

Dealing with the Problem Shooter; Remedial Training

By Tom Perroni

My motivation for this article came from my experience as a Firearms Instructor Trainer. I teach several Firearms Instructor In-Service classes each year, and in each and every class the subject of "Remediation" comes up. Having attended several Firearms Instructor development courses myself, this is one area that is covered but not to the extent that I feel it should be. So what do you do when you have a problem shooter?

Remediating the Problem Shooter Training This training generally takes only one to three days, depending upon the individual need of the officer. *Perroni's Tactical Training Academy* staff can remediate up to five individuals per day on the same range. This limit permits maximum benefit and individual training time to each individual, while also maximizing cost benefits to the agency. The student to Instructor ratio is 1 to 1.

General considerations. No two people learn at the same rate. Some flexibility and certain specific remedial provisions should be built into the program so that the marginal or initially poor shooter can receive extra attention without being stigmatized as a "problem shooter." Firearms instructors should recognize the physical differences between students of differing stature, weight, build, and strength. We use the "crawl, walk, run" method of instruction.

Monitoring progress. It is important for the instructor to observe and monitor the progress of students in basic firearms training on a day-by-day basis. If, during basic training classes each day, a student fails to grasp the fundamentals or displays an inability to perform the required tasks, an instructor should coach the student in an attempt to analyze and overcome the problem. This can be done during breaks, after class, or in some cases by assigning an instructor to work one-on-one with the student while class is in progress. This individual attention will often eliminate the difficulties the student has encountered, instead of compounding them by pushing ahead in the training program before the basics are mastered. It should again be emphasized that a problem shooter should not be permitted to begin tactical or advanced levels of training until competence in basic skills is demonstrated. This training session is fully documented, and a court-ready report is provided to the agency.

Documentation of Performance Problems and Remedial Efforts. As it becomes apparent that a particular student has a serious problem in training, the instructor should document the difficulties encountered and the efforts directed at correcting them. This may become necessary if the validity of the training program or the disqualification of the student is later challenged. If possible, try to have more than one instructor work with a problem student. A second instructor may find a way to solve the student's problem, may eliminate a problem caused by a personality conflict between the students and the original instructor, and will in any event help to document the difficulties and the remedial efforts made.

Specific Remedial Exercises and Procedures. The first step in remedying a student's poor performance is to properly diagnose and analyze the nature of the problem. This will require careful observation of the student by the instructor, and is most easily done on a one-on-one basis. The instructor must understand that every student is an individual, and may require an individual approach to solve a learning problem. With this in mind, some of the remedial exercises which have been useful in dealing with the more common firearms training problems include the following:

1. Inspection of Firearm and Equipment. The instructor should inspect the student's firearm, holster, and related equipment, test-firing the firearm if necessary, to rule out any possibility that the shooter's problem is due to defective, unserviceable, or improperly adjusted equipment.

2. Confirmation of Proper Sight Picture and Master Eye. Student failure to achieve good accuracy is frequently the result of failure to understand or employ a proper sight picture. The instructor should first review proper sight picture with the student, using diagrams or other visual aids if at all possible, and confirm the student's understanding by having the student explain the type of sight picture he or she is seeing. Eye focus on the front sight, rather than on the target, should be emphasized, as should the proper point of aim on the target. If eye dominance may be the cause of the problem, the instructor should reconfirm the student's master eye, and be sure the student is using the master eye behind the sights. by use of an aiming device which allows the student to align a set of sights on a target, then move away from the device to allow the instructor to confirm that the student has properly aimed at the target. We have noticed that over 40% of the Law Enforcement officers we remediate at *Perroni's Tactical Training Academy* have this problem.

3. Dry Practice. Dry practice (also called "dry firing") is one of the best and most widely used methods for training trigger control, while improving trigger finger strength and grip strength at the same time. For best effectiveness, dry practice should be done at least once a day for 10-15 minutes in a safe area. Dry work can also be done to improve the draw, the reload (using empty magazines or dummy rounds), and quick assumption of firing positions (kneeling, pivots and turns, use of cover, etc.). To avoid safety problems, safety precautions appropriate to dry practice should be covered with the recruits, and consideration should be given to issuing written guidelines for dry practice safety. We recommend Dry Practice to all of our students. This should be practiced on a daily basis. We also use this in our remediation training to fix students problems before we ever get to the range. Please also note that a laser device can also be a useful tool in diagnosing trigger control problems once the trigger is pulled if the laser moves (Red dot) the shot would have also been moved "point of aim is point of impact".

4. Ball and Dummy Exercises. Randomly alternating live rounds and empty cases in a revolver cylinder, or live and dummy rounds in a semi-automatic pistol magazine, will allow the instructor to conduct a "ball and dummy" exercise in which the student must maintain proper sight alignment and exercise proper trigger control without knowing whether or not the gun is actually going to fire. Flinching or yanking the trigger can

easily be diagnosed in this manner, as it is readily apparent when not disguised by the recoil of a live cartridge. The ball and dummy exercise can be continued and/or repeated until the student is trained to pull the trigger smoothly, allowing the shot to break as a surprise without the student's anticipation, flinching, or jerking the trigger.

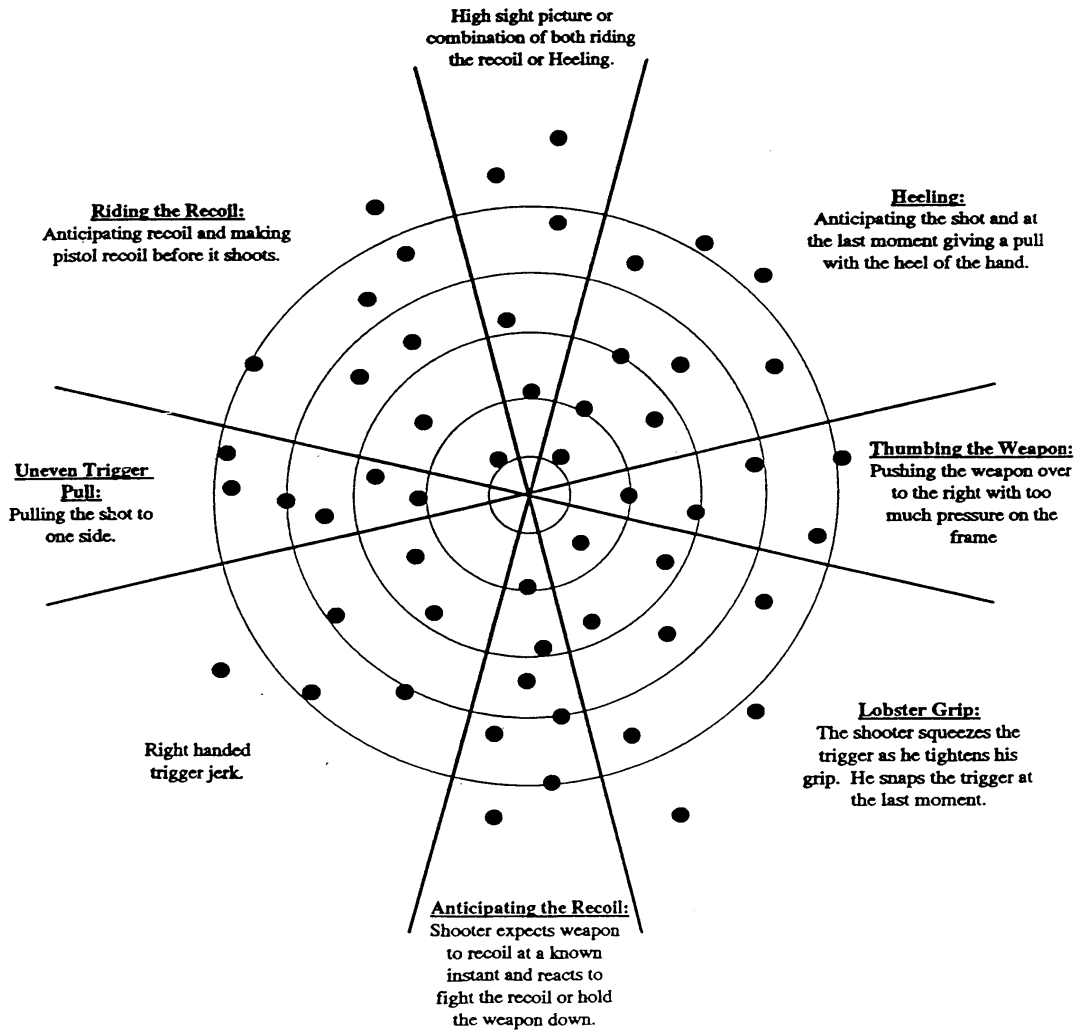
5. Confidence Building. Students who are having problems achieving proper ability with their firearms are likely to develop confidence or attitude problems which can then, in and of themselves, become the primary obstacle in the path of effective remedial efforts. In conducting remedial work, the instructor should strive to build the student's confidence by having the student succeed at simple tasks first, then progress in relatively small increments toward the ultimate goal. Short distances, long (or no) time limits, and a supportive, encouraging instructor are good ways to get a student to achieve initial positive results upon which to build. (Start at the 3yard line move to 7yards and the 15 yards, etc).

6. Grip Strengthening. Good grip and finger strength are especially important for good results with the handgun. A regular program of exercise with spring tension grippers or a rubber ball squeezed in the hand can help a student improve strength and marksmanship results at the same time. Grip devices which allow each finger to be exercised independent of the other fingers can be especially beneficial in allowing strength to be improved without training the hand to "milk" the handgun's grip while firing. As mentioned earlier, physical pre-testing at the entry level can help to identify those students who need to improve strength, so that remedial physical exercises can be started as early in the academy training program as possible.

7. Wrist and Forearm Strengthening. Various devices are available to improve wrist and forearm strength. A simple one can be made by suspending a weight by a short length of rope tied to a section of broom handle or dowel rod. The student holds the rod horizontally between both hands at arm's length with the weight suspended from the rope, and rolls the rope up and down to develop wrist strength.

8. Upper Arm and Shoulder Strengthening. Upper arm and shoulder strength are helpful, not only in handgun training but for use of shotgun and other shoulder weapons as well. Bench presses with a barbell, or dumbbell presses and lateral raises will develop the shoulder area. Pull-ups and pushups will improve upper body strength and provide muscular development of the shoulder area which helps to control recoil when firing the shotgun. Prior to weight training, the student should undergo a complete physical examination, and should be coached as to the safe and proper method of performing the various exercises. The Instructor must watch the student and not the target. To get a good understanding of what the student is doing wrong. Then you can look at the target to validate what the Instructor is watching the student do wrong. This Common Shooting Errors guide should give the instructor a reference..

COMMON SHOOTING ERRORS



There are (7) Fundamentals of Handgun Shooting and in my opinion they are all equally import. They are:

1. Stance
2. Grip
3. Sight Alignment
4. Sight Picture
5. Trigger Control
6. Breathing
7. Follow Through

Each one must be mastered in order for the shooter to be accurate. I discuss this in greater detail in my article Fundamental of Handgun Shooting. A good Firearms Instructor will have a remediation lesson plan and a remediation written policy.

The most import advice I can give a Firearms Instructor is if the student is failing or not meeting the minimum standard. Go back to "Basics" do not assume they know anything. When we teach a student who has no experience why do you think they do so well?

1. You started your Instruction from the very beginning and covered everything and taught them all of the "Basics".
2. They had no "Bad Habits" to fix or break.

Also remember :

"The definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results."

Benjamin Franklin

As a Firearms Instructor it is your job to teach your student / officer how to shoot. "Anyone can call the line it takes a Firearms Instructor to fix what is not working when it comes to shooting".

Stay Safe & Shoot Straight!
