

# 4-H S.A.F.E.T.Y. *Three-Position Rifle Shooting*



## S.A.F.E.T.Y.

SAFE ARCHERY & FIREARMS EDUCATION & TRAINING FOR YOUTH

After learning the fundamentals of firing a shot with a rifle, 4-H'ers can turn their attention to learning the basic rifle shooting positions. The correct ways presented here are the same fundamentals now being used by America's many Olympic, world, and national champions.

Whether a young person desires to shoot just for fun, or is interested in competitive shooting, learning the correct fundamentals of three-position shooting is the first step toward ensuring fun and successful experiences. By learning to shoot a rifle in the three positions through 4-H S.A.F.E.T.Y. (Safe Archery and Firearms Education and Training for Youth), 4-H'ers learn concentration and the satisfaction and excitement of participating in a sport.

### Objectives

1. Understand and appreciate the common elements of any good rifle shooting position.
2. Duplicate the correct standing, prone, and kneeling positions.
3. Successfully execute the fundamentals of firing a shot while in the three positions.

### Teaching Time

Two to three sessions

### Materials and Equipment

- At least one rifle and set of shooting equipment for every two students
- Target, ammunition, scoring plug, and eye and ear protection for each student

## Presentation

### I. Equipment

- A. Rifle—pellet rifle, or single shot, bolt action .22 caliber rifle with sights
- B. Accessories
  1. Sling—adjustable sling with keepers to secure its position on the arm
  2. Handstop or sling-keeper to attach sling to rifle
  3. Shooting mat to lie or sit on while shooting
  4. Spotting scope—a telescope used to see the shots on the target
  5. Kneeling roll to be used in the kneeling position; no more than 8 inches long and 7 inches in diameter
  6. Clothing
    - Sweatshirts—two are used to provide support and absorb pulse
    - Shooting jacket—jacket with rubber pads on the elbows and shooting shoulder
    - Shooting glove—a glove used for the protection and comfort of the left hand, or support hand
    - Flat shoes or shooting boots
  7. Shooting notebook—a small loose-leaf or memo notebook for keeping a record of scores, equipment, and things learned.

### II. Fundamentals of Firing the Shot: Review

- The aiming process
- Breath control
- Hold control
- Trigger control
- Follow through and calling the shot

### III. Learn to Build a Good Position

Success in shooting the three positions hinges on the student's ability to build a good position. When learning each position, the first step is to study the position through pictures or demonstrations. After thoroughly studying the position, the student assumes the position without a rifle. The student should then turn his/her attention toward how the position feels, and where each part of the body is placed.

When the student feels ready, add the rifle to the position. Focus attention again on how the position feels. After the adjustment of the rifle to the student and the instructor's assurance that the position is good, the student should begin to practice the fundamentals of firing the shot in the position by dry firing. After a dry firing session, the student can begin shooting for groups. When the group can be covered by a quarter, the student can then adjust the sights and shoot for score.

## Application (for the leader)

- Discuss the purpose and function of each piece of equipment.
- When beginning a shooting program, have participants make their own equipment. For example, a shooting jacket can be made by sewing rubber to the elbows and shoulder of an old light jacket. A kneeling roll can be made from a variety of items. A bag 8 inches long and 7 inches in diameter can be sewn and filled with beans, rice, or any material that is moveable and can fit the instep.
- Other equipment can be improvised from items found in the home. Have students make up a form to use after each day's shooting, including items such as date, time, weather, course of fire, score, physical and mental condition while shooting, and plans for the next practice session.
- Review each fundamental with the students. Have students explain to the group each fundamental and its purpose.
- When the instructor is explaining each position, the students study pictures or the demonstrator. To stimulate thinking and an understanding of the position, the students should ask questions of the demonstrator and touch the demonstrator to feel the degree of muscle tension in the position.
- Break students into pairs. While one student assumes the position, the partner inspects its correctness, and asks questions to aid the student in thinking about what his/her body is doing.
- The partner should assist the student in adjusting the rifle. Again, the partner should ask questions to aid the student in thinking about the position. When the student begins the dry fire session, the partner monitors the completion of fundamentals of firing a shot to alert the student to any problems. The partner loads the rifle for the student when shooting for groups. After completion of the shooting for groups phase, the partner takes the student's place and the position learning process begins again.

#### *IV. Elements of a Good Position*

The following elements are true of all good shooting positions:

1. A good position is balanced—it puts the center of gravity of the body-rifle unit over the support points of the position.
2. A good position should have a head position that achieves balance and allows proper use of the eyes.
3. A good position requires little use of muscle with the weight of the body-rifle unit supported by the participant's bone structure.
4. A good position provides a small area of hold.
5. A good position allows good circulation and unhindered breathing.
6. A good position should be reasonably comfortable.
7. A good position provides a good natural point of aim.
8. A good position is legal under NRA or ISU rules.

**NOTE: The three positions are explained for the right-eyed and, therefore, right-handed participants. For left-eyed participants, the position is opposite what is presented here.**

#### *V. The Standing Position*

##### A. Body Placement

- Stance—the sole support of the position.
- Feet—at right angle to target, shoulder width apart.
- Legs—straight but not locked.
- Weight—equally distributed on both feet and legs.

##### B. Back-Bend and Body Twist—the key to a balanced position

- The back is bent backward from the waist to compensate for the weight of the rifle.
- The torso is twisted toward the target to lock the lower back muscles and bring the rifle to the line of fire.

- Discuss the meaning and importance of each element.
- To ensure that the student understands the importance of balance and a good head position, ask the student to stand, and tilt head to one side. Students will soon discover that the body will begin to sway.
- To ensure that the student understands the difference between a tense muscle and a relaxed muscle, conduct a simple relaxation exercise. Have the students tighten arm muscles on command and then relax on command. Do the same exercise with the legs, the stomach, the back, and the face. The exercise should end with the tensing of the entire body followed by a relaxation of the entire body. Ask the students to become aware of how their bodies feel when in a relaxed state.

- After demonstrating and explaining the standing position, have the students get into pairs and complete the position-learning process previously explained.
- Use the following techniques with the demonstrator to explain the position to the students:
  - When explaining stance, ask the participant to stand as though he/she were talking to a friend.
  - To teach back-bend and body twist, help the participant assume the position first without a rifle in the following manner:
    1. Have the participant hold arms out to the side from the shoulder, bending the elbows with hands together in front of the face.
    2. Back-bend and body twist are achieved in two distinct movements:
      - Standing behind the participant, the instructor places the left hand at the participant's waist, and right hand on the participant's back, backward toward the instructor.
      - Then, holding the participant's raised arms, the instructor twists the participant's body slightly toward the target.
    3. Then pull the left arm to the ribcage.
    4. Add the rifle to this position.
    5. Encourage participants to participate in flexibility exercises as well as back and stomach strengthening exercises.

- C. Left Arm and Hand—the bone structure of the left hand and arm support the rifle
- Left forearm and wrist should remain straight and relaxed.
  - Left hand supports the rifle.
    - Fist of split-finger position.
    - Use of glove improves comfort.

- D. Right Hand and Arm
- The right hand grips the rifle firmly with the index finger free to control the trigger.
  - Pull slightly to the rear with right hand to help keep the rifle firmly in the shoulder, ensuring firm and consistent placement of the rifle butt.

- E. Head Position
- Upright and slightly forward.
  - To maintain good balance, be sure to keep the head from moving side to side.

#### F. Natural Point of Aim

The natural point of aim is the aiming area the position is pointing at when the participant is relaxed. When assuming any position, the natural point of aim should be checked and corrected if necessary. To check the natural point of aim, the participant drops his/her eyes for a few moments, lets the body relax, and allows the rifle to point naturally. Then the participant looks back through the sights. If the sights are still on the target, the natural point of aim is perfect.

In standing correctly, the natural point of aim should be done in the following manner:

- For a horizontal correction, use the stance as a pivot point to adjust the natural point of aim.
- For differing target heights, extend or pull in the left hand along the stock.

## VI. The Prone Position

### A. Body Placement

- Lie down facing 5–20 degrees to the right of the firing line.
- Keep spine straight.
- Keep body stretched out behind and relaxed.

### B. Left Leg and Foot

- The left leg is parallel to the spine.
- The left foot is pointing straight back or toward the right.

- To decide the best left hand position, have the students try several variations to find the most comfortable and the most stable method.

- When students are assuming the position with the rifle, bring their attention to the method used to place the rifle in the shoulder and stress consistency of placement and consistency of the amount of pull to the rear with the right hand.

- To stress consistent cheek placement, use a piece of tape on the stock to help the instructor watch for consistent placement.
- To ensure that the participant understands the importance of an erect head position, ask the participant to stand without the rifle and tilt the head to the right. The participant will soon discover that the body will begin to sway. (This is a repeat from a previous exercise).

- To ensure that the students understand the importance of checking the natural point of aim, have them set up to shoot on the target next to their own target. Students will soon discover that the position will always return to its natural point of aim, which is on the target next to them.

- After demonstrating and explaining the prone position, have the students divide into pairs and complete the position-learning process previously explained. Place two chalk lines on the floor, one line to represent the firing line and one line at a 90 degree angle back from the firing line. Place the demonstrator in the body position on the floor to aid the students in understanding the correct angle to assume.

- Use a demonstrator on the chalk lines and have students look at the position to understand the placement of the legs and arms.

### C. Right Leg and Foot

- The right knee is drawn up toward the rifle to permit easy breathing and circulation.
- The right foot is naturally pointing to the right.

### D. Left Arm and Hand

- Place left elbow slightly to the left of the rifle.
- Left forearm angled at 30–35 degrees.
- Wrist straight.
- Left hand behind handstop—relaxed, not grasping the rifle.

### E. Sling Adjustment and Placement

- Form a loop with the sling and then turn the loop a half turn toward the body.
- Run the arm through the loop to position above or below the bicep muscle, and tighten keepers.
- The sling around the arm should be loose enough to allow circulation.
- The sling should totally support the rifle.
- After sling is adjusted, make a record by marking the sling.

- Have the student practice putting the sling on. To find correct sling adjustment, instruct the partner to place a very loose sling on the student's arm; have the student assume the position and move the left hand back and forth on the stock until the rifle points to the target; then have the partner tighten the hand stop and the sling.

- To ensure that the sling is totally supporting the rifle, have the student release the right hand and then have the partner wiggle the barrel.

### F. Right Arm and Hand

- Right arm is relaxed.
- Right hand grips the stock with a relaxed but firm grip, as though shaking hands, to allow for control of the trigger finger.

### G. Head Position

- Upright and tipped slightly forward.
- Pressure of the cheek and eye relief should remain consistent for every shot.

- Place a piece of tape on the cheek piece to monitor consistent placement.

### H. Natural Point of Aim

- Correct right or left by pivoting the body position on the left elbow.
- For elevation adjustments, bring the left hand back and shorten the sling for a higher position, or extend the left hand and lengthen the sling for a lower position.

- Have the participant set up to shoot on the left side of a 70-bull 50-foot target; then monitor the change in position for the right side of the target.

## VII. *The Kneeling Position*

### A. Body Placement

- The kneeling roll and its placement.
  - Kneeling roll should comfortably fit the instep and have consistent quality.
  - Place right foot vertically across the kneeling roll.
- A line from the right foot through the right knee should point 30–45 degrees to the right of the target.

- After demonstrating and explaining the kneeling position, have the students divide into pairs and complete the position-learning process previously explained.
- Draw two chalk lines on the floor, one to represent the firing line and the second at a 90 degree angle back from the firing line in the middle of the firing point.

- The right foot should be as vertical as possible with the heel of the right foot against the base of the spine or slightly to the right.
- The participant should sit more on the bottom of the heel rather than on the back of it, with the right toe placed firmly against the ground but not bent under the foot.
- Weight distribution should be 65 percent on the right foot, 20 percent on the left foot, and 15 percent on the left knee. The weight of the shoulders and back should slump down over the right heel.

- Have the demonstrator try several different kinds of kneeling roles in order to find the best fit and comfort.
- Place the demonstrator in the correct position, pointing out the angles of the right knee and position of the right heel.
- Use a demonstrator placed in the position first for the participant to study. Then ask the participant to assume the position on the chalk lines. Check the student's ankle, right heel, left calf, and left foot to ensure understanding of the correct position.

#### B. Left Leg and Foot

- The lower portion of the left leg should be vertical.
- Avoid any tilting of the left leg to the right or left.
- The left foot should be turned in so that it is roughly parallel to the right thigh in order to lock the ankles.

#### C. Left Arm and Hand

- The flat spot on the left elbow should rest on the flat spot on the left knee.
- The left arm is relaxed and slightly to the left of the rifle.
- The left wrist is straight with the rifle resting on the heel of a relaxed hand behind the handstop.

- Have the student feel for the flat spots on the left elbow and left knee.
- Place a demonstrator in the position and have the students look down at the demonstrator to point out the relationship of the left arm and rifle.
- From the top, the participants should notice that the kneeling position is identical to prone.

#### D. Sling Adjustment and Position

- The sling is positioned above or below the bicep muscle.
- The sling should totally support the weight of the rifle.

- Have the student assume the position with a loose sling and hand stop.

#### E. Right Arm and Hand

- The right arm is relaxed.
- The right hand grips the stock with a relaxed but firm grip, as though shaking hands, to allow for control of trigger finger.

- When the student is on the target, tighten the hand stop and sling.
- To ensure that the sling is totally supporting the rifle, instruct the student to release the right hand and then have the partner wiggle the barrel.

#### F. Head Position

- Upright and tipped slightly forward.
- Pressure of the cheek and eye relief should remain consistent for each shot.

- Using a demonstrator or a student, illustrate the relaxed state of the right arm to ensure it is not held stiffly high as in military shooting.

#### G. Natural Point of Aim

- Correct right or left by pivoting on the right foot.
- For elevation adjustment, bring the hand back and shorten the sling for a higher position, or extend the hand and lengthen the sling for a lower position.

- Place a piece of tape on the cheek piece to monitor consistent placement.
- Have the students set up to shoot the left side of a 70-bull target; then monitor the change in position for the right side of the target.

## Summary and Evaluation

Successful three-position rifle shooting requires a complex coordination of the mind and body. Students learn the process for building a good position and practice dry firing before attempting any live firing. This process will ensure students are successful the first time they shoot from the position.

Keep reviewing the fundamentals of firing a shot and correct positioning until the students understand. The most important factor for the instructor to consider is the success of the first live firing experience. When 4-H'ers have learned at their own pace and are immediately successful the first time they shoot at a target, the experience will be fun, and they will continue to learn and grow with the sport.

## Sharing Activities

### *Recreational*

**Turkey shoot.** One of the most popular novelty shooting games and an excellent fund-raising activity. Members of a club take turns shooting at a V or X. The member with the shot closest to the point of the V or the intersection of the lines in the X is the winner.

**Bust-able target games.** Divide club members into teams of three to four. Set up targets of clay pigeons, balloons, poker chips, candy, wafers, or anything that is reasonably priced that will break easily. DO NOT use glass bottles or jars. The first team to break all the targets within a prescribed time limit is the winner.

**Bingo target machines.** Use bingo cards for targets. Each club member fires five shots on a card. The member with the highest score is the winner.

## *Competitive*

**American Prone Shooting.** Outdoor at 50 yards, 50 meters, and 100 yards. Course of fire: 40 shots at 50 yards, 40 shots at 50 meters, 20 shots at 50 yards plus 20 shots at 100 yards (DEWAR MATCH), and 40 shots at 100 yards for a total possible score of 1,600.

**International Air Rifle.** Men: 60 shots fired at 10 meters in the standing position; possible score is 600. Women: 40 shots fired at 10 meters in the standing position; possible score is 400.

**English Match.** 60 shots fired at 50 meters in the prone position; possible score is 600.

**Smallbore Standard Rifle—Prone.** Women and juniors: 60 shots fired with a standard rifle at 50 meters; possible score is 600.

**Smallbore Free Rifle—Three Position.** 120 total shots at 50 meters, 40 shots each in standing, prone, and kneeling; possible score is 1,200.

**Smallbore Standard Rifle—Three Position.** Women and juniors: 60 shots fired at 50 meters, 20 shots each in the standing, prone, and kneeling positions.

**Smallbore Silhouette.** 40 shots fired in the standing position on one-fifth size standard high-power rifle silhouette targets: 10 chicken targets at 40 meters, 10 pig targets at 60 meters, 10 turkey targets at 77 meters, and 10 sheep targets at 100 meters.

**Air Rifle Silhouette.** 40 shots fired in the standing position on one-tenth size standard high-power rifle targets: 10 chicken at 20 meters, 10 pig at 30 meters, 10 turkey at 38.5 meters, and 10 sheep at 50 meters.

## Resources

NRA. NRA Junior Rifle Handbook. Washington, D.C.

Pullam, B., & F. Hanenkrat. *Position Rifle Shooting*.

Winchester Press, New York, 1973.

The United States Army Marksmanship Unit. Basic

Smallbore Rifle Marksmanship Guide, Fort Benning, Georgia.

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