



BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO

RIFLE SHOOTING

Bolt-Action & Lever-Action • Range & Hunting • All Skill Levels

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|----|---------------------------------------|
| 01 | Rifle Types & Action Comparison |
| 02 | Calibres & Ammunition |
| 03 | Safety Rules & Safe Storage |
| 04 | Range Etiquette & Commands |
| 05 | Shooting Positions |
| 06 | Grip, Cheek Weld & Shoulder Pocket |
| 07 | Natural Point of Aim & Breath Control |
| 08 | Trigger Technique & Dry-Fire |
| 09 | Sighting Systems & Scope Selection |
| 10 | Zeroing Your Rifle |
| 11 | Shot Execution & Calling Your Shot |
| 12 | Field Craft & Hunting Application |
| 13 | Practice Drills & Progression |
| 14 | Common Mistakes & Fixes |

01 Rifle Types & Action Comparison

This guide covers the two most popular rifle action types for target shooting and hunting in Alberta — the bolt-action and the lever-action. Understanding their differences before you purchase or borrow a rifle will save time, money, and frustration.

The Bolt-Action Rifle

After each shot the shooter manually cycles a handle — lifting up, pulling rearward to extract the spent case, pushing forward to chamber a fresh round, then rotating down to lock. This positive lock-up makes the bolt-action inherently accurate.

- Capable of sub-MOA groups (under 1" at 100 yds) with quality ammunition. Available in virtually every calibre.
- Simple, robust, and reliable — fewer moving parts than semi-automatic designs. Typically 3–10 round capacity.
- Deliberate cycling encourages shot-by-shot focus — ideal for beginners building fundamentals.

The Lever-Action Rifle

A lever loop beneath the action is pushed downward and forward to eject the spent case, then returned upward to chamber the next round. Compact, reliable, and fast once mastered — lever-actions excel in dense Alberta bush country.

- Fast follow-up shots once the lever stroke is practised to muscle memory. Lighter and shorter than bolt-actions.
- Commonly chambered in .30-30 Win, .357 Mag, .44 Mag, .45-70 Govt. Fed from tubular magazine (5–14 rounds).
- Easy manual of arms proven over more than a century. Excellent for bush hunting and lever-gun sport.

Side-by-Side Comparison

Feature	Bolt-Action	Lever-Action
Accuracy	Excellent — preferred for precision and long range	Very good — best at close-to-moderate ranges
Capacity	3–10 rounds (box or internal magazine)	5–14 rounds (tubular magazine)
Calibre Range	Virtually unlimited	Focused — pistol and classic rifle calibres
Cycling	Moderate — deliberate bolt throw required	Fast — lever stroke becomes quick with practice
Best For	Precision target, open-country hunting, long range	Bush hunting, lever-gun sport, quick shots

■ WHICH SHOULD YOU CHOOSE?

For target shooting or open-country hunting beyond 150 yards, start with a bolt-action in .243 Win or .308 Win. For deer and black bear in Alberta's bush at close-to-moderate ranges, a lever-action .30-30 Win is proven and practical. The best rifle is the one that fits your intended use and motivates you to practice regularly.

02 Calibres & Ammunition

The right calibre matches your intended use, is available at local Alberta retailers, produces manageable recoil, and meets provincial regulations for your quarry. Start conservatively and work up as experience grows.

Recommended Calibres by Use

Calibre	Action	Recoil	Range	Best Use
.223 Rem	Bolt	Very Light	~400 yds	Varmints, coyotes, target practice — minimal recoil, ideal beginner round
.243 Win	Bolt	Light	~400 yds	Deer, pronghorn, varmints — best first hunting calibre for recoil-sensitive shooters
.308 Win	Bolt	Moderate	~800 yds	Deer, elk, bear, target — the most versatile all-around hunting calibre
6.5 Creedmoor	Bolt	Moderate	~1000 yds	Long-range target, deer, elk — exceptional efficiency and flat trajectory
.30-06 Sprg.	Bolt	Moderate+	~500 yds	Deer, elk, moose — the classic Canadian all-rounder; legal for all Alberta big game
.300 Win Mag	Bolt	Heavy	~600 yds	Elk, moose, grizzly — large game at range; significant recoil management required
.30-30 Win	Lever	Moderate	~200 yds	Deer, black bear in bush — the definitive Canadian lever-action hunting round
.357 Mag	Lever	Light	~150 yds	Deer, coyote — pairs with revolvers; excellent in compact lever rifles
.44 Mag	Lever	Moderate	~150 yds	Deer, hogs — powerful at close range; a proven bush hunting combination
.45-70 Govt	Lever	Heavy	~200 yds	Moose, bison, bear — outstanding stopping power for large and dangerous game

Understanding Ammunition Labels

- **Bullet weight** (grains/gr): heavier = more energy at distance but more drop. Lighter = flatter trajectory but less energy downrange.
- **Soft-point (SP)**: exposed lead tip expands on impact — the standard ethical hunting bullet. **Polymer-tip** bullets expand reliably at lower velocities — better for longer shots.
- **Bonded / monolithic** (Trophy Bonded, Barnes TSX): retain nearly all weight on impact — preferred for large or tough game requiring deep penetration.
- **Full metal jacket (FMJ)**: does not expand — range practice only. Never use for hunting; illegal for big game in Alberta.
- Always use the **exact calibre** marked on your barrel — similar-looking cartridges are not interchangeable and can be dangerous. Check twice before loading.

■ AMMUNITION AVAILABILITY IN ALBERTA

The .308 Win, .30-06, .243 Win, .30-30 Win, and .223 Rem are available at virtually every sporting goods store in Alberta year-round. Specialty calibres such as 6.5 Creedmoor are increasingly common but may require ordering in some communities. Buying locally also gives you access to experienced staff who can advise on load selection for your intended quarry.

03 Safety Rules & Safe Storage

Rifle shooting carries greater responsibility than most other firearm disciplines because of the extended range of rifle cartridges — a .308 Win bullet can travel over four kilometres. The rules below are absolute. They apply every time, without exception.

The Four Universal Firearm Safety Rules

- **Rule 1 — Treat every firearm as if it is always loaded.** Even if you just unloaded it. Even if you watched someone else unload it. This assumption costs nothing and prevents tragedy.
- **Rule 2 — Never point the muzzle at anything you are not willing to destroy.** Always be aware of your muzzle direction — even when unloaded and on the bench.
- **Rule 3 — Keep your finger off the trigger until your sights are on target and you have decided to fire.** Your finger rests along the receiver, never inside the guard.
- **Rule 4 — Know your target and what is beyond it.** A missed or passed-through bullet can travel kilometres. In the field, never fire without a clear solid backstop.

Rifle-Specific Safety Rules

- Always open the action and visually inspect the chamber every time you pick up, receive, or store a rifle — regardless of who handled it last.
- **Bolt-action:** open the bolt fully rearward and lock it back; look into the chamber and magazine well to confirm both are completely empty before handing to anyone.
- **Lever-action:** open the lever fully to eject any chambered round; visually check the chamber and magazine tube to confirm the rifle is clear.
- Never carry a live round chambered unless actively on the firing line or hunting and expecting a shot at any moment.
- Check the bore for obstructions before every session — mud, snow, or a squib load in the bore can cause a catastrophic barrel failure on the next shot.
- Ear and eye protection are mandatory for every shooter and bystander at the range.

■ SQUIB LOAD — KNOW THE SIGNS

A squib load fires with insufficient powder, driving the bullet partway into the bore without exiting. Signs: unusually soft or muffled report, minimal recoil, no visible impact on target. If any shot feels or sounds wrong — STOP IMMEDIATELY. Do not fire another round. Firing into an obstructed barrel can cause the rifle to fail explosively.

Safe Storage — Alberta Legal Requirements

- Firearms must be stored unloaded and secured with a locking device or in a locked container. Ammunition stored separately or within a locked container.
- Long guns not in use must be rendered inoperable with a trigger lock, cable lock, or stored in a locked cabinet — even in your own home.
- When transporting in a vehicle: unloaded and cased, or unloaded and not readily accessible. Never leave a rifle unattended in a vehicle for extended periods.

04 Range Etiquette & Commands

A well-run range is a safe and enjoyable environment for all experience levels. Range rules protect everyone present. Learning and following them consistently from your very first visit earns you respect and ensures you are always welcome back.

Range Commands You Must Know

Command	Meaning
"Shooters to the line"	Move to your bench or position — do not handle or load firearms yet
"Load and make ready"	You may now load your magazine and prepare to fire
"Commence firing"	You may now shoot
"Cease fire"	Stop immediately — finger off trigger, open action, step back from the rifle
"Make safe"	Unload completely, open action, place rifle on bench muzzle downrange
"Range is cold"	All shooting stopped — no handling of firearms whatsoever
"All clear / go downrange"	Safe to move forward and check or change targets
"Range is hot"	Shooting may resume — return to the line before handling any firearm

General Range Etiquette

- Arrive early and introduce yourself to the range safety officer (RSO). Ask about range-specific rules before setting up — every range has its own culture and requirements.
- Never touch, handle, or move another shooter's firearm without their explicit permission — even if it appears unsafe. Alert the RSO instead.
- While others are downrange, keep your hands clearly visible and well away from your rifle. Many ranges require all shooters to step back from the bench entirely.
- Always insert a chamber flag or bolt-open indicator in your rifle when it is on the bench and you are not actively shooting.
- Keep muzzles pointed downrange at all times — even when unloaded and resting on the bench.
- Collect your spent brass and leave your bench clean and tidy for the next shooter.
- Keep noise and conversation to a minimum while others are actively shooting or building their sight picture.

Bench Setup Best Practices

- Confirm target distances with the RSO and ensure your target is in the designated area. Bring a front rest or sandbag — shooting off a bare bench makes zeroing unreliable.
- Have a spotting scope or binoculars to read your groups without walking downrange between every string of fire.
- Keep ammunition in a clearly labelled container and confirm you are loading the correct calibre before every session.

■ FIRST VISIT TO A NEW RANGE

Before your first visit, call ahead or check the website to confirm hours, fees, membership requirements, and any calibre or target restrictions. The MFGA range has specific rules regarding target types and bay assignments — ask at the range office on arrival.

05 Shooting Positions

Your shooting position is the foundation of every shot. A stable, correctly built position lets the rifle's mechanical accuracy express itself. Learn each position thoroughly before extending your range, and always choose the most stable option available in any field situation.

Bench Rest — Your Starting Point

With the fore-end and shooting arm fully supported, nearly all positional variables are eliminated so you can focus on sight alignment, breath control, and trigger technique. Spend your first several sessions exclusively at the bench before moving to field positions.

- Rest the fore-end on a front sandbag or rifle rest — not gripped in the hand. Contact the rest at the same point every shot. Use a rear bag for fine elevation adjustment.
- Sit squarely behind the rifle with your body relaxed — avoid reaching, twisting, or hunching forward.

Prone — Most Stable Field Position

Choose prone whenever terrain permits. The low profile also provides natural concealment in hunting situations.

- Lie directly behind the rifle, body in line with the barrel. Use a bipod or a rolled jacket under the fore-end. Support elbow digs into the ground below the shoulder — not splayed wide.
- Legs flat or slightly spread; toes may point outward to reduce muscle tension. A rear sandbag under the stock toe allows micro elevation adjustments.

Kneeling & Standing

Kneeling elevates you above low cover while offering moderate stability. Drop the rear knee to the ground; rest the support arm elbow just behind the kneecap (not on the bony point). A shooting stick dramatically improves stability.

Standing is the least stable position — use only when prone or kneeling are impossible. Always use a tree, fence post, or shooting sticks for support. Tuck the support arm into the body with the elbow beneath the fore-end.

Position Comparison

Position	Stability	Best Application
Bench Rest	Maximum	Zeroing, load testing, learning fundamentals
Prone	Very High	Target range, open-field or dense-brush hunting
Kneeling	Moderate	Hunting above low cover; quick deployment from a stalk
Standing	Low	Dense bush, snap shots — always use external support

■ POSITION SELECTION IN THE FIELD

In a hunting scenario, always take the extra time to adopt the most stable position available. A deer at 150 yards will almost always wait long enough for you to drop into prone or find a tree to brace against. A hasty shot from a poor position is far more likely to wound than kill. If conditions do not allow a stable, confident shot, pass on the opportunity.

06 Grip, Cheek Weld & Shoulder Pocket

Inconsistency in any of these three contact points — grip, cheek, shoulder — will produce groups larger than the rifle is mechanically capable of. These skills are built through repetition and awareness, not theory alone.

The Shooting Hand Grip

- Wrap your shooting hand around the grip with firm, consistent pressure — not a death grip, but deliberate and repeatable. Changing grip pressure between shots shifts point of impact unpredictably.
- Place the **pad** of your index finger — between the fingertip and the first joint — centred on the trigger blade with no sideways angle. Too much finger pulls left; too little pulls right (right-handed shooters).
- **Critical — sympathetic squeeze:** the trigger finger must move independently of the rest of the hand. Squeezing all fingers as you pull the trigger torques the rifle off target before the bullet exits the barrel. This is the most common beginner error.

The Support Hand

- On a bench rest or bipod: rest the fore-end in your open, relaxed palm — do not grip it. Gripping tightly induces torque that shifts point of impact unpredictably at longer ranges.
- In field positions: cradle the fore-end with light, consistent pressure at the same point every shot. Keep your thumb alongside the stock — not over the top of the fore-end.

Cheek Weld

- Bring the rifle up to your cheek — not your cheek down to the rifle. Press your cheek firmly to the same spot on the comb with the same pressure every shot. Even a 3mm vertical difference shifts point of impact measurably at 100 yards.
- If you strain to see through the scope clearly, the stock may not fit. Consider a cheek riser or adjustable comb rather than developing a compensating bad habit.

The Shoulder Pocket

- Pull the butt firmly into the hollow of your shoulder — the fleshy pocket between your chest muscle and the front of your shoulder. Not onto the collarbone and not on top of the shoulder, both of which cause pain and inconsistent recoil.
- Apply the same forward pressure pulling the rifle into the pocket on every shot. Make this part of your non-negotiable pre-shot checklist.

■ ACTION CYCLING — STAY ON THE STOCK

Bolt-action: lift the handle 90°, pull fully rearward, push fully forward, rotate down to lock — all while keeping your cheek on the stock and eye on target. Practise until the action cycles without your head lifting. Lever-action: stroke the lever fully downward and forward in one smooth complete motion, then fully back up. Any short-stroke will fail to feed. Keep your finger outside the lever loop near the trigger during every cycle.

07 Natural Point of Aim & Breath Control

Two of the most important fundamentals — natural point of aim and breath control — are entirely internal. Yet between them they account for a large proportion of accuracy errors at every level. Developing these habits early compresses your learning curve dramatically.

Natural Point of Aim (NPA)

Your natural point of aim is where your rifle points when your body is fully relaxed and no muscular effort holds it on target. It is determined by your body position — not your hands or arms.

- The NPA check: close your eyes, exhale slowly, and let every muscle relax. Open your eyes. Where are your crosshairs? If they have drifted off target, your NPA is incorrect.
- To correct NPA, move your entire body as a unit — not just your arms. In prone, pivot your hips. In kneeling, shift your rear foot. In standing, step your feet. Repeat the eyes-closed check until the sights settle naturally on target.
- If you are using muscles to hold the crosshair on target, those muscles fatigue during the shot process. As they tire, the rifle drifts consistently — creating groups with a pattern but no obvious cause.
- Run the NPA check as the first step in your pre-shot routine before every shot in practice. It takes five seconds and pays dividends on every shot.

Breath Control

Breathing moves your chest, which moves your rifle. Even a shallow breath shifts your aim by several inches at 100 yards. The goal is to fire during the natural pause in your breathing cycle.

- Breathe normally for two to three cycles after settling into position. Rushing to shoot while elevated produces inexplicable misses.
- Exhale approximately half your breath and allow your body to reach its natural respiratory pause — the still point between exhaling and the urge to inhale. This pause lasts 3–8 seconds.
- Your shot must break within this window. If not, breathe for one or two cycles and begin again. Never hold beyond ten seconds — CO₂ buildup causes tremors and a deteriorating sight picture.
- The entire trigger sequence must occur during the respiratory pause. Breathing even partway through the press moves the rifle before the bullet exits the barrel.

■ MANAGING ADRENALINE — BUCK FEVER

Adrenaline affects every hunter — heart rate can double within seconds of spotting game, breathing becomes rapid, and fine motor control deteriorates. Slow your breathing with a deliberate three-count inhale and three-count exhale; focus on a small specific aim point on the animal; run through your shot checklist step by step. Experienced hunters report the feeling never fully disappears — it is managed, not eliminated.

The Correct Shot Sequence

- Build position → NPA check → two normal breath cycles → exhale half → pause at respiratory break → apply trigger pressure → shot breaks → follow through. If either NPA or breath control feels wrong at any point, reset and restart from the beginning.

08 Trigger Technique & Dry-Fire Practice

Trigger technique is responsible for more missed shots than any other single variable. The goal: move the trigger finger rearward in a straight line, independently of everything else, until the rifle fires — without disturbing the sight picture.

Trigger Finger Placement

- Place the pad of your index finger on the trigger — between the fingertip and the first joint, centred on the blade. Contact must be straight on with no sideways angle.
- **Too much finger** (deep into the first joint): the hook motion pulls the muzzle left. **Too little finger** (just the tip): the hand compensates by reaching, pushing the muzzle right.
- Confirm placement by dry-firing at a small dot and watching for any lateral muzzle movement as the striker falls.

The Surprise Release

- Apply pressure in a steady, continuously increasing manner — like slowly squeezing a stress ball. Pressure increases without pause or hesitation until the striker falls.
- The shot should break as a mild surprise — you know it is coming, but not the exact millisecond. This is the hallmark of good trigger technique.
- Do not pause the trigger press waiting for the sight to settle. If the sight drifts, ease pressure slightly, let it settle, then continue smoothly. Slapping or snatching the trigger moves the rifle before the bullet exits the barrel.
- **Sympathetic squeeze:** the other fingers of the shooting hand often tighten as the trigger is pulled, torquing the rifle off target. The fix is conscious isolation of the trigger finger — a skill built exclusively through dry-fire practice.

Dry-Fire Practice — Your Most Valuable Training Tool

Dry-fire costs nothing, can be done daily at home, and allows an enormous volume of trigger repetitions without burning ammunition. Elite competitive shooters typically dry-fire far more than they live-fire.

- **Always use snap caps** in a lever-action or rimfire. Most modern bolt-action centrefire rifles can be dry-fired without them — check your owner's manual first.
- **Verify the rifle is completely clear** before every session. Remove all ammunition from the room, then check chamber and magazine physically and visually.
- **The coin drill:** balance a coin on the barrel near the muzzle at bench or prone. Dry-fire without the coin falling — any muzzle disturbance drops it instantly.
- 20–30 repetitions per session, three to four times per week. Measurable improvement in live-fire groups is typically visible within two to three weeks of consistent practice.

■ KNOW YOUR TRIGGER WEIGHT

Factory hunting triggers typically break at 4–8 lbs. Aftermarket triggers may break at 1–3 lbs and can fire with very light contact. Know the pull weight of your trigger before shooting. Have a gunsmith measure it if you are unsure. Never modify a trigger without a professional safety assessment.

09 Sighting Systems & Scope Selection

The right sighting system depends on your intended use, distances, and visual acuity. Understanding the options before investing in a scope or mount will save money and frustration — a poorly matched optic is often worse than quality iron sights.

Sighting Systems Compared

Type	How It Works	Advantages	Best For
Open / Iron Sights	Rear notch or V aligned with front post, both centred on target	No batteries, lightweight, fast at close range, always reliable	Lever-action bush hunting; close-range work; backup sighting system
Aperture (Peep) Sight	Eye looks through a small rear ring; naturally centres the front post	More precise than open sights; alignment largely automatic; good in low light	Bolt-action mid-range target; hunters wanting precision without a scope
Variable Riflescope	Magnified optic with crosshair reticle; adjustable power (e.g. 3-9x40)	Greatest precision at all ranges; excellent low-light performance; range estimation	Bolt-action hunting at 100+ yards; target competition; any precision application
Red Dot / Reflex	Battery-powered illuminated dot; parallax-free at set distance	Fastest target acquisition; both-eyes-open; compact and lightweight	Lever-action bush hunting; snap shots at close range

Choosing a Riflescope — What the Numbers Mean

- **Magnification (e.g. 3-9x):** magnifies from 3x to 9x. For Alberta deer hunting, 3-9x is the most versatile choice — more magnification narrows your field of view and amplifies movement.
- **Objective lens (e.g. x40):** front lens diameter in mm. Larger objectives gather more light for dawn/dusk performance but add weight and require higher rings.
- **Eye relief:** most rifle scopes offer 3–4 inches. Too close in a heavy-recoil calibre can result in the scope striking your brow on firing — known as 'scope eye.'
- **Reticle:** a duplex crosshair is ideal for beginners. FFP (first focal plane) reticle marks are accurate at any power setting; SFP marks are only accurate at one power (usually maximum).

Scope Mounting — Common Mistakes

- Torque ring and base screws to manufacturer specification (typically 15–25 in-lbs for rings). Under-torqued rings shift under recoil; over-torqued rings can crush the scope tube.
- Ensure the reticle is perfectly vertical before final tightening — a canted reticle causes shots to drift horizontally as you adjust elevation.
- Set eye relief before tightening rings — mount the rifle in your normal position and slide the scope until you see a full, shadow-free image.

■ INVEST IN YOUR OPTIC

A quality scope on an average rifle outperforms a budget scope on an expensive rifle every time. Budget at least as much for the scope and mounts as for the rifle. Reputable mid-price brands — Vortex, Leupold, Burris, Nikon — offer strong warranties and excellent value. Avoid no-name budget scopes; their adjustments are inconsistent and their glass deteriorates in low light.

10 Zeroing Your Rifle

Zeroing adjusts your sights or scope so your bullet strikes where you aim at a specific distance. A rifle that is not properly zeroed will miss consistently regardless of how good your fundamentals are. Complete this before any target shooting or hunting session.

Understanding MOA — Minutes of Angle

One MOA equals approximately 1" at 100 yards and scales linearly with distance: 1 MOA = 1" at 100 yds = 2" at 200 yds = 3" at 300 yds. Most hunting scopes adjust in $\frac{1}{4}$ MOA per click.

- To move your group 1" at 100 yards: 4 clicks. To move 2" at 200 yards: still 4 clicks.
- Turrets: U/▲ = bullet goes up; D/▼ = down; R = right; L = left. Turn toward where you want the bullet to move. Mil-dot scopes: 1 mrad $\approx$ 3.6" at 100 yds; most click in 0.1 mrad increments.

Step-by-Step Zeroing Procedure

- 1. Bore-sight first:** remove the bolt and look through the bare bore at a large target at 25 yards. Adjust the scope reticle to align with what you see through the bore — gets you on paper before firing a shot.
- 2. Fire at 25 yards:** place a 12" minimum target at 25 yards. Fire a careful 3-shot group from a solid bench rest. Measure the group centre's offset from the bullseye and dial your adjustments.
- 3. Confirm at 25 yards:** fire another 3-shot group after adjusting. Repeat until centred. A 25-yard zero typically places you 1–2" high at 100 yards due to bullet trajectory.
- 4. Move to 100 yards:** fire a 3-shot group and make final fine adjustments to achieve your desired zero. Confirm with a final group.
- 5. Record everything:** note zero settings, scope model, ammunition brand, bullet weight, date, and temperature. Recheck after any scope removal, impact, or ammunition change.

Hunting Zero Recommendations

Calibre / Application	Zero	Practical Result
Bolt-action deer hunting (.243, .308, .30-06)	100 yds	~1–2" high at 150 yds; on zero at 100 yds; ~4–7" low at 250 yds
Extended-range bolt-action (6.5 CM, .300 WM)	200 yds	~1.5" high at 100 yds; on zero at 200 yds; ~7–10" low at 300 yds
Lever-action bush hunting (.30-30, .44 Mag, .45-70)	100 yds	Ideal for typical shot distances of 50–150 yds; no holdover required
Varmint / target (.223 Rem)	100–200 yds	Confirm with a ballistic chart for your specific load

■ USE A FREE BALLISTIC CALCULATOR

Apps such as Hornady 4DOF, Federal Ballistics, and Applied Ballistics Mobile let you input your calibre, bullet weight, muzzle velocity, and zero distance, then display precise drop and drift at every distance. Print the chart and keep it with your rifle — knowing where your bullet is at 150, 200, and 250 yards before hunting season is essential preparation.

11 Shot Execution & Calling Your Shot

Shot execution brings all the fundamentals together into a single repeatable sequence. A consistent pre-shot routine removes decision-making under pressure and allows your training to take over — particularly critical in a hunting scenario where there is rarely a second chance.

The Six Fundamentals of Shot Execution

#	Fundamental	Key Points
1	Stable Position	Settle fully into your position before anything else. Wobble at this stage is magnified into a miss. Take the extra time — it is always worth it.
2	Natural Point of Aim	Eyes-closed NPA check. Correct your body — not your hands — until the crosshair settles naturally on target when your eyes open.
3	Sight Alignment & Picture	Scope: no shadow in the image, crosshair on the precise aim point. Iron sights: align rear, front, and target in a single plane.
4	Breath Control	Two normal breathing cycles, then exhale half and pause at the natural break. Begin trigger press only during this pause. Reset if over 8 seconds.
5	Trigger Control	Steady, continuously increasing rearward pressure with the trigger finger only. Shot breaks as a surprise. Nothing else in your hand or body moves.
6	Follow-Through	Hold position, cheek on stock, observe the impact through the scope. Do not lift your head or work the action until you have called the shot.

Calling Your Shot

- Immediately after the shot breaks, note where your crosshair was: "dead centre," "drifted left," "pulled low." If your called shot matches your impact, your fundamentals are working.
- If your called shot does not match your impact — especially if you called centre but hit elsewhere — recoil anticipation (flinch) is almost certainly occurring below conscious awareness. Dry-fire is the remedy.
- Keep a simple shot log: distance, called shot, actual impact, one observation per session. Patterns in this log reveal errors that single sessions cannot expose.

Pre-Shot Mental Checklist

- Position stable / NPA confirmed / cheek weld consistent / shoulder pocket engaged / grip consistent / two breath cycles complete / sight picture clear / trigger press begun.

■ THE SURPRISE RELEASE

The most reliable indicator of correct trigger technique is that the shot breaks as a genuine surprise — you know it is coming, but not the exact millisecond. Shooters who can always predict the exact instant of break are pressing too quickly. This anticipation causes a flinch that moves the rifle before the bullet exits the barrel. Slow the press down and let the break happen on its own as pressure builds gradually.

12 Field Craft & Hunting Application

Applying range fundamentals in a hunting scenario introduces variables no indoor session can simulate — adrenaline, uncertain distances, awkward terrain, time pressure, and the ethical responsibility for a clean, humane harvest. Field craft bridges the gap.

Ethical Shot Distance — Know Your Limits

- Your maximum ethical hunting range is the distance at which you can consistently place shots within a 6-inch circle from a field position. Determined by your confirmed range performance — not the cartridge's theoretical capability.
- Benchmark: if you cannot group three shots inside 3" at 100 yards from the bench, your practical field range is under 150 yards. Bolt-action intermediate shooters: 200–300 yards. Lever-action: 150–200 yards maximum.
- Carry a laser rangefinder for any hunting where shots beyond 150 yards are possible. Pre-range likely shooting lanes before game appears. Know your ballistic drop at 150, 200, and 250 yards from your chart before the season.

Field Carry & Safe Handling

Scenario	Bolt-Action	Lever-Action
Walking in bush	Sling carry, bolt closed on empty chamber. Magazine loaded. Chamber a round only when a shot is expected.	Sling carry, hammer down on empty chamber. Load the chamber only when actively expecting a shot.
Crossing an obstacle	Unload completely. Pass the rifle through first, then cross. Never climb with a loaded rifle — no exceptions.	Unload completely before crossing any fence, creek, or obstacle. Non-negotiable in all circumstances.
After the shot	Cycle bolt for a follow-up; keep rifle mounted and observe through scope before approaching.	Stroke lever for follow-up; observe the animal's reaction and direction of travel carefully.

After the Shot

- Note the animal's exact location at the shot — mark it with a GPS waypoint or visible landmark before you move from your shooting position.
- Observe the animal's reaction and direction of travel. Give it 20–30 minutes before tracking — rushing in can push a wounded animal much further. Approach from behind and confirm it is expired.
- Tag the animal immediately as required by your Alberta licence conditions.

■ ALBERTA HUNTING REGULATIONS — KEY POINTS

Confirm current regulations at alberta.ca/hunting before every season — rules change annually. A valid Hunting Licence and Wildlife Certificate are required. Hunter Education certification is mandatory for all new licence holders. Confirm minimum calibre and energy requirements for your target species and zone. The MFGA can direct you to local Hunter Education courses.

13 Practice Drills & Progression

Consistent, deliberate practice builds the muscle memory and mental discipline that define a confident rifle shooter. Quality matters far more than volume — thirty focused, well-executed shots teach you more than three hundred rounds fired without reflection.

12-Week Beginner Progression

Week	Activity	Goal	Rounds
1–2	Bench rest at 25 yds — zero rifle. Daily dry-fire at home with snap caps.	Centred 25-yd zero; clean trigger pull with zero muzzle disturbance in dry-fire.	15–25
3–4	Bench rest at 100 yds — 3-shot groups. Photograph and log every group.	Groups under 2" at 100 yds; consistent cheek weld and trigger technique confirmed.	20–30
5–6	Prone with bipod or sandbag at 100 yds. NPA check before every shot.	Groups under 2.5" from prone; NPA confirmed as a pre-shot habit every time.	20–30
7–8	Kneeling at 50 yds with/without stick. Standing supported at 50 yds.	Consistent hits on 8" plate from both positions; understand stability differences.	20–30
9–10	Mixed positions at 100 yds. Call every shot. Log called vs actual impact.	Called shot matches actual on 8 of 10 shots; shot log reveals consistent patterns.	25–40
11–12	Field scenario drills — position transitions, timed setup, varied distances.	Confident, repeatable shots from any position; ready for a first mentored hunt.	30–50

Key Practice Drills

- **Dry-Fire Trigger Drill (Daily at Home)** — Verified-clear rifle with snap caps. Aim at a small wall dot and apply trigger pressure — zero muzzle movement is the goal. 20–30 reps, 4 times per week. The highest-return practice tool available and it costs nothing.
- **Coin Balance Drill** — Balance a coin on the barrel near the muzzle at bench or prone. Dry-fire without the coin falling. Any grip tension or trigger disturbance drops it instantly.
- **Cold-Bore Shot Log** — Record where your first shot of every session lands relative to your warm-bore group. In hunting, your only shot is always cold-bore — know your cold-bore offset before the season.
- **Position Transition Drill** — From a slung carry, time yourself deploying into prone with bipod deployed and crosshair naturally on target. Start slow and build speed — simulates the most common Alberta hunting shot opportunity.
- **NPA Confirmation Drill** — Before every shot in practice, run the full eyes-closed NPA check without exception. This builds the habit that holds up in the field when you have only one chance.

14 Common Mistakes & Fixes

Every shooter encounters these errors — often repeatedly before they are fully corrected. Identify the root cause rather than treating the symptom, and exhaust the fundamentals checklist before changing any equipment. Most accuracy problems are caused by technique, not the rifle.

Mistake	Most Likely Cause	Recommended Fix
Shots consistently left or right	Lateral trigger finger pressure; incorrect finger placement on the blade	Reposition pad of finger centred on trigger; dry-fire watching for lateral muzzle movement
Shots consistently high	Flinching upward anticipating recoil; rifle canting to one side	Extensive dry-fire to eliminate flinch; check rifle is not canted; reduce calibre temporarily
Shots consistently low	Head lifting off stock (peeking); dropping the rifle at trigger break	Commit fully to follow-through; cheek weld drill; call every shot before lifting head
Large, scattered groups	Inconsistent NPA; variable cheek weld; loose scope mount screws	Rebuild position from scratch; torque-check all scope mounts; verify NPA before every shot
Groups drifting during the session	Muscle fatigue from incorrect NPA; barrel overheating causing vertical stringing	Correct NPA so rifle holds itself; allow barrel to cool 3–5 minutes between groups
One flyer in an otherwise tight group	Trigger disturbance or blink on one shot; rare ammunition variance	Call your shot — a known call confirms the cause. An unknown call points to flinch.
Short-stroking lever-action	Incomplete lever travel — rushing the stroke before full extraction and feeding	Slow down completely; practise the full stroke with snap caps until entirely automatic
Incomplete bolt throw	Rushing the cycle; not lifting the handle fully 90° before pulling rearward	Lift fully, pull fully rearward, push fully forward, lock down fully — no partial strokes
Flinching / recoil anticipation	Recoil anxiety; often from starting with too heavy a calibre	Down-calibre to .243 or .223; add a quality recoil pad; rebuild entirely with dry-fire
Scope shadow / unclear image	Eye not centred behind eyepiece; eye relief incorrect for mount height	Adjust scope fore-and-aft for correct eye relief; centre eye behind scope every shot

■ YOUR NEXT STEPS WITH THE MFGA

Once you are grouping consistently under 2" at 100 yards from the bench and placing confident hits on an 8" plate from field positions, you are ready to extend to 200 yards, join the MFGA rifle league, or book a session with a certified rifle coach. If hunting is your goal, complete the Alberta Hunter Education course and pursue mentored hunts before heading out alone. The Millet Fish & Game Association welcomes members of all experience levels — ask at the range office about leagues, coaching programs, and mentorship opportunities.