

Handgun Presentation and Recovery

During a deadly force encounter, the mind of the law enforcement officer has much to consider: identification, location, and number of suspects, lighting, terrain, cover and concealment, movement, bystanders, and backdrops. The list goes on *and* changes moment by moment. With so many factors outside of the officer's control, it is important that the officer turn those factors that can be controlled into reflexive actions. For our purposes we will define a reflexive action as an action that does not require *conscious* thought. The more skills that can be made reflexive, the more the mind will be freed up to deal with the variables of the situation. The smooth, timely, presentation of the handgun is one of many basic yet vital skills that can be rendered reflexive through conscientious training. Yet, it is important to remember that most presentations from the holster of a law enforcement officer do not result in the firing of shots. Any training of this vital skill *must* take the fluid nature of real life into consideration and address those times that the weapon is drawn to a "Ready" position (Sec. 1 - Pg. 12 & 13). Additionally, the situation that initially suggests the need to fire shots might change between the time the weapon is grasped in the holster and the moment of squeezing the trigger. Therefore, the officer's ability to de-escalate from the weapon being pointed in on-target to a lowered "ready" position with the trigger finger indexed must be addressed. Range exercises requiring decision making (escalation and de-escalation) must be included in the training until students demonstrate their ability to efficiently present their handgun to any of the "Ready" positions as well as to pointing in on the target and firing shots.

The handgun presentation from the holster may also be referred to as the "Holster-to-Stance Reflex" or simply the "Draw." The speed of the action is determined more by smoothness and efficiency of motion than forced quickness. Efficiency (no wasted motion) is addressed here in this publication. Smoothness must be addressed by the student by following up with precise repetition during live and dry practice. Whether drawing the weapon to shoot a threat or to challenge a suspect from "The Guard" or "Sul" position, movements should be broken down into simple steps with individual, repeatable points of reference which can be easily understood and applied by the student. The number of steps, as well as the names they are given, is not as important as ensuring that they result in bringing the weapon to bear in the most efficient manner possible. *After* the fine points of each individual step are mastered, the objective is to combine each in a seamless manner. Correct repetition of the established precise movement produces controlled speed. Additionally, it is important to remind the student that the adrenaline produced in the real-life situation adds an extra boost of speed. What adrenaline *cannot* do is enhance precise movement. That is something that the student must instill through proper training.

As some presentations of the handgun will result in shots fired at distance (sighted fire,) and shots fired at close quarters (unsighted fire,) and still others with the weapon arriving at a "Ready" position, three variations of the presentation will be addressed in this section.

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Variation #1 addresses the situation in which the opponent's aggressive action has resulted in the decision to shoot being already established in which the distance to the threat requires employing "flash sight picture"* rather than precise sight alignment.

This distance issue takes into account the fact that the time between deciding to shoot and actually firing the shot is too short for the opponent to realistically alter his/her actions in time to influence the officer's course of action. When the confrontation (and range training) takes place at distances requiring the *longer time frames* necessary for precise sight alignment, it may be argued that opponents might have the time to alter their actions to those of compliance, thereby allowing the officers time to adjust their responses accordingly. As addressed earlier, live fire exercises at longer distances with shoot/no-shoot (decision making) targets must be formulated to address this issue.

Variation #2 addresses the situation in which the student perceives the need to have the weapon in hand, but not the need to fire a shot (search, challenge, "Ready," etc.)

Variation #3 addresses the situation where the decision has been made to fire shot(s) at close-quarters where the opponent is in such proximity to the officer that if the weapon is extended towards him the opponent would have opportunity to take it, deflect it or interfere with its operation.

The skill steps required to return the handgun to the holster will be addressed under the separate heading of "Recovery to the Holster."

Variation #1:

Presentation to the Shot(s) (sighted fire)

1. Grip
2. Clear
3. Join
4. Sights
5. Fire

Variation #2:

Presentation to a "Ready" Position

1. Grip
2. Clear
3. Join ("Challenge")

Variation #3:

Steps for **Presentation to the shot(s)** ("Weapon retention" or close-quarters, unsighted fire)

1. Grip
2. Clear
3. Fire

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INSTRUCTIONAL NOTE:

Initially, train each step by verbal command to ensure that students can demonstrate the reference points of each step. This should progress to omitting the verbal commands of each step to allow students to complete the sequence at their own speed. A simple “Go”, “Fire”, Up,” “Challenge” command, whistle, or turning target may be used. As speed progresses, the instructor must monitor to ensure that all reference points are retained by the student. Occasionally, reverting back to verbal commands may become necessary, as students frequently tend to sacrifice the precision of the movement in an attempt to increase speed.

In order to focus on isolating and learning the precision of the essential steps of the skill, when initially introduced to the Handgun Presentation, students should start from an “interview position.” The “interview position” should be adaptable as a passive, defensive tactics stance. Appropriate foot position is described in Sec. 4 - pages 3 & 4 (under “Stance”). Hands should be together and relaxed at the center line of the body at about diaphragm level in a position consistent with note taking. The “interview position” is an *ideal* starting point only. After the basic steps of the draw are learned and consistently demonstrated from this static position, variables representing real life situations should be introduced. These variables include starting with the hands in alternative positions to simulate occupation with other activities, (including holding objects) as well as drawing the weapon while moving, sitting, etc. Instruction on presentation of the weapon while moving must include: when, where, and how to move, along with the advantages and disadvantages of moving (based upon the environment and circumstances of the confrontation).



Interview position

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Variation #1:

Instructional steps for **Presentation to the shot(s)**

1. “Grip”

- Both hands move *simultaneously*.
- The *support hand* moves to the centerline of the body in the area of the diaphragm with the open palm towards the torso.
This places it in the *ideal* position to join with the dominant hand (step #3) for a two handed grip.
- The *dominant hand* moves to the weapon, defeating all retention devices and obtains the *proper* grip in the holster.
Taking the time to obtain the proper grip on the weapon in the holster so that it, the sights, and the body are aligned, is much more efficient than a hurried, sloppy grip resulting in misalignment, which then results in inaccuracy and poor recoil control.



“Grip”



Obtain the proper grip in the holster

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2. “Clear”

- The *support hand* remains in the same position.
- The *dominant hand* draws the weapon from the holster. As soon as the handgun clears the holster opening, briskly elevate the muzzle to a horizontal position pointed at the threat and cant the weapon outboard so that if it must be fired at this point, (see variation #3 on pages 11 - 13 of this section) the movement of the slide will not impact the clothing or body of the student. If the student obtained the proper grip of the weapon initially, the front sight, rear sight, wrist and elbow will now be aligned.
- For agencies using pistols so equipped, a reflexive *sweep* of the thumb to ensure that the *dual function decocking lever* (Sec. 2 – Pg. 22) is in the up (fire) position should be added to this step of the presentation.
- Thumb safeties on single action semi-automatic pistols *must not be disengaged* until **after** this step is completed. Agency policy may address any further restrictions regarding when the safety may be disengaged.
- *After* the muzzle of the handgun is pointed at the threat and all conditions of the General Safety Rules #2, 3, & 4 (Sec. 1: Pages 3 & 4) have been met, the trigger finger should make contact with the trigger and begin taking up any slack (“prepping the trigger”)



“Clear”

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3. “Join”

- The *dominant hand* starts moving the weapon in a straight line towards the threat. Simultaneously, the previously positioned *support hand* moves outboard so that its extended fingers cross over and wrap around the fingers of the dominant hand to obtain the proper two-handed grip. Joining the two hands close to the body allows the proper two handed grip of the weapon to be established by the time the arms are extended to the firing position. Care must be taken so that *the support hand does not pass in front of the muzzle of the weapon at any time.*
- The handgun continues in a straight line to where the front sight intersects the line of sight between the student and the threat as the support hand continues to refine the two handed grip.
- *While* the weapon is moving forward, the trigger finger continues to take up any slack that is present. This will put the finger into position to *finish* the trigger press once the desired sight picture has been achieved. This eliminates the abrupt collision that occurs when the finger “attacks” the trigger from the “indexed” position after the arm is fully extended and the weapon is stationary.

INSTRUCTIONAL NOTE: 1. As each weapon’s trigger varies in weight and length of travel, considerable *dry repetition* must take place prior to making this a live fire exercise. 2. Follow-up training must be added to address confrontations that take place at longer distances, and thus require the time for prioritizing precise sight alignment over speed.

4. “Sights”

- When the decision has been made to shoot and the weapon’s sights intersect the line of sight between the student and the point of aim on the threat, the student needs to make a conscious effort to focus on the front sight to obtain a *flash sight picture* (Sec. 4 - Pg. 12) for short distance shots (or for more *precise sight alignment* (Sec. 4 – Pg. 9 – 11) for longer distance or precision shots, as addressed above).

INSTRUCTIONAL NOTE: As the students become more familiar with the steps of the presentation and their desire to prioritize speed emerges, they will have a tendency to sacrifice their focus on the front sight. Emphasizing this step in the training process increases the likelihood that it will become a reflexive aspect of the Draw.

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5. “Fire”

- At this point, the decision has already been made to fire, the slack has been taken out of the trigger, and the appropriate sight alignment has been verified by the student’s focus. As soon as the weapon stops moving, the student simply continues (or finishes) the trigger press to achieve the surprise break of the shot(s). With repetition, students should be taught to *work towards* the point at which the shot breaks immediately after the weapon becomes stationary *and* their eye has found the front sight.

INSTRUCTIONAL NOTE:

Too long a pause between the weapon being on target with the finger on the trigger and the shot actually being fired (the time between steps #4 & 5), could be interpreted by the student as indicating that it is okay to use this as a “ready” position. This tendency must be overcome by devoting enough time (especially during initial training) for the details of each step to be understood by the student. As students demonstrate an understanding of the reference points of each step, the time between commands #4 and #5 should be shortened to the point at which one step immediately follows the other. In short, we must impress upon the students that if the weapon is pointing at the threat, they should be shooting. If they are not shooting, the weapon should be at a “ready” position.

Variation #2

Instructional steps for **Presentation to the “Ready”** position:

Should the opponent be at such a distance so as to not be a threat to the control or possession of the handgun (beyond arm’s reach), and the officer perceives the need to have the weapon in hand but *not* the need to shoot (search, challenge, etc.), the following steps are applicable:

1. “Grip”

- Both hands move *simultaneously*.
- The *support hand* moves to the centerline of the body in the area of the diaphragm with the open palm towards the torso.
This places it in the *ideal* position to join with the dominant hand (step #3) for a two handed grip.
- The dominant *hand* moves to the weapon, defeating all retention devices, and obtaining the *proper* grip in the holster.
Taking the time to obtain the proper grip on the weapon during this step ensures that, if needed, the sights and the body are aligned once the weapon is drawn.

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2. “Clear”

- The *support hand* remains in the same position.
- The *dominant hand* draws the weapon from the holster. When the muzzle clears the holster opening, briskly elevate it so that it points at the ground, approximately 45° to the front of the student.

3. “Join” (or “Challenge”)

Student preference, training, the environment, and the situation will determine which of the “Ready” positions described in Sec. 1, pgs. 12 & 13 is appropriate.

- **If the “Guard” position is the objective**, the *dominant hand* starts moving the weapon forward and down to a position in which the muzzle points below the threat, and the hands (and weapon) do not block the student’s field of view. Simultaneously, the previously positioned *support hand* moves outboard so that its extended fingers cross over and wrap around the fingers of the dominant hand to obtain the proper two-handed grip. Care must be taken so that *the support hand does not pass in front of the muzzle of the weapon at any time*. The two-handed grip is refined as the weapon moves forward.
- **The trigger finger remains indexed above the trigger guard alongside the receiver.** A verbal challenge may be appropriate. (This section Page 10)



From the “Clear” to the “Guard”

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- **If the “SUL” position is the objective**, the *support hand* is already in position. The *dominant hand* moves the weapon forward and towards the centerline of the body and the *support hand*, as it rotates the muzzle down to point between the student’s feet. The thumb of the *dominant hand* is extended away from the grip of the weapon to make contact with the tip of the *support hand thumb*. The barrel or slide of the weapon rests against the back of the extended *support hand* fingers.
- **The trigger finger remains indexed above the trigger guard alongside the receiver.** A verbal challenge may be appropriate. (This section Page 10)
- Movement between the Guard and the SUL position will be determined by environment and situational changes as well as student preference.



From the “Clear” to the “SUL”

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VERBAL CHALLENGE:

Consideration must be given to instruction pertaining to the verbal challenge. Many commonly used phrases that have encroached upon the world of Law Enforcement are not only unprofessional and inappropriate, but are ineffective or don't accurately convey to the suspect (or the public within earshot) the actual intent of the officer. While the argument can be made that there is value in the standardization of a verbal command, the need for flexibility to suit the situation must also be addressed. For example, more than one tactical officer accustomed to serving high-risk search warrants has found that the habitually shouted; "get down, get down," when applied to the wrong circumstances and environment, has only resulted in placing the compliant suspect out of view behind the furniture or vehicle. The "challenge" serves several purposes:

- Control: A loud, clear verbal introduction announces the presence of the law enforcement officer on the scene and assists in establishing control.
- Identification: The challenge should immediately provide all those present (bystanders, suspect(s)) and any other law enforcement officers on the scene with the knowledge that the person giving the commands is a law enforcement officer.

State purpose or intent: The challenge should provide *understandable* instructions to all present in as brief and concise a manner as possible. Standardization of the challenge helps to eliminate the confusion which occurs when one officer is yelling "put your hands up," and another is yelling "get down, get down."

- Compliance: The challenge should be given with the *intent* of persuading its listeners to comply. *If* the decision has already been made to shoot, officers should *not* slow down their own response time by taking time to talk.

Examples which accomplish each of these purposes and instruct the subjects to cease their activity are as follows:

"Police, Stop" or "Police, Don't Move"

These challenges would then be followed with situation-specific instructions.

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Variation #3:

Instructional steps for **Presentation to the Shot(s)** at “Close-Quarters”

Students must be given the tools to deal with as many realistic situations as possible. Drawing a handgun using variation #1 in a deadly force encounter which takes place at common interview or “handshaking” distances back to two or three yards may result in a physical struggle for possession of the handgun. Therefore, a presentation of the weapon which takes into account the weapon’s security along with accurate firing must be addressed in training.

1. “Grip”

- Both hands move *simultaneously*.
- The *support hand* is raised up to block any incoming blows or strikes to their head or face by the opponent
- The *dominant hand* moves to the weapon, defeating all retention devices and obtaining the *proper grip* in the holster. Taking the time to obtain the proper grip on the weapon in the holster so that it, the sights, and the body are aligned, is much more efficient than a hurried, sloppy grip resulting in misalignment, which then results in inaccuracy and poor recoil control.

2. “Clear”

- The *support hand* remains in the same position to block any incoming blows or strikes from the opponent.
- The *dominant hand* draws the weapon from the holster. As soon as the muzzle clears the holster opening, briskly elevate the muzzle to a horizontal position and cant the weapon outboard so that when it is fired, the movement of the slide will not impact the clothing or body of the student.



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3. “Fire”

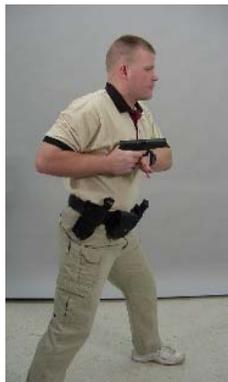
- After the muzzle has cleared the holster and is pointed at the threat the trigger finger is placed on the trigger, the slack removed and the shots are fired. (Minimum standard response: Sec. 12 – Pg. 2)
If the student has obtained the proper grip of the weapon in the holster, the front sight, rear sight, wrist and elbow will be aligned, allowing accurate stance-directed, unsighted fire.

INSTRUCTIONAL NOTES:

- Initial training of this technique should be done as a dry fire exercise with each of the steps performed on command in slow, controlled motion. Instructors will need to ensure that the support hand and arm are consistently, well clear of the muzzle blast area before allowing the students to proceed to live fire.
- Variations on this technique may include a strike towards the face, head or body of the opponent with the support hand/arm while performing step #1 “Grip” and THEN continuing the support hand/arm to the blocking position while performing Step 2 “Clear”
- Once the students appear to have mastered these three steps during both dry and live fire training, the following options may be added to their skills:

4. “Step”

- To gain distance from their adversary, the student then takes a long step backwards with their dominant side foot. This step should not be straight back but rather at an angle from the suspect to require them to change direction if they were to pursue. As the student moves backwards, the distance gained, allows the student to extend the dominant arm and bring the handgun up to eye level. At the same time, the student’s support hand **joins** the dominant hand in a two handed grip on the pistol being careful not to pass it in front of the muzzle of the weapon. This puts the weapon into position for the shooter to acquire a flash sight picture.



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5. “Assess” or “Shoot”
 - After gaining some distance from the opponent the student is in position to assess the situation and determine if it requires more shots to be fired, a challenge given, or if it is safe to evaluate, scan, and holster the weapon.
 - In the training situation, the lesson plan, course objectives, range configuration and instructor discretion determines which action is appropriate.
 - Once students demonstrate their competency in performing this movement safely and efficiently, instructors may decide to add another long step (again, diagonally, this time perhaps in the opposite direction from the first step) to allow the student to continue to take advantage of mobility while they take appropriate action to neutralize the threat.

INSTRUCTIONAL NOTES:

In addition to the factors listed, instructors must consider student to instructor ratio as well as continually evaluate the level of competency and skill level being demonstrated by the students at each stage of the training before increasing the complexity of the exercise by adding movement and live fire.

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Instructional steps for Recovery to the Holster

It is vitally important that emphasis is placed upon holstering the weapon *only* when it is safe to do so, and not merely because the shooting appears to be over. Whether the weapon presentation has resulted in shots being fired, a verbal challenge, or a building search, the officer should always be hesitant to return the weapon to its holster.

1. “Evaluate”

- If shots have been fired and the immediate threat(s) appear to be incapacitated, students should bring the weapon down to a “ready” position (a Guard or SUL) to open up their field of view. Students must be taught that just because an opponent is “down,” he or she is not necessarily incapacitated. Inflicted injuries, which may at first appear to be disabling, may only put the opponent out of action temporarily.
- *Immediately*, the trigger finger is indexed above the trigger guard alongside the receiver.
- Based upon agency policy or training preference, the reference point of decocking applicable weapons may be added to this step.
- Based upon agency policy or training preference, the reference point of placing single action pistols on “safe” (as applicable) may be added to this step.



Evaluate from the Guard position



Evaluate from the SUL Position

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2. “Scan”

Once evaluation has determined that the immediate, obvious threat(s) have been incapacitated, the students must train themselves to account for multiple suspects, tunnel vision, and other distractions. This requires the observation of 360°. Whether students turn their entire bodies or only their heads away from the initial threat will be dictated by circumstances and their environment. Regardless, they are responsible for controlling the muzzles of their weapons. Under some circumstances, the “Guard” position may be sufficient to accomplish this task. A drawback to this position, especially in crowded environments, is that if students choose to turn their entire bodies by pivoting at the hips or by moving their feet, it is much more difficult to keep the muzzle of the weapon from moving laterally. An advantage may be that it keeps the weapon pointing in the general direction of their original, and perhaps potential, renewed threat, thus facilitating quicker follow-up shots if required. Otherwise, the situation may be better suited to the use of the SUL position which provides better muzzle control, especially in crowded situations. When scanning 360° in the SUL position it is important that the student’s feet move. Simply pivoting at the waist will cause the muzzle of the weapon to point at the feet and legs instead of the ground between them. To avoid this, as students turn to look behind them, they should step back with the left foot when turning to the left, and with the right foot when turning to the right, keeping the muzzle pointing between the feet. Students evaluation of the circumstances will determine if turning their backs on the initial threat area is advantageous. In the meantime, training students in each technique familiarizes them with options that they can employ as they determine their applicability to each situation. A first-aid scan should also be added to the list of tasks to be performed at this time. Check your partner as well as yourself for injuries that you may not have noticed before.

- The trigger finger remains indexed throughout the scan.
- Instruction must emphasize that students need to actually *see* what they are looking at, rather than simply going through the motions of the scan.

INSTRUCTIONAL NOTE:

Another reflexive skill should be addressed at this point. If the presentation of the weapon has resulted in shots being fired, the student should make it a habit to *reload* (Sec. 3 – Pgs. 10 – 18) prior to holstering. The type of reload, as well as whether to reload and then scan or scan and then reload, is situational. Students should be reminded that since the eyes are not an essential element of the reloading process, scanning and reloading should be performed simultaneously.

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Scanning from the Guard Position



Scanning from the Sul Position

3. “Holster”

The pistol should return to the holster by reversing the motion and steps of the presentation. Should a threat reappear while holstering, the weapon is thereby always in position for the student to respond in an efficient manner. Using *only* the dominant hand to holster the weapon frees the support hand for other tasks (holding flashlights, opening/closing doors, grabbing handcuffs, etc.) It also prevents students from pointing the muzzle of the weapon at the support hand, which is likely to occur if they reach across the body to push retention straps out of the way. The student must be trained to holster without looking down. Keeping the eyes on the threat area throughout the process must be emphasized. Applicable weapons must be decocked prior to holstering if not already performed during evaluation or scanning steps, per agency policy or training preference. Reengaging manual thumb safeties on applicable single action pistols must occur prior to holstering if not already performed during the evaluation or scanning steps, per agency policy or training preference. Immediately upon holstering, fasten all retention devices.