

Rifle and Pistol Shooting Procedures

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Beginning shooters must learn a protocol for handling firearms on the line. Instructors or coaches should use an expanded procedure to establish and reinforce safe and responsible firearms handling. Once those processes have become conditioned reflexes, control may revert to the basic range control commands. The protocols outlined here are designed to produce safe and responsible shooters. Numbered items are the basic commands. All items in bold print should be explicitly mentioned during the shooting process for beginning shooters.

1. Pick up your firearm [rifle, pistol]. Several elements are implicit in this process.

Keep muzzles in a safe direction. That means down range while on the firing line and away from people (usually straight up) at all other times. Take time to teach a proper position. Muzzle control is the shooter's personal responsibility with the coach and range personnel reinforcing it constantly and having immediate access to each shooter.

Check firearms to be sure they are empty. Verify that each firearm is empty. Control of all ammunition by range assistants or coaches is essential during the early stages of instruction.

Actions open and exposed to view for visual inspection. A closed action means "loaded and ready to fire." This, too, is a shooter's responsibility with reinforcement from their coach and all range staff.

Keep fingers off the trigger until in the act of firing. Until keeping the finger along the trigger guard becomes a habit, all range staff must watch this carefully.

Safeties on. The location and operation of the safety must be thoroughly explained. Define what is meant by "safe" or "on" and "fire" or "off." [Note: Instructors debate the importance of using the safety during range instruction. Many feel it is unnecessary since the firearm is only loaded when a shot is going to be fired. They consider using the safety unnecessary and potentially confusing. Many others feel use of the safety reinforces proper firearms handling and prepares the shooter for field shooting.]

2. Load [and charge] your firearm. Safe loading, unloading and charging (air rifles) must be thoroughly demonstrated and explained. Even when coaches will be loading the firearm, reinforce the process step by step early in instruction. Each coach and shooter must be sure the ammunition provided is appropriate to the firearm being used. When dry

firing, **absolutely no live ammunition** should be on the firing line, or in the possession of anyone on the firing line. Ammunition must be distributed through range staff or coaches until shooters can handle their own.

Place one round in the changer. If air guns are used, remind shooters that the skirt of the pellet goes to the rear, at least for the first few shooting sessions.

Close and lock the action. Reverse this sequence to unload a firearm.

Charge the arm [rifle, pistol] with air. To ensure consistent performance, explicit instructions may be needed in the early stages of instruction.

3, Assume a proper shooting position. The coach and range staff should assist each shooter into a proper shooting position, oriented and positioned for effectiveness. Each point in the position should be checked to give the shooter advantage. During the early stages of instruction, the position, including foot position orientation to the target, stance, grip and other form elements should be developed gradually and in sequence.

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4. Safety off.

5. Align your sights. In the beginning, consider this a two-step process.

Focus your vision on the front sight. Align the front and rear sights.

6. Fire when ready. The firing process is complex and should be considered in a step-by-step fashion for beginning shooters. Often the first shot is fired “by commands.”

Obtain sight alignment and sight picture.

Squeeze the trigger (press the trigger straight back) while keeping the sights aligned, focusing on the front sight and maintaining your sight picture.

Maintain the sight alignment and sight picture through the shot until the projectile strikes the backstop.

11. Cease fire. The cease fire command is also complex and requires step-by-step reinforcement.

Cease fire. [Reinforce immediate response.]

Make your firearms [pistols, rifles] safe.

Open all actions.

Remove all ammunition.

Ground all firearms [rifles, pistols] with the actions open and visible for inspection.

Take one step back from the firing line.