

# SKEET AND TRAP SHOOTING “CHECKLIST”

## George Lindsay & Bev Bacon Fredericton Trap & Skeet Club Novice Program

When it comes to skeet and trap, it's important to talk about positioning your body, as well as your mind, in order to properly address the targets you intend to shoot and break. Below is a checklist of mental and physical positioning points that can help your shoot preparation program. They are based on the approaches we have developed over many years of practice as well as learnings gained from prominent shooters in the game.

This checklist represents a basic approach to mental and physical preparation as you wait for your turn to step on the pad to shoot. Such a list of guideposts is also what most good shooters mentally scroll through each time they shoot. While this checklist may require some minor modification to suit your individual body or mind, try not to stray too far from the basics – that often leads to bad habits which are very difficult to overcome.

### SKEET

#### The Mental Game

1. Positive Approach: Tell yourself you are going to break targets. Proper mental attitude is critically important – if you are ambivalent, or say to yourself “I'm probably going to miss targets” - Guess what? You most certainly will miss targets!
2. If you miss a target – forget about it; it's gone! Ruminating over missed targets only leads to more missed targets!
3. One target at a time and in its time – deal only with the station on which you are standing. Don't be thinking about stations to come that have been giving you trouble. Deal with them only when you are standing on them.
4. Stay focused! Breathe from your belly region – this promotes relaxation of the mind (as well as the body). Also, be aware that shallow breathing from the chest area promotes adrenalin release which tightens muscles and inhibits smooth swings and clear minds.
5. Unload or park all other thoughts, emotions, fears, fantasies etc. so they don't come into view while you are in “shooting mode”. They won't help you – only work against you. Tell yourself you will deal with them some other time, if need be.
6. **Be** in the moment! And the moment is about being safe, having fun and breaking targets; and that requires all of your powers of concentration.

#### The Physical Game

1. Bellybutton: For skeet, point at the low house window on stations 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6. On station 7, the bellybutton points just outside the high house. On station 8 the bellybutton points to the distance markers (about 30° out from the house) so you can easily swing upwards to cover and shoot the rising bird without losing your balance.

2. Feet: Heels about 6” apart; toes about 12” apart comfortably planted to support your weight and permit smooth swinging and balance. For right-handed shooters about 60% of your weight should be on the left foot; for left-handed shooters, 60% of your weight should be on your right foot.
3. Knees: For right-handed shooters your left knee slightly bent to permit a smooth and easy swinging balanced posture. For left-handed shooters the right knee slightly bent.
4. Hips and Torso: Need to be loose and mobile. This is where the swinging motion is generated so your hips and torso need to be ready to spring into their swing when called upon. Let your hips and torso do the work of moving your shoulders, arms, and the gun you are holding in the desired direction. Don’t push or pull your gun by the forearm – this will lead to dislodging it from the proper position on your shoulder and against your cheek. Besides, your hip and torso muscles are much stronger and can do the work more easily.
5. Arms: For right-handed shooters your right arm is raised to a position almost parallel with the ground, and comfortably bent at the elbow creating a “pocket” at your shoulder into which will fit the butt of your gun. The left arm is also raised and bent at the elbow to lightly grip the forearm at a comfortable distance from the receiver that promotes easy and unrestricted swinging. Maintaining both arms in the raised position is important in keeping the gun from canting or otherwise moving out of the optimal shooting position. For left-handed shooters – reverse these positions.
6. Head: In the game! Bring the gun to your cheek and into the shoulder pocket firmly (but not in a death grip!) such that you are looking straight down the rib and are able to view the bead(s) in the proper position. Remember as we say: **“wood on wood!”** Your head must stay on the stock in the proper shooting position from start to finish. If your head comes off the stock during execution of the shot, your site picture changes and you will miss the target!
7. Eyes: Remember your eye is the rear “sight”! As such it must be properly aligned with the front sight from start to finish of executing the shot. **But**, once properly aligned, your eyes must then move onto their other critical function - **“see the target”**. Your system of eyes, brain, nerves, and muscles are “hard-wired” to operate in a coordinated fashion. So if all your body parts are properly positioned and aligned, and ready to execute the shot, it is now time to focus on seeing the target emerge from the house and move across to the “break point”. New shooters have a strong tendency to look back and forth between the target and the end of the gun trying to calculate leads. **Don’t do this.** Trust your hard-wired system to properly position the gun barrel appropriately in front of the bird. Once you have become accustomed to the leads required for each station to ensure the shot string is properly placed to intercept the target, you will spend less time focusing on the lead and more time “seeing” the target.

### Putting the System in Motion

With the mind and body now properly positioned and integrated, and ready to “smoke” targets, it’s time to “put it all together”. In general, the plan is to shoot the targets as close to the centre stake as possible except for station 8 when you want to shoot them well before the stake.

1. Station 1 High House: Barrel aligned with centre stake and elevated at approximately 30°. Shoot the target as soon as it appears over the front sight. If the target is dropping quickly because of wind, come down through the target and shoot as you are going by. **Follow through and stay in the gun after pulling the trigger!**

2. Station 1 Low House: Barrel level with the bottom of the window approximately one third of the distance between the low house and the centre stake. Lead: 1.5ft. **Smooth swing; stay in the flight path; keep the gun moving; follow through and stay in the gun!**
3. Station 2 High House: Barrel level with the bottom of the window; parallel with the face of the high house or out slightly more. Lead: 2.5ft. **Smooth swing; stay in the flight path; keep the gun moving; follow through and stay in the gun!**
4. Station 2 Low House: Barrel level with the bottom of the low house window; positioned about 1/3 the distance out from the low house towards the centre stake. Lead: 2.5ft. **Smooth swing; stay in the flight path; keep the gun moving; follow through and stay in the gun!**
5. Station 3 High House: Barrel level with the bottom of the high house window; positioned about 1/3 the distance out from the high house towards the centre stake. Lead 3.5ft. **Smooth swing; stay in the flight path; keep the gun moving; follow through and stay in the gun!**
6. Station 3 Low House: Barrel level with the bottom of the low house window; positioned about 1/3 the distance out from the house towards the centre stake. Lead: 3.5ft. **Smooth swing; stay in the flight path; keep the gun moving; follow through and stay in the gun!**
7. Station 4 High House: Barrel level with the bottom of the high house window; positioned about 1/3 the distance out from the house towards the centre stake. Lead: 4.5ft. **Smooth swing; stay in the flight path; keep the gun moving; follow through and stay in the gun!**
8. Station 4 Low House: Barrel level with the bottom of the low house window; positioned about 1/3 the distance out from the house towards the centre stake. Lead: 4.5ft. **Smooth swing; stay in the flight path; keep the gun moving; follow through and stay in the gun!**
9. Station 5 High House: Barrel level with the bottom of the high house window; positioned about 1/3 the distance out from the house towards the centre stake. Lead: 3.5ft. **Smooth swing; stay in the flight path; keep the gun moving; follow through and stay in the gun!**
10. Station 5 Low House: Barrel level with the bottom of the low house window; positioned about 1/3 the distance out from the house towards the centre stake. Lead: 3.5ft. **Smooth swing; stay in the flight path; keep the gun moving; follow through and stay in the gun!**
11. Station 6 High House: Barrel level with the bottom of the high house window; positioned about 1/3 the distance out from the house towards the centre stake. Lead: 2.5ft. **Smooth swing; stay in the flight path; keep the gun moving; follow through and stay in the gun!**
12. Station 6 Low House: Barrel level with the top of the low house window; parallel with the face of the house or out slightly more. Lead: 2.5ft. **Smooth swing; stay in the flight path; keep the gun moving; follow through and stay in the gun!**
13. Station 7 High House: Barrel level with the bottom of the high house window out slightly from the side of the house so you can see the target emerge. Lead 1.5ft. **Smooth swing; stay in the flight path; keep the gun moving; follow through and stay in the gun!**
14. Station 7 Low House: Barrel aligned with the centre stake, elevated slightly to come up through the rising bird. **Smooth swing; stay in the flight path; keep the gun moving; follow through and stay in the gun!**

15. Station 8 High House: Barrel level with the bottom of the high house window; out slightly from the side of the house so you can see the target emerge. Grip the fore-end closer to the receiver than normal to permit a rapid and smooth elevating swing. Cover the target with the barrel and pull the trigger. Resist the temptation to lift your head to “peek at the target”. Remember you must shoot the target before it reaches the centre stake. Do not swing past the stake! If the target gets by you - let it go! **Smooth swing; stay in the flight path; keep the gun moving; follow through and stay in the gun!**
16. Station 8 Low House: Barrel level with the bottom of the window; out slightly from the side of the house so you can see the target emerge. Grip the fore-end closer to the receiver than normal to permit a rapid and smooth elevating swing. Cover the target with the barrel and pull the trigger. Resist the temptation to lift your head to “peek at the target”. Remember you must shoot the target before it reaches the centre stake. Do not swing past the stake! If the target gets by you - let it go! **Smooth swing; stay in the flight path; keep the gun moving; follow through and stay in the gun!**

## **TRAP**

### **The Mental Game**

Not surprisingly the mental preparation for skeet, trap and sporting clays is essentially the same for all three disciplines. The major difference is to recognize that the targets are presented differently amongst the three disciplines which means your mental and physical games will be integrated differently for each. It's all about positioning your mind to properly do its part when integrated with the body in order to break targets.

1. Positive Approach: Tell yourself you are going to break targets. Proper mental attitude is critically important – if you are ambivalent or say to yourself “I'm probably going to miss targets” - Guess what? You most certainly will miss targets!
2. If you miss a target – forget about it; it's gone! Ruminating over missed targets only leads to more missed targets!
3. One target at a time and in its time – deal only with the station on which you are standing. Don't be thinking about stations to come that have been giving you trouble. Deal with them only when you are standing on them.
4. Stay focused! Breathe from your belly region – this promotes relaxation of the mind (as well as the body). Also, be aware that shallow breathing from the chest area promotes adrenalin release which tightens muscles and inhibits smooth swings and clear minds.
5. Unload or park all other thoughts, emotions, fears, fantasies etc. so they don't come into view while you are in “shooting mode”. They won't help you – only work against you. Tell yourself you will deal with them some other time, if need be.
6. **Be** in the moment! And the moment is about being safe, having fun and breaking targets; and that requires all of your powers of concentration.

### The Physical Game

Not surprisingly, there are many common attributes between skeet and trap in terms of positioning your body parts and holding your gun. After all, both disciplines deal with a comfortable and efficient shooting stance. As such, other than positioning the body on the shooting station which is specific to trap because of the layout of the field and the approach you must take to properly execute shots, positioning the other parts of your body is common amongst skeet, trap, and sporting clays, with only minor adjustments as noted below.

1. **Body:** For right-handed shooters, on each of the five stations (sometimes called “posts” or “pegs”) align your body such that your left shoulder points more or less in the direction that a hard left target would travel and your bellybutton should then be pointing more or less in the direction that a hard right target would travel. In doing so, you will notice that as you move from station 1 across to 5, your feet will gradually be turning in small increments in a clockwise direction. (More about feet below.) With your body in this position you should be able to comfortably swing the gun to cover the whole area of the field from hard left to hard right targets. For left-handed shooters your right shoulder should be more or less be aligned with the path of a hard right target and your bellybutton with a hard left target. Remember the leads are not as great as in skeet but you must still be able to swing comfortably and effortlessly in whatever direction the path of the target dictates.
2. **Feet:** Heels about 6” apart; toes about 12” apart comfortably planted to support your weight and permit smooth swinging and balance. For right-handed shooters about 60% of your weight should be on the left foot; for left-handed shooters, 60% of your weight on your right foot. As indicated above, your foot position will rotate slightly as you move from station 1 to station 5.
3. **Knees:** For right-handed shooters your left knee slightly bent to permit a smooth, easy swing with a well-balanced posture. For left-handed shooters the right knee slightly bent.
4. **Hips and Torso:** Need to be loose and mobile. This is where the swinging motion is generated so your hips and torso need to be ready to spring into their swing when called upon. Let your hips and torso do the work of moving your shoulders, arms and the gun you are holding in the desired direction. Don’t push or pull your gun by the forearm – this will lead to dislodging it from the proper position on your shoulder and against your cheek. Besides, your hip and torso muscles are much stronger and can do the work more easily. Since the direction and velocity of the swing required to properly execute the shot is unknown until the trap target appears, you need to be prepared to swing effortlessly in either direction.
5. **Arms:** For right-handed shooters your right arm is raised to a position almost parallel with the ground, and comfortably bent at the elbow creating a “pocket” at your shoulder into which will fit the butt of your gun. The left arm is also raised and bent at the elbow to lightly grip the forearm at a comfortable distance from the receiver that promotes easy and unrestricted swinging. Maintaining both arms in the raised position is important in keeping the gun from canting or otherwise moving out of the optimal shooting position. For left-handed shooters – reverse these positions.
6. **Head:** In the game! Bring the gun to your cheek and into the shoulder pocket firmly (but not in a death grip!) such that you are looking straight down the rib and are able to view the bead(s) in the proper position. Remember as we say: **“wood on wood!”** Your head must stay on the stock in the proper shooting position from start to finish. If your head comes off the stock during execution of the shot you will miss the target! Recall that trap guns generally have a “built-in” vertical lead which usually means that the front sight will appear above or “stacked” on top of the mid sight.

As a result, in general, there will be more of the rib visible on a trap gun than would be the case for skeet or other types of shotguns. Again remember these are general principles and may not apply in all cases. The best way to determine if the gun “fits” properly is to shoot it.

7. Eyes: Remember your eye is the rear “sight”! As such it must be properly aligned with the front sight from start to finish of executing the shot. **But** once aligned properly, your eyes must then move onto their other critical function - “**see the target**”. Your system of eyes, brain, nerves and muscles are “hard-wired” to operate in a coordinated fashion. So if all your body parts are properly positioned and aligned, and ready to execute the shot, it is now time to focus on seeing the target move to the “break point”. New shooters have a strong tendency to look back and forth between the target and the end of the gun trying to calculate leads. **Don’t do this**. Trust your hard-wired system to properly position the gun appropriately in front of the bird. Once you have become accustomed to the small leads required in trap-shooting to ensure the shot string is properly placed to intercept the target, you will spend less time focusing on the lead and more time “seeing” the target. Although we spoke of seeing the target emerge from the house in skeet; in trap we don’t do this. Rather, we focus our attention on some object mid-way out in the field and let the target come into our vision. Doing so ensures that when the target comes into view you are already focused on the area of the break point. On the other hand, if you watch the target emerge from the house, you then have to refocus your attention out some distance to the area of the break point. This is inefficient and can lead to lost targets, especially if your vision happens to become momentarily (or otherwise) fixed on the end of our gun as your gaze heads in the outward direction – a fatal error!

#### Putting the System in Motion

With the mind and body now properly positioned and integrated, and ready to “smoke” targets, it’s time to “put it all together”.

1. In general, the plan is to shoot the targets while they are still on the rising portion of their trajectory. Waiting until targets crest and begin to drop is a much more challenging shot, usually also fraught with greater difficulty because of the longer distance and the possibilities for interference from even the slightest breeze.
2. Relative to the front edge of the house, your barrel should be about 12”-18” above the house. This is rather subjective and is one aspect with which individual shooters experiment to find the right elevation above the house that works for them.
3. In general, if the wind seems to be elevating the targets, you may want to hold your gun somewhat higher than normal. Similarly, if the wind is driving the targets downwards, you may wish to hold somewhat lower than normal.
4. For targets being driven downwards by the wind, additional attention needs to be paid to ensure that you don’t shoot over them since they are not on a normal, rising trajectory.
5. While the leads in trap are not generally great, it is critical that you keep the gun moving (see “stopping the gun” below). If the target is moving to the left you need to shoot on the left side of the target. If the target is moving to the right, you need to shoot on the right side of the target.
6. You need to “see” the target quickly to determine if it is moving to the left, right or straight away. Small deviations from the straight away are often difficult to detect, but they become much exaggerated over the flight path of the target which means if you are not properly positioned, it will be a lost target.

7. If you are properly fitted to your gun, at the instant you pull the trigger, the target should be just above the front sight, either to the right, left or directly above it depending on the target trajectory. You may hear people say that you need to shoot at some considerable distance below the target. In such cases, this usually means that the gun is not properly fitted to the shooter. It is also much more difficult to judge some considerable distance between bead and target on a consistent basis and usually leads to a greater number of lost targets. Therefore, if you and your gun are truly compatible, the bead should be in close proximity to the target when you pull the trigger. And yes, follow-through here is just as important as in skeet.
8. Probably the most frequent reason for lost targets, assuming proper gun fit etc. is the shooter shooting over top of the target because of lifting the head to peek at the target in flight. To demonstrate this, pick a spot on the wall, point to it, lift your head, then realign your finger with the new “apparent” spot, then put your head back down to the starting position – you will find that you are now actually pointing above the spot. This is exactly what happens when you lift your head when executing a shot – you shoot over top of the target.

Here are some tips for shooting targets from each of the five stations, assuming that your mental game is activated and that you have the physical components of your game under control.

1. Station 1: Align the barrel such that it is pointing over top of the front left corner of the trap house at the proper elevation that works for you and takes into account any prevailing winds. If it is a windy day you may wish to align the barrel so it is just off to the left of the front left corner to give you an additional fraction of a second if you are presented with a hard left target. **Smooth lateral and vertical swing - left, right or straight away as dictated by target direction; stay relative to the target’s flight path; keep the gun moving; follow through and stay in the gun!**
2. Station 2: Align the barrel such that it is pointing over the back left corner of the house at the proper elevation that works for you and takes into account any prevailing winds. **Smooth lateral and vertical swing - left, right or straight away as dictated by target direction; stay relative to the target’s flight path; keep the gun moving; follow through and stay in the gun!**
3. Station 3: Align the barrel such that it is either slightly left or right of the centre of the house at the proper elevation that works for you and takes into account any prevailing winds. Aligning the barrel off-centre prevents the barrel from hiding a target that could otherwise emerge as a straight away directly from under the barrel and thus delay sighting of the target for an important fraction of a second. **Smooth lateral and vertical swing - left, right or straight away as dictated by target direction; stay relative to the target’s flight path; keep the gun moving; follow through and stay in the gun!**
4. Station 4: Align the barrel such that it is pointing over the back right corner of the house at the proper elevation that works for you and takes into account any prevailing winds. **Smooth lateral and vertical swing - left, right or straight away as dictated by target direction; stay relative to the target’s flight path; keep the gun moving; follow through and stay in the gun!**
5. Station 5: Align the barrel such that it is pointing over top of the front right corner of the trap house at the proper elevation that works for you and takes into account any prevailing winds. If it is a windy day you may wish to align the barrel so it is just off to the right of the front right corner to give you an additional fraction of a second if you are presented with a hard right target. **Smooth lateral and vertical swing - left, right or straight away as dictated by target direction; stay relative to the target’s flight path; keep the gun moving; follow through and stay in the gun!**

## **OTHER CONSIDERATIONS – Some reasons for missing targets and what to do about it.**

1. The gun does not “fit” you. This means that your head and eyes are not properly aligned to let you properly “see” the targets. This is why you see many competition guns with adjustable stock components – movable combs (up, down, in, out), adjustable triggers, adjustable butt plates – all designed to ensure your body is properly aligned with the gun to properly see the target.
2. Stopping the gun during the swing. There is a tendency, especially for new shooters, to stop the gun as soon as they pull the trigger. This means the gun is now stationary while the target is still in motion and the shot string does not intercept. This is why we emphasize **follow through and stay in the gun!** This is also a bad habit that occasionally plagues even experienced shooters. One method of overcoming the habit is to do some “in-basement” dry fire (empty gun or with snap caps or spent shell) training. Pick a location in your basement that affords you adequate space to swing the gun. Pick out a spot on the wall that represents the spot at which you would normally choose to pull the trigger if you were shooting a moving clay target. Then practice swinging by this spot and pulling the trigger as you go by, **following through and staying in the gun.** Do this swinging the gun left and right. Do it over and over and over until you are comfortable that you can go back out on the field and shoot without stopping the gun when you pull the trigger.
3. “Jumping” at targets. Means a swinging motion which is not smooth and easy. Most often associated with trap-shooting when you are not prepared for the trajectory that the target is taking. You jerk the gun to where you want it - usually meaning that it will not be properly aligned to intercept the target. Such uncoordinated swinging motion sometimes occurs in skeet shooting when mental and physical games are not in synchrony. Try following the instructions for overcoming stopping the gun as given above. In addition focus your mental game to permit smooth swinging.
4. Starting to swing the gun before the target appears. What could have been a routine target now becomes a challenge because your normal site picture is changed and you are now mentally faced with trying to compensate for “leaving early”. This will likely lead to either stopping the gun at some point in the swing, or slowing the swing, or both, which will frequently lead to a missed target. Although this occurs more frequently in skeet and sporting clays, it does occur occasionally in trap-shooting. Practice waiting until you see the target emerge before initiating your swing.