

Positional shooting in FT.

SECTION A: Introduction and objective:

This is one of the most challenging aspects of FT shooting. It is most certainly an area where I have regularly dropped shots in the past, and so it has driven me to undertake a personal journey in overcoming poor results. Throughout this endeavour, I have kept one goal in mind... to lose all fear of shooting positional lanes, through building a system that 'guarantees' a hit.

There will never be a guarantee, and naturally, I do still miss. The thing is, that I don't miss NEARLY as often as I used to, and I have no fear of anything a maxed out positional target can challenge me with.

I have found, that if I follow the process and Pre Shot Routine (PSR) I have developed (and practised ...repeatedly...and then again), I FEEL that I cannot miss. I took this system into the 2019 Worlds event with a personal challenge... to 'clear' all of the kneeling and standing lanes. Day 1 and Day 2 I succeeded. Day 3 I failed... for reasons that are revealed later in this document.

While parts of what I say may be deemed nonsense by some experts, I have seen great improvements in others that have assimilated snippets of my techniques into their style (Mark Fairon is one). As you develop, you will find what looks complicated right now, is really quite simple.

I am going to focus on STANDING, as most of what is said applies to kneeling shots as well. The guiding principles are essentially the same. With this in mind, let us begin.

SECTION B: The FUNDAMENTALS (and approach):

Each of these fundamentals comprises several steps and mini-processes (simple ones).

1. **EXPERIMENT!**
2. **RELAX!**
3. **BREATHE!**
4. **AUTOMATE the PROCESSES!**
5. **REPEATABILITY!**

1. EXPERIMENT...

Everyone has their style and physical characteristics that enable them to perform in a certain way. For instance... women are more flexible than men, but men are physically stronger. If you happen to have both, you are very lucky.

Whatever positive shooting attributes you possess, define them and find ways to apply them to your shooting style.

As an example: I am physically strong, so can hold a very heavy rifle in my shooting position for a long time. It also enables me to exploit other attributes of mine... a slow heart rate and the ability to manage anxiety. The combination of these lets me range a target while standing - saving time and maintaining a low heart rate.

Find YOUR 'X' factor by trying new things (don't take what you think you know as gospel - it may be fundamentally wrong). Ask how others do things that they are good at, be eclectic and assimilate. Keep those discoveries that benefit you in a 'mental library', and discarding those that do not work.

While keeping the above in mind, your experimentation MUST have a CLEAR OBJECTIVE. Mine was 'To find a way to get to Natural Point of Aim, and then into the Hit Zone (HZ), in an efficient, consistent, repeatable way'.

2. RELAX...

If you are tense, your body ends up fighting aspects of itself for control. Tension uses energy and blood oxygen.

The result? You will begin shaking and lose stability VERY QUICKLY. When that happens, your mental processes are also forgotten, as panic sets in as the clock runs down further. It also inhibits you from operating the trigger in a smooth action in the micro-instant you are required to.

3. BREATHE...

Breathing is probably the biggest handicap when it comes to positional shooting. Many shooters stop breathing in an attempt to hold the gun steady, either to range-find or to stay in the HZ and the results are tension (previous point) and an increased pulse rate, as well as panic - and then possible failure.

The key here is to NEVER STOP BREATHING...EVER. You will die!

This is what your body is trying to tell you when you begin to shake (muscular oxygen depletion) and bounce (heart rate). Physiologically, the brain will always prioritise itself before anything else during oxygen depletion, and so a shot of adrenaline is released too, as your brain switches to 'fight or flight' mode.

This gives you some related insight: <https://www.elsevier.com/about/press-releases/research-and-journals/understanding-the-brains-suffocation-alarm>

The idea here is to manage this. Perhaps by taking many short, mini-breaths instead of stopping entirely? Experiment and discover what is best for YOURSELF. I prefer simply slowing down my breathing, but breathing deeply (this is important later for aiming).

You will relax, and mitigate all the effects of tension and your body's survival instinct.

4. AUTOMATING the PROCESSES...

Everything mentioned above is a process you will need to embed in your PSR. This is done consciously at first and thereafter (with PRACTICE and REPETITION) automatically. They are the bones. It is here that you add 'the meat'.

The meat comprises all you learn about what works for you in your experimental phase. If you have existing processes that are very solid are already embedded, and which work - do not discard them. Try and include them, if your confidence in them is high.

In the beginning, it may seem intimidating because there may be much to remember, but as each one becomes part of a repeatable routine, you have less to consider and concentrate on. It becomes like brushing your teeth.

5. REPEATABILITY...

Automation builds repeatability... that is, doing precisely the same things, in the same order, every time to take a shot. This repeatability does several things, both physically and mentally. It is the ESSENCE of your PSR.

A repeatable process ensures that the 'discoveries' you have made are embedded and applied as they should be - physically in terms of balance, comfort, breathing and heart rate. It also enables the technical learnings to be applied as they should be in terms of hold, Natural Point of Aim (NPoA), head position, eye position, cheek weld, leading arm and hand, trigger hand and finally, taking the shot.

Those are the foundational tenets on which I built my particular system.

SECTION C: THE SYSTEM...

As I have mentioned before, everyone is different, so much of this may or may not apply to you. Use it as a guide, rather than a rigid methodology. Much of my process I also apply to freestyle lanes.

1. Stop talking about and thinking of anything else: 'GET INTO THE ZONE' however you need to, as soon as you need to shoot. If you, like me, suffer from concentration issues, tell your shooting partner to STFU if necessary. You have the right to do so. Remember to breathe!

2. Oxygenate your blood: Breathe deeper and slower than usual as you approach the lane, or as you wait for your turn. Your heart rate will drop and you will feel more relaxed. Did I mention that you die if you don't breathe?

3. Assess the lane: Find the targets, assess the size of the HZ and allocate time to each, according to the level of difficulty. Define the prevailing wind direction, elevation, incline, branches, the best place to stand on the mat, etc..

If you are shooting second, keep assessing and assimilating data and decide how you will approach your turn. Mitigate any changes that may occur. Breathe!

4. Find (basic) NPoA on the first target: Do this before you bring the rifle up to a shooting position and before you have to start your timer (Rule: As you kneel or bring the scope to your eye)Breathe!

This takes practise, and an understanding of the mechanics of your body. There is no other way to learn what it is and how to get it effortlessly, other than through practical experimentation and repetition.

[Basic NPoA is the position your body will naturally return to when you are standing, but are relaxed.]

The way I establish this is by standing in a RELAXED manner, my feet around shoulder-width apart, and with my rifle down at hip height. The rifle must be at the SAME angle it would be when brought up to my shoulder.

I then move my feet until the rifle's barrel is aligned directionally with the target. I accomplish the directional positioning by gently rocking back and forth while shifting my feet and/or toes so that everything else stays relaxed and naturally-aligned. NEVER force the rifle into position by using muscular tension in your body.

When I do bring the rifle up to my shoulder, I now find that the target is somewhere in my sight picture, with maybe the need for minor vertical adjustment. This goes back to the AUTOMATION process...if you do something often, things just happen naturally. It's also called PRACTICE. Find what works for you.

5. Engage sling and start timer: Bring rifle up and find the target (It should be very close or immediately in your view if your NPoA process is well established).

I have my timer attached to my bag or on my gun, so I can start it without bending over or using my foot if it's on the ground. I don't have to move from my NPoA position or even take my eye off the target. Breathe!

6. Range-find: By standing while ranging, I save valuable time and effort, thereby maintaining a low/steady heart rate.

Also, sometimes it is better to use another object to range on, like the tree or concrete block the target is mounted on. They generally have better texture to focus on, and so speed up the result. This also removes any anxiety that you may have, not being exactly on your NPoA axes (see point 8 below). KEEP BREATHING!

Tips to note on this...

- If you are finding it difficult to range-find while standing, tilt the rifle on its side and just rest it on your palm. Turn the side wheel with your thumb.
- I assess whether it is necessary to ACCURATELY range the second target. If the size of the HZs allow for it, and the difference in distance is nominal, or if it becomes obvious that they are in or close to my zero, I skip ranging the second target and just shoot. Time saved equals less stress and fatigue. Eg. 2 x 40mm targets @ 25m and 35m, or a 25mm @ 25 and a 40mm @ 35m.
- If the targets are laterally very close together, and it won't interfere with your basic NPoA on the first target, range both before shooting. Breathe!

7. Cock and Load your rifle: I have a foam pellet holder attached to my rifle close to the loading port, so the pellets can be accessed without taking my eyes off the target or moving my hand far from the rifle. I can maintain my body's and the rifle's position.

Note: I sometimes do this step before range finding.

Are you still breathing?

8. Final Natural Point of Aim (NPoA) - Setting X and Y axis: This is the gravy poured over the meat. It is this process that ensures that one can bring the crosshairs INTO and THROUGH the HZ repeatedly and consistently - without effort, and without having to adjust ANYTHING further.

Setting the X (horizontal plane) and Y (vertical plane) axes is fundamental to my technique. It reduces the number of variables that occur on these planes and it allows your muscles and skeletal structure to settle directionally, in a naturally-relaxed position... essentially on your FINAL NPoA.

You already have your basic NPoA from the process in point 4.

This is then 'finalised' by moving firstly your feet/toes in small increments (mainly for the POSITION of the Y-axis on the HZ). Your leading hand and leading shoulder for setting elevation (the POSITION of the X-axis) in the HZ. These actions should happen almost simultaneously, but when you start, it will be beneficial to do it in 2 phases until you understand how each influences the other, as you make adjustments.

My specific process:

I set the LEVEL of the X-axis (horizontal plane) by doing the following...

1. I set my weight distribution slightly onto my rear foot, but with a feeling of balance created between my body and rifle. I try and keep as much of the weight as far back and as close to my body as possible, as this reduces stress on my back.
2. I make sure that my head is as UPRIGHT as possible, as tilting your head too far to one side influences your balance.
3. I lift the rifle to around 45 degrees and I tuck my lead elbow in - as tight and as high as I can against my

side in a SPECIFIC position (see Elbow Position - Defining and Control of Descent Angle), with full lungs.

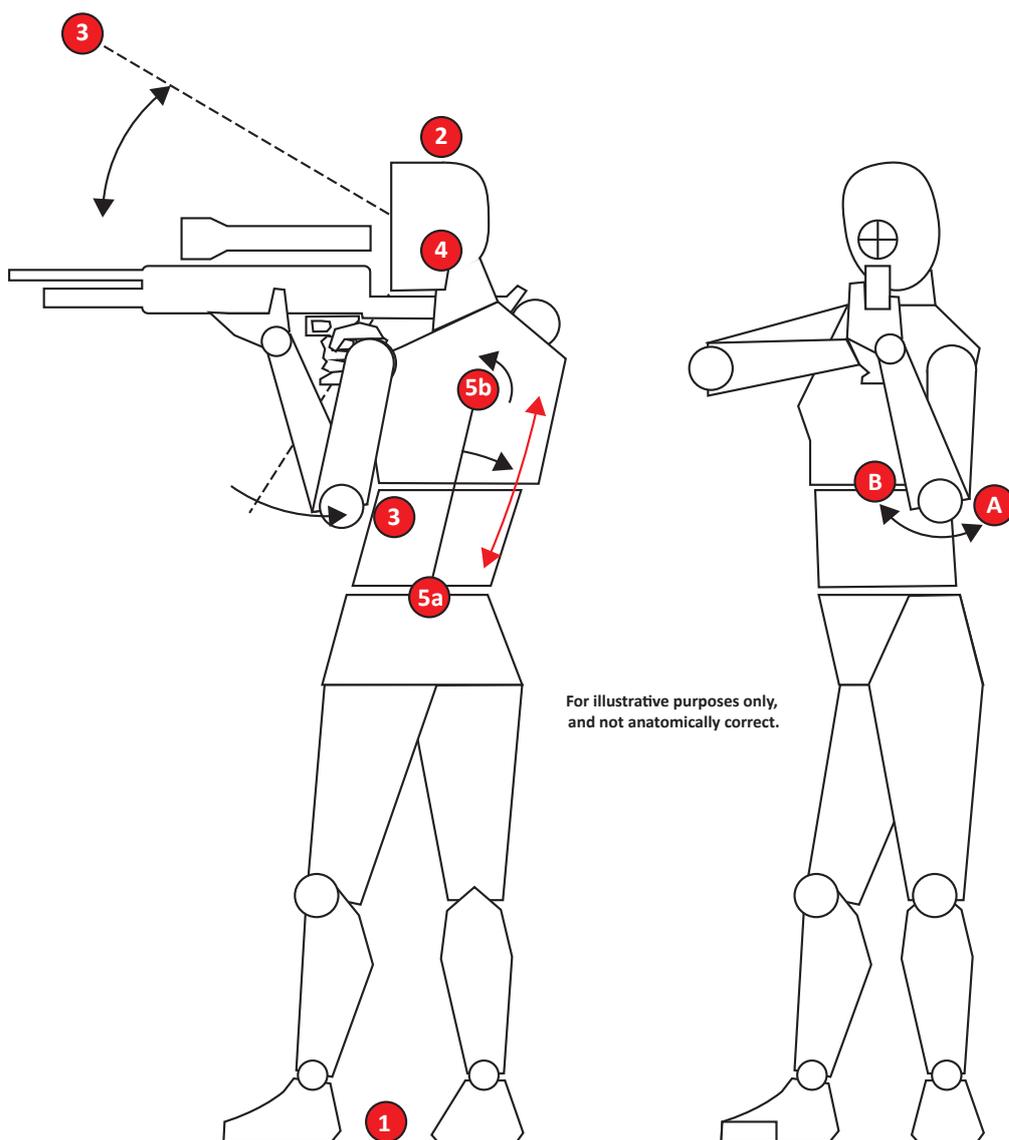
4. I set the CANT of the rifle vertical, and lock this in with my cheek weld. THIS IS CRITICAL to set early and maintain - eliminating other variables that may creep in.
5. I then lean slightly back from my hip (5a), as this creates and sets a 'relaxed tension' (yes it's an oxymoron) down the right side of my body as I bring the gun STRAIGHT down (see Controlling Descent Angle) from the 45-degree angle (pivoting around the point between my shoulders), towards the target (5b). This 'stretch tension' (red arrow), as well as my arm tuck, naturally restricts the distance that the rifle can drop - without engaging any muscles.
6. I sometimes end up higher than the target and then I breath out (in small increments) to allow the rifle to drop further until I am on the HZ. With practice, I can now AUTOMATICALLY come straight down into the KZ at first try, and do VERY minor adjustment with tiny shifts of the rifle against my shoulder, while maintaining the CANT setting.

REMEMBER: Setting and adjustment of either axis should be done with about 15-20% air in your lungs because this is the same state at which you will be deciding to take the shot.

Elbow position - Defining and Control of Descent Angle is important as it reduces variables that may occur. One would use their leading arm elbow position against one's side to set this.

- (A) An elbow set towards your back would cause the rifle to descend from high right to low left.
- (B) An elbow set more towards your chest would descend high left to low right.

You ideally want to find the 'specific' position that delivers a fully upright action, somewhere between the two.



9. Aiming... Controlling the crosshairs with your lungs (believe it!): You now have your NPoA set up, based on your setting the X/Y axis. It becomes a constant. It ensures you will ALWAYS come down to, and THROUGH, the same points on a path without any resetting of posture, arms and/or hands.

Now for final aiming...USING YOUR BREATHING.

The key thought here is to LET THE RIFLE MOVE up and down as you breathe. Too many people try and keep the crosshairs in the same spot, wobbling around (and sometimes inside) the HZ. This causes them to stop breathing (Ref. Sec B, Pt 3).

What is guaranteed, is that if you have followed the example in point 8 of Sec. C - The System, you WILL return to the HZ, every time, and have multiple opportunities to take the shot in the time you allocate yourself to do so (while you Assess the Lane). Patience gets rewarded.

So... once you have set your X/Y axes, you are ready for the '3 breath process'.

The first breath is a DEEP one. You then slowly breathe out and allow the crosshairs to drop towards the target. As the target comes into view, you slow down the release of air, which slows the descent. As you get into the HZ, hopefully with 15-20% still in your lungs, you shut the release off and lockdown for 1-2 seconds. You should be in the HZ. This is your 'confirmation' run. If you need tiny adjustment, do it now.

The second one can be shallower. You know you are good to go from breath 1. This is where, if the planets align, you can take the shot.

The third breath (and subsequent ones) are only needed if you are not feeling comfortable, or have not succeeded at breath 2. Go back to a deep breath and repeat the process.

Another key thought to note is that you do not try to STOP and STAY in the HZ for longer than say, 1 or 2 seconds. You come in, assess if the shot is on, and 'JUST DO IT' - if you 'feel' it's right. The more you practise, the more often it happens like this, in the next point.

10. Take the shot!: The concept is simple. You are working with fractions of a second here. You MUST practise your trigger control (a fundamental in general shooting skill). A fractional, millisecond delay in releasing the shot may end in a bad result.

The beauty of mastering point 8, is that once you have your timing embedded, one can take the shot without truly 'stopping' in the HZ. Gerhard Strydom does this, AFAIK.

As trigger settings vary, I can only speak for myself.

My trigger is a single-stage, with a bit of resistance. What it allows me to do is compress the flesh on my finger to the point where just a fractional addition of pressure releases it. This enables me to carry out a decision in a millisecond, as I enter the HZ.

Key thoughts on this would be...

- NOBODY can keep a rifle still enough to linger in the HZ, so don't try too hard!
- If you ain't in or paused inside the HZ, DON'T take the shot!
- If your process breaks down, reset (to the previous step and try again)!

And finally...

11. Have NO DOUBT that you will knock the target down! Here is where mental fortitude is critical to maintain throughout your event. From target 1 to target 50. This key thought should be embedded when you are assessing the lane.

Rule of thumb: If you THINK you may miss, you probably will. This happens not only on positional lanes but on freestyle ones as well. If you think about it, it may be the average shooter's biggest challenge to overcome. If you can control your thoughts, you control a lot more.

This is where I failed to accomplish my goal of clearing the 2020 FT Worlds event of positional lanes. As

an illustration of the effect of negative (or wayward) thinking - I missed a 17m/40mm target, after missing (AFAICR) a 35m/40mm one.

So if any doubt enters your mind, look at the target and tell yourself you can do it...easily...simply because you have done it before in practise!

That's all folks. Specific questions can be answered if asked.

Good luck!