

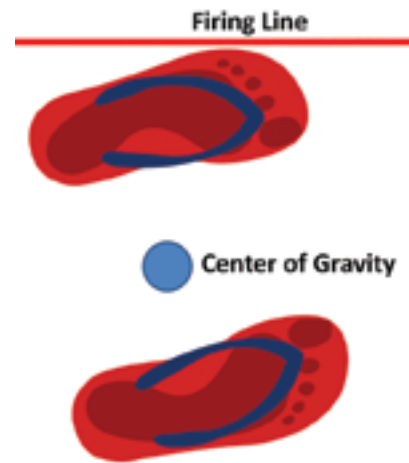


The standing position is generally viewed as the least stable of the three most common rifle shooting positions (prone, kneeling and standing).

However, with some basic knowledge and dedicated practice it can be applied very effectively in a wide range of environments. It allows greater mobility than the other positions and there are some tactical applications where it may be the only appropriate technique.

The first variation of the standing position we will examine is the traditional offhand competition stance. This position has been used since the days of musketry and is still taught in military basic training. This offhand position takes time to properly es-

tablish, affords less control over recoil for rapid strings of fire and provides less mobility than other standing variants; however, it affords the shooter the greatest stability and thus the ability to accurately engage smaller or more distant targets. This stance relies on proper alignment of the skeletal structure, proper placement of appendages to capitalize on bone-on-muscle support (as well as reduce fatigue from holding the position for extended periods of time) and cantilevering the upper body to offset the weight of the rifle barrel.



Traditional offhand competition stance: The feet should be placed a comfortable distance apart, typically shoulder-width with each foot roughly parallel to the firing line.

TIPS FOR RIFLEMEN

# STABLE STANDING

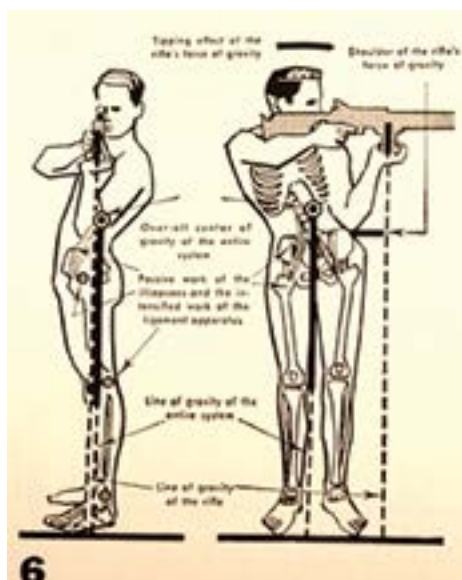
## BUILD YOUR BEST POSITION

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The Marine shown here is demonstrating the competition offhand shooting position. It may be great for this type of competition but it has some shortfalls in tactical application.



left: This diagram from the 1960 edition of the NRA Handbook shows the proper relationship of the shoulders to the hips and the overall centers of gravity for this position.

above: The Marine shown here is demonstrating the competition offhand shooting position. It may be great for this type of competition but it has some shortfalls in tactical application.

## THE STANDING OFFHAND POSITION IS AN EXCELLENT TRAINING PLATFORM FOR DEVELOPING SOLID MARKSMANSHIP FUNDAMENTALS. IT DOES HOWEVER, HAVE ITS SHORTCOMINGS IN MORE DYNAMIC ENVIRONMENTS.

We will begin constructing this platform at the feet. The feet should be placed a comfortable distance apart, typically shoulder-width with each foot roughly parallel to the firing line. By ensuring the feet are parallel or slightly toe-in, the tendons and ligaments in the knee and ankle joints provide more tension around those joints and aid in more natural stability without muscular input. This can be tested by first standing with feet comfortably spread and the toes pointed out at about 45 degrees. With the feet in this position rock gently back and forth. You should notice that the quadriceps, hamstrings, calves and glutes all have to fire in order to maintain balance. Next, repeat the test with the feet parallel or slightly toe-in. This alignment should feel much more stable and require much less muscular input to maintain your balance. Weight should be evenly distributed across the sole of the foot. In fact, many competitive shooters wear specialized shoes with very flat, stiff soles to aid balance.

Moving up, the hips should be centered above and between the feet forming an isosceles triangle. At this point the head, spine and hips should all be aligned such that a straight rod would pass through the top of the head, along the spine, through the center of the hips, and terminate directly between the feet. From here the rifle is raised into position by the supporting hand and the upper body shifts away from the target and the hips shift toward the target to aid in supporting the weight of the rifle. This results in

the shooter's body facing perpendicular to the target or "bladed." This position is often touted as being preferred, since it provides a smaller silhouette and target to the enemy. However, taking an incoming round from this angle increases the chance of multiple vital organs being hit.

The elbow of the supporting arm is anchored against the hip bone along a vertical line from the lead foot to the head. If it is angled to one side or the other you will notice the additional muscular effort that is required to support the rifle. The support hand grasps the rifle while you maneuver the stock into the shoulder pocket. The pocket is first formed by elevating the firing-hand's elbow up and forward while rolling the shoulder forward to form a gap between the collar bone and deltoid. The bottom portion of the stock is then placed into this gap and the elbow relaxed and allowed to drop to the side while still rolling the shoulder forward.

The head is then placed on the stock to align the shooting eye behind the sight and establish proper eye relief. The head position must be comfortable enough to maintain consistency from shot to shot and firm enough to prevent the "stock-weld" from shifting during recoil.

The firing hand should be placed where it can reach the trigger and firing controls without having to change the overall position and should provide just enough rearward pressure to hold the stock in the shoulder pocket. The supporting hand should be located

directly beneath the rifle's center of gravity and should be looked at as a resting platform for the rifle. There are a number of options for exactly how the hand is placed. The first is using the palm as a rest with the fingers extended along the hand guards and pointed toward the target. The second resembles a C-clamp grip around the hand guards with the thumb facing backwards, toward the shooter, so that the tension in the wrist itself aids in supporting the rifle. Some shooters, particularly if they are using heavy shooting gloves, prefer the third method which is forming a fist and resting the rifle directly on top of the knuckles of the supporting hand.

Natural point of aim is then tested by aligning the sights on the target, closing the eyes, settling into the position, relaxing, exhaling and then opening the eyes. If the sights remain on the target no adjustments are needed. However, if they have deviated from the original point of aim the body's natural alignment must be adjusted. Elevation changes are effected by moving the supporting hand forward or back along the hand guards or changing the grip. Left or right deviation is corrected by slightly shifting the rearmost foot. Once an adjustment is made the test must be performed again to ensure the corrections were effective.

When performed properly, the standing offhand position provides more stability than other standing positions and is an excellent training platform for developing solid marksmanship fundamentals. It does



however, have its shortcomings in more dynamic environments.

Now that we have discussed the application of the offhand position applied to the highest form of the art of precision marksmanship we will now look at its crude little brother in the tactical world.

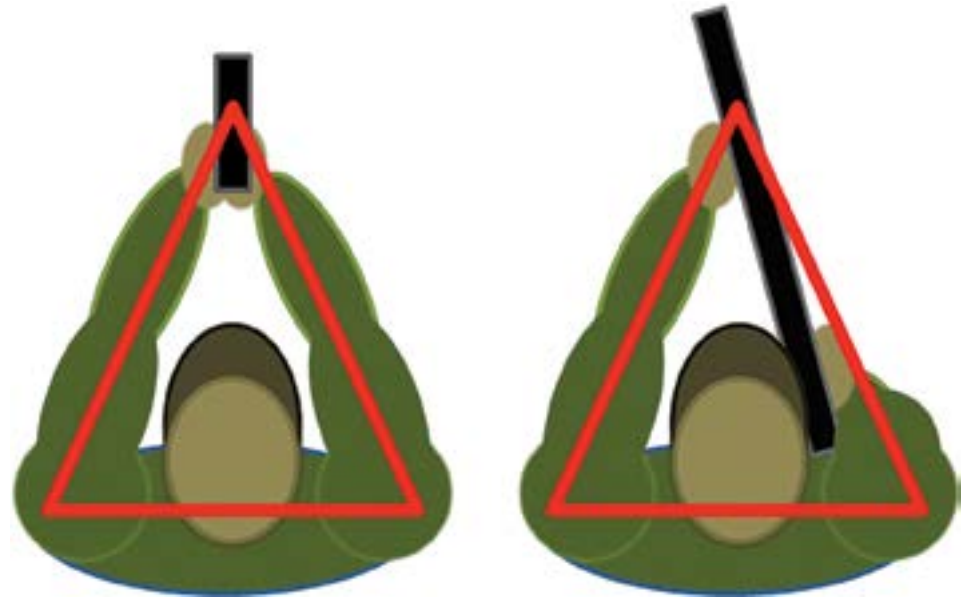
Unlike the offhand position described above, the combat standing position relies more on muscular tension than structural support to provide a solid shooting platform. Although it gives up a good portion of the stability inherent in the competition stance, it allows much greater mobility and recoil control for engaging multiple targets with multiple rounds in fluid tactical environments.

Starting from the ground-up again, the feet should be placed roughly shoulder-width apart with the firing-side foot placed slightly to the rear. The feet should be parallel to each other, to take advantage of the inherent joint stability described above, with the weight distributed toward the front of the foot to aid balance and mobility. The knees should be slightly bent, just enough that you can see the very tips of the toes over the kneecaps.

Hips are again centered between the feet forming an isosceles triangle, are square to the target/enemy, which positions the center of gravity between the balls of the feet.

This also allows the shoulders to be aligned over the hips, keeping them square to the target and preventing an unnatural twisting of the upper body in relation to the hips and feet. At this point the stance is essentially identical to the modern isosceles position used in combative pistol shooting. It is a good, comfortable, basic fighting stance and should allow easy movement in any direction.

This relationship is maintained when pivoting laterally to engage targets arranged side-by-side in front of the shooter. Tension is maintained in the core and the shooter should avoid "tank-turretting" with the upper body. Instead, bend the knees to rotate the body to the left or right. This will maintain a much more stable platform and aid in recoil control by preventing the body from twisting out of alignment. Keeping the hips and shoulders square to the threat will also po-



How the isosceles stance can be applied to rifle shooting as well as pistol.

sition ballistic plates and body armor in the most ideal spot for protecting against a frontal threat. I would argue that this position also provides the greatest survivability, even without armor, due to reducing the number of vital organs that could be hit by a single bullet.

Some common errors in shooter's stances at this point typically include bending too far forward at the waist, feet placed too far apart and too much bend in the knees. All of these errors reduce the inherent mobility of the stance and increase reaction time. Being bent too far over, typically done in an attempt to control recoil, places undue strain on the lower back (especially when wearing armor and a combat load) and in order to move, requires re-centering the hips over the feet

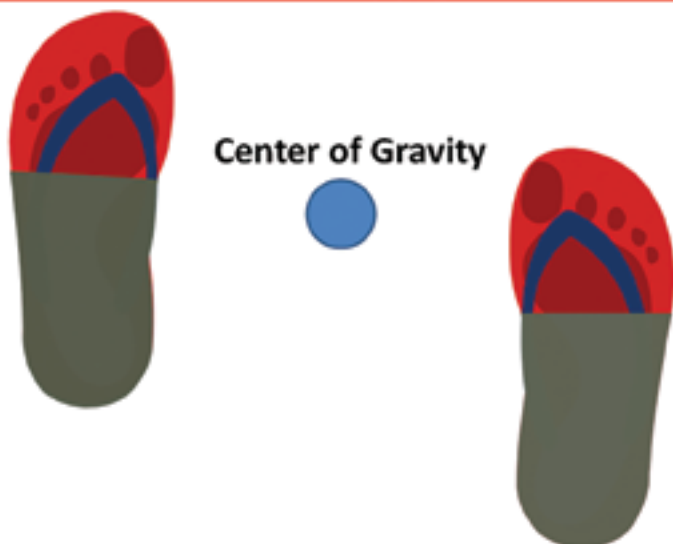
before stepping in any direction. Similarly, having the feet too far apart or knees bent too deeply, also requires additional preparatory movement before the shooter can actually displace from their position. This reduces efficiency and impedes economy of motion.

Unlike the offhand standing position, where very little of the rifle stock (only the bottom inch or so) makes contact with the shoulder pocket, we now want as much contact as possible to aid in controlling recoil.

This is much like utilizing a high, firm grip on the grip of a pistol to get as close as possible to the axis of recoil in order to reduce muzzle-flip. The axis of recoil for the M-16/AR-15 family of rifles is directly in line with the bore, which means we want the stock as low in the shoulder pocket as we can comfortably attain without straining the neck trying to get the head down to the stock. There are also some options for where the stock is placed depending on the shooter's build as well as type and amount of equipment they may be wearing. Ideally, we want the stock resting comfortably in the natural pocket formed between the front of the deltoid and the pectoral muscle. In order to maintain this pocket during the recoil impulses generated during rapid strings of fire or when utilizing the fully automatic mode on military or NFA rifles the shoulder should be rolled forward, wrapping around the stock and preventing it from sliding sideways out of the pocket. Many times however, adding body armor prevents the ideal use of the shoulder pocket as an anchoring point for the stock. In this case, the shooter may have to offset the stock to the inside, directly over the pectoral muscle. As long as the shoulders remain square to the threat the slight rearward pressure on the pistol grip and downward pressure of the head on the stock will prevent the rifle from shifting position while firing. Just remember to manipulate the trigger finger independently and avoid changing pressures exerted in your hand grips while shooting.

**MASTERING THE STANDING POSITION IS A MATTER OF LEARNING THE PROPER TECHNIQUE AND THEN PRACTICING DILIGENTLY TO PROGRAM THE NEURO-MUSCULAR CIRCUITS TO APPLY THE TECHNIQUE SMOOTHLY.**

## Firing Line



Unlike the competition offhand stance, in the combat standing position, the feet should be placed roughly shoulder-width apart with the firing-side foot placed slightly to the rear.

The firing-side hand is placed high on the pistol grip of the rifle with the fingers wrapped comfortably around the grip and the thumb (first knuckle of trigger finger for lefties without an ambidextrous safety) on top of the safety lever when it is in the “safe” position. The trigger finger should be placed straight and high on the side of the lower receiver until the decision has been made to shoot. Enough rearward pressure should be applied that the rifle will stay in position when the non-firing hand is removed from the hand guards. Placement of the non-firing hand can vary based on the shooter’s build, length of the hand guards / barrel, mounting of lights and lasers and the use of vertical foregrips. I prefer placing my non-firing hand in the exact same position in space that I utilize for pistol shooting, thus maintaining commonality of technique and the advantages of the isosceles stance, where the rifle itself becomes one leg of the triangle. Shooters should avoid utilizing the magazine well and magazine for placement of the non-firing hand. For many shooters, this technique is either not deliberately chosen or it is a holdover from the days of the MP5, where the push-button magazine release was positioned too far forward for it to be efficiently activated by the trigger finger. Thus, most shooters opted to hang on to the magazine and utilize the paddle release behind the magazine, similar to the magazine release on AK pattern rifles. The magazine well grip shows its shortfalls when attempt-

ing to rapidly transition between laterally arrayed targets. Since more than 50 percent of the weight of the rifle is unsupported in front of the non-firing hand the result is swinging past the intended target and lost time in recovery. This grip also presents a safety concern for an overpressure cartridge or an out-of-battery detonation. Since explosive forces follow the path of least resistance, the weakest portion of the lower receiver is the magazine itself. Thus placing the hand on the magazine could result in injury, should this occur.

Pressure can either be applied rearward, pulling with the non-firing hand back into the shoulder, or forward, attempting to stretch the rifle between the hands. This technique works well with high recoil shoulder-fired weapons such as shotguns since it distributes some of the recoil energy into the non-firing arm instead of directing all of the force into the firing shoulder. There are also options for how the non-firing hand grips the hand guards, which can be determined by the arrangement of rail-mounted accessories or just shooter preference. Some will grip the hand guards and drive the thumb of the non-firing hand toward the target, again similar to the grip used to control recoil when firing a pistol. Others prefer to extend the index finger along the side of the rail and toward the target as an assist for rapid aiming of the rifle. One other option is to wrap the thumb over the top of the hand guards (if the grip diameter allows) in an attempt to gain

additional control over the rifle and prevent it from moving during recoil.

## DRILLS

Mastering the standing position is a matter of learning the proper technique and then practicing diligently to program the neuromuscular circuits to apply the technique smoothly, correctly, consistently and efficiently. The good news is most of the learning and conditioning process can be performed without access to a range or ammunition by dry firing. Both the standing offhand and the combat standing positions can be built as described above and executed dry fire against a small target. A small target is used to allow you to analyze the stability of the position and whether you are applying the marksmanship fundamentals appropriately. For the offhand, practice establishing the stance, mounting the rifle, maintaining alignment of the sights, controlling breathing and manipulating the trigger until the shot breaks without disturbing the sight alignment or sight picture. Once you are comfortable with this you can test the stance with live fire. For the combat stance, perform presentation drills, where the rifle is brought from the low or inside ready position to the firing position and concentrate on aligning the sights on the target, manipulating the safety and breaking the shot with a minimal amount of movement or sight misalignment. Transitioning between multiple targets can also be practiced dry; remember to drive with the knees and move the eyes ahead of the rifle. Once this has been mastered, live fire is used to test recoil control. Remember, when performing dry fire practice, all firearms safety rules must be followed. **Do not allow any live ammunition into your dry practice area.** If practicing with your duty or carry weapon, it is an additional safety measure to make a habit of waiting at least a half hour after your dry session before reloading live ammunition. ✓

## BIO

*Ken Javes has over 19 years of military and security contracting experience to include multiple combat and contract deployments to South West Asia. He has served with Marine infantry and force reconnaissance units and has trained with some of the top shooters in the world. He also runs Shibumi Tactical LLC and Ronin-Actual Training Services [www.ShibumiTactical.com](http://www.ShibumiTactical.com).*