

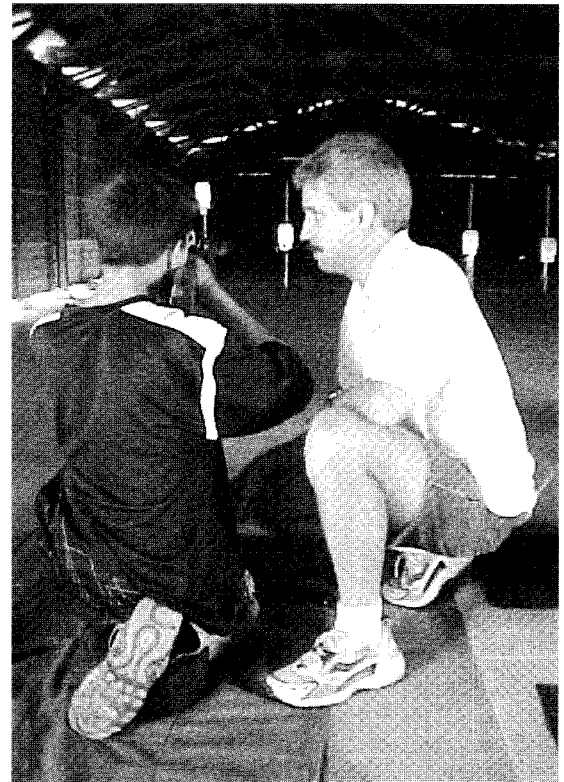
JSCN News Instructors' Notebook--Teaching Rifle Marksmanship

The Most Common Errors of Beginning Shooters

The purpose of the *Instructors' Notebook* is to inform junior shooting coaches about the most effective methods of teaching marksmanship to new shooters. This edition of *Instructors' Notebook* describes new shooters' most common errors and examines how to detect and correct them. Shooting coaches who are skilled at detecting and correcting errors help their students have more positive experiences, encourage them to remain in shooting longer and aid them in achieving higher results.

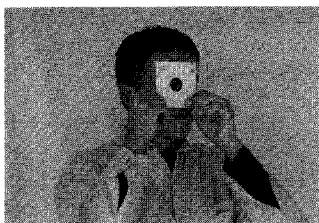
PRINCIPLES OF ERROR CORRECTION. The most important principles to follow in detecting and correcting errors are:

1. **KNOW THE SHOOTING FUNDAMENTALS.** There is no substitute for knowing the details of good shooting positions and techniques when correcting errors. The most serious errors are always violations of shooting fundamentals so the foundation of error correction is knowing the fundamentals well.
2. **USE POSITION AND TECHNIQUE CHECKLISTS.** The best marksmanship lesson plans provide checklists that identify the key features of the positions and shot firing technique. Those checklists can be a basis for identifying most errors.
3. **MAKE ERROR DETECTION AND CORRECTION PART OF EVERY MARKSMANSHIP SESSION.** Error detection and correction must be an on-going, integral part of all marksmanship coaching and instruction. The sooner an error is identified and corrected the less likely it is to become a habit that is difficult to overcome.
4. **ERROR CORRECTION MUST ALWAYS BE POSITIVE.** When an error is detected, correct it with positive guidance. The communication with the shooter must never be, "don't jerk the trigger." Instead, encourage the shooter to perform the skill correctly; "you'll get better results if you press the trigger smoothly and slowly. Let the rifle surprise you when it fires."



Effective error correction begins when the coach knows the shooting fundamentals and spends considerable time with each shooter providing feedback on how they are performing the skills that the coach teaches.

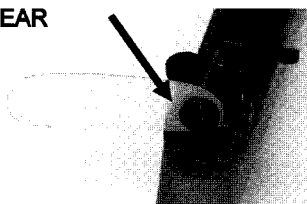
AIMING WITH THE WRONG EYE. This error almost always occurs with cross-dominant shooters and manifests itself in the very first firing sessions. When someone who is left-eye dominant tries to shoot from the right shoulder (or vice versa), they may contort their head and neck in an attempt to look through the sights with the left eye. Sometimes they have the head in the right position, but aim by using the opposite eye, usually with the embarrassing result of missing the target entirely. The most effective way to correct this error is to have the shooter use a blinder on the rear sight. Do not let the shooter squint the non-aiming eye or use an eye patch.



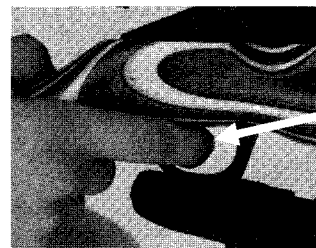
Aiming with the wrong eye is preventable if a dominant eye test is done before shooters begin. Be sure to encourage shooters to fire from the same shoulder as their dominant eye or to use a blinder.

Prevent or correct the error of aiming with the wrong eye by attaching a simple plastic or cardboard blinder to the rear sight. The blinder should be just big enough to block the view of the non-aiming eye.

BLINDER ON REAR



JERKING THE TRIGGER. With the front sight moving rapidly all over the target, new shooters face an irresistible temptation to pull the trigger as quickly as possible in the vain hope of "grabbing a ten." This convulsive movement almost always makes the shot far worse. To teach correct trigger technique, demonstrate what a smooth, controlled trigger squeeze looks like.

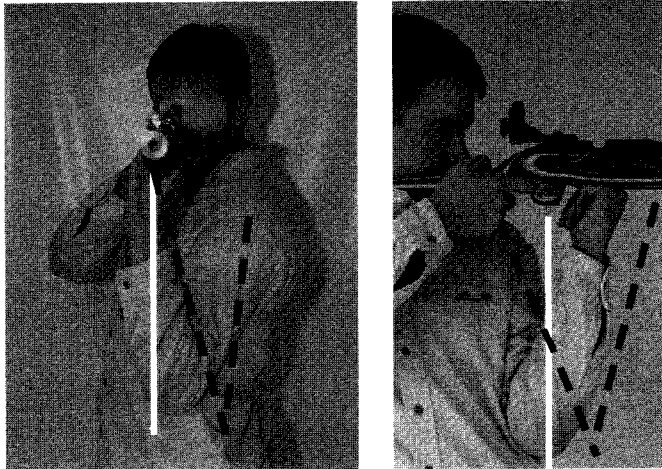


Invite the students to watch closely as you show them how the trigger finger smoothly and steadily presses the trigger to the rear.

A second key concept in trigger control is to teach students to simply center their hold movements over the target and to continue squeezing as long as the hold is centered.

Common Errors of Beginning Shooters

POSITION SUPPORT PLANE IS NOT VERTICAL. Each of the three positions have support planes that must be kept vertical to achieve a stable position. In the illustrations below, vertical support planes in each position are shown with solid white lines. The dashed lines show typical incorrect support planes that are not vertical.

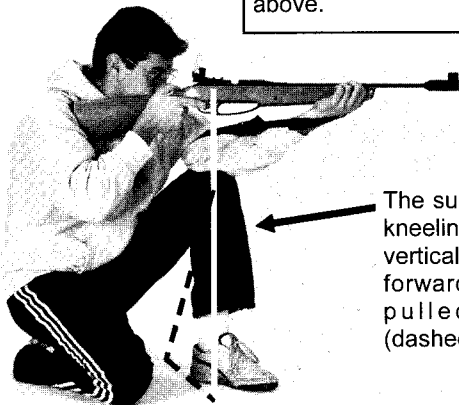


For beginners, the first key to a stable standing position is **TO PLACE THE ELBOW DIRECTLY UNDER THE RIFLE!** If the elbow is directly under the rifle and rests on the side or hip, the support plane will automatically be vertical. The muscles in the support arm must be completely relaxed so that the forearm forms an inert brace that holds the rifle steady.



Look for a vertical support plane for the prone position in the left arm and sling. The correct arm position can most readily be seen from above. An imaginary plane cutting through the support arm should be perfectly vertical (solid line) when viewed from above.

The support plane for the kneeling position includes both the left arm and left leg. A plane cutting through the leg and arm should appear vertical when viewed from above.



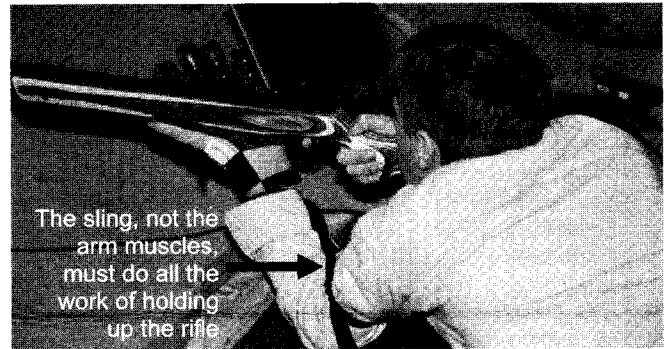
The support leg in kneeling must be vertical or angled forward, never pulled back (dashed line)

A CRITICAL SAFETY TIP



New shooters often make the mistake of not controlling the muzzle while loading. When new shooters begin live firing, stress the critical importance of keeping the muzzle pointed up or downrange during the entire loading sequence.

IMPROPER SLING SUPPORT. In the prone and kneeling positions, one of the most common beginner's mistakes is not using the sling to support the weight of the rifle. Some new shooters even make the mistake of thinking it is easier to shoot prone or kneeling without a sling.



Coaches must make special efforts to teach the proper method of using and adjusting the sling. When the shooter is in position, check each shooter to be sure the sling is adjusted tightly enough so that the **SLING SUPPORTS ALL THE WEIGHT OF THE RIFLE!** Stress how the support arm must be completely relaxed so that the sling, not the arm muscles, hold up the rifle.

LOSING CONTROL. One of the most egregious shooter errors is to become upset or frustrated and then to lose control. The most serious error occurs when an angry shooter acts out by throwing things, cursing or jerking open the rifle action after a bad shot. Prevent this by stressing how important it is for shooters to control their emotions no matter what happens. When a shooter loses control, the coach must intervene immediately to make it clear that acting out is not tolerated on the shooting range and that all shooters are expected to learn self-control. When self-control is encouraged and praised, all shooters will quickly learn that this helps them get over mistakes more quickly.

I JUST CAN'T SHOOT VERY WELL! Negative thinking is another serious error. Young shooters whose first results are lower than those of other shooters often want to believe they have no talent for shooting. When young shooters start thinking they "can't shoot very well," assure them that there have been several Olympic champion shooters who were last in their training groups when they started. Help your shooters understand that practice and perseverance, not talent, will make them good shooters.