



# FIRING LINE

ACCURACY AND SAFETY - ALL THE TIME **FRANK GROTH**



## ! FOCUS !

Every discipline in the shooting sports has it's own set of do's and don'ts, rights and wrongs. But there is one thing that cuts across them all; the need to focus in order to put your shot on the target each and every time. When we think of the word focus we naturally will consider our vision; what we see and how we see it, first and foremost so let's explore that first.

The point of focus, or where the image is most clear, varies greatly from discipline to discipline. In shotgunning we want to see the target clearly, with the front bead somewhat fuzzy and as a visual reference to where the muzzle of our gun is in relationship to the bird. In handgun and rifle shooting the point of visual focus is on the front sight, as shown in this illustration.



But when I think about focus the mental part is where I always go first. In any situation where the target is moving; be it on a trap field or in a duck blind it becomes important to pick a spot on the target and shoot to it. If you are on station five at trap and get a hard right bird it's a good idea to focus at the leading edge of the target, rather than at the whole target. Assuming your head remains on the stock and your eyes on the bore line, the gun will go where your eyes are looking and you will break the bird. What you don't want to do, though, is to focus like a laser on that point. Your eyes, and your brain which is doing the math, need to be aware of both the target and the muzzle. Losing awareness of the muzzle leads to missing and is why my fellow instructor Chester Parker never lets students forget about keeping their head on the stock. Lifting the head is the fast path to loss of muzzle awareness, and missing the target.

Handgun and rifle shooting are different in that we need to visually focus on the front sight but mentally focus like a laser on the target. With these firearms precision is the order of the day so it becomes vitally important to put your attention to the spot you need to hit.

When I am working with students on handgun shooting, or honing my own skills, I more often than not will use unmarked white paper plates as targets. I find scoring lines on printed targets to be distracting, and sometimes they can be intimidating for a student. I use 8 inch dinner plates for longer distance and beginners, and 3 inch dessert plates for skill building. This helps me form a sharp mental point of focus that I can translate into any situation in the field. Being able to mentally visualize that three inch circle on the vitals of a deer and aim to it, for instance, will give me a much fairer chance of putting meat in the freezer this fall.

One really great instructional aid for pistol shooters to teach visual and mental focus is the aptly named Dot Torture target, available for free on line through [pistoltraining.com](http://pistoltraining.com). You print them yourself from your

computer on standard 8.5x11 paper. The target is designed to allow you to fire 50 shots across the ten dots with the idea that all your shots are within the dots for each stage. The course of fire for each dot is printed right on the target. Even at three yards distance this is a real test of marksmanship that can humble even really good shooters, myself included. But it will get you to focus your vision on the front sight and your mind on the target without question, and make you a better shooter.

Until next time, keep those muzzles pointed down and actions open when you're not on the firing line. Safety first, safety foremost, safety always.

~~ Frank

