



LOADING FOR OTHER PEOPLE

A CODE OF PRACTICE

1. INTRODUCTION

This is a code of practice for those who load for others. If followed, it will contribute to a safe and responsible future for the sport. It is primarily aimed at those who have successfully completed a loading qualification, such as that provided by Lantra Awards. The code will support and supplement the novice's training and attainment of a qualification. This code should be read in conjunction with the *BASC Shotgun Safety Code of Practice*.

High standards underpin public and political support for shooting, now and in the future.

The code provides advice at two levels:

Advice that **must** be followed in order to deliver sustainable shooting – unless otherwise stated, the term 'must' only applies to meeting the standards set by this code of practice and does not refer to a legal obligation.

Advice that **should** be followed in order to achieve best practice, any deviation from which would need justification.

THE FOLLOWING GOLDEN RULES APPLY:

1. The most important rule of gun handling – you should never point a gun, loaded or unloaded, in an unsafe direction.
2. No one should touch the trigger of a shotgun until they intend to fire it.
3. The safe conduct of shotgun shooting must meet the standards described in this code, show respect for the countryside, due regard to health and safety and consideration for others.
4. It is the loader's responsibility to alert the shoot captain of any breaches of safety that may arise.
5. Remember – ignorance of the law is no excuse. If in doubt, always ask.

2. BEHAVIOUR IN THE FIELD

Attitude and shooting client interaction

As a loader you will often work with shooting clients with different requirements and varying levels of competence. The relationship is often directly between the loader and the shooting client, so make sure that your responsibilities are agreed before you start shooting. Remember safety and security is ultimately the shotgun certificate holder's responsibility.



There are three main roles that a loader may be asked to perform, these are:

- Acting as a mentor for a novice shooting client
- Single gunning (often referred to as 'stuffing')
- Double gunning

There will be situations where a mix of some of these roles will be requested or required. The most important aspects of the loader/shooting client interaction will be the level of instruction given, the amount of feedback and coaching provided, and the level of small talk expected. Some shooting clients will require full interaction from the loader, while more experienced guns may only require clear instructions regarding the reloading operation. Typically, the more experienced shots, will only expect you to provide coaching or advice when asked. Coaching is not compatible with double gunning. When double gunning the loader is performing a technically demanding role with little or no opportunity to observe and coach to any proficient level.

Safety

Above all, safety is the most important consideration. Always be aware of the direction in which the muzzle of your shooting client's shotgun is pointing and never allow the gun(s) to point in an unsafe direction. Whenever you are loading, you should be aware of the safe arcs of fire and advise your shooting client where their shot may fall before each drive. Also advise your shooting client where the beaters and pickers up are likely to be positioned throughout the drive.

- Always treat a shotgun as though it were loaded and keep its barrel pointing in a safe direction.
- The safety catch locks the triggers so that they cannot be pulled. However, this does not immobilise the firing mechanisms and it is possible for a gun to be discharged by a knock, a jar, or even a hard pull on the trigger.
- During double gunning the safety catch should be on when guns are being passed between loader and the shooting client.



- The loader has no reason to touch the trigger.
- On picking up or being handed a shotgun, check immediately that there are no cartridges inside and that the barrels are clear.
- At the end of the drive the loader should request that the shooting client passes the gun back to them unloaded, stock first with the action in a broken position.
- Always try, whenever possible, to encourage a safe and responsible attitude in your shooting clients.
- Above all – be safe and sensible.

Behaviour and etiquette

Normally, BASC promotes and insists on safe and sensible behaviour by shooters in all disciplines. You should act on these points to reassure shooters and non-shooters alike, that you and your shooting client can be trusted to be safe with a shotgun:

- On many shoots there will be a dress code that loaders should be aware of. If going to a new shoot to load, check the dress code.
- Confirm with the shooting client what quarry they may shoot.
- At the start of the day the loader should familiarise themselves with the shoot pegging system, to avoid confusion.
- Always respect the owner's property, crops, livestock and fences and follow the *Countryside Code* and, in Scotland, *the Scottish Outdoor Access Code*. Open gates rather than climb them, and close them after you. If you and your shooting client have to climb a closed gate, do it at the hinged end.

3. QUARRY

Seasons

Below, is a summary of the main quarry species likely to be encountered on a driven shoot. This is not an exhaustive list, and it is recommended that the BASC Pocket Guide to Quarry Identification is consulted. As part of the loader's personal development it is recommended that other relevant wildlife identification resources are also consulted.

| Species | Open season |
|---|---|
| Pheasant | 1 October – 1 February (Eng/Wal/Sco) 1 October – 31 January (N. Ireland) |
| Partridge (red-legged and grey) | 1 September – 1 February (Eng/Wal/Sco) 1 September – 31 January (N. Ireland) |
| Grouse | 12 August – 10 December (Eng/Wal/Sco) 12 August – 30 November (N. Ireland) |
| Mallard | 1 September – 31 January |
| Woodcock | 1 October – 31 January (Eng/Wal/N.Ireland) 1 September – 31 January (Sco) |
| Common snipe | 12 August – 31 January (Eng/Wal/Sco) 1 September – 31 January (N. Ireland) |

4. THE SHOTGUN

Types of gun

In formal driven shooting you will normally be dealing with over-and-under or side-by-side shotguns. These will be primarily 12, 20 and 28 bore, but other bores such as 16 and .410 might occasionally be encountered.

The gun(s) will either be a single gun or a pair of guns. Pairs come in two forms: matched and composed. A composed pair is generally two unrelated guns of the same type or specification, put together by a maker. Matched pairs are two guns made consecutively, with the same stock blanks and the same craftsmen producing each part of the gun to the same specification and standard.

Some shotguns will have assisted opening or self-opening mechanisms.

For efficient and safe loading the guns should be breech loading, ejecting, with automatic safety catches. They must be of sound condition and in proof.

The guns will vary in chamber length from 2 to 3½ inch, which is important when determining which cartridges to use.

Safety catch

The safety catch should normally be automatic, but it is worth checking that it is not manual.

In double gunning, the loader should hand the gun to the shooting client with the safety catch on. A gun should not be passed with the safety catch off as this is unsafe.

Fitness for purpose

It is good practice for the loader to make checks on the gun(s) being used by the shooting client. This may be an agreed requirement of the loader/shooting client relationship. A quick visual check will reveal any cracks in the stock or fore-end, dents or bulges in the barrels and lifting or sprung ribs. Multi-chokes should be present and tight. Make sure the barrels are not 'off the face' (or loose). If there is any chance that the damaged gun could cause harm to either the loader, shooting client or other members of the shooting party, the shooting client must be informed of the damage and it must not be used.

Knowledge of proof

The loader must be familiar with proof information and where to find this information on the gun. This is particularly important in relation to which cartridges may be safely used in which gun. Many guns are not proofed for high performance cartridges or for steel shot. You must also check that the stated chamber length of the gun exceeds that of the cartridge length.

Suitability of the cartridge

Ensure that the cartridge type and shot size is suitable for both the quarry and the gun. If you use non-lead shot, make sure the gun and cartridge are compatible, otherwise damage could occur.

It is very important not to allow cartridges of different bores to become mixed. A smaller size (say a 20 bore) can be inadvertently loaded into a 12 bore gun and lodge in the barrel. If a 12 bore cartridge is then loaded and fired over the top, it can burst the barrel and cause fatal injuries. You must have no cartridges in your pocket except those of the gauge you are about to load.

Cartridge malfunction

There are two common cartridge malfunctions, hang fires and misfires, both of which can be caused by errors in cartridge manufacture or a faulty shotgun. Repeated misfires and hang fires could be a sign of worn firing pins, and the gun should be repaired by a reputable gunsmith.

Hang fire

This is when the cartridge fails to fire upon pulling the trigger, but does fire after a delay. What usually happens is that the cartridge fails to fire altogether, even though the primer of the cartridge has been struck. The gun should be pointed in a safe direction and held securely for 30 seconds. Looking away from the action, the gun should be opened slowly and the cartridge removed.

Misfire

If the cartridge makes an unusual or muffled noise upon firing, or the recoil is reduced, it should be presumed that a misfire may have occurred. The gun needs to be lowered in a safe direction and opened slowly; the barrels should then be inspected for blockages or damage.

5. LOADING

Loading routines and safe gun handling – single gun

This is a method often used by shotgun coaches while instructing ‘on the peg’. As a technique, it offers the coach more control over the shooting process.

From a loader’s perspective

- From the moment the drive starts to the moment the drive ends, eye and ear protection should be worn.
- Loaders should familiarise themselves with working with both left and right-handed shooting clients.
- The loader should stand to the right-hand side of a shooting client shooting off their right shoulder and to the left of a shooting client shooting off their left shoulder.
- The loader should make sure he/she has a cartridge bag or pockets of good capacity, with easy access.
- It is good practice to make a note of which pegs your shooting client should be on, for each drive.



- The loader should also make sure that the gun slip is stowed out of the way so that it does not act as a trip hazard.
- When the breech is presented by the shooting client to the loader, the loader should check that the safety catch is on and the shooting client's finger is off the trigger.
- The loader then chambers cartridges and observes safe closure.
- The loader may give the shooting client brief instructions. This is to make sure that the shooting client is operating safely, closing the gun while facing the front and operating the safety catch correctly.

A shooting client's perspective

- The shooting client should observe all health and safety requirements of the shoot.
- The shooting client must ensure that the gun is safe, including a visual check of the bores.
- The shooting client should present the open breech to the loader, with the safety catch on and their finger off the trigger.
- The shooting client should then face the drive, before safely closing the gun, being muzzle aware at all times.
- When the drive is over, the loader should ensure that the shotgun is 'empty and safe' and that it is placed in the slip in the correct manner.

Loading routines and safe gun handling – double gun

It is important that the shooting client's experience is matched with that of the loader's experience. For instance, it would be unwise to pair an inexperienced shooting client with an inexperienced loader.

A loader's perspective

- From the moment the drive starts to the moment the drive ends, eye and ear protection should be worn.
- Cartridges should ideally be stored in a specialist 'loaders' bag, with a wide entrance.
- Muzzle awareness is key for the loader.
- The loader has no reason to touch the trigger and should never have his finger on the trigger.
- Never load or close the gun in the direction of the line of the guns.
- Slipped guns should be carried with the barrels facing down and the zipper/buckle end of the slip facing up, no matter who is carrying the gun(s). This is to prevent guns falling out of slips with faulty zips or buckles, and thus preventing potential damage to the guns.
- When guns are transported in vehicles, equipment should not be stored on top of them.



A shooting client's perspective

- It is always a good idea for the shooting client to have a dry run with the loader, particularly if it is someone who has never loaded for them before.
- The safety catch should be on, and the shooting client's finger off the trigger before passing the gun to the loader.
- The gun should always be passed vertically to the loader with the trigger finger arm.
- This means that the loader is always on the right-hand side of a right-handed shooting client and on the left-hand side of a left hander.
- The loader passes the loaded gun with their right hand, on the outside of the gun which is being passed back to the loader on the inside, to the loader's left hand.
- When receiving a gun from the loader, the shooting client keeps his finger off the trigger, mounts the gun, takes the safety catch off, then puts his finger inside the trigger guard.
- The shooting client takes their shots, takes his finger out of the trigger guard, puts the safety catch on and passes the gun back to the loader.
- In most circumstances, the shooting client should not move around; they should remain on the peg in the same position. This is the shooting client's responsibility. The loader should never be following the shooting client around.
- The loader should not have a gun with the safety catch off.



6. EQUIPMENT MAINTENANCE

End of the day cleaning

On many shoots it is customary for the loader to clean the shooting client's shotgun(s) once the day's shooting has finished. The loader should always bring a complete cleaning kit with them just in case.

Cleaning kit

A basic loader's cleaning kit should consist of the following:

- Cleaning rod
- Phosphor bronze brushes of various bore sizes
- Jag
- Barrel cleaners of various bore sizes
- Bore snake or paradox barrel cleaner
- Oil (spray or dropper)
- Dry cloth
- Fine oiled cloth
- Kitchen roll
- Fine grease or Vaseline
- Old towels

Drying wet guns

If the guns have been used in wet conditions, it is very important to dry them thoroughly with towels first.

Cleaning routine

Every loader or assistant will have their own cleaning routine or will develop one with experience. The loader must bear in mind that they may be judged on the thoroughness of their work by the shooting client, so it is important to have good cleaning procedures in place.

Remember to scrub the inside of the barrels thoroughly to remove the build-up of plastic and other residues. Clean the rest of the gun and grease bearing surfaces. Excess oil should be removed to prevent it soaking into the wooden surfaces, which may weaken the gun over time.

There will not always be the time to do a thorough cleaning job, particularly if the client needs to get away quickly. In these situations there may be only an opportunity to dry the gun and run it through with the cleaning rods.

Storage and transportation

Guns can be stored in slips overnight, only if the slips are dry. For this reason the loader should have spare slips to use for overnight storage. Many larger shoots or sporting accommodation will have dedicated gunrooms or cabinets where the guns can be stored overnight. Shotguns should not be stored in vehicles overnight.



If no secure storage is available it is best that the barrels are stored separately in a locked vehicle and stocks and forends are kept in your luggage in the hotel or house.

Ideally guns should be dismantled and stored in a dry case for transit, and packed in such a way that they cannot move around.

Other shooting equipment

The loader should check his equipment list, dry all equipment which has become damp and check all zips and buckles for breakages. Any of the loaders equipment which is damaged or missing should be replaced.

7. INSURANCE

It is essential for you and your shooting client to have adequate legal liability (third party) insurance when shooting. BASC have a Professional Insurance package which covers loading and double gunning. See <http://basc.org.uk/membersoffers/bespoke-insurance-policies/shooting-professionals-policy/>

8. FURTHER INFORMATION

The BASC ideal is that, all who shoot conduct themselves according to the law and to the highest standards of safety, sportsmanship and courtesy, with full respect for their quarry and a practical interest in wildlife conservation and the countryside.

Never guess at what the law allows. If in doubt, contact BASC.

BASC is the largest representative body for sporting shooting in the UK.

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