

Teaching the Standing Position

An On the Mark Series by Gary Anderson, DCM

Recent experiences in training instructors for both the JROTC Marksmanship Instructors Course (JMIC) and the CMP Games Master Club Instructor program have helped us refine and improve the methods of instruction that we recommend coaches and instructors use to teach the standing position to new shooters, whether they be juniors or adults. Indeed, the more we teach coaches, instructors or new shooters, the more we are convinced that what they are taught must not only be stripped down to the raw basics, but that those basics must be taught in a specific order. To teach too much or to teach in the wrong order will slow new shooters' development and leave them in need of remedial instruction later.

In the standing position, the shooter holds and aims the rifle while standing erect over a small support surface established by the two feet. For a new shooter to have a relatively steady (steady for a new shooter) position it must exhibit three features: 1) the feet must be positioned to **turn the body 90 to 100 degrees** away from the target, 2) the body must be configured in such a way that the position provides a **straight, solid column of support** for the rifle and upper body from the left foot up to the rifle and 3) the **rifle-body weight** stabilized by that column of support **must be relaxed and balanced** over the feet. The keys to getting the support column straight are making sure the left elbow and left hip are both directly under the rifle. The shooter must inwardly control balancing the body-rifle system over the support surface, but the good news is that even first-time shooters can quickly learn to sense when their positions are balanced.

Let's go through the *Steps in Building a New Standing Position* to see how these steps fit together and to understand what each step seeks to establish. Note that all descriptions are for a right-handed shooter—simply reverse left and right for a left-handed shooter. After reviewing these steps with new shooters in a brief instructional session, the coach or instructor should lead the process of building new standing positions by talking new shooters through these six steps, one step at a time, in order. Go slowly enough with this process that any failure to perform one of these steps correctly can be corrected before going to the next step.

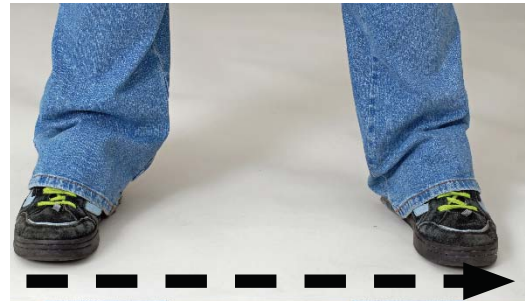
STEPS IN BUILDING A NEW STANDING POSITION

1. **Orient the Body**—stand on the firing line and turn the body 90 degrees away from the target.
2. **Shoulder the Rifle**—while keeping the wrist straight, grasp the fore-end just ahead trigger guard—place the butt plate in the shoulder and drop the left arm down onto the side or hip.
3. **Position the Left Elbow**—place the left elbow on the side or hip so that it is directly under the rifle.
4. **Position the Butt and Head**—lower the head to the cheek-piece to look through the sights. Adjust the location of the butt-plate in the shoulder so that the head is reasonably erect while aiming.
5. **Relax and Balance the Position**—after placing the rifle in position, relax the left shoulder and arm down and balance the position so that the weight of the body and rifle is equally distributed over the feet.
6. **Select the Correct Left Hand-Wrist Position**—with the rifle in position, look through the sights to see if they point at the target or above or below the target. Select a left hand position that raises the sights to the level of the target while completing the column of support between the hip and rifle.

Step 1: Orient the Body.

Step to the firing line with the rifle and orient the body by turning it 90 degrees away from the target.

Do this by turning both feet so that the body faces 90 degrees away from the target and the left side points to-



Step 1. Orient the body by turning the feet so that the body is turned 90 degrees away from the target.

wards the target. If done correctly, imaginary lines drawn through the hips and feet will point directly at the target. At this point, how far apart the feet are placed is not important. Within reason, how close or far apart the feet are spread does not affect stability, but turning the body so that the left hip and left foot end up directly under the rifle does affect stability.



Step 2. Shoulder the rifle by placing the butt-plate in the shoulder, keep the wrist straight and lower the left arm down onto the side.

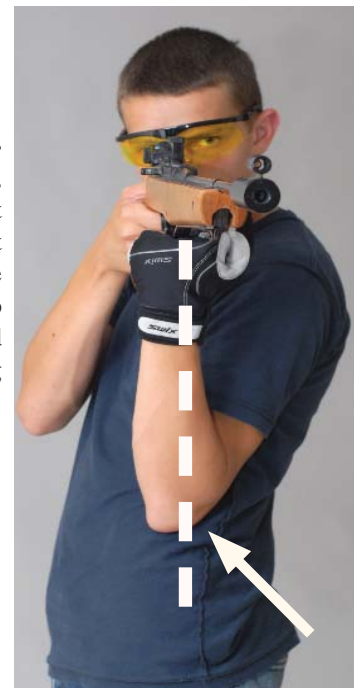
Step 2: Shoulder the rifle.

To start to build the position, the rifle must be placed in position on the shoulder. Do this by grasping the rifle with the left hand just ahead of the trigger guard. Keep the left wrist straight while doing this. Seat the butt-plate in the right shoulder and drop the left arm down on the side or hip.

Step 3: Position the Left Elbow.

With the rifle at the shoulder, shift the left elbow position so that it is directly under the rifle. In most cases, that will require moving the elbow forward. Be sure to also keep the left hip over the feet and directly under the rifle while doing this.

Step 3. Position the left elbow by resting it on the side or hip directly under the rifle.



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Step 4. Adjust the position of the butt-plate in the shoulder so that the head remains reasonably erect.

Step 4: Position the Butt and Head. The correct position for the butt-plate is determined by the correct position for the head, not vice versa. In the correct position, the head remains nearly erect so that aiming is easy and comfortable. Determine where to locate the butt-plate in the shoulder by slightly lowering the head down to the cheek-piece to look through the sights. If this movement is small and the head remains reasonably erect while

looking through the sights, the butt location is good. If the head must drop a lot to look through the sights, correct this by raising the butt-plate in the shoulder.

Step 5: Relax and Balance the Position. Before going to the final step of selecting the correct hand-wrist position to support the rifle, it is necessary to relax the left shoulder and arm down onto the side or hip. It is also necessary to stand so that the weight of the body-rifle system is balanced over both feet. This may require leaning or bending the body slightly to the right and rear to counterbalance the weight of the rifle, but most new shooters do this automatically.



Step 5. Relax and balance the position; relax the left arm down onto the side; balance the weight of the body and rifle evenly over both feet.



Step 6: Select a Left Hand-Wrist Position. With the rifle in position on the shoulder, the left shoulder and arm relaxed onto the side or hip and the weight of the body-rifle system balanced over the feet, look through the sights. Do they point at

Step 6. Select a hand-wrist position that completes the support column for the rifle. The hand-wrist position must fill the distance between the hip and the bottom of the rifle.

the target or do they point above or below the target? At this point, it is critical not to force the rifle up or down to get the sights pointing at the target. The correct way to do this is to select a left hand-wrist position that fills the support gap between the left hip and the rifle fore-end. A good mid-range starting position is to keep the wrist straight and either set the rifle on top of a closed fist or support the rifle between the thumb and the first knuckle. Either of these options will work well for most shooters. However, shooters with proportionately longer arms and shorter torsos will have rifle sights pointing high with either of these hand positions. By breaking the wrist and resting the rifle in the flat of the hand or by keeping the wrist straight and dropping the rifle down into the fork of the hand they should be able to comfortably bring the sights down to the target. Conversely, shooters with proportionately shorter arms and longer torsos need a wrist-hand position that adds more length to the support column. They can achieve this by resting the rifle between the spit fingers and thumb, up on the second knuckles or, highest of all, on the thumb and fingertips. The chart illustrates all of these left hand-wrist options in order of height.

Adjusting the position by shifting the rifle up or down to place the sights at the level of the target while the position is relaxed and balanced is as much of the concept of natural point of aim as a coach or instructor should introduce to new shooters. Simply have them select a hand position that raises the sights to the level of the target, keep their feet turned 90 to 100 degrees away from the target and shoot by bringing the sights onto the target. Later, after many hundreds of dry and live fire repetitions, fine adjustments in rifle height and slight horizontal shifts that remain within the 90-100 degree turn standard can be introduced, but not now!

As soon as a new standing position is developed that applies these steps correctly, it is important to teach new shooters to check their positions before each shot. Once their feet are in place, they must learn not to move their feet until they finish a firing exercise. When placing the rifle in position for each shot, every shooter should make these checks before starting to fire the shot:

1. That the **butt-plate location** in the shoulder is the same for every shot.
2. That the **left elbow** is under the rifle.
3. That the **left shoulder and arm are relaxed** down onto the side or hip.
4. That the **body-rifle weight is balanced** over the feet.

Hand-Wrist Positions for the Left Support Arm, from lowest (on left) to highest (on right)



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Once the basic standing position is established, the shooter must complete many dry fire and live fire repetitions in the position to become comfortable with it. As this experience base expands, the stability of the position will become better and better and the scores higher and higher, that is, as long as the position adequately incorporates the features that best ensure standing position stability: 1) the feet are turned so that the body faces 90 to 100 degrees away from the target, 2) the body is configured so that there is a straight column of support from the feet straight up through the left hip and elbow to the rifle and 3) the rifle-body weight supported by that column is relaxed and balanced over the feet.

Common New Shooter Mistakes in Standing

Coaches of new shooters must be especially alert to detect and correct these common mistakes:

1. **Incorrect body turn**—too little or too much body turn makes it impossible to have a straight column of support under the rifle and upper body and difficult to balance the position.
2. **Left elbow not under rifle**—incorrect elbow positioning misaligns the column of support.
3. **Left hip not under rifle**—incorrect hip position misaligns the support column and makes attaining good balance more difficult.
4. **Butt too low in shoulder**—when the head is tipped down too far to see through the sights comfortably, the butt must be raised in the shoulder and a higher left hand-wrist position must be selected.
5. **Left arm not relaxed down onto side or hip**—this means the rifle is being supported with muscles instead of bones—relax the arm down onto the side or hip and, if necessary, select a higher hand position.



Savage Junior Smallbore Rifle

Savage Junior Smallbore Rifle Now Available to CMP Clubs. The Savage Mark I-FVT single shot .22 cal. rimfire junior smallbore target rifle can now be purchased by CMP-affiliated clubs, youth camps, 4-H Shooting Sports clubs and BSA organizations for \$212.00 each through a special marketing agreement between Savage and the CMP. The rifle is sized for juniors at 5 1/4 pounds, has an adjustable receiver sight and an excellent trigger. Any CMP-affiliated organization with a junior shooting program may apply to the CMP for a purchase eligibility certificate. The \$212.00 cost includes sights and shipping. Interested organizations should first download the informational brochure and application form that is available on the CMP web site at <http://www.odcmp.com/Programs/Savage.pdf>. To purchase these rifles, organizations must first apply to the CMP to obtain a certificate of purchase eligibility and instructions to order the rifles. If you have questions about this program, contact CMP Program Sales: (419) 635-2141 ext. 1116; email clubrifle@odcmp.com.