

Games You Can Play to Sharpen Your Skills

Games, or competitions, can set the shooter up to compete against the clock, other people, or teams, and helps stimulate a stress response. This stress response will obviously be far less intense than the response to a real life-or-death threat, but training that puts any degree of stress on the shooter will help them learn to deal with it and work through it toward the goal of getting through a real incident unharmed.

Only two shooters are needed for a competition (Sure, you can compete against yourself), but several of these games can be used for department/group training as well.

Steel Targets

Falling plates and dueling trees are good, but are expensive and very heavy. A single set of falling plates can be shot against the clock, or two shooters can shoot at two sets of plates. If there is an even number of plates, two shooters can fire at one set of plates to see who can knock down their half fastest. If there are an odd number of plates, the winner is the one who can knock down the plates on their half plus the center plate; there may be arguments about who fired the shot that knocked over the center plate, so decide in advance whether contested results will be considered a draw and require a re-shoot, or be handled otherwise.

A **dueling tree** is less likely to result in arguments, as it is clear when one shooter manages to swing all the plates to the other shooter's side. If the shooters are evenly matched, this contest can go on for some time, so you may want to decide in advance how many rounds or magazines are allowed each shooter. Or let them find out for themselves that more rounds is better.

Steel targets should be shot from no less than 15 yards, and both the shooters and observers must wear eye protection in case of splash-back (fragments of lead or copper jacket that bounce back). Well-designed steel targets rarely produce splash-back, as the surfaces that move absorb the energy of the round and the ones that don't move are angled to deflect these missed shots to the sides or down.

Plates or the tree are very unrealistic in some respects, such as the lack of shooter movement (though one step left or right could be required for each shot, and one spectator assigned to watch each shooter to make sure they comply). At the same time, both emphasize the need to have hits in order to prevail. The noise of the second shooter's rounds adds to the confusion and stress. The re-appearance of flags that you have already shot on your side of tree is also stressful. Speedy reloads are likely to be essential, as is marksmanship.

A similar contest could be simulated with paper targets by drawing a 3x3- or 4x4-line grid: Each shooter must put one round inside each square on the grid to win. Any round that touches a line does not count. (See 'Tic-Tac-Toe', etc.).

Running and Shooting

Moving tends to add a bit of stress, or at least get the heart rate up, and when combined with competition against other shooters or another team the stress level goes up some more.

An exercise used in the NRA LE Firearms Instructor Course is called **The Run Down**. Targets are 8" paper disks; although they are a bit larger than 8", paper plates would be quick and easy. At the 7-yard line, shooters unload their guns and field-strip them, laying the parts on a piece of cardboard, folded newspaper, or – this is so obvious – another paper plate. They then move back to the 25-yard line and deposit a magazine loaded with 10 rounds; use another plate.

Shooters begin at the 50-yard line, run to get the magazine at the 25, then run to the 7-yard line to assemble their gun, load, and fire all ten rounds at the plate. They then unload the gun and remove the magazine, lay the gun down again with the action open, and stand up, putting their

hands on their heads to signal that they are done. For scoring, count all hits on the target, with a five-second penalty for missed rounds.

If you don't have a 50-yard range to work on, adjust distances accordingly.

8" target or paper plate	□	□	□	□	□
7 yards					
Plate with field-stripped pistol	}	}	}	}	}
10 - 25 yards					
Plate with magazine	□	□	□	□	□
10 – 25 yards					
Starting line	□	□	□	□	□

While the circumstances of this drill are far from reality, many shooters will perceive a time distortion, which is frequent in stressful situations. Chances are your shooters are perfectly capable of hitting a target this size at seven yards, but the perception that they are losing time and must hurry may make them rush their shots in an effort to make up for the lost time, and the result will be misses.

A single line of shooters can compete against each other, or two or more lines can compete as teams; the team time is based on how long it took for *all* shooters to compete the drill. If run as a team drill, consider running the drill three times for each team, and score based on the best two out of three runs for each team.

It's not necessary for all the shooters to be present at the same time to run a competition. The **Walk-On Competition** can be done one shooter at a time, over a period of several hours or even days, as might be the case during an open range day, or during regular qualifications shoots, when officers arrive on different days or at different times because of their shift hours.

After their practice session, or firing the qualification course, officers are offered the chance to compete, with a free lunch or other prize for the over-all winner. (Get a local restaurant to donate the prize.)

The target should have scoring rings, so that a numeric score can be calculated for each shooter; if the center ring is 10 points, the next ring 9, and so on, the maximum possible score will be 100. A shot timer is better than a wristwatch or stopwatch for this type of contest.

Starting from the holster or low ready, each shooter fires 5 rounds, reloads, and fires 5 more. 7 or 9 yards would be a reasonable shooting distance. After the target is scored, the score is divided by the time (in seconds) to see how many points the shooter scored per second. Example: A score of 88 and a time of 9 seconds = 9.777 points per second.

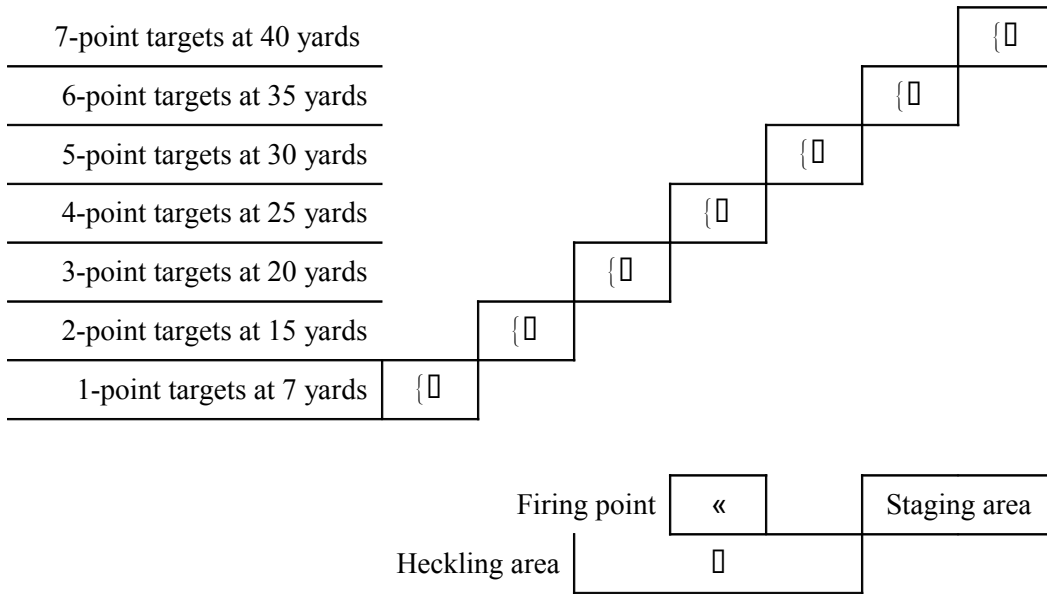
Posting the top 3 or 6 shooters will hopefully encourage officers to try harder next time, but all officers should be advised via e-mail or privately of their score. A traveling 'trophy' would provide bragging rights to the winner. Firearms instructors can keep records of the scores from each contest, to track improvement by individual shooters.

A **Relay Race** used by Honolulu SWAT officers could be run by any group as a team competition or as an individual competition.

From a designated firing point, a series of target stands is set up, the closest at 7 yards, and the rest at 5, 7 or 10 yard increments, each further from the firing point. It all depends on how much space you have to work with and how many target stands. On each target stand, staple up two pieces of colored paper – red and blue or whatever you've got. You can use a full sheet of colored copy paper, or you can cut/fold the paper in half (= 8½ x 6½") or even into quarters (4 x 6½"),

depending on the skill of the shooters. Pick two colors that the shooters can distinguish at the furthest distance (pastel colors don't work as well as bright ones).

The closest targets count as one point for each hit, the next as two points, the next as three points, and so on. Choose a firing point that allows the shooter to see all the targets at once and be sure there's a safe back-stop for all the targets. Designate a staging area 5 or 10 yards from the firing point, and a heckling area 5 yards behind the firing point.



Set a timer for a specific time, say 5 or 10 minutes, and begin. Each shooter must run from the staging area to the firing point and fire two rounds at any target, using whatever firearms he wishes – Pistol, carbine or shotgun & slugs. He then runs back to the staging area and tags the next shooter.

The next team now has the same amount of time to run through as many shooters as they can, again at 2 rounds each, but firing at the other color. The hecklers also change when the other team is on deck.

During scoring, you'll see why the targets are placed side-by-side – If team A misses, they may give a point to team B.

This drill not only induces stress from the running, heckling and competitive aspect, but requires a certain amount of strategy, as some targets are worth more than others.

Other Games

We've come up with a few games that are good for less experienced shooters, and can be fired with any pistol from a .22 to a .45, or even carbines. You can 'level the playing field' by setting up a novice with a .22 against a more experienced shooter with a 9mm. They can even be played from the bench by kids with .22 rifles; place the targets at an appropriate distance.

Tic-Tac-Toe is one of the easiest games, and the target is easiest to hit. Just draw a standard 3x3 grid on the paper, and play the game as you would with a pencil. Three in a row wins. If you miss the square you intended to shoot, you've lost that turn.

You can play a second game on the same target, but you'll have to watch carefully to see where the new holes appear. That's the downside of this game – the targets get used up pretty fast.

I keep a yardstick in the back of my van to make grid targets, though I've gotten pretty good at drawing them freehand.

Follow the Leader uses a similar grid target, but the squares should be roughly 4 to 6" square. An easy target has larger squares, no more than 4 rows of 4, while a harder target has 6 rows of 8 or 10. The first shooter hits a square (a line shot is a miss) and up to 3 other shooters must hit the same square. If you miss the square or hit a line, you're out for this round. The remaining shooters continue until one shooter is left, then the next shooter becomes the 'leader.'

To make the game more complex, use a target that has fewer squares but shoot from further away, and the leader must call his shot before firing. If he misses, the next shooter is the leader.

It's fun to see how fast you can find the square just shot and get your shot off, but it becomes increasingly difficult to see where the latest hole appeared. No scoring on this game.

Shooting the Hole can be done with a single target or multiple targets. For multiple targets, lay the required number on a bench and trace a circle or two. You can use humanoid targets, cutting one circle on the chest and a smaller one on the head. Use a utility knife to cut through all the layers.

The objective is to not hit the paper. Rather than counting hits, only misses are counted. It's surprising, but trying to miss the paper at first seems harder than hitting the same size circle on a regular target. I like this exercise for teaching combat shooting, as it discourages the shooter from taking the time to get a really tight group. If the target backer is at all shot up before you start, the shooter won't be able to tell exactly where their shots are going, only whether they are inside or outside the circle.

An instructor or fellow shooter can call the shots required, whether two to the body, one to the head, failure to stop/body armor, etc.

With any of these drills, shooters should reload and clear stoppages on their own, without commands. This adds a certain amount of stress to the game.

Some information in this piece is from "Let the Games Begin" by Bill Campbell, Gilbert, AZ, PD
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