

TRANSITIONS

Efficiency. This is the key to fast, smooth transitions. Remove all wasted motion. If one hand is busy reaching for the shotgun, use your other to reach for shells. If one hand is holstering a pistol, reach for the next gun with the other hand. Keep both hands busy.

There are five different transitions; first shot, revolver to revolver, revolver to long gun, long gun to long gun, and long gun to revolver. They should be practiced home. Range time should be spent working on fundamentals and drills to help you increase your confidence and build speed.

We will address staging of the long guns in the appropriate sections below. Careful staging of your long guns will make transitions faster and smoother than careless staging. Pay attention to the stage descriptions and make sure to stage your guns for easiest retrieval.

You can practice your transitions at home using snap caps. At-home practice gives you a chance to get used to the equipment you are using and focus on efficiency. It also gives you time to remove any unneeded motions from your actions. Practice in front of a mirror so that you can observe. This will give you the feedback you need in order to refine your motions for best efficiency. Use a video camera to record your practice sessions and go back and study it. Looking for wasted motion or one hand not busy.

For live fire drills, it's very helpful to invest in a timer that can be set for instant start and delayed start. In addition, you should also be able to set a par time. This function has a start beep and a follow-up beep for a specific time period. For example, if you are practicing your draw and you know you can do it in less than 2 ½ seconds, set the par time for 2 ½ seconds. Then you will be able to work this time down to progressively lower and lower settings.

If you have a video camera, it will be helpful to tape your practice sessions. Then you can go back and review to see what you are doing right and what you are doing wrong.

First Shot:

Before we start, make sure there is no ammunition in the area, and your guns are not loaded.

The first shot is the most critical shot for a stage. It sets the tempo and the rhythm. There are three different first shot drills on which we will focus. Each drill starts with a different gun, and from a different position. We'll start the long guns from port arms and we'll start the revolver from low surrender (hands above shoulders). Port arms is a very common starting position with the long guns. Starting position for the revolvers varies tremendously. I have chosen the low surrender position because it is a common position and adds the element of getting your hand to the revolver, as opposed to starting with your hand on the revolver.

Revolver:

Do you want to start with your strong side revolver or your weak side revolver? I start with whichever side facilitates the transitions on the rest of the stage. Either way, make sure to practice the same side draw consistently.

- Put a small target up on the wall with the little orange circle.
- Put on your rig and load up a revolver with snap caps.
- Holster your gun on the side you are going to draw from first.
- Set up the timer to give you a delayed start. You want to get used to using the beep as the key to draw. You are using the stance we discussed, right?
- Focus on the target. Don't look at the gun.
- Press the button on the buzzer and move your hands into the low surrender position.
- At the buzzer, draw (if shooting with a 2-hand hold, meet your hands at your natural "hand clap" position to get your grip and extend your arms to the target). If you are drawing from a cross draw, make sure you don't break the 170. If you are drawing from a weak side straight drop holster, then make the transfer to your strong hand. You are using the grip we discussed, right?
- Bring the sights in line with the target and focus on the front sight. As you are doing this, cock the gun.
- Once you are on target, squeeze the trigger.



*Single Action
Jackson drawing
for that first shot.*

Practice this over and over until it becomes comfortable and natural.

One final tip: if the stage calls for starting with your revolver, hold the grip of the revolver until the last moment. This will help your arm and hand "remember" where to go on the draw.

Long Gun:

Port arms means that the butt of the gun is at or below your gun belt on your strong side and the muzzle is at or above the shoulder of your weak side. If you are starting with your shotgun, you need to think about the actions you need to take to load and shoulder. It's helpful to start by keeping your eyes on your shells. Use the techniques we described.

If you are starting with your rifle, you need to think about the actions required to lever the gun and shoulder. It will be helpful to start by keeping your eyes on your first target.

In both cases, you are using the stance that we discussed, right?

- Put a target up on the wall with one of those little orange dots.
- If you are using your shotgun, get your leather on and put in a couple of snap caps. If you are using your rifle, insert one snap cap that will feed into the loading gate.
- Assume a port arms position. You are using the stance we described, right?
- Set up a timer to give you a delayed start. You want to get used to the beep as the key to start.
- If you are using your shotgun, start by looking at your shells. If you are using your rifle, start by focusing on the target.
- At the buzzer...
 - Shotgun: Using the loading techniques we described above, load, shoulder, point, and fire.
 - Rifle: Shoulder (lever the action as you go) and bring the sights in line with your vision.
 - Transfer your focus to the front sight.
 - As it comes to target, fire.

Practice these actions over and over until they become comfortable and natural.

Often stages require picking up a long gun from a staged position. Spend some time practicing with both your rifle and your shotgun. Set the firearms down in positions that approximate the normal staged positions (leaning against a wall, setting on a table, etc.). When you stage the guns, think about the position that the gun is in. Can you set it right-side-up for easy retrieval? Can you set it with the grip just off the edge of a table to facilitate retrieval?

When you practice this with your shotgun, make sure that when your first hand gets to the gun, you have shells in the other hand. With the pump gun, put a shell into the chamber before you pick it up. With the double, have your shells in hand so you can get them into the chambers quickly. Practice over and over!

Revolver to Revolver:

Before we start, make sure there is no ammunition in the area, and your guns are not loaded.

If you have a friend with a stopwatch that beeps, you can time each other. In this case, have your friend wait for the 5th shot to start the timer and the 6th shot to stop it.

- Set up some targets on the wall with the one-inch orange dots in the center.
- Load your revolvers with snap caps and holster.

- Assume an athletic stance and grip the gun you will start with, but leave it in the holster. Gripping your gun before going to the start position helps your body remember where to go to draw.
- Relax your arms at sides.
- At the beep, draw your first gun (if shooting with a 2-hand hold, meet your hands at your natural “hand clap” position to get your grip and extend your arms to the target).
- Shoot the five shots, making sure to stay on target.
- Holster and draw your second gun (if shooting with a 2-hand hold, meet your hands at your natural “hand clap” position to get your grip and extend your arms to the target).
- Find the sights and the target and break the shot (squeeze the trigger).

Sourdough Joe has developed a pistol-to-pistol transition drill he prefers. This drill stresses gun-handling skills. It can be done both with live fire and dry fire. The instructions presented here are for live fire.

- Load each pistol with five rounds each, hammers down on empty chambers and holster.
- Using the timer, at the beep, draw one pistol, fire one shot at the target and quickly re-holster it.
- Draw the other pistol, fire one shot and quickly re-holster it.
- Repeat drawing and firing the pistols as described until 5 shots have been fired for each revolver.

Keep track of your times in order to gauge improvement. To make the drill more challenging and less boring use five targets and double-tap or go down and back or inside out, outside in.

As you practice these drills, check the following: Is your grip right? Was your shot on target? Did you look down and watch the draw? Did you rush? Did you have to shift your grip on the weak side gun in order to get the right grip? Be honest with yourself and continue to practice!



Prairie Dawn Demonstrates the strong side draw and transition



Geronimo Jim demonstrates the cross-draw draw and transition.

Revolver to Long Gun; Long Gun to Long Gun; Long Gun to Revolver:

Before we start, make sure there is no ammunition in the area, and your guns are not loaded.

These three transitions can all be done so many different ways that it's pointless to provide step-by-step instructions.

As with all the transitions, focus on eliminating extra motions. When you holster a revolver or set down a long gun with one hand, be reaching for the next gun with the other hand. If you have a hand free and you are reaching for your shotgun, pick up some shells with the free hand. It's all about efficiency.

Get a friend to help you analyze your motions. Look for periods where one hand is busy and the other isn't. Look for extraneous actions. Keep the transition simple. Work on keeping both hands busy, and working together. It is also helpful to practice in front of a mirror.

Think about how your long guns are staged. Can you set them right side up with the stock hanging off the table? What about having the stock off the table enough so that you can grip the gun? If they are leaning against something, can you set them up so that the grip is facing you for quick retrieval? Are empty cases from your rifle going to fall into the action of your shotgun (common problem with the pump guns)? Placement of your guns can mean the difference between fast and smooth transitions or difficult and slow transitions.

Lastly, don't forget about proper grip, stance, and sighting, also – practice, practice, and practice!



Single Action Jackson transitions from shotgun to rifle.



Sourdough Joe transitions from rifle to pistol.