

# Shooting Tip: Why we Love the Front Sight

By Duane Thomas

The classic advice to new pistol shooters on aiming is "Focus on the front sight." There are reasons we say this, both physical and mental. Has anyone ever explained to you WHY we focus on the front sight? When you ask most people that, they just kind of brainfade, and then say, "So you can aim the gun." Well, yes, but there's a bit more to it than that.

In order to aim a handgun and hit the point we want to on the target, there are three things we need to see: the front sight, the rear sight, and the target. We need to see all three of those things, and we need to see them all at once, all lined up. Problem: the three things we need to see are all on different focal planes – different distances from our eyes – the eye can only focus on one focal plane at a time, and the further away an object is from that focal plane the blurrier it gets. There is no way we can see all three things in focus at once.

To solve that problem, we focus on the front sight. The reason we focus on the front sight is that it's the *middle* of the three focal elements. If we focused on the target it would be sharp, the front sight would be blurry, we couldn't see the rear sight at all. So we couldn't see all three things. If we focused on the rear sight, that would be sharp, the front sight would be blurry, the target would be fuzzed out. Again we couldn't see all three things. So we focus on the front sight, the rear sight is a little blurry, the target is a little blurry, but we can see *all three at once*. That's why we focus on the front sight, at least from a physical standpoint.

There are also compelling mental reasons to focus on the front sight. Once we've mastered the physical components of shooting, the great challenge becomes to turn the shooting over to our subconscious mind. The conscious mind operates in a very linear A-to-B-to-C-to-D fashion, and it can only process one thought at a time. There is no way we can process thoughts fast enough to do something like fire a handgun accurately at speed if we have to consciously work our way through each thought sequentially. There is just WAY too much happening in a short time frame, the conscious mind can't keep up. The subconscious mind, by contrast, thinks globally, it can process many different inputs and thoughts at once. The ONLY way we can operate at a high level of efficiency in fast, accurate pistol fire is to shoot from the subconscious mind.

However, many people distrust the subconscious mind. They see the conscious mind as "me," the subconscious mind as "other" and therefore frightening. To not constantly THINK during shooting seems like giving up control. The conscious mind doesn't want to let go, to trust the subconscious mind. Like an overbearing, micro-managing boss, it won't just get out of the way and let the work get done. The way we get around this is, also, to focus on the front sight. Remember, the conscious mind can only focus on one thing at a time. Occupy it with watching the front sight, the subconscious mind can do everything else. Yes, watching the front sight allows us to align the gun with the target, and that's an important thing, but once we master the basics of shooting, I'm convinced the biggest advantage of watching

the front sight is that it gives the conscious mind a generally useful job to do, so it can feel like it's in control, thus to get the hell out of the way. It's like the overbearing boss says, "Look at MY invaluable input. Look at what I'm doing," while the fact that someone else is doing the vast majority of the work totally escapes him.

Having said all that, I do think that, with all this "Focus on the front sight" stuff we sometimes do other shooters a disservice. Because those folks with less-than-perfect vision often feel the fact they have trouble bringing the front sight into sharp focus means they can't be good shooters. Untrue. While we tell new shooters, "Focus on the front sight, let the target blur, let the rear sight blur, the front sight should be crystal clear," it is not, in the overall scheme of things, overwhelmingly important that the front sight be perfectly clear, only that it be *clear enough*, and that we project our mental attention onto it.

So the front sight is a little blurry? Who cares? Can you make out its general shape? Can you tell that the top of the front sight is even with the top of the rear sight? Can you tell that there are even amounts of light on either side of the front sight inside the rear notch? Do you know how much deviation from "perfect" sight alignment you can have at various distances and still hit what you need to hit? Yes? Then what more to you need? You've got a blurry front sight? Fine. LOOK AT THAT. It doesn't matter that it's blurry, only that you can see it "good enough" and that you focus your conscious mind on what you can see.

