Once you have decided you would like to take a lesson, you should call Silver Willow and start the process by booking a lesson. You can expect to be asked a few questions to ensure you are matched to the most appropriate instructor. Open lines of communication before and during the lesson will ensure you get the most out of the lesson.

It is also important to understand what products are available to you as the consumer. Silver Willow offers single lessons as well as a comprehensive four-lesson bundle. The foundational principle of the bundle is the continuity afforded the client. The client is matched with the most appropriate Instructor, and a plan for the four lessons is laid out and agreed upon by the client and the Instructor. A comprehensive written report is provided at the conclusion of each lesson, including activities the client can work on before the next lesson.

The four-lesson bundle has proven to deliver superior results than would be expected from four lessons with four different instructors. The planning and reporting aspects of the bundle result in a learning experience where the whole is greater than the sum of the parts.

**Step One – Having a Goal**

If you are considering a shooting instructor, know what you hope to achieve, and be able to communicate your goals at the time you book your lesson as well as to an instructor. Here are a few examples:

* You are a novice shooter and want to learn the basics.
* You have done some shooting and want to improve your sporting clays skills.
* You want to transition from shooting clays to shooting live birds, or vice versa.
* You enjoy sporting clays and would like to improve your skills in order to enter competitions.
* You are a competitive shooter and would like assistance regarding specific aspects of the sport.

**Step Two – Arranging for an Instructor**

Once you have expressed your intention to engage an instructor, it is likely that you will be asked some clarifying questions by the staff at Silver Willow, either through email, a telephone call or in person if you have to book the lesson while at the club. These clarifying questions could include:

* **Parallel interests** – if you want to learn to shoot a shotgun for the purposes of upland bird hunting, for instance, having an instructor who is also an upland bird game hunter is beneficial.
* **How much shooting experience do you have**? It is important to match your skill level with the competencies of the Instructor. Some of our Instructors are best suited to novice shooters, while others are a better match for the shooter who wants to improve their competitive performance.

**Step Three – The Lesson**

Now that you have booked your first lesson, here are a few things to keep in mind:

* **Your goals –** Once again express your goals to your instructor. It is important to have a realistic understanding of what can be achieved through one lesson or a series of lessons. It is not realistic for a new shooter to expect to win a large Provincial or Regional competition after one lesson.
* **Communication skills** – communication during your lesson is not limited to verbal communication. The best instructors are excellent observers, and they can see when the student is bored, tired, nervous, frustrated or confused. But do not hesitate to express to your instructor if you are tired or something is not making sense. The instructor should be able to adjust their delivery to accommodate your needs, but remember that learning is a two way street and your feedback to your instructor is just as important as the instructor's direction being provided to you. Many, but not all, instructors will provide a written report for the student – it need not be anything formal or fancy. A short email to the student with an overview of the lesson as well as the salient points is often enough. A lot of material can be covered in a lesson, and many students find it helpful to be able to review what was covered in a lesson so they can focus their practice.
* **Simplicity** – Good instructors want to simplify things rather than complicate the technique. It has been said that perfection is not adding everything that you need, but rather, eliminating everything that is not necessary. If your instructor is giving too much information for you, say so, and between the two of you, decide a path of focus. For example, you may decide to concentrate on stance, or your gun mount, but you may not be able to do both at the same time.

It is important for the client to understand their role in the Instructional process. Learning a new skill is often the result of a cumulative process, and the client needs to understand that learning is often a layered process that takes time. It is unrealistic to believe that one lesson is all that a person needs to achieve their objectives. Shooting a shotgun is a complex, dynamic activity that has a lot of moving parts. It is not unusual to spend an entire lesson focusing on one aspect of shooting. As a result, your goals may need to be modified to either work on a specific issue, or to work on basics. Sometimes the Instructor will work on a problem with the student, and sent the student away with ‘homework’ – things to work on for a period of time before the next lesson. Don't get discouraged if your Instructor wants you to focus on basics - the best shooters have mastered the basics, eliminated any inconsistencies, and are therefore able to focus on hitting the target.

**Step Four – Going forward**

Once you have had your lesson you may choose to book additional lessons, if so:

* **Goals** – look again at you original goal and continue on that path, or you may want to adjust. For example, you may have booked your first lesson simply to improve your skills, but now you may be thinking of entering a competition. Goals can change – be sure to always be clear what your goals are and communicate them to your instructor and between the two of you, map out a realistic, achievable plan with measurable results. There is not a lot to be gained, for example, by emphasizing the mental aspects of competition if the shooter wants to become a more proficient upland game hunter. And it is unlikely that someone who has been shooting for a season or more to expect a sudden jump from C class to Master Class after just one lesson. A good instructor is certainly able to help shooters get into the higher classes, however, it takes time and it takes a serious commitment on the part of the student. It takes time on the range and at home, it takes lots of targets and lots of rounds, and it means training as opposed to practicing.
* **Continuity** – Understand the cumulative benefits of multiple lessons. Each lesson should re-enforce skills learned in the previous lessons and progressively build upon them resulting in a compounding effect on the skill level of the student.

Now that you have had a lesson, or are embarking on a series of lessons, keep in mind that it is up to you to apply the instruction you have been given. Vince Lombardi is often credited with the quote, “*Practice makes perfect*.” In reality, that is not what he said, nor is it what he meant or used in his coaching. “*Perfect practice makes perfect*” is the whole quote, and it only makes sense. If you are going to be training and getting better, you need to practice the right things the right way. You need to eliminate the less desirable aspects of your technique and focus on perfecting the more desirable parts of the technique.

Practicing the wrong things establishes bad habits that can take years to overcome.

Good instructors take the time to get to know the student, and they learn to tailor their delivery to the student. For example, an engineer may relate better to a physics-based explanation, whereas an artistic individual may respond better to an instinctive or visual method of teaching. The good instructor will try to draw on similarities between shooting and something familiar to the shooter. To achieve this, there needs to be a rapport and open communication. Chatting about your job, hobbies, and other interests may be very relevant to developing a successful method of teaching.

When the instructor/student relationship is well balanced and rooted in mutual respect, everyone benefits, and it can result in a lasting enjoyment of the sport and perhaps a friendship that can endure for many years.