

THE PREPARED CITIZEN

MASTERING BASIC SHOOTING PRINCIPLES

FOR CONSISTENT ACCURACY AND CONTROL



| THE
CARRY GUY®

ARE YOU READY?™

The Carry Guy Complete Manual: Basic Shooting Principles

Safety First

Always keep the firearm pointed in a safe direction. Keep your finger off the trigger and outside the trigger guard until your sights are on the target and you have decided to shoot. Treat every firearm as loaded. Be sure of your target and what is beyond it. This material summarizes the fundamental principles of handgun marksmanship as described in NRA American Rifleman, USMC MCRP 3-01B, and related published training materials. It is not a substitute for in-person professional instruction, manufacturer guidance, or compliance with local laws.

Who This Is For

Every handgun owner and carrier. New shooters establishing correct habits. Experienced shooters diagnosing accuracy problems. Anyone who needs a single reference covering the core principles that produce consistent hits.

What the Basic Principles Are

Published sources consistently identify these core elements of handgun marksmanship:

- Stance / position
- Grip
- Sight alignment and sight picture
- Breath control
- Trigger control
- Follow-through

NRA materials list aiming, breath control, hold control, trigger control, and follow-through. USMC MCRP 3-01B emphasizes aiming, trigger control, and breath control for pistol marksmanship. Additional sources expand the list to include grip and stance as foundational. The practical goal across all formulations is identical: keep the sights aligned and on the target while the shot breaks.

When to Apply the Principles

Every shot. During slow-fire practice, rapid strings, defensive drills, and competition. Under stress the principles that have been practiced correctly are the ones that remain available.

Where the Principles Apply

Range, training environments, and any location where the handgun is fired. The same principles govern both iron-sight and red-dot equipped pistols, with the difference that red dots eliminate the need to align front and rear sights.

How: Complete Instruction on Each Principle

Stance / Position

A stable platform allows the shooter to manage recoil and recover the sights. Documented common stances include:

- Isosceles: Feet approximately shoulder-width apart, toes toward the target, knees slightly bent, shoulders squared, arms extended, slight forward lean so weight is over the balls of the feet.
- Weaver / modified Weaver: Bladed stance with the support-side foot forward, support arm bent, strong arm more extended, creating opposing tension.
- Fighting / athletic stance: Balanced, weight evenly distributed, support-side foot slightly forward for mobility.

Sources note that a slight forward lean improves recoil management compared with leaning backward. Elbows are typically slightly bent rather than locked. The specific stance is less important than consistency and balance.

Grip

The grip is the primary means of controlling recoil and returning the sights. Standard instruction:

- Place the web of the dominant hand as high as possible on the backstrap without interfering with slide travel.
- Wrap the fingers around the grip; the middle finger contacts the underside of the trigger guard.
- Support hand fills remaining grip surface; thumbs forward along the frame.
- Apply firm, even pressure (sources commonly describe greater pressure from the support hand).
- Index finger remains outside the trigger guard until the decision to shoot.

A low grip increases muzzle flip. Excessive tension can interfere with independent trigger-finger movement.

Sight Alignment and Sight Picture

Sight alignment is the relationship between front and rear sights. For iron sights the standard description is: front sight centered in the rear notch, tops level ("equal height, equal light"), focus on the front sight while the rear sight and target appear softer.

Sight picture is the aligned sights placed on the target.

With a red-dot optic the shooter superimposes the dot on the target while focusing on the target.

Small alignment errors produce large misses because of the short sight radius of a handgun.

Breath Control

Take a normal breath, let part of it out, and fire during the natural respiratory pause. Holding the breath too long increases tremor. The goal is a stable platform at the moment the shot breaks.

Trigger Control

Move the trigger straight to the rear with steady, continuous pressure from the pad of the index finger without disturbing sight alignment. The shot should break as a surprise when practicing precision. Anticipating recoil or jerking the trigger moves the sights off the target before the bullet leaves the barrel. After the shot, allow the trigger to reset under control.

Follow-Through

Maintain the grip, stance, and sight alignment after the shot breaks. Follow-through allows the shooter to call the shot and prepares the sights for the next shot. Sources describe it as applying all fundamentals the same way before, during, and after the shot.

Integration

The principles work together. A correct grip and stance stabilize the firearm. Sight alignment aims it. Trigger control fires the shot without disturbing that aim. Breath control and follow-through protect the process. When groups open, diagnose the single element that is failing rather than changing everything at once.

Common Errors

- Low grip that allows excessive muzzle rise.
- Unequal light or height in the iron sights.
- Jerking or slapping the trigger.
- Leaning backward under recoil.
- Watching the target instead of the front sight (with iron sights).
- Failing to follow through.

Special Considerations

Differing viewpoints exist on the optimal stance (Isosceles vs. Weaver vs. hybrid) and on the precise pressure distribution in the grip; both approaches appear in documented successful instruction. Red-dot sights change the aiming process but do not eliminate the need for grip, stance, trigger control, or follow-through. Professional instruction is required to develop consistent application under stress and time pressure.

Conclusion

Basic shooting principles—stable stance, high firm grip, correct sight alignment and picture, controlled breath, smooth trigger press, and follow-through—produce consistent hits. Apply them on every shot. Diagnose errors by identifying which single principle is failing.



For hands-on training go to www.thecarryguy.com.

Sources

NRA American Rifleman “Fundamentals of Handgun Shooting”; USMC MCRP 3-01B Pistol Marksmanship; published marksmanship guides describing grip, stance, sight alignment (“equal height, equal light”), trigger control, and follow-through. Differing viewpoints exist on preferred stance and grip pressure distribution; both appear in documented training practice.



