



It is extremely important you check that your gun is unloaded before practicing dry fire drills.

# EFFECTIVE DRY FIRE PRACTICE

[ BY TOM GIVENS ]

***“Dry firing” or “dry practice” consists of practicing firearms manipulations without the presence of any live ammunition.***

There are a couple of excellent reasons for engaging in this practice. For one thing, the rising cost of ammunition and the time burden of traveling to and from a live fire range often limits the amount of practice we can get. More practice equals more skill. Dry work can be accomplished in your own home and with no expenditure of ammunition, so there is zero cost.

Second, dry work is actually a better way to ingrain many skills. Without live fire, the shooter does not have the noise of a weapon's discharge, the noise of other shooters' guns firing, flying brass, reciprocating slides, and the myriad other distractions on a typical firing range. Quiet, mentally focused dry work is an excellent way to learn

the feel of your trigger, for instance, or to perfect your presentation from the holster. During the 1970s, the old apartheid government of South Africa was under a U.N. arms embargo and could not import ammunition. Their domestic production could not keep up with demand. As an experiment, the S.A. Army had one group of new recruits go through the normal handgun training program, while another group went through doing only dry practice. The “dry” group did not fire a single shot until qualification day. When the scores were tallied, the dry group slightly outperformed the group which had done all the usual live fire practice. In my view, you go to training to learn new skills, but you perfect and ingrain those

skills through thousands of correct repetitions. It is easier and quicker to amass 5,000 repetitions if you engage in dry work between range sessions.

Since you will be handling a real gun in your home there are certain precautions you will need to observe. Here is a checklist for you. Make a ritual out of going down this checklist every time, and before long these will be habits.

Dry practice should only be conducted in one designated, established area, and nowhere else in your home. That area should have a *safe wall*, that is a wall that will actually stop bullets in the event of an unintended discharge. A brick exterior wall or a stone fireplace can work, or you can use a body-armor vest as a backstop. Do not dry fire toward an interior drywall.

When you enter the dry fire area, clear the gun and remove *all* live ammunition from the area. This includes loaded magazines or speedloaders,

rounds in your pocket, or rounds in the desk drawer. Take all live ammunition to another room, then come back and clear your gun again.

You will need a target, which is simply an object to aim at while you dry fire. You can use an actual commercial target, a hand drawn reduced scale target, or something similar. Don't use an expensive or important item or the house pet! Remember to place the target on the safe wall or body armor backstop.

A session of mentally focused practice should probably not last more than ten to fifteen minutes. If you try to stretch the session out, you will tend to get bored and sloppy. Sloppy practice is worse than no practice. Remember, our goal is to rack up a huge number of correct repetitions over time, to build reflexive skills. Muscle memory, kinesthetic programming, conditioned reflexive responses, and habit all actually mean the same thing. All are born of consistent repetition.

If you get interrupted during the session by a phone call or other distraction, start all over again, back at step 1. Failure to do this is an invitation to disaster—unintentionally using a loaded gun for dry work.

There are two points in this process where there is actually a danger of an unintended discharge. Those two points are the very beginning and the very end of the session. Failure to clear the gun, move all ammunition out of the room, and then clear the gun again can result in an unwanted discharge. The most common error seems to be finishing the session, loading the gun, and then saying, "Just one more rep." When the session is over, say out loud to yourself, "This session is over. No more practice." Leave the dry fire area for a while. Later, go back, load the gun, and say out loud to yourself, "This gun is now loaded." At that point, it can be safely put back in the holster or wherever you keep it.

There are certain skills that lend themselves well to dry practice. Here are some that I suggest you practice frequently. By the way, these should be practiced dressed exactly as you are when going armed, including us-



above: Work on your holster presentation. It should be practiced until it becomes second nature.

right: Dummy rounds, like these snap caps, are helpful in dry fire practice.



ing a cover garment for concealment.

Work on your presentation from the holster. In the real world, whether you wind up drawing to *ready* to challenge someone, or draw to shoot, you will have to produce your pistol before you can do anything else with it. Both options should be practiced until they are second nature.

Work on trigger control. In dry practice you can more easily feel the slack take up, the trigger break, and reset. If you press the trigger and the gun goes "click" with the sights still sitting on your point of aim, then that would be a hit in live fire. If the sights move off the point of aim as the gun goes "click," that would be a miss. Keep working.

Empty gun reloads can be easily practiced with a couple of dummy rounds (again, *no* live ammunition). Start with the gun in hand, with the slide locked open, and an empty magazine in the gun. Have a spare magazine with one or two dummy rounds in it. Punch out the empty magazine, insert the magazine with dummies, and close the slide. Get your hands back on the gun and get

a sight picture. The dummy rounds allow the slide to go forward, simulating an actual reloading sequence.

Those are some of the obvious skills you can polish in dry work. Use your imagination as your skills progress. Recoil recovery and building a tolerance to the noise and concussion of gunfire are really about the only skills we cannot improve by dry practice, so get to work! ★

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