For both the coach and the athletes, the session plan is the most hands-on and visible aspect of a performance plan. No matter how good our performance plan is, if we do not match the activity performed at the range and in the classroom with the requirements of the performance plan then we will fail the fundamental purpose of the plan and we will also fail our athletes in the process.

**WHAT IS A SESSION PLAN?**

Our performance plan provides the overall direction for our training and competition activities. The actual training activity carried out on the range, classroom or in the gym is controlled through the use of a session plan. As the name suggests it is an individualised plan for a specific training session as identified at the micro-level in the performance plan.

In this context, a session plan can be seen as the programme of activity that we as coaches will undertake with our shooters during this period. For example, it can be a day long training session or a series of sessions based over a one week period. At its simplest level, a session plan states what the purpose of the training session is, what activities will be undertaken and what outcome is expected at the end of the session.

However, we can make much more use of a session plan and incorporate much more detailed information and most importantly an accurate evaluation of the session and feedback for use in later training sessions.

**WHY USE A SESSION PLAN**

Once our performance plan has been created we are faced with the operational task of implementing it. Through the performance plan we will have identified a high level requirement to affect a coaching/technique change to our shooters. We will have set aside a period of time to achieve this and we will have set a date or an event at which point we will evaluate the results.

By analysing the nature and type of change we will make within our shooters technique or approach, we will identify the activities that we as coaches believe will affect that change. Those changes may require more than one type of training activity and/or a sustained period of the same activity depending on the task.

By using a session plan we can create a structural framework for the training session to break down the overall session into a series of steps which will bring us through the training activities whilst allowing us to evaluate the progress and the results.

As we develop as coaches we create different training activities through experience to address technical issues and to make changes in a shooters technique to achieve a better performance. Each one of these activities combine to become over time a toolkit for the coach from which the coach can draw on to create the training session that is required to match the performance plan.

For this article I am not going to go into the detail of creating training activities, that is a fundamental role of the coach and one which is too far a wide to cover in this short article. I will however show you how to structure the training activities and how they must be constructed with a teaching method that is suitable to the skill being learned and the students who must learn it.

**MAXIMISING COACHING TIME WITH YOUR ATHLETES**

One of the great advantages of a session plan is that it creates a timetable for your training activities. It makes the most of the time that is available to train while avoiding wasted time on negotiation of what the training session is about. By circulating the session plan in advance we also give the athletes time to mentally and physically prepare for the session. They will know what is expected of them and can bring whatever equipment will be needed to the range. The range staff can also set up the range with any special requirements as specified by the coach thus avoiding any delays as the athletes wait for the range to be adjusted.

Let us examine two different approaches by coaches “A” & “B”. Coach “A” turns up at the range a few minutes before the start of the training session with no plan in place for the 3-hour training session

If we examine how the available time is used we can see areas of coach “A”’s time could have been better utilised by prior preparation and proper planning. From the chart we can see that coach “A” spends 35% of the time
available in setting up the range, deciding on what to do and greeting his team members as they arrive in after the start of the session.

If we now examine Coach “B”’s approach we see that the maximum time has been created for the training activities by arranging for the athletes to arrive 10 minutes before the start of the session and by taking care of the preparation of the range prior to the start. As the athletes know what is expected from them during the session, no time is required in deciding what activities will be undertaken.

The difference in coach “B”’s approach to that of “A” is that we have now doubled the time available for training activities through the use of planning.

**STRUCTURE OF THE TRAINING SESSION**

Just like the performance plan, a session plan has a structure of its own to aid the coach in preparing the activities of the training session. So what do we put in our session plan? A good starting point is to identify the common areas of activity/resources and evaluation that must occur if any training session is to be considered a valid and productive session.

We can start with a basic structure and develop it by adding further criteria depending on how complicated the training session will be and whether it is for juniors of elite athletes. For instance a high-level view of the session plan and the questions that must be answered could look like this:

- **Health and Safety requirements**
- **Aim of the training session**
- **What training outcome is expected**
- **What activities we will undertake to achieve the outcome**
- **An indication of the time required for each activity**
- **What resources are required to accommodate shooters of different levels of experience**
- **What assessment activities will be used to evaluate the session**

Already with this list we have a framework which we can make informed decisions and judgements as to what we will do during the session. So lets take this list and elaborate on what we might do under each heading.

**Health and Safety requirements**
First and foremost on our list is always safety. Not only the physical safety of gun handling and range work but when we work with juniors we must also be aware of child protection law and policies of appropriate behaviour concerning them. Start each session with a safety and range briefing.

**Aim of the training session**
This will create the link between the training session and the overall performance plan. For instance, we might have a requirement for a technique or tactical change as identified in the performance plan and we are now deciding on the training activities to effect the change. A short but clear description of what we are going to do will suffice and the code used to identify the session in the performance plan should be used to cross-reference the session.

**What training outcome is expected**
When we structure a training session we should always anticipate what we expect to see as a result at the end of the session. We should not expect any immediate or dramatic performance improvements from the session, that is not the nature of coaching but we can look for progression and increased awareness and understanding in line with the skills we are teaching.

**What activities we will undertake to achieve the outcome**
As coaches we have developed training drills and classroom sessions that we can use to impart our knowledge and understanding to our athletes. This is the bread and butter of our coaching world. Here you must bring your experience to bear in deciding what coaching activities you should employ to meet the goals that the training session is designed to meet.

**An indication of the time required for each activity**
Set out a timescale for your activities. Outline how long the warm-up period will be, how long the briefings will take and also how much time each training activity will take place. Setting a timescale will force discipline into your programme. As coaches you must determine how the time is best allocated. A good timescale will see the athletes motivated and alert at the right time when you need them to make the maximum use of the training activity. Concentration and attention spans are limited so make good use of variety and differing levels of intensity within your training session to maximise that scarce resource.

**What resources are required to complete the session**
Identify in advance what equipment and personnel you will need to conduct your session. Preparation is a key element to the success of the session. Minimise the amount of time you need in setting up specific drills at the range by ensuring that they are ready in advance of the session. A smooth transition between training elements will help to keep up the momentum of the session and the motivation of the athletes.

**How to accommodate shooters of different levels of experience**
Our shooters will have different levels of development and expertise and we should
not assume that each and every athlete is capable of performing the same training activities to the same level of proficiency. Different levels of expertise can be accommodated within a training activity by applying a different training method or a different focus on aspects within the training tasks. One goal of a successful session should be that every athlete should experience a level of training which is suitable to their level of experience and which is positive in its nature.

What assessment activities will be used to evaluate the session
No training session can be considered successful if we do not evaluate the performance of both the shooters and of ourselves as coaches. This is a form of continual assessment and it gives us the opportunity to make changes to future training sessions based on the feedback from the current sessions. The evaluation processes can vary with the nature of the session. The easiest form of measurement is quantitative, such as the measurement of score or a statistical trend in scoring consistency. We can look for qualitative measures beyond the straight-line scoring performance and look for intangible gains such as an increased awareness of the skills being learned, an increase in confidence levels and in the overall commitment of the athletes. A balanced use of quantitative and qualitative measures will give the best all round overview.

Finally, before your athletes leave, perform a short review and analysis of the session. This is not a full evaluation but a short recap of what the session was about and what was achieved. Reinforce the learning experience and give positive feedback to the athletes. Compliment good performances and encourage everyone to take something positive away from the session. If possible outline what the next session will focus on and encourage the athletes to continue their personal preparation ahead of that session. This will help to create continuity between the current and following sessions.

CHOOSE YOUR TEACHING METHODS WISELY

The choice of teaching method is crucial to the success of the session and it must suit the task that is being coached. As coaches we have many different ways available to us to impart knowledge and skill to our athletes. We must choose the methods carefully to ensure that we deliver the right knowledge to our athletes in a way that is most receptive to them. We must also keep in mind that not all of our students might respond the same way so we must be aware of the individual needs of our students. There is a wide variety of teaching methods suitable for sport based learning and we could spend much time expanding on them here but for this article I want to briefly introduce some of the more common approaches and how they might be introduced in the training session.

To make the best use of the learning experience during the training session it is best to use a mixture of teaching methods to promote diversity and to avoid boredom. A bored athlete will not be receptive to new ideas.

Classroom/Lecturing
The use of the classroom to show the theoretical basis for technique and specific movements is an ideal starting point for beginners and for complicated subjects. It affords the students time to evaluate what is required and to ask the questions that will arise particularly when new knowledge is being acquired.

It is best to keep classroom sessions short as to avoid boredom. Good preparation of the material and the correct use of diagrams or video can make the session very productive.

Demonstration
By physically demonstrating the technique or the movements required, we create a visual explanation which is easier for students to understand than a verbal explanation. Great care must be taken with demonstrations to ensure that the technique is demonstrated correctly as this will form the basis of the imitation of the technique that the students will perform.

Imitation/Chaining
Imitation is a natural means of learning and we can quickly make progress as we replicate the technique and movements as shown. This is a time when the coach must ensure that the technique is taken step-by-step and it is best not to progress the technique until each individual step is performed correctly. Progressing from one step to another is described as “chaining” the technique and ensures that each component of the skill is linked to the preceding and following components.

Discussion
Finally, the use of discussion between the coach and student should be encouraged as it will expand the understanding of the technique being performed and why it is being performed in a certain way. If a shooter is instructed to perform a movement without fully understanding why, it creates within the shooter confusion and causes the movement to be consciously controlled rather than sub-consciously controlled.

USE A TRAINING DIARY TO MANAGE YOUR TRAINING SESSION

As coaches we ask our athletes to maintain training diaries to aid in monitoring their training and competition performances. Training diaries are a valuable tool for both the athlete and coach as they provide a historical record of training and competition activity. Too often the valuable lessons we learn are lost to the mists of time, but through the disciplined use of training diaries the shooter can record contemporaneous notes while they are still fresh and vivid in the mind.

It is also a good idea for coaches to maintain their own training diaries but I prefer to call them coaching diaries. Such a coaching diary can be tailored in a way that is complementary to the session planning concept. In doing so we would create an historical record of our own training sessions, which we can later call upon as a reference point when we need to prepare a new session plan to deal with a specific training task.

An example of a simple session planning template is available on the ISSF website (next page) to complement this article. The template is in MS Word and can be formatted to print as an A5 sized page for use in a Filofax or similar ringed diary. The template is provided copyright free and you are encouraged to amend it to your own requirements as you see fit.

A session template should be concise in what it records but it should not be too brief as to not record the substance of what you have to do and how you have tailored the session to the requirements of the plan. You must record enough information to make the session plan understandable when reviewed at a time in the future.

Evaluation of the session can be twofold using a simple scale of 1 to 10 and the option of a short feedback section. This can provide you with a quick and very visual record of progress particularly when you are reviewing the diary over a period of time.

Kevin Kilty
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References:
Planning & Organisation by Zeljko Todorovic (2008) ISSF Training Academy
COACHES DIARY & SESSION PLANNER

Training module: ________________________________
Location: ______________________________________ Date: ________ Time: ________
Athletes: ________________________________________________________________________

MAIN OBJECTIVES

TRAINING METHODS & ACTIVITY OUTLINE

SESSION EVALUATION

Volume of Targets: ______________________________ Weather: ____________________________

RATE PERFORMANCE

Rate Session (1-10): __________________________ Rate Your Coaching (1-10): ____________

FOLLOW-UP

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