

No matter what the situation, a good instructor will never be impatient with their client.

• Any instructor worth their salt

The characteristics game Shots should be looking for in their shooting instructor.

PHOTOGRAPHY: CHRIS WARREN, ALAMY

The spring and summer months are traditionally the time of year when we head out on to the shooting ground or school to begin our preparations for the season. The majority of us will enlist the services of a qualified shooting instructor, but who do you go to if you're new to shooting or want a fresh pair of eyes on your technique? We asked five leading names what traits, advice and inspiration every instructor should be able to offer clients by asking them two simple questions: what will a good shooting instructor always do and what will they never do?

NIGEL MUIR
Instructor at the Royal Berkshire Shooting School

A good instructor will always give clients the ability to think for themselves

There is a huge difference between instructing and teaching. When a client is in the field on their own, without the safety net of their trusted instructor, they should be able to self-analyse and therefore try to correct any problems. If they have been taught – in a structured way – how to successfully put a shot together, they will quickly

be able to identify any missing component part: the correct focus on the target, a good connection to establish line and speed, a good gun mount, the application of lead and not taking their eye off the target until they see the result of the shot. If any part is missing, they should be able to identify it and, most importantly, change something. Better to do it this way than just repeating the same mistake.

A good instructor will never stop challenging/pushing a client to get better

Regardless of a client's ability and experience, there must always be a structure or plan to the lesson. Consolidating previous work and embedding the basics is crucial, but, most importantly, clients must be allowed to move on to more complex challenges. Moving a novice from shooting "gun up" to "gun down", experiencing more challenging targets in terms of height, speed and distance. A client who is preparing for game shooting must understand that most birds are just as sensitive to line as they are to lead. You cannot, in good faith, send a client to a "difficult shoot" if all they have been taught is how to hit a low to average driven bird. It is all too easy to accept that

the client cannot progress much further and put in minimal effort. Professionally that is unacceptable. A good instructor should have faith in his own ability to grow any client's skills and ask himself at the end of every lesson, "did the client leave knowing more and understanding more than when they arrived?"

SEAN BRAMLEY
Senior instructor, EJ Churchill Shooting Ground

... will always listen

Everybody is an individual, and it is the instructor's job to fully understand what the client's expectations are, their ability, their needs and why they are shooting in the first place. It is important to build a strong rapport with a client and to build trust so that after every lesson, whether a client is a novice or a regular shooter, they leave feeling that they have achieved what they wanted, as it is their time. Listening is imperative.

... will never overload a client with information

Less is more. It is really important to teach clients one thing at a time. If you give too much information too quickly, it is just going to



confuse people and they will start overthinking. This will result in them not hitting the target, and then not enjoying the shooting. As soon as a client stops enjoying the very essence as to why they are there, they simply won't go. As an instructor, it is also my job to make sure they have a smile on their face, and they need to enjoy it.

MARK HEATH
Senior instructor, West London Shooting School

... will always keep it simple

At the shooting school we teach clients of every ability and at every level. In the early stages of teaching a novice client there is a massive download of information that covers the operation of the gun,

including the very basic functions, safe handling, use of the safety catch for game shooters before and after the shot, along with gun mount and how to be successful on the first few shots. This has to be done in a way that enables the client to absorb and act on the information, bearing in mind that every client is different. This needs also to be undertaken in

A good instructor will always push their client to be the best they can be.

a way that builds trust between client and instructor and caters for the new shooter keen to be successful early on.

... will never be impatient

To achieve the above requires a structured approach that suits each client. Approximately 25% to 30% of the information imparted on the first novice lesson will probably be retained for the second. To shoot consistently well requires every technical aspect of the shot to be repeated in terms of footwork, gun mount, timing, focus and lead, among other aspects of the shot. Therefore patience, in addition to being a virtue, is a necessity as a shooting instructor as you need to be prepared to repeat every aspect of your teaching many times over and find different explanations to suit a broad variety of clients to enable them to be successful.

ADAM CALVERT *Shooting Gazette shooting agony uncle and director of Calvert Sporting*

... will always make sure they fully understand what the client wants to achieve

All too often, the client doesn't really understand what they are trying to take away from a lesson. It is therefore important that the instructor spends five minutes over a cup of coffee to discuss a basic plan with the client in order that they get the best out of the lesson.

... will never allow their safety standards to slip with a client

As a client shoots more, they can often become complacent about gun safety. It is important that the instructor encourages the client to be safe at all times, whether it be while shooting or just general gun handling. It is often the little things that slip, such as getting the gun out of a slip properly or closing

the gun to the floor correctly. These things are vitally important and failing to do them right could result in, at best, other Guns taking a dim view of their safety and not wanting to shoot with them again and, at worst, an accident.

CHRIS HANKS *Senior instructor and manager of Lady's Wood Shooting School*

... will always be clear

It might sound a bit obvious me saying this, but I have lost count of the number of times someone has said to me "oh, I understand what you mean – nobody has ever explained it like that before" or "why has nobody ever told me that?" A good instructor will always communicate with their customer and help them learn by quickly getting to know them, what makes them tick, and how their brain works. For example, in a group lesson you might have to say the same thing three different ways, draw a diagram or get someone to watch another member to get the same instruction across to each individual.

... will never be afraid to think outside the box

As humans, our brains learn in many different ways and this varies from person to person. When a shooting instructor has a preferred style, method or set of targets, they must not limit themselves to doing this same thing over and over with every customer. Everyone is different. For example, to teach lead on a target, don't just go from the slow crosser to the fast crosser every time. If a customer struggles with the transition, find a slow crosser you can walk in on, start close and begin to move back a few paces each time they "find it", then progress from there. 🦋

