

# **Basic Rifle For the Dumbfounded**

**A guide for new and  
inexperienced 4-H shooting sports  
leaders on the basic elements of  
teaching the Rifle discipline.**

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# Rules and caveats for using this Guide

- You must be a certified leader to teach any of the shooting disciplines
- This guide is a supplement to the 4-H rifle discipline manual not a replacement for it.
- Read and refer to your 4-H rifle discipline manual to gain a better understanding of the concepts outlined in this guide.
- The attention span of your students will dictate how much can be covered in one lesson. Typically, the younger the age group the shorter the lesson.

This guide is an attempt to boil down rifle instruction to the most basic concepts. The goal is to assist the novice instructor in teaching safe and correct techniques for rifle shooting. Basic concepts taught correctly are far better than more complex lessons taught poorly. As you gain more knowledge and experience as an instructor your confidence in teaching more advanced concepts will grow. Remember, the basic 4-H goal is youth development. You do not have to be an Olympic class coach in rifle to run a successful program.

# Safety First

A brief discussion of the Safety Rules should occur at the beginning of every meeting or event. This will indicate to all that safety is taken seriously and get everyone thinking about it. Repetition of the safety rules also ingrains them into the participants and they eventually become a habit.

- **MAT** - A simple reminder for the 3 primary safety rules that is easily memorized. Just make sure that students fully understand the meaning and are not just parroting it back.
  - MUZZLE in a safe direction.
  - ACTION open.
  - Finger off the TRIGGER until ready to shoot.
- **Range Commands** - Commands can vary from location to location but are similar in purpose. Whatever list of commands selected should be used consistently to avoid confusion.
- **Responsibility** - Be clear that everybody is responsible for safety. Reward good safety practices and reinforce the idea that anyone can call cease fire if an unsafe situation arises.

# Basic Teaching

If you've been through a National or State Training workshop you will have acquired a lot of detailed information about rifle shooting. Don't feel you have to pass on every tiny detail to your students in the first lesson. This is a common mistake with new instructors. You as an instructor should be knowledgeable of the finer points or at least know where you can find the information. However, most of your students just want to shoot. Your job is to get them shooting as soon as possible within the limits of good safety practices. Don't bore your students with long lectures. They will not remember most of it anyway.

- Your presentation should be appropriate to the age group.
- Keep your instruction in short easy to remember segments.
- Make sure your students understand the terminology.
- Give your students just enough information to accomplish the immediate exercise.
- Review and **repeat** the key pieces of information often.
- Have a goal of two or three things you want your students to learn.

# Basic Teaching Continued

Tell'm what you're gonna tell'm - Tell'm - Tell'm what you told'm

For the first lesson I recommend having everything set up so that you can get your students shooting ASAP. Shooting is what they came for. You can get them involved in setting up the range and equipment care in future meetings. Get them hooked first.

## **Example First Lesson:**

Instructor: "Before we begin there are some important things we all need to understand. They are the parts of the rifle, the safety rules and the range commands."

***Briefly explain the basic parts and what they do. Barrel/Muzzle, Action/Trigger, Stock, Sights. Emphasize the importance of the muzzle and trigger. SAFELY demonstrate how the action works. Explain how the sights should be aligned. NRA has some excellent posters for the different types. Review and ask for feedback.***

***Briefly explain the safety rules that apply to this lesson. Since you should be shooting off the bench, for the first lesson the rules are simple. Keep the muzzle pointed down range. Keep your finger off the trigger until ready to fire. Do not handle guns when others are down range. Obey all range commands immediately. Review and ask for feedback.***

***Briefly explain the Range Commands. It's a good idea to have a poster with the range commands posted wall tile wall near the firing line. This will help you and others to remember and use the commands consistently. Make sure they understand anyone can call a cease fire. Review and ask for feedback.***

# Basic Teaching Continued

If you are properly prepared it shouldn't take any longer than 15 or 20 minutes to get your students shooting. Remember, young people have a short attention span. Once you have them shooting for awhile you can stop and give them another 15 minute chunk of information.

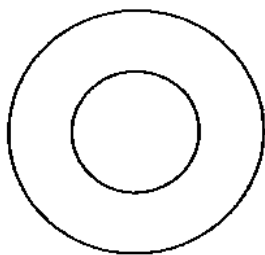
First, praise them for the things they are doing right. Make sure it is legitimate, not false praise. It may be something different for each individual but there will always be something.

Make it easy for your students to succeed. Start with a sight alignment exercise by having them shoot at a blank piece of paper. The back of a target works well. This will encourage them to focus on the sights. If they can keep all shots in a 4 inch circle or less then they understand sight alignment. When you introduce a target I recommend the TQ-18 training target. It has a small black area but the scoring rings go all the way to the edge of the target. This provides a 6 inch diameter scoring area. If your students understand sight alignment they will score on this target and it will build confidence. The regulation air rifle target, by contrast, is only about 1.5 inches in diameter and the beginner may not score on this target. Not scoring is no fun! The regulation distance to the target is 33 feet. There is nothing wrong with starting at 25 feet to insure initial success.

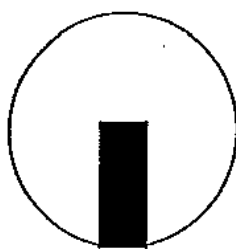
Another thing that must be considered is the capability of the equipment. If your rifles will shoot no better than 1 inch groups at 33 feet then using a regulation target is ridiculous. Shoot at bigger targets.

# Sights

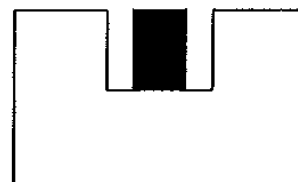
Front and rear sights in proper alignment.



Peep Sights



Peep and Post



Open Sights

# Trouble Shooting

- Once your students start shooting, observe them carefully for basic errors. Safety errors must be corrected immediately. Shooting errors should be corrected one at a time. If a student is doing four things wrong don't try to fix them all at once. You will just confuse and frustrate the shooter.
- The two most common safety violations you will see are FINGER ON THE TRIGGER BEFORE READY TO SHOOT and POOR MUZZLE CONTROL. Fix these errors immediately and remind your shooters often about proper safety practices.
- Remember, 4-H is learning by doing. Give them a chance to learn on their own and enjoy shooting. When you do make a correction be positive and brief with your instruction.
- After your session is over allow a few minutes to debrief. Talk to your students about what they learned. Find out what they liked most about the session. This feedback will reinforce the lesson and it will also give you a clue if you accomplished your goal.
- Make a few notes on changes you may want to make for your next session while they are fresh in your mind.
- Inevitably you will make mistakes. If you aren't making a mistake now and then you probably aren't doing much. Instructing is a lifetime learning process. Learn from your errors and try to do better next time. Nobody is born an expert instructor. You are in 4-H and you are learning by doing too.



# Summary

This document is intended to provide some hints on teaching and demonstrate one approach to a basic first session for new shooting sports leaders. Additional lessons can be developed using a similar format. This is not the only way to do things. Feel free to use your imagination and develop your own style of presenting the rifle discipline material. However, I do feel that there are basic tenants for successful teaching that should not be ignored. You will notice that stress the importance of brevity numerous times. In my opinion this is not an option. Nothing turns off a kid quicker than a long drawn out lecture. Even when teaching adults you will have much greater success if your lesson is broken down into small segments of simple instruction and then doing the activity.

Shooting Sports is truly an activity for a lifetime and it's a great way to carry the mission of youth development to young people. Good luck and thanks for your effort.