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I always hear people talking about patterning their shotguns. What actually is involved in doing this?

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Patterning your shotgun is the first step to successful marksmanship. It involves three stages. First of all set up a sturdy bench or table 25 metres behind a two metre by two-metre pattern plate which will have a red dot in its centre. Find a sandbag or other bench rest to lay the barrels of the gun on and position your head on the stock so when you are looking down the barrels at the pattern plate the only thing visible will be the front bead on the end of the barrel. Fire 5 shots at the red dot with the bottom barrel, analyse the results and fire a further 5 shots with the top barrel. Ideally this should show a result of 50 per cent of the shot strikes above and below the red dot and the same amount left and right.

Next, again at 25 metres, stand up in your normal shooting position and rest your head in its normal position on the stock of the gun and repeat the procedure. This time the markings should show a slightly higher impact point. Just what is considered ideal will largely depend on what the use of the shotgun will be. Trap shooters want much higher shooting guns than most field shooters. I would suggest however that no matter what you are shooting at you never want the gun shooting lower than half of its pattern below the aiming point. Hopefully though the vertical impact points are still 50 per cent left and right of centre.

Finally take a distance back from the pattern plate that you believe will be a typical distance you will be using your shotgun at. Fire some of your favourite shotshells individually at the plate and take note if the markings left on the plate after each shot are too widely dispersed or even too clumped together. If so you may want to vary the shot size or if you are lucky enough to have variable chokes then loosen or tighten the choke size as desired. These tips should get you on your way.

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