

COWBOY ACTION SHOOTING™

Match Directors Guide



Match and Stage Design

Compiled and Edited

by

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SASS Match Directors Guide

MATCH AND STAGE DESIGN

The SASS Match Director's Guide is designed to provide guidance in the production and execution of a responsible and safe Cowboy Action Shooting Match. The guide draws on many years of experience in stage design and safety procedures and stresses the elimination of stage design pit falls.

A Match Director is an individual or group of individuals appointed by a club and given the task of running the match. Match Directors should be knowledgeable of all aspects necessary to design a fun, safe match and be able to enforce the rules and regulations according to the SASS Shooter's Handbook.

Responsibilities of a Match Director

Be trained in all areas of:

- Stage Design
- Safety
- Equipment
- Range Officer Activities and Duties
- Arbitration
- SASS Rules and Policies

Safety

Range safety shall be a high priority to the entire range staff. When setting up the range, pay careful attention to bullet impact areas. An inspection of any berms or impact areas shall identify any potential weaknesses or areas to avoid in the backstops. Watch for rocks or other debris that might cause a bullet to ricochet in an undesirable direction. Also, give some thought to the angles of the targets that might create lead splatter somewhere other than into the ground directly beneath the target.

All props shall also be inspected for potential hazards. Once the buzzer sounds, most shooters aren't very concerned with treating a prop gently. Strong, sturdy props are vital to prevent malfunctions during an event. Be prepared to provide steps, platforms, handrails, and anything else needed as assistance for a

wide variety of shooters to complete the event. Pay especially close attention to situations where the shooter must get in and out of or climb on or off of any props.

Accidents can and will happen. It is the responsibility of the event staff to minimize the opportunity for such occurrences and be prepared to handle them without creating havoc when they happen.

Stage Design

Concise written stage descriptions are paramount to convey your instructions to the shooters. Stage descriptions should be specific in addressing each step in the sequence: i.e., pre-stage guns at/on ____, start with hands ____, move right, left, holster, set down, sit, stand - don't be vague. Try and imagine every interpretation of your instructions – many shooters will look for alternatives within the limits of the written description that may give them an advantage. It is your responsibility to ensure the instructions are specific enough to limit the scenario to what you intended. Today there are a number of COWBOY ACTION SHOOTING™ courses being offered that include interpretive instruction to *exploit* stage descriptions and gain a competitive advantage. Among the top shooters these slight advantages often make the difference between winning and losing. Well thought out instructions limit the scenarios and make the field as equal as possible. Let skill make the difference, not interpretation of stage instructions.

Tools

Microsoft PowerPoint is a great tool for documenting stage scenarios. Integrating verbal descriptions and graphics is easy and greatly expands your ability to create a complete picture for the competitors. A standard page set-up is a great reminder of the minimum requirements for every stage description. Here's a few suggestions:

- Somewhere in the field show the ammo requirements in the sequence used. *Example:* 5 pistol, 4 shotgun, 9 rifle, and 5 pistol.

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- Create icons of all targets, tables, and props you use at your range (See sample page below).
- Color in your graphics can be effective in helping to get your message across.

Do's and Don'ts

Starting and Stopping

1. Detail exactly how the shooter will *start* the stage: where the hands, guns, and props are to be located. Go to the extreme in detailing how a shooter will start leave nothing to interpretation. "Relaxing in a chair" – means exactly that ... not on the edge "ready to go."
2. If verbal queue's or prop manipulation is required to begin a stage, have this activity take place off the clock (prior to the timer being started).
3. Always end the shooting string with a shotgun or revolver, so the time can reliably be recorded. No main stage scenario should ever be designed to end with a rifle.

Movement

1. Never have the shooter move with a cocked loaded gun in hand. Once a pistol is cocked, a rifle is levered, or the action of a shotgun is closed, have the shooter expend the round and then move to the next position. (If no target is shot, the result is simply a five-second miss. If an inappropriate target is shot, this is a procedure for shooting a target out of sequence or from the wrong position, and results in a 10-second penalty.)
2. Drawing pistols on the move is an acceptable procedure although some shooters and clubs do not like it. It is better to stop the shooter from holstering or drawing on the move by requiring the shooter to carry a prop (money bag, other long guns, or something that uses both hands) to the next shooting position prior to using the next gun rather than giving the shooter a penalty for doing something that is an ac-

cepted procedure. Make sure the intent of occupying both of the shooter's hands is clearly understood. Don't try to write an exercise into a stage that might cause discretionary calls or are simply designed to trip up a shooter. Remember, "fun" is the idea and a "hard ass" is not in the spirit of the game

3. Moving parallel to the firing line can create pitfalls for shooters. It is very easy for a shooter to break the 170° safety rule moving parallel to the firing line. It is better to arrange the stage to be moving forward, but with common firing lines this is practically impossible. If moving parallel to the firing line is necessary, it is best to have all long guns staged at the appropriate shooting positions.
4. Do not move up/down or over/under props, stairs, or obstacles with anything in the shooter's hands. All folks will not be able to negotiate props in the same manner. It is a good idea to leave the shooter's hands free of guns and ammunition to grab onto a handrail or other means of assistance, if necessary.
5. Design a flow from left to right, right to left or up range to down range. Shooters should not move back and forth or from down range to up range (toward the crowd).
6. Whenever possible, design the stage "ambidextrous" – that is allow movement right to left or left to right depending upon whether the shooter is left handed or right handed.

Props

1. If you're using a prop with windows/door openings or such, and you want to have movement, stage the guns at those positions in order to avoid causing a trip hazard for the shooter or the timer.
2. If long guns are staged against the prop, ensure they do not break the 170° safety rule.

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Avoid staging the guns leaning against the prop on the down range side.

3. Design your props to be stable, and ensure if guns are to be staged, reliable gun holders, or placement location is incorporated. Pre-located scabbards, holsters, straw bales, and tables work better than wood peg type gun holders. At window and door openings most inexperienced shooters will tend to lean on the prop to steady themselves - make sure the prop will support their weight. Note where brass is likely to fall. Avoid those conditions where the brass will be difficult to reach and increase recovery time or where brass will fall in the path of the shooter on his or her way to another shooting position.
4. Always have extra supplies of expendable prop media at the stages where they are used. Keep spare targets where they are readily available in the event of failure, and make sure someone knows where they are located and/or how to access them. Avoid special mechanical targets, where only one is available. If it can break, it will.
5. If props such as aprons, overalls, and the like are required, make sure there are several sets available so the next shooter is fully prepared to engage the stage as soon as the prior shooter is finished and this shooter leaves the loading table.

Time and Balance

1. When reviewing the stages for *time balance* (stages should all take about the same time for the average shooter to complete) consider set-up time between shooters. If pre-staging guns or incidental prop media is used (e.g., re-setting clay birds, manual target setting down range, bows/arrows, aprons/hats, shot glasses/bottles, playing cards), include that time in the total elapsed time estimate. Twenty-five to thirty seconds per stage is a good average for large matches.

2. Be familiar with the layout of your range. Calculate travel time between stages and consider the terrain (hills, bridges, and other bottle necks) that may impede the shooters between stages, and schedule accordingly. For example, if the range is large or there are multiple “natural” shooting areas (e.g., a set of “upper” shooting bays and a set of “lower” bays), establish a shooting schedule that allows all the stages in one area to be shot before moving to another area. Similarly, for large shooting facilities, don’t schedule the shooters for bay “1” immediately after competing on bay “12.” See the schedule for an “off stage”. There is never any reason a competitor should have to hustle from one end of the range to the other to accommodate posse shooting schedules. When the shooting schedule demands several stages be shot back to back, the competitors should never have to move very far between stages.

Targets

1. Regarding target size and placement, the bigger and closer the targets, the better. Shotgun knockdowns leave no doubt and are undisputed. All pistol and rifle knockdowns should be pre-set so a factory 158 grain .38 Special round will trip it. Adding a heavy knockdown pistol target to defeat the gamesman, usually will not work, so don’t do it. SASS target guidelines are clear, and provide excellent guidelines for minimum sizes and placement.
2. Design stages that promote action and quicker (rather than slower) target engagement. Smaller targets of reasonable size mixed with larger targets (set at the appropriate minimum size/maximum distance requirements) can be used to challenge the shooters.
3. Don’t “choreograph” the stage with complex target sequences. Stay away from complex target engagement sequences. Basic sweeps from left or right, single, double, or triple taps, a “Nevada Sweep” (left,

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center, right, center, left, or the opposite) orders are acceptable. Target order consistency within a stage will ease procedural and spotting problems. Varying target order from stage to stage is acceptable, will add to the personality of each stage, and still demands the shooter pay attention and think about what he/she is doing.

General Guide Lines

1. Avoid designing a stage that brings “luck of the draw” into the outcome. Rolling the dice, cutting the cards, spinning the wheel are all excellent means of providing a more interesting scenario, but should not attach a particular benefit for one shooter over another by the outcome. For example, cutting the cards to determine which gun is to be shot first is acceptable while cutting the cards to determine the number of shots to be fired is not.
2. Design your stages for ALL SASS categories. Don’t forget the Frontiersman (reloads), Frontier Cartridge (excessive [over 6 rounds/stage] shotgun usage), or Junior categories (tall props). If there is any question whether or not the Gunfighters will understand what they are expected to do (should be less and less of a problem as the discipline matures), include any needed special instructions.
3. Do not design stages that require shooters to perform out of the ordinary tasks such as moving a heavy object or extraordinary athletic feats. The shooting skill of the competitor should be the deciding factor not the their overall athletic ability.
4. In staging long guns give the shooter a substantial place to stage the gun. Tables or hay bales are better than leaning against buildings. If using pegs or blocks, the design should accommodate varied lengths of long guns, the shortest being a double barrel coach gun with the action open. Make sure the long guns lean down range.
5. Shotgun knockdowns are encouraged for good reason. Calls on shotgun hits can be speculative at times, with the “golden BB” rule too often used. Re-settable targets of some kind that go down with a good hit leave no doubt and are undisputed. Allowing shooters to “shoot until the shotgun popper is down” rather than taking a miss is in the “Spirit of the Game”. The penalty then becomes the additional time it takes to bring the target down rather than a five-second-miss penalty.
6. Designs that offer a small bonus (say 2-5 seconds) for a bird hit or a small target, and no penalty for a miss are viewed more favorably by competitors than designs that are scored as a miss and no bonus.
7. The responsibility of the RO is to watch the shooter at all times insuring safety on the line. Do not design stages that could possibly require an RO to become a target spotter.
8. Be careful to avoid designs that take shooters to the edge of safe firearm handling, promoting the chances of awarding these shooters a penalty or DQ for something that you (the designer) could have eliminated with a little more thought. Be careful of designs that find shooters operating close to or on top of the 170° safety rule.
9. Do not design a stage that requires the shooters engage from a prone position or other unnatural shooting position. Not only is it uncomfortable for many shooters, it can be immodest for ladies with hoop skirts, and darn near impossible for older or heavier people, especially if they have to get up to complete the shooting sequence. Getting off a horse may be doable (but time consuming) under the clock, but getting on is a definite “no-no”.
10. Pistol or rifle reloading should not be used in big matches. The time for a one shot reload can vary from 3 to 15 seconds per shooter.

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11. It is recommended stages be designed to contain no more than an average of 8-9 rifle (not 10), 10 pistol, and 4 to 6 (only) shotgun rounds per engagement. Designing a match that is well rounded in terms of round expenditure and firearm use is advised.
12. Make the match interesting for as many competitors as possible. If Gunfighters are accommodated, give them several stages where they can shoot with a six-gun in each hand.

In Summary

The *Bottom Line* for stage design is keep it safe, interesting, have some action, but not strenuous or athletic. A good stage is a balance of action and shooting, with the action well within the range of all shooting categories. Design stages with the average shooter in mind – the top shooters will be competing at another level, so don't try to design the perfect stage that makes the average shooter equal to the legends of the game. It takes greater skill to design a simple, challenging stage than a complicated one. Complicated and highly "choreographed" scenarios are not fun for most average shooters, and being complicated can lead into unsafe situations for some. Most of us are just average folks, so never turn your stages into an intelligence test – you shouldn't have to have a photographic memory to enjoy COWBOY ACTION SHOOTING™. And, after all, that's what we're here for – to be safe and have a good time

Targets

Things to Consider

All targets to be used should be of a safe design and capable of handling lead bullets for a long time. Inspect all targets for deformation, such as cupping or craters. Never use targets that could possibly cause ricochet problems. Targets generally don't last forever. Over a period of time, targets will become cratered or dimpled due to the target material, heavy

loads, or just the sheer number of rounds placed on them. Softer metals will tend to bend or cup in the center over time. Most targets have two useable sides. Try reversing the sides from match to match to prolong the use period.

Materials

Targets are one of the most costly items a club will encounter. There are several target materials that are available from mild steel to armored plate. These materials can get expensive, so give some thought to how much you can afford. But remember, the life of the target is usually proportioned to the price. For larger matches, steel targets are most efficient due to the lack of necessary re-set-up time. The use of clay shotgun targets, paper targets, or any other "disposable" type of target should be discouraged for large matches. They are certainly useful and fun at club matches and the like

Target Stands

Always use target stands or hangers that cause the bottom of the targets to hang vertically or with the bottom slanted down range. This causes the bullets to impact into the ground close to the base of the stand or hanger. Some target stands require the use of a bolt to attach to the stand. The bolt head can become a cause of ricochet or splatter. The use of springs or spacers on the bolts between the target and the stand help absorb bullet impact and direct lead splatter to the ground. The stands should also be capable of handling fairly heavy loads without falling or turning to an unsafe angle.

Target Angles

Be cautious of angles at which targets are placed, again due to ricochet or splatter. Lead tends to splatter parallel to the target face if the target face is clean and straight. Never place a target at an angle where its edge points toward the spectators, loading, or unloading areas. It is best to always face the targets parallel to the firing line. Placing targets close to the sides and ends of bermed areas will also reduce the distance lead splatter can travel.

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Be prepared

It is a good practice to have extra targets available on each stage just in case one breaks or malfunctions unexpectedly. This is especially true for large matches where a broken target can create a huge backup of shooters.

Recommended Sizes & Distances

Listed below are the minimum target size and distance standards. Designers are encouraged to use larger targets at the distances indicated whenever possible for main stage scenarios. Measurements of targets do not include appendages, and must offer continuous steel for compliance. Special care should be taken when using paper targets, stop plates, fixed or flying clay birds, and other non-conforming targets due to the additional time necessary to reset them after each shooter.

Pistol targets

- Minimum distance is 7 yards; maximum distance is 12 yards.

- Minimum pistol target size for 7 yards is 10" x 10".
- Minimum pistol target size for 8 to 12 yards is 16" x 16".

Shotgun targets

- Minimum distance is 8 yards; maximum distance is 12 yards.
- Minimum shotgun target size for 8 yards is 8" x 8" (MGM size poppers allowable)
- Minimum shotgun target size for over 8 yards is 16" x 16" average.

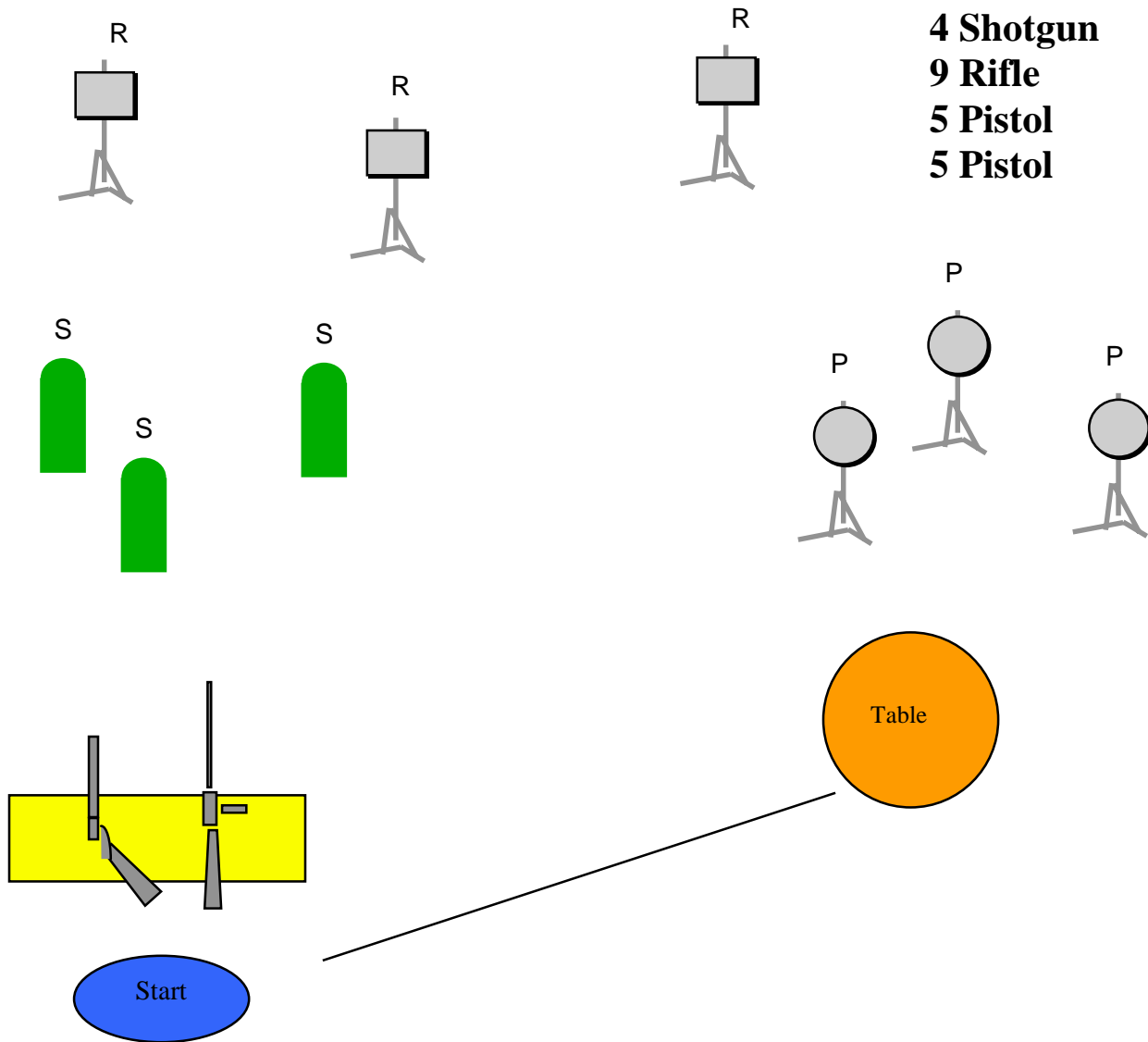
Rifle targets

- Minimum distance is 10 yards; maximum distance is 40 yards.
- Minimum rifle target size for 10 yards is 8" x 8".
- Minimum rifle target size for 11 to 15 yards is 12" x 12".
- Minimum rifle target size for 16 to 40 yards is 16" x 16".

Appendix

Stage Descriptions

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4 Shotgun
9 Rifle
5 Pistol
5 Pistol

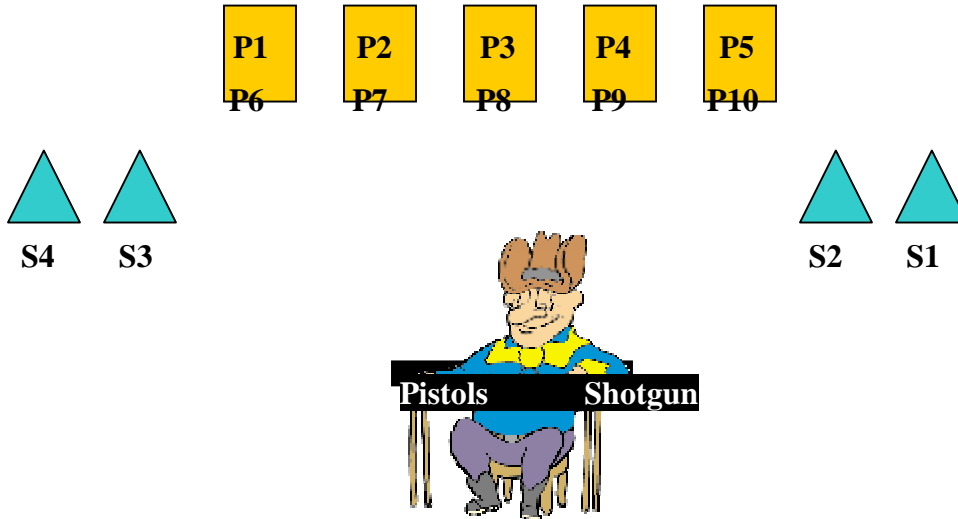
- Pre-stage shotgun and rifle on bar, at least 4 S-G rounds in box on bar. Shooter starts with hands on bar. At buzzer-
- Pick up shotgun, loading shotgun with ammo from the box, shoot 4 targets any order, open action, and set shotgun on bar.
- Pick-up rifle and shoot 9 rifle any order, open action, pick up shotgun, *take both rifle and shotgun* to the table and set them down.
- Draw 1st pistol, engage pistol targets, any order, holster.
- Draw 2nd pistol, engage pistol targets, any order, holster.

Note: Ladies with long dresses or Handicapped shooters may request to leave one long gun at the bar, prior to starting stage. (At Posse Leaders discretion). Caution, if permission is granted, shooter may not draw pistol until at a full stop and the one long gun is deposited on the table.

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Stage 6 - Maverick

2 pistols and 10 cartridges, shotgun and 4 shells



Procedure

Staging: 2 pistols loaded with 5 rounds each and placed on the table (muzzles down range). Shotgun open and empty placed on the table (muzzle down range).

Starting Position: Start seated at the table holding your hand of cards with both hands. The deck of cards must be in the square on the table.

At the beep, turn over a card and stand up. If you draw to your flush or inside straight, (i.e. if you draw a Spade ♠ or Jack) pick up your first pistol and engage the five pistol targets shooting from left to right. Holster, pick up your second pistol and engage the five pistol targets shooting from left to right. Holster, pick up your shotgun and, loading from your body, engage the four shotgun knock-downs in any order. If you do not draw to your flush or inside straight, (i.e. if you do not draw a Spade ♠ or Jack) pick up your shotgun first and, loading from your body, engage the four shotgun knock-downs in any order. Place the open and empty shotgun back on the table, pick up your first pistol and engage the five pistol targets shooting from left to right. Holster, pick up your second pistol and engage the five pistol targets shooting from left to right. Remember you must holster your pistols after shooting.

This is a gunfighter stage. Gunfighters will draw both pistols at the appropriate time and, alternating fire first with one pistol then the other, engage the targets as follows: Begin with the left target and sweep to the right, then with the left target again and sweep to the right. If you look at the diagram, all odd numbered pistol shots are with the first pistol and all even numbered pistol shots are with the second pistol. Only Gunfighters will be allowed to shoot the stage in this manner.