



# **NSCA Level II Instructor Certification Instructor Manual**

## **A GUIDE TO THE NSCA LEVEL II INSTRUCTOR CERTIFICATION**



(Version: May 2020)

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Dear Level II Instructor Candidate:

Congratulations on your progression as an NSCA instructor. On behalf of the Instructor Committee and the staff of the NSCA, welcome to the NSCA Level II Instructor Certification Course. By attending this course, you have taken a major step in furthering your education as a senior instructor within the ranks of the NSCA Instructor Corps. This 3-day course, as well as the 4-day Level III Course, is unique to North America as the only nationally recognized *advanced shotgun instructor courses* in the clay target disciplines of Sporting Clays and FITASC. While the NSCA Level I Course is widely recognized as the finest course in North America for training shotgunning instructors, an instructor attending and passing the requirements of the NSCA Level II Course is recognized as an *advanced diagnostician*. Simply having been a Level I instructor for 2 or more years and having taught a minimum of 500 hours of instruction is only the beginning of our expectations.

In short, a Level II Certified Instructor is expected to possess an advanced level of diagnostic and instructional ability and able to readily recognize and solve the challenges of shooters, whether the student is a beginner, novice or more advanced competitor. It is assumed that, as a Level II Instructor Candidate, you already possess a level of diagnostic and instructional skill dramatically beyond that of a Level I or beginning level instructor. These skills will have been learned through teaching, being mentored and by ongoing continuing education and self-study. As an instructor progresses to higher levels of NSCA certification, the purpose of the certification course becomes less content driven and increasingly evaluative in nature. While the Level I course is designed to teach shooters how to teach beginning and novice students, the purpose of the Level II course is to deepen your understanding of some of the concepts you are already familiar with, like eye dominance, gun fit, lesson plans and the mental game, while simultaneously evaluating your abilities as an advanced instructor to determine whether they warrant a Level II Certification.

There is always room for improvement and enhancement of any of our courses, so we invite your comments on ways in which we can improve this course and the program. Thank you for taking this major step and joining the many certified instructors who preceded you in elevating themselves to the ranks of the NSCA's advanced instructors.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ron Curtis', written in a cursive style.

Chief Instructor  
National Sporting Clays Association  
NSCA Level III Instructor



## II. Mission, Purpose and Acknowledgements

### Mission Statement

The NSCA will deliver the most consistent and highest possible quality of instruction to sporting clays and FITASC shooters at all levels of shooting proficiency by training, maintaining and supporting a highly competent instructor corps and delivering the most effective curriculum possible, stressing safety and the fundamentals of good shotgunning.

**Purpose of the Level II Course and Certification:** As an instructor progresses through the various levels of NSCA certification, the purpose of each certification course becomes less content driven and increasingly evaluative in nature. The purpose of the Level II course is to prepare you to be a coach, deepen your understanding of concepts you already know while evaluating your ability to diagnose and solve more complex challenges with more advanced shooters. Level II Certification requires a high level of expertise, with an emphasis on accurate diagnostics and solid communication skills. The Level II Certification Course includes classroom presentations, shooting and hands-on teaching exercises during three days of intensive training. A sound knowledge of the fundamentals and solid diagnostic skills are vital, as well as the realization that there are no advanced shooting techniques, just advanced applications of the basic principles.

Candidates must be able to safely instruct a wide variety of shooters, up to advance-level competitors, in sporting clays and FITASC. Level II Instructors are encouraged to be active competitors who will encourage their students to compete in the sport as well as promote the sport to new shooters. In addition to demonstrating your mastery and retention of Level I competencies, the Level II candidate must demonstrate strong communications and advanced diagnostic skills; be highly proficient at teaching the fundamentals of shotgunning, assessing and addressing eye dominance and gun fit challenges and diagnosing and addressing *the root cause* of a shooter's miss. Because the Level II instructor will be teaching more advanced shooters, it is essential that the candidate be able to diagnose more complex gun fit and eye dominance issues and the causes of misses on targets of more advanced levels of difficulty. As with the other certification levels, the program encourages certified instructors to continue their learning process through teaching, shooting, individual study and seeking the assistance and advice of one or more instructor mentors. Successful completion of this course to the Level II standards will entitle the graduate to advertise as a Certified NSCA Level II Instructor and seek clients for instructional services.

### What to bring:

You are expected to bring at least 150 shells, your shotgun, vest/pouch, eye/ear protection, notebook, lesson/log book and cash/check to remit your portion of the Certifying Instructor's Expenses (see "**Cost**" below). Additionally, as an experienced instructor, you are expected to bring your "instructor bag" with you. Most instructors will carry extra earplugs; extra shooting glasses, visual aids and whatever else is needed to make field expedient modifications to gun fit and intervene to fix eye issues. On the instructor portion of the NSCA website, under "Instructor Support Materials", you will find an "Instructor's Tool Kit" with a list of items you might want to consider including in your own tool kit.

### Acknowledgements:

Since the origins of the NSCA's Instructor Program, many have contributed to the course content and the way in which the courses are now conducted. The influence of many contributors is evident on the pages of the course manuals and we extend our thanks to NSCA



instructors who, over the years, have had a hand in the development of the NSCA Instructor Program.

### III. Admissions Guidelines, Criteria and Cost

1. Applicants must be active members in good standing of NSCA.
2. Applicants will be active Level I Instructors with at least two years of instructional experience as a Level I Instructor and will have taught a minimum of 500 clock hours of instruction (clock hours are counted as actual/total instructional hours...for example, a 4-student clinic running 3 hours in length is considered 3 hours of instruction, not 12).
3. In addition to meeting all of the Level I prerequisites and certification requirements (READ THE LEVEL I MANUAL!) and complying with all NSCA Safety Rules and shooting range safety protocols during the course, the Level II instructor should be a strong communicator and an advanced diagnostician highly proficient at teaching the fundamentals of shotgunning, assessing and addressing eye dominance and gun fit challenges and diagnosing and addressing *the causes* of a miss. Because the Level II instructor will be teaching more advanced shooters, it is essential that the Level II Instructor be able to diagnose more complex gun fit and eye dominance issues as well as the causes of a miss on targets of more advanced levels of difficulty.
4. As in the Level I course, only a 100% safe shooting environment will be acceptable. Candidates are solely responsible for their personal safety, the safety of their students and the safety of range personnel. The ability to pay attention to every detail is essential.
5. Candidates must have taken a minimum of 8 hours of lessons from a Level II, III or equivalent instructor (as approved by Chief Instructor) at some point prior to attending the Level II Course.
6. Shooting Proficiency Requirement – Each candidate must prove reasonable proficiency at engaging clay targets with a shotgun by either, 1) having at one time earned a minimum of an NSCA A Class rating and shot a minimum of 6,000 lifetime registered targets, OR 2) during the Level II course, demonstrate an equivalent proficiency level with a shotgun. Since the purpose of the Level II Instructor Course is to evaluate and train instructors in how to effectively teach students up to and including advanced-level competitors, the Level II candidate should have attained a minimum shotgun-shooting competency level. You don't have to be a champion shooter to be a Level II instructor but the Level II Instructor should be able to teach students how to break the level of targets their students are attempting to engage. The Level II proficiency requirement is defined as the ability to break 75% or more of a broad assortment of targets that is of a level of difficulty that surpasses the Level I Shooting Proficiency Test and is challenging to a shooter that has earned a rating of A Class or above.



## **COST**

Tuition is \$750 for the three-day course plus shells, target costs and a shared portion of expenses for the Certifying Instructor(s). Certifying Instructor (CI) expenses will vary with the distance the CI is required to travel for the course, overnight stays required, materials and whether a rental car is required. This cost is divided equally among the instructor candidates who attend the class.

## **IV. THE NSCA PHILOSOPHY OF INSTRUCTION**

The best way to describe the NSCA's philosophy of instruction is – "keep it safe, keep it simple and have fun." We want all aspects of the program to be simple to understand, simple to teach and simple to communicate. As an instructor, you are in the communication and entertainment business – talking, listening, negotiating, motivating, encouraging and consoling. The biggest obstacle to success that we find with most intermediate instructors and coaches is that they deliver too much information and provide excessively lengthy verbal solutions to problems. It is much easier for the student to understand a short and direct solution than it is to listen to a five-minute verbal dissertation from the coach. Remember, the student will usually only remember the last one or two things the coach says during a lesson. When it comes to teaching, "less is more." For candidates who are high-performing competitors, the most common obstacle to success that we see is inflexibility; an inability to adapt to individual students and teach multiple styles. "My way or the highway" doesn't work in coaching. To be a really great coach, you have to be a bit of a chameleon. To be an effective coach, you must teach the fundamentals with consistency but adjusting and adapting your delivery and teaching style to the aptitudes, preferred technique, experience level, commitment level and available time and resources of the individual student. Make sure you review the four major learning styles and seven teaching styles described in the Level I manual.

As you know from your experience, much of the art and science of teaching is learning to ask questions of your students in order to find the correct teaching method based on their learning style. Teaching more advanced students and teaching novice students more effectively is best accomplished by a student and instructor learning to communicate and cooperating to solve each problem.

Effective communication requires creativity. Simply telling a student what you see will usually not result in effective learning. To be clear, telling a student where they missed is NOT the correct way to guide a student to breaking a target. Lead is almost never the problem and is almost always a symptom of the problem. In most circumstances, if you fix the *cause* of a miss, the lead will fix itself. There is very little expected of a Level I Instructor Candidate with regard to diagnostics and creativity. The beginning instructor lacks the experience, mentoring and instructional hours necessary to possess a wide variety of ways to solve the same problem, customized to the way an individual student most effectively learns. As a Level II candidate, however, you are expected to have developed a wide array of techniques and "word tracks" to fix the shooting challenges of your students. Having a physical "tool box" is one thing. One major objective of the Level II Course, however, is for you to add to your "tool box" of techniques as you work with your CI and other instructor candidates during the course.



## V. REQUIRED COMPETENCIES

(\*\*\*Not everyone passes the Level II course. Please be sure to carefully weigh your experience and expertise before signing up for the course.\*\*\*)

Each Level II Candidate is required to demonstrate competency in a variety of tasks across seven competency areas...the same seven competency areas required to pass the Level I certification except that, for some competencies, a higher level of demonstrated mastery is required for certification. Additionally, you must achieve a minimum score of 80% on the Level II course examination administered during the course. **It is absolutely critical that you study the Level I manual in parallel with this Level II manual. Level II candidates are expected to know and be proficient in the competencies outlined in the current Level I AND Level II manuals in order to be certified as a Level II Instructor.** The following tasks must be performed on a pass/fail basis to the standard(s) and under the conditions indicated for each task below (or as stated in the Level I manual when the standard is the same for both Level I and Level II). In an effort to assist Candidates in mastering each of the tasks required, the CI will provide any and all reasonable assistance to each Candidate during the course. If, however, large gaps exist in an individual candidate's knowledge or proficiency in diagnostics or communications, it will be difficult if not impossible to address these during the course of the class.

You will find similarities between the Level I and Level II Certification Courses because all shooting is built from the same basic principles. There are no advanced principles, only advanced applications of the basic principles. As stated earlier, however, a higher standard of diagnostics, problem solving and communications will be expected and required for Level II Candidates. For example, if a Level II candidate encounters a student with gun fit and eye dominance issues that effect his or her performance, the Level II Instructor must be able to properly identify, diagnose and address the student's challenges. In addition, the Level II Certification Course will provide Candidates with training in the mental game. Learning to control anxiety and having a solid pre-shot routine is a major part of becoming a better and more consistent shooter. As an instructor of more advanced students, you must be equipped with the tools to help your students in this area of their game.

### General Discussion:

The NSCA Level II Course cannot replace experience. The knowledge gained from instructing students is far more transformational than a three-day course could ever be. However, it is our intent that the NSCA Level II Course will help propel your learning, shorten the learning process and reduce painful errors by teaching you the principles of coaching based on the collective wisdom of successful coaches that have come before you.

What is the difference between an instructor and a coach? Rainer Martens, in his classic text "Successful Coaching", says that a good coach should have "the teaching skills of an educator, the training expertise of a physiologist and the counseling wisdom of a psychologist."-- "Successful coaches help (students) master new skills, enjoy competing and develop self-esteem. Successful coaches are not only well versed in the technical and tactical skills of their sport, but they also know how to teach these skills and direct their (students) in the performance of these skills." Most coaches have learned the skills of coaching through years of trial and error.



According to Rainer Martens, "A mediocre coach tells, a good coach explains, a superior coach demonstrates, but the great coach inspires." With the help and guidance of a successful instructor, students will master new skills while enjoying the competition and developing their self-esteem. As a seasoned instructor, you must be on a never-ending quest to hone your craft and learn new skills. While steadfast in your principles, you must be a chameleon in your delivery: able to change techniques and approaches based on the needs of your student with a regular and healthy dose of self-evaluation.

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### **COMPETENCY #1: Safety and Positive Control**

(Same as Level I)

#### **Task #1-1: Individual Safety Responsibility Task #1-2: Safety & Positive Control**

### **COMPETENCY #2: Assessing Eye Dominance**

(Refer to the Level I Manual, as well as the following. Same Task and Condition as Level I except that a higher standard of diagnostics and problem solving will be expected and required.)

#### **Task #2-1: Determine a shooter's eye dominance status**

#### **Task #2-2: Employ appropriate response to eye dominance issues effecting performance**

### **DISCUSSION:**

As experienced shotgun instructors, we simply must be able to accurately diagnose and address eye dominance and gun fit issues in order to clear the way for a student to experience steady progress and performance improvement. It is very common to see shooters who have struggled with their shooting for years and for whom the cause of their struggles is rooted in either eye dominance or gun fit.

In addition to the information contained in the Level I Manual (Competency #2), the following is a "solution protocol" designed to guide experienced instructors as they attempt to properly respond to students/shooters with a variety of eye dominance statuses (Task #2-2). Eye dominance involves the neuro-pathways between the eye and the brain. The way in which individual shooters respond to a clay target will differ because everyone's "visuo-motor system"<sup>1</sup>, including the eyes, brain and body, work differently. Therefore, you should use the following table with caution. It is not uncommon for shooters, or their well-meaning instructors, to put a piece of tape on the glasses of a student to help them hit targets when the reason for the miss is something else entirely. As a Level II Candidate, you are expected to be able to observe a pattern of misses and accurately diagnose the cause; whether eye dominance anomaly, gun fit, bad mount, insufficient visual focus or another cause. **An instructor should never "assume" that a shooter has an eye dominance problem but should first presume that the student is either mounting incorrectly, has improper gun fit (too much drop at comb) or is not applying sufficient visual focus to the target.** For the purposes of this discussion, however, let's assume that you are instructing a

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<sup>1</sup> Vickars, Joan. The Quiet Eye in Action: Perception, Cognition and Decision Training. Human Kinetics, 2007. Print.





student that is experiencing a particular pattern of misses, for example, a right-handed shooter consistently missing a left-to-right quartering away target, high and behind. You have eliminated the possibility that the cause of this pattern of misses is gun fit, lack of visual focus, flawed movement or some other cause and have determined that the cause is an eye dominance anomaly. As mentioned in the Level I Manual, there are no hard and fast rules regarding eye dominance although there are common patterns and symptoms that provide the observant instructor with insight about the cause and proper resolution. Again, everyone is different so be cautious in your approach to applying occlusion devices (patches, dots, etc.) to the eyeglasses of your students. Corrective action should NEVER be undertaken by an instructor without: 1) testing for and understanding the students eye dominance status, 2) seeing the student attempt to engage targets, and 3) seeing the student miss on certain "telltale" targets on which eye dominance anomalies would normally cause a miss. When and if you employ an occlusion device of some sort, you should always start with the "least invasive" or least amount of occlusion and work your way toward greater occlusion until the problem is alleviated.

So, your student is experiencing a pattern of misses on certain types of targets and you are convinced that the student has an eye dominance anomaly which can't be solved by simply having the student focus more intensely on the target. What do you do? You are now entering into a realm of problem solving that is every bit as much art as science. The student is missing the targets due to the fact that the brain is receiving target guidance information from the non-shooting eye. In order to remedy this situation, and enable the shooter to correctly place the gun on the target, you must occlude (block, "handicap" or limit the influence of) the non-shooting eye. Winking the eye is always an option. However, the winking of an eye is prone to produce inconsistent results. Some students will partially close, or "shutter", the eye instead of fully winking, causing some inconsistency. Additionally, a student may time the wink a bit differently from shot to shot; once again causing some inconsistency that is very difficult for the instructor to diagnose. If you opt to use an occlusion device, you now have to determine what level of occlusion is needed.



## Eye Dominance Assessment and Likely Course of Action

<b>Eye dominance assessment</b>	<b>Shooting side?</b>	<b>Intervention Required? *</b>	<b>If yes, what is most likely required?</b>
<b>Solidly right</b>	<b>Right</b>	<b>No</b>	
<b>Solidly left</b>	<b>Left</b>	<b>No</b>	
<b>Solidly right. (student missing high and right**)</b>	<b>Left</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Shooter is "cross-dominant". Have student mount the gun on the right side***</b>
<b>Solidly left. (student missing high and left**)</b>	<b>Right</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Shooter is "cross-dominant". Have student mount the gun on the left side***</b>
<b>Primarily right, with shift toward center/left.</b>	<b>Right</b>	<b>Unknown / possibly</b>	<b>If student consistently missing high and left, may need to place occlusion foil on left eye **</b>
<b>Primarily left, with shift toward center/right.</b>	<b>Left</b>	<b>Unknown / possibly</b>	<b>If student consistently missing high and right, may need to place occlusion foil on right eye **</b>
<b>Primarily right, with shift toward center.</b>	<b>Left</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Have student mount the gun on the right side***</b>
<b>Primarily left, with shift toward the center.</b>	<b>Right</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Have the student mount the gun on the left side***</b>
<b>Center ocular / co-dominant (may slightly favor the left or right side).</b>	<b>Right</b>	<b>Likely</b>	<b>Student may have a tendency to miss high and left. If needed, place occlusion foil or solid dot on left eye.**</b>
<b>Center ocular / co-dominant (perhaps even very slightly favors the left or right side).</b>	<b>Left</b>	<b>Likely</b>	<b>Student may have a tendency to miss high and right. If needed, place occlusion foil or solid dot on right eye.**</b>

\* Once again, corrective action involving applying any sort of occlusion device or recommending that the student close an eye, should NEVER be undertaken unless and until the instructor first: 1) tests the student's eye dominance, 2) observes the student attempt to engage targets, AND 3) observes the student miss on certain "telltale" targets (targets for which eye dominance anomalies would normally cause a miss).

\*\* While shooting with both eyes open

\*\*\* see Discussion and Scenario's in Level I Manual



An instructor who “overcorrects” and unnecessarily blocks the non-shooting eye is doing a disservice to the shooter because occlusion will limit some of the useful information flowing to the brain from the non-shooting eye. Some experimentation is required to arrive at the right level of occlusion for the student. Always start with the least amount of occlusion and work your way into that level of occlusion necessary to allow the shooting eye to dictate shot placement. We will discuss this in much greater detail during the class.

When applying occlusion devices, the following is a very general set of guidelines to follow. As stated earlier, you can’t generalize and apply a “one-size-fits-all” approach. Everyone is a bit different.

### Occlusion Options

Occlusion Level desired	Recommended Remedy	Alternative
None	Nothing	n/a
Very light	Shotspot 1.0 (rarely effective)	Using a white board marker (e.g., EXPO), make a small pattern of dots on the outside of the glasses, wink the non-shooting eye.
Light	Shotspot 0.8 or 20/25 Foils	Using a white board marker (e.g., EXPO), make a small pattern of dots on the outside of the glasses, wink the non-shooting eye.
Moderate	Shotspot 0.6 or 20/50 Foils	Using a white board marker (e.g., EXPO), make a small pattern of dots on the outside of the glasses, wink the non-shooting eye.
Heavy	Shotspot 0.3 or 20/70 Foils	Using a white board marker (e.g., EXPO), make a small pattern of dots on the outside of the glasses, wink the non-shooting eye.
Very Heavy	20/100 Foils	Very thin film of Chapstick (apply a very tiny amount with finger), Scotch tape, wink the non-shooting eye.
Total	Morgan Magic Eye Dots*	Scotch tape, electrical tape, Chapstick, wink the non-shooting eye.

Note: These are just guidelines.

Size of occlusion device:

12 mm (average size of pupil) for shooters with a very consistent mount

16 mm (1.59 cm) for shooters with a less consistent mount

\* Note: Cutting a Morgan Magic Eye Dot into 12mm or 16mm diameter circles maximizes peripheral vision for the shooter and is quite effective when this level of occlusion is called for.

**Placement:** If you determine that an occlusion device (dot, spot, Chapstick, tape) is required, placement of the dot is critical. The device must be placed such that, when the shooter has the gun fully mounted, the center of the device (spot, dot, etc.) should be aligned directly between the pupil of the non-shooting eye and the front bead of the shooter’s shotgun. If not properly placed, the shooter will be able to see around the dot during shot execution and this will defeat the purpose of the device.



### COMPETENCY #3: Assessing Gun Fit

(Refer to the Level I Manual, as well as the following.)

#### Task #3-1: Check Gun Fit

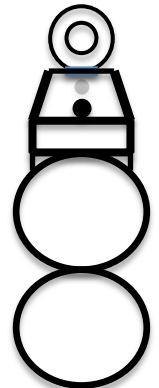
(Same Task and Condition as Level I except that a higher standard of diagnostics and problem solving will be expected and required.)

#### Task #3-2: Field Expedient Gun Fit (Level II Only)

Candidate will take whatever measures are necessary to ensure that the student has a *generally* well-fitting shotgun for the lesson.

**Condition:** The Candidate is presented with a student in a field setting with a shotgun that does not fit.

**Standard:** Candidate will take whatever measures necessary and reasonable to fit the shotgun to the student for the lesson. Candidate will employ one or more of the following methods: adjusting the comb (if comb is adjustable), changing/modifying butt pad for length of pull and or pitch, using "tradecraft" equipment (e.g., slip-on butt pad extension, comb riser, spacers, duct tape, moleskin, or any other means to get the job done) and/or changing guns. It is expected and assumed that the Candidate will have assembled, and have in his/her possession during the course, an "instructor bag" with an assortment of items needed to modify a shotgun to fit a student to an ill-fitting shotgun. It is expected that, when the gun is fitted properly, the student's iris will be generally aligned with the center of the shotgun rib (left-to-right / horizontally) and that the iris would be sitting on top of the rib vertically.



*Above: (as seen by instructor from the muzzle-end of the barrel) Proper placement of the iris/eye over barrel rib when shotgun fits the shooter.*

### COMPETENCY #4: Teaching the Fundamentals

(Same as Level I)

### COMPETENCY #5: Lead and Lead Types

(Same as Level I)

### COMPETENCY #6: Problem Solving - "getting the student to hit the target."

#### Task# 6-1: Identify Placement of a miss

(Same as Level I)

**Task# 6-2: Identify the cause or reason for a miss (Mandatory for Level II)** Candidate will correctly identify the cause or reason(s) for a student's miss on one or more targets.

**Condition:** Candidate instructing a student and the student exhibiting difficulties in engaging a target.

#### Standard:

Candidate will accurately attribute a student's miss to one or more causes to the Certifying Instructor:

- A. Insufficient focus on the target / Failure to visually fix on the target.



- B. Poor ready position
- C. Wrong lead picture
- D. Gun off line / "spoiled the line" (gun placed between the eye and the target)
- E. Comb not in contact with cheek
- F. Poor movement / mount
- G. Pain

**Task #6-3:** Candidate will effectively communicate with the student to resolve the student's challenges in engaging and breaking targets. (i.e. demonstrate to the CI the ability to solve problems, improvise, and think outside the box)

**Condition:** Candidate providing feedback and direction to a student exhibiting difficulties engaging a target.

**Standard:**

Candidate will effectively...

1. Lead student to break the "missed target"
2. Demonstrate effective problem-solving skills
3. Demonstrate and employ strong communication skills in addressing student's shooting challenges
  - A. Using just enough verbal communication to get the job done.
  - B. Avoiding intimidation (especially with youth and new shooters).
  - C. Avoiding technical explanations or using unfamiliar nomenclature.
  - D. Relating the correction to information the student is familiar with (other activities or sports they engage in)
  - E. Recognize and correctly interpret student's body language.
4. Employ a flexible and creative style in addressing the student's shooting challenges.

**Discussion on Diagnostics:**

(Also see Level I Manual)

Every miss, pattern of misses or shooting performance below a shooter's potential can be found in one or more of five areas using the acronym:

(G-E-T-M-M)

- 1) Gun fit
- 2) Eyes
- 3) Tactics
- 4) Movement
- 5) Mental approach

**GUN FIT:**

The definition of a fitted gun is one in which the shooter is comfortable and the POI (point-of-impact) is the same as the POA (point-of-aim or focal point). Our objective in fitting a shotgun will depend largely on the shooter having a proper and repeatable stance as well as proper and repeatable gun mount. For a novice shooter with an inconsistent and imperfect mount or stance, the ability of the gun fitter to achieve the "perfect fit" will be limited to a standard of



“good enough”. “Good enough” means that the shooter is comfortable, with proper length-of-pull” and pitch, and has good visibility of the target over the shotgun. For a novice shooter, this will often require a little less drop-at-comb to ensure that the gun is not occluding the target when the shooter is fully mounted. Again, with the neophyte shooter, the best we can hope for is comfort and target visibility. If you are observing the position of the student’s iris from the muzzle end of a safe gun when the shooter is properly mounted to the shotgun, you will see the student’s iris positioned atop and generally centered over the rib, like a marble on a table. For comfort, we are looking for proper length-of-pull and pitch such that there is even coverage and contact between the shoulder and the butt pad, from heel to toe.

#### Point-of-impact (POI)

The real test of gun fit, however, is whether or not the shotgun shoots where the shooter is looking. This can only be determined on a patterning board together with observing the shotgun’s point-of-impact on actual targets.

#### Methodology

The methodology for evaluating gun fit starts with a sound stance & mount. First observe the shooter in a static mode, by directing the shooter to mount the gun to a designated spot in the distance. Caution the shooter against trying to aim or consciously align the front sight with the target.

It is neither necessary nor advisable to take a new or novice shooter to the patterning board except for educational purposes because it may reinforce a tendency to aim, rather than point, the shotgun.

For validating POI, a patterning board AND targets are recommended. Many shooters mount very differently on targets than they will on a patterning board or in a static mode thus evaluating POI on actual clay targets is considered the gold standard. Flat trajectory crossing targets are ideal to check drop-at-comb and flat trajectory out-going / trap-like targets are best for validating cast. What you should be looking for is the direction that the target pieces fly after the shot string impacts the target. For a flat trajectory trap-like target, if the majority of pieces are deflected to the right, the shot pattern impacted the left side of the target. If the majority of pieces are deflected to the left, the shot pattern impacted the right side of the target. Consequently, the gun should be adjusted to yield more or less cast as appropriate. For a flat trajectory crossing target, if the majority of pieces are deflected upwards, the shot pattern impacted the bottom of the target. If the majority of pieces are deflected downward, the shot pattern impacted the top of the target. Consequently, the gun should be adjusted to yield more or less drop-at-comb as appropriate.

#### VISION / EYES

The quantitative eye dominance test (e.g., the pointing test) is THE BEST way to determine: 1) Which eye is more dominant, and 2) How dominant the dominant eye is. Any other method of testing for eye dominance will not reveal the degree to which a shooter is dominant nor will it reveal center vision in a given shooter.

Visual focus, and the intensity of a shooter’s focus on the target, is critical to a shooter’s success in our sport. To optimize a shooter’s connection with a target, the eyes must...



- 1) Acquire the target with the peripheral vision (Ambient System guides initial movement of the shotgun)
- 2) "Fix" on the target with acute focus, with good visual follow-through (through shot execution).

Acute focus is required in order to "feed the brain". The target information needed to break a target only occurs with acute focus and when visual images are concentrated on the Fovea (2° – 3° degrees of visual angle - less than 1% of retinal area). Again, acute focus MUST be an intentional and conscious act. Visual connection with, and visual follow-through on, the focal point of the target is critical.

The "Advanced Diagnostician" must ascertain why the shooter is disconnected. "Keep swinging" or "Keep the gun moving" is NOT the answer. When the eyes are not connected to the target at the moment of shot execution, it is either voluntary or involuntary.

A voluntary disconnection occurs when the shooter checks the gap ("manages the gap" between the muzzle and the target, i.e., measuring just prior to shot execution). Even for an experienced shooter, shooting to avoid a miss and lack of confidence about a particular target can cause doubt in the mind of the shooter. This will in turn cause a "check" in which the shooter attempts to measure the barrel-target relationship just prior to shot execution. For the shooter to see the gap, or measure, he or she is forced to soften visual focus on the target, which usually results in a stopping or slowing down of the muzzle in relationship to the target. This lack of flow most often causes a miss behind the target.

An involuntary disconnection occurs when the shotgun occludes the target. We commonly refer to this as "spoiling the line". If the shotgun gets between the shooter's eye and the target, he loses sight of the target which, once again, results in a stopping or slowing of the barrel in relationship to the target. The root cause of "spoiling the line" is usually due to one or more of three issues: 1) gun fit (excessive drop-at-comb), 2) improper gun mount wherein the shooter presses his head down on the comb, forcing his eye below the rib just prior to shot execution, or 3) improper movement of the gun in relationship to the target line causing an inadvertent occlusion of the target with the barrel. In the case of this third cause, the most effective solution is usually to employ the intercept technique, shortening the move of the shotgun (move the hold-point closer to the breakpoint) and angling the muzzle downward slightly, keeping the muzzle away from the line of the target until the gun reaches the breakpoint.

## TACTICS

Much has been made and written on the subject of "muzzle awareness". We all have awareness of the barrel. The important question is not, should we or shouldn't we have awareness of the muzzle. We all do! The key question is, should that awareness be conscious or subconscious? The answer is unequivocally, the awareness should be subconscious.

A shooter who is more aware of and more intentional about, the movement of his shotgun at the breakpoint, is a shooter who is more competitive and more consistent. But again, this awareness should be subconscious.



Given the fact that there are five commonly used techniques to break a target in sporting clays, which technique is the right technique for a given target? Answer: The one that works! NO SINGLE TECHNIQUE IS RIGHT FOR ALL SHOOTERS even when shooting the same target.

#### MOVEMENT:

Proper and efficient movement promotes acute focus. Sound movement starts with a good ready position that includes a good stance, physical balance (weight distribution), proper hold point, proper draw Length, appropriate barrel orientation, good mount and movement and consistent cheek / stock weld. The front hand should lead the gun, with the head still (oriented on the target area), moving at a comfortable pace and the gun should be mounted to the cheek first.

#### MENTAL APPROACH

(See section VI C below)

Summary:

Use the acronym G-E-T-M-M) as a “diagnostic tree” to identify the root cause of a miss and affect a correction.

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### **COMPETENCY #7: Observation, Motivation and Communication Skills**

(Same Task and Condition as Level I except that a higher standard of observation and communication skills will be expected and required.)

**Task #7-1: Effectively observes the student in order to recognize the causes of misses.**

**Task #7-2: Effectively communicates with the student to affect positive change.**

**Task #7-3: Encourages student throughout lesson .**

#### **Discussion:**

An advanced instructor must be able to send a clear, understandable message while also observing and listening to understand what the student is attempting to communicate. As a Level II Candidate, you are expected to have honed your listening, communication and diagnostic skills. It is critical for a Level II Candidate to listen effectively to what the student is communicating; both verbal and body language. The Candidate must effectively observe students and use creativity and flexibility in communications thus recognizing that different students will learn and respond differently to different teaching styles. These are some of the factors that will differentiate the seasoned shotgun instructor and coach from a novice one.





## **VI. Other Topics:**

### **A. Reading the Targets**

(See Level I Manual)

There is an excellent discussion about target reading in the Level I manual. As you work with more advanced shooters, it becomes increasingly important to notice the details about your student's shot execution. As a seasoned instructor, and an experienced shooter, it is critical that you "landmark" the target lines and the shooter's chosen hold points and breakpoints. By making a mental and visual note of the target's flight path and the student's break points and hold points, you are in much a better position to evaluate the consistency, or lack of consistency, in your student's execution. For example, one of the more difficult types of shooter errors for instructors to detect is called "spoiling the line". A shooter "spoils the line" when the gun barrel gets between the shooter's shooting eye and the target at some interval just prior to the breakpoint. This causes an interruption in the visual connection between the shooter's shooting eye and the target. In effect, the shooting eye and the target "disconnect" thus interrupting the flow of target information to the brain. This is usually very difficult for a shooter to self-diagnose for the following reason. While a shooter who "spoils the line" visually disconnects the shooting eye from the target, the shooter normally still sees the target with the non-shooting eye, making the non-shooting eye the brain's sole source of target information as they execute the shot. This causes a miss but leaves the shooter a bit confused as to why the target didn't break because the shooter can still see the target (but with the wrong eye). To diagnose this type of shooter error, it is critical for the instructor to visually "landmark" the target lines and the shooter's hold points and breakpoints. Unless you, as the instructor, know the exact flight path of the target, it is difficult to spot when the shooter's barrel occludes the target and spoils the line. It is this level of attention-to-detail that differentiates the "hyper-observant" diagnostician from a less experienced instructor. It is this advanced diagnostician that we expect to see as a Level II Candidate. Just as top shooters always plan and visualize the target lines, hold points, visual pick-up points and breakpoints, so too must you if you hope to be an asset to advanced shooters.

### **B. LESSON PLAN / LESSON LOG / HOME WORK**

A lesson plan is a vital part of your teaching. As you progress to an advanced instructor and coach, you should have developed a number of different lesson plans to suit different students at different levels and points in their progression. You should be ready to "call up" a lesson plan with the right content for the student's needs. The more you teach, the larger your menu of lesson plans will become.

How and when do you determine what the content of the lesson should be? It depends. You might decide at the conclusion of your previous lesson with a student. It might be at the start of the lesson after hearing the student's commentary on some of his challenges or perhaps even after watching a new student shoot two or three stations. Whether it is your first lesson with a given student or just one in a long line of instructional sessions, you should try to identify your student's biggest opportunity for improvement and concentrate there first. Target planning, pre-shot routine, the mental game, engaging teals and engaging rabbits are just a few of the lesson plans you should think through and be ready to deliver when the occasion calls for it.

Since taking your Level I, you have hopefully expanded your client list to include repeat clients: students who come to you on a regular basis because of the progress made under



your instruction. Dedicated students want to continue to grow as shooters. While weeks or even months may separate two lessons with the same student, most students will expect you to be “invested” in their shooting and that you will remember what you discussed in the last lesson. Dedicate the last few minutes of each lesson to listing two or three “takeaways” with the student. Get the student’s take on what the most meaningful aspects of the lesson were. Give them some homework. By doing so, you will communicate your interest in progress and in the future...the student’s future as a shooter. Keep a lesson log on every lesson and refresh your memory before each subsequent lesson with a student. Referring to information covered in the previous lesson at the beginning of a subsequent lesson is pretty impressive to a student and makes the student feel like the lesson is “all about me”....which it is. One of the greatest sportsman-Presidents that ever lived was Theodore Roosevelt who said, “Nobody cares how much you know, until they know how much you care.” By recording your student’s progress and communicating it to the student, you move from an instructor to a coach.

### **C. The Mental Game**

Besides being great shots, competitors at the top of our sport have something else in common...a process. Whether in sporting clays, FITASC or any other self-paced sport from golf to shot put, top competitors have a process or “program” that they run through as they prepare for and execute the shot. Simply put, a pre-execution routine breeds consistency in execution and reduces the likelihood that our conscious mind will be occupied with thoughts that distract us. Pre-shot routines help us focus our mental energy on the task at hand. Virtually all sports psychologists will tell you that, in order to consistently deliver peak performance, the athlete should focus on the process, not the results. In competition, you can’t control the weather, your competitor, malfunctions or the behavior of your squad mates. You can, however, control the process you use when competing and how well you adhere to that process for each pair.

Have you ever missed the second target of a pair because you forgot where the target was coming from? Have you ever felt yourself rushing through the third or fourth pair at a station because you just wanted to get it done and get out of the station? Have you ever crushed your first two pairs and then missed one or two in the third or fourth pair? At best, the root cause of these types of misses is a momentary lapse in concentration: an error on the mental side of the shooter’s execution. At worst, it might represent the absence of a mental game and pre-shot routine altogether.

The purpose of this section, and the additional training you will receive on the mental game during the Level II Course, is *not* to provide you with a singular airtight process to teach your students and use in competition. The mental game is highly individualized and, for most competitors, is ever changing; evolving and improving with experience in competition. Our purpose is to simply introduce you to the principles and concepts of sports psychology and the mental game as well as share some of the elements most commonly employed by top competitors in our sport.

#### **Assumptions about the mental game**

1) **VISUALIZE:** If you visualize and mentally rehearse the execution of a target pair, you are more likely to execute the pair properly than if you don’t rehearse it.



- 2) **MANAGE THE MIND:** If the conscious mind is properly “managed”, you are more likely to stay “in the present” and focused on the process rather than the results. You are also less likely to allow certain thoughts, doubts or distractions to interfere with your execution.
- 3) **MANAGE THE BODY:** If you can consistently execute an effective pre-shot “program” or routine -- visualizing, relaxing and breathing prior to calling for a target pair -- you can train your brain to emit wave types that will optimize hand-eye coordination.

### **Anatomy of the mind**

Before diving in, let's establish some basic concepts of how the mind works. Let's think about the mind as having three parts: 1) “the conscious mind”, 2) “the subconscious mind”, and 3) “the glass”.

The conscious mind is best defined as what you are thinking about at the present moment: your present awareness. Whatever occupies the conscious mind at the precise moment a competitor calls for a target pair could have a significant impact on the outcome, good or bad. Dawn Grant, a sports hypnotherapist well known in the sporting clays world, describes the conscious mind as a naughty little boy with a one-track mind that often wanders off and is a bit disobedient. The conscious mind can only think of one thing at a time, which is bad news if you allow negative thoughts to enter your consciousness. Lanny Bassham, an Olympic Gold Medalist and highly respected mental game coach in shooting sports, points out that the conscious mind can get in the way of a good performance because “the conscious mind tends to be more careful and outcome orientated.” A thought like “Oh no, a teal” is more likely to negatively impact the outcome of a target pair than “No problem. I got this”. The good news is, with some effort and training, you can control what occupies the conscious mind at certain pivotal moments in your execution. A pre-shot routine is a mental program, or thought sequence, that keeps you “in the present” and effectively occupies the conscious mind with constructive thoughts and mental cues.

The subconscious mind is a multi-tasking machine that has the ability to simultaneously control dozens if not hundreds of tasks “in the background”. In the world of shotgun sports, or any other sport, certain aspects of our execution is transformed from conscious to subconscious through practice and repetition. For a brand new shooter, gun mount is a very conscious act. With practice and repetition, however, the mount of the experienced shooter becomes completely subconscious. Practice and repetition, executing correctly over and over again, is the most effective way to hone the subconscious mind.

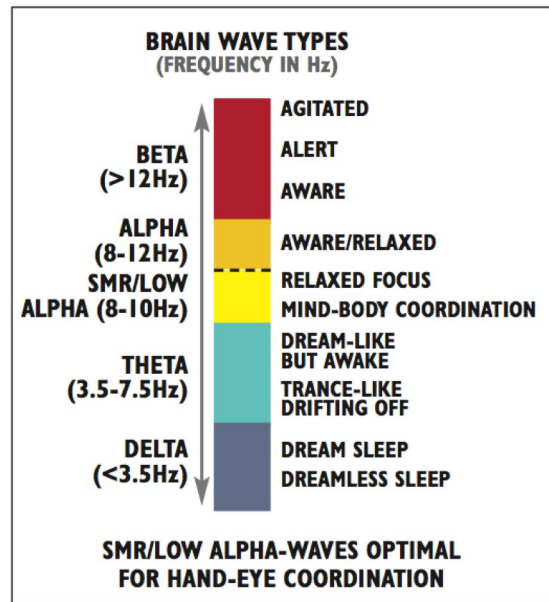
“The Glass” is simply a metaphor for your self-esteem or self-confidence; the way you think about yourself as a shooter. Is your Glass full or empty? Perhaps more importantly, do you see your Glass as partially full or partially empty? Lanny Basham refers to this aspect of the mind as “self-image”. Your Glass, how you see yourself as a shooter, will impact your success, either positively or negatively. A positive attitude is a shooter’s most important tool. A shooter who keeps a positive attitude when approaching a difficult station will score far ahead of the shooter with a negative attitude. Positive is powerful. Negative is destructive. Positive “self-talk” is a very powerful tool. But the power of negative suggestion is far stronger. The top shooter has a positive attitude. He is confident and has a high opinion of his shooting abilities. He thinks about what he wants to happen and his past accomplishments, not his failures. He



believes he is among the best and can break any target. Paramount in his mind is breaking the targets rather than avoiding a miss.

**Bio Feedback**

Biofeedback is a technique you can use to learn to control your body's functions, such as your heart rate, breathing and brainwave activity. In essence, biofeedback gives you the power to use your thoughts to control your body to maximize physical performance and is often used as a relaxation technique. While there is a sizable volume of published research on brain-wave activity and biofeedback in self-timed sports, it is not necessary for you to understand the science of biofeedback. Just know that your brain emits various types of brain waves depending on what you are doing, thinking and seeing and that there are certain brain wave types that optimize hand-eye and mind-body coordination. These are referred to as low-alpha or SMR waves. You can train yourself to increase low-Alpha brain-wave activity just prior to engaging a pair of targets by executing a simple, memorable and repeatable pre-shot "program". In other words, by executing the right pre-shot routine just prior to calling for each pair, you can optimize low-Alpha waves and your hand-eye coordination. A proven technique for momentarily increasing your low alpha (SMR) waves and optimizing your hand-eye coordination is to briefly close your eyes, take deep breaths and visualize the pair in your mind.



**Elements of the mental game**

While a competitor's pre-shot routine is highly personal and individualized, most top shooters and sports psychologists, both in and out of the shooting sports, generally agree on the basic elements of the mental game for a sport involving the interception of a moving object where the athlete times their execution. These common elements are planning, visualization, pre-shot routine.

**Planning**

(Refer to the sections on "Reading the Targets" above and in the Level I Manual.) Pre-shot planning is most often accomplished outside the shooting stand, unless you happen to be the lucky first shooter in the rotation. Once pre-shot planning is complete, you should be very familiar with the pair you are about to shoot. In fact, you should have essentially memorized the pair, the location of the traps and the target lines. You should have identified your visual pick-up points (or focal points), your hold points and your break points. You should know exactly where your eyes and your gun will go at every step in the execution of the pair. You now have a solid shot plan and you have rehearsed it a few times to make sure that it's sound. Having a plan, a plan that you believe in, will feed your confidence as you approach the stand and execute the shot pair.

**Visualization**



One top shooter describes his pre-shot visualization as an “out of body rehearsal” of how it will feel to move to each target and successfully execute the shot pair. Visualization occurs during pre-shot planning and is then repeated during the pre-shot routine as you are loading your gun and preparing to shoot. Visually establish the target line across the sky, vegetation and terrain. Visualize the targets in your mind at the actual speed you will see them as you call for the pair. Recall the break points you established during your pre-shot planning. As you execute the pair in your mind for a second time, take another deep breath and as you slowly exhale feel yourself moving to and focusing on each target as they break. Imagine seeing the first target break, then transitioning your eyes and gun to the second target.

#### Pre-shot Routine / Program

Your pre-shot routine is the mental “program” you run each and every time you set-up to shoot a target pair. As you load two shells, take a deep breath and focus your attention on the area over which you will shoot the targets. Execute your “out of body rehearsal”, visualizing the targets, feeling your move to the targets, your visual focus and seeing the targets break. As you move into your ready position, clear your mind and breathe deeply you deliver your mental cue: the last trigger thought before calling for the target (“see the bird”, “focus”, “dead pair”).

#### “P U L L”

As you load the gun again, you visualize the pair you just broke sink into your subconscious. Without moving your feet, you load two more shells for your second pair, re-run your pre-shot routine, call for the targets again...and so on.

Symptoms of a weak mental approach include inconsistent, or lack of commitment to, technique, breakpoints, hold points and/or visual pick-up points; inconsistent gun movement, dropping a target at the end of a station, and dropping a target after breaking the first pair. Other symptoms of a weak pre-shot routine might be a change in pace of pre-shot and/or post-shot routine.

We strongly recommend that you coach your students to incorporate the mental game early in their progression, but gradually. By implementing aspects of the mental game gradually, your student is more likely to integrate and retain the pre-shot planning process and pre-shot routine. A suggested and phased process for helping your student incorporate a pre-shot planning and pre-shot routine might be:

- Stage 1 - Pre-shot planning
- Stage 2 - Mental trigger / visual cue
- Stage 3 - Breathing
- Stage 4 - Visualization / OOB Rehearsal

The top four mental errors committed on the shooting course are: 1) trying too hard, 2) distractions, 3) stress, and 4) focusing on the outcome rather than the process. By occupying the conscious mind with a memorable, repeatable and effective pre-shot routine, your subconscious mind can make the shot without distraction and with very little effort. To be a great shooter, your mental game must be every bit as solid as your technical game. If you occupy your conscious mind with constructive thoughts and rely on your subconscious mind to execute the shot, your scores and consistency will rise.



Novice shooters engage instructors to learn *how to shoot*. Experienced shooters engage instructors to learn *how to shoot consistently*. A shooter can't shoot consistently without a consistent routine. As a seasoned instructor coaching seasoned shooters, your ability to coach your students on the mental aspects of the game will be critical to their progression toward greater consistency. As a coach, you must help your student fill his Glass, help him maintain a positive outlook, help him break more targets and, if he is a competitor, help him win in competition.

## **VII. POST-GRADUATION**

Graduating from the NSCA Level II Instructor Course is a big accomplishment. Just like your progression from Level I to Level II, your progression to Level III will likely be the result of your eagerness to continue your path of learning, how often you teach and the information you receive along the way. How aggressively you pursue continuing education and mentoring by one or more senior instructors will directly contribute to your progression. Make sure to keep a good lesson log so that you have documentation for the number of hours you have accumulated if you should decide to attend the Level III Course.

A question often asked by Level II instructors after graduation is, "What do I need to do to retain my certification?" The answer is, remain an NSCA member in good standing and continue to conduct yourself in a manner that brings credit upon the NSCA. In order to be listed in the Association's magazine and website, we ask you to fulfill any obligations that the NSCA may require from time to time to include shooting a minimum number of registered targets each year and fulfilling any continuing education and mentoring requirements\*. For an instructor and coach, the learning never stops. The moment it does, you stop growing as a coach and your value to your students will be limited. Be sure to make time to shoot some yourself, and compete as often as possible to experience as many target presentations as you can. Remember, to be a good instructor or shooting coach, you do not have to be a shooting champion, but you must understand and know how to break any shot that you will be teaching. You will find that experience is a wonderful teaching tool. Taking lessons from more senior coaches is another great way to increase your teaching knowledge and will help you develop different problem-solving techniques.

Participation in a minimal number of competitions and expanding your knowledge as a certified instructor will add value to your students, particularly those students who compete or might want to compete. Congratulations on your decision to attend the Level II course and, as always, we look forward to your feedback.

Thank you again for taking the course and for your interest in the NSCA Instructor Program.

\* Instructors who graduated from the Level II Instructor Course prior to 1999 or are 65 years or older are exempt from any and all retention requirements to maintain their listing but are encouraged to participate, particularly in mentoring. Additionally, if a Level II fails to meet any of the retention requirements, the Instructor will continue to be certified as a Level II and the instructor may continue to market accordingly. However, they will not be listed as "active" and therefore will not be listed in the association's magazine or on the association's website.