

Your First USPSA Match



Every top shooter in the country today was once a beginner, every top shooter arrived at their very first match with butterflies in their stomach and wondered what they had gotten themselves into.

The format of a typical match has not changed much since the sport was first founded; There may be some regional differences in how matches are run but this guide will give you a rough idea of what to expect and the meaning of some of the terminology that you may encounter.

We will assume that you have completed a basic safety course of some description, these courses will teach you the basics of loading, unloading, magazine changes, drawing from a holster etc.. If you have not completed such a course then it is in your best interest to do so before shooting in your first match.

This guide is not a substitute for a good safety course.

Before you leave Home

On the day of your first match there are a list of things that you will need to take with you, and they are shown below:

- 🕒 Gun and magazines, ideally you should have at least 5 magazines.
- 🕒 Ammunition (typically about 200 rounds for a local match).
- 🕒 Holster, belt and magazine pouches.
- 🕒 Shooting glasses, ear-plugs and/or ear-muffs (preferably both).
- 🕒 Good boots, something that supports the ankle, hiking boots or baseball boots are both good.
- 🕒 A bag to cart all your stuff around and a bag to keep your used brass cases in.
- 🕒 Sun block if it's hot, and a pair of gloves.

Arriving at the Range

Once you have all that you need to get yourself down to the range, always try to arrive early. This will give you time to walk around and examine the stages before the shooting starts.

Signing Up

If you plan to shoot with someone that you know then sign up at the same time as they do. Typically each match will use some kind of squads - grouping shooters together - and you will stay with that squad for the entire match and move from one berm to another to complete each stage. So if you sign up next to your shooting buddy then chances are that you will wind up in the same squad. If you don't know anyone at the club then mention this to the person doing the sign-up and they should be able to recommend someone to guide you through the first match. If there are other women shooters at the club then it may be preferable to join up with them.

Every good club will go out of their way to accommodate new shooters so don't be afraid to ask for help.

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Getting Ready

Once you have signed up, you will receive some score sheets, there will be one for each stage. Fill in your name, division, and other pertinent details on each score sheet. These will be collected at the end of the day and someone will type all that information into a scoring program called EZWinscore and produce the results. More on that later.

Once the score sheets are filled out then you want to find the Safety Area - this should be clearly marked - and put on your holster, gun etc..

Don't handle ammunition in the Safety Area. This is against the rules.

Feel free to load your magazines wherever you want - but not in the Safety Area - so that you are all ready for the start.

Match Briefing / Shooters Meeting

At the start of each match there will be a briefing or meeting where the Match Director will go over any pertinent information that you may need, there could be some announcements of future matches for example. Once that is done then each stage will be described, this is called the Stage Briefing and will give instructions on the way that the stage is to be shot.

Each stage briefing will have several key points and they are listed below:

- 🎯 **Comstock** - Indicates that you can shoot as many rounds as you need to complete the course of fire or stage.
- 🎯 **Virginia Count** - You can only shoot the required number of rounds, any more and penalties will apply.
- 🎯 **Speed Shoot** - It's typically a fast stage with little or no movement.
- 🎯 **Medium Course** - Not as fast as a speed shoot and may have 2 or more shooting positions.
- 🎯 **Field Stage** - The big stages can have upwards of 32 rounds and require multiple shooting positions.
- 🎯 **Number of Rounds** - The minimum (or maximum for Virginia Count) rounds that will be required for this stage.
- 🎯 **Number of Points** - The number of points that are available, typically this is FIVE times the number of rounds, a twenty round stage is typically worth 100 points.
- 🎯 **Description** - This describes what you have to do in this stage, it will include the start position, certain targets that have to be engaged from specific positions. Basically it is a guide to shooting the stage. Speed Shoots generally are more specific about the way they are to be shot, Field Stages are generally less specific.

Try to get near the front of the crowd while the briefings are being read so that you can hear what is being said and get a look at the stage. If there is anything that you are not clear about, then please ask the Match Director or the Range Officer for some clarification. There is no such thing as a stupid question.

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Each briefing is written on a piece of paper, and that paper is available on that stage for the duration of the match so you can read it at any time to make sure you understand the process.

Once all that has been read out then all the shooters will move to the next berm and the entire exercise is repeated until all the stage briefings have been read.

Then the Match Director will announce the squad numbers. Typically there will be a squad for each berm and each squad will hold a similar number of shooters. So if a match consists of 5 stages and there are 80 shooters then each squad will have 16 people in it.

The squad that you are in will be determined by your Shooter Number that is written on each score-sheet; If you are shooter number 20 then you would be in Squad 2 (in the example above, Squad 1 will be shooters 1-16 and squad 2 will be shooters 17-32).

If you are in squad 2 you will start on Stage 2, then go to Stage 3, 4, 5 and then finish on Stage 1.

Shooting the Match

The Berm

Okay we have made our way to the correct berm, the butterflies are doing acrobatics in your stomach but don't worry, it's going to be okay. First things first, someone will be collecting score-sheets. Find the correct score-sheet for this stage, if you are not sure which is the correct score sheet then ask someone. Everyone is there to help, we all want your first match to be fun.

Walk-Through

The walk-through is a vital part of the stage, this is the opportunity to walk through the course of fire as if you were shooting it, leave the gun in the holster at this point. Handling the gun without the supervision of an RO (Range Officer) causes a tremendous amount of excitement... but not the good kind; You will suffer a match disqualification which means you get to go home very early.

If you are unsure of the best way to shoot the stage - and bear in mind there may be *many* ways to shoot a stage - then don't be afraid to ask for help. We were all new at this once and everyone will happily offer advice. The trick for the first few matches is to keep it simple.

Procedure

Once all the walking through is done, then it's time to start shooting. There will be an RO (Range Officer) and a Score Keeper. These are usually people of have done a few matches and who are familiar with the rules. Some have completed extensive USPSA training to become RO's but there is no training to be a Score Keeper, which is why checking your score sheet is so important.

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The Score Keeper will call out the name of the first, second and third shooter. The first shooter will be called the '*shooter*', (pretty obvious so far),

The second shooter will be called as '*on deck*', the third shooter will be '*in the hole*'. Don't ask why they are called that because I honestly don't know.

If you are called to shoot first, tell the Score Keeper that you would like to be moved down a bit in the shooting order, this gives you an opportunity to watch some other people shoot the stage before it's your turn in the spotlight.

Workers

Once the list of the shooter and the two standby shooters have been called, then the Score Keeper will call the names of the people who have to work. They will typically call two people to '*patch*' or '*tape*' and one person to set steel - assuming that there are steel targets on this stage. And one or two people to '*brass*'.

Patching/Taping

If your name is called as a Patcher or Taper then grab a roll of brown sticky tape, it's hard to miss, it looks like a very flat inedible donut. As the RO scores the targets - actually AFTER the RO scores the targets - you can tear off an inch of tape and patch the holes.

There is white tape for the no-shoot targets and black tape for the hardcover targets.

Make sure that the tape is pressed down firmly and not left all curly.

Brassing

If your name is called to Brass then it means that you get to scabble around in the dirt and pick up the shooter's empty cases (this is where the gloves come in handy). Most shooters have a '*brass bag*' for this purpose.

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Shooting

This is the stuff where you get to do your thing. You should be familiar with the standard procedures, such as:

'LOAD AND MAKE READY'
'STANDBY'
'BEEP'
shooting, shooting and more shooting
'UNLOAD AND SHOW CLEAR'.
'IF GUN IS CLEAR, HAMMER DOWN'
'HOLSTER'.

By now you are out of breath and wondering if you screwed up or not. Don't worry about screwing up, as long as you are safe then no-one will laugh, we were all '*newbies*' once. Don't try to set any speed records at your first match, the idea is to get comfortable with the gun and to be safe.

Scoring

The RO will now proceed to score your targets - don't worry about picking up your brass cases or your empty magazines your squad-mates will take care of that - you will get plenty of opportunities to pay back this kindness later.

Follow the RO around as he scores your targets and look at where your shots are. If they are too low or too high then some adjustment of your sights may be in order.

The RO will call out the hits and misses and the no-shoots and the procedural errors that you had for running over the fault lines that you no doubt missed in all the excitement.

The job of the Score Keeper is to immortalize all this data on your score sheet and total up all the hits, misses and no-shoots etc..

Checking

Once the scoring has completed the Score Keeper will hand you the score sheet to check and sign.

Check the score-sheet, make sure it is your score-sheet and not someone else's, make sure that the time is recorded correctly. Make sure that the total number of Hits and Misses totals the number of rounds on the stage. If you are happy then sign it, if you are not happy then ask the Score Keeper to clarify the scores and make any corrections. Once you have signed it, it is cast in stone.

The score-sheets will remain with the Score Keeper and turned in at the end of the match.

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Preparation

Clean your magazines that you dropped all over the floor and load them up ready for the next stage. Cleaning your magazines is important because dirt, sand etc. can work it's way into the magazine and cause malfunctions.

Helping

Once you have prepared everything for the next stage, you may want to help out with the Patching or Brassing, even if your name has not been called to help. Helping to patch and brass keeps the squads moving and prevents delays in the match.

Alternatively you may want to follow the Score Keeper around to see how the score sheet is marked up. That way you can do this duty yourself after a few matches.

At the End of the Match

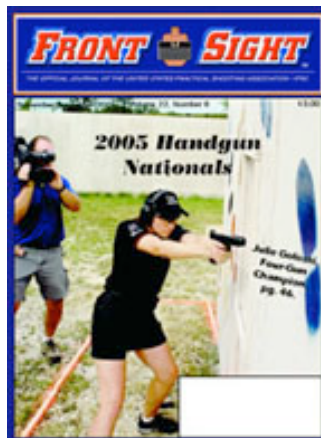
At the end of the match the stages are dismantled and all the props are put away. Please help to tear down the match, if everyone does a little then no-one has to do a lot.

While all this is going on someone will be entering all the scores into the computer to calculate who won and the final positions of every competitor.

This scoring process may take a few hours and in most cases the scores will be uploaded to the USPSA Members Area where you can see your results. The link is shown below:

<http://www.uspsa.org/members/>

Access to the Members Area requires a user-id and password that is listed in Front Sight magazine which you get 6 times a year with your USPSA membership.



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Congratulations

You have completed your first and hopefully not your last USPSA match. The more matches that you shoot, the more your confidence will grow. At the start it is important to focus on the basics of Practical Shooting, don't try to set the world on fire with blazing fast times, just focus on safety and hitting the targets.

Once the confidence has started to build then feel free to experiment with different techniques for shooting stages and for moving from one target array to another.

Your first match is like the first time you got behind the wheel of a car, there are all these knobs, levers, pedals and switches and it can all be a little overwhelming. So just focus on the simple things.

After a few driving lessons you were able to steer and use turn signals without conscious thought, but in the beginning you had to think about every action.

This is the same with shooting, thinking about each action will mean that it will take you longer to shoot a stage - and that's okay - you are just at the *beginning* of your shooting. We were all beginners once, even the World Champions went through this *same learning experience*, if they can do it, then you can do it.