

Guide to Your First USPSA Match at CASA

Every top shooter was once a beginner. Every top shooter arrived at his first match with a stomach full of butterflies and wondered what how he was going to get through the competition.

The format of a typical USPSA 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 should give you an idea about what to expect, as well as teach you some of the terminology that you will encounter at the range.

Before You Leave Home

Here is a list of things that you need to bring with you to your first match:

- Gun and magazines – ideally you should have at least four magazines.
- Ammunition (typically about two hundred rounds or more for a local match).
- Belt Holster, belt, and magazine pouches. (no thigh or shoulder holsters)
- Shooting glasses, earplugs and/or earmuffs (preferably both).
- Good boots that support the ankles. Hiking boots or baseball cleats are both good.
- Bag to carry your gear.
- Bag to keep your used brass cases.
- Sun block if it is hot.
- Pair of gloves if it is cold.

Arrive at the Range

Always try to arrive early at the range on match day. The extra time will give you an opportunity to walk around the range and examine the stages before the match begins; and make some new shooting friends, too.

Safe Area

After arriving at the range and installing your belt-ride holster and magazine pouches, locate the Safe Area, which is clearly marked. The Safe Area is where you remove your gun from your gun bag and holster it. Your other gear may be put on at any time before or after sign-in. Only handle your gun in a Safe Area or under the supervision of a Range Officer (RO).

Do not handle ammunition in the Safe Area. This is against the rules.

Feel free to load your magazines wherever you want, but not in the Safe Area.

Sign-In

If you plan to shoot with someone that you know, then try to sign-in at the same time as your friend. Typically, each match uses self-squading – grouping shooters together – and you stay with that squad as you move from one course of fire (CoF) to another for the entire match. If you sign-in next to your shooting buddy, chances are good that you and your friend will be assigned to the same squad. If you do not know anyone at the match, then mention this to the person coordinating the sign-in, and he will recommend a shooter who can guide you through your first match. Every good club should go out of its way to accommodate new shooters, so do not be afraid to ask for help. Everyone is there to help, and wants your first match to be safe and fun.

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Squads

There is usually a squad on one stage at a time, and each squad holds a similar number of shooters. For example, if there are 32 shooters signed-in for the match, there will be 4 squads that consist of 8 shooters per squad. The ideal number of people on a squad is eight to ten. Too few shooters and there is not enough people to handle the workload required to properly run a stage, and too many shooters makes it seem like an all-day affair to get through a match.

Score Sheets

Once you have signed-in, you will receive a score sheet that contains scoring information for each CoF. Complete your name, division, and other pertinent details on the score sheet. The score sheet is collected at the end of the match, and someone will key the information into a scoring program called EZWinscore that generates the results.

Definitions

- **Comstock Scoring** – You can shoot as many rounds as you need / desire to complete the CoF or stage.
- **Virginia Count Scoring** – You can only shoot up to the maximum number of rounds. If you shoot more than the maximum number of rounds, penalties will apply.
- **Short Course / Speed Shoot** – Typically a fast stage with little or no movement with around 9 rounds.
- **Medium Course** – Not as fast as a speed shoot, and the stage may have two or more shooting positions with around 20 rounds.
- **Long Course / Field Course** – The large 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 the stage.
- **Number of Points** – The number of points that are available, typically this is 5 times the number of rounds. For example, a 20 round stage is typically worth 100 points.
- **Walk-Through / Description** – Guides you through the stage, and describes what you have to do in detail. It includes the start position and lists certain targets that have to be engaged from specific positions.
 - Speed Shoots generally are more specific about the way they are to be shot; Field Stages are generally less specific.
 - Try to get to the front of the crowd for the walk-through so that you can hear what is being said and get a closer look at the stage. If there is anything that you do not understand, then please ask the Match Director or the RO for clarification. There is no such thing as a stupid question.

Match Briefing / Shooters Meeting

There is a shooters meeting before the match starts where the Match Director reviews any pertinent information. For example, the Match Director could announce future matches. After the briefing, the squad list is read, and then it is time to head to your first stage.

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Walk-Through

You have made your way to the correct CoF, and the butterflies are doing acrobatics in your stomach; but do not worry, it is going to be okay. The “squad mom” (a person that helps to run the squad) or RO for your squad collects each shooter’s score sheet.

Each walk-through is written on a sheet of paper, and is available on every stage during the match so you can read it at any time to make sure you understand the process. Once the walk-through is read and all questions have been answered, each shooter has three to five minutes to “memorize” the CoF before the first shooter’s name is called to shoot. This is your opportunity to look at all the different angles and positions in which to shoot that particular stage. You are allowed to walk around the CoF to see where the targets are placed.

Procedures

Once the walk-through is completed, then it is time to start the CoF. There is a RO and a Score Keeper at each stage. These people have experience with matches and are familiar with the rules. Some people have completed extensive USPSA training to become ROs. However, there is no training to be a Score Keeper, which is why you should double-check your score sheet after each stage.

The Score Keeper calls out the name of the first, second, and third shooter. The first shooter is called the “shooter,” the second shooter is “on deck,” and the third shooter is “in the hole.” If you are called to shoot first, tell the Score Keeper that you would like to be moved down in the shooting order so you can have an opportunity to watch other people shoot the stage before it is your turn in the spotlight.

Terminology and Stage Workers

USPSA is a volunteer sport, and there are many different duties that need to be manned.

- Range Officer (RO) – Runs the timer.
- Score Keeper – Scores and calls the next couple of shooters.
- Shooter
- Just Finished Shooter – Loads his magazines for the next stage.
- On Deck – A person who is walking through the CoF, memorizing the stage.
- Tapers and Setters – People who tape targets and set steel for the next shooter.
- Brassing – If a shooter wants his brass back after shooting, then several people pitch in to pick up the brass and hand it back before the next shooter starts the CoF.

Your Turn to Shoot

Now it is time when you get to do your thing. Do not worry about making a mistake, as long as you are safe. You should be familiar with the standard procedures, such as:

- “MAKE READY” – means load your gun and put it back in your holster.
- “ARE YOU READY?” – The RO asks this of you, if you do not respond with a NO, then he moves on to the next command.
- “STANDBY” – a 1 to 3 second pause then...
- An audible beeeeeep! – draw your gun as you face downrange and engage targets according to the walk-through. When you are done shooting, the RO will say...

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- “UNLOAD AND SHOW CLEAR” – remove your magazine and pull the slide back to un-chamber the round, and after seeing the round drop out and checking the empty chamber...
- “IF CLEAR, HAMMER DOWN AND HOLSTER” – aim the gun at the rear berm and pull the trigger. Click! Now put your gun back in your holster, you are done.

Do not try to set any speed records at your first match; the idea is to get comfortable with the gun and to be safe. It is important to focus on the basics of Practical Shooting; do not try to set the world on fire with blazing fast times. Instead, focus on safety and hitting each target.

Scoring

After shooting the CoF, you are out of breath and wondering how well you shot. The RO proceeds to score your targets – do not worry about picking up your brass cases or your empty magazines – your squad mates take care of that. You will get plenty of opportunities to repay their kindness later. Follow the RO as he scores your targets, and look closely at your shots. If your shots are too low or too high, then an adjustment of your sights may be in order. The RO calls out the hits, misses, 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 Score Keeper notes the data on your score sheet and totals all the hits, misses, no-shoots, etc.

Preparation

Clean your magazines that you dropped on the ground and load them for the next stage. Cleaning your magazines is important because dirt, sand, etc. can work its way into the magazine and cause malfunctions.

Help with Taping, Brassing, or Future Score Keeping

Once you have prepared everything for the next stage, you will need to tape targets or brass. Helping to tape 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 completed. After a few matches, you can perform this duty yourself.

End of the Match and Tear Down

At the end of the match, proceed to a Safe Area, and put your gun in your shooting bag, and remove the rest of your gear and place it in your bag. The stages are dismantled, and all the props are put away. Please help tear down the match. If everyone does a little then no one has to do a lot. While tear down is occurring, someone is entering the scores into the computer to calculate the final positions of every competitor. The scoring process may take a few hours, and then the results are uploaded to the CASA Web site (www.casarange.com) and posted on the Scores page.

Congratulations

You have completed your first USPSA match. The more matches you shoot, the more your confidence grows. Once your 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.

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Your first match may seem overwhelming, and it may take you longer to shoot a stage. Try to focus on simple tasks. After a few matches you will be able to work your way through each CoF without concentrating on every action.

Each shooter starts out as a beginner; every World Champions has gone through this *same learning experience*.

Be safe.