

# Improving Agility for Cowboy Action Shooters™

Roger Rapid  
SASS #96080  
Poza River Vigilance Committee at Lazy Arrow

Ver: 12/18/18

Doing well at Cowboy Action Shooting™ requires more than practice and good gear. It also calls for great eye-motor coordination. Having our hands and fingers do what we tell them with ease, speed, and agility is paramount to drawing pistols, thumbing hammers, working actions, and squeezing triggers. Hitting the target is – well – up to you!

Last year at Winter Range, I was sitting on my cart doing an agility exercise when a fellow shooter came over to me and said, “Mind if I ask what you are doing?” When I told him I was hoping to improve my agility, he cocked his head and said, “Seriously? I’m curious – do you mind showing me how?” Ten minutes later, he looked at me with a big grin.

So, I thought it might be fun to share this with all my fellow cowboy and cowgirl shooters. Hopefully, this little exercise will work for you, too.

To ease some back pain caused by age and degeneration, I’ve been seeking the care of Kelly Reed Daulton, a movement therapist who specializes in the Gyrotonic Expansion System® method and Z-Health®. To better understand my needs at our first meeting, Kelly inquired of my activities, and when I told her I was doing cowboy shooting she smiled and said, “Then we’ll also work on some exercises to improve your shooting.” She had my attention!

Kelly described the connection between the brain and our hand and finger movements as the process of the nervous system interpreting information the brain gathers from the environment, and turning it into a motor (muscle) response. The better the clarity of the information, the better the response. Agility is a skill driven by the ner-



Fig. 1: Hold one hand just above the palm of the other, palm down, and rotate the hand back and forth as quickly as you can to evaluate how rapidly and easily you can do it.

vous system (actually, everything we do is driven by the nervous system), so we have to train the nervous system (brain) in order to be more agile. Good hand-eye coordination is the result of a nervous system that is functioning efficiently.

First, Kelly asked me to do a test by flipping one hand back and forth in the palm of the other hand (see Fig. 1). After observing how well and quickly I could do that, she had me hold a pen in one hand as far in front of me as I easily could, and focus on it with both eyes. Then she demonstrated how to bring the pen toward my nose (Fig. 2), still focusing carefully with both eyes, to where the pen just got blurry, and then to move



Fig. 2 Kelly demonstrated how to hold the object at arm's length, and then bring it as close to your eyes to where you can still keep it in focus (Fig. 3).



Fig. 3 Here the object is drawn close to the eye to where it is still in focus. Slowly repeat this movement 10 to 12 times and then try the flip test again to see if your agility has improved.

the pen away to arm's length where I started. She described the time to move the pen from far to near to be the equivalent of about “one Mississippi, two Mississippi, three Mississippi” and to return to the starting position with the same slow movement.

When I was finished with 12 sets of forward and back movements with the pen, Kelly had me re-test my hand flip movement to see if there was any improvement in the way it felt, the coordination, and the speed. Much to my surprise, I could flip my hand back and forth more quickly, more smoothly, and more easily than before the exercise.

Doing this, she said, was making both eyes focus on one moving target in a very specific, controlled way that creates very small muscle movements in the eyes. The muscle movements help us see better and give our brain more information to interpret. When the brain receives more and better information, it not only relaxes the body but it also gives better directions about the muscle output (our hand coordination and agility).

How did it apply to my shooting? Well, the only thing I can measure is that my overall time has improved a bit, especially on my pistols where thumbing the hammer seems to be done with greater ease and efficiency (I'm a Cattle Baron and shoot traditional cowboy style.) I also noticed that I am more "centered" in my stance, composure, etc., and my mind feels more focused. Drills

like these can improve your time, your vision/accuracy, and your mental acuity.

Kelly told me to do the exercise two to three times a day for about 12 sets each time, and to include it in warm up before an activity to improve performance.

I am not really sure how long the results of the exercise last for me because there is no clear indication of when it ends. Kelly suggests that the results of the exercise last longer depending on how often I do the exercise and allow my brain to adapt. Once the brain has adapted to doing it one way, there are ways to make the activity more complex or challenging to continue improving the results even further.

Of course, you don't have to use a pen. When at the range, I simply use a bullet or shell as my focal point.

---

Kelly Reed Daulton is a proprioception specialist and movement therapist. She is proprietor of Symmetry In Motion in Atascadero, CA.