

10 F-Class Rules For Beginners

by

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Some time ago, I wrote some rules in jest to try and help new shooters make their way up the [NRA classification ladder](#). These were based on lessons that I learned the hard way. However, as I age, I tend to forget things and sometimes even feel like a new shooter. The 2020 F-Class Long-Range Nationals in Phoenix served to point this out to me in spades. I broke no less than three of my own rules during the championships.

Below are my 10 cherished rules of F-Class rifle competition.

- **Rule No. 1:** Never fire the first shot in a match. (Always wait for someone else to mess up and fire during the ready period. You have plenty of time to shoot your shots.)

- **Rule No. 2:** Check your target number. You can't give away 10 points and stand much chance of winning. (Believe me, I know.)
- **Rule No. 3:** Listen to what your scorekeeper says. It may be important. (I can attest to this.)
- **Rule No. 4:** F-Class rifles with mirage shield and rain cover attached must weigh ½ pound under the limit on your scale or the one you used last. (Scales can give different weights, and gravity is known to be different to a small degree around the world.)
- **Rule No. 5:** Always have plenty of ammunition. (I had a 66-shot shoot-off during the first F-Class World Championships.)
- **Rule No. 6:** If the mirage or flags show any change, it is worth something, even if it is only half an inch at 1,000 yards. (Remember that a 1/8-MOA click moves impact by 1¼ inches at 1,000 yards.)
- **Rule No. 7:** A nine on the upwind side is worth the same as one on the downwind side. (As Obi-Wan Kenobi famously said to Luke Skywalker in *Star Wars*, "Trust your feelings.")
- **Rule No. 8:** If you shoot a 10 or X, immediately shoot another shot after checking the condition. (This applies more if you feel you can't read the wind.)
- **Rule No. 9:** If you shoot a good shot and then hold up, you won't remember what the conditions were two minutes later, much less five minutes later. (This takes about two seconds for me.)
- **Rule No. 10:** The one thing you will need during a tournament is the one you left behind. (Make a list and check it twice **before** you leave home.)

2020 NRA Mid-Range and Long-Range F-Class National Championships

Before telling my tale of woe, let me mention the 2020 NRA Mid-Range and Long-Range F-Class National Championships, hosted by the Desert Sharpshooters at Ben Avery, were the most efficiently run I have ever seen in 57 years of competitive shooting. We received squad cards on the first day (or the day prior if you happened to be at the range then). From there, we were able to go online the night before and get our target and relay numbers, which were determined by our ranking in the matches thus far. This helps to ensure the wind conditions are the same for those with like scores. Shooters knew before we got to the range where to park our vehicles. If we were scheduled to go to the pits, that was color-coded also. Each day, awards were given out quickly after the challenge period was over. While we waited for the challenge period to end, the prize drawings were held. The statistical crew certainly had their act together. Did we miss food trucks at the range and dinner for the grand aggregate awards? Yes, but that unfortunately was due to COVID-19, not the organizers.

Enter the last day of the Long-Range Championships. The course-of-fire consisted of two strings of 20 shots for record. I was on the third relay. When it was my turn to shoot, I set up my gear and prepared to fire. I had checked my ammunition the night before and had 52 rounds left to fire sighters and 40 record shots. The first match allowed unlimited sighters and second only two, i.e., 10 sighters for the first match and two for the second. No problem.

As I started the first match, the wind changed quickly from moment to moment. My multiple sighter shots were all over the target, and I could not get a handle on the condition changes.

Keep in mind that my hearing is shot (pun intended), and the scorekeeper was six feet away and wearing a mask. After a bit, I fire a shot and happen to hear him say, “13th sighter is a _.” Something goes off in my memory banks—13 sighters. I confirm that with the scorer. Yep, 13th sighter. I checked my ammunition box, which had 39 rounds left. I needed 20 rounds to finish this match, and 22 to fire two sighters and 20 record shots in the next match. I was three rounds short. Thus, I had broken rules No. 3 and No. 5. I usually go back home with a 100 or so leftover. Live and learn (maybe).



What happened?

Nothing to do but start shooting my record rounds for this match. I told the scorekeeper, “I’m going for record.” Conditions had moderated somewhat and I managed to finish with a 194-6X. Not a great performance, but I was happy to sign the scorecard. After scoring for my shooting partner, I had to figure out how to shoot 22 shots for my final championship match with only 19 rounds. After doing a bit of high math, I determined it was impossible.

So, the hunt began to find compatible ammunition. I noticed my scorekeeper was shooting a straight 284 also and with the same bullet, a 184-grain Berger Hybrid with only ½ grain more of the same powder and long seated in unfired cases. The question was would they chamber in my rifle?

Not wanting to put a loaded round in a rifle on the range, I needed a firing pin removal tool. Unfortunately, I had left mine at home on the loading bench. Now, I had broken rule No. 10.

Off to the races—Lou Murdica had his truck and loading trailer behind the firing line. Lou said to look in the black bag in his truck bed to find a firing pin removal tool. With the firing pin taken out, the bullet too far out to seat in the chamber. My Berger teammate, Jim Murphy, wandered by and said, “Lou has all kinds of dies and presses in his trailer.” We found a 284-seater die, and reseated the bullets down to where they looked to be the same as mine. After trying one in the chamber, the bolt still wouldn’t close easily, but those new cases look to be my best bet. A different reamer size, perhaps?

Then I had to decide which ammunition to shoot first. The three scrounged rounds first or my own? I figured ½-grain more powder won’t make much difference. I’ll shoot them last just in case one does get stuck. Next, it is time for me to shoot my last string.

I closed the bolt on one of my rounds, aimed and pulled the trigger. Nothing happened. Upon opening the bolt there was no hit on the primer. Stupid me, so I tried another round with the same result. At this point I was getting a bit worked up. I had 30 minutes to fire two sighters and 20 record shots and the clock was ticking. I figured something was wrong with the bolt that I took apart. I went to go get the tool from Lou’s truck and check it out, but his truck and trailer were gone. He was done firing and had left the range. I told the scorekeeper, “I’ll be back.”



Two types of bolt tools.

I went looking for another tool. Walter Lange had one, so we journeyed to his truck and take the bolt apart. He gives the pin a once over, and without thinking I tap the bolt on his tailgate. Nothing came out. We put the bolt back together and de-cock it to see if the pin will come out and it does. I grab it and hotfoot it back to my fire point and prepare to fire my first sighter, but I can't put the bolt in the rifle, it is de-cocked. Rush back to find Walter and get the bolt cocked. At this point, I am a bit worn out when I get back to my firing point. (What do you expect for a 79-year-old?)

The clock is ticking, I load one of my rounds, aim and squeeze the trigger. Bang, we are good to go! I shoot as fast as the target puller can pull. Two sighters and 17 record rounds downrange and there are the three scrounged rounds. The bolt closes stiff on the round. But where do I hold? I just shoot another at the same aiming point as the last shot. The target goes down and stays there. Did I miss the target?

After a while, the target comes up and there are two white marker disks on it and a red one indicating a value of eight. One of the hit markers is dead-on at 12 o'clock, and the other right at three. Which one is mine? The range officer was no help to me. I have an eight, but there is no way of knowing which is mine. Maybe the wind picked up a little. Maybe I should have held a bit left, but it looks the same now, so the shot at 3 o'clock could be mine. Back on the rifle, chamber another round, aim, point the same as last shot and fire. Target goes down, comes back up another eight at 12 o'clock. Apparently ½-grain does matter at 1,000 yards. Next, I hold down in the middle of the 8-ring and it comes up in the middle. I scored a 182-8X. My stopwatch indicated a little over two minutes left.

The funny thing is that after I finished, Jim Murphy, who was leading the Grand Senior category (70 and older) congratulated me for beating him in the grand aggregate and winning the High Grand Senior award for the fourth time since I turned 70 (nine years ago). Something else to note is that all the winners of that trophy for the last 11 years have been members of Team Berger (the "Old Geezers").

While waiting by the clubhouse for the awards to start, my target puller tells me a paster must have fallen off the target (the first time in 57 years of competitive shooting this has happen to me) and they couldn't tell which shot was mine. Believe me, I will pay much more attention to my own rules from now on.

Maybe I should add one more rule:

- **Rule No. 11:** Print the above rules and put a copy with your ammunition and read them before you leave for the match, and then right before you go up to the line each time.