

# The Importance of a Match Plan

*In match shooting failing to have a plan is like planning to fail. There is no way to set a plan to suit every shooter, but below are a few guidelines for being prepared for the unpredictable rigors of competition.*

## Preparation

Carry a check list with you at all times. Keep it in your gun box, or somewhere where it cannot be mislaid, such as in your wallet or purse. On the morning of the match BEFORE you leave your hotel or lodgings, ensure that everything you will need to compete is in your gun box or your range bag. Even go to the extent of physically checking each item is where you remember leaving it. Many a shooter has opened his shooting box on the line at the start of Preparation Time to discover his glasses are still on the bedside table at his hotel where he had been dry firing the night before.

Bring more ammunition than you are likely to need for the match. In the event of a range breakdown or other natural disaster (not under your control) there may be a requirement to reshoot a portion of the match. You don't need the distraction of trying to beg, borrow or steal a few rounds from your neighbors, and they will probably not appreciate the interruption either.

Take a bottle of water to the line, even if the weather is not extremely hot. This way, if the shooter next to you annoys you in any way, you can squirt a quart of rust enhancer into his shooting bag when he's not looking. Okay, so I'm kidding on that part. But keep your fluids up and you are less likely to have vision problems. If you feel thirsty you are probably already dehydrated, so make a habit of taking a sip regularly.

## What's the Plan, Stan?

The overwhelming bulk of shooters I have met seem to suffer the same tactics for shooting a match. If and when the wheels fall off their little wagon and performance lags, they vary their technique throughout the rest of the match in the hope that fortune will smile on them and they will discover a great new way to shoot tens. If this sounds like you, at least you're being honest about it. Those who maintain they don't experiment either have a match plan, are outright liars or are in the fortunate minority of people with good self discipline. It's human nature to improvise when things get rough, but in these circumstances you're making life even tougher on yourself.

The fact is, even if you don't get nervous on the line you can't expect to shoot as if you were at home. There are too many distractions. A strange range, strange faces, a shooting bench that's a different height to what you're used to, targets in shade, targets in direct sunlight, poor lighting for your sights, smelly armpits to the left, a chatterbox to the right - good grief, before you've fired a shot you're mentally cataloging a woeful bunch of excuses to draw from!

Below is a list of common excuses used at big matches, followed by the translation into English:

"I couldn't see my sights."	"I wasn't watching my sights."
"There was too much light on the target."	"I wasn't watching my sights."
"Did you see that mirage?"	"I wasn't watching my sights."
"I haven't shot in six months."	"I wasn't watching my sights."

“I’ve been too busy at work to practice.” “I wasn’t watching my sights.”  
“I must’ve moved eighteen clicks.” “I wasn’t watching my sights.”  
“Did you see that brunette down on 26?” “I wasn’t watching my sights.”  
“I must have a dud batch of ammo.” “I didn’t squeeze the trigger OR watch the sights.”

Fact is, any number of potentially damaging factors are present every time we go to the range to shoot. Why is it they only come into play when we’re anxious to shoot well? Do circumstances conspire to make us look bad? Is God really that cruel? Not likely.

But here’s the good news. Shooting is a laughably simple sport. Sure, we love to complicate it, but if you think about it the technique needed to fire a good shot is not difficult. So where’s the problem? We allow ourselves to become distracted. We cease to think logically. We need a simple set of instructions to follow, and for the first time in our lives we need to consult them BEFORE we make an utter hash of things. In this way we can make a pre-emptive strike by having our minds on the job at hand rather than be confounded by strange surroundings. Create a feeling of familiarity by reacquainting ourselves with the important facets of our technique, and in this way leave no room for extraneous distractions.

So the secret to it all? It’s simply to make up a written plan of action that covers every possible scenario within a match. It should be drawn from your shooting diary (gasp!\*) including all of the little things you do to complete a successful shot. By all means it should have a detailed description of your shot process, and also a description of how your shooting position should feel, how you maintain balance, how you find the sweet spot for your trigger finger on the trigger shoe, any little thing that is an integral part of your technique. Read and digest this before going to the line and you’ll be ready to perform like you never have before.

The second part of the plan should include contingencies should things not be running as smoothly as they might. This includes poor performance. If the wheels start to fall off, it should be stressed that the best way to get back on track is to simply focus on good technique. Shots falling outside an acceptable area are 99% of the time a dead giveaway that your mind is not where it should be. Be honest with yourself and trust your notes and you will recover. This is where the unprepared shooter will panic, abandon the old technique because “it isn’t working” and fish around for the rest of the match trying to hit on a new way to find the ten ring. Or merely hold, and hold, and hold, in the hope that the shot will break all by itself and miraculously go through the center of the target.

Other contingency plans should be included for circumstances beyond your personal control. Should there be an enforced delay, say a range is shut down by a target malfunction, you should have instructions to reinforce the importance of being prepared to restart the match whenever you are sent back to the line. Be prepared and you will not feel inconvenienced. It will bother other shooters, but it will not bother you. When they come to you after the match and say, “Man, I was going just great until we had that stoppage!” you can smile to yourself and translate what he really said: “I wasn’t watching my sights.”

Try to foresee any possible disaster. You might crossfire. Somebody else might crossfire on your target. Not only would you know how to handle it within your head, you’ll be able to quote the relevant rule and page number from your match plan if the range staff are clueless (it does sometimes happen).

### **Forewarned is forearmed.**

If all of this seems like too much work, I guess you could take the option of not bothering with a match plan. After all, with experience all of these things will become second nature. Your mistakes will make

you wiser. I can tell you it will take roughly twenty years. Maybe a little less for those not as dense as myself. But having spent so many years repeating history I can tell you I wish somebody had beaten me about the ears when I was much younger and made me do it.

It's all a part of working smarter, not harder.

And doggone it, I just wasn't watching my sights...

\*You do keep a shooting diary, don't you???