

LEFT-HAND

TRAINING METHODS

FOR

SEMI-AUTOMATIC PISTOLS

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Some say that approximately 10% of the American population is left-handed and some say it is 13%, but honestly and truly if we looked at the overall perspective it's probably closer to 30% of the population that is left-handed. The problem that faces most lefties is when they come to a firearms training class they end up being treated as dysfunctional righties. My interests, as far as the left-handers go, came from my very early military service when we were taught how to shoot the Colt 1911. All the manipulations were done with the right hand. For the left hand shooters, after you've done everything right handed, you would put the gun on safe, transfer it to the left hand, take the gun off safe and then shoot whatever you had to shoot. If you still had bullets left in the gun, you would put the gun on safe, transfer it to the right hand and then do all the manipulations of unloading in a right-handed manner. Now this was so ridiculous that even I as a 19-year-old young buck who didn't know squat about anything could figure that this was absolutely wrong. Our Instructors were just trying to keep the soldiers from shooting each other or themselves while on the firing line. We needed enough training to go to war without decimating our ranks within our own population. This piqued my interest in the fallacy of training and the discrimination against the lefties.

At the SIGARMS Academy, one of the first things we do is establish if you are left or right handed. The bottom line with a semi-automatic pistol is whichever hand a person is most comfortable with is what we want them to work with. Eye dominance is important but not that critical. In the firearms training business we use different training techniques to adapt and to make seamless the training from the right-handed shooter to the left handed shooter. At the SIGARMS Academy we have been able to do that without a lot of difficulty. Handling of the firearm is the biggest difference for left handed shooters. Basically, both right and left handed shooters must know how to point the gun at the target and give a good press on the trigger to achieve the desired outcome. But getting the gun loaded, unloaded, sustaining its load, performing immediate action drills, operating the safeties, opening the action, making the gun safe, etc; are the things that we run into that are different in training the left handed shooter.

Let's begin with basic handling for the left-handed person. Commonly, we have been taught to lock the slide to the rear using the thumb or index finger on the bottom of the slide catch, regardless of the brand of gun. The problem you will run into is when the student turns the muzzle of the gun to their side to lock the slide back. For

example, a right handed person would turn it to the left and end up pointing the gun at everybody down the firing line, unless they moved their feet to accommodate the muzzle direction. In working on the left hand techniques to lock the slide to the rear taught at the Academy, we find the left-handed shooter automatically keeps the muzzle pointed into the impact area where the targets are. We realized that if the lefties were doing this easily and correctly then the righties should be



The lefty releases the magazine by removing his index finger from the trigger and depressing the magazine release.

able to do this as well. So we developed a technique that uses the side of the thumb, instead of the end of the thumb, to apply the pressure to the slide catch. This automatically keeps the muzzle pointed in the correct direction so there is no need to move your feet or worry about the gun being pointed somewhere other than the impact area.

We teach our students to grip the slide with the fingers on the right side in the gripping grooves, then place the heel of the thumb, the fleshy part, in the gripping grooves on the opposite side or the left hand side of the slide. This allows the thumb to overlap the arresting notch (little notch in the slide that interlocks with the slide catch.) Once the hand is in position we verify that no part of the hand covers the ejection port.

Now, by drawing the slide to the rear and using the tip of the thumb, lift the slide catch into the arresting notch. Once the slide catch is in the arresting notch, we release the tension on the slide and the slide stays locked to the rear. That allows us to be able to perform the visual and physical check of the handgun and make sure it is safe.

This left hand technique for locking the slide to the rear can also be used for weak handed righties. One of the things this technique does is by rotating the gun inboard, with the sights toward body center, we have a little bit more power as we pull the slide to the rear and also push the frame forward. It's kind of like tearing a sheet of cloth in half. You've got both hands, both arms, chest muscles are doing the operation of locking the slide to the rear rather than just supporting the pistol with the hands and allowing just one muscle group to do it all.

After we have done our visual and physical check to make sure that the gun is clear and empty, we can now insert the magazine into the

pistol. The technique for loading a pistol is pretty similar for the left hand or right hand shooter. Letting the slide go forward after the magazine is loaded is another area that the Academy teaches from a different perspective. To release the slide forward we use one of two sling shot methods. The shooter supports the pistol in the dominant hand, grips the slide in the gripping grooves at its rear with the non-dominant hand, draws the slide to the rear until it stops and releases it forward. The nondominant hand should be clear of the ejection port during this operation. Let the recoil spring do its work when the slide is released, never help the slide forward. Part of what we train is combat skills at the Academy. The combat skills rely on gross motor function for successful operation. When we are under stress we have gross motor skills that are available to us while our fine motor skills basically disappear. What we train is to use the sling shot method simply because that gross motor skill is what will likely be available to us in the time of combat.

There are two ways to release the slide forward with the sling shot method. The inboard and the vertical. With the inboard method, the pistol is rotated slightly towards body center with the fingertips of the right hand (nondominant hand) gripping the gripping grooves. The thumb is in contact with the gripping grooves on the left. Simply retract and release the slide. This is the simplest and quickest way to get it done for most people. In the vertical method, the pistol is kept upright; the fingertips of the nondominant (right hand) go over to the left side of the slide, the heel of the hand to the right side of the slide. Getting a good grip on the gripping grooves, retract and release the slide. In either case, the slide goes home freely and chambers a round.



When releasing the slide, get a good grip on the gripping grooves, pull back and release. Let the slide do the work and don't ease it forward.

Now, in order to put some pistols into operation, there are safeties that will have to be manipulated. The thumb usually gets the job done if the pistol is ambidextrous. If the gun isn't an ambidextrous gun (as most aren't), the index finger of the dominant hand, the left hand in this case, will usually get the job done. Let's take the SIG pistol as an example and we just chambered a round. The hammer is cocked to the rear and we want to reholster. The hammer needs to be in its forward

rest position in order to holster the pistol safely. By depressing the decocking lever we can safely lower the hammer to the intercept notch, which locks the hammer away from the firing pin. If we pull the trigger to lower the hammer, that disengages all the safeties, and gives us potential for an unintentional discharge. So with the de-cocking lever, we allow the hammer to go forward without the possibility of discharge.

Let's say we've got a student whose fingers are exceptionally long. Their range of motion won't allow decocking with the index finger. As an administrative procedure to de-cock the hammer, the pistol is simply rotated inboard and the nondominant thumb is used to depress the de-cocking lever. In some cases, people that have very large hands will reach under the gun and use their fingertips to de-cock the pistol. Either is acceptable. Again, it's an administrative procedure, as opposed to a combat procedure.



In the vertical method of releasing the slide, the fingers of the nondominant hand go over to the left side of the slide, retract and release the slide.

We should speak to single actions just a bit. The Browning High Powers, the Colt, and all of their clones and derivatives are going to have to have a safety on the right hand side of the gun in order to be operated with the thumb of the left-hander or you're going to have to use the nondominant hand to get the job done. That's really not a good option for either one of those. Almost all the Brownings that you see have ambidextrous safeties. The Colts often have after market add-ons, but they usually work just fine. A trainer may tell you that the index finger is a good way to go, and someone else will tell you the dominant side thumb can reach across. That is too much motion in the heat of battle for most people. Can you do it? Yes. But can you do it under stress?

Sustaining or unloading the pistol requires manipulation of the magazine catch. The magazine catch from the left-hander's perspective is probably in the best place on the left side of the gun. The shooter takes his index finger off the trigger and depresses the magazine catch, which releases the magazine. From a safety standpoint, having the magazine catch over on the dominant side of the gun is probably a pretty good idea. If we wanted to go back to convention, and talk about thumb manipulation of the magazine catch, most brands, not all, but most brands of firearms today have a reversible magazine

catch. In other words, we can put the catch on either side of the pistol to suit the needs of the shooter. This gives the shooter the option of the thumb or the index finger. Find a side, stick with it, and train with it, learn it, and leave it there. That's it, that's the whole deal. At least three major manufacturers provide pistols with ambidextrous magazine catches, one on each side of the pistol. The same thing applies here as with the single sided pistols. Find what works for you and practice religiously until the manipulation of the magazine catch is subconscious.

Another thing to look at is the European style magazine catch. The European magazine catch is located at the base of the grip frame and is handled the same way by right or left-handed shooters. The thumb of the nondominant hand is used to move the magazine catch away from the base. The index finger of the same hand is wrapped around the floor plate to withdraw the magazine.

Let's talk about unloading the pistol. The magazine comes out of the gun first, removing the source of ammunition. The slide is retracted and released to watch the round that is in the chamber come out and go to the surface upon which we are standing. Then we lock the slide to the rear in the manner in which we just talked about. Next perform a visual and physical check of the ejection port, chamber, and magazine well. The pistol is now clear, empty, and safe.

Function checks on the pistol include all the handling manipulations that we talked about as far as the magazine, magazine catch, de-cocking lever, slide release, safeties and trigger manipulations. Performing a function check as a lefty or righty should be equally as easy and just as important.

Trainers that are interested in their work and what they do must take it upon themselves to learn both left handed and right handed techniques. All the trainers at SIGARMS Academy have left handed sets of equipment. If we need to demonstrate left hand methods, we can do that and work from the lefties own turf. As an example, if I've got a left handed shooter in something as simple as an armorer's class, I insist that they show me the left handed method of the function check. I've already demonstrated this to them, so if they're going to carry the gun left handed, I want them to work left handed. Plain and simple.

Often we have found that lefties are better shooters and better handlers simply because they've had to learn from a little different angle than the accepted the method of being a righty. Their focus and concentration on motor skill proficiency is enhanced by learning both right and left-handed techniques. This usually gives the left hand operator an edge over the right-hander.

As the psychology professionals tell us, the lefties are the only ones working in their right mind.

Stay Safe and Watch Your Six.

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