RIVALSHOT ACADEMY · COURSE BOOK

Good Lane Neighbor

Range Etiquette and the Range Officer: a companion book

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Foreword: How to use this book

This book goes with the RivalShot Academy course Good Lane Neighbor: Range Etiquette and the Range Officer. It is written for people who already know the basics of a supervised range visit and now share lanes with other people on a regular basis: shooters coming back after years away, people who have just started going on their own, and newcomers stepping into their first local competitions. If you have never been to a range, start with a supervised first visit and safety briefing at the range instead. This book assumes you have already had a supervised introduction and a safety briefing.

Each chapter follows one lesson of the course and develops its ideas further. You can read the book straight through, or read one chapter after each lesson. Every chapter has the same shape:

- the main ideas, explained with everyday examples;
- **In practice**: two short fictional cases that show the ideas working (or not working) in real-feeling situations;
- **Checklist**: things you can actually do on your next visit;
- **Key terms**: the vocabulary of the chapter in plain words;
- **Talk it through**: three questions for a club meeting, a study group, a friend or your own notebook;
- **Journal prompt**: one question to answer privately.

A few things about how this book is written. All people, ranges, clubs and events in the examples are fictional. Where the book states a fact, such as what a hearing protector does or what a particular public range posts, it comes from a government, industry or competition source that was re-read on 2026-10-15; those

sources are listed at the end. Rules and laws vary from place to place. Where a rule might be a legal matter, this book says so and points you to the official source for your jurisdiction. It gives no legal determination.

There are also things this book deliberately does not do. It does not teach how to operate, load, carry, clear, adjust or modify any firearm, and it contains no drills or performance advice. Those belong in supervised, hands-on instruction at a range, from people qualified to give it. It gives no medical advice. It never asks you to confront anyone. Leaving, asking staff and calling for help are always valid choices. And this is an educational reading course, with no saved completion, certification or qualification. It is not range officer training.

You can put this book down at any time and come back to it later. Nothing in it is timed or graded.

Chapter 1. Why the range officer leads

The problem every shared range solves

Think about what a public range or club line actually is. A row of people, often strangers, each focused on their own target, their own gear and their own thoughts, are sharing one space. Each of them can only see a slice of that space. If something goes wrong in a slice nobody is watching, the person who pays for it may be someone who did nothing wrong at all.

Every shared range has to solve that problem somehow, and many of them solve it the same way: one person is given the job of watching the whole line and deciding, for everyone, when it is active and when it is not. Depending on where you are, that person may be called the range officer, the range safety officer, the line officer or, at a match, a match official. The title does not matter much. What matters is that their job is the whole picture, not any one lane.

What the range officer sees that you cannot

Sit at your bench for a moment and notice your field of view. You can see your lane clearly, your neighbors partially and the rest of the line hardly at all. You probably cannot see the door behind you, the parking lot, the viewing window, the walkway behind the benches or the person three lanes down who has just stood up to get something from a bag.

The range officer is positioned, trained and expected to see those things. They notice the child who has wandered close to the viewing glass, the visitor who walked in and is unsure where to stand, the person who looks unwell, the piece of range equipment that is not working, and the moment when everybody's attention drifts at once. They also know things you may not: who is booked into which lane next, which part of the floor was just cleaned, and what the facility's own experience has taught it.

That is why authority on a range is about sightlines and timing, not about rank. When one person who can see the whole picture makes the calls, decisions are fast and consistent. When everyone decides for themselves, you get twenty slightly different versions of "probably fine," and nobody can predict anyone else.

Many public ranges write this into their posted rules. The Utah Division of Wildlife Resources, for example, asks every visitor to its Lee Kay public range to check in with a range safety officer before entering, and its posted rules say that people whose actions raise safety concerns must correct them before they continue. That is not a personal judgment of anyone. It is a system designed so that one person can protect everyone at once.

Authority as a shared agreement

It helps to think of the range officer's authority as something all of the shooters on the line have agreed to, rather than something imposed on them. When you check in, you are joining an agreement: everyone here will follow one set of calls from one person, so that all of us can do what we came to do. That agreement is what lets a nervous newcomer and a thirty-year regular share the same line without either of them needing to trust the other's judgment.

Seen that way, following the range officer is not about deference. It is about keeping your side of an agreement that protects you as much as anyone else.

Comply now, clarify later

The most useful habit this chapter offers is a short one: **comply now, clarify later.** When the range officer gives you an instruction, do it first. Then, at the next natural pause, in a normal voice, ask about it if you want to understand it better.

This works for three reasons. First, the instruction may be based on something you cannot see from your bench, and the reason may not be something the officer can explain at that moment. Second, an argument across an active line pulls the officer's attention away from everyone else at exactly the wrong time. Third, a question asked calmly at a break gives the officer room to give a real answer, and often a friendly one. "Can you help me understand that call so I get it right next time?" is a very different conversation from "Why are you telling me that?"

It also helps to make the range officer easy to find before you need them. On arrival, ask at the desk: "Who is the range officer today, and how do you signal a break?" Notice what they are wearing or where they usually stand. If you have a hearing difference or another need that affects how you receive instructions, tell them now. You are not asking for a favor. You are helping them do their job.

At a match: officials apply a shared rulebook

If you are new to competition, you will find the same idea at a larger scale. Each competitive discipline publishes its own rulebook, and some organizations publish range officer procedures

and command scripts alongside the rules. The Civilian Marksmanship Program, for example, publishes separate rulebooks for its disciplines, links range officer documents for several of them, and states that its staff can interpret unclear rules but may not modify them.

That last point is worth keeping in mind. Match officials are applying a shared, published rulebook; they are not inventing rules on the spot. Their calls can still be mistaken, which is why many rulebooks describe a way to ask a question or raise a concern. Find out before the match whether yours does, and how it works. During the match, the same habit applies: comply now, clarify later, through the channel the rules provide.

When you disagree

You will sometimes disagree with a call. That is normal and not a problem in itself. The question is what you do with the disagreement.

A useful sequence is: follow the instruction; wait for a natural pause; ask a genuine question rather than making a case; listen to the answer; and if you still think something is wrong, take it to management or the match organizer later, calmly, ideally in writing so you can keep it factual. This sequence keeps the line safe and still gives your concern a real hearing.

What this does not mean

Respecting the range officer's authority does not mean they are always right. It does not mean you must accept rudeness, discrimination or unfair treatment, or that you give up your own judgment about your own safety. If an instruction confuses you,

ask. If an interaction with staff felt disrespectful, raise it later with management. If you feel unsafe and the situation is not resolving, you can always stop, tell staff you are leaving, and go.

The range officer's authority also has a scope. It covers safety and the running of the range. It does not extend to your personal life, your opinions or anything else beyond the line, and the same is true in the other direction.

In practice

The early regular. Odile has been opening her club's Saturday line with the same small group for years. A new volunteer range officer, Bram, asks the group to wait in the lobby until he has walked the line, a step they have always skipped. One of the group grumbles that this will cost ten minutes. Odile says, "Let's do it his way," and waits. Afterward, she asks Bram about it. He explains that the club's board added the walk-through after finding a door unlatched the previous month. Odile mentions it at the next members' meeting, and the grumbling stops. Her example did more than any explanation would have.

The first match. Jae-won, in his first local match, is asked by a match official to wait behind a line he did not know existed. He is embarrassed and almost argues that nobody told him. Instead, he steps back and says, "Thanks. I didn't know about that line." After his relay, he asks the official where he can read the procedure. The official points him to the published rulebook and the match's own information sheet, and introduces him to the match director. Jae-won spends the evening reading the relevant section and arrives at the next match better prepared than most of the regulars.

Checklist

- At check-in, ask who is running the line today and how they will get your attention.
- Notice where the range officer usually stands and what they wear.
- Tell the range officer early about anything that affects how you receive instructions.
- When given an instruction, follow it first and ask about it at a natural pause.
- Ask questions as questions ("Can you help me understand…?"), not as arguments.
- Before a match, find out whether the rulebook describes how to raise a question or concern.
- Take lasting disagreements to management or the organizer later, calmly and factually.

Key terms

- **Range officer (range safety officer, line officer):** the person responsible for watching the whole line and deciding when it is active, paused or clear.
- **Match official:** a person who applies a competition's published rules during an event.
- **The line:** the area where people stand or sit to shoot; also used for the group of people there.
- **Comply now, clarify later:** follow an instruction first, then ask about it at a natural pause.
- **Rulebook:** the published rules for a competitive discipline, often updated each year.

Talk it through

1. What can a range officer see that you cannot from your own bench? List as many things as you can.
2. Why might an experienced shooter find it harder than a beginner to follow an unfamiliar instruction? What helps?
3. Describe a respectful way to disagree with a call at a match. What makes it respectful?

Journal prompt

Think of a time when someone in charge asked you to do something you thought was unnecessary, at a range or anywhere else. What did you do, what did you later learn, and what would "comply now, clarify later" have looked like in that moment?

Chapter 2. A cease-fire stops everyone, every time

What a cease-fire is for

A cease-fire is the range's shared stop signal. It might be a spoken call, a horn, a whistle, a flashing light, a flag, or several of these together. It might be called because someone needs to go forward to change or remove targets, because a person has wandered somewhere they should not be, because an animal has crossed an outdoor range, because a piece of range equipment has failed, because someone feels unwell, or because the range officer saw something they want to check.

Most of the time you will not know which. That is not a flaw in the system. It is the system. A cease-fire works precisely because everyone responds in the same way without first needing to hear, understand or agree with the reason.

Why "instantly" is the whole idea

Imagine a range where people respond to a cease-fire when they personally see why it was called. Some stop immediately. Some finish what they were doing. Some look around to see what others are doing first. Some decide it must be a false alarm. In the few seconds of disagreement, someone may already be walking forward, or the problem the range officer saw may be getting worse.

That is why the right response is immediate and complete. Immediate means now: not after one more, not once you finish what you started, not after you check what your neighbor is doing.

Complete means everyone, every time, including the most experienced person on the line and including when the cease-fire turns out to be unnecessary.

Principle, not procedure

Every range writes its own cease-fire procedure, and you should learn yours from the range's posted rules and its supervised briefing. This book deliberately does not teach handling procedures. What it can do is describe the principle that all of those procedures share.

The Utah Division of Wildlife Resources' posted rules for one of its public ranges give a clear example. They say a warning is given before a cease-fire is called; that during a cease-fire nobody handles or moves their equipment; and that everyone stays behind a marked line until the range safety officer clears the range. Your range may differ in the details. The principle does not: **stop, follow the posted steps, stay where you are told, and wait for the all-clear.**

A short mental script can make this automatic: Stop. Step back to where the rules say. Wait. Listen. When the range reopens, return only on the real all-clear signal. Do not return because a few other people have started moving; they may simply be wrong.

When you might not hear it

A cease-fire only works if people notice it, and range conditions make that harder than it sounds. Good hearing protection, which you should be wearing, reduces how clearly you hear voices. Some people have hearing loss. Concentration narrows attention. Outdoor ranges can be windy; indoor ranges can be loud.

This is why many ranges use more than one signal, such as a horn plus a light. It is also why a good habit is to watch your surroundings as well as listen. If your neighbors suddenly step back, or a light changes, treat that as a cue to stop and check rather than a curiosity.

If you know you may miss audible signals, say so at check-in. Ask what visual signals the range uses and where they are. Many range officers are glad to make eye contact before a break or to suggest a lane where the signal light is easy to see. You are not asking for special treatment; you are making the shared signal work for everyone, including you.

Anyone can be the person who sees a problem

Some ranges make clear that a cease-fire can be called by people other than staff. Wisconsin's statewide rules for its state-owned ranges, for example, treat failing to comply with a cease-fire called by the range officer or any other person as a violation.

That has two implications. The first is about responding: a cease-fire call deserves your instant response even if it comes from a quiet visitor on the far lane and turns out to be unnecessary. A false alarm costs a minute. Ignoring a real one can cost far more.

The second is about calling one yourself. Learn at check-in how your range wants visitors to call a cease-fire, and keep it for a genuine unsafe situation, such as a person or animal moving into an area where they could be hurt. When you have called one, tell the range officer briefly what you saw, then let them take it from there. You do not need to justify yourself at length or investigate further.

After the stop

Cease-fires interrupt your flow, and it is completely human to feel impatient, especially during a booked hour or a timed match. What you do with that impatience matters, because others are watching. Avoid loud sighs, questioning the range officer while the range is still stopped, or hurrying the people walking forward. Once the range is active again, you can ask what happened if it is relevant to you.

If the cease-fire was called because of something you did, take the correction, say thanks and carry on. Many experienced shooters have had that moment, and the person who handles it gracefully is remembered for the right reason.

Cease-fires at matches and with companions

At a match, cease-fires are often part of the schedule as well as a response to problems. Officials may call them at set points so targets can be scored or changed, and the pace can feel brisk. The principle does not change because the setting is competitive. Stop at once, follow the officials' instructions and the published procedure, and wait for the all-clear, even if you feel rushed or think you have lost time. If a call affects your result, the rulebook's process for questions is the place to raise it, after the range is safe.

If you shoot with a friend, partner or family member, talk about cease-fires before you go. Agree that both of you will stop the instant either of you hears or sees the signal, without waiting for the other to confirm it. Agree, too, that either of you will tell staff if you missed a signal or did not understand one. A short conver-

sation in the car can prevent a confused moment on the line, and it makes the habit something you share rather than something one of you enforces on the other.

What this does not mean

A cease-fire is not a punishment, a verdict that someone did something wrong, or an invitation to investigate. It does not ask you to go forward, inspect anything, or manage another person. Responding instantly means stopping immediately, not rushing about; the response itself is calm and deliberate.

If a cease-fire is called because someone is hurt or unwell, follow staff direction, help call for emergency help if asked, check that the scene is safe before moving toward anyone, and leave care to people trained to give it. If you want to be better prepared for moments like that in everyday life, look for hands-on first-aid training from a recognized provider.

In practice

The family lane. Teresa and her sixteen-year-old son, Luca, who shoots with a junior club, are sharing a lane at a fictional outdoor range. A horn sounds. Luca is mid-way through what he was doing and looks at his mother, unsure. Teresa has already stopped and stepped back to the marked line, and Luca does the same. Nobody can see why the cease-fire was called. A minute later a staff member walks out to fix a target frame that had come loose. On the drive home, Luca says he had been tempted to finish first. Teresa says that is exactly why she stopped so fast: so he would see that nobody finishes first.

The person who called it. At a fictional rural club, Ruth sees a dog trotting along the far edge of the range from a neighboring field. She uses the club's posted method for calling a cease-fire, and the line stops. The range officer thanks her, and a member who knows the farm goes to fetch the dog. One shooter grumbles that the dog was nowhere near the targets. The range officer says, loud enough for everyone to hear, "She did exactly the right thing." Ruth was nervous about being wrong. She learned that calling a cease-fire for a genuine reason is never something to apologize for.

Checklist

- At check-in, ask how a cease-fire is signaled at this range: voice, horn, light, flag or a combination.
- Ask where people wait during a cease-fire and how the all-clear is given.
- Write the answers on a card the first time you use a new range.
- Tell the range officer if you might miss audible signals, and ask about visual ones.
- When you hear or see the signal: stop, step back where the rules say, wait, listen.
- Return only on the actual all-clear, never because others have started moving.
- Learn how visitors may call a cease-fire, and use it only for a genuine unsafe situation.
- Save questions about why it was called until the range is active again.

Key terms

- **Cease-fire:** the range's shared signal for everyone to stop shooting immediately and follow the posted procedure until the all-clear.
- **All-clear:** the signal that the cease-fire has ended and the range is active again.
- **Posted procedure:** the range's own written steps for what people do during a cease-fire.
- **Visual signal:** a light, flag or gesture used alongside or instead of an audible call.
- **False alarm:** a cease-fire that turns out to have been unnecessary; still deserves an instant response.

Talk it through

1. Why does a cease-fire work better when people respond without knowing the reason first?
2. What makes it harder to notice a cease-fire on a busy day, and what can a range and its users do about that?
3. How should a range respond to a visitor who called a cease-fire that turned out to be unnecessary? Why does that response matter?

Journal prompt

Imagine yourself on your usual lane when a cease-fire is called and you cannot see why. Write what you would feel, what you would do in the first five seconds, and what you would do once the range reopened.

Chapter 3. Posted rules beat habit

The hidden risk for returning shooters

Habits are useful. They let you do familiar things without thinking through every step, which frees your attention for what matters. That same quality is what makes habits risky when you move between places. A habit does not check whether it still fits. It just runs.

Think about where your range habits came from. Some came from a club you belonged to years ago. Some came from a friend who took you along. Some came from a class, some from a video, and some you invented yourself because they worked once. All of that is habit. The rules posted at the range you are standing in today are what count.

Returning shooters can be caught out by this. Beginners tend to read every sign and ask about everything, because nothing is familiar. Returning shooters walk in feeling at home and assume they already know. The gap between what you remember and what is posted is where many etiquette mistakes, and some safety problems, can begin.

Why rules differ

It can be frustrating to find that two ranges handle the same thing differently. But rules differ for good reasons. Ranges are built differently: indoor and outdoor, long and short, with different walkways, doors and sightlines. They serve different activities and

different groups. They answer to different owners, landlords, insurers and local requirements. And each one learns its own lessons from its own close calls.

Public range rules show this variety clearly. Wisconsin's statewide rules for its state-owned ranges, approved in 2017 and summarized on signs posted at those ranges, require people to collect and remove or properly dispose of spent casings, targets and other materials they bring, and some of those rules apply "unless otherwise posted at the range." The Utah Division of Wildlife Resources' rules for one of its public ranges require eye and ear protection before you cross a fence onto the range, and require people to retrieve their target frames and dispose of used targets at the end of a session. Neither set is universal. Both apply where they are posted.

The practical lesson is simple: wherever you are, the posted rules are the rules. Your memory of another place is not.

Reading a range

A good habit to replace all the others is to read every range as if it were new, every time. That sounds like a lot of work, but it takes about two minutes. Try what this course calls the **two-minute sign walk**:

- **At the entrance:** look for hours, closures, required check-in and any notices with a date on them.
- **At the desk:** look for the main rules board, any recent changes and anything about lane bookings, guests or accessibility.
- **At the line:** look for signs about where to stand, how breaks work, what is allowed at the bench and how cease-fires are signaled.

When something differs from your habit, turn it into a question for staff: "I'm used to doing it this way; the sign here says something different. Have I understood it?" That question is easy for staff to welcome, because it tells them you are paying attention.

Keep a short note in your phone for each range you use, written in your own words: what is different here, what to ask next time. Over a year, those notes become a personal map of how each place works.

Competition: rulebooks and their editions

If you are starting to compete, there is another layer. Each discipline has its own rulebook, and rulebooks change. The Civilian Marksmanship Program, for example, publishes separate rulebooks for several disciplines, has them approved each year, marks changes in red underlined text, and tells competitors to check the rulebooks that govern the disciplines they shoot. A particular match may also publish local information of its own.

This is good news for newcomers. A newcomer who reads the current rulebook section for their event, and asks the match organizer one or two specific questions in advance, can be better prepared than a veteran working from memory of an old edition. You do not need to read the whole rulebook cover to cover. Read the parts that apply to what you will be doing, note what you do not understand, and ask.

"Nobody actually follows that one"

Sooner or later, a friendly regular will tell you that a posted rule is ignored. They may even be right that many people ignore it. Thank them, and follow the sign anyway.

There are good reasons for this beyond simple obedience. You cannot know why the rule was posted; it may answer a problem the regular never saw. You cannot know whether staff have recently started enforcing it. And every person who follows the rule makes it easier for the next person to do the same. A range where everyone keeps a private rule set is a range where nobody can predict anybody else, and predictability is a big part of what keeps a shared line safe.

If a posted rule seems unclear, outdated or different from what staff are telling you, ask staff, not the crowd. Staff can explain how they apply it, and management can update a sign that has fallen behind.

When you bring a guest

If you bring a guest, you become their rules board. They will copy what you do, including your habits from other places. Read the posted rules with them on arrival, point out anything that differs from what either of you expects, and introduce them to the desk so they know whom to ask. A guest who learns to read the signs on their first visit will read them on every visit after.

When a rule seems wrong

Occasionally, a rule really will seem wrong to you: badly worded, contradictory, or simply inconvenient. Following it while you ask about it is still the right move. Then, if you still think it should change, say so to management in a constructive way: what the rule says, what confused you, and what you would suggest. Ranges do change rules, sometimes because a member asked a good question.

Laws vary

Some posted rules reflect laws or regulations; others are house rules. This course cannot tell you which is which where you live, and it gives no legal determination. If a rule raises a legal question, check the official source for your jurisdiction, such as the relevant government agency's own published rules, or ask someone qualified to answer. A regular's memory is not a legal source, however confident it sounds.

What this does not mean

"Posted rules beat habit" does not mean the posted rules are all you need, or that anything not explicitly prohibited is fine. The safety basics you learned in supervised instruction still apply everywhere. It also does not mean you must memorize every rule before you show up; reading what applies to what you are doing today, and asking about the rest, is reasonable. And it does not mean the habits you built are worthless. Many of them will match. The point is to check, not to assume.

In practice

The visiting member. Farid belongs to a club whose members can use a partner club's range a few times a year. On his first visit, he notices that the partner club asks everyone to sign a paper log at the line as well as at the door. He finds that tedious and almost skips it, since his own club uses only a door log. Instead he signs and, at a break, asks a member why. She explains that the partner range has two separate shooting areas and the line log lets the range officer know who is in which. Farid writes "line log: two areas" in his phone notes. Next visit, it is automatic.

The new rulebook year. Wren has competed for two seasons and considers herself up to date. Before the first match of the year, a friend mentions that her discipline's rulebook has a new edition. Wren opens it and searches for the marked changes. One affects how competitors are expected to report to the line at her event. She asks the match director to confirm how they will run it locally, and he thanks her: several regulars had not noticed the change. At the match, Wren is relaxed while others are surprised.

Checklist

- Do a two-minute sign walk at every visit: entrance, desk, line.
- Look especially for notices with recent dates.
- Turn any difference from your habit into a question for staff.
- Keep a short note per range describing what is different there.
- If you compete, read the current edition's changes for your discipline each year.
- When told "nobody follows that," thank the person and follow the sign.
- Take unclear or outdated rules to staff or management, not the crowd.
- For anything that sounds like a legal question, check the official source for your jurisdiction.

Key terms

- **Posted rules:** the rules a range displays at its entrance, desk or line; they apply at that range.
- **House rule:** a rule set by a range or club for its own reasons, as distinct from a law.

- **Two-minute sign walk:** a short routine of reading posted rules at the entrance, desk and line on every visit.
- **Edition:** a particular version of a rulebook, often updated each year.
- **Match information:** local details a competition publishes in addition to the discipline rulebook.

Talk it through

1. Which of your current range habits came from somewhere else? How would you check whether they fit where you shoot now?
2. Why might a range post a rule that seems unnecessary to an experienced regular?
3. What is the most respectful way to suggest that a posted rule be changed?

Journal prompt

Write down one habit you are fairly sure you would bring into an unfamiliar range without thinking. Where did it come from? What would you look for on the posted rules to check it, and what question would you ask staff?

Chapter 4. Share the line: space, brass, talk and noise

A small rented world

Most range etiquette can be traced back to one idea: the space on either side of you belongs to someone else, even when it looks empty. A lane, a bench, a bay or a stall is a small rented world. Your neighbor has paid for theirs. They are trying to concentrate. And unlike a neighbor at a café, they cannot easily get up and move away from you.

The good news is that being a good neighbor at a range does not require charm or conversation. It mostly requires being predictable and easy to ignore, in the best sense of that phrase. The rest of this chapter breaks that down into four areas where friction tends to appear: space, brass, talk and noise.

Space

Gear spreads. Bags, cases, folding chairs, coats, water bottles and boxes find their way into the gaps between lanes and the walkways behind them, especially on a busy day. It happens to careful people too.

Keep your gear inside your own area. Walkways behind the line are for moving, and the people using them include someone with a mobility aid, someone carrying an armful of equipment, and a parent keeping a child close. A walkway that is clear for you may not be clear enough for them.

If you need more room, ask staff for a different lane or bench rather than creeping sideways. If the lane next to you happens to be empty, do not treat it as overflow storage; someone may be checked in to it five minutes from now, and moving your things in a hurry is how gear gets knocked over.

Time

Space also includes time. On a busy day, finishing on schedule lets the next person start on time. If you booked an hour, plan to be packed up when the hour ends, not just to stop then. If the range has a waiting list, a few minutes of courtesy at the end is a gift to someone in the lobby.

Brass

Spent casings, often called brass, travel. Some of yours will land beside or behind your neighbor, and some of theirs will land at your feet. This is completely normal and rarely anyone's fault. Two habits keep it friendly.

First, never reach into another person's space to pick something up while they are shooting. Wait for a break and ask, or simply let it go.

Second, learn the range's brass policy, because it varies widely. Some ranges ask you to collect all of it, some ask you to leave it for the range, and some reserve it. Wisconsin's rules for its state-owned ranges, for example, require people to collect and remove or properly dispose of spent casings and other materials they bring. Another range might ask the opposite. The posted rules, again, are the rules.

If a neighbor's brass keeps landing on you, mention it at a break with a smile. Often there is a simple fix, such as a different lane, that neither of you would have thought of alone.

Talk on the line

On an active line, keep conversation short and practical. Save the stories for the lobby or the break. This is not about being unfriendly; it is about attention. Everyone around you, including you, is safer when attention stays on the task.

One kind of talk deserves special care: unsolicited advice. It can be tempting, especially for experienced shooters, to offer tips to a newcomer who seems to be struggling. Resist. A stranger did not ask for your coaching, may already have an instructor, and may find advice from a passerby confusing or embarrassing. If they ask, it is fine to point them to staff or to a class. If you see something genuinely unsafe, that is not a coaching moment at all; it is the range officer's job, and Chapter 6 describes how to raise it.

Noise in the lobby

The lobby is part of the shared space too. Some people waiting there want quiet focus. Some are nervous about a first class. Some are on the phone with a babysitter or reading forms. Take calls outside, use headphones for any audio, and keep your voice at an indoor level. If someone asks you to be quieter, a good response is "Sorry, of course," whether or not you think you were loud.

Hearing protection and conversation

On the line, hearing protection makes everyone louder and harder to understand. People raise their voices without noticing, and some people lift their earmuffs to hear a neighbor. That is a poor trade. The National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders notes that even briefly removing hearing protectors in a very loud environment puts your hearing at risk, and suggests choosing protectors that let you communicate so you do not need to remove them. Step outside the door to talk, or use that kind of protector.

The ten-second hello

Here is a technique that can head off a lot of friction: the **ten-second hello**. When you arrive at a lane with neighbors, introduce yourself at the first natural pause, never during live fire. Say three things: your lane or bench, roughly how long you will be there, and one courtesy.

"Hi, I'm Sol, lane 6, here until noon. If my brass bothers you, just say so."

It sounds small. But it turns a stranger into someone you can easily ask for something, and it makes later requests feel normal instead of confrontational. If someone greets you this way, answer in kind. You do not need to say more.

Guests and companions

When you bring someone with you, your lane's etiquette includes them. A friend, partner, teenager or visitor who is new to this range will not know its customs, and they will take their cues from you. Before you arrive, mention the basics in a sentence or two:

where you will sign in, that the walkway stays clear, that phones go outside, that conversation waits for breaks, and that the range officer's calls come first. Make sure they know that if they are unsure of anything, they can ask you or staff at any time, and that it is completely fine to step outside or stop early.

If your companion is watching rather than shooting, find out where spectators are allowed to wait and what protection they need there. Keep their bags and coats inside your space too. And if they make a mistake, as everyone does, handle it quietly and kindly. They are more likely to come back, and more likely to become a good neighbor themselves, if their first lesson in range etiquette came from you rather than from an annoyed stranger.

What this does not mean

Neighborly courtesy does not mean you must chat, make friends or share your life story. Being quiet and focused is a perfectly good way to be a neighbor, and some people come to the range precisely for that quiet.

Courtesy never stretches to tolerating unsafe conduct to keep the peace. Unsafe goes straight to the range officer.

And courtesy does not make you the enforcer of everyone else's etiquette. If a neighbor's habits annoy you but are not unsafe, you have several reasonable options: a friendly word at a break, a request to staff for a different lane, or simply finishing early. You never have to have the conversation if you would rather not.

In practice

The coach who wasn't asked. At a fictional indoor range, Hal, a longtime regular, notices that the young woman on the next lane seems frustrated. At a break, he starts to explain what he thinks she should change. She politely says she is working with an instructor who has given her specific things to practice. Hal realizes his advice, however well meant, could have muddied that. He apologizes, wishes her a good session, and from then on limits himself to "Good luck today." Weeks later she asks him, of her own accord, which local club he would recommend, and that conversation goes much better.

The phone in the lobby. Bea is waiting in a fictional range lobby for her lane when her phone rings: a work call she has to take. She starts talking, then notices two people waiting for a class and a staff member doing a phone booking at the desk. She steps outside, finishes the call by the door, and comes back in. Nobody said anything, and nobody needed to. Her small choice kept the lobby calm for everyone else.

Checklist

- Keep bags, cases and chairs inside your own space; keep walkways fully clear.
- Ask staff for more room rather than spreading into an empty lane.
- Plan to be packed up, not just stopping, when your booked time ends.
- Never reach into another person's space while they are shooting.
- Learn and follow the range's brass policy.

- Keep talk on the line short; save stories for the lobby.
- Do not coach strangers who have not asked; route safety concerns to the range officer.
- Use the ten-second hello at the first natural pause.

Key terms

- **Brass:** spent casings; where they go and who collects them depends on the range's policy.
- **Walkway:** the open space behind the line used for moving safely; not storage.
- **Unsolicited advice:** coaching offered to someone who did not ask for it.
- **Ten-second hello:** a short introduction at the first pause: your lane, how long you will stay, one courtesy.
- **Indoor voice:** a speaking volume suited to a shared waiting area.

Talk it through

1. What are the most common ways people accidentally crowd their neighbors at a range? How could a range's layout or rules help?
2. When, if ever, is it appropriate to offer advice to a stranger at a range? What could you offer instead of coaching?
3. How would you respond if a neighbor asked you to change something you did not think was a problem?

Journal prompt

Write the ten-second hello you will use on your next visit, word for word. Then write one thing you would like a neighbor to tell you about yourself, and how you would want them to say it.

Chapter 5. Hearing and lead hygiene are shared habits

Two hazards that travel

Most range hazards stay put. Two do not: noise and lead. Noise reaches everyone nearby, including people who are not shooting. Lead residue leaves the range on hands, faces, clothes and shoes. The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), the federal agency that researches workplace safety and health, notes that workers and users of indoor ranges may be exposed to hazardous levels of both.

Hearing protection and range hygiene are a related topic worth exploring in more depth. This chapter looks at the same hazards from a different angle: that of a neighbor. What do your habits mean for the people beside you on the line, for the people waiting at home, and for the newcomer quietly watching how regulars behave?

How loud a range is

Gunfire is loud enough to injure hearing quickly. In one NIOSH evaluation of firearms at indoor and outdoor ranges, peak sound levels measured between 155 and 168 decibels. For comparison, the National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders (NIDCD) explains that sounds at or below 70 dBA are generally considered safe, that long or repeated exposure at or above 85 dBA can cause hearing loss, and that a gunshot at close range can cause immediate and permanent damage.

Hearing loss from noise damages the inner ear, and NIDCD lists shooting sports among the settings where hearing protection is recommended. NIOSH also notes that high noise exposure can cause tinnitus, a ringing in the ears.

Double protection and fit

In the same NIOSH evaluation, earmuffs alone reduced peak sound levels by about 26 decibels on average, and earplugs alone by about 24. Used together, they reduced peak levels by about 44 decibels. That is why NIOSH recommends double protection, earplugs and earmuffs together, for this kind of impulse noise. NSSF's safety rules likewise say that everyone shooting should wear protective shooting glasses and some form of hearing protection.

Fit matters as much as type. NIDCD notes that proper fit is important; that earplugs should never be forced into the ear; that it may take some practice to get a comfortable seal; and that glasses, hats, hairstyles and facial hair can break the seal of earmuffs. If your protection feels uncomfortable or loose, ask range staff, or a hearing professional, about other options rather than putting up with a poor fit.

Hearing habits that protect your neighbors

Your neighbors' hearing depends partly on your choices, and yours on theirs. A few habits make a real difference:

- **Protection on before, off after.** Put your protection on before you enter the shooting area and keep it on until you are out. Some ranges require exactly that before you pass a door or fence.

- **Do not lift it to chat.** NIDCD warns that even briefly removing protectors in a very loud environment puts your hearing at risk. Step outside the door to talk, or use protectors designed to let you hear conversation.
- **Carry a spare.** A pack of foam earplugs costs little. Offer a pair to a friend who forgot theirs, or a visitor watching from behind the line.
- **Make room for visual cues.** Some people rely on lights and gestures because protection, or their own hearing, means they cannot catch every call. Do not block signal lights, and be patient if a neighbor needs a moment to notice a change.
- **Close the doors behind you.** Doors between the line and the lobby are there partly to keep noise where it belongs.

How lead exposure happens

Lead is the quieter hazard. According to NIOSH, lead exposure at ranges happens mainly in two ways: breathing in lead fumes, and swallowing lead, for example by eating or drinking with contaminated hands. Residue clings to skin, hair, clothes and shoes, which is how it can travel well beyond the range: into cars, kitchens and laundry baskets, and to children, partners and anyone else you live with.

NIOSH's recommendations for shooters are plain and practical. Wash your hands, arms and face before eating, drinking, smoking or contact with others. Change clothes and shoes before leaving the facility. Wash clothes used at the range separately from the rest of the household's laundry.

Wash, swap, separate

This course turns those recommendations into a three-word routine you can use at the door:

- **Wash:** hands, arms and face, before food, drink, smoking or contact with others; ask the range about suitable lead-removal washing facilities and follow product directions.
- **Swap:** shoes and your outer layer, with the range ones going into a bag.
- **Separate:** range clothes washed apart from the household laundry.

Add one neighborly step: keep food and drinks out of the shooting area. Wash before eating or drinking, and use a designated clean break area away from lead dust. A small kit in your car (spare shoes, a bag, a clean shirt) makes the routine almost effortless.

If you bring a companion, share the routine as something you do rather than a lecture about what they should do. Routines people see can be easier to pick up than rules they are told.

Talking about it at home

Because lead residue can travel home, the people you live with are part of this habit too, even if they never visit a range. You do not need to alarm anyone. A calm, practical explanation is enough: “Range clothes and shoes go in this bag and get washed separately, and I wash up before I eat or pick anyone up.” Agree on where the bag lives and who does that laundry. If young children live with you, the hand-to-mouth habits of small children are one more reason to keep range shoes and clothes out of play areas.

NIOSH also advises ranges to inform pregnant workers and shooters about possible risks to the fetus. If you or someone in your household is pregnant or planning a pregnancy, that is a good reason to ask a health professional about range visits and household routines. This book cannot answer that question for you, and it does not try to.

What facilities do, and what you may ask

Facilities carry their own responsibilities. NIOSH's recommendations for employers include effective ventilation, regular filter maintenance, noise control and proper cleaning methods such as wet sweeping and HEPA vacuuming of surfaces. You do not need to inspect any of that, and you should not try. But it is reasonable to ask staff about suitable lead-removal washing facilities, whether there is somewhere to change, and where food and drink are allowed. Those are ordinary customer questions, and a good range will be glad to answer them.

What this does not mean

This chapter is not medical advice, and it cannot tell you whether you or anyone else has been exposed to too much lead or noise. NIOSH advises that if you suspect you have been exposed to lead, you get your blood lead level tested, even if you have no symptoms. If you are concerned, talk with a health professional. Ringing in the ears or muffled hearing after a session is a reason to review your protection and speak with a professional, not something to tough out.

Sharing good habits also does not mean policing other people's hygiene or hearing protection beyond what the range requires. Set the example, offer a spare, answer if asked, and leave enforcement to staff.

In practice

The grandparent's range day. Augusto, who is seventy-one, takes his adult daughter to a fictional indoor range for her first session since college. Afterward, she heads for the café in the lobby. He says, "Give me two minutes at the sink first; it's a habit." She follows him, a little puzzled. In the car, he explains about residue and the grandkids, and points to the bag where his range shoes go. A month later, she sends him a photo of her own small kit in her trunk. He never had to explain twice.

The visitor at the window. At a fictional range, Ngozi notices a visitor watching the line from the viewing area, with the connecting door propped open and no hearing protection. She does not lecture the visitor. Instead, she mentions the propped door to the desk and offers the visitor a spare pair of foam earplugs from her bag: "These might make it more comfortable." Staff close the door. The visitor thanks her, and later signs up for an introductory class.

Checklist

- Put hearing protection on before entering the shooting area; keep it on until you are out.
- Consider double protection (earplugs and earmuffs) and check the fit each time.
- Step outside to talk instead of lifting your protection.
- Carry spare foam earplugs to offer others.

- Wash hands, arms and face before eating, drinking, smoking or contact with others.
- Swap shoes and your outer layer before leaving; bag the range ones.
- Wash range clothes separately from the household laundry.
- Talk to a health professional if you are worried about exposure.

Key terms

- **Decibel (dB, dBA):** a unit of sound level; dBA is weighted to match how human ears hear.
- **Impulse noise:** a very short, very loud sound, such as gunfire.
- **Double protection:** wearing earplugs and earmuffs together.
- **Take-home exposure:** residue carried from the range to home on skin, clothes, shoes or belongings.
- **HEPA:** high-efficiency particulate air filtration, used in some cleaning equipment.
- **Wash, swap, separate:** this course's three-step routine for leaving residue at the range.

Talk it through

1. Why might it be easier to copy a routine than to follow a rule? How could you use that at your range?
2. What could a range do to make good hearing and hygiene habits easier for visitors?
3. How would you offer a spare pair of earplugs to a stranger without sounding like a lecture?

Journal prompt

Walk through, step by step, what happens between the moment you leave a range and the moment you next eat, hug someone or walk into your home. Mark each point where noise or residue could follow you, and choose the one change you will make first.

Chapter 6. Speak up well and welcome the next person

Sort what you saw

Sooner or later you will see something at a range that bothers you. Sometimes it will be a genuine safety problem. Other times it will be something in between: a crowded walkway, a rule someone seems to have missed, a person who looks unsure. The skill this chapter teaches is choosing the response that fits what you actually saw, using the right channel, and keeping everyone's dignity intact, including your own.

The first step is to sort. Ask yourself one question: is someone in immediate danger right now?

Immediate danger

If the answer is yes, use whatever method your range has told visitors to use in an emergency. Some ranges let anyone call a cease-fire for an unsafe situation; Wisconsin's rules for its state-owned ranges, for example, require compliance with a cease-fire called by the range officer or any other person. This is why it is worth learning your range's method at check-in, rather than guessing in the moment. If someone is hurt, alert staff, call for emergency help, and follow staff direction.

Not immediate: tell the person whose job it is

If the answer is no, the right move is usually to bring it to the range officer or staff rather than to handle it yourself. NSSF's safety rules say that if you see someone violating safety precautions, you have an obligation to insist on safer practices. On a staffed range, a practical way to insist is to tell the person whose role it is to act. They have the authority, the training and the context, and they can act without turning a concern into a confrontation between two customers.

Where, what, when

A good report is short, specific and about behavior. A simple structure helps: **where, what, when.**

- **Where:** the lane, bench, door or area.
- **What:** what you actually observed, in plain words.
- **When:** roughly when it happened, and whether it is still happening.

For example: "Lane 9: during the last break, the person there stayed at the bench after everyone else stepped back. I thought you'd want to know." Or: "The side door by lane 5 has been propped open for about half an hour while the line is active."

Then let staff decide what to do, and accept that you may never hear the outcome. That is not a sign you were ignored. Staff often handle things quietly, and that discretion protects everyone, including the person concerned.

Behavior, not identity

Notice what a good report leaves out: guesses about who the person is, how they look, their age, how they are dressed, where they might be from, whether they have a disability, or "what kind of person" does that. Those details do not help the range officer act, and they can do real harm. They turn an observation into an assumption, and an assumption into suspicion of people who did nothing wrong.

Describe actions, not identity. If the range officer needs to identify someone, the lane number is often enough.

Direct courtesy requests

Some issues are about courtesy rather than safety: a bag in the walkway, a neighbor's phone call, a little too much conversation. For these, a direct word at a break is often the respectful move, and it can be simpler for everyone than going to staff.

Keep it to one request, said at a natural pause: "Would you mind keeping the walkway clear? I'm trying to get my chair through." Speak about what you need rather than about what they "always" do. Accept a simple yes; you do not need an apology or an explanation.

If the person reacts badly, or if you would simply rather not speak to them at all, that is completely fine. Ask staff, move lanes, or end your session. You never have to confront anyone at a range, and you never have to win a disagreement.

When the concern is about staff

Occasionally your concern will be about the people running the range: an instruction that seemed unsafe, an interaction that felt dismissive, or a rule applied differently to different people. The same principles apply, with one change of channel. Comply with safety instructions in the moment, then raise the concern afterward with management or the club's committee rather than with the staff member on the line.

Write it down if you can. Use the same where, what, when structure, keep to what you observed, and say what you would like to happen: an explanation, a clearer sign, a conversation. Leave out guesses about motives. A factual note is far easier for a manager to act on than a heated account, and it protects you if the concern needs to go further. If a concern involves discrimination or harassment, you can raise it, and you can also choose a different range.

Receiving feedback

The same skill runs in reverse. When a neighbor or a range officer asks you to change something, treat it as information, not an accusation. "Thanks, I hadn't noticed; I'll fix it" is a good first sentence, even if you think they are mistaken. You can ask a clarifying question afterward.

This matters more than it seems. Every time a regular takes a correction gracefully, the people watching learn that speaking up at this range is safe and normal. That is the kind of culture that helps keep a range safe.

Welcoming the next person

Being a welcoming regular is less about what you say than about what you make easy. Newcomers often do not know where to sign in, where the rules are posted, how breaks are signaled, or whether it is all right to ask. You can help with orientation without becoming an instructor:

- "The sign-in sheet is at the end of the counter."
- "The rules board is just there; the staff are great with questions."
- "Breaks here are on a schedule; there's a light above each lane."

For anything about technique or equipment, point people to staff, and to qualified, hands-on instruction if they want to learn more. NSSF's safety pages, for example, link to a way of finding a safety course, and many ranges run their own supervised classes.

Avoiding gatekeeping

Gatekeeping is any behavior, however light, that tells someone they do not quite belong. Remarks about a person's gear, clothes, age, body, accent or experience are not welcoming, even as jokes. Neither are knowing glances, sighs at a slow check-in, or stories that start with "back when people knew what they were doing."

A sport stays healthy when people of every age, ability and background feel they belong at the line. Regulars set that tone, often without realizing it. If a newcomer asks about clubs or events, staff are a good place for them to start.

What this does not mean

Speaking up does not make you responsible for fixing the situation, investigating it or staying somewhere that feels unsafe. Leaving is always a valid choice, and so are asking staff and, in an emergency, calling for help.

Being welcoming does not mean instructing people, vouching for them, or overriding staff. And reporting is never a tool for settling personal grudges; keep reports to safety and the range's rules.

Finally, this is an educational reading course, with no saved completion, certification or qualification. It is not range officer training of any kind.

In practice

The concern that turned out fine. At a fictional club range, Yusuf notices that a member on the far bench keeps walking past the end of the line to a parked car during an active period. He is not sure whether that is allowed. At the next break, he tells the range officer: "Far bench, last twenty minutes, someone walking past the end of the line to the parking area while the line was active. Might be fine; I wasn't sure." The range officer explains that a path there is outside the range area and permitted, and thanks him for asking. Yusuf feels slightly foolish. The range officer tells him not to: "That's exactly the kind of thing I'd rather hear about."

The welcome at the match. Celeste, who uses a wheelchair, arrives early at her first local match and is unsure where competitors check in. A regular, Pádraig, sees her looking at the sign-in table and says, "Morning! Competitors sign in at the green table; the match director is the one in the gray cap if you have ques-

tions." He does not ask about her chair, her equipment or her experience. Later, when the squad list shows them on the same relay, he introduces her to the others with a simple "This is Celeste; it's her first match here." At the end of the day, Celeste asks when the next one is.

Checklist

- Learn at check-in how visitors may call a cease-fire in an emergency.
- Sort what you saw: immediate danger, or not?
- For non-immediate concerns, tell the range officer or staff.
- Use where, what, when; describe behavior, never identity.
- Make courtesy requests one at a time, at a natural pause.
- When corrected, start with "Thanks, I'll fix it."
- Welcome newcomers with orientation, and point to staff for instruction.
- Remember you can always ask staff, step away or leave.

Key terms

- **Where, what, when:** a short structure for reporting a concern to staff.
- **Behavior, not identity:** describing what someone did, not who they are or how they look.
- **Courtesy request:** a direct, single request to a neighbor about a non-safety matter.
- **Gatekeeping:** behavior that signals to someone that they do not belong.
- **Orientation help:** pointing newcomers to the desk, rules board or staff, without instructing them.

Talk it through

1. What is the difference between an observation and an assumption? Give a range example of each.
2. Why might a regular hesitate to report a concern to the range officer? What would make it easier?
3. Think of a time you felt welcome somewhere new. What did people do, and what did they avoid doing?

Journal prompt

Write the where-what-when report you would give a range officer about a concern you could plausibly see, using behavior only. Then write the one-sentence welcome you could offer a newcomer in a range lobby, and note what you would deliberately not say.

Glossary

- **All-clear:** the signal that a cease-fire has ended and the range is active again.
- **Behavior, not identity:** reporting what someone did, not who they are or how they look.
- **Brass:** spent casings; the range's posted policy says who collects them.
- **Cease-fire:** the range's shared signal for everyone to stop immediately and follow the posted procedure until the all-clear.
- **Comply now, clarify later:** follow a range officer's instruction first; ask about it at a natural pause.
- **Decibel (dB, dBA):** a unit of sound level; dBA is weighted to match human hearing.
- **Double protection:** earplugs and earmuffs worn together.
- **Gatekeeping:** behavior, however light, that tells someone they do not belong.
- **HEPA:** high-efficiency particulate air filtration, used in some range cleaning equipment.
- **House rule:** a rule a range or club sets for its own reasons, as distinct from a law.
- **Impulse noise:** a very short, very loud sound, such as gunfire.
- **The line:** the area where people shoot from; also the group of people there.
- **Match official:** a person who applies a competition's published rulebook during an event.

- **Posted rules:** the rules a range displays; they apply at that range.
- **Range officer (range safety officer, line officer):** the person responsible for watching the whole line and deciding when it is active, paused or clear.
- **Rulebook:** the published rules for a competitive discipline, usually issued in editions.
- **Take-home exposure:** residue carried from the range to home on skin, clothes, shoes or belongings.
- **Ten-second hello:** a short introduction at the first pause: your lane, how long you will stay, one courtesy.
- **Two-minute sign walk:** reading posted rules at the entrance, desk and line on every visit.
- **Wash, swap, separate:** this course's three-step routine for leaving residue at the range.
- **Where, what, when:** a short structure for reporting a concern to staff.

Where to go next

Qualified, hands-on training. This book is not a substitute for supervised instruction. If you want to learn or refresh any practical skill, look for a qualified instructor and a supervised class. Ask the range you use what classes it runs and who teaches them. NSSF's safety pages link to a way of finding a safety course. For competition, read the current rulebook for your discipline, and ask the match organizer about any new-competitor briefing or clinic.

Your range's own rules and staff. The most important source for any range is the range itself: its posted rules, its briefing and its staff. Keep your notes from the two-minute sign walk and bring your questions.

Official resources.

- NIOSH (CDC) publishes guidance on lead and noise at firing ranges, including Reducing Exposure to Lead and Noise at Indoor Firing Ranges.
- NIDCD (NIH) explains hearing protectors, fit and noise levels.
- Many state wildlife or natural resources agencies publish the posted rules for the public ranges they operate. Check the agency for your area.
- For any rule that may be a legal matter, check the official source for your jurisdiction.
- For questions about lead exposure or hearing, talk with a health professional.

Related topics. These are topics to explore, not courses offered here.

- A supervised first visit: for anyone you bring who has not had one.
- Hearing protection and range hygiene in more depth.
- Finding clubs, organizations and events.

Sources

All sources were re-read on 2026-10-15. They support limited factual statements in this book; no wording, lesson structure, images or media were copied. Where a public range's rules are quoted or summarized, they are examples from that facility or agency, not universal rules.

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