

## Defensive Strategies



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Is the venerable double tap good, bad or irrelevant?

When I learned to shoot for defensive purposes, the double tap was taught as a matter of course, and was touted as one of the best ways to practice for a real confrontation.

Before we talk about whether this is a good technique, we should know what it is, but there seems to be a difference of opinion here. The point of agreement is that a double tap involves two very fast, aimed, accurate shots on the same close target. How close is close? Maximum 7 yards; real defensive situations don't often occur at long distances. How accurate? The shots should be within a 6"-8" spread; beyond 12" is not suitable for defense. How fast? We'll get to that.

This article is about double tapping for defensive shooting, IDPA and IPSC shooters have some different ideas about double tapping to improve their scores.

This technique is sometimes

## Double Tap

called a "controlled pair," but I prefer the term "double tap," as it has wider usage. It is often described as a technique suitable only for semi-auto handguns, but it could be performed with a revolver just as well. To some people, the arms should be slightly bent for the fast first shot, but extended for the second one. Will any two shot burst do? Nope.

To some people, the double tap means any two shots triggered as fast as possible, to disable an opponent. Shooting without bothering to aim is a recipe for disaster, as bullets that miss the target are not what you want on the range or on the street.

Shooting one shot aimed and a fast second shot without aiming is a technique called the "hammer." It might be blindingly fast, but the accuracy lost by not aiming the second shot can be unacceptable on the street. If you have time to aim one shot, you will have time to aim the second.

I've found brief mention on the web of double tap hits to the head of a target, but common sense as well as convention dictates that the shots go where they are most likely to be effective: the center of mass of the target (the middle of the chest if you can see it; the center of the largest body part you can see if the chest isn't available).

Why not just shoot once? Handgun ammunition is

notoriously fickle, and one round, regardless of the caliber, the bullet weight, and the powder, might not do the job. Shooting once and then pausing to evaluate whether a second shot is needed is a recipe for disaster, because the answer will usually be "Yes, more shots are needed!" and your delay, even a fraction of a second, can be disastrous. Firing a two-shot burst probably more than doubles the chance that the assailant will be stopped.

If two shots are better than one, but still no guarantee, why stop there? Why not keep firing? In a real situation, you might have to do just that. Some people under the effects of an intense life-or-death fight, keep pulling the trigger until their gun is empty. But it doesn't make sense to have all your practice sessions involve emptying your gun every time you load it, not only because of the cost of ammunition but because many defensive situations don't require a lot of shots and many people can stop shooting sooner rather than later. Practice should focus on techniques that will build muscle memory for the things that are most likely to be needed in a gunfight. Shooting your gun empty is not what you want to practice most of the time because it isn't what you are going to need on the street most of the time.

To good instructors and practitioners, double tap shots must be aimed--both of them. That's where a lot of practice is almost certainly required. Getting the sights aligned for the first shot is easy to learn, but managing the recoil and quickly reacquiring the sight alignment for the second shot usually takes beginners some time.

Here's how to do it.

Work on the first shot speed and accuracy by itself for a while. Accuracy, sights and trigger control are more important than speed. When you start working on the second shot, don't just whack the trigger twice. Pay particular attention to trigger control. To help your speed, work on allowing the trigger to release just enough

to reset between shots, not enough to release all the way.

Eventually, practice with a timer, if you want, so that you know how long it takes you to get the first shot off, and the second one. You don't really need a timer, just start concentrating on reducing the shot-to-shot time only after you know you are using the sights for both shots.

Remember I said at the beginning of this article that we would get to answer the question, how fast should a double tap be? Here's the answer. As fast as you can make both shots accurate.

Notice whether your first shot or your second one is more accurate. For many people doing the double tap properly, it is the second. If your second shot is going wild,

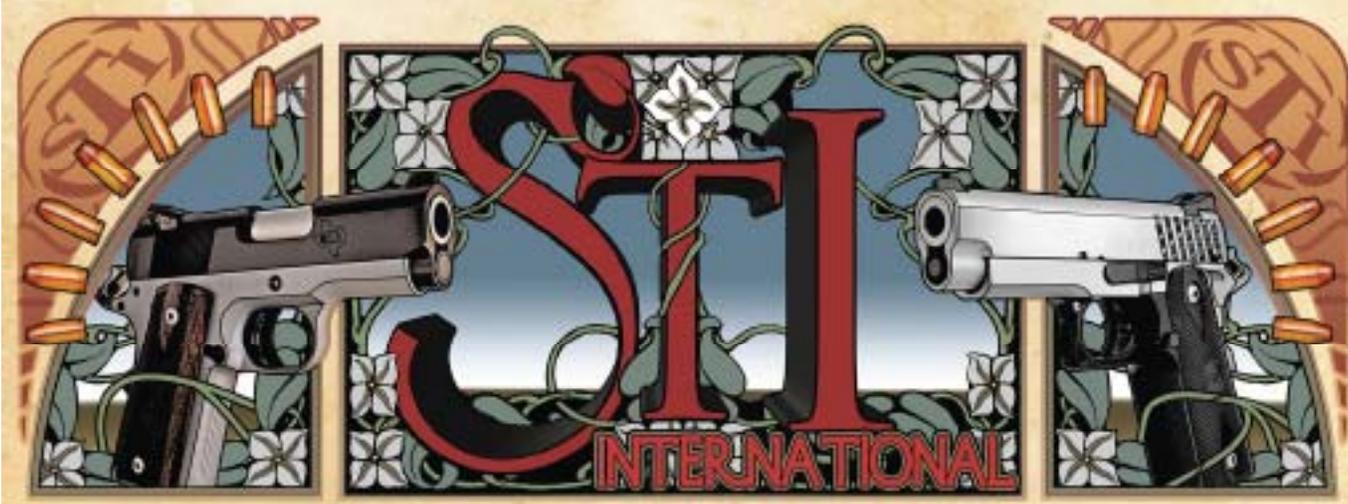
forget speed and work on getting both sight pictures clear.

There is no one technique that will work for all situations. Police trainers who used to teach double taps now stress shooting an unknown number of shots.

If you are prepared and practiced to fire either a single shot, a double tap, a "Mozambique" (two shots to the body followed by one to the head if the target has not gone down), or more shots all at once, you will be prepared to evaluate a situation and determine which of those is needed to save your life.

The double tap can still be a valuable technique, but it should not be the only one in your shooting repertoire. Be prepared to shoot until the threat is over.

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