

Skill Atrophy

You train hard, perfect your skills and develop new ones. You're a modern day warrior poet, a gunfighter. Always remember:

**Is not life a fleeting existence in the present?
A split second separate the past from present,
The present from the future, now and unknown.
The past gone, the present now, future unknown.**

Life is fleeting, and so are your skill at arms. Without regular maintenance, how long until your hard-fought skills begin to atrophy? Which skills will degrade first?

A Navy study on the degradation of skills of their Aviation Anti-Submarine Operators showed that the skills and knowledge had "degraded significantly" when tested after 29 days. Interestingly, both the factual and computational portions of the test showed similar levels of atrophy while the classification portion of the test showed no loss. Obviously, I'm not comparing being a pistolero to being a Navy geek but I've personally experienced a similar phenomenon. If I've gone a month or more without training I can still classify different parts of the pistols and discuss fluently the fundamentals of pistol marksmanship. The loss occurs on the line when I'm engaging "threats." Both accuracy and speed suffer from the time away from the range.

The Army conducted a similar study on Nurses in an attempt to understand the retention of both Basic Life Support (BLS) and Advanced Cardiac Life Support (ACLS). Following certification in both skills, the nurses in the study (133 nurses assigned to Fort Sam Houston) were retested 3, 6, 9, or 12 months later. The findings show that while theoretical knowledge of both BLS and ACLS skills remained strong, performance skills suffered greatly. The basic skills were retained at a higher rate and tended to atrophy at a slower rate. 63% of nurses retained BLS skills after 3 month and 58% after 12 months. Only 30% of nurses passes ALCS after 3 months with just 14% after 12 months. My takeaway is that your basic firearms skills will degrade more slowly than your advanced skills. My guess is we tend to practice our basic skills more often. Basic skills tend to be easier to train on at most ranges. Many ranges specifically prohibit skills needed to maintain advanced weapons proficiency. Drawing, rapid fire and shooting while moving can be difficult to train on because of range constraints. The result is that we're all better trained on basics than advanced skills.

There has also been several studies that discuss the general decline of "skilled work" in our industrialized and computerized society. The craftsmen and artisans of 50 years ago are being replaced by technology, lasers, and robots. Is it possible that it's becoming more difficult to develop true skills in our modern society. Not necessarily apropos for the current discussion, but still fodder for discussion around the squad or team room.

So how do we develop a firearms training program that will maintain the highest level of proficiency? It will obviously have to represent a realistic commitment. We can't spend all our time working to be good at our job. Whether we like it or not, we actually have to leave the range from time to time in order to *do* our job.

Just like in other areas of our life, we have to prioritize and focus our efforts on our *needs* even at the expense of our *wants*. There's a natural tendency to work on things that we like to do, and we tend to have better skills at the things we work on (because we like them).

We won't be assaulted at the time or place, or in the manner of, our choosing. In order to best prepare a solid foundation of basic skills needs to be developed. Built on this foundation will be the advanced skills necessary to dominate and survive a violent encounter. Shooting while moving, shooting from barricades, shooting at moving targets, shooting "disadvantaged" (i.e. shooting after being hit by your attacker), and shooting from alternate positions should all be the focus of your program. The advanced skills will atrophy at a faster rate than basic skills. To counter this trend, spend minimal time working on stationary targets from static positions.

Don't train on what you want. Train on what you need. Jedburgh Corp has developed the most comprehensive firearms training available anywhere. It was built on the vast personal combat experience of some of the most elite special operators in the country. Contact us at info@Jedburgh-USA.com to provide feedback on the blog, or discuss your training needs. Also, feel free to post your comments.

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