

YOUR GUIDE TO WHAT'S GONNA HAPPEN AT A MATCH

So, you've been to a class, practiced a bunch, and have now decided you are ready to shoot a match. Great! The first thing that we ask of you is to contact an experienced shooter or the Match Director. If you are a new or novice shooter we *may* ask that you meet us at the range prior to the match for a safety briefing and a discussion of the **rules** of the match, just to make sure that you have the right equipment and understand the importance of safe gun handling.

Now, on to the match. If you haven't pre-registered on-line (which we highly recommend), we'll need you to show up at least an hour early for registration and squadding. Here we'll enter your personal information into the match computer and collect your match fee. We'll typically ask you to sign a waiver which states you will not hold us or the range liable if you shoot yourself, your buddy, or anybody else within a couple miles. We'll also assign you to a shooting squad. We'll have a short shooters meeting, and then the fun begins.

CRITICAL MEMORY ITEM: Our matches are held under **cold range** rules, so you may **never** handle your gun behind the line of fire and **no** loaded firearms are allowed unless you are under the direct supervision of a Range Officer (RO). If you need to play with your gun, repair your gun, or show your gun to a buddy, you **must** go to a designated safe area to do so. If you aren't sure where that is, simply ask any RO.

You'll then proceed to the first stage that your squad has been assigned to and the scorekeeper will create a shooting order. The RO will read the stage description and ask if there are any questions before proceeding. As a new shooter you'll never be asked to go first, and there will be plenty of others to watch and learn from. So by the time it's your turn to shoot you should have no doubt what is expected of you. If there is, simply tell the RO "Hey, I'm not sure what I'm doing here," and he'll gladly break it down for you. (Don't be embarrassed, we do it all the time).

You also need to know some simple **range etiquette**. While you're waiting your turn, it is expected that you will help pick up brass, paste targets and keep score. The only people exempt from this process are the ROs, the shooter who is in the box (whose adrenaline levels are reaching critical), the shooter on deck (who's getting his mojo together), and the shooter who just finished shooting (who needs to take a few minutes to calm down and reload his magazines for the next stage). This only leaves the rest of the squad members to ensure that the match keeps running smoothly.

BRASS PICKUP: Most shooters will want to keep their used brass, and they'll need you to pick it up and return it to the shooter. If the shooter doesn't save their brass, then simply throw it in a brass collection bucket or a garbage can if no one wants it (which is rare).

PASTING TARGETS: In order to keep the match going smooth and fast, everybody's help is needed with the pasting of targets, which is taping over the holes left in the target by the last shooter. While everyone appreciates the help, it is **critical** that you follow **behind** the RO and

scorekeeper who are recording the hits. **Do not** paste a target before they have given permission or you may upset a few people.

SCORING: After you have experienced a few matches, you may be asked to perform the duties of score keeper as well. This is an administrative duty that is pretty easy using our electronic scoring system. The RO will tell you what to put in each data field (times, target scores and penalties). You simply need to comply with his instructions. After scoring, move behind the shooting line and review the information with the shooter. Then ask the shooter to “sign” the scores by selecting the “Save” option. The completed scores will be automatically transferred to the match scorekeeper.

Now it’s **YOUR TURN**. When they call your name, report to the RO with a holstered gun and loaded magazines in your possession. **Do not** do anything unless the RO tells you to. The RO will instruct you to “**LOAD AND MAKE READY.**” From this point on, you (and your gun) **must** always face downrange and never “break the 180.” You may now take a sight picture (if you so desire) with an unloaded (preferably) firearm. Once satisfied that your sights are still there and you remember what they look like, you may load your gun, put your safety on and re-holster your gun. As you assume the start position, you’ll hear the RO say, “**ARE YOU READY?**” If you aren’t, you’d better speak up! If not, tighten your seatbelt. If he does not hear a negative response from you, he’ll say, “**STANDBY,**” and 1 to 4 seconds later you’ll hear the electronic buzzer go off. As safely as you can, draw your gun (without shooting your foot or the RO’s foot) and begin to engage the targets as per the course description.

But at this point, **forget speed!** Walk through the match. No amount of speed will make up for missed targets or poorly shot rounds. To be good at this (or any other) sport, you have to pay your dues, learn the fundamentals, and be able to apply them on demand. Think safe and smooth and concentrate on getting all “A” hits. Forget winning: think about your front sight. Practical shooting is very much a mental game. Shooters who are obsessed with winning rarely do; they distract themselves.

Above all else, concentrate on **controlling your gun!** Nobody wants to see you get disqualified on your first time out because of a safety violation, but it will happen if you try to run before you can walk, or miss fast before you can hit anything slow. Concentrate on learning safe gun handling practices; speed will come with practice and experience. And always, always pay attention to your muzzle direction and to where your trigger finger is!

When you are done shooting the stage, you need to freeze in place, and keep the muzzle facing downrange. I know you want to turn around and whoop and holler at your buddies, but you have to clear your gun to the RO’s satisfaction first. He’ll say, “**IF FINISHED, UNLOAD AND SHOW CLEAR.**” You need to (in this order): remove the magazine, pull the slide back to eject the loaded round, and hold the gun (muzzle downrange) in a position so the RO can visually confirm that the chamber is clear. Once he has done that, he’ll say, “**IF CLEAR, HAMMER DOWN AND HOLSTER.**” At this time you need to close the slide, pull the trigger allowing the hammer to fall on an empty chamber (further verifying that the gun is empty) and place your gun safely in your holster. The RO will then declare, “**THE RANGE IS CLEAR.**” NOW you can turn around and show your friends that big toothy grin on your face.

You should then follow the RO and scorekeeper as they score your targets. Word of advice: **never** touch your targets. If you question the hit value assigned to a target, bring it to the RO's attention at that time and do not allow them to paste that target until the dispute has been settled. Once all targets have been scored, the last thing you need to do is electronically "sign" your scores by selecting "Save" on the scoring tablet. It is now time to take a deep breath, congratulate yourself on completing your stage, and look forward to the adrenaline rush of your next one!

Note: We wish to thank the North Carolina Section of USPSA Area 6 for giving us permission to use their Match Guide as the basis for ours. After reading their excellent description of what to expect at your first match and trying to come up with something original of our own, we realized that the oft-cited government motto of "if it ain't broke, we'll fix it" applied here. So we modified their write-up to make it specific to our club's procedures and to include references to our PractiScore scoring system which was implemented in 2015. Thanks again, guys! We also want to acknowledge Patti Thomas who took our unique procedures and combined them to create this Guide. Thanks Patti!