

# The Art of Spotting for Handgun Metallic Silhouette

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How often have you been on the line, hoping to shoot a great score and all you have had is frustration because you can't see where your shots are going, you are not confident in your windage or elevation (sight) settings and your spotter is not really helping you?

Rather he or she is too busy recording your shots, shot by shot on the score-card! You are kept waiting for feedback on each shot placement until your spotter starts shouting long-winded descriptions from way behind you, complicating the picture and wasting time as you are trying to get ready for your next shot. You are getting zero guidance on sight adjustments, time is slipping by and as the pressure builds. You become more and more tempted to watch the targets rather than your sights (to see where your shots are going), your spotter's comments are aggravating you and the whole situation gets worse and worse as the match progresses.

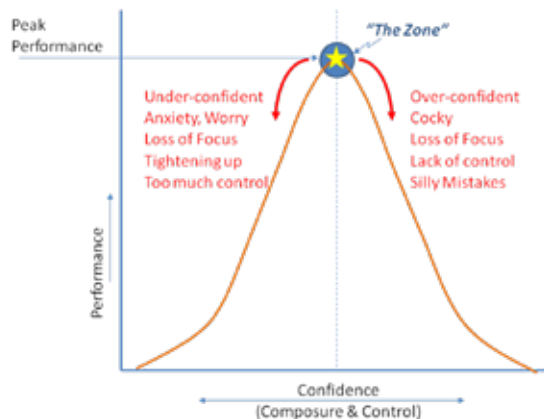
Sound familiar? Unfortunately it is all too common! Everybody wants a good spotter to help them get the best results from their match but few are good at repaying the compliment by striving to be a good spotter themselves.

Follow these notes and strive to be a good spotter for your shooting mates and you will soon find people will be helping you more because they would like you to spot for them! Good spotting is a win-win situation! Good spotters learn from each-other and become better shooters as they learn.

## The Art of Spotting

So why should we call spotting an 'art'? It seems appropriate to refer to spotting as an 'art' because when done well, it involves a broad mixture of activities that includes helping the shooter to manage and control his or her time, temperament and technique – and to do that well requires an appropriate mix of technical and interpersonal (psychology) skills in the spotter. As we have seen in previous coaching materials, to perform well the shooter must maintain presence in the optimum *zone* of confidence, concentration and control, and that *zone* sits on top of a slippery slope that is very easy to fall off. A key aspect of the spotter's job is to help the shooter maintain his or her optimum performance for the whole of the match – and poor spotting technique can push the shooter out of the *zone* very quickly.

Indicative Graph of "Confidence" versus Performance



Knowing how to keep the shooter in the *zone* is key – you can't force your shooter to go into or stay in the *zone* but you can do a lot to help him or her to maintain that position throughout the match. Key things a spotter can do to help the shooter focus and stay in the *zone* include;

- Always ask the shooter for his or her preferences for spotting before starting the match, experienced international shooters may be expecting to maintain a relatively small group size within each target and may only want feedback if a shot falls outside of that 'inner circle' on a target

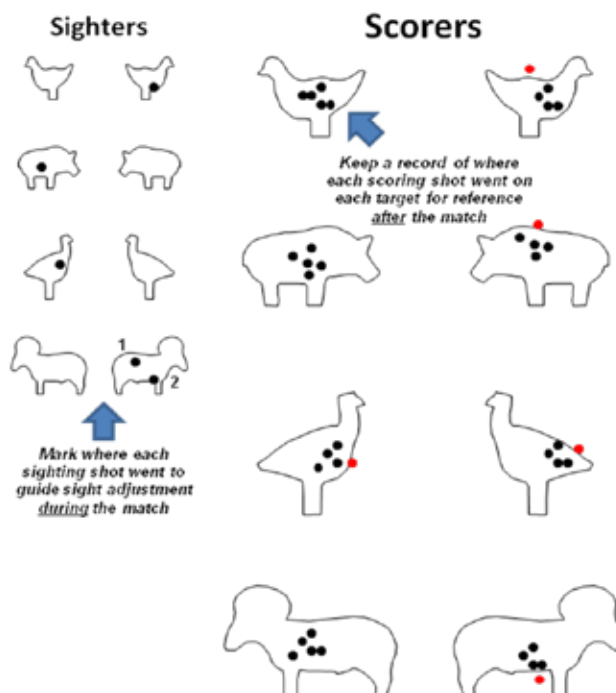


- Lower grade shooters may be shooting groups bigger than the target, with obvious (and maybe plentiful) misses and will be looking for help in obtaining better sight settings and technique – help the shooter work on grouping ("same sight picture - watch that front sight", etc.) before random/repeated sight adjustment



After the match, consider referring the shooter to the sister coaching materials "*Tips on How to Shoot Better Silhouette Scores*" and "*Tips on Shooting in the Creedmore Position*".

- Each shooter may have preferences for feedback using verbal descriptions of shot placement or pictorial using a spotting board or a laser-pointer (*See last section: "Getting Organised in the Shooting Bay"*), others may just want peace and quiet while they shoot
- While the shooter is shooting the sighters, mark up on the score sheet (or similar) exactly where each shot goes for each target – this is very important to give the shooter a clear basis on which to make judgments on adjusting sight settings before engaging each bank of the scoring targets – especially if one or more sighters were missed
- Some shooters may also want you to keep a record of where all the 'scoring' shots went so that he or she has a clear record of shot placement for each 40-shot match – this can be important for people practicing and preparing for State or National team selection and participation
- Give immediate feedback (in line with the shooter's preferences) on where the shots are going (hit or miss, etc.) so that he or she can focus on follow-through on sight picture rather than looking to see if the target has fallen.
- For less consistent shooters, encourage and reinforce his or her confidence with an immediate "yes" or "good" or "in the black" for every hit, even if the hit is way off centre and even if you can't see exactly where the shot connected
- Use simple, agreed language for shot placement on the target – nothing complicated – allowing for normal grouping, any hit well inside the edges of the target is "centre", outside of that it could be a "high centre/low centre/left or right centre" – all of which is confidence reinforcing language. "Good!" followed by "take a look" is a good way to introduce a 'wonky' shot that clips the target close to an edge but still topples the target. "Just over/under" or a "fraction right/left" is a soft/comforting way to announce a miss even if the shot was a disaster and missed by miles. Language and tone of voice matters if you want to keep the shooter in the zone – tone it down and cut out the waffle!
- Use a spotting board or laser pointer for pictorial feedback rather than words – and make sure the shooter can see the picture easily and immediately without having to twist and turn in the bay, thereby disrupting his or her shooting position and comfort – use the shooter's preferred feedback requirements and you the spotter should do the moving where-ever necessary! (*See last section: "Getting Organised in the Shooting Bay"*)
- Give feedback on progressive shots and grouping – e.g. "drifting right", "tending high", etc or "grouping in bottom third of target", etc. Remain cool and calm in reporting a missed shot – help the shooter stay calm, everybody misses at some time or other, even the best shooters!



- Recommend appropriate changes in sight setting (windage, elevation) depending on the progressive grouping of the shots with respect to the centre of the target, e.g. "last three shots were low – you might want to come up a click or two"
- Help the shooter stay focused on shooting the right targets (especially important when targets are clamped in windy conditions or if several targets have been missed in succession – "number three, count them across" etc.)
- Help the shooter manage his or her time (five shots in 2 minutes) by watching the clock and alerting the shooter if time is getting too short (e.g. "30 seconds for two shots") or if he or she is rushing through the shots unnecessarily (e.g. "plenty of time – 50 seconds for two shots" etc.) – help maintain the shooter's rhythm and tempo
- Give positive reinforcement for the shooter's confidence and concentration between shots – comments such as "doing well – relax", "focus", "deep breathing between shots", "watch that front sight", etc can all help to maintain the shooter's presence in the zone
- Keep an eye on where the shooter's sight adjustment screwdriver is (or any other tools or dropped bullets, etc) so that if misplaced and needed quickly, you can help him or her locate and use them with minimum fuss, panic or lost time – a good spotter will double-check on the shooter's requirements and will provide encouragement, help and support at all times

That is a fairly long list of things for the spotter to do, and to be a good spotter you need to do them all, ALL OF THE TIME – and to do them well, you need to get ‘up close and personal’ with the shooter in the shooting bay – close proximity means no ‘shouting’ and you are close by to give instant feedback on every shot and to give other help as and when needed.

If you seat yourself a couple of meters (or further) behind the shooter you cannot perform these tasks well – most likely you are sitting there making yourself comfortable while you progressively mark up the score sheet – which is no help whatever to the shooter! If this is the way you spot for others then you can only blame yourself if you cannot get a good spotter to help you!

Remember, filling up the score-sheet is the least important task that should be done when, and only when the shooter has completed all ten shots in the series. It should be the last thing the spotter does before going forward to re-set and paint the targets.

### Getting Organised in the Shooting Bay

A lot of people take far too much clutter into the shooting bay – a good spotter will help them get better organised. It is important to make sure that the shooter is comfortable and has all the necessary equipment at hand including gun-tray, hat, glasses, earmuffs, ammo, sight-settings, screw-driver, clock/timer, water bottle, etc (and competitor number at the nationals). Most other ‘stuff’ is unnecessary and can get in the way.

The spotter should position him/her-self with the spotting scope as close as possible to the shooter (without getting in his or her way) to facilitate clear and concise communication and easy assistance.

That way, it is easy to show hits and misses on a spotting board (metal with moveable magnet) which the spotter can lean forward with and hold in easy sight of the shooter – without the shooter having to twist and contort his or her neck to see it easily. Better still is for the spotter to use a laser pointer to highlight shot position on a picture of the target placed just forward of the shooter’s equipment box or tray in easy line-of-sight of the shooter – feedback is instant and no movement is required of the shooter to receive that feedback – and all feedback should be coupled with positive reinforcement of confidence, concentration and control.

Follow these tips to spot well for others and they will spot well for you - and your scores will improve with their help.

For further reading, refer to the sister coaching materials for improved Technique and Grouping: “*Tips on How to Shoot Better Silhouette Scores*” and “*Tips on Shooting in the Creedmore Position*”.

