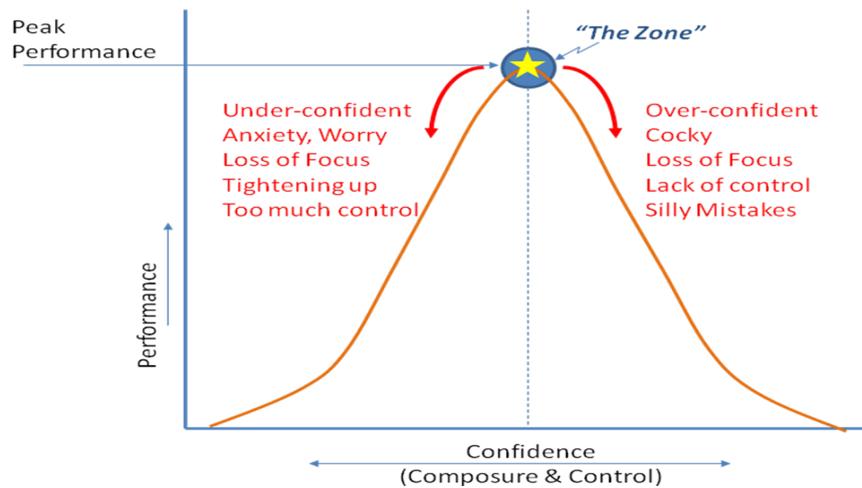
Next we have the group size set by your own ability to repeat and maintain an effective sight picture and pull the trigger without imparting any movement on the gun. If we add the two group sizes together we can see how we start to miss the target. Variations in wind speed and light conditions can make the situation more difficult.



Note: In your normal shooting position, try dry-firing on some spent cases or dummy rounds and make sure you can pull the trigger with zero movement in the sight picture – if the gun moves during your trigger pull you have a problem and need to work on it. A good method is to make 20 dummy rounds and mix in 5 live 'full house' rounds – then load your gun without looking at the ammo' (or have someone load it for you) and then try shooting them. You will have a 1-in-5 chance of the round actually going off and you will feel 'stupid' when the gun jerks or recoils when the hammer goes 'click' instead of bang. If you can master the zero imparted movement during your trigger pull, then when the shot takes you by surprise with a load 'bang' and associated recoil you will be pleasantly surprised at how accurate the shot was.

Most guns with the right ammo will shoot group sizes that are considerably smaller than the size of the silhouette targets – except perhaps in the ½ size unlimited matches. The biggest challenge is to learn how to minimize your own impact on group size by sharpening up your shooting **process** – and confidence is one of the key drivers of a good shooting process (see picture on next page).

### Indicative Graph of “Confidence” versus Performance



Loss of confidence induces worry making it harder and harder to “pull the trigger” during which time you’re trying not to breathe, your eyes become tired (lack of oxygen) and your sight picture deteriorates and your level of worry (lack of confidence) increases, etc, etc.

Over-confidence breeds lack of care and concentration and leads to silly mistakes.

Your best sight picture (and steadiest hand) in freestyle usually occurs within the first few seconds after engaging the target, so the optimum time to pull the trigger is somewhere between 6 and 12 seconds after commencing sight alignment on the target (faster for standing – 4 to 8 seconds because you have a less stable base when standing). So how do you build the confidence to pull the trigger that quickly?

#### Building Confidence:

Building confidence starts at the re-loading bench! Take care with your re-loading to ensure the best possible quality of ammunition to ensure reliability and eliminate doubt at the firing line. You are probably going to travel several hundred kilometers and spend a fair amount of cash each to you go to a competition so why not invest a bit more time in ensuring that your ammo is A1 the best before you go!

When using a tight chambered gun (eg: Freedom Arms / BF) it pays to cycle all your newly made loads through the chamber to make sure there are no tight-fit cases that are going to upset you on the firing line. Take the utmost care of course because you don’t want any shots going off in the garage, etc – bolt actions need the most care because they ‘cock’ automatically on closing (you may be able adjust the sear screw to ‘heavy trigger’ to reduce risk of accidental discharge else do it at the range).

Keep your ammo clean at all times (especially on the firing line) so that you don’t pick up dirt / dust that may cause it to jam in the chamber.

Give your guns some TLC – Tight (all screws / sight fittings are tight – especially check all ‘body screws’ on revolvers), Lubricated (remove excess lube / oil from the barrel) and Clean (remove all

dirt from working parts and barrel) to ensure they function effectively during the match. Check your T/C hammer spring stiffness regularly.

Before you go to the firing line, make sure that you have all necessary sight settings, screw-drivers, ammo, timer, ear-muffs, etc to hand. Take what's necessary and don't cram the shooting bay full of needless junk.

When your match starts, sighters are important. Try to get 'perfect shots' on all four sighter targets and have your spotter record where they hit (or missed). You will need this information during the match to make minor adjustments in sight settings – and to do that confidently you need to be confident that you made 'perfect' sighter shots (sight picture, control and trigger pull, etc).

When you shoot the chooks – try to shoot your best possible group. Although chooks should be the easiest targets to knock down, having shot each one 'dead centre' builds your confidence in the gun's grouping ability and in your own ability to shoot it well. Do the same in the pigs and you will be building your confidence to do the same on the turkeys and then the rams!

Think about executing a perfect process 'perfectly' and the results will be good – don't think about the result else you will be looking at the target (to see it fall) rather than watching your sight picture 'right through the trigger pull'.

To shoot 5 targets in 2 minutes you have 24 seconds per target. Try to get the first shot away 10 to 15 seconds after the "fire" command and then work to a tempo of 20 seconds per shot thereafter. This will ensure that if you do get a jam or a misfire, you have 20 to 30 seconds of spare time for sight adjustments or to reload and make the 5<sup>th</sup> shot confidently and effectively.

Have a timer in your kit and use it – always! A timer will only cost you around \$20 and that is probably the best investment you can make to improve your scores because, when you lose track of time your mind will start to play all sorts of tricks on you - most likely causing you to panic and miss targets unnecessarily. Even though it is only 2 minutes, you must manage your time well to get good scores.

Don't load your gun on the "load" command and get ready (in your shooting position) to shoot immediately – you will be hanging in there getting a stiff neck, sore arms and tired eyes too soon. Revolvers take a bit longer to load, but for single shot pistols it can be better to wait until there are only 10 to 15 seconds to go to the "fire" command and invest the waiting time in breathing and stretching the neck to ensure you are relaxed and your eyes are well oxygenated.

Be prepared for extreme temperatures:

- On very hot days have a small sponge-bag and wet flannel in your kit. A quick wipe of the face, neck, hands and forearms between details can be wonderfully refreshing and help stop sweat running into your eyes or dripping on your glasses – both of which can ruin your sight picture.
- On very cold days, put your shooting glasses on well before you start shooting so they can warm to body temperature. If you put them on cold and immediately lie down to start shooting they can fog up with your warm breath and ruin your sight picture.

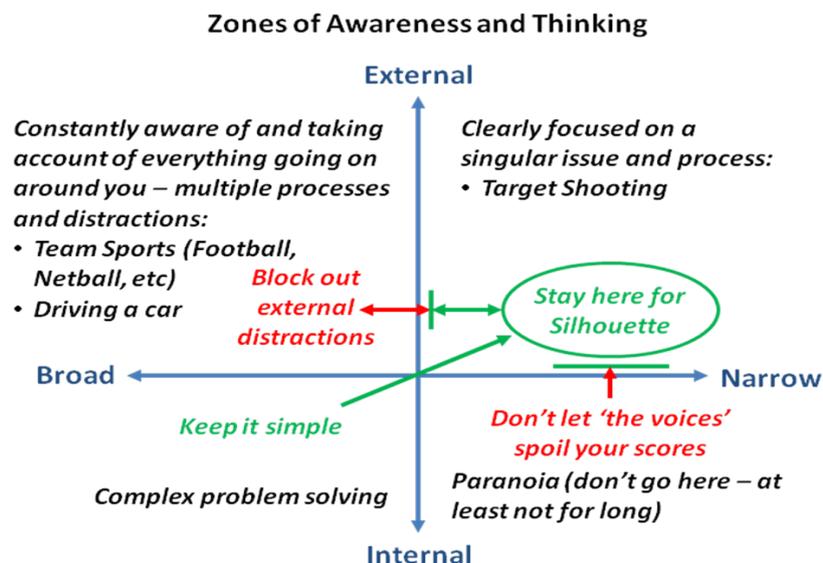
Your spotter should be helping you to maintain your confidence! Your spotter should be giving immediate feedback on each shot so that the shooter knows the result as soon as possible after letting it go – this helps eliminate the shooter’s desire to look at the target when he / she should be focusing on executing the shooting process. Make all communications calm and positive to reinforce confidence.

- “It’s in the head”, “On the tail”, “You missed it by miles” are great ways to destroy confidence and induce worry.
- “Good”, “Yes” for every hit builds and reinforces confidence! “Have a look” (at the spotting board) is a calm way to let the shooter know that the shot was not perfect and some adjustment may be necessary.
- Don’t give long winded descriptions of where the shot went – use a spotting board and show it to the shooter so that he/she can see it easily in their “comfortable” shooting position without having to twist and turn in the shooting bay – help and don’t hinder the shooter, you will appreciate it when your spotter does it for you!
- Keep track of successive shots to give the shooter feedback on “grouping in bottom quarter / left third” or “trending high / left / right”, etc.
- Help keep the shooter “in the zone”.

### Maintaining Focus and Control:

Maintaining confidence is one critical issue – the other is to maintain focus and control of our own shooting process - and that often means blocking out all distractions from outside of your shooting bay, and from inside your own head.

It helps here to appreciate the four general zones of awareness and thinking (see diagram below):



A good shooter will have grown the ability to blot out all external distractions of other people shooting, talking and generally mucking around behind the shooting line – but not at the expense of missing the range officer’s commands (the spotter can help here by repeating the range commands).

A good shooter will also have learned how to block out any internal thoughts about “OMG – everybody’s watching me”, and “oh hell, what if I muck this up and the whole team loses out”, etc. These are negative internal thoughts, they are mostly imaginary and they must not be allowed to enter your mind during the match.

Once a good basic technique is attained (eg: 20% of the targets are centre hits) and appropriate quality control is applied to all aspects of reloading and match preparation – then the game becomes 99% mental.

Putting all this together is called ‘Match Discipline’ – apply it diligently and you’ll soon be gaining momentum on the improvement trail.

Most importantly, have fun along the road and enjoy it.

*Richard*

*Note:* You must be comfortable in your chosen style / position for freestyle shooting. In silhouette just about every international shooter uses the Creedmore position even though it may feel uncomfortable for many new shooters. In fact, once you are used to it the Creedmore position is very comfortable and probably the best for stability and accuracy of shooting – it is very very rare to see anything different at a world championships where almost everybody is shooting 40’s (or even 80’s). So the advice to new shooters is that unless there is some compelling reason not to use it, give the Creedmore position a fair go and ask for tips from others and stick at it ‘till you get the hang of it.