



CENTERING

CENTERING has been used for many years by top athletes and can be adopted to shooting very easily.

The technique can be used during shooting when feeling '**up-tight**' or when certain aspects of the match are not going as planned.

Shooting requires fine motor control to perform tasks such as holding and trigger release, which must be done smoothly, to achieve the best possible results within the shooter's capabilities.

If an athlete finds their hold, or the trigger release is not as smooth as they would like during a match, as it is during training, the CENTERING procedure can help to get the mind and muscles back on track.

For example the athlete may develop a slight tremor. They tighten the grip slightly and the tremor gets worse, tighten the arm a bit more and still the tremor is there, the grip tightens more, the shoulders tense up and so on.

We can see that a '**spiral**' has started. If this spiral is not broken, serious implications may occur, not to mention a loss in points. What is most concerning is that the next time the athlete goes to competition, they may carry over this '**spiral**' to other events and then begin to notice the '**failure experience**'.

Doing the centering procedure breaks this spiral. Then, once broken, the person has a '**cue**' word which has already been decided upon to get themselves back on track and thinking of the more relevant aspects of the shot process or series.

The type of '**cue**' word the athlete may use will depend on what works for them. It should not be a phrase, but rather one word, which pertains to the most important factor required to fire a good shot or a series of shots. For shooting it may be "**sights**". It can be anything at all, but it must be something that is relevant to the task and will get their mind back on track quickly.

So, two main points must be realised to successfully use the centering procedure during actual competitive situations.

- 1) *The athlete needs to recognise when they are beginning to lose control over a situation and then find time to go through the procedure.*
- 2) *Knowing where to direct attention, at the same time being careful not to fall into the same hole you just got themselves out of.*

The centering procedure can be carried out either standing or sitting, depending upon where you are and the match you are involved in.

The spiral has been broken and you are now ready to regain some control and remind yourself of the constructive action you should take. It may take several attempts at centering before a significant change is noticed at the time of the match or certain event. If

the technique is not used as soon as possible, a loss in performance can have detrimental long term effects.

Where and what to attend to, depends on the sport which you are involved in. In pistol shooting, the need is to **'focus'** attention to the most important factor to help you shoot a ten, the sights. The cue word for shooting could be 'sights', but this may vary from person to person.

However, as previously discussed in other articles, sights need not be "the most important" aspect of good shots.....the application of the trigger finger operated in a smooth continuous movement is possibly more important. Here the athlete must decide which avenue to take. For example, we discussed a "slight" shake, which may not be eradicated immediately, but focus on a smooth uninterrupted trigger application can be dealt with immediately.

The process of centering, once mastered, takes as long as it takes to inhale and exhale.

The procedure is as follows:

In the standing position, let the arms hang loosely by your side and take a breath from the diaphragm (stomach) and take note of the stomach expanding. Hold the breath for about 4 seconds and exhale. Feel the stomach go loose. At the same time note that the shoulders have dropped slightly, thereby taking some tension out of the neck and shoulder region. Tension within the neck and shoulders will affect the fine motor control needed to hold steady and operate the trigger finger.

At the moment of breathing out, say the **'cue'** word which will get the mind back on track. The cue word most commonly used is **'sights'** as this is one of the most important factors in shooting. If training has been applied correctly, the trigger finger should operate somewhat automatically, without conscious thought. All conscious thought is left free to see the sights and concentrate on sight alignment.

Centering can also be performed whilst shooting. For precision, follow this routine. As the pistol is raised above the target, breathe in. Hold the sights roughly aligned above the target and breathe out as the pistol is lowered to the target. In the breath out, drop the shoulders and say the 'cue' word as you settle into your area of hold.

Be sure that all breathing is done from the diaphragm. Breathing from the upper chest region will raise the shoulders and increase tension. You may feel that you are steadier with correct breathing because as you breathe out, the body feels heavier on the soles of your feet.

For the turning target events, by breathing out just before the targets face, there is time to say the cue word as the arm is raised which will help focus thoughts on the task at hand i.e. smooth lift.

Centering can easily be adapted to Service Pistol and Action Pistol. There are only a few seconds to begin the draw from the time that the hands are raised till the targets turn. As the hands are raised, breathe in, then out, saying the cue word. You will find that as soon as the cue word is mentally said, the targets should turn and your thoughts should be focused on the smooth draw and the sights or dot.

When centering in the sitting position, leave the arms loose by your side, or rest the forearms on the knees and breathe as in the standing position, with the only difference being that you feel heavy in your seat. Be sure that either way of centering, sitting or standing, note the shoulders being dropped on the exhalation. Each time during the exhalation, the body feels heavier.