

CRAIG
BODDINGTON

PROFESSIONAL MEMBER
Photos Courtesy of Author



ACCURATE HUNTER

READY, KNEEL

With practice, you can significantly reduce that wobble, but it's always going to be there. In field shooting, where "almost" isn't good enough, this is what limits the range and utility of the kneeling position.

Understanding this, and understanding there are no range rules in the field, the kneeling position is ripe for modification, and when modified, may be even more useful than sitting.

The farther you get from the ground—and the less solid support you have for your elbows—the less steady you are. So the sitting position isn't as steady as prone, and kneeling isn't nearly as steady as sitting. On the other hand, it's a whole lot steadier than standing unsupported! For that reason, it can be an extremely useful field-shooting position with two primary advantages: First, it gets you a bit higher off the ground than sitting, so you're able to see and shoot over somewhat higher vegetation. Second, and generally most important, kneeling is fast!

If you have time, there are probably better options, such as using a natural rest or setting up a pack, bipod, or tripod for a rest. Sometimes you don't have time or can't risk much movement, but you still need to steady your shooting motion. Kneeling can be a viable option. In 2009, I drew a Shiras' moose tag in Colorado. On about the second night we caught a glorious snowstorm, which helped my buddy George Taulman and I find fresh tracks up on a snowy ridge early the next morning. We followed them into dark timber, and after a little while, ran straight into a really good bull staring back down the trail from some thick conifers, barely visible between snow-laden branches. The distance was maybe a hundred yards; I had the shot, but I couldn't move. Wrapping into a hasty sling, I dropped to one knee, found a patch of shoulder, and got the shot off.

Quick. Simple. That's kneeling. Unsupported, it is not a long-range position. Most shooters will have a horizontal wobble, controllable enough for short and perhaps medium-range shots, but hopeless at longer ranges when precision becomes essential. On the other hand, at longer ranges one usually has time to find better options!



The formal kneeling position. Left-handed Boddington demonstrates right-handed; ideally, his shooting-side elbow should be more horizontal. This is the “high” kneeling position, sitting on the supporting-side heel, probably faster and more useful in the field than the “low” kneeling position, sitting on the side of the foot.

Formally there are really two kneeling positions: high and low. In both cases the supporting-side leg is forward, toward the target, knee bent about 90 degrees, foot grounded; the shooting-side leg is out at 90 degrees, knee grounded, lower leg bent back under the body. In the higher position, the toe of the shooting-side foot is grounded, toes 90 degrees away from the target (right for right-handers, left for left-handers), and you sit on the upraised heel. In the lower (sitting) position, you turn your shooting-side foot forward, toward the target, ground the side of your calf, and you sit on the side of your foot. The basic ground rules apply: The closer to the ground you get, the more stable you are, so the low kneeling position is steadier. This is a tradeoff, because the high sitting position is faster and gets you a few inches higher, which can be critical in brush.

Either way, kneeling is not a perfectly steady position, and is probably not a position to be chosen if there are other options. It's for those situations when the shot is too far (or the target too small) for

a standing or offhand shot, but time or circumstances don't allow a steadier position. You simply drop to your shooting-side knee, rest your supporting-side elbow over your supporting-side knee, and take the shot. As with sitting, you will be steadier if you can get that elbow over the knee rather than on top of it. This is also a position in which a tight hasty sling makes a huge difference!

The biggest problem with kneeling, however, is that the shooting-side elbow is unsupported. Ideally you don't want it “flapping in the breeze.” Instead, get that elbow more horizontal, using your shooting arm to actually pull the rifle tight into your shoulder. It is lack of support for the shooting-side elbow that creates the almost unavoidable horizontal wobble in the kneeling position. With practice, you can significantly reduce that wobble, but it's always going to be there. In field shooting, where “almost” isn't good enough, this is what limits the range and utility of the kneeling position.

Understanding this, and understanding there are



TOP: George Taulman and Boddington with a good Shiras' moose from Colorado, taken from a quick kneeling position during a close encounter in heavy timber. BOTTOM: The “reverse kneeling” position, with the rifle rested and the shooting-side knee used to support the shooting-side elbow, is invaluable if the rifle is solidly rested. This position netted Boddington very nice tahr in Nepal's Himalayas, taken with one shot at 465 yards.



no range rules in the field, the kneeling position is ripe for modification, and when modified, may be even more useful than sitting. Time and opportunity allowing, the first thing to do is stabilize the rifle over a solid rest. Whether you use a natural rest such as a rock or log, a makeshift rest such as a pack or pile of packs, or a bipod or tripod you've carried with you, the obvious criteria is you must have a clear path to your target. This, not the height of your rest, determines how high you need to be, and thus, the shooting position.

There are many times when it's better to kneel behind a supported rifle than to sit behind it. Obviously you're going to be steadier supported than unsupported, but that flapping elbow is still a problem. So let's figure out ways to stabilize it. A daypack usually isn't high enough, but an upended pack with an internal or external frame is often just right.

However, since the rifle is now stabilized, it's no longer really necessary to rest your supporting-side elbow on your knee. So think about reverse kneeling (my term). The rifle is supported, so you ground your supporting-side knee under the rifle, put your shooting-side leg out, knee bent, and rest your shooting-side elbow on that upraised knee. This is a non-doctrinal position, but I've found it extremely stable. Donna and I often carry three-legged shooting sticks that can be shortened for sitting or kneeling behind. This "reverse kneeling" position is perfect for kneeling behind a tripod,

and there have been several occasions when I've found it an ideal solution for kneeling behind a natural rest.

Given time and opportunity, a solid rest is always better than any unsupported position. So, given a clear path to the target, the height of the rest dictates the position. Sometimes you can lie prone over a log, and sometimes you can stand over a tall boulder, but some variation of sitting or kneeling are probably the more frequent options. As with all field shooting, you can throw away the range rules. The point is to get steady!

Unsupported kneeling is a very difficult position to master (if in fact it can be mastered), but it's extremely useful in almost all close-cover hunting. So it's a good idea to practice it on the range for those fast-breaking situations when you have just two choices: take the shot standing, or drop to one knee. Kneeling is a whole lot steadier than standing! But you can also get creative in your practice. Set up over a variety of rests of different heights, and figure out what works for you. I'm big on the hasty sling, but of all the positions I think it pays the greatest dividends in kneeling. Then, if you can find a way to stabilize that shooting-side elbow, kneeling becomes a whole different ballgame. ■

TOP: If a natural rest is available, then the height of the rest determines the position. This is a very unorthodox kneeling position, but it was the only way to get the right height over the boulder. **MIDDLE:** This is the position Boddington used to take a Shiras' moose in Colorado. It was a close encounter in heavy timber, but a bit too far for a certain offhand shot. The best solution was to quickly kneel and fire. **BOTTOM:** Boddington doesn't have a patent on the "reverse kneeling" position, but he's used it for a long time. This photo was taken about 35 years ago, just after he took a Coues' whitetail from this position.