

GETTING STARTED

Diligentia, Vis, Celeritas ("DVC") is the practical shooting motto. It stands for "Accuracy, Power, and Speed" and symbolizes the challenge of the sport. How fast can you shoot? How accurately? Can you find the right balance of speed and accuracy to solve the shooting scenario before you? As practical shooting is freestyle, you provide the solution to the shooting problem, and both your score (points) and speed (time) are factored.

By now you're probably thinking: "Holy Cow! This sounds amazing, but where do I go from here?" Glad you asked, because there are several ways to contact the Big Sky Practical Shooting Club (BSPSC) and become involved in our sport:

Come to the Range. BSPSC activities take place at the Western Montana Fish and Game Association (WMFGA) Deer Creek Shooting Center ("the Range"). You can find directions to the Range here: [Range Map & Directions](#)

Take a class. BSPSC offers training opportunities for both new and experienced shooters. In the spring of each year, we hold a New Competitor Clinic. We use this clinic to cover the rules of the sport and the equipment used, as well as discussing techniques and skills. If attendance is not possible or if you are discovering us later in our match season, we can still get you started with some one-on-one training with one of our Range Officers. During the year, several of our club members also offer independent classes on handgun safety, concealed carry, and competition shooting. Links to some of these classes are available [here](#). These are excellent classes that fill up fast, so if you are interested, you should act quickly. In addition, we arrange for world-class professional shooters to come to Missoula almost every summer to teach clinics. Keep an eye on the BSPSC website for announcements and information about these very special opportunities to learn and improve your shooting skills!

Come practice with us. On Wednesday evenings during the spring and summer months, we hold practice sessions at the Range. Shooting takes place on Bays 50B and 50C starting around 4 p.m. You may come and watch or shoot the course of fire set up for that evening. Whether you're a new shooter working on fundamentals, or an experienced competitor working on advanced skills, you'll find these sessions useful and fun. They are also a great place to get to know other club members. You will need to be escorted by a WMFGA member if you are not already a member yourself. If you have any questions or need to arrange an escort, call Mike Shapiro at (406) 531-7580.

Come to a match. See the [Schedules](#) page for our current schedule and plan to attend one of our matches or other events this season. When you arrive, talk to the people in the "Management Shed" and they will give you all the information you need about the club, the Range, and the sport of practical shooting. You will also get to meet some of the competitors involved, as well as see some of the equipment and firearms used. Please remember that both eye protection (safety glasses) and ear protection (muffs or plugs) are required for both competitors and spectators. The Range gate is open on match days, but you must check in with the Match Officials.

Attend a club meeting. We usually hold our board meetings on the first Tuesday of the month at the meeting room at the west end of the Range. The meetings begin at 6:00 p.m. During the winter months and depending on the weather (this *is* Western Montana), meetings may be held elsewhere. Check our Schedules page or with one of our officers or directors for the exact dates and time.

Become a member. If you are interested in further participation, we encourage you to join BSPSC by completing and submitting a [Membership Application](#) with the applicable dues. Membership in BSPSC is available on an Individual and Family basis. We also have a special membership category for Law Enforcement Officers. BSPSC members enjoy all benefits and privileges offered by the club, including participating in BSPSC events and access to the club's extensive collection of props, steel targets and target holders for use in practice sessions.

[Please note: BSPSC members who wish to use the Range, other than for monthly club matches, must join [WMFGA](#).]

Safety

To paraphrase Jeff Cooper, the father of practical shooting: owning a firearm doesn't make you a safe shooter any more than owning a guitar makes you a musician.

No one wants to lose a toe, or worse. This is why we have LOTS of rules for handling firearms, personal conduct and responsibility at the shooting Range, and procedures for matches; and why it is extremely important for new shooters to take one of the new competitor or firearm safety classes offered by the club and some of its members as noted above.

Keep in mind that the shooter is always responsible for his or her actions and safe gun handling. For everyone's safety, prospective new shooters will be completely briefed concerning safety procedures before being allowed to shoot. The following principles apply whether you are at a match, practicing at the Range, or shooting targets in your backyard:

- 1. Always treat all firearms as if they are loaded.**
- 2. Never point a firearm at anything you are not willing to destroy.**
- 3. Be sure of your target and what is beyond your target before firing.**
- 4. Keep your finger off the trigger and outside the trigger guard until your sights are coming on to your target.**

Learn and practice these principles; tape them to your wrist, if necessary. Failure to obey these rules is considered to be a severe safety violation, and will lead to disqualification from matches.

The careless will find other shooters intolerant of sloppy gun handling, as they expect to compete under safe conditions. Safety comes first and foremost—always!

Guns and Gear

Let's be honest. This is a sport that can get expensive quickly. If you've flipped through the pages of firearm periodicals, done research on various gun-related websites, or checked the firearms section of a local sporting goods store, it has probably become clear that choosing the right firearm and accessories can be very confusing. So before you spend a fortune based on "something you read on the internet," check around. Ask an experienced shooter. Ask several. Take it from someone who has spent years trying to justify to their non-shooting spouse that this latest purchase is "not only the greatest thing since John Moses Browning created the M1911, but will vastly improve my shooting skills" just to find out that it wasn't and didn't. Most shooters are happy to share their experiences—good and bad—on what to buy and where to get the best deals. Heck, they will probably let you try out some of their stuff. And if someone is willing to let you shoot their firearms, keep in mind that ammo is pricey. So offer to reimburse the generous soul—they might not take you up on it, but the gesture will not go unnoticed.

Shooter Classification

Have you ever seen the TV show "Top Shot"? If you haven't, it was one of those competition shows that pitted really, really good (and by that, we mean, expert) shooters against other expert shooters in a variety of challenging scenarios. Well, that's kind of what we do, too. That is, BSPSC uses the USPSA shooter classification system so that while new or inexperienced shooters will compete alongside more accomplished shooters, their scores will be compared against other folks at their same skill level. So relax and enjoy yourself. As your skill increases, so may your classification.

Competition

Nervous about your first "public performance?" Most people are! Remember: everyone you meet had a first match too; we've all been there. You'll find that both experienced shooters and Range Officers are friendly and helpful with new shooters. We all enjoy practical shooting and want to get you started right.

But before you show up, study the [Safety and Match Rules](#) and ask any questions that you might have of the Range Officers officiating the match prior to shooting any stage. To help you avoid those nasty *faux pas* on the Range, we've also included a [Match Guide](#) on what you can expect and what is expected of you at your first match.

Now let us give you a few basics.

Competitors in practical shooting matches are challenged with courses of fire which include cardboard targets with scoring zones and steel targets which fall when hit. Courses usually begin by drawing the handgun from a holster and may include moving to other shooting positions or reloading. Time and accuracy are always factors in the final score. Accuracy is measured by your hits and misses; electronic timers are used to measure your speed.

The firearms used in competition (USPSA and Steel Challenge) include revolvers, semi-auto pistols and pistol-caliber carbines. Multi-gun matches may include handguns, rifles and shotguns. The minimum cartridge case dimension for handguns to be used in USPSA matches is 9mm x 19mm. The minimum bullet diameter is 9mm (.354 inches). The minimum caliber for rifles is 5.45mm x 39mm. Shotguns must be 20 gauge or larger. Some divisions may have a higher minimum. Generally magnum loads and rifles are not allowed on steel targets because these loads may damage the targets. Exceptions are allowed for sanctioned matches and other USPSA/BSPSC events.

Most competitors use semi-auto pistols in a variety of calibers. The most popular calibers are 9mm, .40 S&W and .45 ACP. If you are not into reloading yet, the 9mm is probably the least expensive and 115 grain round nose ammunition is sufficient for competition. Typically our matches will require a minimum of 125 to 150 rounds of ammunition, but it is always a good idea to bring at least twice that amount to the matches.

You will need a sturdy gun belt and a good holster. Your holster must cover the trigger guard of your handgun, and ideally it should not have any retention device (like a strap). Holsters made from Kydex (a stiff plastic) work better than those made from soft materials – especially nylon. You will also need to be able to carry extra ammo on your belt, so magazine pouches and extra magazines (at least 3, and maybe as many as 5 or 6 depending on which Division you are shooting) may be necessary.

Remember to pack some water, because you will get thirsty; some snacks are a good idea, too. Since our matches are outdoors, you should wear and bring clothing that is appropriate to the weather, however changeable that might be, on the day of the match. Matches are held regardless of rain, snow, sleet, hail or hot, sunny weather. Dress to stand around while you're waiting your turn to shoot. Pants should allow you to freely bend and stretch. Shirts should fit closely so loose fabric doesn't snag your draw. Open-toed shoes should be left at home. Most important of all, ear protection (muffs or plugs) and eye protection (safety glasses) are mandatory for both shooters and spectators.

Got all that? Great. If not, don't be shy about asking questions. In fact, we encourage it, which is why taking a class, joining us in our practice sessions, or attending a match or two as a spectator is so critical. Remember that everyone involved in practical shooting had to start somewhere, so relax and enjoy it; we all do this because it is fun!

With that in mind, we hope to see you soon at a practice session or match.

Note: Our great appreciation to Team Northwest from the USPSA Area 1 in Washington State for their contributions to our website. Team Northwest has a most entertaining and easy-to-read discussion of practical shooting, its background, and what you need to know to get started. We borrowed liberally from their website and used it as an inspiration for our own. Thanks, and great job guys! We also want to thank Patti Thomas who took information from numerous sources and added her own spin to create this informative and entertaining section.