

LESSON 2: FIREARM SAFETY AND SAFE RANGE OPERATION

PURPOSE

This lesson introduces you to the main parts of the air rifle and the safest way in which to use it.



action
muzzle
safety
trigger

INTRODUCTION

The sport of target rifle shooting is one of the safest of all youth sports. In 104 years of Olympic shooting, there has never been an accidental injury involving a firearm. There are several thousand JROTC teams and junior clubs that practice and compete in position rifle shooting, with more than 100,000 participants throughout the United States, but these youth marksmanship activities have been accident-free for many years.

Target shooting established its record as one of the safest of all sports because it is a sport where the safety of its participants can be assured when everyone follows basic safety rules. Target shooting is, in fact, a sport of control and discipline where everyone involved, including participants, instructors, coaches, and range officers, are expected to know and apply the sport's safety rules at all times.

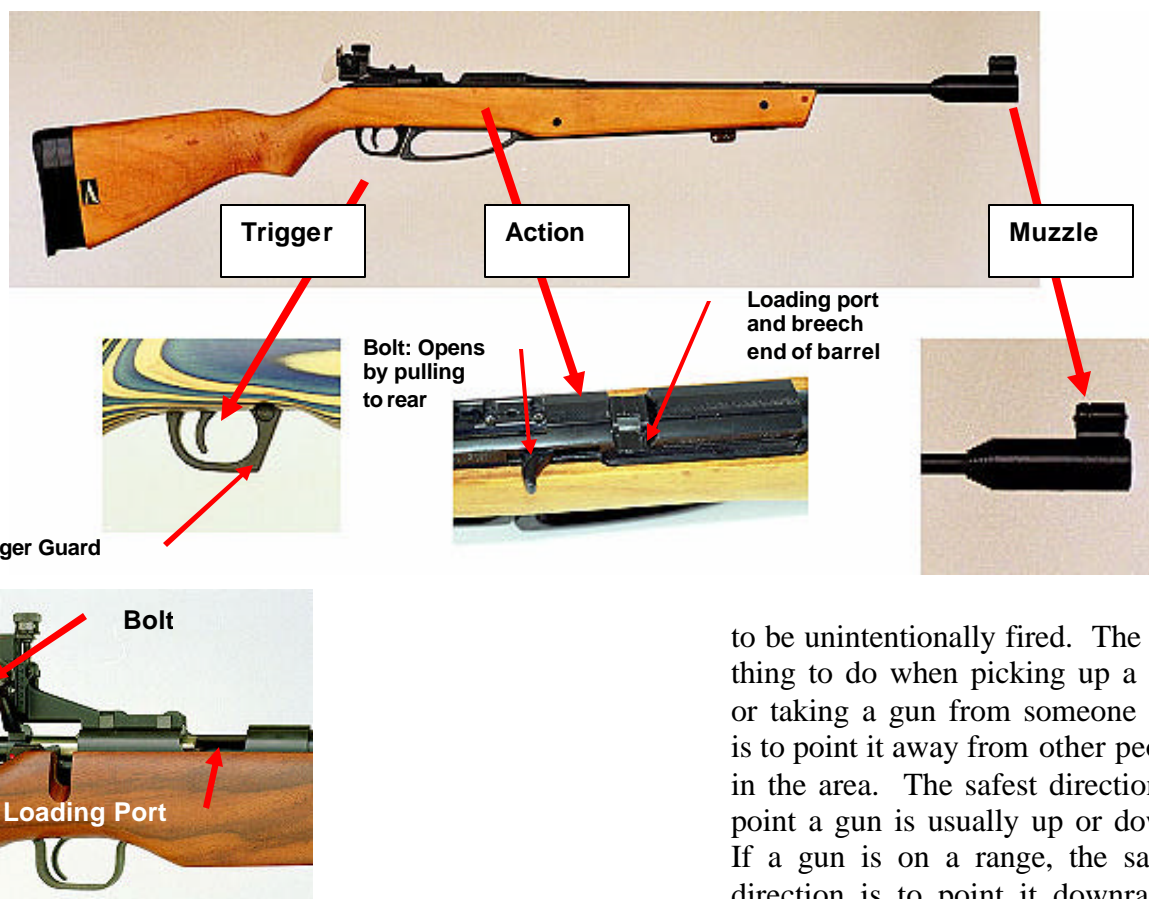
RULES FOR SAFE GUN HANDLING

There are three basic rules that are the foundation for the safe handling and shooting of all types of guns. These rules fully apply to the air rifles that are used in JROTC marksmanship programs. These fundamental safety rules focus on three key parts of every gun that control when and where the gun can be fired. Those parts are the **MUZZLE**, **ACTION**, and **TRIGGER**.

Everyone should know these basic parts of a gun, whether or not they ever will be involved in target shooting, so that they can practice the rules for safe gun handling any time they are in a situation where a gun is present.

- **MUZZLE.** The forward end of the barrel. The point where the pellet or projectile leaves the barrel when the gun is fired. A gun is aimed by pointing its **muzzle** at the target.
- **ACTION.** The working mechanism of the gun. Gun **actions** typically have a bolt or lever that is used to open and close the action so that the gun can be loaded and unloaded.
- **TRIGGER.** The **trigger** is part of the action or working mechanism of the gun. The trigger is a lever that projects out of the bottom of the gun. A trigger guard protects the trigger. After a gun is loaded and the action is closed, the gun is fired by pulling the trigger.





Some JROTC units still conduct rifle marksmanship training with .22 cal. small bore rifles like the one shown above. These rifles have bolt actions that are opened by lifting a bolt and pulling it to the rear

THREE SAFETY STEPS

The application of the rules for safe gun handling should follow a step-by-step sequence that is designed to assure that even if a gun were to be unintentionally fired, it would not cause personal injury or serious damage. Be sure to follow these steps:

- Whenever anyone picks up a gun of any kind, **the first thing that must be done is to control the direction the muzzle is pointing.** Immediately point the gun in a safe direction where it is not directed at another person and would do no serious damage even if the gun were

to be unintentionally fired. The first thing to do when picking up a gun or taking a gun from someone else is to point it away from other people in the area. The safest direction to point a gun is usually up or down. If a gun is on a range, the safest direction is to point it downrange toward the targets.

- As soon as the gun muzzle is pointing in a safe direction, **the second step is to check the action of the gun and to open it if it is not already open.** Since the gun's action contains its firing mechanism, it cannot be fired unintentionally or accidentally if the action is open. All guns, except muzzle loading guns, have a bolt or lever on the action that is used to open the action. Be sure to learn where the bolt or cocking lever is on any gun you handle. With the action open, it is possible to visually check most guns to see whether the gun is loaded and has a cartridge or pellet in the breech end (rear end) of the barrel. If the gun is loaded and it is possible to remove the cartridge, that must be done.

- With the muzzle pointing in a safe direction and the action open so that the gun cannot be fired, **the third safety precaution is to hold or carry the rifle so that the index finger is held outside of the trigger guard and not on the trigger itself.** The trigger guard is a protective loop around the trigger. Its purpose is to protect the trigger from being pulled unintentionally. By keeping the index finger outside of the trigger guard, it is impossible to accidentally pull the trigger should the action somehow become closed.

RULES FOR SAFE GUN HANDLING

1. **MUZZLE.** Always keep gun muzzles pointed in a safe direction. Gun muzzles should never be pointed at other persons under any circumstances. On a range, the safest directions to point a gun muzzle are usually up or downrange toward the target.
2. **RIFLE ACTION.** When handling any rifle or firearm, the action should be open. Gun actions must remain open except when the gun is on the firing line and the command to LOAD has been given. When shooting is finished or the rifle is placed down to take a break, the action must be open and unloaded, even when the gun is on the firing line. The gun action may be closed when it is placed in a gun case or storeroom, but must be opened as soon as it is picked up again.
3. **TRIGGER.** Keep your finger off the trigger until after placing the gun in the shooting position and preparing to fire a shot. It is especially important to keep the finger outside of the trigger guard when loading the gun and placing it in the shooting position.

SHOOTING RANGES

Everyone who comes in contact with a gun needs to know the three basic rules for safe gun handling. Individuals who will use rifles in JROTC marksmanship or other target shooting activities also need to know and practice several additional rules regarding the safe operation of target shooting ranges.

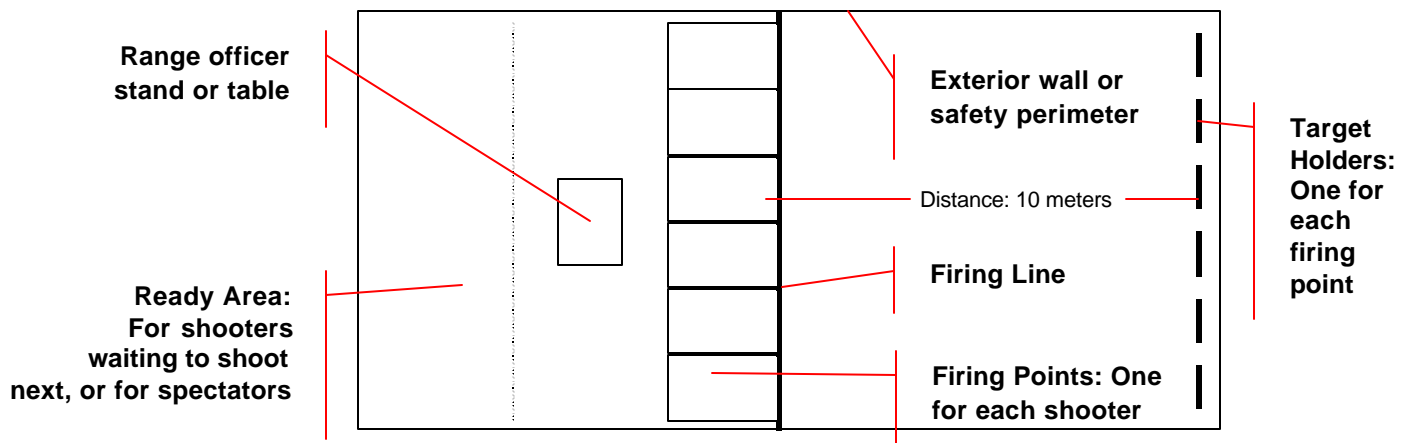
To understand these safety rules it is first necessary to know something about how target ranges are designed. Study the diagram of the range so that you understand how the firing points and targets are positioned on a typical range. This diagram is for a six-point range, but target ranges can have as few as four and as many as 100 or more firing points.



10-meter air rifle range target holders with targets placed at the proper heights for firing from the prone, kneeling, and standing positions.



A range officer or instructor is in charge of the firing on every range.



Each range has these primary features:

- Safety Perimeter.** Ranges normally have an outside wall or some means of preventing unauthorized persons from entering the range area while firing takes place.
- Target Holders.** At one end of the range there are a series of target holders. The target holders normally have a metal sheet behind the targets that serves as a backstop to stop and collect all of the pellets that are fired at the targets. The target holders are designed so that targets can be hung on them at heights appropriate for the three shooting positions. Prone targets are hung low, standing targets are placed chest high, and kneeling targets are between the two.
- Firing Line.** At a distance of exactly 10 meters from the targets, a firing line is marked on the floor of the range. The firing line is normally a red or black painted stripe or line of tape that is two or three inches wide. All shooters must position themselves on their firing points so that no part of their feet or body touches the firing line.
- Firing Points.** The firing line is broken into divisions called firing points. Firing points are rectangular spaces behind the firing line. Firing points are approximately 1 meter x 2 meters in size. The width of each firing point corresponds to the distance between the targets. Only one shooter may occupy one firing point at one time.
- Range Officer.** Immediately behind the line of firing points, a table or stand for the range officer is located. The range officer is in charge of firing on the range and gives instructions to control shooting. Range officers use a standard series of range commands that control the conduct of any shooting activity.
- Preparation Area.** Most ranges also have an area behind the firing line that is designated as a preparation or ready area. If there are spectators, this is the area where they should stand or sit. If there are other shooters who are waiting their turn to fire, this is the area where they should remain.

FIRING PROCEDURES AND COMMANDS

The range officer or instructor conducts the firing activity on the range. To begin a range activity, the range officer designates the shooters who will use the firing points and instructs them to move their equipment to the firing line and take their shooting positions. When rifles are brought to the range, their muzzles must be pointed upward or downward range, their **actions** must be open and the guns must be unloaded. After the shooters get into their shooting positions and are ready, the range officer gives a series of commands to start and stop firing.

- **LOAD.** No one may load any rifle until the range officer gives to command **LOAD**. Then the shooters may cock their rifles and insert a pellet or cartridge in them. It is a serious offense to load a rifle on a range before the command **LOAD** is given.
- **START.** The next command tells the shooters that they can begin to aim and fire at their targets. No one may fire a shot until this command is given, even if the command **LOAD** has been given.
- **STOP.** When shooting is finished, the range officer commands **STOP**. If the command **STOP** is given during firing, every shooter must immediately stop firing, open the **actions** on their rifles and wait for further instructions. No one is authorized to fire a shot after the command **STOP** is given. The range officer or any other person on the range can command **STOP** if they become aware of a dangerous or unsafe condition.

- **UNLOAD.** If anyone on a range has a loaded air rifle after the command **STOP** is given, they must notify the range officer by raising their hand or calling out “**Loaded rifle.**” The instructor will then give directions for unloading any loaded rifles. Loaded air rifles are normally unloaded by firing the rifle into an Air Rifle Discharge Container.



An air rifle discharge container is filled with paper or other material. When an air rifle remains loaded after the command STOP is given, the range officer will instruct that the rifle be unloaded by firing it into the container.

After firing is completed the range officer will check each rifle to be sure it is unloaded and the action is open. When that check is completed, the range officer will instruct the shooters on the firing line to leave the firing line so the next group of shooters can move up to the firing line.

There are a few other rules that are used on shooting ranges to assure safety and orderly conduct of the shooting activity. Every shooter should be familiar with these rules and any special rules that apply to the range you are using.

ADDITIONAL SAFETY RULES

1. **TARGET.** Shoot only at the target designated for you. Be sure your target is properly placed in front of a safe backstop. Shooting at any object on a range besides your own target is strictly forbidden.
2. **LOADING.** Rifle muzzles must remain pointed downrange or upward whenever the rifle is cocked and loaded. Special care must be taken to assure that a rifle muzzle is never allowed to point at a neighboring shooter or to any area behind the firing line during cocking and loading.
3. **GOING DOWNRANGE.** Whenever it is necessary for someone to go forward of the firing line to place or retrieve a target or for any other purpose, all rifle actions must be opened and rifles placed on the floor. No one should go forward of the firing line until authorized to do so by the range officer and no one should handle rifles while anyone is in front of the firing line.
4. **EYE AND HEARING PROTECTION.** Wearing eye protection is recommended for air rifle shooting because of the remote possibility that a piece of a lead pellet could bounce back off of the backstop. Some shooters also wear hearing protection (ear plugs) while shooting air rifles, by shooters who wish to reduce noise and improve their ability to concentrate.

5. **TREAT EVERY RIFLE AS IF IT WERE LOADED.** This is the ultimate gun safety rule. Even if you are sure your rifle is unloaded and even if a range officer has checked it, treat the rifle as if it were loaded. Be sure it is never pointed at another person.

CONCLUSION

The most important lesson that cadets who complete a basic marksmanship course will learn is how to be safe while handling any type of air rifle or firearm. By learning and following the rules of safe gun handling and the range safety rules for your range and by practicing those rules during target rifle practice, anyone who participates in a marksmanship training course will acquire the knowledge and skills to handle all guns safely. This knowledge will not only assure safety during rifle marksmanship training and competition, but it will ensure that *any* encounter a person has with a firearm is a safe encounter.

Learning and practicing these safety rules will help to ensure that target shooting remains one of the safest of all sports.