



The Flyer

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Club Newsletter



Ready to Try a Match at Airfield Shooting Club?

Safe, structured, and fun—that is the heart of competition at the Airfield Shooting Club in Wakefield, Virginia. Whether you are brand-new to organized shooting or already comfortable on the range, ASC competitions offer a welcoming way to build skill, meet other members, and enjoy the shooting sports in a controlled environment. The goal is not to pressure anyone into shooting faster than they are ready for. The goal is to help every participant become safer, smoother, and more confident. At ASC, we believe that good match habits begin with patience, preparation, and respect for the range commands. In other words, slow is smooth, and smooth becomes fast.

What We Shoot

ASC offers several competition disciplines, giving shooters and archers a variety of ways to participate. Rimfire events are especially popular because .22 LR rifles and pistols are accurate, approachable, and enjoyable for a wide range of skill levels. Depending on the event, rimfire may include benchrest-style precision shooting, steel targets, Know-Your-Limits challenges, or other friendly formats that reward consistency and fundamentals.

Defensive and action pistol matches give handgun shooters a chance to test accuracy,

safe gun handling, and decision-making under a structured course of fire. These matches are not about reckless speed. They are about following directions, moving safely when required, maintaining muzzle discipline, and making accurate hits within the rules of the stage. Bowling Pin matches are another club favorite because the concept is simple and exciting: clear the pins from the table safely and efficiently. The immediate feedback makes it fun for both shooters and spectators.

Shotgun shooters can enjoy traditional clay target games such as skeet, trap, and 5-Stand. These events challenge timing, focus, and smooth gun movement while providing an enjoyable social atmosphere. ASC also supports archery through field and 3-D opportunities, giving bowhunters, target archers, families, and youth another way to participate in outdoor marksmanship. No matter the discipline, the common thread is safety, sportsmanship, and steady improvement.

How a Match Day Works

Most match days follow a simple and predictable flow. Participants should plan to arrive early, usually 30 to 45 minutes before the scheduled start, so there is enough time to park, unload gear properly, sign in, ask questions, and get settled before the safety brief begins. New shooters should let the

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Match Director or check-in volunteer know that it is their first time. That one simple statement helps the staff place them with experienced shooters who can explain the process and keep the day comfortable.

After sign-in, the Match Director or Range Safety Officer will conduct a safety briefing. This is one of the most important parts of the day. The briefing covers range commands, emergency procedures, course-of-fire details, reset duties, scoring expectations, and any special notes for that match. Shooters are then assigned to squads, benches, flights, or rotations depending on the discipline. Once shooting begins, participants take turns completing the course of fire while others help reset targets, paste paper, set pins, score targets, or prepare the next relay.

At the end of the match, scores are usually collected and results may be announced or posted according to the event format. While everyone enjoys seeing how they performed, ASC matches are about more than score sheets. They are about safe participation, learning something new, and leaving the range better than when you arrived.

Safety Is Our Culture

ASC operates with a strong safety-first mindset. A cold range means firearms remain unloaded with actions open until a shooter is on the firing line and has been instructed to load by the Range Safety Officer or Match Director. That one rule sets the tone for the day and keeps everyone working from the same standard.

Every participant is expected to maintain muzzle discipline, keep their finger off the trigger until they are ready to fire, and follow all range commands immediately. Eye and ear protection are required for shooters and spectators in active range areas. Shooters should also pay attention during the safety brief for the location of first-aid equipment, emergency procedures, and any designated medical contacts for the event. Safe habits are never assumed, and reminders are not meant to embarrass anyone. They are part of a healthy range culture where everyone looks out for everyone else.

Who Can Participate

ASC competitions are designed to be welcoming. Many events are open to members, guests, and the public, although each match may have its own requirements. The ASC calendar and event listing should always be checked for current participation details. Spectators are generally welcome as long as they follow range rules, wear proper eye and ear protection, and remain in designated areas.

Youth participation is encouraged when appropriate for the discipline, equipment, and match format. Young shooters must be accompanied by a parent or guardian and must be able to follow instructions safely. For many families, competition day becomes a great opportunity to teach responsibility, patience, and respect for firearms or archery equipment in a supervised environment.

Costs and Gear

New competitors do not need to buy everything at once. The best advice is to start with what you already have, make sure it is safe and reliable, and learn from there. A new pistol shooter may need a safe firearm, magazines, ammunition, a proper case, eye and ear protection, and any holster or magazine carrier required by the match. A rimfire shooter may need a reliable .22 rifle or pistol, ammunition, magazines, a rest or bags if the event calls for them, and basic range gear. Shotgun shooters should bring the appropriate shotgun, shells allowed for the event, and the gear needed to safely carry and handle their firearm. Archers should bring properly maintained equipment, arrows, and any protective gear they normally use.

Most events may have a modest match fee to help cover targets, clays, pins, backers, paint, pasters, or other supplies. Because fees and requirements can change by event, shooters should avoid guessing and instead check the ASC calendar or program page for current information. It is also wise to bring water, snacks, weather-appropriate clothing, sunscreen, a small towel, a chamber flag if required, and extra ammunition. Running out of ammunition halfway through a match is a preventable frustration.

Volunteering Keeps Matches Moving

ASC matches run on volunteer effort. Every safe and enjoyable event depends on people who arrive early, help set targets, paint steel, move tables, score targets, reset pins, run timers, paste holes, and clean up afterward.



New shooters should not be shy about helping. In fact, volunteering is one of the fastest ways to learn how a match works.

The culture is simple: when you are not shooting, look for a safe way to help. Resetting targets, carrying supplies, and assisting with teardown may not sound glamorous, but those jobs make the match possible. Over time, regular volunteers may choose to learn more advanced roles, such as scorekeeping, stage setup, or serving as a Range Safety Officer. The club is stronger when members support the programs they enjoy.

Where to Find Dates and Contacts

The ASC website calendar is the best place to confirm current match dates, start times, locations, fees, seasonal changes, weather updates, and contact information. Program pages may also provide helpful discipline-specific information about equipment, rules, and expectations. Because schedules can change due to weather, range maintenance, holidays, or volunteer availability, shooters should check the calendar during match week before loading the car.

Questions should be directed to the Match Director or contact listed in the calendar entry. If no specific name is listed, the calendar entry or ASC program page is still the best starting point. New shooters are encouraged to ask questions ahead of time, especially if they are unsure about gear, ammunition, holster requirements, or whether a match is suitable for a first-time participant.

Quick FAQ

Many people ask whether they need to be a member to compete. The answer depends on the event, so the best guidance is to check the ASC calendar listing. Many club competitions are welcoming to guests or the public, but each event may have its own requirements.

Another common question is whether someone can simply watch before shooting. In most cases, observing is a great idea. Bring eye and ear protection, check in when you arrive, and ask where spectators should stand. Watching a match first can make the first time competing much less intimidating.

New shooters also worry about not having the right gear. That is normal. Start with the basics, ask the Match Director what is required, and avoid buying equipment before you understand the match. Experienced competitors are usually happy to explain what works, what is optional, and what can wait.

Weather and seasonal schedules can also affect events. Some programs may pause during certain times of the year or adjust based on conditions. Always check the ASC calendar for the latest information before heading to the range.

Your Invitation

If you have been curious about competition, ASC is a great place to begin. Pick a discipline that interests you, check the ASC calendar, read the event notes, and arrive 30 to 45 minutes early with eye and ear protection, safe

equipment, and an open mind. Introduce yourself at sign-in and let the Match Director know you are new. You may be surprised how quickly someone offers to help.

Competition at ASC is not just about winning. It is about learning safe habits, improving fundamentals, supporting fellow shooters, and enjoying time at the range with a community that cares. Whether you come for rimfire, defensive pistol, bowling pins, shotgun, or archery, you will find a place where safety comes first and progress is worth celebrating.

The Importance of Muzzle Control at the Range

Safety is the cornerstone of any shooting activity, and muzzle control is one of the most critical aspects of firearm safety. Whether you are a seasoned marksman or a first-time shooter, proper muzzle discipline ensures a safe and enjoyable experience for everyone at the range.

What is Muzzle Control?

Muzzle control means always keeping the barrel of your firearm pointed in a safe direction. At the range, this typically means keeping the muzzle pointed downrange at all times, whether the firearm is loaded or unloaded. This simple practice minimizes the risk of accidental injury or damage in the event of an unintended discharge.

Why is Muzzle Control So Important?

Preventing Accidents: Even with safety engaged and the chamber empty, a firearm should always be treated as if it is loaded. Maintaining proper muzzle



control ensures that if a round is unintentionally discharged, it is safely directed and less likely to cause harm.

Building Trust and Confidence: Muzzle control demonstrates respect for others at the range. When everyone practices proper discipline, it creates a safer and more comfortable environment for all participants.

Upholding Range Rules and Etiquette: Muzzle control is a fundamental rule at any shooting facility. Adhering to this standard reflects positively on you as a responsible shooter and ensures that the range remains a safe space for all members and guests.

Tips for Practicing Muzzle Control

Always Point Downrange: Ensure that your firearm is pointed toward the target area whenever you are handling it, whether loading, unloading, or simply holding it.

Be Aware of Your Surroundings: Keep an eye on others at the range and ensure your actions do not inadvertently point your muzzle in an unsafe direction.

Use a Chamber Flag: When your firearm is not in use, insert a chamber flag to clearly indicate it is unloaded and safe. This reinforces good habits and gives others peace of mind.

Practice Even Off the Range: Safe firearm handling begins with habits you develop at home. Always practice muzzle control during cleaning, transport, or dry-fire practice.

Muzzle control is not just a rule; it's a mindset every shooter must adopt to ensure everyone's safety at the range. By consistently practicing proper muzzle discipline, we can maintain a safe,

enjoyable environment for all shooters and continue to uphold the highest standards of responsible firearm use. Let's make safety our top priority—because it's everyone's responsibility!

Clash of Steel: Sanford vs. Schoner — A Summer Showdown at Airfield Shooting Club

At a recent board meeting of the Airfield Shooting Club, what began as routine discussion quickly turned into something far more exciting—a challenge. Not just any challenge, but a head-to-head gauntlet thrown down by Rimfire Challenge Match Director Thomas Sanford against Bowling Pin Match Director Art Schoner.

The stakes? Bragging rights, pride, and the unofficial title of **"Top Steel Shooter at ASC."**

In a moment that will likely be talked about around the benches and berms for months, Sanford laid it out plainly—it's time to settle the debate of which discipline reigns supreme: precision-driven rimfire steel or fast-paced, hard-hitting bowling pin shooting.

Schoner, never one to back down, accepted.

And just like that, a summer event was born.

Two Disciplines, Two Styles

This isn't just a competition—it's a clash of philosophies.

Rimfire Challenge (Sanford's Arena):

- Precision over power

- Speed balanced with discipline
- Small targets that punish even the slightest error
- A game of wind calls, consistency, and control

Bowling Pin Matches (Schoner's Domain):

- Raw energy and decisive hits
- Targets that must be driven off the table—not just struck
- Fast transitions and aggressive shooting
- A test of recoil management and timing

Each director brings years of experience and a loyal following, and both formats demand skill—just in very different ways.

While final details are still being ironed out, early discussions suggest a **hybrid steel tournament** that will push competitors outside their comfort zones:

- Rimfire stages emphasizing precision and target sequencing
- Bowling pin stages requiring power, speed, and clean clears
- Potential mixed stages combining elements of both disciplines
- Head-to-head shoot-offs between Sanford and Schoner

This won't just test who is best in their own game—it will test who can adapt, overcome, and perform under pressure.

What makes this event special isn't just the competition—it's what it represents for the club.

- **Community Engagement:** Expect strong turnout from both rimfire and pistol shooters



- **Cross-Discipline Exposure:** A chance for members to try something new
- **Friendly Rivalry:** The kind that builds camaraderie while fueling performance
- **Spectator Appeal:** This will be just as fun to watch as it is to shoot

The real question is when the steel stops ringing and the last pin hits the ground, one question will be answered:

Does precision beat power—or does power overwhelm precision?

Sanford vs. Schoner.

Rimfire vs. Pins.

This summer, at Airfield Shooting Club, we find out.

Stay tuned to the club calendar and announcements for official match details. One thing is certain—this is a match you won't want to miss.

From Good to Great

What Separates Consistently Top Shooters at ASC from the Rest

Spend enough time on the firing line at Airfield Shooting Club and a pattern becomes clear. There are many good shooters—competent, consistent, and capable of producing tight groups and competitive scores. But then there are the few who seem to remain at or near the top month after month, regardless of conditions. Whether the wind is calm or switching, whether the field is strong or light, their performance holds. The difference between good and great at ASC is not luck, and it is rarely equipment. It is discipline, applied consistently over time.

Great shooters protect the fundamentals relentlessly. While most shooters understand the basics—natural point of aim, consistent bag pressure, clean trigger press, and proper follow-through—the best competitors refuse to compromise them under any circumstances. They don't allow shortcuts to creep in mid-relay, and they don't abandon their process after a mistake. Where others get casual, they stay deliberate. They don't get bored with fundamentals; they rely on them.

They also understand that matches are not shot on rhythm—they are shot on conditions. On the 50-yard rimfire line at ASC, wind is rarely static. Good

shooters often fire when it "feels right," maintaining a cadence. Great shooters, however, watch the flags and mirage continuously, waiting for their specific condition to return. They are willing to pause, even when others are shooting, and then commit decisively when the moment aligns. They know that impatience costs more points than hesitation.

Another defining trait is how quickly they recover from mistakes. Every shooter drops a point now and then, but top competitors don't allow one mistake to become two or three. There is no visible frustration, no rushed follow-up shot. Instead, they take a breath, reset, and return immediately to their process. Their ability to recover—quietly and efficiently—is one of the clearest separators on match day.

You'll also notice that great shooters rarely blame their equipment. They don't chase single impacts with constant adjustments, and they don't tinker mid-relay unless there is a clear and consistent issue. They understand that most problems originate from wind, process, or tension—not hardware. Their equipment choices are deliberate and stable, not reactive.

Their approach to practice is equally disciplined. They don't simply go to the range to shoot; they train with purpose. They simulate full match conditions, track performance, document wind behavior, and focus on specific weaknesses. In many cases, their practice sessions are more demanding than the matches themselves. As a result, competition feels familiar, not stressful.

One of the most overlooked areas where great shooters excel is in the middle of the relay. Most competitors start strong and finish with urgency,





but the middle is where focus fades and small mistakes accumulate. Top shooters anticipate this. They mentally break the relay into segments, reset regularly, and maintain the same level of discipline from start to finish. They understand that matches are often decided not at the beginning or end, but in the quiet middle where others lose focus.

They also practice disciplined shot calling. They know where the reticle lifted, how the trigger broke, and whether the condition changed. There are no surprises. This level of awareness allows them to make informed decisions rather than reactive ones. It builds confidence because nothing feels random.

Emotionally, they remain steady. Watch them closely and you'll see little difference in their demeanor whether they've just fired a perfect shot or dropped a point. They don't show frustration, and they don't rush to recover. They conserve emotional energy, keeping their focus where it belongs—on execution.

Perhaps most importantly, they understand the long game. They don't measure success by a single match. They track progress over time, identify patterns, and make deliberate improvements across a season. One bad day doesn't derail them, and one good day doesn't inflate them. Their consistency is built through patience and perspective.

In the end, the difference between good and great at Airfield Shooting Club is rarely dramatic. It's often one or two points, one disciplined decision, or one avoided mistake. Great shooters are not flawless—they are consistent. They protect their fundamentals, manage their mindset, and execute with discipline every time they step to the

line. And over time, that consistency is what sets them apart.

How to Improve Between Matches

Making the Most of Limited Range Time at ASC

Not everyone has unlimited time at the range, and at Airfield Shooting Club many shooters are balancing work, family, and other commitments with their time on the firing line. Yet some competitors continue to improve steadily between matches while others feel stuck. The difference is rarely about how much time they spend shooting. It is about how intentionally they use the time they have. Improvement between matches comes from focus, structure, and discipline—not from simply firing more rounds.

The first and most important shift is moving from volume to purpose. Too many shooters approach practice with the idea of "getting rounds in," but unstructured shooting often reinforces inconsistency rather than correcting it. Before every range session, you should be able to answer one simple question: what am I working on today? That focus might be wind discipline, trigger control, bag consistency, or shot calling—but it should be only one. A single clear objective will produce more improvement than an entire afternoon of unfocused shooting.

Even with limited time, a structured one-hour session can be highly effective. Begin with a short fundamentals check, confirming your natural point of aim, bag placement, and basic shot execution. This is not the time for speed or experimentation. It is a quiet confirmation that your foundation is solid. From there, move into a focused

block of skill isolation, where you deliberately work on your chosen objective. If wind reading is your weakness, spend time observing flags and mirage and only firing in repeatable conditions. If trigger control is the issue, slow down and focus on clean, consistent breaks. This is where real improvement takes place.

Once you have isolated the skill, transition into applied practice. This is where you begin to connect what you've worked on to real match conditions. Shoot a short card, introduce light time awareness, and maintain your full shot process. The goal is not perfection, but controlled execution. Afterward, take a few minutes to evaluate. Ask yourself what improved, what broke down, and what you will focus on next time. Writing these observations down turns each session into a stepping stone instead of a disconnected effort.

Between matches, it is critical to prioritize weaknesses rather than comfort. It is easy to shoot well on calm days and feel confident, but growth comes from working on what challenges you. If wind is giving you trouble, practice in the wind. If you struggle with mid-relay focus, simulate full cards. If you tend to rush, deliberately slow yourself down. Improvement happens just outside your comfort zone, not within it.

Not all progress requires live fire. Dry fire remains one of the most underused tools available. At home, you can safely refine trigger control, reinforce a consistent grip, and rehearse your pre-shot routine. Even ten focused minutes a few times a week builds discipline and consistency without using ammunition. Over time, these small repetitions translate directly to improved performance on the range.



Tracking your performance is another essential piece. Improvement is not measured by perfect groups but by trends. Record your group sizes, note wind conditions, and observe how consistently you are calling your shots. Patterns will begin to emerge. If your worst groups are improving, you are progressing—even if your best groups look the same. Without tracking, it becomes difficult to distinguish real improvement from temporary success.

To better prepare for competition, introduce light pressure into your practice. Keep score. Use a timer. Set simple performance standards. Most importantly, do not restart a string after a bad shot. Finish it. This builds familiari-



ty with consequence, which is the key difference between practice and matches. When your practice includes accountability, match day begins to feel much more familiar.

Perhaps the most important habit to protect between matches is your shot process. Every shot—whether in practice or competition—should follow the same sequence. Confirm your condition, confirm your position, apply your mental cue, and execute with proper follow-through. Avoid casual shooting habits, because practice habits become

match habits. The more disciplined you are in practice, the more stable you will be under pressure.

It is also worth remembering that improvement does not require a high round count. In many cases, forty to sixty well-executed shots will produce far more benefit than double that number fired without purpose. Each shot should be observed, executed, and evaluated. Quality, not quantity, is what builds consistency.

Airfield Shooting Club offers a unique advantage in this process. The range provides consistent opportunities, varied conditions, and a community of

experienced shooters. Even when you are not actively shooting, you can learn by observing wind behavior, watching how others approach conditions, and asking questions between relays. Improvement does not only happen behind the trigger—it happens through awareness and engagement.

In the end, limited time is not a disadvantage if it is used correctly. Focused practice builds consistency, reinforces fundamentals, and reduces avoidable mistakes. Between matches, you are not just maintaining your skills—you

are shaping them. One deliberate session at a time is all it takes. That is how steady, reliable improvement happens at ASC.

Seeing Clearly: Understanding Scope Components and Why They Matter

For many shooters at the range—whether punching paper at 25 yards or chasing tight groups at 100—few pieces of equipment are as misunderstood and underappreciated as the rifle scope. To the untrained eye, it's simply a tube with glass. But to the recreational and competitive marksman alike, a scope is a precision instrument, and understanding its components is the difference between frustration and consistency, between guessing and knowing.

At its core, a rifle scope is designed to do one thing exceptionally well: allow the shooter to aim precisely. But how it accomplishes that is a combination of carefully engineered components working together. The **objective lens**, located at the front of the scope, gathers light and determines how bright and clear your sight picture will be. A larger objective lens—say 50mm versus 32mm—typically provides better light transmission, especially in low-light conditions, but may require higher mounting and introduce balance considerations. For the recreational shooter, this means clearer visibility during early morning or late evening sessions. For the competitive shooter, especially in disciplines like rimfire benchrest, it can mean the ability to better resolve target edges and subtle mirage.



Moving to the rear, the **ocular lens** (or eyepiece) focuses the image for your eye. This is where diopter adjustment comes into play. Properly setting the diopter ensures that the reticle appears sharp and defined. Many shooters overlook this step, assuming factory settings are sufficient, but an improperly adjusted ocular lens leads to eye strain and inconsistent aiming—small issues that become big problems over the course of a match.

Between these two lenses lies the heart of the scope: the **erector assembly**. This internal system controls magnification and reticle movement. When you adjust magnification on a variable power scope, you are manipulating this

something no serious competitor can afford.

The **reticle** itself—the crosshair or aiming pattern—is where the shooter interfaces most directly with the scope. Whether it’s a simple duplex or a more advanced Christmas-tree-style reticle, its design dictates how you aim, hold for wind, and compensate for drop. In recent years, first focal plane (FFP) reticles have become increasingly popular among competitive shooters because their subtensions remain consistent across all magnifications. Second focal plane (SFP) reticles, however, still dominate recreational shooting due to their simplicity and often lower cost. Choosing the right reticle isn’t about trends—it’s about application and understanding how you shoot.

and left alone. But for the competitive marksman, especially in disciplines requiring precision adjustments between shots or stages, turret quality is paramount. Repeatability, tactile feedback, and accurate tracking are non-negotiable. A scope that doesn’t track correctly introduces doubt—and doubt is the enemy of good shooting.

Another often overlooked component is the **parallax adjustment**, usually found as a side knob or adjustable objective. Parallax error occurs when the reticle and target are not on the same focal plane, causing the reticle to appear to move relative to the target when the shooter’s eye shifts. Eliminating parallax is essential for precision shooting. At 50 yards on a rimfire benchrest target, even a slight parallax

Photo from Vortex.com



assembly. In competitive shooting, especially disciplines like precision rifle or rimfire benchrest at ASC, consistent magnification behavior is critical. Any inconsistency can shift point of impact,

External adjustments come in the form of **turrets**, typically located on the top and side of the scope. These control elevation and windage. For the recreational shooter, turrets may be set once

error can be the difference between a clean center shot and dropping points.

Equally important is the **scope tube** itself, typically constructed from air-



craft-grade aluminum and available in sizes like 1-inch, 30mm, or 34mm. Larger tubes allow for greater internal adjustment range and improved structural rigidity. For the recreational shooter, durability and reliability are key. For the competitive shooter, especially those dialing for elevation and wind, increased adjustment range can be a significant advantage.

All of these components are tied together by one overarching factor: **optical quality**. Glass clarity, coatings, and light transmission separate entry-level scopes from high-end optics. While it's easy to assume that more expensive always means better, the real value lies in how well the scope performs for your specific application. A hunter or casual shooter may prioritize durability and low-light performance, while a competitive shooter may focus on edge-to-edge clarity and precise tracking.

So why does all of this matter?

For the recreational marksman, understanding scope components builds confidence. It removes the guesswork. When your shots aren't landing where expected, you can diagnose whether the issue lies in your fundamentals, your setup, or your equipment. It transforms a frustrating day at the range into a learning experience.

For the competitive shooter, knowledge of your scope is non-negotiable. Matches are often won and lost on the smallest margins. A misread turret, a poorly adjusted parallax, or an unclear reticle can cost points. But more importantly, confidence in your equipment allows you to focus entirely on execution—on reading the wind, managing your trigger, and calling your shots.

At ASC, where disciplines range from rimfire benchrest to steel challenges and beyond, we see this firsthand. The shooters who consistently perform at a high level aren't just skilled—they are intimately familiar with their equipment. They know how their scope behaves in changing light, how their turrets track, and how to quickly eliminate parallax. Their scope isn't just an accessory; it's an extension of their shooting system.

In the end, a rifle scope is more than a tool for seeing your target. It is a system of precision components that, when understood and properly used, elevates your shooting. Whether you're a weekend recreational shooter or chasing match wins, taking the time to understand your scope may be one of the most impactful improvements you can make.

Because in shooting, as in many things, clarity—both visual and mental—is everything.

Eliminating the Illusion: Why Parallax Adjustment Matters More Than You Think

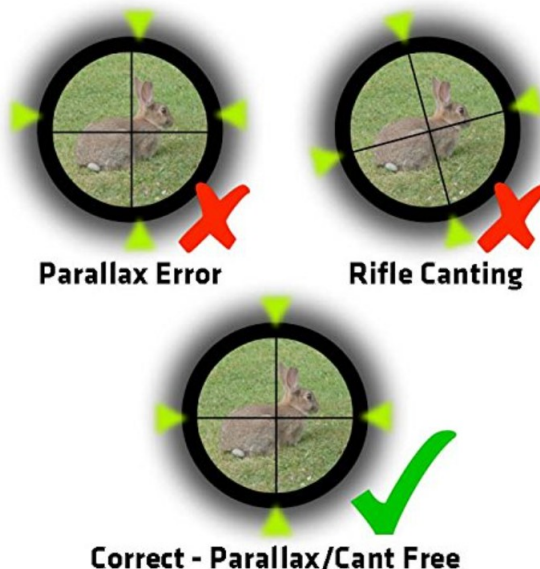
If there is one concept in rifle optics that quietly undermines accuracy—often without the shooter realizing it—it is parallax. Many shooters have heard the term. Fewer truly understand it. And even fewer consistently manage it. Yet for both the recreational shooter and the com-

petitive marksman, mastering parallax adjustment is one of the simplest ways to tighten groups and eliminate unexplained misses.

At its most basic level, parallax is an optical illusion. It occurs when the reticle and the target are not on the same focal plane inside the scope. When this happens, even a slight movement of your eye behind the scope causes the reticle to appear to shift across the target. The rifle hasn't moved. The target hasn't moved. But the aiming point appears to drift—and that illusion translates directly into point-of-impact error.

This is where **parallax adjustment** comes into play. Found either as a side-focus knob or an adjustable objective at the front of the scope, this control allows the shooter to bring the target image and reticle into the same focal plane. When properly adjusted, the reticle will remain perfectly still on the target, regardless of minor eye movement behind the scope. That stability is what precision demands.

For the recreational shooter, parallax





error often shows up as inconsistency. You may fire a tight group, only to see the next few shots open up for no apparent reason. You check your fundamentals—grip, trigger control, breathing—and everything feels right. But if parallax is not properly set, your eye position from shot to shot may be slightly different, causing subtle shifts in your point of aim. At shorter distances, this may only amount to a fraction of an inch. At longer distances, or on small targets, it can be the difference between a hit and a miss.

For the competitive shooter, especially in disciplines like rimfire benchrest at 50 yards or precision rifle matches at varying distances, parallax is not optional—it is critical. At ASC, where targets can be unforgiving and scoring rings are measured in tenths of an inch, even the smallest optical error becomes magnified. A shooter who neglects parallax adjustment is effectively introducing variability into every shot. And in competition, variability is the enemy.

One of the most common misconceptions is that parallax settings on the scope—those yardage markings on the adjustment knob—are precise. In reality, they are only approximate. Environmental conditions, lighting, and even individual eyesight can affect the true parallax-free setting. Relying solely on the numbers is a mistake. Instead, the correct method is visual and deliberate.

The process is straightforward. After settling into your shooting position, place the reticle on the target and slightly shift your head side to side or up and down while maintaining your position on the stock. If the reticle appears to move relative to the target, parallax is present. Adjust the parallax knob until that movement disappears.

When the reticle remains locked in place, you have achieved a true parallax-free condition.

This simple check takes only seconds, but its impact is profound.

Parallax adjustment also plays a significant role in reducing eye strain and improving target clarity. When the scope is properly adjusted, the image appears crisp and natural, allowing the shooter to focus entirely on execution. When it is not, the shooter may subconsciously fight the image, leading to fatigue over the course of a long practice session or match. In high-round-count environments, that fatigue compounds and begins to affect performance.

Another key consideration is consistency. Parallax should be adjusted every time the shooting distance changes. Many shooters set it once and forget it, especially when practicing at a fixed distance. But in dynamic shooting environments—such as transitioning between 25, 50, and 100 yards—the parallax setting must be updated to match the new target distance. Failing to do so reintroduces error at the worst possible time.

It is also important to understand the relationship between parallax and magnification. As magnification increases, parallax error becomes more noticeable. At lower magnifications, the error may be present but less apparent. At higher magnifications, especially above 10x or 15x, even small parallax misalignments can create significant reticle movement. This is why high-magnification scopes almost always include adjustable parallax, while many lower-power scopes are factory-set for a fixed distance—often around 100 yards.

For those shooting rimfire at 50 yards, this becomes particularly relevant. A scope with a fixed 100-yard parallax setting will inherently introduce error at 50 yards unless the shooter maintains a perfectly consistent cheek weld and eye position—something that is difficult to achieve shot after shot. Adjustable parallax eliminates that variable and allows the shooter to focus on what truly matters: breaking a clean shot.

At its core, parallax adjustment is about removing uncertainty. It ensures that where you think you are aiming is exactly where the rifle is pointed. It eliminates the illusion and replaces it with confidence.

The best shooters at ASC don't treat parallax as an afterthought. It is part of their pre-shot routine. Just like checking wind flags, confirming their natural point of aim, or settling their breathing, they verify that their scope is parallax-free before sending the shot. It becomes automatic—a habit that reinforces consistency and precision.

In the end, parallax is not a complicated concept, but it is a critical one. It is one of the few factors in shooting that can be completely controlled with a simple adjustment. And yet, it is often overlooked.

For the recreational shooter, learning to manage parallax will tighten groups and build confidence. For the competitive marksman, it is a foundational skill—one that separates good shooters from great ones.

Because when the reticle stops moving, and everything aligns as it should, you are left with the one thing every shooter is striving for: a true and honest shot.



Aim with Purpose: Reticle Design and Its Practical Applications

To many shooters, the reticle is simply the crosshair in the center of the scope—a reference point for aiming.

But for those who spend time refining their craft, the reticle becomes far more than that. It is a tool for measurement, a guide for correction, and in many cases, the difference between reacting to a shot and controlling it. Understanding reticle design—and more importantly, how to use it—is essential for both the recreational shooter and the competitive marksman.

At its simplest, the reticle provides a point of aim. Traditional designs like the duplex reticle, with its thick outer posts tapering to a fine center cross, were developed for quick target acqui-

sition and clarity in varying light conditions. These remain popular among recreational shooters and hunters because they are intuitive and uncluttered. When the goal is to place a shot on a clearly visible target at a known distance, simplicity works.

However, as shooting becomes more precise and conditions more dynamic, reticle design evolves to meet those demands. Modern reticles often incorporate **subtensions**—small hash marks or dots spaced at precise intervals. These are typically measured in minutes of angle (MOA) or milliradians (MRAD), both of which allow the shooter to quantify adjustments directly through the reticle. Instead of dialing a turret, the shooter can hold over or hold off using these reference points.

For the recreational marksman, this opens the door to a more interactive shooting experience. Rather than firing, observing impact, and then adjusting,

the shooter can begin to predict and correct in real time. If a shot lands slightly low, the reticle provides a built-in ruler to estimate how much correction is needed. Over time, this builds a deeper understanding of bullet behavior and environmental effects.

For the competitive shooter, reticle design becomes a critical component of performance. In disciplines where time, wind, and distance are constantly changing, the ability to quickly apply corrections without touching the turrets is invaluable. A well-designed reticle allows the shooter to stay in position, maintain focus, and execute follow-up shots with precision.

One of the most significant advancements in reticle design is the distinction between **first focal plane (FFP)** and **second focal plane (SFP)** scopes. In an FFP scope, the reticle scales with magnification, meaning the subtensions remain accurate at any power setting. This is particularly useful in competitions where magnification may change between shots or stages. In an SFP scope, the reticle remains the same size, and subtensions are only accurate at a specific magnification—usually the highest setting. While this requires more awareness from the shooter, SFP scopes often provide a cleaner sight picture and are more common in recreational use.

Another important aspect of reticle design is its application in **wind reading and hold-off**. Wind is one of the most challenging variables in shooting, and the reticle serves as the primary tool for managing it. Advanced reticles, often referred to as “Christmas tree” designs, include a grid of horizontal and vertical references below the center point. These allow the shooter to simultaneously hold for both elevation and wind. Instead of guessing or mak-





ing multiple adjustments, the shooter can visually map the correction and execute the shot in one motion.

At ASC, where wind conditions can shift quickly even at 50 or 100 yards, this becomes especially relevant. A shooter using a basic reticle may need to rely heavily on trial and error. A shooter using a well-understood reticle can read conditions, apply a precise hold, and stay ahead of the environment. The difference is not just in equipment—it is in how that equipment is used.

Reticles also play a role in **range estimation**, particularly in field shooting scenarios. By knowing the size of a target and using the reticle's subtensions, a shooter can estimate distance without a rangefinder. While this skill is more commonly associated with tactical or hunting applications, it reinforces a broader principle: the reticle is a measurement tool, not just an aiming point.

Clarity and usability are equally important. A reticle that is too busy can become distracting, especially for newer shooters. Too many lines and markings can obscure the target and slow down the shot process. On the other hand, a reticle that is too simple may lack the references needed for precise corrections. The ideal reticle strikes a balance—providing enough information to be useful without overwhelming the shooter.

Illumination is another feature found in many modern reticles. While often associated with low-light shooting, it can also help the reticle stand out against dark or complex backgrounds. However, illumination should be used thoughtfully. Too much brightness can cause the reticle to bloom and obscure fine aiming points, particularly at high-

er magnifications.

Ultimately, the effectiveness of any reticle comes down to familiarity. The best reticle in the world is useless if the shooter does not understand how to use it. This is why consistent practice with your chosen optic is so important. Learning where your holds correspond at different distances, how your reticle aligns with your ammunition, and how to quickly interpret its markings under pressure—these are the skills that turn a reticle from a static design into a dynamic tool.

For the recreational shooter, investing time in understanding your reticle will make range sessions more productive and enjoyable. It transforms shooting from a reactive activity into a deliberate one. For the competitive marksman, it is a cornerstone of performance. Matches are often decided by the ability to make fast, accurate corrections, and the reticle is at the center of that process.

At its essence, the reticle is your interface with the rifle. It is where vision meets execution. When properly understood and applied, it provides clarity, precision, and control.

Because in shooting, the difference between seeing the target and truly aiming at it often comes down to the lines in your glass—and what you know how to do with them.

Dial or Hold? Understanding Practical Differences in Firing Solutions

Every shot you take—whether at a steel plate, a paper bullseye, or a small scoring ring in competition—requires a

firing solution. That solution is your answer to a simple but unforgiving question: *Where do I aim to hit exactly where I intend?*

For most shooters, especially at ASC, firing solutions come down to two primary methods: **dialing your corrections** or **holding using your reticle**. Both are valid. Both are effective. But understanding the practical differences between them—and when to use each—is what separates a reactive shooter from a deliberate one.

Before comparing methods, it's important to understand what a firing solution actually includes. At its core, it accounts for **bullet drop**, **wind drift**, and sometimes environmental factors like temperature or elevation. Whether you calculate it mentally, reference a dope card, or rely on a ballistic app, the goal is always the same: align your point of aim with your point of impact.

The difference lies in *how* you apply that correction.

Dialing involves physically adjusting your scope's turrets—typically elevation (up/down) and sometimes windage (left/right)—to match your calculated correction. Once dialed, your reticle's center point becomes your true point of aim again.

For the recreational shooter, dialing simplifies the shot. You place the crosshair directly on the target and break the shot without worrying about holding over or off. This is especially useful when shooting known distances with time to prepare.

For the competitive marksman, dialing shines in **precision-focused disciplines** like rimfire benchrest. When conditions are stable and targets are small, dialing



allows for the most exact alignment possible. You remove visual estimation and rely on mechanical precision.

But dialing has its tradeoffs. It takes time. It requires confidence in your turret tracking. And if conditions change—especially wind—you may find yourself chasing adjustments rather than executing shots. In fast-paced or changing environments, dialing everything can quickly become a liability.

Holding uses the reticle’s subtensions—those hash marks or grid lines—to apply corrections without touching the turrets. Instead of dialing 1.5 MOA up, you simply hold 1.5 MOA above the target using the reticle.

For recreational shooters, holding can feel less intuitive at first. It requires familiarity with your reticle and an understanding of what each mark represents. But once learned, it becomes incredibly flexible.

For competitive shooters, holding is often the preferred method in **dynamic or time-limited stages**. When engaging multiple targets at different distances, dialing between each shot is simply too slow. Holding allows you to transition quickly, apply corrections instantly, and stay in rhythm.

Wind management is where holding truly excels. Conditions rarely stay constant, especially at ASC where even a light shift can move a rimfire bullet significantly at 50 or 100 yards. Instead of dialing wind and constantly adjusting, most experienced shooters hold for wind—making real-time corrections shot by shot.

The tradeoff? Holding introduces the potential for visual error. Misreading a reticle mark or misjudging a hold can

lead to missed shots. It demands practice and confidence.

In practical terms, the best shooters don’t choose one method exclusively—they use both, depending on the situation.

Dial when:

- The distance is known and stable
- Time is not a factor
- Maximum precision is required (benchrest, zeroing, slow fire)
- Environmental conditions are relatively consistent

Hold when:

- Engaging multiple targets at varying distances
- Time is limited (competition stages, timed drills)
- Wind conditions are changing rapidly
- Quick follow-up shots are needed

A common hybrid approach is to **dial elevation and hold wind**. This gives you the precision of a dialed elevation solution while maintaining the flexibility to adjust for wind in real time. It’s a method widely used by experienced shooters because it balances stability and adaptability.

No matter which method you use, consistency is everything. A firing solution is only as good as your ability to apply it the same way, every time.

For recreational shooters, this means picking a method and practicing it until it becomes second nature. If you’re constantly switching between dialing and holding without a clear plan, you introduce confusion—and confusion

leads to misses.

For competitive shooters, confidence in your system is critical. You must trust your data, your equipment, and your process. Whether you dial or hold, hesitation is costly. The best shooters make decisions quickly and execute without doubt.

At ASC, firing solutions vary widely depending on the discipline. In rimfire benchrest, dialing is often the dominant approach due to the emphasis on precision and repeatability. In steel matches or rimfire challenges, holding becomes more common due to time pressure and changing target arrays.

What separates top performers is not just their equipment—it’s their ability to apply the right firing solution at the right time. They understand when to slow down and dial, and when to stay aggressive and hold.

A firing solution is more than numbers—it’s a strategy. Dialing and holding are simply tools within that strategy. The key is understanding their strengths, their limitations, and how they fit into your shooting style.

For the recreational marksman, learning both methods will make you more versatile and confident on the range. For the competitive shooter, mastering their application is essential to staying consistent under pressure.

Because at the end of the day, every shot comes down to one question: *Did you apply the right solution, the right way, at the right time?*



Minimum Essential Equipment for a Gun Range: A Practical Guide for Safe and Effective Shooting

Whether you're a brand-new shooter or a seasoned competitor, having the right equipment at the gun range is critical for safety, performance, and overall enjoyment. While it's easy to get caught up in high-end gear and accessories, the foundation of a productive range session is built on a core set of essential items. This article outlines the minimum equipment required for any range trip, provides examples at various price points, and then breaks down additional requirements specific to pistols and rifles.

A successful day at the gun range begins long before the first round is chambered. It starts with preparation — not just with firearms and ammunition, but with the essential equipment that keeps shooters safe, comfortable, and effective. Whether you are spending a quiet morning at the bench refining a rifle load or running drills with a defensive pistol, the right gear turns a casual outing into purposeful training.

At the top of the list — always — is hearing protection. A single unprotected gunshot can permanently damage hearing. Many new shooters begin with simple foam earplugs, such as those made by 3M, which cost only a few dollars and provide adequate protection when inserted properly. Stepping up slightly, over-the-ear passive muffs from companies like Walker's or Howard Leight offer higher noise reduction ratings and easier use. For those who train regularly or participate in matches, electronic hearing protection from manufacturers such as Peltor, Walker's

Razor, or Pro Ears is worth the investment. These units amplify conversation while automatically suppressing gunfire, allowing clear communication without sacrificing protection.

Eye protection is equally critical. Spent brass, unburned powder, or debris from steel targets can pose serious hazards. Budget-friendly ANSI-rated safety glasses from brands like Allen Company work well for most shooters. Mid-range shooting glasses from Smith & Wesson or Radians often include interchangeable lenses for different lighting conditions. At the premium end, companies like Oakley and Wiley X produce ballistic-rated eyewear with exceptional optical clarity and comfort for extended sessions. The key is impact resistance and a secure fit — style comes second.

Beyond eye and ear protection, responsible shooters should never arrive at the range without a trauma-capable first aid kit. ASC provides a trauma kit and first aid kit in the sign in shed and an AED at the 50 yard range. The national "Stop the Bleed" initiative has emphasized that severe bleeding can become life-threatening in minutes. A proper kit should include a tourniquet such as a CAT (Combat Application Tourniquet), pressure bandage, hemostatic gauze, gloves, and chest seals. Preassembled kits from North American Rescue or MyMedic range from modestly priced compact kits to more comprehensive individual first aid kits (IFAKs). Equally important is knowing how to use them. Owning the equipment without training is not enough.

Comfort and maintenance items may seem minor, but they often determine how productive a session will be. Shooting gloves from brands like Mechanix Wear, Magpul, or PIG Gloves protect hands from hot barrels and

improve grip. A simple small towel — often overlooked — helps manage sweat on hot days or wipe dust from optics. Spare batteries for red dots, electronic muffs, or shot timers are inexpensive insurance against frustration. Nothing ends a training session faster than a dead optic with no back-up power source.

Lubrication and cleaning supplies deserve a place in every range bag. Firearms are mechanical systems, and they run best when properly maintained. A small bottle of CLP from Break-Free or lubricant from Slip 2000 or Lucas Oil can quickly resolve sluggish cycling. Compact cleaning kits from Hoppe's or Otis allow quick bore cleaning or debris removal. A small tool kit with Allen keys, a torque wrench for optics, and a multi-tool ensures that loose screws or shifting mounts can be addressed immediately.

For rifle shooters in particular, the ability to see hits at distance is vital. Affordable binoculars from Bushnell may suffice for short distances, but serious precision shooters often rely on spotting scopes from Vortex, Leupold, or Athlon. These tools eliminate constant trips downrange and allow for precise shot correction.

Those who train with purpose often incorporate a shot timer. Companies such as Competition Electronics and PACT manufacture reliable timers that measure split times and draw speed. While casual shooters may not see the need, anyone interested in improving efficiency and accountability will benefit from measurable feedback.

Targets should reflect the type of shooting being practiced. Bullseye targets from Champion are ideal for precision work. IPSC or IDPA silhouettes support defensive-style drills. Steel



targets from AR500 Target Solutions or Caldwell offer instant feedback when used safely at appropriate distances. Reactive splatter targets add visibility for newer shooters. Selecting the right target transforms random shooting into structured practice.

Hydration is frequently underestimated. Especially during summer months, water and electrolyte drinks are as essential as ammunition. Dehydration reduces concentration and increases fatigue — both undesirable on the firing line.

When turning specifically to pistols, additional gear becomes necessary. A reliable handgun — whether an entry-level Glock, Smith & Wesson M&P, or Springfield Armory pistol — should be properly zeroed and transported in a secure case from companies like Plano or Savior Equipment. A sturdy shooting belt from Kore Essentials or Blue Alpha Gear supports holsters and magazine carriers. Holster quality is critical; reputable manufacturers such as Safariland, Blade-Tech, and Tier 1 Concealed produce holsters that fully cover the trigger guard and provide consistent retention. Bringing sufficient magazines — ideally five or more — prevents constant reloading interruptions. Ammunition choice should match the training goal, whether economical range loads from Federal or Winchester, or higher-performance defensive ammunition for function testing.

Rifle shooters face additional considerations. A properly zeroed rifle, whether a Ruger American, Savage, or custom precision build, should travel in a padded case from VISM or Pelican. Stability is essential for accuracy. A bipod from Harris or Atlas provides front support, while rear shooting bags from Armageddon Gear or Wiebad enhance consistency. As with pistols, multiple

magazines and appropriate ammunition are necessary. Precision shooters often select match-grade loads from Hornady or Federal Gold Medal to ensure consistency.

Finally, there are the small but significant items many overlook: a chamber flag for safety compliance, a stapler for hanging targets, sunscreen, a notebook to record adjustments, and even a simple trash bag to leave the range cleaner than you found it.

In the end, essential range equipment is not about extravagance. It is about responsibility, preparation, and performance. The shooter who arrives organized and properly equipped spends less time solving preventable problems and more time refining skill. Safety, reliability, and discipline form the foundation of every successful range day — and the right equipment makes that foundation solid.

Practice vs. Competition — Why You Don't Shoot in Matches the Way You Shoot in Practice (and How to Fix It at ASC)

If you've spent any time competing at Airfield Shooting Club, you've likely experienced the frustration of shooting exceptionally well in practice, only to see that performance slip on match day. During a typical range session, your groups are tight, your timing feels natural, and your confidence is high. But once the match begins, something changes. Your grip tightens, your timing feels rushed, and shots you would normally execute cleanly begin to drift. This disconnect between practice and competition is not a reflection of your ability—it's a reflection of pressure,

structure, and mindset.

The primary difference between practice and competition is consequence. In practice, there is no penalty for a mistake. You can reset, repeat a string, or ignore a bad shot entirely. In competition, every round is recorded, every point matters, and there is an awareness—subtle or not—that others are watching and scores are being compared. That awareness changes your physiology. Your heart rate increases slightly, your fine motor control tightens, and your decision-making speeds up. These small shifts are enough to disrupt even well-developed fundamentals.

Another major factor is that practice is often too comfortable. Many shooters unconsciously wait for perfect conditions, especially in rimfire or rifle disciplines at ASC. They may redo a string if it doesn't feel right or stop early when frustration sets in. Matches do not allow those luxuries. Competition exposes the gaps that relaxed practice can hide. If your practice lacks structure and accountability, match conditions will feel unfamiliar and more difficult to manage.

What typically breaks down on match day is not your mechanical skill, but your decision-making. Shooters tend to rush shots they would normally wait on, particularly in changing wind conditions. They abandon their shot process, skipping steps they routinely follow in practice. They begin thinking about outcomes—scores, standings, or winning—instead of focusing on execution. And perhaps most damaging, they allow one bad shot to affect the next, creating a cascade of avoidable errors. These are not equipment failures; they are mental reactions to pressure.

Closing this gap requires a deliberate



shift in how you train. Practice must begin to resemble competition. That means adding structure, accountability, and consequence. Instead of casual shooting, incorporate timed relays, scored targets, and full-stage runs. Hold yourself to standards and accept every shot as it lands—no resets, no excuses. When practice includes consequence, competition begins to feel familiar rather than stressful.

Equally important is training your shot process under mild pressure. This doesn't require extreme stress, but it does require intention. Use a shot timer, set performance goals, and track your results. Compete against your previous performance rather than other shooters. This builds comfort with expectation, which is the foundation of match composure. Alongside this, develop a consistent reset routine between shots. In both practice and competition, mistakes will happen. The difference is how quickly and calmly you recover. A simple reset—pause, breathe, reestablish position, and continue—prevents one error from becoming several.

Perhaps the most important shift is mental. In practice, shooters often experiment and explore. In competition, the focus must shift to execution. Outcome thinking—focusing on winning, scores, or rankings—creates pressure and tension. Execution thinking—focusing on the next clean shot—creates calm and consistency. At ASC, matches are often decided by small margins, and those margins favor shooters who stay disciplined in their process rather than those who chase results.

It is also important to accept that competition will always feel different. Even experienced shooters feel a heightened awareness on match day. The goal is

not to eliminate that feeling, but to function effectively within it. Pressure is not a flaw; it is a sign that you care. The skill lies in maintaining your process despite that pressure.

Airfield Shooting Club provides an ideal environment to develop this skill. With regular matches, supportive competitors, and a variety of disciplines, shooters have the opportunity to gradually build comfort under competitive conditions. By introducing structure into practice, reinforcing a consistent shot process, and focusing on execution over outcome, the gap between practice and competition begins to close.

In the end, the difference between how you shoot in practice and how you shoot in competition is not about talent or equipment. It is about familiarity with pressure and trust in your process. When practice mirrors competition, competition becomes routine. And when competition feels routine, performance begins to match your true ability.

The Five Most Important Fundamentals in Rimfire Benchrest at ASC

Building groups that hold up on match day

Rimfire benchrest at Airfield Shooting Club often appears deceptively simple. The rifle is supported, the distance is only 50 yards, and recoil is minimal compared to centerfire platforms. Yet anyone who has spent time on the line knows how quickly small mistakes show up on the target. At this distance, with .22LR ammunition, the margins are incredibly tight. The ten ring is unforgiving, wind is subtle but constant, and even minor inconsistencies in set-up or execution will immediately ap-

pear on the card. Success at ASC is not built on equipment alone—it is built on disciplined fundamentals.

The first and most critical fundamental is natural point of aim. If the rifle does not rest naturally on the target without muscle input, consistency becomes nearly impossible. A simple check reveals the truth: settle into position, aim at the target, close your eyes briefly, and relax. When you open your eyes, the crosshairs should still be centered. If they have moved, the solution is not to steer the rifle back into position, but to adjust your body. Small shifts in seat position or hip alignment will bring the rifle into natural alignment. If you must force the rifle onto target, recoil will force it off somewhere else. At 50 yards, that difference is enough to cost points.

Equally important is consistent front and rear bag control. The rifle should recoil straight back and return to nearly the same point after every shot. That requires identical placement in the front rest and consistent pressure on the rear bag. The fore-end must sit in the same location each time, and the rifle must track smoothly without binding. At the rear, shoulder pressure and bag squeeze must remain consistent. Many shooters unknowingly introduce horizontal dispersion by varying rear bag pressure from shot to shot. When the rifle behaves differently under recoil, the group will reflect it.

Trigger control and follow-through form the next critical piece of the puzzle. Even with the mild recoil of rimfire, a rushed or uneven trigger press can disturb the rifle enough to open a group. The goal is a smooth, straight-to-the-rear press with no sudden movement. Just as important is what happens after the shot breaks. Maintaining sight picture and staying in the scope



Tying all of these elements together is shot process consistency. The best shooters follow the same sequence every single time: confirm the wind, settle into natural point of aim, verify crosshair placement, execute a smooth trigger press, follow through, and call the shot. Under pressure, the temptation is to rush or skip steps, especially late in a card. But consistency in process produces consistency in results. Each shot must be treated as its own event, executed with the same discipline as the last.

While not strictly mechanical, emotional control plays a vital supporting role in all five fundamentals. Frustration, impatience, or score awareness can subtly alter grip pressure, timing, and decision-making. One dropped point can quickly become several if not managed properly. The disciplined shooter pauses, resets, and continues without emotional carryover.

It is worth noting what does not belong at the top of the fundamentals list. High magnification optics, barrel tuners, ultra-light triggers, and constant equipment adjustments may refine performance, but they cannot replace solid fundamentals. At ASC, many excellent scores are produced with well-set-up factory rifles and disciplined technique. Equipment enhances performance—but fundamentals create it.

A simple test can reveal the strength of your fundamentals. Shoot two consecutive five-shot groups in calm conditions without adjusting anything. If both groups are similar in size and shape, and your shot calls match impacts, your fundamentals are working. If not, the solution is rarely new equipment—it is refinement of the basics.

Rimfire benchrest is a discipline of precision and repeatability. Natural point

of aim, consistent bag control, clean trigger press, wind awareness, and a repeatable shot process form the foundation of success. Master these, and your performance at Airfield Shooting Club will become more predictable, more consistent, and ultimately more competitive. Everything else is refinement. Fundamentals are what win matches.

Building a Pre-Shot Routine That Holds Up Under Match Pressure at ASC

If you've competed at Airfield Shooting Club for any length of time, you've felt it. The sights settle, the wind looks right, and you know exactly what to do—yet something feels different. Your grip tightens just slightly, your breathing shortens, and the shot breaks a little sooner than it should. The impact lands just outside where you called it. That moment isn't a failure of equipment or ability. It's pressure. And the most reliable way to manage that pressure—whether you're shooting rimfire benchrest at 50 yards, centerfire at 100, or pistol on the 50-yard line—is through a consistent pre-shot routine.

A pre-shot routine is not superstition or a lucky habit. It is a deliberate, repeatable sequence that you follow before every shot, in the same order and with the same rhythm. Its purpose is to remove decision-making in the moment. Under match pressure, the mind wants to rush or overanalyze. A routine eliminates both by giving your focus a structured path. When built correctly, it allows match shots to feel no different than practice shots.

At ASC, even in a friendly and supportive environment, competition in-

troduces subtle stress. You become aware of your score, the clock, and the shooters around you. These factors can quietly disrupt consistency—altering grip pressure, breathing rhythm, trigger timing, and even decision-making in the wind. A strong pre-shot routine stabilizes these variables. It becomes an anchor that keeps you grounded in execution rather than outcome.

Every effective routine includes a few essential elements. It begins with confirming your position. For benchrest shooters, this means verifying natural point of aim, consistent bag pressure, and relaxed shoulders. For pistol shooters, it involves establishing a solid grip, balanced stance, and natural sight alignment. If your position isn't correct before the shot, it won't correct itself during the shot.

Next comes the condition check. At ASC, particularly on the 50-yard line, this step is critical. You must confirm that the wind flags, mirage, or visual indicators match the condition you intend to shoot in. Too many points are lost not from poor technique, but from firing in inconsistent conditions. Discipline here is often the difference between an average card and a winning one.

Breathing follows. A simple, natural breath—taken and allowed to settle—provides both physical and mental control. The shot should break during the natural pause, not during a forced hold. Breathing is often overlooked, but it serves as a powerful stabilizer under pressure.

A short mental cue then helps narrow focus. Something simple like "smooth press," "good condition," or "stay in the scope" replaces distracting thoughts with a clear instruction. This small step prevents the mind from



drifting toward score or outcome and keeps attention on execution.

Finally, follow-through completes the routine. The shot is not finished at the trigger break. Staying in the scope, watching the impact, and calling the shot reinforces discipline and builds awareness. Only after this should you reset and begin the process again.

The key to making this routine effective is building it during practice. It must be used on every shot—not just during matches. If you skip steps during practice, you will skip them under pressure. If you rush during practice, you will rush during competition. Consistency in practice creates reliability in matches.

Many shooters make the mistake of changing their routine mid-match, often in response to pressure or a mistake. Others make it too complex to sustain, or rush through it after a dropped point. The reality is that the moment you feel pressure is the moment you need your routine most. It must remain simple, repeatable, and unchanged.

When a pre-shot routine is properly developed, the effects are noticeable. The match begins to feel slower. Decisions become clearer. Mistakes don't cascade. Mid-relay slumps become less frequent. Most importantly, you gain the ability to reset quickly and continue performing at a consistent level.

The true test of your routine comes in the middle of a relay. Early in the match, focus is sharp. At the end, urgency often sharpens it again. But the middle is where attention drifts and discipline fades. If your routine remains consistent in that moment—unchanged from the first shot—you've built it correctly.

In the end, success under match pressure is not about doing something extraordinary. It's about doing the same simple things, the same way, every time. A strong pre-shot routine turns pressure into structure and uncertainty into familiarity. At ASC, where matches are often decided by the smallest margins, that consistency is what separates a good performance from a great one.

Small Mistakes That Cost Big Points

The Hidden Errors in Rimfire Benchrest at ASC

Rimfire benchrest at 50 yards appears simple at first glance. The bench is solid, the rifle is supported, and the target is clearly defined. Yet anyone who has spent time competing at the Airfield Shooting Club knows that simplicity is deceptive. The smallest inconsistencies—barely noticeable in the moment—are often the ones that quietly cost the most points. It is rarely one major mistake that ruins a card. Instead, it is a series of subtle lapses that accumulate over the course of a relay.

One of the most common hidden errors is steering the rifle instead of aligning behind it. Shooters often nudge the rest, lean slightly, or apply subtle pressure to bring the crosshairs onto the bull. It may feel controlled, but the moment the shot breaks, recoil reveals the truth. If the rifle is not naturally aligned, it will not return to the same point. Establishing a true natural point of aim—where the rifle rests on target without effort—is essential. The correction is simple: move your body, not the rifle.

Another frequent issue is inconsistent

shoulder pressure. It changes subtly from shot to shot—leaning forward slightly on one, relaxing on the next, then tightening unconsciously after a dropped point. These small differences alter how the rifle tracks in the bags and often result in horizontal dispersion, especially in calm wind conditions. Consistency here is critical. Light, repeatable pressure allows the rifle to recoil naturally and return predictably.

Mid-card impatience is another silent score killer. Shooters tend to begin a relay carefully and finish with urgency, but the middle is where discipline fades. It is easy to fall into a rhythm, firing because it feels right rather than because conditions are correct. At ASC, many matches are won or lost in this phase. Breaking the relay into smaller segments and resetting mentally every few shots can prevent this gradual loss of focus.

Closely related is the tendency to break the shot just a little too early. The crosshairs pass over the center, and instead of waiting for them to settle, the shot is taken. The result is often a near miss—just outside the ten ring—small enough to overlook, but significant enough to affect standings. In rimfire benchrest, precision demands patience. Let the sights settle and press the trigger smoothly rather than trying to “catch” the shot.

Wind discipline is another area where small lapses carry large consequences. Mirage may be slightly angled, or a flag may flicker, yet the temptation is to take “just one” shot anyway. At 50 yards, even minimal changes in wind can shift impact enough to matter. The disciplined shooter waits for repeatable conditions. That restraint often separates strong scores from average ones.



Rear bag control is another subtle factor that is easy to overlook. Variations in squeeze pressure or body tension can introduce vertical stringing, even in calm conditions. Many shooters attribute these changes to ammunition or wind, when in reality the inconsistency lies in their own input. A consistent rear bag technique and stable breathing cycle eliminate this variable.

Follow-through is equally important and often neglected. After the shot breaks, some shooters immediately lift their head or relax their position. That small movement disrupts recoil tracking and introduces inconsistency. Staying in the scope, observing the shot, and allowing recoil to complete naturally ensures better repeatability.

Emotional response also plays a role. A single dropped point can lead to frustration, which carries into the next shot. Grip tightens, timing changes, and now one mistake becomes two or three. The disciplined shooter treats each shot independently. One breath, one reset, and a return to the process keeps errors from compounding.

Equipment adjustments can also become a hidden trap. A slight shift in impact leads to rest movement, scope adjustments, or other changes mid-relay. More often than not, the cause was a change in wind rather than equipment. Adjusting too quickly introduces new variables and disrupts consistency. Patterns—not single shots—should guide any corrections.

Finally, distraction from other shooters can quietly erode performance. Glancing at neighboring targets, listening to conversations, or thinking about stand- ings divides attention. In a discipline where focus is everything, even minor distractions matter. Staying mentally contained within your own process is

essential.

What all of these mistakes share is their subtlety. None are dramatic, yet each has a measurable effect at 50 yards. Rimfire benchrest magnifies small inconsistencies, making discipline the deciding factor. Eliminating these hidden errors—rather than chasing equipment changes—often produces immediate improvement.

At Airfield Shooting Club, the difference between a good card and a great one is rarely found in gear. It is found in consistency.

One Hour - One Goal = Real Improvement

How to Structure a Productive Range Session at ASC

We've all done it. We arrive at the Airfield Shooting Club with good intentions, set up at the bench or step to the firing line, and start sending rounds downrange. An hour later the ammunition is gone, the brass is piling up, and we pack up feeling like we "got some practice in." But the real question is whether we actually improved. At ASC, whether you're shooting pistol on the 50-yard line, refining a centerfire rifle at 100 yards, or competing in one of our rimfire challenges, skill does not come from round count alone. It comes from structured, intentional practice. The encouraging part is that meaningful improvement does not require an entire afternoon. A focused one-hour session, approached with purpose, can produce measurable gains.

The foundation of any productive session begins before a single round is fired. A shooter must define a clear objective. What specific skill is being worked on? How will success be measured? What does improvement look

like at the end of the hour? A pistol shooter might focus on achieving a clean, consistent draw with an accurate first shot. A rifle shooter may aim to tighten group size at 100 yards. A rimfire competitor could concentrate on follow-through and wind discipline. The key is discipline in focus—one session should have one primary objective. When everything becomes the priority, nothing improves.

Once on the range, a simple structure can transform an otherwise casual session into deliberate training. The first ten minutes should be dedicated to confirming fundamentals. This is where mechanics are checked and refined. The next twenty minutes should isolate a single skill, allowing for repetition and focused improvement. The following twenty minutes should apply that skill under mild pressure, incorporating additional elements of shooting performance. The final ten minutes should be reserved for evaluation, reflection, and note-taking. This structure works across pistol, rifle, and rimfire disciplines and ensures that each minute on the range has purpose.

For pistol shooters, the session should begin at close distance—typically seven to ten yards—to confirm grip, sight alignment or dot tracking, trigger control, and follow-through. This stage is not about speed; it is about confirming that the fundamentals are solid. If issues are present here, they will only be amplified when speed is introduced. Once confidence in fundamentals is established, the shooter should spend the next portion of the session isolating a single skill. This might include draw-to-first-shot practice, trigger control at extended distances, or controlled transitions between targets. If practicing from the holster, where permitted, a shot timer can provide valuable feedback. The emphasis should remain on



back. Vertical stringing may indicate inconsistent breathing, while horizontal spread often points to trigger issues. Random flyers frequently stem from unstable positioning.

As rifle shooters move into

competition rewards patience and punishes inconsistency.

During the applied portion of the session, rimfire shooters should simulate match conditions. Benchrest shooters may run a practice card under time constraints, while steel shooters can run full stages at a controlled pace before increasing speed. The objective is not to “win practice,” but to build repeatable performance under realistic conditions. In the final minutes, honest evaluation is essential. Did the shooter chase the wind? Did tension affect stability? Were shots rushed unnecessarily? Small corrections in rimfire shooting often produce significant improvements in results.

smooth, efficient movement rather than rushing. Speed develops naturally from efficiency.

As the session progresses, pistol shooters should begin applying these skills in short, structured drills. Controlled pairs, reload sequences, or timed engagements introduce a level of pressure while still reinforcing discipline. The goal is not to shoot as fast as possible, but to maintain accuracy while gradually increasing efficiency. In the final minutes, the shooter should step back and evaluate performance. Were misses predictable? Did grip consistency degrade under speed? Did tension or anticipation appear? Writing down observations helps identify patterns and drives improvement in future sessions.

For centerfire rifle shooters, the session begins with confirming zero and ensuring equipment stability. A small group fired at the start can confirm point of impact and prevent wasted time chasing adjustments later. Once confirmed, attention shifts to fundamentals such as natural point of aim, breathing, trigger control, and recoil management. Deliberate, well-executed groups provide valuable feed-

the application phase, the focus should shift toward increasing the challenge. This may involve shooting smaller targets, refining group size standards, or introducing mild time constraints. For those preparing for hunting or competition, it is beneficial to simulate realistic conditions rather than relying solely on a perfectly supported bench position. The final portion of the session should be dedicated to recording data. Ammunition type, environmental conditions, group sizes, and any adjustments made should be documented. Consistent documentation allows shooters to identify trends and make informed improvements over time.

Rimfire shooters, particularly those participating in ASC’s benchrest and steel challenges, must pay close attention to consistency. The session begins with equipment checks, including bag setup, optic confirmation, and environmental awareness such as wind conditions. The next phase focuses on small, deliberate groups or controlled target engagements. In benchrest shooting, attention to follow-through and wind reading is critical. In steel challenges, smooth transitions should be developed at slower speeds before attempting to increase pace. Rimfire

Ultimately, the difference between shooting and training comes down to intention. There is nothing wrong with enjoying a relaxed day at the range, but improvement requires structure. Unstructured shooting consumes ammunition, while structured training builds skill. A disciplined one-hour session uses fewer rounds, produces measurable results, and leaves the shooter with valuable insights rather than just empty brass.

At the Airfield Shooting Club, we are fortunate to have outstanding facilities that support a wide range of shooting disciplines. However, access alone does not create progress. Improvement is built through preparation, focus, and disciplined execution. The next time you head to the range, consider approaching your session with a clear objective and a structured plan. One focused hour, used effectively, can deliver more progress than an entire afternoon of unstructured shooting. That is how real skill is developed—one deliberate session at a time.



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