

Short Skills Trail Exercise

Objective: Students will encounter a variety of scenarios that could be experienced when hunting to practice the decision making process. They will learn to exercise safe and ethical judgment while hunting by considering three questions, “Is it safe? Is it legal? Is it ethical?” before taking any shot. Students will also have the opportunity to practice skills learned from previous exercises in the classroom.

Questions about safety and legality should be cut and dry, yes or no. On questions of ethics, student responses will vary. What is ethical for some may not be for others. Let the student decide and honor the decision.

Time Allotted: 30 minutes

Materials: There can be 2 to 4 hunters depending on your class size, Have the following materials for each hunter: a firearm or dummy gun, matching dummy ammo, hunter orange vest, hunter orange hat, and water bottle. The group should have an ammo box, and at least one pair of binoculars. Other materials for use on the trail are game decoys or cut-outs- (dove, ducks, turkey, owl, deer), antler shed, rubber rattlesnake, rope or surveyors tape, manikin dressed in camo (alternative may be camo shirt hung in tree with coat hanger, camo overalls stuffed with newspaper, or even a real person dressed in camo), deer corn, and vehicle . Suggestion: Artificial Christmas trees work great for this indoor exercise.

Preparation: An ideal site would be outside, have some variety of terrain and cover to make the experience as realistic as possible. Being able to hide one scenario from another also helps the class stay focused on one situation before seeing the other, but is not necessary. A well-defined path to follow is preferable. Each of the 7 scenarios will require their own set up along the trail.

Vehicle: Inside, the firearms should be in their cases, loaded with dummy ammo, 2 hunter orange vests and hats, the ammo box, canteen and binoculars.

Dove: arrange dove in a tree or on the ground. Place a handful of corn on the ground and cover with leaves/grass.

Waterfowl: 3-4 duck decoys, 1 owl (or other protected bird). Large, dark plastic lawn trash bag, sheeting or mat. Place ducks very close together on the “water” (trash bag). Place owl in a tree to the side (or on the ground).

Turkey: 2 gobbler decoys, one hen, mannequin dressed in full camo or stuffed camo overalls. In obvious view, set the hen in front of the gobbler. Off to the side, in a clear area, place the other gobbler. Behind it, 15 to 20 yards in the line of fire, place the mannequin in camo to simulate another hunter, Preferably it would be sitting with its back against a tree and some cover in front.

Awareness: shed antler, rubber rattlesnake. Place antler in noticeable spot off trail, place rubber rattlesnake within “striking” distance without being too obvious. May camouflage with grass.

Deer: A white-tailed deer decoy, preferably a “grazing” deer with head down. Place the decoy so that the body is recognizable but the head is not so that from the trail the sex cannot be determined. Between the deer and the trail, create a “fence,” using rope or surveyors tape.

Ideally the trail would be a loop, beginning and ending at the vehicle. If circumstances don't allow, a configuration could be set up around a classroom during the break for lunch.

Introduction: Tell the students that they are going to be led through a series of hunting scenarios where they will need to determine whether or not to take a shot. The instructor will inform the students of the conditions that apply to that scenario. The students should always ask themselves Three Questions before pointing a firearm at any animal. They are: Is it safe? Is it legal? Is it ethical?

Presentation

Scenario 1- Leaving the Vehicle

Lead class to the vehicle and ask for two volunteers. Tell them that many hunting accidents occur around vehicles at the beginning or end of a hunt. Tell the students to open the vehicle and get ready to hunt. While they are doing so ask the class to name 4 Primary Rules of gun safety:

- 1) Always point the muzzle in a safe direction.
- 2) Treat every firearm (or bow) with the respect due a loaded firearm.
- 3) Be sure of your target, and what is in front of and beyond it.
- 4) Keep your finger off the trigger until you are ready to shoot.

See if the volunteers check their firearms to see if they are loaded and generally how they control their muzzles and fingers around the triggers. If they don't check their firearms, ask them to do so. Ask them where their ammo should have been (in ammo box). Did they put on vests and hats? Take binos and canteen? Before or after getting firearms guns? They should have put on vest and hats first, then got binos and canteen, then checked firearms. When getting ready to hunt deal with gear first, firearms guns last.

Reverse order when returning after hunt, secure firearms guns first then deal with other gear.

NEVER lean firearms against vehicle. Must be vigilant with safety at all times, not just in the field!

Activity: lead group down the trail to next scenarios.
(Switch volunteers after each scenario to maximize participation).

Scenario 2- Dove Hunt

Tell the volunteers they are on a dove hunt. What would be the first thing they would do? (Establish safe zones of fire)

Tell them that not many dove have been flying, they haven't shot many birds, It is 15 minutes before legal sunset. Point out dove decoys. Should they take the shot?
Ask the Three Questions: Is it safe? Is it legal? Is it ethical?
(Yes, Yes, Depends)

Next, step forward and reveal the corn. Tell them another hunter poured several bags of corn around where you're hunting.
Ask the Three Questions: Is it safe? Is it legal? Is it ethical?
(Yes, No, No)

Could go into other considerations (perhaps while walking to next scenario or switching volunteers):
must have valid license, migratory bird stamp, HIP certified, 3 shell max, lead ok, bag limit,

possession limit, keep each hunter's limits separate correct zone/dates, species, leave - no limit, leave on head and one wing unpicked on for ID, coolers and zip locks for transport, shooting hours, etc.

Switch volunteers, move along to next station.

Scenario 3 – Duck Hunt

Tell them they are now on a duck hunt, they are each one duck short of their bag limit. Should they take the shot?

Ask them, "What are the Three Questions you should ask before taking a shot?"

They should respond: Is it safe? Is it legal? Is it ethical?

(Yes. Maybe- what if they kill more than 2 ducks? Depends- is it more ethical to flush and shoot in flight?)

Point out owl. Should they take a shot at the owl?

Ask them, "What are the Three Questions you should ask before taking a shot?"

They should respond: Is it safe? Is it legal? Is it ethical?

(Yes. No, No)

Could discuss importance of wildlife ID, how hens of different species look similar and implications on bag limit of shooting the wrong species of hen, what birds are protected/threatened/endangered, 3 shell max, non-toxic shot, stamps needed, different zones/dates ducks/geese, baiting illegal, etc.

Point out that all laws and regulations regarding waterfowl are not found in the TPW Outdoor Annual. Hunters must find out all the regulations from the Texas Waterfowl digest. May want to discuss how federal and state laws differ or are alike.

Switch volunteers, move along to next station.

Scenario 4- Turkey Hunt & In the Line of Fire

Tell the volunteers they are now on a spring turkey hunt.

Point out gobbler and hen, should they take the shot?

Ask them, "What are the Three Questions you should ask before taking a shot?"

They should respond: Is it safe? Is it legal? Is it ethical?

(Yes, Maybe- can't hit the hen, No- wait for clear shot on gobbler.)

Point out solo gobbler, should they take the shot?

Ask them, "What are the Three Questions you should ask before taking a shot?"

They should respond: Is it safe? Is it legal? Is it ethical?

If they don't see the other "hunter," tell them to use the binoculars to check.

Instead of the mannequin, if you can get an assistant to serve as the other hunter, this scenario will have a much greater impact on the class. Do not disclose the other hunter and have them call out at the appropriate moment.

Can discuss importance of not shooting at sound or movement, identifying target, what's before and behind, wearing hunter orange to and from hunting location, covering harvested bird with hunter orange for transport out of hunting area. Illegal to shoot off roost. License, upland bird endorsement, tagging and other rules specific to turkey.

Point out that although you would not be able to walk up on a real turkey wearing hunter orange, people have shot at decoys before, thinking they were real. Also this scenario should remind people how effective camo clothing can be. We see it worn every day and forget how effective it really is in the woods. You may wish to point out how many eyes were looking at the same scenario, how close the camo figure was and how few people actually saw it.

Switch volunteers, move along to next station.

Scenario 5- Awareness

On the way to next station, point out the antler shed by the trail, if they go to pick it up, do they notice the snake?

Can discuss need to be aware of surroundings, importance of Hunting Plan, need to get certified in First Aid CPR.

Scenario 6- Deer Hunt

Tell them that they are now hunting deer, on a property where the landowner permits only harvesting does. The deer is on the other side of a fence (rope/tape) Should they take the shot?

Ask the Three Questions: Is it safe? Is it legal? Is it ethical?

(Yes, Maybe- is fence a property boundary? No- don't know if buck or doe)

Tell the fence is not a boundary. Should they take the shot?

Ask the Three Questions: Is it safe? Is it legal? Is it ethical?

(Yes, Yes, No- don't know if buck or doe)

Tell them they are hunting in Johnson County, where the Special Antler Restrictions Apply. The deer is an 8 point buck, should they take the shot?

Ask the Three Questions: Is it safe? Is it legal? Is it ethical?

(Yes, Depends on width of rack, Yes)

Go to the deer decoy and have them safely cross the "fence." Can discuss what to do after the shot, make sure animal is dead as approaching. Tag immediately, cut out month and day, complete county and ranch in ink, complete harvest log on back of license

If deer runs off after shot impact, wait 1 hour before following blood trail. Go to the place where animal was shot and then track,

Scenario 7- Hunt's Over

Return to vehicle and open truck/car.

Tell them the hunt is over and they should pack up to go back home.

See if the volunteers FIRST safely unload the firearms and store the ammo separately. Then remove bins, canteen, hats, and vests.

Evaluation: watch to see if they maintain control of their muzzles and if they keep fingers off triggers until ready to shoot. Safeties are on until aimed. Do they exhibit skills learned from previous exercises? Coach as needed, ask group for input, praise safe and ethical behavior and decisions.

Summary: You will need to watch your time and move along to keep on schedule. You may want to have on hand: insect repellent, spray sun block, extra hats, water.

This Skills Trail does not include a blood trail since blood trails can eat up a lot of time. If you have time and are so inclined, you may want to offer to set up a blood trail after the course is concluded. See the two Skills Trail examples in Section IV of the book for other ideas and more extensive background.