



Clay Bird Shooting Tips From Ducks Unlimited.

Ducks Unlimited Mission Statement

Ducks Unlimited conserves, restores, and manages wetlands and associated habitats for North America's waterfowl. These habitats also benefit other wildlife and people.

Find your Master Eye: Virtually every shooter has a dominant (master) eye. To shoot well, you must use that dominant eye and shoot from that shoulder. Most right-handed shooters have a right dominant eye, and most lefties have a left dominant eye. But not always. Here's a quick test

With both eyes open, extend your arm and index finger full length and point the index fingertip at a distant object. Keep both eyes open and focus on the target object. Now close your left eye, while still focusing on the target object. If your fingertip stays on the target object, you have a right master eye. If your finger jumps off of the target object when you close your left eye, you probably have a left master eye.

If you've found that your master eye is on the opposite side of the shoulder you shoot from, there are some alternatives. The simplest and quickest is to simply close your off-shoulder master eye and shoot with one eye only. But that might not be the best for you. We suggest that you check with a competent shooting instructor at your local gun club for other options

Gun Fit: Most sporting firearm manufacturers tailor their off-the-shelf shotguns to fit an average adult male. But if you're shorter, taller, thinner, or heavier than average,

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your shotgun could require some adjustment by a competent gunsmith. Ladies and youngsters frequently require some custom stock work to ensure a good fit.

There are two stock measurements that are important in determining if a gun is a good fit. The most important is called "length of pull." That's the distance from the center-front surface of the trigger to the center-rear of the buttplate or recoil pad. The other key dimension is "drop at comb," which is the distance between the plane of the ventilated rib extended rearward over the stock, and the comb (the actual top front) of the stock.

Here's a quick test to check to see if your gun fits you. Make sure your gun is unloaded, and then fully mount it to your shoulder with your eyes closed. Now, open your eyes, without moving the position of your head on the stock. If the back of the thumb of your grip hand (right hand for a right-hander) is not touching your nose, and is no more than two inches from your nose, the length of pull is probably fine. And if your master eye is generally looking down the centreline of the ventilated rib (laterally), and it is not notably above or below the plane of the rib (vertically), the drop at comb is probably fine, as well. But, if you don't pass both of these quick tests, you might need a stock adjustment by a competent gunsmith in your area.

Gun Mount: In shot gunning, movement is everything, and everything is moving. The target is moving. So is your body. So is the gun. Coordinating those movements is critical to success.

Your movement of the gun to the target must be confident and smooth, and the entire shot process must be fluid. Watch the target and bring the stock smoothly up to your cheek. Do not lower you cheek to the stock! The butt must nestle firmly against your shoulder, with your body leaning forward slightly. As you move to the target, keep the gun firmly against your shoulder, with your head firmly on the stock, and the gun moving smoothly throughout the shot. Don't stop moving until after the shot has been fired.

Remember, movement is everything, and everything is moving. Jerky, hesitant movement is bad. Smooth, confident movement is good!

Focus on the target: lessons a shooter will learn, this is the most important. It doesn't matter if the target is a clay bird or a drake mallard. Watch the target!

Learn to trust your eyes. Your hands and body will move the shotgun to where your eyes are looking. Just make sure they're looking at your target. Think about other sports. How can Tiger Woods repeatedly make those incredible shots on a golf course? His first rule is to watch the ball! How does Barry Bonds hit all those home runs? He keeps his eye on the ball from the time it leaves the pitcher's hand until his bat makes contact and he drives it over the wall! And Tiger and Barry don't just watch the ball, they focus completely on the ball. Tiger may focus on just one dimple on that golf ball, and Barry actually watches the rotation of that 95 mph fastball. They focus completely on their target!

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A shotgunner must do the same thing to become proficient. Pick out your target, focus on it intently and keep focused on it until you've made the shot. Then you can relax. Or, if another target is available, refocus on that second target and repeat the shot process. But always watch the target!

Stay in the Gun: In the language of accomplished shotgunner, that means keep your head down firmly on the stock with the gun positioned firmly against your shoulder and your hands in control of the fore-end and grip of the shotgun. It's the equivalent of "keeping your hands on the wheel" when driving your car. Stay in complete control of the shotgun, and most importantly, keep your head firmly on the stock.

Lifting one's head off the stock is one of the most frequent causes of missed targets. Remember that your master eye is actually the rear sight of the gun. To keep that rear sight on the target, your head must stay on the stock. If you move your head at all, your master eye (your rear sight) moves too, and the result is almost always a miss. Keep your head down until after the shot is fired

Follow Through: Remember the earlier points about movement. Movement is everything, and everything is moving. The "follow through" concept generally applies to the completion phase of the shot. A shooter can do almost everything right and still miss the target. That's usually because he stops moving the gun just as he pulls the trigger, or shortly thereafter. A guaranteed miss.

Remember that the target does not stop. Your shotgun can't stop either. If you want to hit that speeding clay target, or that teal screaming over your decoys, you absolutely must move your gun as fast, or faster than, your target. Don't quit before the job's done. Stay with the bird and follow through!

Do not Panic: This is a subject that is rarely, if ever, discussed. Perhaps because it's a bit embarrassing for hunters to admit it. But it happens, and it happens frequently...even to the experienced hunters. Have you ever seen a flock of ducks decoy beautifully to a blind full of hunters, and then watched those hunters empty their guns in less than five seconds...and never touch a feather? Has it happened to you?

Of course it has. It happens to everyone. The excitement of taking a shot at decoying ducks, passing doves, or flushing pheasants can sometimes be overwhelming, and frequently leads to a lot of empty shells and no birds to show for it. Experience and age helps hunters maintain better control at those moments of high excitement. But no one is immune to the "panic miss," regardless of age or experience.

The best cure is to simply recognize that you generally have plenty of time to make most shots. There rarely is a need to rush. It's great to be excited in the field. But when it's time to make the shot, stay in control physically and mentally. Don't panic!

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Conclusion: Remember that shooting is not much different than other athletic activities. Most of us are reasonably proficient at one or more popular sports ... golf, tennis, bowling, or baseball. Those games require good physical technique, mental concentration and practice. So does shotgunning.

This year as you go to the field, remember the simple tips we've reviewed today. Mount your gun smoothly, focus on your target, "stay in the gun," follow through and don't panic. You'll probably find yourself shooting better and enjoying your hunting even more.

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