

Shooting Tips – How To Approach and Manage Your 10 Shot Stage (By Angus Bell)

One of our great shooters once said to me “Shooting is very easy, you just aim at the middle, hold steady and fire”.

But the above simple statement belies a list of pre-requisites needed to make it that easy. To assist new shooters (and remind seasoned competitors) I have tried to list a number of tasks required of the shooter to first prepare properly and then secondly perform successfully to complete a shooting stage.

1. Preparation

Before you fire your first shot you need to complete a multitude of pre firing tasks as follows :

a) Rifle Preparation

- Set Elevation to correct range
- Set Wind to Zero
- Insert or adjust front ring to correct size for that range and set the rear aperture size
- Maintain Rifle – rifles usually shoot best when clean, and the bolt locking lugs should be lubricated with an appropriate grease.
- Ensure you have all the parts required (including the bolt)

b) Ammunition Preparation

- First make sure you have enough ammunition before going to the mound, ensure you have at least one extra round during competitions as they may remove a round for compliance testing
- I always make sure that I take at least 6 more rounds down to mound so I am not conscious of when I am firing my last shot.

c) Shooting Equipment Preparation (Must Haves)

- Shooting Undershirt
- Shooting Jacket
- Shooting Hat
- Sling
- Earmuffs
- Glove
- Shooting Mat
- Spotting Scope + Stand
- OPTIONAL ITEMS
 - i. Scorebook + Pencil
 - ii. Rain Gear
 - iii. Stopwatch
 - iv. Wind chart

2. Conduct Of the Shoot

a) Natural Prone Position

- It is critical that you setup your prone position so that your natural point of aim is on the target
- To achieve this do an initial setup then close your eyes and go through a load procedure, place buttplate on shoulder, take your normal 2-3 breaths and then hold the rifle in position and gently open your eyes and note where the rifle is pointing, if necessary adjust the position and re-do the above to confirm the natural point of aim is on the target. I find I need to do this 3-4 times to get it right.
- When Set check Elevation is set to correct range

b) Dry Firing

- Its important that your pre firing practice is exactly the same as what you intend to do when you start shooting for a score.
- If you normally take 3 breaths before firing then ensure you take this same preparation during dry firing
- Try and get a good rhythm happening during your dry fire so that when you start you already have a process ready
- I find I need to take at least 6-10 dry firers to steady my process before commencing my scoring shoot.
- Don't forget to study the wind during this phase

c) Sighters

- Set your windage
- And then fire the best shot you can at the target – as this is probably the most crucial shot of your shooting stage in establishing an accurate point of reference
- Note the wind setting on the sight and what you should have had on
- Adjust your elevation and windage as required – make a full adjustment to the target centre
- Fire your 2nd sighter at the target – again a crucial shot in establishing an early group size. You need at least 3 shots to get a truly accurate group, but 2 shots does provide a lot of guidance
- Note the wind setting on the sight used for the 2nd shot and again note what you should have had on, this may start to provide a “bracket” if conditions are changing rapidly

d) Scoring Stage

- Now you continue on with your scoring stage
- You need to be well aware of your grouping capacity, if you can shoot a group that 60% of the bullseye then when a shot appears in this area – do not adjust your sights. If the shot is outside of your expected group size then you need to make a decision whether to adjust your sights. Changing your sight settings when the shot appears inside your expected group is called “shot chasing” and you can easily wind yourself out of the bullseye because you have not allowed for the spread of the shots around your sight setting

- During your scoring stage – when deciding to adjust your sights consider winding only half the distance from centre, to allow for your group size. As your group develops you will then have a more accurate picture of the where the group centre is that may require sight setting changes
 - Concentrate on :
 - i. Consistent Load / Aim / Fire Process
 - ii. Consistent Rhythm
 - iii. Perfect aiming whilst your trigger finger somehow does the business without you having to consciously fire the shot
 - iv. Follow Through – you need to hold steady and aim through the shot sequence to ensure consistent accuracy
 - v. Ignore the score developing and just concentrate on the next shot – the score will work itself out at the end.
 - vi. Watch the wind flags – looking for a flag(s) that show direction and speed (often different flags).
- e) Mind Control
- Its important to clear the mind and focus on your shot process
 - If you find you are having a loss of focus and negative thoughts are affecting you consider :
 - i. Using a shot release word to block out negative thoughts – such as P.E.R.F.E.C.T or C.E.N.T.R.E or S.M.O.O.T.H or something similar, spell the word during your shot release and this will divert the mind from the negative thoughts as it needs to concentrate on the mind effort to spell the word, in effect you are tricking the mind. This only works for male shooters !
 - ii. Use a scorebook to jot down information to take your mind off the negative thoughts and re-introduce process tasks, again giving the mind something to do

3. Post Shoot

- a) Record Sight Settings
- Rear Sight Elevation (and range)
 - Front Sight Elevation (if applicable)
 - Front + Rear Ring / Aperture Settings – note whether it was bright and sunny or overcast as this is important information for front + rear sight aperture settings in the future
 - Comment on process used and rhythm
 - Etc
- b) Discuss your shoot with clubmates to dissect performance and look for opportunities for improvement, ask what they did