

Saul Kirsch

Perfect Practice



A Guide to Quality IPSC Training

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*Dedicated with love and respect
to my father, Sam
who always inspired me
to look for the right way of doing things*

Foreword

If you are the kind of shooter who goes off to the range, meets up with the guys and says, "So, what are we going to practice today?", this book is for you.

If you know what you would like to improve in your technique, but not sure how to do it – read on.

If you would like to make your hours on the range and the money you spend on your ammo give you maximum improvement in performance – you have bought the right book.

Perfect Practice is about training effectively. In other words, how to make the time you spend on the range work best for you. It will help to ensure that you leave the range after every practice a better shooter and a better competitor.

This book is intentionally printed in A5 size format for a convenient fit in your range bag. Each drill includes a small table for recording your practice results. Write in pencil, and erase and update as needed.

WARNING

IPSC shooting is inherently dangerous, as live ammunition is used. Double-Alpha Academy and all others involved in the distribution and sale of this book assume NO LIABILITY whatsoever for any action resulting from reading this book.

Range safety is YOUR responsibility and should always be your first concern. Be safe in your gun handling!

I wish you excellent shooting.

Saul Kirsch
Double-Alpha Academy
August 2004

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General Guidelines to Quality Practice

We have all heard the phrase “practice makes perfect”. Well, that simply is not true. Practice does not make perfect – it makes permanent. Whatever you do will be improved by practice. If you practice shooting badly, you will get better at shooting badly. If you practice shooting without taking care to be accurate, don't expect anything else in competition.

Here are the guidelines I consider crucial to quality practice.

Be a goal setter. Set your goals and plan your training schedule accordingly. Keep in mind that the goal of an individual practice session is not the session itself. Sure, you can enjoy your shooting, but if you're aiming to participate in competitions, an individual practice session is rather about improving your skills than having fun on the range.

A specific goal helps to keep you motivated and on track with your training. If you are unfamiliar with setting goals and building a training schedule, read up on this topic. There is plenty of good information out there.

Plan your practice content in advance.

Don't come to the range without knowing what you plan to shoot. Keeping track of your performance and shooting skills answers the question, “What should I work on today?”. It is important that you train with a plan, so that you don't always repeat the same elements and fall short on other skills.

Avoid the trap of practicing only what you are already good at.

This is a very common mistake. Many shooters enjoy shooting what they are good at. This keeps them happy about their performance, and in a group session makes them look good in the eyes of their peers. So there is a tendency to keep training the “easy and fun” stuff. Speed shoots, simple stages, fast shooting. Many shooters avoid training weak hand shooting, bobbars (swingers), tough accuracy shots, difficult body positions, and so on. It is very important to train your weak points. Once you have brought your weakest skill up to strength, your overall match performance greatly improves.

The “KISS” principle: Keep It Simple and Small.

I am an advocate of practicing small drills and simple exercises with many repetitions, rather than shooting big stages. I believe you can more effectively improve a technique by repeating it many times. In addition, you can better isolate the skill you are working on by not combining it in a stage that inevitably introduces additional elements. If you are practicing reloads, there is no need to complicate it by drawing the gun from the holster – start with the gun in hand. If you are training shooting on the move, don't add the complication of reloading in the middle of the string (unless complication is what you are after!). Building complex stages takes time. And you need to wait your turn if you are shooting in a group. This reduces the number of repetitions you can do and makes the session ineffective.

I am not saying you should never shoot stages in practice. You should, especially if you do not participate in enough matches. You need to improve your stage analysis and shooting skills as well. But this should not take up most of your practice time. I prefer to schedule stage shooting when I have a practice partner I can compete against. I am then able to shoot stages with/against him and create a match atmosphere, which is always good practice. Be sure to keep track of the points, as well as the time, when you score stages in practice.

Keep a diary.

Keeping a shooting diary is very important. Write down any conclusions you have drawn from your session, and anything new you have learnt. Record what you did exceptionally well in order to reinforce that achievement in your self image and subconscious. Keep records of your times and hit factors on various standard drills. You will be able to revert back and track your progress. Keep records of your loads and chronograph testing, your gear modifications and maintenance, and so on.

Try to sit down and write your diary entry before you leave the range. If you don't, there is a good chance you will forget to do so once you are back home. There is value attached to keeping a diary, even if you never again read what you write. The act of sitting down to review and record the practice you have just completed forces you to analyze your performance and consciously look at your shooting and any changes. This accelerates your learning curve.

How much to shoot?

There are many considerations in determining how much ammo and time to spend on each session. Of course, this depends on your budget of both. As a rule – be careful not to shoot too much. Don't get to where you lose interest in your practice. You need to care about the quality of each shot and you may burn out and lose interest if you shoot too much. I try to shoot 300-400 rounds per practice. However, I may shorten the session and shoot less if mid-way through I feel that I am losing interest and shooting badly. On the other hand, if I am shooting really well and enjoying the practice, I may extend the session.

If possible, shoot more when shooting well. When not doing well, I suggest you pack up, rather than repeat and reinforce mistakes.

Keep your practice group small.

Of course this is not always possible, but it is an advantage. I try to practice with no more than one or two additional shooters. I prefer shooting with a partner to shooting alone, as I find this helps concentration and focus. Shooting in a big group becomes more of a “social” happening, and while that is not something negative, it is not what you want when working on your skills. Many of your shooting buddies may not be as dedicated to intense quality training as you are, and that may affect the merit of your practice. In addition, a big group creates more wasted time at the range as you wait your turn to shoot.

I believe a practice should be as short as possible, while allowing you to achieve your goal. I see no reason to spend five hours a day on the range, if you can achieve the same results in two.

Choose your practice partners carefully.

One tends to raise or lower one's level of performance according to the level around one. Nothing will speed your progress more than practicing with shooters who are much better than you. Likewise, being the best shooter in your practice group will not contribute to your advancement. Wherever possible, train with good shooters.

Only do good practice. Never practice poor shooting!

Simply put – if you rehearse a bad performance – you will get better at delivering that exact bad performance again and again. That is why the quality of your practice should be your utmost concern. When shooting steel, don't

allow yourself to keep shooting 50% hits. Unless, of course, 50% hits is what you are aiming for in a match. Slow down! Work on your concentration, and bring that percentage up. Practicing shooting badly does not make you a better shooter!

Sometimes, you just can't do anything right. On such a day you are better off running the timer for the others, and not shooting at all.

Spend time improving your precision.

So many shooters ignore this. On the surface IPSC appears to be a sport dedicated to fast shooting. But in fact, if you are unable to shoot an accurate shot, on demand, you will have a real problem in IPSC competitions.

Precision shooting with a pistol is a perishable skill. If you don't practice it – you lose it. Make a point at every practice session of spending some time working on accuracy. Shoot groups free style. Shoot groups off a rest. Work on your trigger control, breathing, and sight picture. Once those free style groups are nice and small, practice shooting them strong hand only. And weak hand only. This will serve you well under pressure in the heat of competition.

Pay attention to accuracy.

All too often shooters think that accuracy in their practice is not very important. After all, the score in practice doesn't count, does it? But understand this: when you train to shoot some A's, some C's, D's and misses, you are in fact building your subconscious skills for this type of shooting. When you are in competition, all your shooting is subconscious. You cannot consciously think your way through IPSC shooting. It is too fast and too complex. So the subconscious takes over. As it should. This is where our mental power lies, and all good performances need to be subconscious.

However – and here's the catch – you build your subconscious skills through repetitive practice. If you practice hitting 5 poppers with 8 shots, that is the skill and speed you are developing, and that is what you will get in a match. In fact, your accuracy may even be slightly less than the usual level in practice, as match stress does not usually contribute to precision shooting.

If you want to shoot 90% A's and 10% C's in a match, you need to practice with at least that level of accuracy. There is no other way. Always keep in mind: "Practice makes permanent, not perfect".

Do a little dry fire warm up.

Develop the habit of doing some dry fire before you start spending your bullets. True – most dry fire can and should be done at home, but it is helpful to do some on the range as well. This ensures that your motion is fluid and precise before you start to shoot. When you are shooting, much of your attention goes to the sights and targets, and physical technique may suffer. A few minutes dry fire helps prevent this.

Don't start at 100% pace.

Allow yourself a few repetitions at reduced speed when practicing multiple repetitions. Be sure to be very precise and correct in the technique you are executing. Then gradually work your way up to 100% speed. Occasionally you can try to push your limits and practice at a 110% pace – but not too often! When you do this, your control and accuracy suffer, and you do not want to practice that mistake too often. Speed will naturally increase with practice.

Create a level of tension.

A practice session is not competition shooting. Your performance when shooting under pressure is very different, and the best way to deal with this is to experience it as often as possible. Most top shooters make an effort to attend numerous matches during the year in preparation for the one that is really their goal. Nothing can replace match participation, and you need to experience the tension in order to learn how to cope with it.

Try to create a level of tension in practice, especially if you are unable to attend enough matches. Here are some techniques you can use:

Visualization

Imagine, as you shoot a stage in practice, that you are on the range at your big match. Try to put as much detail into your visualization as possible: hear the conversations of your competitors, see the professional RO's and well-built props on the stage, feel the pressure. Sit and visualize this before you shoot, and you will feel an increase in tension.

Practice competitions

If you have training partners who are at a similar or higher level than you, run simulation matches during some practice sessions. It does not require a lot of preparation. Each shooter sets up a stage or two, you all do a walk through, and

shoot one time for score. Be sure you score points as well as time, and calculate hit factors for overall ranking and score. Add interest by betting or challenging one another - "Winner doesn't pick brass or clear the range", "Winner gets free drinks", and so on. Do whatever keeps you interested and increases tension. Use this in combination with visualization.

Make your hits to shoot the stage

This is a nice technique for keeping you interested and focused on accuracy. Set up a stage that starts with two or three steel targets. Each shooter has to make these 3 shots on the steel, no extras allowed. If you need an extra shot, you miss your chance to shoot the stage. In this case you unload and go back to the end of the line. This practice is particularly effective with 4 or more shooters, as you need to wait some time for your next turn. You feel the tension on those first shots. This is an excellent practice technique and can be used in many combinations. Use your imagination.

When you are at practice – be all there!

We all have a lot going on in our lives and putting private matters aside is difficult. However, it is of the utmost importance during training to concentrate all your attention and focus on shooting. This is why well-funded sports teams go away to training camps once in a while. They may have all the necessary facilities back home, but they have the everyday distractions too.

Detaching oneself from everything else is very important. Make an effort in this regard. Of course, it is not always easy.

Each practice session teaches you something.

Be aware that every repetition burns an action into your subconscious. If you do good repetitions, you build good subconscious skills. If you do bad repetitions, you build bad subconscious skills. Do not allow yourself to do bad practice! You will get very good at being bad...

Try to vary your practice times, conditions and locations.

Many shooters train only in the evenings. Some train only in the mornings on weekends. Our matches tend to last all day, and often stretch over three days or more. You need to get accustomed to shooting at all hours. Try to vary your practice times as much as possible, so that you can be prepared for all eventualities.

This applies to weather conditions as well. We all like to stay out of the cold and

the rain, but competitions are sometimes conducted in horrendous weather. It is to your advantage to be familiar with such conditions through practice. The same goes for locations. Try to practice on different kinds of ranges - indoor, outdoor, ranges with various types of surfaces. This will ensure you are better prepared for anything you may encounter in a match.

Strong hand weak hand shooting.

You may be wondering why this book does not have a chapter on strong hand weak hand drills. The reason is simple: almost every drill here can be shot both strong hand or weak hand. And should be! Cultivate the habit of always shooting part of your practice one handed. You need to shoot weak hand well enough not to lose points on such a stage. Group shoot, draw, and make transitions both strong and weak hand. This will make you a better shooter.





Saul Kirsch is a top international IPSC shooter with extensive world-wide competition experience. Over the past 10 years he has won numerous level III matches and the Europeans Steel Challenge twice. He was placed second at the European IPSC Championships and fifth overall at the 2002 World Shoot. Saul is a qualified sports instructor and accomplished coach.

Perfect Practice is Saul Kirsch's first book and the ideal guide to quality IPSC training.

Created from Saul's own personal practice know-how, over 50 carefully crafted practice drills ensure you acquire all the knowledge, tips and skills necessary to excel.

Topics include accuracy and recoil control, calling your shots, improving your draw, reloads, shooting position transitions, barricades, shooting on the move, swingers, and more.

Each topic contains detailed insights into the attitudes and techniques critical to success. Each drill is explained in depth - how to shoot, what you learn and how to keep track of your progress and learning curve.



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