

The topic of how to correctly dry fire a handgun for skill development come up often during our Tactical Analysis Group (TAG, LLC) training courses. The concern is safe doctrine and also productiveness. Can you really improve on your skills without firing a live shot? The answer is yes.

Most top instructors are big fans of dry firing when conducted safely and properly. Dry firing can foster good trigger control and aid in perfecting the draw stroke and presentation as well as magazine changes and clearing stoppages. It can also expose problems with equipment like holsters and concealment garments.

In the TAG, LLC Progressive Pistolcraft course we teach correct dry fire methodology. The critical issue is to ensure all live ammunition is physically separated from the room when you start a dry fire session. The line taught at Gunsite Academy is to, "put your ammo in a sock and place it in your empty bathroom tub".

This is of course a mental image designed to illustrate how safety is imperative during at-home, unsupervised dry fire practice. The preferred practice from TAG is to have an observer acting as coach and safety monitor.

First, ensure all people in the home understand you are not to be disturbed and all distractions (phones, TV, computers, etc.) are silenced and put away. Yes, this means smartphones too, but keep it nearby to document your dry fire practice with CCW Guardian once you're done.

To start, safely unload and clear your weapon, locking the action open. Again, remove all live ammo physically from the entire area.

Next, have a pen and paper handy and write down what skills your dry fire session will practice and define your goals. For instance, "I want to work on improving my draw stroke and presentation from the holster," or "I want to achieve a quicker front sight focus."

Next, write down the time and date. Ideally dry fire is 10 minutes or so per session, two to three times a week. Dry firing too often or attempting longer sessions can mean you'll lose focus and reduce the benefits.

By the way, try focusing, really focusing on something for more than a couple of minutes. Stare at your watch. How long can you clear your mind and really focus on your watch before distracting thoughts enter your mind and take your attention off your watch? One minute? Three?

The point is limiting your dry fire practice to the amount of time you can shut out the world and do it right. This is not just for safety, but also to ensure the session is worthwhile.

After checking all magazines again and ensuring the firearm chamber is clear, place your pistol in your holster.

Now the environment is properly set up and your goal is set then close your eyes and mentally rehearse what you are about to run through. For this example we'll use the goal of improving the draw stroke and presentation. Picture moving your hands to the correct position making sure the Support hand moves with your Weapon hand.

As you mentally grip the weapon (correctly) your support hand is on your lower chest. In your mind, you release any holster retention devices and clear the weapon up and rotate it to a level, close-ready position. Weapon hand elbow is back and the arm is tight against your body. Then you move to the 'smack' position where as you thrust the gun forward your support hand intercepts and completes the grip.

Still only in your mind, you see the front sight in your peripheral vision as you extend your arms pushing the weapon forward and on target. You watch the front sight as it settles on target and increase your focus, sharply, on the front sight alone. Now on target, your trigger finger moves to the trigger and a rearward press begins removing the slack. Pressing, not pulling, not jerking, not slapping, you add weight to the trigger smoothly until, as you stare at the front sight, you achieve a clean, surprise break.

Remember never to 'fake' or simulate recoil when dry firing and continue to focus on the front sight. Then slowly reverse the draw stroke back to close ready and then into the holster with your support hand moving back to your chest.

Take your time. There is no such thing as a "speed re-holster."

Remember, "Draw quickly – shoot carefully – re-holster reluctantly."

You did all this while standing still, hands at your side, and with your eyes closed. All martial arts and pro athletes use visualization techniques such as this. It is essential to good dry fire.

Now prepared, having visualized yourself doing it correctly, you will start dry fire.

(SAFETY- RECHECK WEAPON)

Begin in slow motion. Practice does not make perfect, 'Perfect' practice makes perfect.

During TAG training I actually dislike that old saying but its use here is to illustrate you should not allow yourself to practice a technique sloppily or wrong. Perfect is the enemy of excellent, so don't beat yourself up when you do something off of correct. Just stop, breathe, and go back to step one.

Go slow and execute the draw as proficiently as you can. If you have issues with the entire draw stroke and presentation, try to work on one phase of it at a time. For instance, moving from a relaxed position to a solid grip on the gun while still in the holster.

Once you have the technique down, conduct three very slow, correct draw strokes and presentations. Take a breath. Work on exhaling as you draw. Do three more at half speed. Never dry practice a technique at full speed. Speed will come with thousands of correct repetitions, never from trying to be quick. As soon as you mentally say 'now' and try to go fast, chances are you'll dork it up.

Smooth is the real fast. Smooth and correct will beat fast and flustered every time.

Three more draw strokes ensuring the front sight is in sharp focus. Half speed at the most. If you catch yourself losing focus on this one skill or messing something up, go back to quarter speed and fix it.

When next in the holster and safe, stop and check your watch. Are ten minutes up? If so stop, write down the time and close your session.

Put away everything and set your firearm up for storage - or depending on the situation - back ready for CCW carry. Resist the urge to go longer or worse; after dry fire practice is over to re-unload and go again. That's where accidents happen.

All Clear? Safe? Now let the world back in. When you have a minute, use your CCW Guardian app to document this training. (Have an iPhone? Go to [www.CCWGUARDIAN.com](http://www.CCWGUARDIAN.com) for the app)

Future sessions might be trigger control and reset drills, possibly using plastic dummy rounds. This increases the risk somewhat so add emphasis to the safety controls we put in place. Magazine changes are another good topic, but again you have to adjust the safety controls in place.

Sometimes there is a limit to what you can do on your own and you need to have a mature, trained and skilled observer help by watching you. Pick this person wisely as someone who nit-picks you to death will kill your focus.

(I hate golf to this day because of the guy who wouldn't let me swing once uninterrupted without a correction of some sort!

With only a little self-promoting, this is what TAG, LLC's Progressive Pistolcraft (the PRP) is all about. Professional coaching before bad habits sets in, is essential.

Dry fire training with mental visualization of proper techniques can increase your proficiency, build kinetic weapons handling skills, and make your expensive live fire training sessions vastly more productive.