

Teaching the Kneeling Position

An *On The Mark Series* by Gary Anderson, DCM



The kneeling position is the most complicated of the three shooting positions that are typically taught to juniors. Kneeling usually follows prone since prone offers a better setting for mastering the use of the sling. Nevertheless, the proper method of initially adjusting a sling is the same in kneeling as in prone. Kneeling also requires the effective use of a second position support, the kneeling roll.

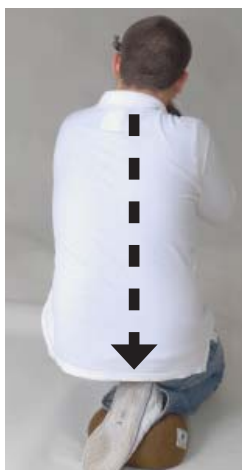
The prerequisites for developing a stable kneeling position capable of steady improvement are 1) Sit with as much body weight as possible relaxed and balanced over the heel and kneeling roll, 2) align and balance the shoulders and hips over the heel so that tension in the torso is minimized and 3) configure and balance the left leg, left arm and sling above the left foot to provide stability in supporting the rifle while not compromising prerequisites 1) and 2). All this sounds complicated and it is, but if new shooters follow the “Steps in Building a New Kneeling Position” they will start with a kneeling position that conforms to these requirements.

Step 1--Build The Position Foundation. Just as we did for prone and standing, let's go through the *Steps in Building a New Kneeling Position* to see how these steps fit together and what each step seeks to establish. All descriptions are for right-handed shooters—simply reverse left and right for left-handed shooters. First, review these steps with new shooters in a brief instructional session, then build their new kneeling positions by talking them through these steps, one at a time, in order. Go slowly so that any difficulty in performing a step properly can be corrected before going to the next step.

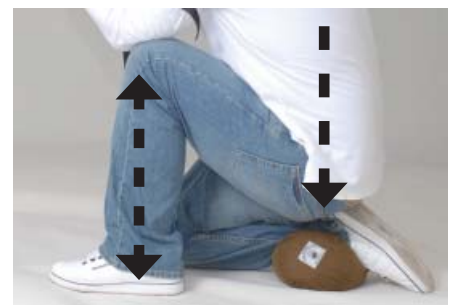
In building any position, the first step is to establish the foundation. In standing, that was done by locating the feet so that the body is turned 90 degrees from the target. The position is then built upon this foundation by placing the left elbow and butt-plate in position. In prone, the foundation is the floor or shooting mat and the position is built by locating the left elbow and butt-plate in the shoulder. In kneeling, the position's foundation starts with a kneeling roll, but there are several additional steps to building the complete kneeling position foundation.



Step 1b. Kneel over the roll—place the ankle on the roll—keep the toe extended and the foot vertical (heel up).



Step 1c. Sit on the right heel. Let the weight of the body relax down onto the heel. Keep the foot vertical.



STEPS IN BUILDING A NEW KNEELING POSITION

1. Build the Position Foundation--

- Locate the Kneeling Roll**—place the kneeling roll on the firing point and turn it approximately 40-60 degrees from the target.
- Kneel over the Roll**—kneel by placing the right ankle over the kneeling roll—keep the right heel vertical.
- Sit on Right Heel**—place heel in center of buttocks—sit with weight back on the heel.
- Locate the Left Leg**—place the left foot under the rifle so that the lower leg is vertical.

2. **Add the Sling and Rifle**—prepare for the next steps by putting on the sling, adjust it “long and loose” and attach it to the rifle.

3. **Shoulder the Rifle and Locate the Left Elbow**—with the sling loose on the arm, place the butt-plate in the shoulder—with the weight back on the heel, drop the left elbow down onto the knee or leg.

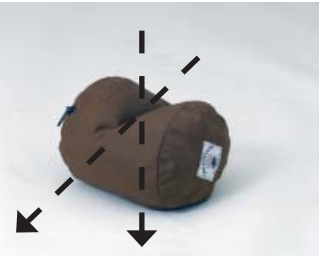
4. **Position the Butt-Plate and Head**—locate the butt-plate high enough in the shoulder to establish a good head position.

5. **Adjust the Rifle Height**—move the left hand forward or rearward to raise the rifle sights to target level.

6. **Adjust Sling Swivel and Tighten Sling**—with the hand position established, move the sling swivel back to the hand and tighten the sling until it takes over the work of supporting the rifle.

7. **Rotate the Position to the Target**—rotate the entire position by pivoting on the kneeling roll so that the sights point naturally at the correct target.

Step 1a--Position the Kneeling Roll. The kneeling roll is the base point for the kneeling position. Start with a roll that is three-fourths filled so that a shallow “V” can be formed in the center. Turn the roll 40 to 60 degrees away from the line of fire. It is also recommended that a shooting mat not be used in kneeling; there is no real need for padding under the knee or feet; a mat only makes the support surface a little less solid.



Step 1a. Place the kneeling roll on the firing point and turn it 40 to 60 degrees away from the line of fire.

Teaching the Kneeling Position

An On The Mark Series by Gary Anderson, DCM

Step 1b--Kneel over the Roll. Start with the right toe behind the kneeling roll. Kneel with the right ankle resting on the V in the kneeling roll. Extend the toe to the rear and keep the heel vertical. The key to this step is keeping the foot vertical. If the foot is turned even slightly to the side, it will gradually turn further while shooting due to the weight of the body pressing down on it.

Step 1c--Sit on Heel. Try to sit with the heel placed in the center of the buttocks. Rest as much body weight as possible on the heel. Indeed, the key to this step is to sit with the weight back on the heel.

Step 1d--Locate the Left Leg. The left leg provides the support base for the weight of the rifle and left arm. The correct location for the leg is to place the foot so that the lower leg is vertical. It is OK to shift the left foot and lower leg slightly forward, especially for a shooter with longer legs and a short torso. It is not OK to shift the left foot back so that the lower leg is angled to the rear.



Step 2. With the position foundation established, put on the sling and attach it to the rifle.

Step 2--Add the Sling and Rifle.

With the position foundation established, you are ready to put the sling on and attach it to the rifle. Place the sling high on the arm, just as in prone. Likewise, leave the sling long and loose, with the sling swivel moved forward. With the sling on the arm and attached to the rifle, you are ready to build the upper part of the position.



Step 3. With the sling on and attached to the rifle, shoulder the rifle and drop the left elbow to the left leg or knee. Do not reach forward; just let the elbow drop naturally to the leg or knee.

Step 3--Shoulder the Rifle and Locate the Left Elbow. To build the upper part of the kneeling position, the rifle must be placed in the shoulder and the left arm dropped to its natural location on the left leg or knee. The key to this step is placing the left elbow in the correct location on the left knee or leg. To do that, place the butt-plate in the shoulder, continue to sit with your weight back on your heel and drop the left elbow onto the left leg. Do not reach forward with the left elbow; let it drop onto the leg without leaning forward with the body. For some shooters, the elbow will fall on the left knee; for other shooters, the elbow will fall somewhere behind the knee. For only a rare few, will the elbow fall ahead of the knee. Be sure the sling remains loose when locating the left elbow position.

Step 4--Position the Butt and Head. Just as in standing and prone, the correct position for the butt-plate in the shoulder is determined by the correct position for the head. The head must be reasonably erect in all positions. Locate the butt-plate high enough in the shoulder that the head and eyes can look forward comfortably and without straining while aiming. Try to keep the butt-plate close to the neck while aiming in kneeling.



Step 4. Fix the location of the butt-plate in the shoulder—keep the butt close to the neck and high enough to assure that the head and eyes look forward naturally while aiming.



Step 5. With the sling still loose, shift the left hand rearward and forward until the sights are at target level.

Step 5--Adjust the Rifle Height. After the butt plate is fixed in the shoulder so that aiming is comfortable, the height of the rifle must be adjusted so that the sights are aligned at the level of the targets. Do this the same way it was done in prone, by shifting the left hand forward or rearward to raise or lower the rifle until the sights point at target level. Do not worry about where your target is, only that the sights are at target level.

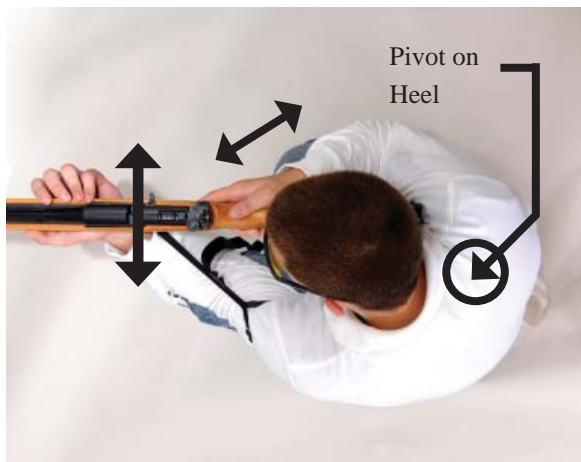
Step 6—Adjust Sling Swivel and Tighten Sling. With the sights at target level, the sling swivel should be moved back to the hand and tightened in place. Then the sling must be tightened so that it fully supports the weight of the rifle.

Step 6. With the left hand location established, move the sling swivel back to the hand and tighten the sling. Adjusting the sling swivel is easier if someone is available to assist.



Teaching the Kneeling Position

An On The Mark Series by Gary Anderson, DCM



Step 7. Rotate the entire position over the right heel and kneeling roll until the sights point naturally at the correct target.

Step 7. Rotate the Position to the Target. The final step in building the kneeling position is to rotate the position over the right heel and kneeling roll until the sights point at your target. The pivot point for rotating the kneeling position is the right heel and kneeling roll. Rotate by shifting the left foot and right knee right or left as necessary to bring the sights onto the correct target.

After the new position is built, it is important to have new shooters do both dry and live firing in the position to become comfortable with the new position. Teach them to prepare to fire shots in kneeling by checking:

1. That the butt-plate location in the shoulder is the same for every shot.
2. That weight of the body is relaxed down onto the right heel and kneeling roll.
3. That the left arm and shoulder are totally relaxed with the sling supporting all of the rifle weight.
4. That the weight of the body-rifle system is balanced over the right heel and left heel; there should be little or no weight on the right knee.

Consistency, relaxation and balance are the keys to getting good kneeling scores after a sound position structure is established. Consistency means placing the butt-plate and elbow in the same location for each shot. Relaxation means relaxing the body weight down onto the heel and kneeling roll and letting the sling totally support the weight of the rifle. Balance means balancing the weight of the relaxed body-rifle system over the two heels. After many practice sessions where good position structure and sound technique are maintained, most shooters will reach a point where they need to fine-tune their position because kneeling is, after all, a position where the complex interrelationship of several parts of the body, rifle, sling and kneeling roll must be worked out. That cannot begin without a good foundation, however.

Common New Shooter Mistakes in Kneeling

Coaches should be alert to detect and correct these common mistakes:

1. **Kneeling roll too big** (or too small)—If the kneeling roll is too big or too full, the body will be too high.
2. **Right foot turned**—if the foot is not vertical, it will gradually turn further under the weight of the body; a vertical foot is stable and cannot turn further.
3. **Pulling lower left leg back**—this shifts weight forward off of the heel and reduces stability.
4. **Sitting up straight**—sitting up straight increases tension in the body; instead, let the shoulders and upper body relax down.
5. **Unbalanced position**—leaning to the right usually by placing weight on the right knee requires lots of muscle tension to keep the body in position; instead, balance the entire weight of the body-rifle system over the right and left heels.



Consistency, relaxation and balance are the keys to getting good kneeling scores after a sound position structure is established.