

THE KNEELING POSITION

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The positions your instructors have placed you in look quite good. Some of you are using a low kneeling on the side of your foot instead of using a kneeling roll. This is acceptable, but it is more difficult to be consistent in the low position because of the discomfort. I'm not saying you can't shoot good scores in it, because you can.

Margaret and I both shot on the side of our foot at one time. But when I went to the USAMU, they gave me a book on shooting and told me to work on using a kneeling roll. My scores went down, really down at first, and I disliked the new position. But by staying with it, the scores started coming back up until I began averaging higher kneeling scores than I had ever shot with my old positions. However, if you feel relaxed shooting on the side of your foot, have a good hold and feel that you can shoot a good score, then don't give it up. If you are having difficulty, you may want to consider learning the use of a kneeling roll which is used by most shooters in the world.

In either kneeling position, sometimes no matter how hard you try, it seems impossible to get into a good relaxed position with a good hold. When this happens the best thing you can do is get up, walk around, then get back into it. The reason for this is because sometimes we are a little careless getting into position and do not properly check everything we should that makes the hold steady. You should have a check list to remind you of the things you should do to make your position natural and solid, instead of making modifications which generally add to your problems.

For the ease of this class, we will refer to a right-handed shooter. Naturally everything will be opposite for a left-handed shooter. To assume the kneeling position the body should face approximately 15° to 30° to the right of the line of fire. The right leg is a maximum of 45° to the right. This is called shooting out of your position. Most shooters have trouble kneeling because they shoot across their position instead of out of it.

It all starts with proper placement of the kneeling roll, which is placed under the instep of the right foot. Once the roll is in place, the foot should be as near vertical as possible. The heel is against the base of the spine or slightly to the right. You should try to sit more on the bottom of the heel rather than the back of it. The toe is firmly against the surface and not bent under. The body weight is then relaxed down on the right foot with very little pressure on the right knee. The left leg is vertical or may be pulled back slightly. The left foot is turned parallel to the right leg. The sling is high on the arm. The flat part of the left elbow just behind the point is placed on the flat part of the left knee. The left arm is not forced under the rifle, but extends naturally as in the prone position, with the left hand relaxed against the fore-end stop. The right arm is relaxed and the hand only grips the rifle with enough tension to control the trigger. The rifle is then canted slightly into the position to allow a good head position and then the whole position is relaxed down. If your natural point is off to one side, a correction from one side of the target to the other can be made by simply moving the left

toe only one centimeter right or left. Large errors are created by moving the whole foot or right leg. The most common error made when you tire, is to move the right leg more open or to the right. This forces the left elbow under the rifle forcing you to shoot across your position and causing a problem with horizontal hold. To correct this problem more, move the right leg back toward the target. Relax straight down or slump onto the kneeling roll into the position. Some shooters misinterpret this and lean forward. This takes your weight off the roll and onto your left elbow causing poor hold and rapid fatigue.

Women can use a wider angle with the right leg because they are generally more flexible than men. Do not go beyond a relaxed placement however. If your right leg is strained to keep the angle, it will throw the entire position off by forcing the right shoulder back and the left elbow under the rifle. If the butt of the rifle seems to be pulling out of your shoulder, this could be the problem.

Do not overlook the important little things like natural point of aim on the target in any position. Never force your position. You will go to ranges where the firing line is not level. You should try to level your point, but if you can't there are several minor adjustments that can be made that will not damage your basic position. You can pull your left leg back slightly. This will lower your point of aim. Your sling could be tightened or loosened one notch. The fore-end could be in or out one centimeter, or the butt plate could be raised or lowered slightly. It is not necessary to make all of these adjustments. Usually one will solve your problem.

MA: How do you feel about shooting off the mat in kneeling?

EK: It's best to shoot right off the concrete. Your left foot should never be on a mat. You have very little contact with the right knee anyway as your weight is over the kneeling roll. To attain the low kneeling you just slump down, which may mean you need to move the fore-end stop out just a little bit, lengthen your sling a little bit and perhaps raise your butt plate. These adjustments should be small. Then let your shoulders relax and slump forward a bit. The same principles apply when using the side of your foot instead of the kneeling roll.

MM: For those of you who learned kneeling with a free rifle instead of a standard rifle, the relaxed slump forward helps put a little more weight out on the barrel, which the rifle doesn't have and it will give you a better hold.

BK: Right. The weight stays over the kneeling roll, but the slump of the shoulders adds a little more weight on the supporting elbow, locking the position in. Whereas, when you kneel and stay erect, you have a more delicate point of balance. This kind of position is alright for gallery, but not good outdoors where you may take some wind. Rather than having to change from indoor to outdoor, it's better to develop the more steady position that will work well in all conditions.

In kneeling, your rifle should hold almost as steady as in prone. Movement is usually a result of overholding if you have developed a sound position.

MA: Margaret, maybe you would like to talk about the right hand with standard rifle as opposed to free rifle since you have put a lot of time in on standard rifle.

MM: Most of you put your rifle in your shoulder with the use of the pistol grip. You should put the standard rifle in your shoulder with your right hand on the butt with your elbow high, so you really get it into the shoulder solid and the same place each time. Then take hold of the pistol grip and relax down. This way your rifle butt is in solid against your coat and shoulder and won't move on you. Also, you need to grip the pistol grip just slightly more on standard rifle than free rifle. I don't really pull back as I do in offhand, but I grip just enough with my fingers to keep a little tension in my right arm which gives me control over the standard rifle. You can pull back slightly. If your right arm is completely relaxed as it is with free rifle, the slightest tension will start moving your rifle erratically. A slight tension to begin with seems to control the rifle better. You use a lot more muscle shooting standard rifle than in free rifle. With free rifle, you just relax and let the hook do the work of keeping the rifle in place.

MA: Are the guys at MTU shooting their kneeling a little more forward than was once advocated?

BK: Yes, we used to shoot kneeling pretty straight up, but now all the good shooters are slumping forward. This applies to standing with the free rifle. Shooters let the head relax forward onto the stock a little bit more.

EA: If you shoot low kneeling on the side of your foot, should you shoot off the mat.

BK: Your right foot should be on the mat, otherwise it is too painful for the ankle. The left foot should be on a solid surface. However, using the mat is not as stable as the concrete contact of the kneeling roll position.

EA: Some ranges have slick concrete.

BK: Then you might get a thin, hard rubber mat and shoot low kneeling with both feet on it. You could also spray a little Firm Grip on the surface. However, a slick surface will not effect a person using a kneeling roll.

Something else I wanted to mention - when you shoot a bad shot, most shooters get mad and tense up. Instead of doing this you need to make yourself relax, understand why you shot a bad shot - was it conditions or was it your follow through. Try to figure out what caused the bad shot. Thinking about why will help you settle down. Get your thoughts together and then put full concentration on the correct sequence of shooting the shot. When you tense up, you change your position from the normal and you begin to muscle the rifle causing more bad shots. Again, remember instead of tightening up, concentrate on relaxing and the correct sequence to fire the next shot. We all remember why we shot our bad shots, but we don't remember why we shot our good shots. This is a mistake. When you have a good performance, write down what you did that made it right and try to repeat it.

As you improve, you'll start shooting tens. You can be too aware of this and let it destroy the use of your subconscious. But you can also make this work for you. See how many consecutive tens you can shoot in a difficult position such as standing. When you drop a shot, then forget it and start again. You'll be able to string the first ones fairly easily because you are performing well and concentrating becomes easy. You need to experience success. This is one way to prepare

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yourself. Another is to be able to start concentrating on how you are going to shoot the match before you move onto the line and continue this concentration until the last shot is fired.

A good position is a thing of beauty and the coach as well as the shooter knows when it is right. Proper position along with the intergraded act of firing a shot are absolutely necessary to allow you to place 100% of your concentration on firing the shot and producing the maximum effort necessary to win.

MA: Bill, thank you for working with us on kneeling. It takes a lot of thinking and analyzing to develop a really sound kneeling position.