

## Components of a productive training session

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It is tempting to believe that each training session is beneficial to our development and as a consequence we may not be aware that every session is not necessarily constructive. Thus the purpose of this article is to outline the necessary components of a productive training session, which should typically be 1½ to 2 hours in duration.

We have, thus far, provided our readers with a series of articles that deal with physical, technical and mental training and we have treated each as separate processes. However, every training session has an impact on both the mind and the body and therefore it is necessary to look at how these processes are, in actual fact, integrated.

There are three component parts that each training session should include the **warm-up**, the “**main part**” and the **cool-down**. It is important for the shooter to fully and whole-heartedly engage in each part of the training process.

We know that during shot production the shooter must focus his/her attention on a particular part of the shooting routine at a particular point in time. If this focus cannot be applied it is likely that the shot or a series of shots will not be executed correctly. The same holds true for the training session.

The warm-up needs to take up at least 15% of the total amount of time allocated to the training session and is an essential part of the session. It serves to loosen and prepare the muscles for irregular activity and ensures “smooth” functioning of the physiological processes in order to prevent muscle injury and reduce muscle stiffness. Simultaneously the warm up prepares the brain for the work to be done in the training session.

The warm-up should begin with gentle physical exercises involving the whole body and then proceed to specific exercises in which the pistol is used to finetune the physical movements involved in shot production. Warm up exercises must require that the shooter concentrates on certain visual images, the speed of his/her movements and the degree of his/her muscle tension. The warm up must be robust enough so that by the end of the warm-up, movement control is at optimum levels. This cannot be achieved if the warm-up is too easy because the shooter will not have had adequate mental preparation.

It is important to note that the process of the ‘warm up’ is a discipline that requires self control and shooters must exercise this in order to build mental strength and/or character. It is, therefore, discipline that determines both the value and predictability of the training session. If self-control is not exercised during the warm-up, the shooter is likely to stay in his/her comfort zone and not be in a state of readiness, which is necessary for the shooter to meet the objectives of the “main part” of the training session.

The “main part” of the training session may take up to 75-80% of the total amount of time allocated to the training session. In order for this part to be constructive, the coach/shooter should identify particular task(s) that must be completed or ideas that must be learned during the session.

In considering how physical, technical and mental training influence each other, let’s suppose that you have started the “main part” of the training session and have therefore been exerting yourself physically for a given amount of time. How do you know when to take a break?

The shooter needs to know when to take a break from training so that he/she is able to recover and then continue to work productively. Over-exertion results in more frequent mistakes, which can

raise the shooter's level of anxiety and impede his/her performance. Therefore the shooter should follow a *training strategy* that shapes the shooter's physical and mental state.

The *training strategy* should dictate the shooter's behaviour at each progressive stage in the training session by taking into account the physical factors such as training loads as well as the psychological factors such as the training conditions and the type of tasks undertaken. These physical and psychological factors will both have an influence on the shooter's mental state and may thus raise the shooter's anxiety and affect his/her performance. Consequently, training tasks need to take into account both the shooter's physical and the shooter's mental capabilities.

The shooter should feel a certain level of tiredness during some or each stage of the "main part" of the training session and this should be a guide as to when the shooter should take a break and recover before continuing. The coach must also use his/her observation skills in order to properly advise the shooter as to when to take a break. In the case of precision shooting, I suggest that the shooter takes a break to recover when his/her arm begins to move more quickly and suddenly and he/she is not able to rectify the problem when attempting to execute a shot.

Recovery from psychological fatigue is equally important as recovery from physical fatigue. If not carefully controlled, training tasks can raise the shooter's level of anxiety to the extent that mental development is impeded. In the majority of cases, recovery from psychological fatigue requires more time than recovery from physical fatigue.

Therefore, both the coach's skill and a well thought-out program of tasks designed for the training session are key factors in the shooter's physical, technical and mental development.

The final stage of the training session is the cool-down, which should take up approximately 5-10% of the total amount of time allocated to the session. The cool-down is as important as the warm-up, but it is usually the stage of the session that is ignored. If it is consistently applied at the end of a training session, it is likely that the shooter will maintain a better recollection of this component than the other components of the training session.

The cool-down is designed to gradually lower body temperature and heart rate and it speeds the recovery process before the next training session. Overlooking this part of the training session could cause cramps and muscle stiffness and recovery is much slower.

This final phase of the training session also provides a perfect opportunity for the shooter and coach to discuss and evaluate the entire training session. By doing so the shooter and the coach are able to develop their general analytic skills, which require observation and interpretation of those observations that then become the basis of decisions for future training sessions. This is also an appropriate time for the coach to discuss any relevant technical issues with the shooter and suggest various new and different exercises that will assist the shooter's development.

It is important to note that future training sessions will be shaped by the success or failure of past sessions. Any shooter, beginner or experienced, will be disappointed if he/she perceives that a training session has not been successful because the desired results were not achieved. The main aim is, therefore, to ensure that each training session is successful in achieving the desired outcome for at least some of the tasks of that session. This is not easy, but I urge any shooter or coach to take the challenge and experience the benefit.