



# **How The OODA Loop Applies To Gunfighting**

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Within each defensive encounter there exists an ongoing battle for information. Prior to a shot being fired, issuing a command to stop is given or ultimately you are able to retreat or stop the threat there exists a continuous cycle of observation, interpretation, decision-making, and actions. The key to understanding this cycle is intended to aid increasing your chances of success within a given situation.

Identified as the OODA Loop, this tactic which was originally developed for use within the military by Colonel John Boyd of the U.S. Air Force and has become one of the most influential concepts within military strategy, law enforcement, competitive and defensive shooting tactics. Although it was originally designed to explain aerial combat, it was determined that the principles apply to any rapidly evolving scenario where rapid decision making under pressure is required.

However, it is important to understand what the OODA Loop is not. The OODA Loop is not intended simply for making someone a faster shooter than someone else, but rather increasing your efficiency and speed within processing the information and being able to better act upon the information obtained.

## **The OODA Loop Defined**

The acronym “OODA” stands for a series of four separate steps which when used together complete a loop of tactical thought. The steps include the following and each will be discussed separately below.

1. Observe
2. Orient
3. Decide
4. Act

Each one of these steps will occur repeatedly throughout any dynamic situation where every action on the part of either party to the confrontation will change the environment and requiring new observations and decisions. An individual who is able to process this cycle more efficiently will very often gain a significant tactical advantage because they understand what is occurring more quickly.

## **Observation**

The first element within the OODA is “Observation”. This is more than simply looking around at the environment and involves actively gathering as much information as possible, including: What is seen, what is heard, who and if possible how many individuals are present (This includes bystanders as well as threats), is any abnormal behavior observed from anyone present, are there any obvious environmental risks, is there an exit nearby and finally, what if anything has changed while or since you have been observing.

## **Orient**

Orientation or the second element is frequently the most misunderstood yet most important element of

the OODA Loop. This is because while observation tells you what is happening, it is orientation which will help you determine what it means.

Unlike observation which requires simply visualizing the situation or event, orientation skill is developed through : Training, experience, existing knowledge, environmental conditions, stress, personal bias and individual expectations.

This is because two different people can observe the same event interpret what they see or differently.

## **Decide**

The third element of the OODA is the requirement to make a decision based upon the information obtained from the previous two elements and sometimes the correct decision is to not act immediately but rather to continue to observe and interpret the information received.

Within some situations, the best response may be to simply leave the area, if this possibility safely exists. Yet other times the appropriate decision is to seek cover, prepare to fight and begin the application of the use of force continuum by jumping directly to the second level of verbal commands or instructions.

It is however critical to understand that for the private citizen within most jurisdictions and from a practical point of view, every effort to avoid confrontation should be considered the ultimate goal or objective.

## **Act**

This is because while acting within an event or situation is not the end of the process and every action should match the circumstances while remaining as consistent as possible with the law., once all the available information is obtained, considered and a decision on the best course of action has been made, it must be carried out decisively and without hesitation. However it must be remembered that each action taken by you will change the event or situation and therefore will create new information which will require the OODA to begin again, because the OODA loop is in reality a continuous process which remains necessary until the event or situation is concluded.

## **The OODA Loop Application Within Defensive Shooting**

While a firearm should never be considered the only solution to every problem, it does remain one possible response within a much larger decision-making process.

Through several important principles the OODA Loop reinforces the principles of responsible firearms use within a violent situation by causing the shooter to first observe enough to positively identify the situation followed by causing the shooter to think about and understand to the best of their ability the information obtained through orientation which will often lead to a decision being made and finally aiding within an action being taken. The use of these processes will often help reduce impulsive decision making while under pressure.

## **Applying Training The OODA Loop**

It is not possible to improve decision making by simply shooting tighter groups without regard for the speed at which those shots are made. This is in no way intended to imply that marksmanship is less important, but rather that competence with defensive firearms requires additional skills, abilities and knowledge, including: The development of situational awareness skills, threat recognition and identification, stress management, understanding the impact of environmental changes, legal implications and more.

This is why training with a professional instructor is so important and within a separate article we will be discussing the selection of a instructor. But for now, we can leave it at the instructor you choose to

work with should seek to help train your mind as well as your body, as every repetition builds mental pathways that improve your ability to process information more efficiently and under stress the brain will naturally rely on patterns it has practiced before.

## **In Conclusion**

The OODA Loop is one of the most powerful decision making tools ever developed as it reflects how people process rapidly changing situations and provides a framework for thinking not simply reacting.

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Our training philosophy is built around developing well-rounded individuals who understand that personal safety and professional performance require more than simply equipment alone. Awareness, critical thinking, communication, and disciplined decision making skills remain the foundation of effective preparation.

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- ˘ How stress impacts critical decision-making and performance
- ˘ The high value of consistent professional training and continued education
- ˘ How the correct mindset will impact informed decisions within high stress environments

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#### ***About the Author***

Brian S. Williams is a professional firearms instructor, tactical trainer, and executive security consultant with greater than 35 years of experience in firearms instruction, use-of-force training, and protective operations. As the founder of several firearms training and security organizations, he has developed and delivered firearms, tactical, and instructor certification programs for civilians, law enforcement officers, military personnel, and licensed security professionals throughout the United States.

Over the course of his career, Mr. Williams has trained and certified more than 10,500 Connecticut pistol permit applicants, instructed more than 2,000 civilians and hundreds of law enforcement and security professionals in advanced firearms and tactical applications, and provided remedial firearms training to military and correctional personnel. He served as a Marine Police Officer and Watch Commander with the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection and was appointed to the Connecticut State Police Firearms Advisory Council, where he contributed to firearms training and policy discussions.

Mr. Williams holds numerous professional certifications, including NRA Training Counselor, NRA Law Enforcement Firearms Instructor, General Dynamics Simunitions FX™ Instructor, The Heckler &

Koch International Training Division and Sig Sauer Academy Instructor certifications, and USCCA Concealed Carry and Home Defense Instructor. He is the author of *Welcome to the Real World: A Dangerous Place to Be Caught Unprepared* and has been recognized as an expert in firearms by the Connecticut Superior Courts. His work continues to emphasize responsible firearms ownership, sound judgment, lawful use of force, and practical, reality-based training.