

Dry Firing: Why and How; Purpose and Goals

There are many good reasons for dry firing between live firing exercises. How you do your exercises and what exercises you do, depends on what your goal is. Or put another way, what training effect are you aiming for? Here are some ideas and principles that will help you choose the kinds of practice to do.

Principles:

- Do not include conflicting goals in the same practice – this will diminish outcomes.
- When learning, work iteratively on sub-skills and on holistic integration. Both are necessary.

There are, I think, three main goals for practice:

- Learning New Skills (Processes)
- Automatizing Existing Processes
- Stress Testing Automatized Processes

These require different approaches to dry firing, as well as different drills within the dry firing session. Examples on the second page.

Learning:

Requires a calm, focused environment, together with a calm, focused, recovered, athlete. Learning is hard, so you need to be comfortable and refreshed when you start. To learn a new process, you need a map or script to follow, that defines the process, and drills that allow you to work on sub-parts, as well as drills that allow you to try out and integrate the complete process. You also need to optimize the learning tools, for example, the aiming points, rifle, clothing, etc. so that the learning environment is a close approximation to the performance environment.

Automatizing:

Assumes you can repeat the process that produces the desired skill/performance most of the time, so this kind of practice will be oriented around repetitions; exact repetitions of the process until it no longer requires conscious thought. The requirements for the practice environment are the same as in Learning. You are repeating the learned process in your conscious brain in order to train lower level elements in your brain and body (nerve and muscle reflexes and firing patterns) to execute the skill (process) below the level of conscious thought. It is *still* learning!

Stress Testing:

This is where you test a skill to find out if it is race ready or not. You don't make a new skill race-ready by attempting to learn it or automate it, under stress (see above). For stress test practices, you first have to define the kind of stress you experience under race conditions and then you need to devise simulations of these stresses. The simulations should be such that you can vary the levels of that particular stress from "easy" to "too much".

You also need to optimize your practice environment, for example, the aiming points, rifle, clothing, footwear, etc. to closely approach race conditions.

Stressors should be applied gradually, always starting from low stress where you can perform perfectly, progressing by steps, to a stress level where the process breaks down. Then back off to get some more perfect rehearsals before ramping up the stress again. Ideally, you should be aiming to cope with stress levels that are above those encountered in competition.

Examples:

Set Up:

- Find a quiet, well-lit space where you can set up (prone or standing) without touching walls or compromising your position.
- Your targets should be printed so that the black lines and dots are crisp and clear. Dot spacing for 5-across should simulate the same arc-traverse distance as experienced at 50m ranges.
- Take up your training position with the rifle at 90 degrees to the wall; check your internal and external position to make sure it is good. Now have an assistant place your target(s) on the wall so that the target lines up with your position. NO compromises here!
- The sight picture (concentric circles) should be as close to the picture you see at a 50m range as possible.
- Adjust the distance-to-target as necessary for different drills to maintain an appropriate sight picture.

Learning:

There are many of these in the Shooting Cookbook. Here is a simple sequence for learning traversing skills:

1. Natural alignment on 'C'; not bolt movement, no trigger pull.
2. Breath in, traverse to 'E' and breath out.
3. Do a 2-breath cycle, excluding trigger squeeze on the 2nd breath;
4. When you get the aiming point, hold for the follow through.
5. Breath out and traverse to the next target.
6. Do 2-breath cycle and shoot the next target.
7. Repeat until you shoot 'A' and return to 'C'.

Next iteration:

Same drill.

Next iteration:

1. Same:
2. Same
3. Do a 2-breath cycle, including trigger squeeze on the 2nd breath;
4. When you get the aiming point, squeeze the last 15% and hold for the follow through.

Next iteration; full dry fire:

Add the bolt reload before Step 1 and in Step 5.

Automatizing:

Use the same drill as in Learning above.

- First 3 min. is just like Learning above (easy rehearsal of sub skills)
- Second 3 min. Do all 5-across with 3-4 breath pause between. Keep the speed and rhythm constant.
- Third 3 min. Do all 5-across with 3-4 breath pause between. Keep the speed and rhythm constant.

Stress Testing:

Use the same drill as in Automatizing, but apply suitable stresses either between 5-across bouts or between 5-across bouts, depending on intent.