THE Unspoken Rules Of Skeet

If you're new to skeet, sometimes you don't know what you don't know.

BY PAUL GIAMBRONE III

As I travel to my clinics and go to various tournaments throughout the year, I hear a lot of questions from beginner shooters about the ethics/rules of the game. They are all really good questions! There is no "rule book" that covers this type of conduct in our sport, but there are several unspoken rules of the game that experienced shooters expect from others. While I do expect the same things, I also realize that some people just don't know the unspoken rules. I think there are very few people in our sport who would do anything maliciously. Most of the time, the shooters just don't know any better or were given bad advice from someone who doesn't know any better, either.

First off, realize that safety is by far the most important fundamental there is in our sport. I see guys getting their guns out of the cars with the actions closed. Whether it is a semi-auto or an over-and-under shotgun, the action should always be open. The only exceptions are when you are on the station ready to shoot (not walking onto the station), or when you are putting your gun in the rack (over-and-under shotguns only, semi-autos should be open even when in the rack). The NSSA has given us a good acronym to follow in MAT. It stands for Muzzle, Action, Trigger. To keep it simple, always keep the muzzle pointed in a safe direction (even when it is unloaded). Keep the action open unless you are ready to shoot or when storing your over-and-under in the gun rack, and keep your finger away from the trigger until you are ready to call for the target.

Let's start with when you get to the gun club. If you have a semi-auto shotgun,

LEFTY RAY CHAPA

always have the action open until you are on the station ready to shoot. This is the only acceptable time where the action should be closed. All other times, including when you are getting it out of your vehicle, the action should be open. The muzzle should be pointed straight down towards the ground or straight up in the air. Down at the ground would be preferred. We should also try to keep the action visible so other people can see that it is open and that you aren't carrying around a potentially loaded gun.



▲ Have a plan before you step on the station to keep the round moving for the whole team.

Again, most shooters don't mean any harm by pointing their guns all over the place, but to someone who doesn't know you or if your gun is loaded, it can be a traumatic experience. I have had several muzzles pointed at me. A couple were loaded (during a hunting trip) and none of them left positive memories, so please be mindful of others. This can be traumatic enough that I have heard of kids getting scared and never wanting to go back to a gun club again. You never know how harshly your actions may affect someone else, so please be cautious and kind! After all, you are holding one of the most deadly weapons inside 15 yards in your hands. Often, these actions are done by "experienced" shooters who have lost some respect for the firearm they are carrying. As experienced shooters, we need to set great examples for everyone around us, because we never know who is watching and who will pick up on our good or poor habits.



▼ The action of your gun should be open at all times when you are not standing on the station preparing to shoot.

What about over-and-under shotguns? When getting out of the car and carrying the gun toward your field or the clubhouse, keep it open. The only time your gun needs to be closed is when you are putting it in the gun rack or when you are already on the station getting ready to shoot. Again, you do not want to be closing your gun/action while you are walking on the station. What if you trip on a crack in the concrete while loading the gun and you drop a loaded gun? You should be on the station before you load the gun and before you close the gun.

Muzzle awareness for an over-and-under needs to still be on your radar, but it is not as critical as the semi-auto because when it's open, nothing can happen. Most of the time, you can rest the end of the muzzle on your foot or throw your gun over your shoulder, keeping the gun open during that time to show everyone you are unloaded and safe.

What about safeties and the trigger? I mean, if my gun is loaded and closed but my safety is on, nothing can happen, right? Wrong. Never, ever, ever rely on your safety to bail you out. On that note, you do not need to turn your safety on and off when you shoot on a skeet field. You can if you choose to, but it is not a requirement. Your finger should be on the trigger only when you are ready to call for the target and the gun is already mounted. I see some accidental discharges throughout the year because a shooter has their finger on the trigger while they are mounting or closing the gun and they don't realize the pressure they have on the trigger. It's much safer to have your finger off the trigger until your gun is mounted and you are ready to call for the target. Safety is the top priority when you get to the gun club.

Ok, you arrive at the club and you are being safe with your gun — what next? Gather all of your gear, glasses, ear protection, pouch and ammo. I prefer to put my glasses on before getting close to the field because I do not want a stray pellet finding my eye. Yes, the pellets do ricochet when they hit the targets. They will sometimes come back in the direction of the field. Even if you are just spectating, it is always recommended that you wear eye and ear protection.

Next, before you storm out to the field, check in with the manager or the person at the desk, or check to see if the club has a sign-in sheet. Check with your club, because their rules might differ from another club you have belonged to or visited.



▲ Safety first: Finger off the trigger until you're ready to shoot.

Shot size is a popular topic, and it depends on the club as well. Sometimes they have close neighbors and you can shoot nothing larger than No. 8 shot. This is not an attempt to wreck your day by making you shoot a certain shot size — it has to do with how far the shot travels. Again, please respect the rules of the club. If your shot goes too far and the neighbor complains and the EPA gets involved, you won't have a club to shoot at anymore. Each club has different rules on this, so please check with the club. Some clubs are now required to shoot steel shot only, although this is not too much of a trend yet.

Once you have checked in and made sure you have the appropriate ammo and such, await your field assignment or take your field according to club rules. When you arrive at the field, please introduce yourself to the other shooters. You'll likely find them very welcoming, and they will probably offer any help or advice that you may need. Find out from them if they prefer to keep things very quiet or if they are usually a little chatty (encouragement or heckling). Each person is different, so please be respectful. Even if they say they are chatty, you still want to keep the volume off when there is someone on the station about to shoot. Now, if you have a question, please grab one of the shooters and step back to a safe distance so you can ask your question without disrupting the shooter on the station.

When the shooter in front of you is shooting, have a plan of what you want to do on that station and have ammo in hand so that when they are finished, you can step up and shoot in a timely manner. There's no reason why a five-man squad can't shoot a full round of skeet in 15 or 20 minutes. If everyone is ready with ammo in hand when they get on the station, this should not be a problem. If you step on the station and then grab your ammo, then think about where you want to stand, where your hold point is, etc., the rounds drag on and take forever. You should know where you want to stand, where your hold point is and where your look point is before you get up there. If you don't, it might be a good idea to get some help so you know exactly what you want to do.

While you are waiting to shoot or once you have completed your station, be aware of where you are standing. You do not want to be anywhere near the current shooter's peripheral vision. You want to be sure to stay out of their vision out of courtesy for them and also to keep you out of harm's way. If you are flirting with being in their vision field, you might find a muzzle pointed in your direction. Generally speaking, if you stay directly behind the station, you are ok. If you start to go outside the station, make sure you are back as well — that way you stay out of their way and you stay safe.

Station 8 can be a little tricky if you are new. Again, if you follow suit and just stay behind the shooter in front of you, you should be fine. Newer shooters, remember on 8 that everyone shoots the high house first, then the squad turns around to shoot the low house. Always load one shell on high 8, never two. Lastly, on 8, remember the center stake is out of bounds, so your muzzle should never pass up the center stake.

Once the round is over, if there are other shooters waiting, please exit the field in a timely manner so they can go ahead and get started on their round. If not, you can take your time and go again when your squad is ready. This is the time to ask some questions to the other shooters if you have any. Since you aren't shooting, ask away! Just be sure to keep the volume down for the other shooters if another group takes the field. CTN

BONUS TIP FROM PAUL

The bottom line is that we need to make safety our top priority so no one gets hurt and so we don't scar anyone for life and make them not want to come back. Remember, we need to grow our sport, not make people not want to come back.

Next, always check with the club and learn and respect their rules, because you don't know the political battles they are fighting behind the scenes.

Lastly, be kind and respectful to the other shooters. While most shooters are pretty casual, some are very serious about their game. You just have to be aware of your surroundings. Of course, don't forget, this sport is a game and is supposed to be fun — so have fun and make some friends! The people in skeet are going to be the best people you will ever meet in your lifetime.