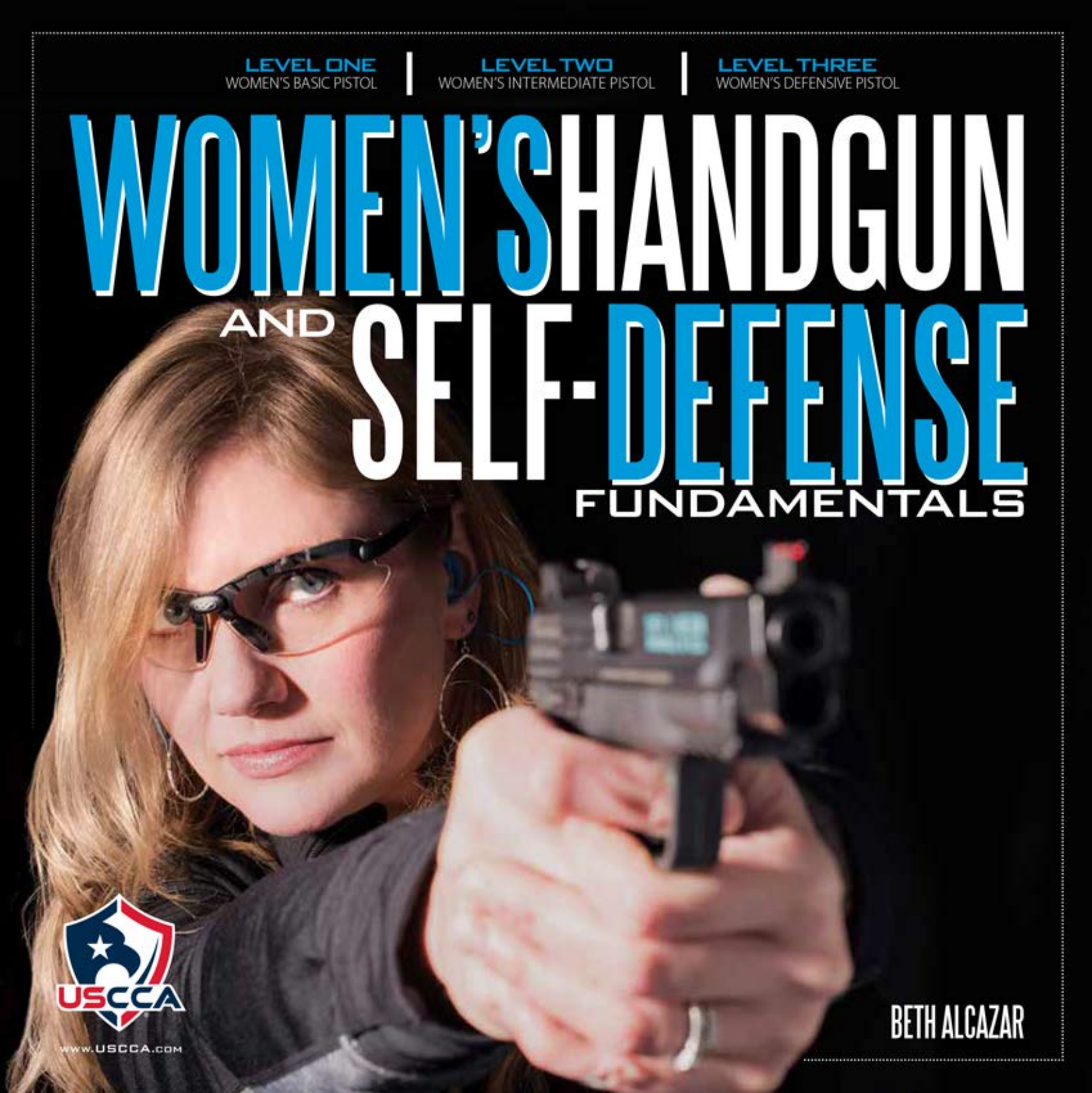
LEVEL ONE
WOMEN'S BASIC PISTOL

LEVEL TWO
WOMEN'S INTERMEDIATE PISTOL

LEVEL THREE
WOMEN'S DEFENSIVE PISTOL

# WOMEN'S HANDGUN AND SELF-DEFENSE FUNDAMENTALS



USCCA

www.USCCA.com

BETH ALCAZAR

# FOREWORD

**WHEN I STARTED THE WELL ARMED WOMAN IN 2012,** the world of firearms training had not fully grasped the unique differences and needs of female shooters. What has been missing is the curriculum and training techniques that fully embrace these differences. However, a learning style and methodology that welcome millions of female shooters will ensure a higher level of retention and will instill the drive to keep growing as shooters. I firmly believe that the driving force ushering women into gun ownership is the desire to become equipped and trained to be self-protectors and defenders of those they love. It is critical that the firearms industry understand this passionate motivation and provide women with not only the fundamentals of shooting but also the training required to effectively and responsibly defend and protect life. This is what makes *Women's Handgun and Self-Defense Fundamentals* such a welcomed and much-needed curriculum. Beth Alcazar has hit it out of the park with this program. She brings her extensive firearms training and knowledge — as well as her experience and understanding of what women shooters want in their training — and matches that with her natural ability to share and connect with grace and ease. I can't tell you how excited I am to have this program available and to encourage everyone who is serious about empowering themselves — or the women in their lives — to use this excellent guide.

Carrie Lightfoot

Founder and Owner of The Well Armed Woman, LLC and
Founder and Chairwoman of the Board of TWAW Shooting Chapters, Inc.

Copyright© 2018 Delta Defense, LLC

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted by any means: electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording or otherwise, without first obtaining written permission from Delta Defense, LLC.

Printed in the United States

ISBN 978-1-5323-4046-8

Women's Handgun and Self-Defense Fundamentals, First Edition

Written by Beth Alcazar

Edited by Carla Dickmann

Cover Designed by Kelly Welke

Designed by Kelly Welke

USCCA

www.USCCA.com

# INTRODUCTION

This book, *Women's Handgun and Self-Defense Fundamentals,* has been long in the making — mostly, I believe, because it has been in the hearts and minds of so many women who have become involved with firearms training over the last few decades. But this program doesn't exist because women are incapable of learning from male instructors, in coed classrooms or even with testosterone-dominated environments. It exists because women often think — and learn — differently. Women have unique needs and expectations, and they relate to one another in distinctive ways.

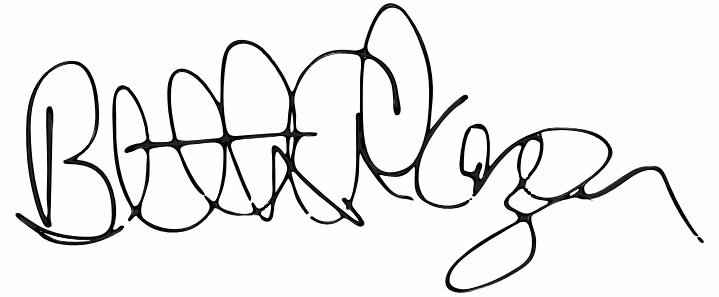
The purpose of this training program is to celebrate those differences and to welcome women into a community that accepts and respects them but that still has the decency to recognize that guns, holsters and even instruction are not "one size fits all."

That's also why this program is designed to focus on three separate areas of firearms training: *Women's Basic Pistol, Women's Intermediate Pistol* and *Women's Defensive Pistol.* In essence, you're getting three books in one — and, unlike most curriculum, there's really no right or wrong way to use these materials. You can do what works best in your firearms training journey. Feel free to explore each section separately, take some time to review the fundamentals, dig deeper into the correct mindset and skills, try out some dry-fire drills, start from the very beginning or just jump in wherever — and whenever — you need.

The goals of *Women's Handgun and Self-Defense Fundamentals* are to:

- **PROVIDE** a welcoming, knowledgeable and supportive instructional environment;
- **SHARE** the importance of firearms safety, ownership and training;
- **EMPOWER** you with the knowledge, skills and confidence required to use a handgun safely and proficiently;
- **BUILD** the number of responsibly armed women; and
- **ENCOURAGE** you to get out of your comfort zone, to adopt the correct mindset for personal protection and to train and practice regularly.

Ultimately, it doesn't matter where you are in your firearms training, as long as you have committed yourself to it. You might not own a handgun. You might be uncomfortable carrying a firearm on your body. You might wonder if you could ever use a gun in self-defense. You might simply have a desire to learn about responsible firearms ownership. There are endless reasons to commit yourself to firearms training, and that's why it's so incredible that we can offer *Women's Handgun and Self-Defense Fundamentals.* The information you'll learn within these pages doesn't just have the power to change minds; it also has the power to change lives.



**Beth Alcazar, USCCA Associate Editor**

# CONTENTS


1 LEVEL **ONE**
**WOMEN'S BASIC PISTOL** 6

2 LEVEL **TWO**
**WOMEN'S INTERMEDIATE PISTOL** 58

3 LEVEL **THREE**
**WOMEN'S DEFENSIVE PISTOL** 124

**GLOSSARY** 174

# 1 LEVEL **ONE**

# WOMEN'S BASIC PISTOL

LEVEL ONE


- Introduction
- What's Your Why?
- Understanding Firearms
- A Few Introductions
- Clearing Semi-Automatics
- Universal Safety Rules
- Every Gun Has a Safety
- Learning the 'Right' Way
- Shooting Fundamentals
- Stance
- Grip
- Sight Alignment
- Sight Picture
- Trigger Control
- Breath Control
- Follow-Through
- Putting It Into Practice
- Working on Stance and Grip
- Using Good Trigger Manipulation
- Racking the Slide
- Loading a Magazine
- Shooting Live-Fire
- Conclusion

It's interesting to take note of how many women have told me throughout the years that they would love to take a beginner's pistol class to gain knowledge and experience about firearms. However, these women often don't follow through with their desire to take a class … because they have little to no knowledge or experience with firearms. But isn't that the point of a beginner's class — to begin to gain knowledge and experience? Waiting to take a class focused on learning about guns until you have learned about guns seems to be a bit of a catch-22.

The thing is: I get it. I understand. At one time, not all that long ago, I was also at the beginning of my journey into firearms training. It can be quite daunting, even overwhelming. And because of that, it can be easy to keep putting off. Just know that you are not alone. I've experienced this reluctant attitude about other events in my life as well. Like many other women out there, I don't want to be caught unaware or unprepared for anything if I have a choice (or if I have any control over the matter). For instance, after having my first child, I didn't want to start working out at a gym until actually getting in some weight training and cardio first. I mean, who wants to be the newbie who doesn't know how to use the equipment properly (or who appears to have years of chocolate chip cookie dough in her diet)? Similarly, I wouldn't want anyone coming over to clean my house unless I'd had a chance to organize and straighten up a little beforehand. As silly as it sounds, I would hate for anyone to think I actually needed a cleaning service!

With that in mind, it makes perfect sense that the same can be true about learning to be safe and responsible with a gun. I very clearly remember not

wanting to walk into my first firearms class knowing absolutely nothing. That would have been uncomfortable and unacceptable to me. I wanted to have a foundation on which I could build more information before setting foot in that (typically male-dominated) environment.

Ultimately, it's natural to want to get started on the right foot and not enter a completely new situation without planning or preparation. And that's exactly what *Women's Basic Pistol* is all about: learning the essentials and gaining that extra confidence and knowledge up front so you can be ready to take the next steps in your training.

Just keep in mind that a beginner class is an introductory class. It's like starting with a blank slate. And the focus of this class — and my goal — is to make connections with what you already know in order to help new information make sense and stick. And because this class was created *for* women *by* a woman, my hope is that it reaches you where you are in your journey and helps explain and share firearms in a welcoming and empowering way.

Will we cover everything about firearms? No. Will this course answer all your questions? Hardly. Will it teach you everything there is to know? Hopefully not! Remember: This is just the beginning. That's how this class was designed. And when we get through, I hope you'll say the two words I love — and most often hear — at the conclusion of our class: "What's next?"

All in all, *Women's Basic Pistol* is all about sharing the basics along with the fun, the seriousness and the importance of being a responsibly armed female. It's time to stop procrastinating and making excuses and just get started. It's time to take those first steps. After all, we are worth protecting.

# WHAT'S YOUR WHY?

What's your why? No two women are going to be exactly alike, and neither are our stories — our reasons for taking this class, our "why." Exploring and voicing these stories can give us the power to push forward and provide those around us with a deeper sense of appreciation and understanding.

Sharing our why brings us closer, puts us all on the same page and gets us ready to take those first steps in a new journey — together. This will be a powerful learning experience for everyone — even your instructor! It's always rewarding to offer this class because of a unique and awe-inspiring phenomenon: Women come here as students and leave as friends.

So, if you don't mind me asking: Why are you here? What is your reason for taking this class? In my years of teaching *Women's Basic Pistol,* I've observed that the students' stories are always wide-ranging and all-embracing. Some are simple and concise. Others are colorful and layered. And I've heard just about every explanation there could be. Some women take this class because they are deeply concerned with what's happening in the world around us. Some students have experienced a frightening or violent situation in their own lives. Some ladies simply express a strong desire to do whatever it takes to protect their families. Others just want a solid understanding of their self-defense options and tools.

> NOTHING IN LIFE IS TO BE FEARED. IT IS ONLY TO BE UNDERSTOOD.

Marie Curie

No matter the reason, this is a perfect opportunity to share why you have started your training. Just remember: You don't have to be a victim or a survivor to want to learn about firearms. You don't have to have been hurt or had a frightening experience. It isn't required that you were (or are) in an abusive relationship, have a stalker or need a restraining order. Learning about firearms is not just for people who have experienced situations like these. It's not just for people who want to erase memories or overcome anxieties. Of course, I'm not discrediting those who do have a story, nor am I meaning to take away from their victories and successes. I've heard many powerful motives and inspirational accounts for owning and carrying firearms. And I am amazed and encouraged by what these individuals have overcome. What I am hoping to accomplish is to reach out to the "rest of us" and reinforce the fact that anyone can do this. Anyone can learn about safe and responsible firearms ownership. It's our Second Amendment right, after all. And you don't need a special reason or explanation.

Do you want to know what my "story" is? I'm just an average, everyday mom with a gun. And I want to be better equipped and prepared to protect myself and my family. It boils down to the fact that I do this for my three children. And while that may not seem like an exceptional reason, for me, it's one of the most powerful reasons in the world. As a woman and a mother, I want to be as prepared and as safe as possible. That's why I have a gun, why I train and why I learn everything I can about how to use a firearm for self-defense. That's why I'm here.

So what's your why? Take a few minutes to share why you're here or to discuss what you hope to learn.

## A FEW WOMEN'S WHYS...

**It's amazing and inspiring to discover the variety of reasons so many women have chosen to learn about and train with firearms. Here are a few of those stories to encourage you and give a glimpse into how different — or similar — our whys can be.**

**"My sister was attacked and shot multiple times … made me realize that my personal safety was a priority!"** ***Susan B.***

"BESIDES THE FACT THAT I WANT TO DO MY PART TO PRESERVE THE SECOND AMENDMENT, I REALLY ENJOY THE TRAINING AND SKILL DEVELOPMENT THAT COME WITH SHOOTING." *Lisa T.*

"TOO MANY CREEPY EXPERIENCES OUT ON LONG RUNS FAR FROM HOME. SOMETHING ABOUT A WOMAN RUNNING REALLY DRAWS OUT THE CREEPS! NOW I JUST LOVE SHOOTING AND CARRY EVERYWHERE I CAN DAILY." *Jennifer P.*

**"My husband is a gun hobbyist. I wanted to know how to pick up and use a gun safely."** ***Sara R.***

**"My husband decided to open a gun shop."** ***Nadine G.***

"AS A SENIOR CITIZEN, I DECIDED I WANTED/NEEDED TO LEARN SAFE GUN HANDLING TO DEFEND MYSELF AND MY GRANDSON." *Connie C.*

**"I BECAME A WIDOW AND WANTED TO BE RESPONSIBLE FOR MYSELF."** ***Jo N.***

"I GOT ROBBED AT GUNPOINT WHEN I WAS AN OFFICE MANAGER AT A BANK." *Laurie H.*

**"I think my interest started so my dad would take an interest in me. He is a 'man's man,' and I wanted to spend time with him. Shooting was something we did together when I was younger and something we still bond over today! My reasons have changed over the years, but a daddy's love started it!"** ***Shanan S.***

**"SOMEONE TRIED TO BREAK INTO MY HOME WHEN I WAS ALONE WITH MY FIVE KIDS, AND I FELT COMPLETELY HELPLESS. THAT NIGHT, I DECIDED TO CHANGE THAT."** ***Julie P.***

**"My abuser said, 'I'll win one way or another.' I chose at that moment to never be his victim again."** ***Kara G.***

**"At first it was for hunting, to share a passion with my husband, and now it's to teach youth and other women how to protect themselves, compete and hunt."**
***Mindy S.***

"I WAS IGNORANT TO GUNS, AND THEY SCARED ME. SO I WALKED INTO THE RANGE AND EXPLAINED MY SITUATION. THEY HAD A YOUNG LADY TAKE ME OUT ON THE RANGE AND WORK WITH ME. AFTER BEING TREATED LIKE A PERSON (AND NOT LIKE AN OBLIVIOUS IDIOT), I RETURNED TO FURTHER MY KNOWLEDGE OF GUNS." *Linda T.*

## "BECAUSE I LIVE ALONE IN A REMOTE LOCATION."
## *Lori S.*

"I REALIZED THE WORLD WAS RAPIDLY BECOMING MORE DANGEROUS AND I NEEDED TO BE MY OWN FIRST RESPONDER AND PERSONAL SECURITY." *Kandy H.*

## "I HAD MY CONCEALED CARRY PERMIT BUT NEVER TRAINED."
## *Peggy R.*

**"I wanted to have a common hobby with my hubby that we could bond over, one that didn't connect directly to our children or families, something where I felt I could contribute and enjoy it just as much as he did."**
***Kristin B.***

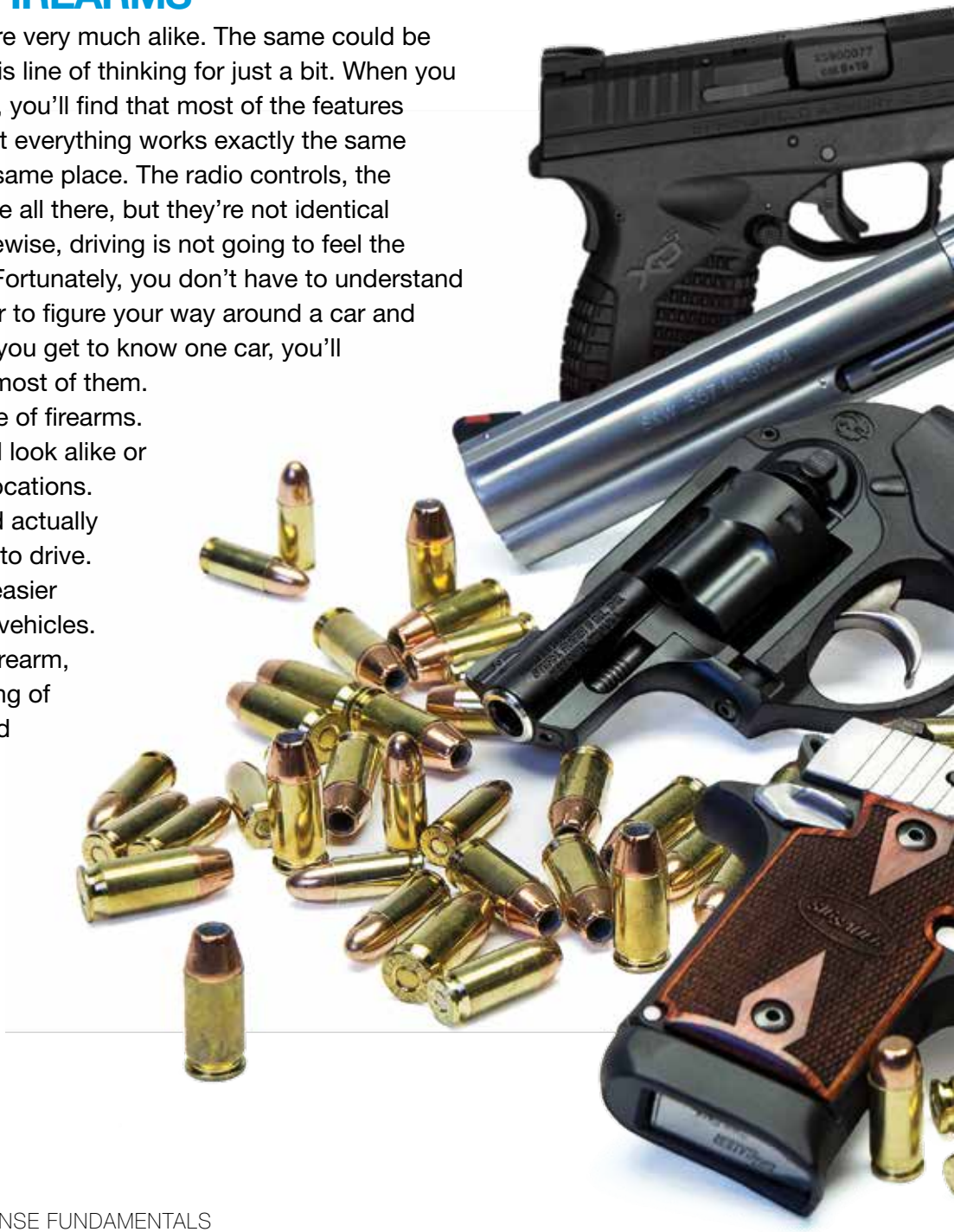
"A HOME INVASION AT 4 A.M. TAUGHT ME THE VALUE OF SELF-DEFENSE. I ONLY HAD A KNIFE AT THE TIME, AND IT WORKED TO PROTECT ME. BUT GUNS WORK BETTER."
*Libby Y.*

**"I had obtained my fourth restraining order against my ex-husband. I wanted to know that if something were to happen, I would be able to protect myself and my children."** ***Ann B.***

## UNDERSTANDING FIREARMS

Guns are all different, yet they are very much alike. The same could be said about cars. Follow me in this line of thinking for just a bit. When you get into different models of cars, you'll find that most of the features and functions are similar. But not everything works exactly the same way or is located in exactly the same place. The radio controls, the gas cap and the hazard lights are all there, but they're not identical from one vehicle to another. Likewise, driving is not going to feel the same from one car to the next. Fortunately, you don't have to understand or recognize every detail in order to figure your way around a car and drive it. And more or less, once you get to know one car, you'll have a better understanding of most of them.

You'll discover the same is true of firearms. Gun models and makes don't all look alike or have uniform parts in identical locations. And learning how to shoot could actually be compared with learning how to drive. Some firearms work smoother, easier or faster than others … just like vehicles. But once you get to know one firearm, you'll have a better understanding of most firearms. And with time and practice — like driving a car — shooting will become more familiar, normal and consistent. Soon, you'll be ready to add more layers of depth and understanding to your training.



* With hundreds of makes, models, sizes and calibers available in both semi-automatic pistols and revolvers, the choices can seem overwhelming. The goal of this course is to start your education with the basics, including an understanding of the universal safety rules.

## A FEW INTRODUCTIONS

We will be utilizing a couple different training tools in the classroom and on the shooting range, and I'd like to take a few moments to introduce those to you.

First, let's meet the blue gun (which could actually come in a variety of different colors, most often blue, red, yellow or orange). This plastic replica is molded to look just like a real firearm, but it does not have any movable parts, nor is it weighted like the "real thing." However, a blue gun is still a very valuable tool for teaching and demonstration as well as for training and practice.

Next, let's look at the Shot Indicating Resetting Trigger (SIRT) pistol, shown on the opposite page. The SIRT training pistol is designed to match the weight of a live-fire gun and was developed to complement live-fire training. It looks and feels quite real

(and has a weighted, removable magazine) and is an extremely effective practice gun. The SIRT is equipped with some moving parts (such as a magazine release and trigger), and it uses what is called a dual-indicator laser. The red laser will light up and give immediate feedback as you begin to press the trigger, and the green laser will light up and show where your shot will hit as the trigger is pressed.

Even though these training tools are not "real" firearms, they may look real and could be mistaken for live-fire guns. But unless specifically noted for instructional purposes, we will treat these tools with caution, respect and with all the safety rules in place, just as if they were real, loaded guns.

# CLEARING SEMI-AUTOMATICS

One of the most important things you can do whenever you pick up a gun (or whenever one is handed to you) is check to be sure the firearm is unloaded or "clear." In other words, make sure there is no ammunition in the firearm. To learn how to properly check and clear a semi-automatic handgun, follow the step-by-step instructions to the right.

It's a good habit to repeat these steps twice. Verify the firearm is clear and then look away. Return your focus to the gun and start the process over again. Duplicating the process helps eliminate the "cruise control" mode we sometimes find ourselves in and helps ensure we have gone through the motions properly and consciously. If you are ever uncertain a gun is empty, ask someone else to check it. It's always a good idea to have another person go behind you and make certain your firearm is clear. Getting into the habit of checking every gun you pick up is a great idea, even if people think it's unnecessary or overdone. Remember, there is no shame in safety!

Remove/drop the magazine by pressing the magazine release button or lever.

Lock the slide back by using the slide lock/release (or slide stop).

3

Keep the gun pointed in the safest direction and look straight down into the firearm. Do you see anything? You have removed the source (the magazine) of the gun's food (the ammo), and this space should be wide open and empty. In a way, an empty firearm will resemble a baby bird with its mouth open, waiting to be fed. If you look down at your empty gun, you should be looking through the grip of the gun, and you should see nothing but the ground, your hand or whatever is below. (When shooting, the slide should lock back when the gun and magazine are empty. So, if you're on the range and have a "baby bird," it's time to load a new magazine into your firearm.)

4

Finally, with the gun still pointed in a safe direction — away from you or anyone else — look toward and into the barrel. You can even stick your pinky in there to be certain it's empty.

## UNIVERSAL SAFETY RULES

No matter the scenario or the situation, whenever working on and training with firearms, it's imperative to follow all the safety rules — all the time. Learn the four universal rules. Commit them to memory. And use them — without compromise!

### 1 Treat all guns as though they are loaded.

Why treat every gun as if it's loaded? Because you need to respect every gun, every time! Even if you've checked the firearm (and it's clear, and someone else checked it behind you), still treat the gun as if it were loaded. Treat anything that *looks* like a gun as though it were loaded. Imagine if I picked up an air gun and set it on a table in front of me. Is it loaded? Yes. If I handed you a blue gun (a plastic training replica), is it loaded? Yes. If I pulled a pistol out of my purse, is it loaded? Yes. And if I dropped the magazine and locked the slide back on that pistol, showing that it is clear, with no ammunition in it, is it loaded? The answer is still yes! You get the picture — and it's very important that you do. Never become comfortable or complacent with firearms or with safety. That's when bad things can happen.

Another way to think about this first rule is to make sure that you always know the status of your firearm. Beyond treating the gun with respect, you are keeping track of all the details. If a gun needs to be loaded with defensive ammunition, with a round in the chamber, and holstered (for self-defense, competition or training, for instance), then so be it. But if it should be completely empty, with the magazine out (for storing, cleaning or just about every other instance), then make sure it is. If it's in your hands — or in your possession — that firearm is your responsibility, and you need to be sure that you're safe and in control.

### 2 Never point your firearm at anything you are not willing to destroy.

An effective way to remember this rule is to always think about muzzle management. You are managing the "business end" of the gun (where the

bullets come out) and making sure that it's pointed in the safest direction possible at all times. To help you with this, imagine a laser extending indefinitely from the end of your gun. Make sure that the laser doesn't touch anyone or anything it shouldn't.

Basically, to keep the muzzle pointed in the safest direction means to not point it at people or things. Only point the gun at approved targets. This is extremely important to remember and obey when you are taking a firearm out of a range bag, placing a gun on a shooting table, reloading your gun, cleaning your gun, just holding your firearm or anything! Constantly be aware of the muzzle's direction. I like to tell people to think of the muzzle of the firearm as a very strong magnet that is always pulling in the direction of the target. On a shooting range, the direction would always be downrange — toward the target — where all bullets should end up. With the "magnet" in mind, my head and body can move around, but the gun ALWAYS points downrange. Invariably, people want to know if pointing guns up or down would be considered safe. In most cases, a gun should not be pointed at the ground or straight up in the air. Those directions may not be safe at all! When aimed at the ground, a gun may be pointed toward people's legs or feet, and a bullet could ricochet off concrete or rocks. Indoors, a gun pointed down could fire a bullet through the floor and hurt someone or something in the level below you. Pointed up in the air when shooting outside is no better, since we all know that what goes up must come down. A bullet, once leaving the gun, can travel a long way and still do a lot of damage. Indoors is no different, since the projectile may penetrate the ceiling, roof and more.

Remember that you are responsible for every bullet that leaves your gun. At the range, point your gun toward your targets on the berm or backstop. Indoors or elsewhere, determine the safest direction and keep the gun pointed that way, regardless of what you're doing: loading, unloading, figuring out a malfunction, asking a question or resting the gun on a table.

## 3 Keep your finger OFF the trigger and outside the trigger guard until you are on target and have made a decision to shoot.

This rule can be a tough one because many of us have muscle memory to overcome. When we grabbed those Nerf guns or water blasters as kids, the first thing we did was wriggle our fingers into the trigger area so we could start sending foam darts or spraying water at everyone and everything! However, this is one of the most important firearms safety rules. Your finger should be off the trigger and outside the trigger guard (straight out along the side of the gun) until you are on target and ready to shoot. Be vigilant about this. Don't let that trigger finger wander. When you are done shooting — unless firing several rounds in a row — remove your finger and place it to the side once again.

I know it's exciting to shoot. We're anxious to learn. We want to enhance and improve our shooting skills. But always make a conscious effort to get your finger off the trigger and outside the trigger guard EVERY time. You must have both intent and justification before you use a firearm. In other words, you must make a conscious decision to pull the trigger, and you must have a reason and a right to shoot. Get this rule etched into your brain so you're safe and ready no matter where you are.

## 4 Always be sure of your target and what's beyond.

I like to expand this rule and say, "Know your target and what's *around* it." I like to consider more options than "beyond" the target: Something could be over, around, beside, in front of or even on the target. For example, if you're indoors, someone near you might step out too far in front of the firing line. If you're outdoors, a big gust of wind could knock your target stand down, or a wild animal could run in front of your target. (Recently, a mad and confused momma bird sat right on top of my target, perhaps to distract me from shooting so she could return to her nest overhead.) In a nutshell, to be sure of your target and what's around it means to always be aware of your surroundings so you can be certain there's nothing — and no one — in harm's way!

## Other Considerations

When manipulating firearms, there are other important guidelines to consider as well. Think about other issues that could come into play, some of which may be more significant for you than others. For instance, it's imperative that you understand how to safely store guns and keep firearms out of the hands of unauthorized users, especially children. It's also important to never use firearms in combination with drugs or alcohol.

You should also be sure that your gun is in good working order. Don't get out an antique that was passed down to you through generations and expect it to be safe to use with modern ammunition. Maintain your firearms. Clean them. Read the manual and take good care of them. Always check to make sure you are using the correct ammunition for your gun. And store ammo in a cool, dry place.

Beyond that, as soon as possible after training, shooting or working with firearms, be sure to wash your hands thoroughly with soap and cool water. Keep in mind that lead particles like to stick to clothes, shoes, hair and even to your skin (especially if you are wearing lotion, sunscreen or makeup). These particulates can transfer to other things (car, purse, coat) or to other people (spouse, children). So be sure to take whatever precautions are necessary to limit lead exposure across the board. Wearing an outer jacket or shirt that can be removed or changed is a great idea. Changing shoes or keeping certain shoes just for shooting is helpful. And washing all your clothes and taking a shower to remove gunpowder residue and lead particles are great habits to get into whenever you're done.

## EVERY GUN HAS A SAFETY

Speaking of firearms safety, did you know that every gun has a safety? No, it's not a mechanical safety on the gun itself that clicks or moves into place to keep the gun from firing. Not every firearm has that kind of device. The safety I'm referring to is YOU. You are the most powerful safety a firearm has. If you thoroughly and consistently follow the four universal safety rules, you will not have a negligent discharge. And you can be confident and in control of your firearm at all times.

## LEARNING THE 'RIGHT' WAY

There are many instructors and schools of thought out there when it comes to firearms training. In order to shoot well and to build on and improve your skills, we will be teaching you the "right" way to shoot. Yes, "right" is in quotation marks because what we are sharing with you is universally accepted as the correct method for shooting. However, because of limitations or abilities, sizes and shapes — because of the unique person YOU are — it may be necessary to make some adjustments that work and fit best for you.

Ultimately, the goal is to be SAFE, to LEARN something and to have FUN (in that order). As long as you are doing those three things and are effective, comfortable and consistent, you won't be told "you're doing it wrong." As my friends at SIG Sauer Academy say: "Simple is good." So don't overthink this. Do your best. And use positive self-talk and visualization. A lot of people claim that shooting is 20 percent physical and 80 percent mental, so let's get physically and mentally ready to do this!

### Determining Ocular Dominance

Before digging into the fundamentals, we need to discuss your eyes … specifically, which eye is your dominant eye. Ocular dominance determines which eye is actually providing the most accurate/reliable information to your brain (or which eye your

* Think that both of your eyes provide exactly the same information to your brain? Think again. Just as each of us has a dominant hand, each of us has a dominant eye that is favored by the brain to receive and process input.

brain pays more attention to, since it can't focus on two pictures at once). This is important because your dominant eye will focus on the front sight of your firearm (which we will discuss in just a bit). Oh, and just because you are right-handed does not automatically mean that you are right-eyed. In fact, we have seen much higher numbers of women than men who are what we call cross-dominant, in which their dominant hands do not match their dominant eyes. No matter what we discover, it's important to know so you can use, adapt or modify the fundamentals to your needs and abilities.

Want to know how to find your dominant eye? Find something across the room (about 10-15 feet away) that you can focus your attention on, like a light switch, a door knob or even just a spot on the wall. Now, make an "OK" sign with your hand and stretch your arm all the way out in front of you. Keeping both eyes open, try to line up the object of your focus so it appears to be sitting in the middle of your "OK" sign. Hold your hand steady and slowly close or cover your right eye. Open both eyes. Keep your hand in the same position and slowly close or cover your left eye. Did the image appear to jump when you closed one of your eyes? For some, your hand will appear to move slightly. For others, the "jump" will be very noticeable. Your dominant eye is the one that is open when you observe less of a

* When viewing an object through an "OK" sign with just your dominant eye, the object should be the same (or similar) as it would be with both eyes open.

* When attempting to view the same object with your non-dominant eye, the object will likely appear to jump or shift and will not be visible through your "OK" sign.

jump in the image. (Hint: Most people automatically use the dominant eye when looking through a camera viewfinder or a telescope. If you can't determine which eye is dominant, don't fret! It's entirely possible that both or neither of your eyes are strongly dominant. In this case, go with what is most natural, which may mean using the left eye if you are left-handed or the right eye if you are right-handed.)

## Shooting With Both Eyes Open

Although your dominant eye is very important, I highly recommend you keep both eyes open when shooting. Sound contradictory? While some people suggest shutting the non-dominant eye for shooting long guns or for shooting long distances, if possible, keep both eyes open. Keeping both eyes open allows for better overall vision (especially in low-light

* Shooting with both eyes open: Jessie Duff holds multiple world and national championship titles, including the Bianchi Cup and the Steel Challenge World Speed Shooting Championship, and is the captain of the Taurus Shooting Team. (Photo courtesy of Taurus)

conditions) because it truly gives you the full picture. If you shut one eye, you lose part of your vision, along with depth perception, balance, hand-eye coordination and spatial orientation.

On the other hand, if that non-dominant eye is keeping you from shooting accurately, go ahead and do what works best. Believe me: I can totally relate. My left eye is VERY dominant, and I struggle to get an accurate picture (and an accurate shot) with both eyes open. So it's OK to try closing one eye to gauge what seems to give you the most success, especially when shooting smaller targets or greater distances. How will you know when to shoot with one eye closed? With practice, you will know! But with most precision shots, it may be a necessity. Of course, if you find that you are closing one eye all the time, it may be necessary to retrain your brain. Countless hours of repetition will be the key to overcoming the one-eye-closed tendency. Even though it can take time and training, two eyes are typically better than one.

## EYES AND EARS

Here's a question for you: Are you protecting your body while shooting? While at the shooting range, you can put on closed-toe shoes, don a hat and wear clothing that covers your skin (to keep hot brass cases from making contact with delicate areas), but you will also need to wear protective gear for your eyes and ears. In fact, a lot of times people refer to eye and ear protection as "eyes and ears."

Since you never know when or where bits, pieces, particles or hot cases can come at you, it's imperative that you protect your eyes. All shooters, instructors, range safety officers and spectators are required to wear eye protection while shooting is in progress. Some people wear their prescription eyewear or regular sunglasses, but keep in mind that these may get scratched, and they may not protect enough of your eyes (on top or around the sides). In addition, they may not be impact-resistant. Specially designed shooting eyewear is your best bet. There are many types, styles, price points and even colors you can choose. Note that different lens colors can have pros and cons for different shooting conditions, so it's not always best to simply pick the purple ones just because you like that color. (My shooting glasses actually do have purple lenses — and they are great for indoors and outdoors — but I switch to darker lenses when it's really bright outside.)

The use of specially designed ear muffs or plugs that reduce the intensity of the sound reaching the ears is also highly recommended. Gunfire is loud, especially in an indoor range (even after you get used to it). Some guns are so loud that a single shot can cause immediate and permanent hearing loss. Get something that's comfortable for you to wear — whether inside-the-ear foam or molded-plastic plugs, traditional muffs or a combination. Check the noise-reduction rating (NRR) of your hearing protection. The higher the NRR, the more the noise level (in decibels) is reduced. Some models even include amplification for voices (so you can hear fellow shooters and/or instructors) while reducing the sounds of gunfire. Of course, due to the technology needed, electronic hearing protection tends to be the most expensive of all the hearing-protection devices.

# SHOOTING FUNDAMENTALS

Depending on whom you ask (and how you look at it), there are seven basic fundamentals of shooting. These are the building blocks on which everything else will rest. While some of these items are more important (or more tricky) than others, together they can create a strong, solid basis for your technique and skill.

Let's take a look at each step, individually, but keep in mind that these fundamentals depend heavily on one another and even blend into one another. The seven fundamentals include: stance, grip, sight alignment, sight picture, trigger control, breath control and follow-through.

## STANCE

Your stance is the foundation for your shooting platform. Not only does a proper stance provide balance and assist in controlling recoil (movement of the gun), it also allows you to move and react quickly and draw your weapon effectively.

The proper stance should be comfortable and stable and should consist of:

- Your shoulders facing the target;
- Feet about shoulder-width apart or with one foot out slightly in front of the other; and
- Ears in front of shoulders and shoulders in front of hips (leaning inward and toward the target, not BACK away from it).

One of the most common stances is called the isosceles stance. It has this name because the shape of your extended arms and your body resemble that isosceles triangle we learned about in geometry class.

Most new shooters will take this stance almost instinctively. It's comfortable and natural. And most instructors will teach this stance or, at least, will highly recommend that you try it out. Using the isosceles stance, your elbows will be straight and locked, with your wrists a bit more flexible. You will also lean slightly forward (which aids in recoil management and balance).

If you are uncomfortable leaning forward, pull back slightly or try squatting a bit more. Just don't lean back away from your target. You need a strong stance with some forward angle to absorb and manage the movement of the gun. Many first-time shooters lean back, in part, possibly, because they are afraid of the gun. But this can be the start of a bad habit.

You may also need to try different positions with your legs and knees. One foot may be in front of the other, but your knees should be bent.

* If you recall from 5th grade geometry, an isosceles triangle is a triangle with two equal sides, and that's exactly what we're going for with the isosceles stance. When viewed from above, the shoulders will be square to the target, and both arms will be extended, straight in front of the body, forming a perfect isosceles triangle.

Will all stances be identical? No. And you may need to try different positions or adjustments to see what works best while shooting. Keep in mind that in addition to any physical limitations or challenges (e.g. back or knee pain), eye dominance and handedness will also come into play. For instance, I am cross-dominant (right-handed and left-eyed). For me to be comfortable and fairly sturdy, I stand with my left foot in front of my right foot and I lean in toward the target pretty aggressively. I also tilt my head slightly and shift my "triangle" a bit to the left so my firearm lines up with my dominant left eye.

*The ears are in front of the shoulders and the shoulders are in front of the hips (leaning toward the target, not away). With both arms extended straight out in front of the body, the firearm is naturally raised into the shooter's line of sight.

## GRIP

I'm sure you know this, but when a gun is fired, it moves. (Thank you, Sir Isaac Newton, and your third law: "For every action there is an equal and opposite reaction.") That's one reason why grip is so important. A firm, proper hold on the firearm helps you control recoil and muzzle flip. A good grip also allows the shooter to follow through or obtain a follow-up sight picture and make consecutive shots more easily. Thus, overall, the goal of a two-handed grip is to encircle and cover the grip of the gun to have as much control of the firearm as possible.

Ideally, the firearm should be placed in the shooting hand so a straight line is formed with the barrel of the gun and the forearm (like the gun is an extension of your arm and your hand as you are pointing at the target). The webbing of your hand should be high up on the grip of the gun, fully under the tang of the back strap. Just imagine giving someone a nice, firm handshake. Not one of those limp, wimpy shakes — a solid, firm, "meaty" handshake! If you can, turn to a friend, classmate or family member and try a good handshake on him or her now. Remember the feel of this motion and put your hand in a "high handshake" position on the grip of the firearm so there's no extra space between the top of your hand and the back of the gun. And hold firmly. (Note: Until you are ready to shoot, your trigger finger is OUTSIDE the trigger and trigger guard, resting along the side.)

*Sir Isaac Newton's third law, "For every action there is an equal and opposite reaction," helps to explain that if your bullet leaves the barrel with 100 foot-pounds of energy moving in a forward direction, your gun will be driven backward into your hands with the exact same 100 foot-pounds of force.

Your support hand then applies pressure in a similar fashion, filling in the rest of the space on the grip so the wrists touch, the hand angles forward and the thumb rests on the same side of the gun as the shooting-hand thumb (which usually rests on top of the other). I like to refer to this as the "thumbs are friends" method to help people remember how the thumbs are positioned along the side of the gun.

Some basics to describe a good grip:

- Firm and consistent (like a solid, high handshake)
- High on the back strap (to reduce muzzle flip and help with recoil)
- Finger must comfortably and safely reach the trigger (but remain outside until ready to shoot)
- Weak-side fingers wrap around/over the strong hand
- Wrists are close together
- Thumbs face forward (pointing toward the target) and rest on top of one another ("thumbs are friends")

Remember that with a semi-automatic pistol, your thumbs should never be behind the gun or the slide. Why? You will immediately self-correct when you fire the gun. The movement of the slide will likely "bite" whatever finger happens to be in the way. (And that's no fun … trust me!) It can also cause the gun to malfunction. So be sure your "thumbs are friends" and they are hanging out together on the side of the gun.

Another hint for a solid grip is that your support hand should be putting more pressure on the gun than your shooting hand. Some people like to break this down into percentages, like 80 percent support hand and 20 percent shooting hand. I have yet to be able to accurately measure what I am doing, so I just make a conscious effort to use my support hand a bit more aggressively. Why do we teach this and strive for this? Well, we are trying to keep the gun firm and steady and manage the recoil the best we can. But we are also trying NOT to squeeze the shooting hand or fingers. Only the trigger finger needs to be making noticeable movements in order to press the trigger rearward. (More on this will follow in the section on trigger control.)

* When viewed from above, a perfect grip on a semi-automatic will have the tips of the shooting-hand index finger lined up across from the thumb on the support hand.

## SIGHT ALIGNMENT

In order for the bullet to hit the center of the target, the shooter must aim the pistol and give the barrel a definite direction. To do this, the shooter must get the sights (the built-in notches or posts) lined up properly using sight alignment. Sight alignment is the relationship between the shooter's eyes and the gun's sights. To do this properly (and to get the bullet to go where you want it to), the front sight needs to be centered and flush with the rear sights. It's kind of like hanging up three pictures on a wall. You want all three to be lined up equally across the top, and you want all three to be equal in distance from one another. Otherwise it doesn't look, feel or work right.

Thus, to get three pictures and to get your front and rear sights straight and evenly spaced, think: "Equal height; equal light."

Remember, it's not always easy to get good sight alignment. Different guns have different-looking sights — from bright red, yellow or green fiber-optics to white dots or barely distinguishable nubs. It will take some practice to get them lined up to aim properly. Additionally, you will have to do your best to line up the sights while the gun is moving since it's impossible to hold the gun completely still!

Keep in mind that wherever the front sight is pointed is where the bullet will go once it leaves the muzzle of the gun. If your front sight ends up too low compared to the rear sights, your bullet will impact the target lower than you want it to. If your front sight is higher than the rear sights, the bullet will impact too high. Similarly, if the front sight is further to the left or to the right side, that's where your bullet will hit the target.

* Equal height and equal light works not only for hanging pictures on a wall but also for sight alignment. For perfect sight alignment, the front sight needs to be centered and flush with the rear sights.

Want a quick way to visualize sight alignment in three dimensions? Take your dominant hand (shooting hand), make a thumb's up sign and extend your arm all the way in front of you. Now, take your non-dominant hand and make a peace sign. Hold this peace sign about a foot in front of your face. Practice lining up the thumb on your outstretched hand within the fingers of your other hand. Be sure all your digits are lined up equally across the top and that there is equal space on both sides of your thumb as it's positioned in between your fingers.

**Sighted Fire: Sight Alignment**
Equal amounts of spacing should be visible on the left and right of the front sight.

Sights must be in a perfect horizontal line.

At 10 to 15 feet, these misaligned sights can still mean a hit, but an alignment error as small as one-sixteenth of an inch will translate to more than 12 inches of error at 50 feet.

## SIGHT PICTURE

Sight picture is what the shooter actually sees when shooting. A lot of people automatically assume that when you fire a gun, you are looking at the target. This might work for point shooting (after all, we do have a natural point of aim), but it is not as effective for marksmanship.

Sight picture is the relationship of the target, the front and rear sights, and the eye, and it involves the placement of the sights on the target while maintaining proper sight alignment. Emphasis here is on the front sight. The eye can only focus on one object at a time. You cannot keep the rear sight, the front sight and the target in focus simultaneously. So for correct aiming (and accurate shot placement), the shooter must concentrate on the front sight. And I mean REALLY concentrate. Once it is lined up properly, put so much focus on the front sight that you could burn a hole straight through the middle of it with your gaze!

This is definitely not an easy task to accomplish. You may be fighting what feels natural to you or what seems to make the most sense. Getting the correct sight picture takes practice, and it takes some getting used to. You may find that your vision is moving in and out or back and forth to the target, to the sights and then back to the target again. To help with this, as I learned at SIG Sauer Academy, think: "Float the dot. Shoot the shot." In other words, float or move that front-sight dot into the correct sight alignment, right in front of the target — and then fire the gun.

Just remember:

1. The target should be blurry.
2. The rear sight should be blurry.
3. The front sight should be in sharp focus.

**Sighted Fire: Front Sight Focus**
When the requirements for precision require that you must use sighted fire, it's important to focus on the front sight rather than the target for the most precise shot. The front sight will be in complete focus, the rear sight will be semi-blurred, and the target will be the blurriest thing in your sight picture.

## TRIGGER CONTROL

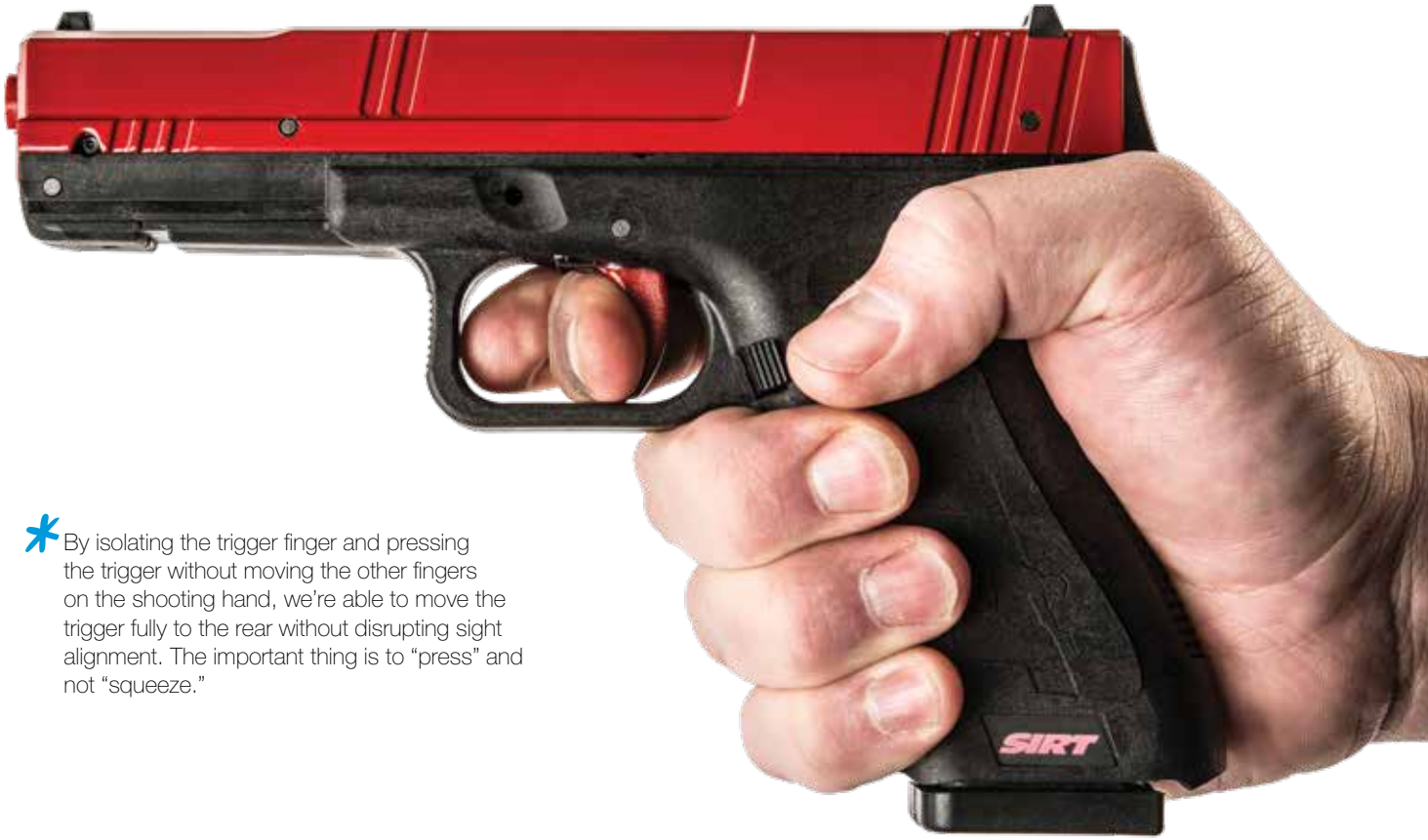
Trigger control can be defined as smoothly and steadily applying pressure on the trigger straight to the rear to fire the gun and then immediately allowing the trigger to return so the gun can be fired again.

Trigger manipulation can, therefore, be defined as the speed at which the trigger is pressed. It should be a single, smooth, continuous motion at a single speed (not increasing speed as you apply pressure, not a jerk and not a little at a time). Just as competitive shooter Julie Golob shares, the motion should be similar to dragging your finger through creamy peanut butter.

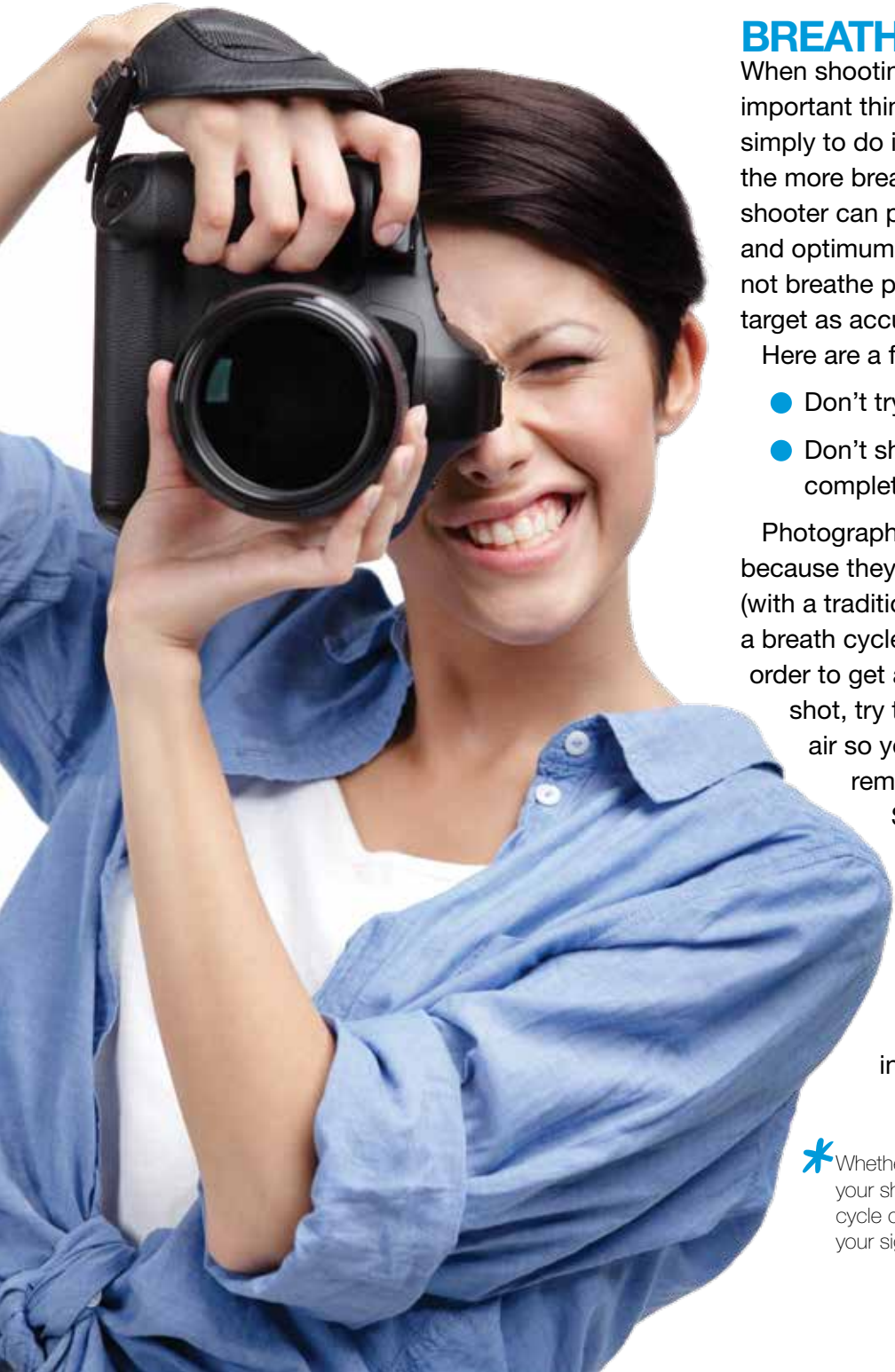
We won't get into all the nitty gritty discussions about trigger press, such as where on your finger you should press and how much pressure is needed. For now, let's keep things simple. I bet you've done this before with water pistols, hot glue guns or spray bottles. The technique is not that much different than what you're used to. The important term here is a "press" and not a "squeeze." Squeezing typically involves all of the fingers or the whole hand in operation. You need to avoid this and, instead, "isolate" the trigger finger and focus only on this finger moving to press the trigger rearward. The goal is to manipulate the trigger without adding any additional movement to the gun.

* Whether you're using a water pistol, a hot glue gun, a spray bottle or a firearm, concentrate on isolating the trigger finger and focus only on this finger moving to press the trigger rearward.

You can practice trigger control without a gun or training firearm of any kind. Place the fingers of your support hand into the palm of your shooting hand and wrap your shooting hand around your fingers as if you were gripping a firearm. Keep the trigger finger extended. Now, slowly move your trigger finger, going through the motions as if you were pressing the trigger. Are the other fingers on your shooting hand moving? They will want to sympathize with your trigger finger and do the same thing, but to be more effective with trigger manipulation, you should not feel much movement in the fingers wrapped in your closed hand. If you do feel movement, try harder to move only your trigger finger — and remember not to squeeze!




* By isolating the trigger finger and pressing the trigger without moving the other fingers on the shooting hand, we're able to move the trigger fully to the rear without disrupting sight alignment. The important thing is to "press" and not "squeeze."



## BREATH CONTROL

When shooting a handgun, one of the most important things to remember about breathing is simply to do it! But the further away the target is, the more breathing can come into play. And while a shooter can practice sight picture, sight alignment and optimum shooting positions, if the shooter does not breathe properly, he or she may not engage the target as accurately as possible.

Here are a few things to remember:

- Don't try to hold your breath while you shoot.
- Don't shoot as you inhale or when you have completely exhaled.

Photographers are often good at this fundamental because they have been taught to snap the picture (with a traditional camera) toward the "bottom" of a breath cycle (or at a natural respiratory pause) in order to get a good, clear photo. So before each shot, try taking a breath and letting out enough air so you are comfortable; then hold the remaining breath while firing the shot. Some shooters like to remember to slowly press the trigger while they slowly let out that breath. Do what works best for you. Just remember that if you hold your breath for more than seven seconds, muscle tremors may start, and that will definitely interrupt a good shot!

* Whether you're holding a camera or holding a gun, taking your shot when you're near the bottom of your breath cycle or during a natural respiratory pause will ensure that your sight picture is not disrupted.

A useful acronym that can help you remember what to do for proper breath control is B.R.A.S.S. The steps are as follows:

**BREATHE:** Take a nice, deep breath and get some oxygen into your system.

**RELAX:** Don't let your muscles get tight and don't hold the air in your lungs. Think happy thoughts, and release that breath about halfway.

**AIM:** Work on good sight alignment and sight picture.

**SLACK:** Take up the slack in the trigger. In other words, begin pressing the trigger smoothly and slowly.

**SHOOT:** Press the trigger all the way to the rear, and be careful not to add any additional movement to the gun.

## FOLLOW-THROUGH

This is the end of the "cycle" in the fundamentals of shooting. It is at this point, after you have fired a round, that the fundamentals begin all over again. To follow through effectively, you should finish the shot, keep the gun at eye level, obtain proper sight alignment and sight picture as quickly as possible, and begin asking yourself these important questions:

- Did it work properly?
- Do I need to take another shot?
- If I shoot again, will I hit my target?

Your answers will help determine what happens next. Are you on target? Do you need to adjust your sight alignment or sight picture? Do you need to make adjustments in any of the shooting fundamentals? This is all part of effective training and good practice.

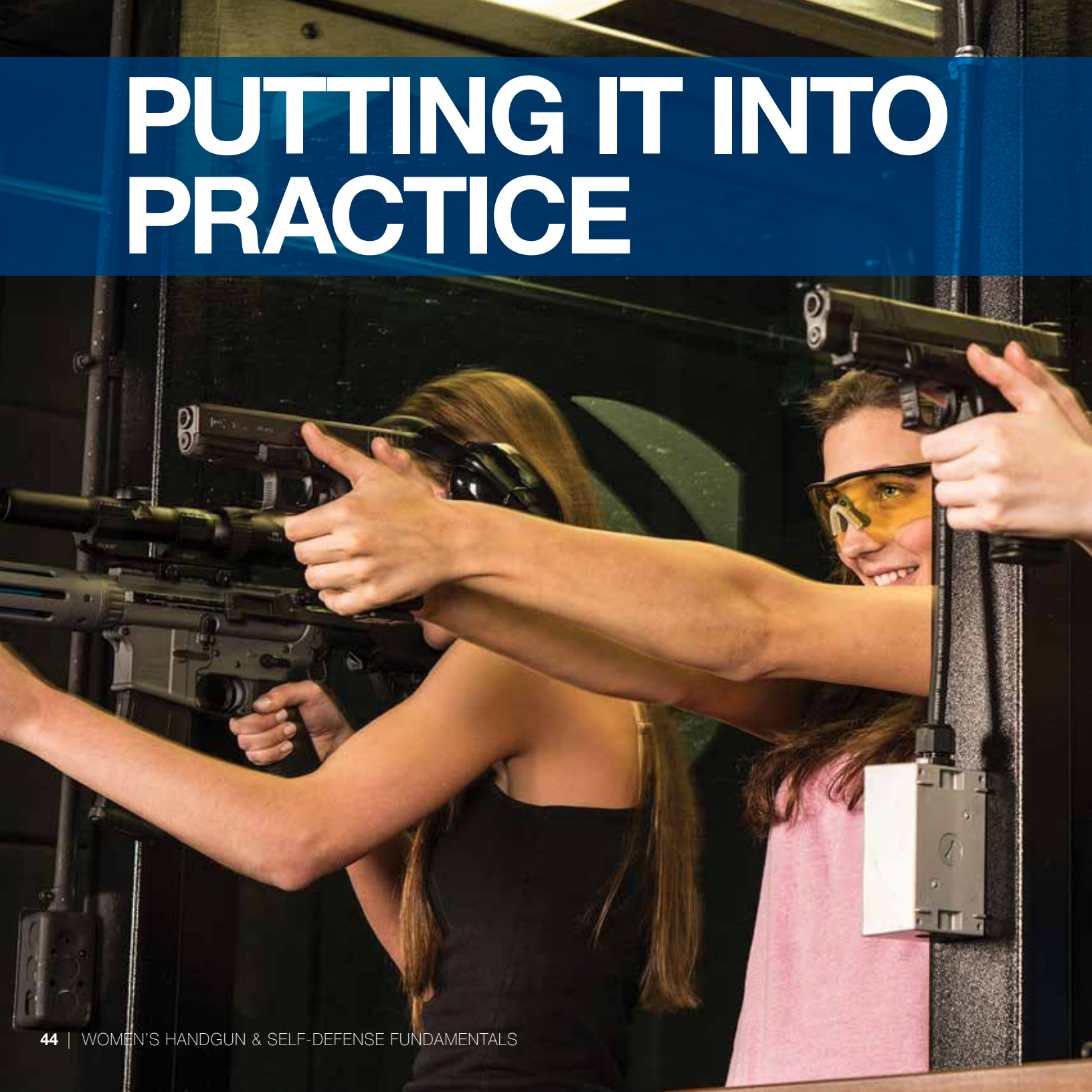
## STRANGE NEW WORLD

If you've never been to a shooting range, it can be a strange new world. There are obvious rules to follow (think universal safety rules), but there are also some unspoken courtesies. Some of those things are specific to the range itself. Others are just norms that most people have observed and absorbed from experience. While I could spend a lot of time on all the nuances of range etiquette, for the purpose of this class, I want to be sure that everyone understands two words that may be used often: "hot" and "cold." These are not referring to the temperature; they are referring to the range itself.

A cold range means that no one is accessing firearms. If an instructor or a range safety officer calls the range "cold," everyone needs to put their firearms down (preferably with the magazines out and the slides locked back, with those "baby bird" openings facing up so it's easier to see that the guns are clear). A cold range is typically a time when people are going downrange to check or change targets. And no one wants to be downrange with others handling guns on the firing line. When the range is cold, you are not touching guns, clearing malfunctions or even putting guns away. All firearms are to be unloaded and remain untouched. Step back from the firearms if that helps you remember.

On the opposite end of the spectrum, if an instructor or a range safety officer calls the range "hot," then you can manipulate your firearm. A hot range means that the targets are secure and ready, no one is downrange, and shooters are ready at the firing line. This is a time for loading magazines, getting your gun ready and, of course, shooting.

# PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE



It's now time to put all these details together so you can get the first-hand experience you need to continue strengthening your foundation for firearms training. Some of the drills will be conducted indoors (or off the range) with training guns or with cleared, live-fire guns. Please be sure there is NO LIVE AMMUNITION in the classroom (or in your designated practice area). And if you try any of these drills at home later, always make sure there is no ammunition in the room with you.

“KNOWLEDGE IS OF NO VALUE UNLESS YOU PUT IT INTO PRACTICE.”

Anton Chekov

## WORKING ON STANCE AND GRIP

Let’s first work on your stance and grip so you can get comfortable with how you will pick up, hold and use a firearm. For this exercise, we will be using a blue gun. Treating the blue gun as if it were a real gun (and following ALL the universal safety rules), pick it up off the table or bench. Don’t be freaked out by this! Keep the muzzle pointed in a safe direction and keep your finger off the trigger. I usually reach with my shooting hand, almost making an “L” shape with my thumb and pointer finger, and firmly grasp the firearm. The phrase “Make a gun, take a gun” may help you remember to make the shape of a gun with your shooting hand before you take the gun in hand.

As you grasp the gun, concentrate on getting a good grip (using that “high handshake” form). Don’t toss the gun around in your hand like a toy, but feel free to move it around until it’s comfortable and until you have a firm and proper grip with both your shooting hand and your support hand. Remember your thumbs should be “friends” at the side of the firearm in a thumbs-forward position. Try this with your thumbs, and reposition your fingers, hands and wrists until it feels best for you. (Note that the blue gun may not feel like a perfect fit in your hands. Our hands come in all shapes and sizes — and so do firearms. But keep focusing on the fundamentals.)

Now, with a proper grip on the gun, push your arms out in front of you (elbows straight) and focus on your stance. Remember that isosceles triangle. Think about your dominant eye and be

sure to line up the firearm in front of that eye. Turn or lean your head a bit if you need to or slightly cant (adjust) the gun at a slant so it lines up better with your dominant eye. Is your trigger finger still outside the trigger and along the side of the gun? Good!

Try standing with both feet shoulder-width apart or with one foot out in front. Which is most comfortable for you? Switch feet if needed. Keep your balance and find what feels most stable for you. Bend your knees a bit if it helps. Do not lean back. (By the way, the imaginary magnet in your muzzle should be pulling your firearm toward the safest direction at all times while you are discovering and practicing your grip and stance!)

Safely place the blue gun back on the table and try this sequence of movements a few more times until you are more comfortable picking up the gun and getting into your grip and stance. Don't worry about speed or what you look like! Worry about safety and correctness. This is a perfect opportunity to work on these two important fundamentals and to start getting that muscle memory in place.

## USING GOOD TRIGGER MANIPULATION

In this drill, we are building on the fundamentals we just practiced and will use the SIRT pistol to work on trigger manipulation. Remember that a slow, steady press rearward (without adding any additional movement to the gun) is what we want. So think about isolating your trigger finger — in creamy peanut butter! In other words, think about moving ONLY that trigger finger in one smooth movement.

One effective way to do this is to use the "Wall Drill," created by George Harris of International Firearms Consultants. This drill allows you to dry-fire in a way that provides understanding and feedback on what you should see with your eyes and feel with your hands to achieve a good shot. The "Wall Drill" is also a good tool for getting proper sight alignment and sight picture.

Stand about an arm's length from a blank wall. Pick up the SIRT pistol and get into your proper stance and grip. With arms extended and with the muzzle at eye level, stand with the gun less than one inch from the wall. There are no aiming points (targets, holes, etc.) to look at, as those could just be distractions. Line up the sights (using proper sight alignment), focus on the front sight and use smooth trigger manipulation to press the trigger.

The goal is to maintain focus on the front sight and pull the trigger without upsetting sight alignment and without moving the gun. Remember that the red laser on the training pistol will give immediate feedback on your trigger manipulation as you get ready to press the trigger and that the green laser will show where your shot will hit. The red dot should remain as steady as possible, and the little green dot should appear on the wall as a smooth, quick, steady pulse. If the laser pulses look like lines instead of dots, then you are moving the firearm. Work hard at only pressing the trigger and keeping the SIRT still.

Practice this several times so you get a good feel for only moving your trigger finger. If your arms get shaky (which translates into shaky movements and missed shots), place the SIRT gun back on the table and take a few moments to shake it off and relax before starting over again.

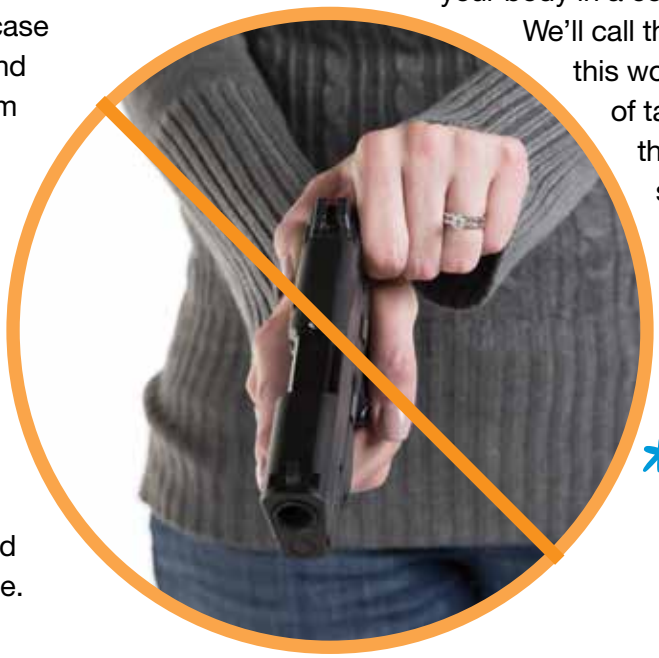
Note: If you are at home and would like to practice the drills for stance, grip and trigger manipulation (or any drills, really), you can use your own personal firearm as long as you have cleared it, you follow the safety rules, and you have NO ammunition in the gun or even in the room with you. This is called dry-fire practice because you are practicing with a real gun that has no ammo to fire. (Most modern handguns are OK to dry-fire and will not harm the gun, but some may not be. Your manual should inform you which is true for your specific model, or you can check with the manufacturer. It should clearly state: DO NOT DRY-FIRE.)

## RACKING THE SLIDE

First of all, what *is* racking the slide? What does it do? As we lightly touched on earlier, a semi-automatic pistol functions by using the energy from the recoil of a single round of ammunition to extract and eject a fired case from the pistol's chamber and to load an unfired round from the magazine for the next shot. Most types of semi-automatic pistols rely on a removable magazine for supplying ammo to be able to fire the gun. Once the magazine is inserted into the pistol, typically, the first round must be manually loaded into the chamber by pulling back and releasing ("racking") the slide.

Sadly, this is the step that often keeps women from wanting to own or use semi-automatic pistols. It may even be the reason why many gun-store workers point females in the direction of revolvers. But guess what? Unless you struggle with arthritis or other issues with your fingers, hands or wrists, I bet you can rack the slide. It's true that women don't have as much upper-body strength as men, and we often don't have super strong hands either. But if you use these tips and techniques and put in some practice, you may be pleasantly surprised. Also, keep in mind that it is easier to rack the slide on some guns than others, so don't give up after one try or one type of pistol.

First things first. Take a moment to clap your hands. That's right, give yourself a round of applause. Now freeze in place. Where are your arms and hands? Outstretched in front of you? They're likely close to your body in a comfortable and natural position. We'll call this your "work space." It is in this work space that you will do a lot of tasks with your firearm. One of those tasks will be racking the slide (as explained in the step-by-step procedures shown on the opposite page).



* Avoid using the "slingshot" method of racking the slide, which requires much finer motor skills to accomplish. While it might work at the range, in an intense moment, with adrenaline pumping, gross motor skills are usually our best bet.

Since we have much more control and strength if we are holding the firearm close to our bodies, that's where we'll begin. Hold the gun in your shooting hand while keeping the muzzle pointed in a safe direction (and keeping your finger off the trigger). Your support hand will come over the top and, using the fingers and the meaty part of your palm in the shape of the letter "C," will clamp onto the slide at the rear of the gun.

Be sure to grasp the slide very tightly and keep your arms fairly close to your body (for more support, strength and control). Then use a push-pull movement to push the gun forward while you pull the slide rearward and quickly release it. The push-pull is created when the hand and arm that are holding the gun actually push forward while the support hand (in its "C" formation) simultaneously pulls the slide rearward. If you need a little extra support, strength or control to be able to do this effectively, you can turn your body in toward the firearm. Practice this movement of racking the slide with a cleared firearm (and empty magazine) when the slide is locked back (like a "baby bird") and when the slide is closed. It will require a little more strength when it's closed since you will be pulling the slide a bit further back. Just always let go of the slide as it begins its movement forward. Don't hang on to it. Let it go! You do not want to hold it or baby it. This is a firearm; it's meant to work with some powerful energy and recoil. So you do not have to be gentle! Besides, you do not want to interrupt the movement of the slide's motion forward, as this motion is what will properly strip a round from the magazine and get the gun ready to fire.

## LOADING A MAGAZINE

Loading a magazine is providing the firearm with a source of ammunition (or food). As Carrie Lightfoot of The Well Armed Woman teaches, you can think about loading ammo into a magazine kind of like loading candy into a PEZ dispenser.

There is a method and a rhythm to loading rounds in a magazine, and it may take some time to get used to or find what works best for you. In the meantime, your thumbs and your hands may get a bit tired — or sore! (You can also use a loading tool called a speedloader, which takes the pressure off of your fingers — and off of you.) But, all in all, this is an important step to understand and to be able to do. I used to get my husband to load the magazines (and the gun) for me when I first started shooting, but I learned absolutely nothing that way. It's so much better to do all of this on your own.

Keep in mind: This is not the easiest task since you are working against a tight spring in the magazine. The more ammo you load, the tighter the spring gets. So inserting more rounds can take quite a bit of pressure, but it will loosen some with use and will become easier the more you do it.

If you need to take rounds out of the magazine, you can use a motion that's almost the opposite of loading them. Just push down a little with your thumb while moving the round forward and it should pop out pretty easily. Need help? Just ask! No one does this perfectly on the first try.

Take one round in your dominant hand (or use a "dummy round" or a "snap cap," which is an inert practice round) and be sure it's facing in the right direction. How do you know it's correct? Look at how the magazine will be seated in the firearm and be sure that the ammo's rounded bullet end will face toward the muzzle when inserted. You may want to rest the base of the magazine on a solid surface (on a table or against your hip or thigh) for some extra support.

Hold the magazine in your non-dominant hand. (I grasp it with the back of the magazine positioned between my thumb and index finger.) Next, take a round (one at a time) from your dominant hand and push it into the magazine, starting at the front third of the top of the magazine and using a downward and backward motion, being sure the spring pushes downward and the round "catches" and sits snugly and properly.

Once the first round is in, use the thumb that's holding the magazine to help push down on the back of the round as you place another one on top, again using the downward and backward motion. Once your magazine is loaded (with one round or all the way to capacity), you can insert it into the firearm by pushing it upward into the grip until you hear a clicking noise, indicating that the magazine has locked into place and is properly seated. (Note: We will not do this last step until we are on the range, ready to fire.)

# SHOOTING LIVE-FIRE

Before we get started with the live-fire portion, please review the four universal gun safety rules, have your eye and ear protection ready and get mentally geared up! The shooting range can be loud and intimidating, especially if you are not used to it. It can also be a ton of fun to punch holes in paper or to hear the ring of steel targets.

Are you ready? Take all the safe firearms knowledge and information you have gained thus far and let's use it! When the range is hot and you are on the firing line, load your magazine with one round. If you need assistance, don't hesitate to ask. Why one round? This is just a good way to get everyone started. This way, instructors and/or range safety officers are ready to look for any issues or to help with any problems. If the shooter gets a bit excited, anxious or distracted, we will be working with an empty gun after that first shot is fired. That takes a little bit of the pressure off everyone.

> NOW THIS IS NOT THE END. IT IS NOT EVEN THE BEGINNING OF THE END. BUT IT IS, PERHAPS, THE END OF THE BEGINNING.
>
> Winston Churchill

Now, pick up the gun and magazine and, keeping the gun pointed in a safe direction, insert the magazine into the firearm and rack the slide. Unless there is some sort of mechanical safety, your gun is now ready to fire. The next step is to get your good grip and stance that we talked about and practiced with the blue gun. Your finger should be off the trigger and along the side of the gun. Get comfortable. And get ready. The next fundamental to think about is sight alignment (think equal height, equal light). Now focus on the front sight. Breathe. Stay steady. And when you are lined up on target, gently press the trigger. (After your first shot, you can put the gun down if you'd like, or an instructor or RSO may take it at this time, if necessary.)

So … how did that feel?

I ask that question now, right here in the text of the curriculum, because this is a favorite question of mine to ask new shooters (particularly females). Once I see that the muzzle is in a safe direction and the finger is off the trigger (or the gun is set down), I want to know your thoughts! Most of the time, I see delight, wonder, excitement or amazement. Sometimes I see a little uncertainty. This is a great opportunity to talk about any concerns, ask any questions, see how you did, sigh with relief and/or get ready for the next shot. Instructors can also use this time to make adjustments or recommendations. (Of course, we may not even know exactly where your shot hit since we are really focusing on YOU and not on the target!) Just remember that the "right way" of shooting may not be identical to your way. Be flexible and willing to try some different things. Be ready to share what works or what doesn't work for you. And don't be frustrated if you're not

hitting the bullseye every time. Think through the fundamentals and work on the basics for now. It may take some time to find out how to improve your shot. This is all part of the learning process.

When you are ready, let's load up the magazine (this time with five rounds) and insert it into the pistol. Go through the fundamentals the exact same way as we have learned. Get that good grip and stance. Find your sight alignment and sight picture. Press the trigger. Follow through. And start all over again.

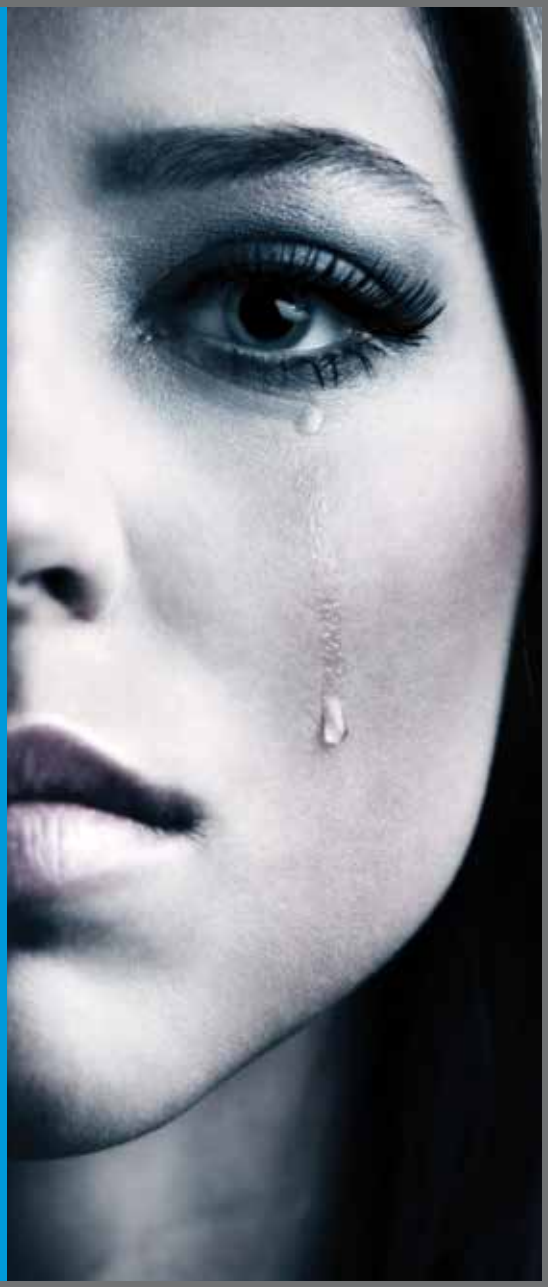
Keep practicing as much as time allows. Just remember that safety is of utmost importance, so be vigilant about following all safety rules at all times. As previously stated, the goal is to be SAFE, to LEARN and to have FUN! And I truly hope that this runs through your mind every time you have an opportunity to shoot!

## CONCLUSION

Ah-ha! You saw the word "conclusion," and I bet you thought you were done. But no, my friends … you are only just beginning. While *Women's Basic Pistol* might be winding down and finishing up, the amount of learning yet to be experienced is vast. We've barely scratched the surface. But don't let that discourage you. In fact, it should do the complete opposite. You now have the basics. You've started to build a foundation. The firearms world is not so completely mysterious and misunderstood anymore. And you haven't just learned about it on paper — you've done it! That's right! Congratulations! YOU DID IT!

So I challenge you now to think about all the information we've covered. Practice it. Use it. Build on it. Share it. Be sure to seek out more education, incorporate additional training into your schedule and always be ready to ask: "What's next?"

# IT'S OK TO CRY



Women are emotional creatures. It's okay to admit that and to embrace that — even on the shooting range! In fact, instructors who have been teaching for a while would probably agree that a few tears while shooting is not all that uncommon. But it's definitely an issue that deserves some attention. One of the most interesting things to recognize about crying while shooting is that the reasons behind the tears can be quite varied. As long as everyone remains safe, those tears can be something that everyone can push through and possibly learn from. Here are 11 of the more common reasons why someone may cry at the range, along with a few things to consider for managing or overcoming those reactions. Whatever your reason, know you are not alone!

1. **Scared of the gun.** That first shot can be quite surprising. It's loud, almost obnoxiously so, like a firework going off just inches from your face. And the gun may have moved more than expected. It's very easy (and very normal) to be intimidated by something so powerful. But that fear can be a good thing since it may encourage a strong, unwavering respect for firearms.

2. **Afraid of having to use the gun in self-defense.** No one welcomes the possibility of using a gun in a violent encounter. No one wants to imagine being responsible for wounding or killing someone. For many, this is a difficult hurdle to overcome, but we must remember that we have firearms as tools to protect our loved ones and ourselves — and we are worth protecting.

3. **Worried about messing up/not doing it right.** When trying something new, it can feel overwhelming to try to do it the "right way." Some people are simply worried about facing humiliation or embarrassment if they use a gun improperly. However, if all the safety rules are in play, we should remember to relax and have fun. It's not as difficult as it may seem — and all those marksmanship details can come later.

4. **Concerned about getting hurt or accidentally hurting others.** This is a natural fear, and it's not necessarily a bad one. Again, that fear can encourage a respect for firearms. Just remember that if we follow the basic safety rules, we can manipulate firearms without causing any harm. The more practice one gets, the easier it will be to understand and accept that.

5. **Upset by something that happened in the past with guns.** I have heard this reason a lot, that there was an incident or some sort of carelessness associated with guns. An accident like this is not something easily forgotten or overcome. It can weigh heavily on someone's mind. And rightly so. We just need to be sensitive to this situation and remember that while we may not have had any influence at that time, we have control over this moment right now.

6. **Worried about things they have heard about guns.** The media is full of stories of "gun violence," accidents, danger, bad people and even gun myths. Most of us have grown up with this negative influence. And it may take some hands-on experience to put those thoughts aside.

7. **Fearful of the unknown.** It's natural to be apprehensive about things we don't understand or about something we've never done. That's part of the process. And sometimes, we may need a little more time to think things through, to gain some confidence and to move past that fear.

8. **Wary of bad people.** For many people, when they think of guns, they think about the reason we need to use them: to defend ourselves from bad people. Remember that for some, the bad people are strangers; for others, those bad people are already a part of their lives, whether from a domestic violence situation, abuse or an attack. Either way, the emotions are VERY real.

9. **Relieved that they've shot a gun.** The adrenaline is pumping. There are physical and emotional effects of stress. And fears are being faced and overcome. Once that first shot rings out, it can be a huge relief! And sometimes tears are a sign of that.

10. **Excited that they've shot a gun.** This could be a first-time experience or one that hasn't happened in a long time. And it's easy for emotions to swell up and sometimes run over the top. In this case, these are "good tears." It could be elation at hitting the target or the feeling that, "It's done … and it wasn't so bad after all!"

11. **Experiencing a mix of overwhelming emotions.** We all deal with stress in different ways, and sometimes tears fall for no "apparent reason." Since we can't always pinpoint the exact explanation, reaction or hormone, just chalk it up to a mix of feelings — all across the gambit.

When tears appear on the shooting range, we may be tempted to state that "there's no crying in shooting." But tears are not abnormal or strange. It may be something a shooter needs to address or something she simply needs to accept. But it's nothing to be ashamed of, so don't worry about it. Just stay safe, have fun and don't give up.

# 2 LEVEL **TWO**

# WOMEN'S INTERMEDIATE PISTOL

LEVEL TWO

- Introduction
- Revolvers Versus Semi-Automatics
- Universal Safety Rules Review
- Form and Function
- Advantages and Disadvantages
- Size and Weight Comparisons
- Choosing the Right Gun
- Bullets and Ballistics
- Cycles of Operation
- Common Malfunctions
- Holsters and Concealed Carry
- Inside the Hip or Waist
- Concealed Carry Bag
- Outside the Waistband
- Bra or Underarm
- Leg (Thigh or Ankle)
- Just the Facts, Ma'am
- Establishing Boundaries
- White: Unaware
- Yellow: Relaxed State of Awareness
- Orange: Heightened Awareness
- Red: Action
- Survivor Mindset
- Shooting Fundamentals Review
- Putting It Into Practice
- Loading and Unloading
- Reloading
- Multiple Shots
- Multiple Targets
- One-Handed Shooting
- Clearing Malfunctions
- Conclusion

The first time I stepped on a basketball court to try out for my school's team, I was a lanky, uncoordinated seventh-grader who hadn't touched a basketball outside of physical education classes. I had no idea what I was doing. I missed every shot. I was embarrassed and frustrated. But I gave it my all. And somehow, I ended up as the 13th player on our girls' basketball team.

Of course, being the 13th person on our team meant I didn't even have a uniform. I practiced with the team and learned all the plays, and then I sat on the bench, watching and cheering on my teammates. It was a rough start, but I worked hard and did my best to learn all about basketball and improve my skills. Eventually, when one of our star players was injured, I inherited her uniform. I played my first game and actually contributed two points. Two years later, I was scoring triple doubles, breaking school records and earning trophies for defensive player, offensive player and most valuable player.

I share my experience with basketball because it's a poignant reminder that we all start at the beginning. No one jumps into something new with an expert level of knowledge or skills. My story is also a testimony to the power of hard work, dedication and practice. Anything worth doing takes determination. And if we don't commit ourselves and try our best, we won't improve. We'll remain in the same spot, stagnant and uncertain, or we will regress and deteriorate.

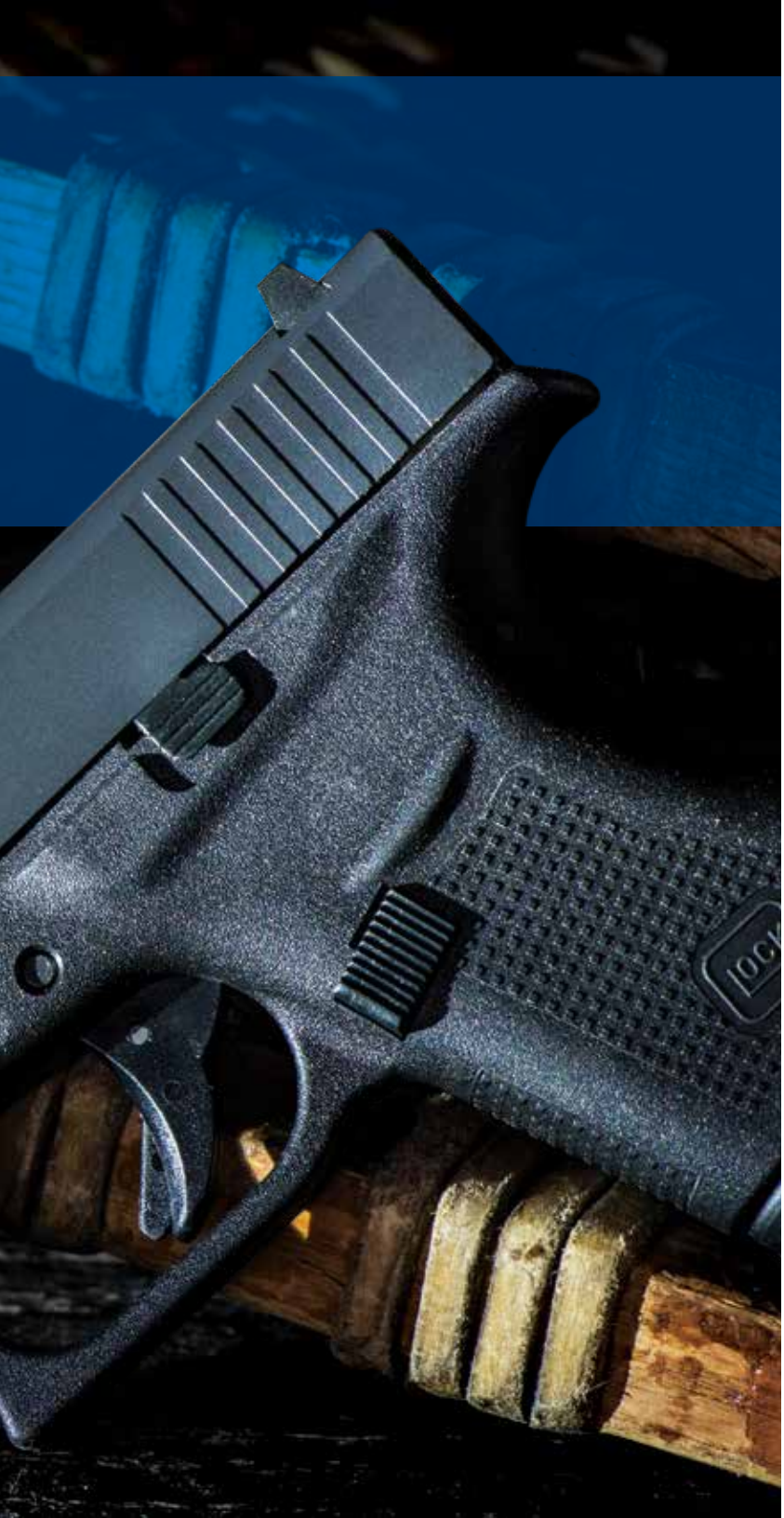
Similarly, when it comes to firearms training, the work is never done. Not only is there always something new to learn, there is also more practice to complete. At times, you may feel you have no idea what you're doing. You may even miss every shot. But just like with sports or any other skill, you have to try (and try again).

On top of that, you have to use that skill once you've learned it. If you don't, you lose proficiency with the skill (or the ability to do it altogether). Think about playing an instrument, speaking another language or even completing advanced-level calculus equations. When you are immersed in the activity and are practicing it regularly, you have a better chance to retain your skills as well as refine them and build on them. The same is definitely true about firearms and shooting skills. One visit to the range isn't enough. Honestly, one visit to the range every month isn't enough either. Gaining and maintaining skills takes time and dedication. So it's encouraging that you feel ready to take the next steps and tackle the intermediate stages of pistol training.

*Women's Intermediate Pistol* offers a perfect opportunity to build on the basic skills and fundamentals you have already learned. This is your chance to take those next steps so you're not standing still in your training — literally or figuratively!

This course will dig a little deeper into topics you should know from *Women's Basic Pistol* or from other training. We'll take a closer look at types of firearms and ammunition as well as learn about how firearms work. We'll also cover tips and tactics for selecting handguns and holsters. While *Women's Intermediate Pistol* is not a defensive pistol class, you will be introduced to the right mindset for self-defense. And though this is not a marksmanship class, the drills we use will challenge your skills with the goal of bringing you up to the next level. All of these topics, discussions and exercises will help you better understand firearms and safe shooting so you can be more comfortable and confident with your training.

# REVOLVERS VERSUS SEMI-AUTOMATICS



When it comes to firearms, there are a lot of choices out there. Just walk into your local gun store; you'll probably see more firearms than you care to count! All the different styles, shapes, colors, models, makes and price points can make the selection process seem overwhelming.

Luckily, the myriad choices can be narrowed down to two basic types: the revolver and the semi-automatic pistol. Both styles of guns are used by millions of Americans for a wide variety of reasons. And both styles of guns have caused these same millions of Americans to disagree, debate and argue over why they choose one over the other. In fact, the revolver-versus-pistol topic is one of the most heated, ongoing discussions among gun owners and firearms enthusiasts. The important thing to note is that there are definite pros and cons to consider for each.

“IT IS BEYOND A DOUBT THAT ALL OUR KNOWLEDGE BEGINS WITH EXPERIENCE.”

Immanuel Kant

## UNIVERSAL SAFETY RULES REVIEW

Before we get any further into the course, it’s imperative that we pause and review the four universal gun safety rules. You can NEVER hear them too often. These safety rules govern every activity that involves firearms and firearms training, so commit them to memory if you have not done so already. Keep them in the forefront of your mind whenever you are in the classroom or on the range … or wherever you are!

1. **Treat all guns as though they are loaded.**
2. **Never point your firearm at anything you are not willing to destroy.**
3. **Keep your finger OFF the trigger and outside the trigger guard until you are on target and have made a decision to shoot.**
4. **Always be sure of your target and what’s beyond.**

## FORM AND FUNCTION

I don't know about you, but I'm much more comfortable and confident around tools when I know how to use them (or when I at least understand the basics). For instance, a blender can appear to be a pretty gnarly kitchen appliance, slashing through fruit and grinding up ice cubes for a delicious smoothie. But I know that a blender has to be plugged in and turned on to work. I also recognize that I control the settings and that a blender comes apart into different pieces that can be cleaned or swapped. And because I understand the basic parts and functions of this device, I feel good about using it safely.

Of course, blenders and firearms are in no way the same thing, but I'd like to think that even while a firearm can appear pretty gnarly, it's something I've learned about and understand. I know that a gun has to be loaded and the trigger has to be pressed to fire. I also recognize that I control the functions of this device. I also know that a gun comes apart into different pieces that can be cleaned or swapped. And because I understand the basic parts and functions of this device, I feel good about using it safely.

Since having this kind of knowledge really is powerful, we will go over some of the basic functions and parts of revolvers and semi-automatic pistols. Revolvers and semi-automatic pistols have a lot of similarities, but they also have many distinguishing features. Hopefully, this will begin to paint a clear picture of how these firearms work as well as help aid in decisions to purchase, carry and train with the firearms that best fit you, your needs and your lifestyle.

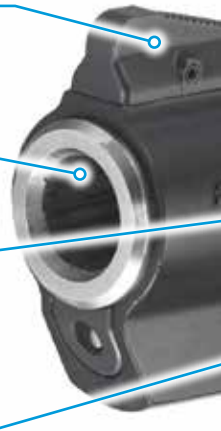
# REVOLVERS

If we're looking at longevity, revolvers have been around for quite a long time. Samuel Colt was granted a U.S. patent for his "revolving gun" on February 25, 1836. And thanks to percussion technology (which offered a more reliable ignition system), his design is recognized as the first practical revolver and the first practical repeating firearm.

In its basic form, a revolver is a handgun that uses a revolving cylinder that can hold multiple rounds of ammunition in separate chambers (the individual compartments or slots that hold the rounds). Revolvers enable users to fire these rounds (typically five or six) without reloading. Each time the user cocks the hammer, the cylinder turns to line up the next round.

With a single-action revolver, the user cocks the hammer spur back and then fires the gun by pressing the trigger. With a double-action revolver, the user can press the trigger and accomplish both moving the hammer back and firing the gun. (This creates a longer and heavier trigger pull than single-action.) Loading and unloading a revolver requires the user to swing out the cylinder, remove the empty cases and insert the proper ammunition — all while keeping the gun pointed in a safe direction.

Interestingly enough, Colt's original design has not gone through many changes. His sturdy "wheelguns" remain very strong sellers, particularly in the personal-defense handgun market.



**Front Sight**

**Muzzle**

**Barrel**
The measured length of the barrel does not include the length of the cylinder.

**Cylinder**
Cylinders are designed to hold multiple rounds in separate chambers.

**Cylinder Release**
This allows the cylinder to be opened for loading and unloading.

Rear Sight
Hammer Spur
Grips
Revolver grips can be replaced with aftermarket grips, allowing the grip size to be increased or decreased and allowing the revolver's natural point of aim (its "pointability") to be adjusted for the individual shooter.
Trigger
The weight and distance of the trigger press is much lighter and shorter in single-action mode versus double-action mode: as light as 3 pounds in single-action and as heavy as 10 pounds in double-action.
Trigger Guard

If we're looking at technology, semi-automatic pistols are considered to be steps ahead of their wheelgun counterparts. While cruder models of semi-autos have been on the design floor for a long time, this handgun has gone through many changes and improvements and continues to see modernized tweaks and enhancements.

In its basic form, a semi-automatic pistol is a handgun that uses the energy of a fired round of ammunition to cycle the action of the firearm and advance the next available round into a position for firing. Semi-autos require a removable magazine to hold the ammunition, and a user can load it by inserting the magazine into the magazine well (in the grip of the gun) and racking the slide. After a round is fired, the spent case is ejected from the gun and a new round is stripped off from the magazine and loaded into the chamber, allowing another shot to be fired as soon as the operator presses the trigger again. (Note: The slide does NOT need to be racked again once the gun is fired the first time. All this, except the actual firing, is done automatically — hence the name "semi-automatic.")

### Slide
This is the moving part of the pistol that slides to the rear, ejecting a spent case and loading a new round.

### Takedown Lever/Rod
This control allows the slide to be removed from the frame, allowing the barrel and recoil spring to also be removed for cleaning.

### Slide Lock
When the slide is manually retracted to the rear, it can be locked in the open position by pushing the slide lock (or slide release or slide stop) upward, catching it in the small notch (seen just below the "LCP" in this photo).

## Ejection Port

As the slide moves to the rear after the gun is fired, an extractor removes the empty case and ejects it to the right (out of the ejection port).

## Hammer

The hammer on this Ruger LCP is not exposed and is shrouded by the back of the slide.

## Tang

This is the curved part of a handgun's grip where it meets the slide.

## Grips

The grips on most composite pistols can't be replaced, but a number of manufacturers offer pistols with replaceable back straps, shipping the pistols with several back straps of various sizes so that the user can tailor the grip size to his or her preference.

## Magazine Release

Pressing the magazine release will release the magazine from the magazine well. Most semi-automatics have a single magazine release on the left side of the firearm, while others have an ambidextrous release.

## ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES

Now that we've covered some of the basics, you may be wondering: What's the big debate all about? While there are always some personal preferences involved with firearms selection, here are some of the main factors — some of the pros and the cons — that come into play when the topic is revolvers versus semi-automatics.

### REVOLVER

| PROS | CONS |
|---|---|
| Simple to load and unload | Typically holds less ammunition than a semi-automatic of comparable size |
| Mechanically simple, resulting in a lower likelihood of malfunctions when compared with a semi-automatic | The bulky cylinder may make it harder to conceal than a thinner semi-automatic |
| Typically more reliable with many different types of ammunition | A revolver often weighs more than a semi-automatic of comparable size |
| Easier to clean (and easier to maintain) than a semi-automatic | Some may find a revolver to be more difficult to shoot than a semi-automatic because of a heavier trigger weight, a double-action trigger or the shape of the grip |

### SEMI-AUTOMATIC

| PROS | CONS |
|---|---|
| Larger magazine capacity (more ammunition) | Malfunctions are more common when compared to using a revolver. The operator must learn how to clear these malfunctions! |
| Faster to load and reload than a revolver | Field-stripping for cleaning and maintenance is more complex and involves multiple parts that must be removed |
| More options — styles, shapes, sizes and calibers — including choosing a hammer or striker-fired, etc. | Based on size or hand strength, some people may find it difficult to rack a semi-automatic's slide, which will be required for initial loading and when clearing malfunctions |
| Flatter shape is easier to conceal than a revolver | |
| Less recoil | |

# SIZE AND WEIGHT COMPARISONS

## Smith & Wesson
***Model 27***
**Length:** 9.25”
**Frame Material:** Steel
**Caliber:** .38 Special / .357 Magnum
**41 Ounces**

## Smith & Wesson
***Model 60***
**Length:** 7.5”
**Frame Material:** Steel
**Caliber:** .38 Special / .357 Magnum
**24 Ounces**

## Smith & Wesson
***Model 36***
**Length:** 7”
**Frame Material:** Steel
**Caliber**: .38 Special
**20.4 Ounces**

## Smith & Wesson
***Model 442***
**Length:** 6.4”
**Frame Material:**
Aluminum Alloy
**Caliber:** .38 Special
**15 Ounces**

## North American Arms
***Mini-Revolver***
**Length:** 4”
**Frame Material:** Steel
**Caliber:** .22 LR
**4.5 Ounces**

## Springfield
***1911 Loaded***
**Length:** 8.5”
**Height**: 5.5”
**Frame Material:** Steel
**Caliber:** .45 ACP
**41 Ounces**

## Smith & Wesson
***M&P***
**Length:** 7.75”
**Height:** 5.5”
**Frame Material:** Composite
**Caliber:** 9mm / .40 S&W
**30 Ounces**

## SIG Sauer
***P229 Equinox***
**Length:** 7.1”
**Height:** 5.4”
**Frame Material:** Steel
**Caliber:** .357 SIG / .40 S&W
**32 Ounces**

## Springfield
***XD Sub-Compact***
**Length:** 6.25”
**Height:** 4.75”
**Frame Material:** Composite
**Caliber:** 9mm / .40 S&W / .45ACP
**26 Ounces**

## Ruger
***LCP***
**Length:** 5.2”
**Height:** 3.6”
**Frame Material:** Composite
**Caliber:** .380 ACP
**9.4 Ounces**

## SAFE STORAGE

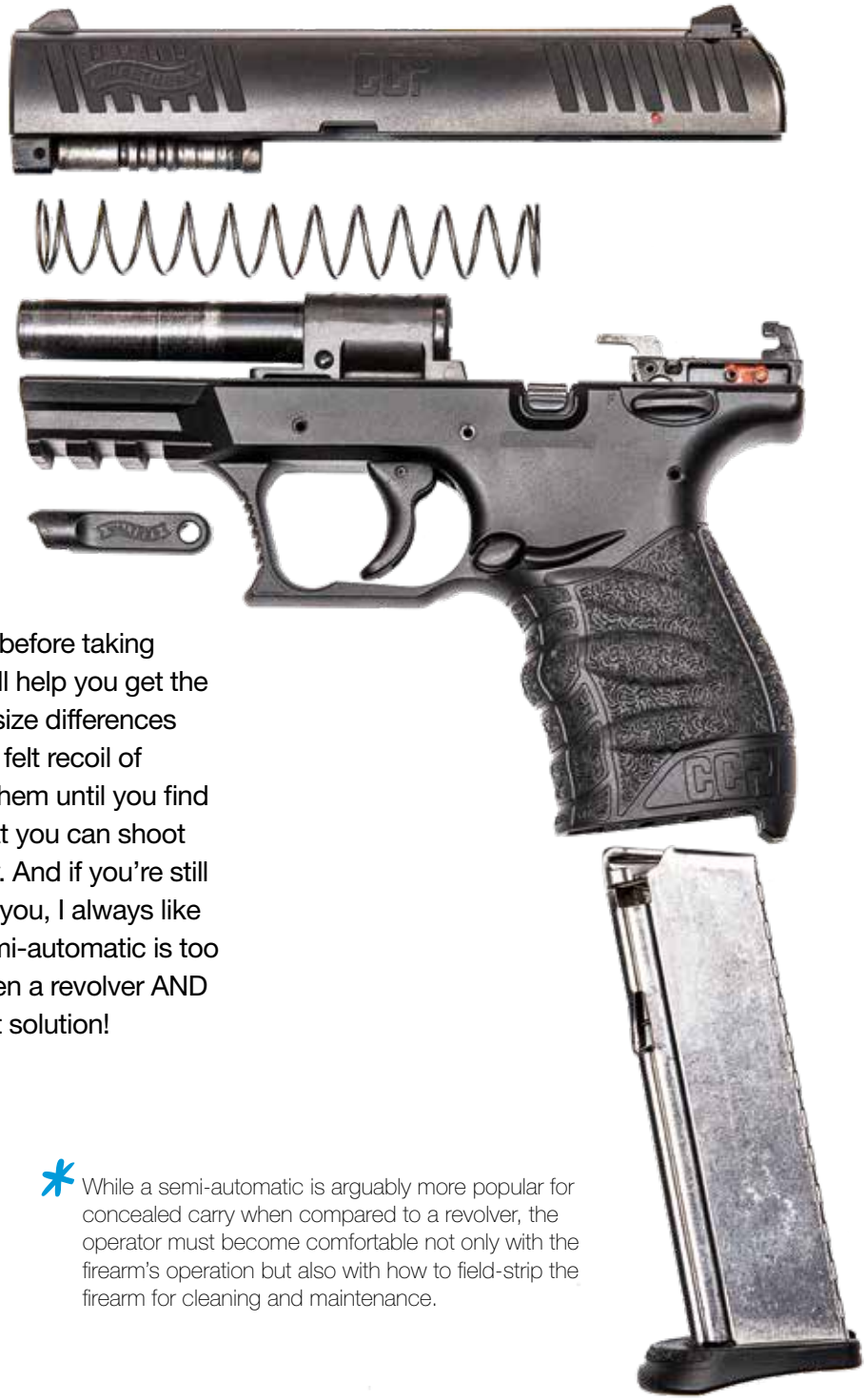
There's no doubt that storage is an important topic when we're working with firearms. With safety always at the forefront, here are a few tips for making sure your guns are safely stored in your home:

- Store your firearms in places where they're only accessible to you or to designated members of your family.
- Use a storage location that is out of reach of children and that can be secured with a lock. For your home-defense firearm, a smaller, single-gun safe may be an ideal option so you can access it quickly. For this option, you may want to consider a biometric or RFID-based safe.
- Keep guns (and magazines) unloaded when in storage.
- Store ammunition in a separate locked location that is out of reach of children.
- Make sure keys or combinations are kept in a place where children can't access them.
- Get into a set routine for securing your concealed carry firearm and go through the same motions every time.
- Use a gun-locking device (such as a cable lock) as an extra safety precaution on a stored firearm.

## CHOOSING THE RIGHT GUN

Selecting a concealed carry handgun for personal protection is one of the most important decisions you can make, whether you're a college student, a businesswoman or a busy mother of three. Since there's more to consider than just revolver or semi-automatic, the process can generate a host of interesting questions and challenges. Women often have specific needs and preferences to think about, and the differences between men and women really come into play when it comes to finalizing your handgun purchase. For instance, your wardrobe preferences can limit your choices. Your hand and body shape — as well as your physical size and strength — need to be considered. The makeup of your family, your household, your career and your lifestyle make a difference. How and where you want to carry is also an important factor. All these attributes can influence or alter your ability to comfortably, effectively and proficiently use a defensive handgun. That's why it's vital to think through and consider all the options. Some of the concealed carry handguns that women predominantly prefer are models that are lightweight and easy to shoot yet extremely accurate and powerful. For anyone who's trying to find the right firearm, look at three primary areas: shootability, reliability and efficiency. As we have learned, revolvers are very dependable, but they are slow to reload and hold fewer rounds. And while they are often wider and harder to conceal than semi-autos, revolvers require less maintenance, are easier to clean and have less likelihood of jamming when shooting. On the other hand, semi-autos are quick to reload, carry more rounds and are usually easier to conceal, but issues with racking the slide or cleaning the gun could deter some shooters from choosing them.

Overall, there is no "perfect choice" between the two major gun types … except for the gun that YOU like the most. It is unfair to say one is better than another, because it depends on personal preference and opinion. Ultimately, the best handgun for your personal defense is the one you will learn how to shoot proficiently and carry every day. And one of the most helpful things you can do when making your selection is to find a gun shop or a range that will allow you to rent or test out firearms before taking one home. Shooting various guns will help you get the feel of various action types, test the size differences between models and experience the felt recoil of discharging different cartridges. Try them until you find the one that fits you the best and that you can shoot the most comfortably and accurately. And if you're still agonizing over which gun is right for you, I always like to suggest that if a revolver OR a semi-automatic is too tough a decision for you to make, then a revolver AND a semi-automatic may be the perfect solution!




* While a semi-automatic is arguably more popular for concealed carry when compared to a revolver, the operator must become comfortable not only with the firearm's operation but also with how to field-strip the firearm for cleaning and maintenance.

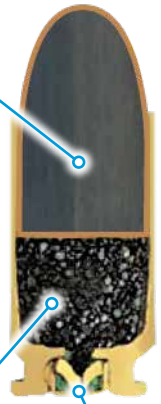
# BULLETS AND BALLISTICS

There are a lot of different kinds, types, sizes and calibers of ammunition out there. To discuss more than just the basics could take up a lot of time. It could also be confusing, especially since bullets are often another big topic of debate. For instance, there are many people who will tell you that only a certain caliber, a specific brand, a specified power or a special type of ammo will be able to protect you effectively from an attacker. We'll avoid that debate for now and just cover some essentials.

## Anatomy of a Round: How It's Made

First and foremost, let's go over the parts of a round. This is important so you can understand how ammunition works and use the correct terminology. For instance, you've probably heard people call ammunition "bullets." This is incorrect. A bullet is only the end of a round — the projectile that actually leaves the firearm. The entire thing is known as a cartridge, a round or ammunition/ammo. And a round is generally made up of four components: the case (the metal housing that makes up the majority of what you see); the primer (the charge or ignition source that's struck by your gun's firing pin); the propellant (the gunpowder inside the case); and, as mentioned, the bullet.

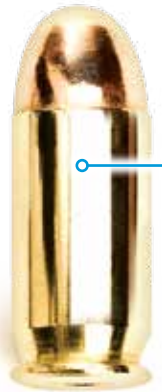
Bullets have been around for centuries, but they have seen a tremendous amount of innovation and change throughout the last three or four decades. These days, there are two basic bullet types: ball ammo and hollow-point ammo. Each has different uses. With ball ammo, the projectile is one solid mass. Ball ammo is typically less expensive and is great for punching holes in paper, but it should not be used in a



**Bullet**
Since this bullet is one solid mass, it is referred to as "ball ammo."

**Propellant**
Modern propellants have a high amount of surface area to ensure a rapid, stable burn and a maximum expansion of gases.

**Primer**
When struck by the firing pin, the round's primer causes a small explosion, showering sparks into the round's case, igniting the propellant.



**Case**
This is the metal housing which contains the propellant and primer. The top of the case is crimped in slightly to hold the bullet in place.

defense gun. The problem is that ball ammo tends to over-penetrate and pass through soft targets. Studies in the late 1990s showed that ball ammunition was over-penetrating through criminals' bodies and hitting other people. In fact, as documented by the NYPD in 1998, 46 percent of innocent bystanders (and 39 percent of law enforcement officers) who were hit by police rounds were struck by bullets that had passed through attackers or other objects. If you're target shooting at a range, this shouldn't be an issue. But if you're using this ammunition for defense, you'd have to worry about the damage your bullet could cause to whatever (or whomever) is on the other side of your intended target.

With hollow-point bullets, a section of the projectile has been removed (or hollowed out) from the center. This design allows the bullet to expand on impact, which slows the bullet down inside your target, preventing it from passing through that target (in most cases). As a self-defense round, hollow-point ammo can also do greater damage due to its expanded size within the target, which means an increased chance of stopping the threat.

**Hollow-point**
This cutaway of a hollow-point round shows how a section of the projectile has been removed (or hollowed out) from the center. This design allows the bullet to expand on impact, which slows the bullet down inside your target, preventing it from passing through that target (in most cases).

SAFETY CHECK

At the USCCA, we believe that even if a firearm does not come equipped with a mechanical safety, every gun has a safety: YOU! In fact, you could argue that there are always two safeties to every gun. If you keep both safeties working at all times, and if you follow the four universal safety rules (without exception), you will always be safe with firearms. The first safety is your brain, which will consider both intent and justification to determine whether or not to shoot. If your brain is not switched on and completely focused on the events around you, then you have no business with a gun in the first place. The second safety is your educated and well-trained trigger finger, which is always off the trigger and along the side of the gun until your brain tells it to shoot.

## Type of Ammo: How to Decide

I'm not going to tell you what caliber or brand you should use. Your decision will depend on factors such as the type and weight of your firearm, your tolerance for recoil and your ability to shoot, among others. And while ammo can certainly be a personal choice, you should definitely consider the differences between training ammo and carry ammo. For practicing, just about anything will do as long as your owner's manual says it's OK. Even the less-expensive stuff is fine as you're refining your shooting skills. After all, most of the time when training, all you're doing is punching holes in paper. And something like a wadcutter bullet (with a lighter powder load and a lower-velocity projectile) is great for putting nice round holes in a paper target.

While training and working on your shooting skills, don't be afraid to try different types of ammunition; it can give you an idea of how that particular ammo functions in your gun. Believe it or not, guns can have some pretty picky preferences on what ammo they like best. You may discover that some ammo doesn't cycle your gun properly. On the other hand, others may fire more accurately. There are also light-recoil options so that you can discover the differences in how much noise, recoil or "flash" are produced by different kinds of ammo. How heavy or dirty your gun becomes when using different ammunition will be apparent as well. Consider these factors, especially when buying in bulk.

For defensive ammunition, the decision-making process is a little more intense. A life-or-death situation is not the time to discover that a certain bullet type or underpowered ammo doesn't function well in your gun. This is also not the time to be frugal and use hand-loaded or reloaded ammo. Look for reliable, made-in-the-USA products by reputable manufacturers. (There are a LOT of them out there!) This ammunition has been quality-checked for accuracy and effectiveness and is produced the same way over and over again. This is important if you ever have to use your firearm for self-defense. If you use a well-known

defensive ammo, there are statistics and data that can be used to show how the round was made and how it's supposed to work, which can help your case if you ever find yourself in court defending your actions. If you used a hand-loaded round, there would be little chance to prove how it was made — or if it was even made correctly.

All in all, the "right" ammo for your carry gun must be able to hit the target, stay inside that target and deliver enough power to stop that target … and stop the threat. For these and other reasons, as mentioned, the best choice for defensive ammunition is a hollow-point bullet, which is designed to expand on impact. You could also choose ammunition with a frangible bullet, which is designed to come apart on impact. Both of these ammunition types release most of their energy inside their targets and then stop rather than continue through and potentially hit someone (or something) else.

Whatever defensive ammo you select, make sure you run a box or two through the gun you've planned to use for personal protection — *before* you trust your life to that gun/ammo combination. It may be a bit more expensive every time you pull the trigger, but at least you'll have peace of mind that it functions properly, and you will know how that ammo operates in your gun. (Remember: Some guns just don't like some ammo!) Shooting your self-defense ammunition will give you an idea of how it's different from your training ammo. It may be louder or produce more recoil. But it's better to know this — and deal with it now — than to find out at the wrong time.

If you're still unsure of what ammo to put in your gun, don't be afraid to ask. Local law enforcement officers, gunsmiths, instructors or gun-store workers may share what types they have tried and used — both for training and for self-defense. Just be warned: Every knowledgeable person you ask about the "right" ammunition will most likely offer a different view based on experience, opinion or urban legend. The bottom line? Buy a quality brand of ammunition, keep practicing and continue your firearms education.

## CYCLES OF OPERATION

I'll be honest with you: I may never fully comprehend how a car works. To me, the complex series of actions and reactions seem both utterly archaic and completely mysterious. However, I do know some of the basics, and I acknowledge that understanding what a car does to allow me to drive around is important for me to be able to successfully use it and maintain it.

In some ways, the same can be said about firearms. You may never fully comprehend how a gun works. You don't have to understand every piece, every part and every function, but I firmly believe that if we understand the basics, it is much easier to respect guns, to use them safely and even to understand why they sometimes don't function properly. So let's explore some of the basics and explain how a gun works. Generally speaking, a gun works by using the explosive force of a propellant to drive a bullet out of the barrel and toward a target. (In other words, a burst of pressurized gas forces a projectile through a tube.) Although there are many different types and styles of firearms, every one of them follows a similar cycle of operation. With some minor exceptions, these eight steps are part of that cycle. (And these same forces are at work whether using an antique muzzleloader or a modern-day pistol.)

1. **FEEDING:** A round of ammunition is stripped from a magazine (in a semi-automatic) or is manually placed in the cylinder (for a revolver).
2. **CHAMBERING:** The round, held in place by the extractor on a semi-automatic, is pushed into the chamber. Revolver ammunition is rotated into place by the movement of the cylinder.
3. **LOCKING:** In this step, the breech (rear part of the barrel where the cartridge is inserted) must close completely so the major mechanical parts in the firearm align to ensure that the gun will fire properly.
4. **FIRING:** The trigger press causes the firing pin or striker to hit the primer. A spark causes ignition of the powder/propellant within the cartridge. The powder burns rapidly, which increases pressure (gas expansion) and propels the bullet down the bore.
5. **UNLOCKING:** In a semi-automatic pistol, the gas expansion causes a rearward movement of the slide. In a revolver, the shooter manually performs the unlocking.
6. **EXTRACTION:** Backward motion of the slide in a semi-automatic causes the extractor to "pull" the empty case out of the chamber. (The user manually performs this action in a revolver by using the cylinder release to expose spent cases.)
7. **EJECTION:** Prior to the termination of backward movement of the slide, the empty case being pulled by the extractor comes in contact with the ejector, which "pushes" the case through the ejection port. (The operator manually performs this action in a revolver by using the ejector rod to remove empty cases.)

8 **COCKING:** During the backward movement of the slide (while extraction/ejection is taking place), the hammer or striker is readied to start the cycle of operation again. The shooter manually performs this action in a revolver. (Note: In double-action and double-action/single-action guns, cocking and firing are incorporated into the action of the trigger press.)

If you prefer a more simplified, easy-to-remember way to think about how a gun works, remember this: STRIKE, IGNITE, EXPAND, PROPEL.

- The pin **STRIKES** the primer.
- The spark **IGNITES** the powder.
- The gas **EXPANDS** inside the barrel.
- The pressure **PROPELS** the bullet out of the gun.

* Faster than the eye can see, a semi-automatic handgun will cycle through the eight steps: feeding, chambering, locking, firing, unlocking, extraction, ejection and cocking.

## COMMON MALFUNCTIONS

With all those mechanical pieces moving and small explosions happening, it's no wonder that something might not work properly during a firearm's cycle of operation. Just like with any other tool, malfunctions do occur with guns. Of course, not all of these malfunctions are created equally. Some problems are minor and simple to fix. Others may be pretty challenging and may require some serious work (or even the help of a gunsmith) so damage does not occur to the gun or to the people around it.

We typically recognize two main categories of firearms malfunctions, with several subcategories within each. These two categories include ammunition malfunctions and mechanical malfunctions.

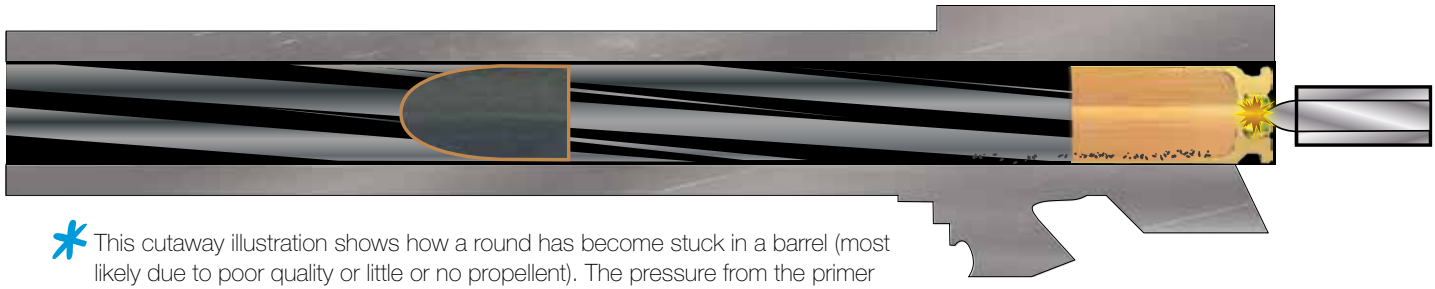
* On this misfired round, an indentation from the firing pin is clearly seen on the primer, yet the bullet is still firmly seated in the case.

## Ammunition Malfunctions

Just as the name suggests, an ammunition malfunction occurs when the ammo doesn't work as expected. For this reason, it is highly recommended that you purchase quality ammunition, store it in a cool, dry place and use it properly and in a timely manner.

Within this category, there are a few subcategories:

- **HANGFIRE:** This is also called a "delayed discharge." A hangfire occurs when there is an unexpected delay between when the trigger is pressed and when the gun actually fires. A hangfire may happen if the ammunition has been stored improperly or kept for a long period of time. Because the bullet does eventually leave the gun, there are no steps for clearing this malfunction. If a hangfire occurs, check any remaining ammo from the same box or batch; it may all be bad.
- **MISFIRE:** With this malfunction, the trigger is pressed but nothing happens. You hear a "click" of the trigger press and nothing else. The primer or the propellant doesn't work. If you have a misfire, the standard procedure is to keep the firearm pointed in a safe direction and wait for 30 to 60 seconds, just to be sure it is not a hangfire. If the gun doesn't fire after this time, then it might be because of a bad cartridge. In this situation, the procedure to clear the malfunction is to rack the slide, eject the bad round and dispose of it properly. (As with the hangfire, you may also want to check to see if there are more bad rounds from this same box or batch of ammo.)
- **SQUIB LOAD:** A squib is considered to be one of the most challenging ammunition malfunctions, often because the shooter does not recognize the problem and/or because the bullet becomes lodged in the barrel. A squib load is often caused by poor quality or insufficient propellant, so there is not enough force to push the bullet out of the barrel. Many shooters describe the sound of this malfunction as a "pop" instead of a "bang," and, of course, there is less or no recoil and muzzle flash. A squib can cause an extremely dangerous situation if the stuck bullet is not removed. If another round is fired, the bullet will impact the one stuck inside and may cause the weapon to explode. The proper way to deal with a squib is to keep the gun in a safe direction and remove all sources of ammo, field-strip the firearm and then take a wooden dowel or cleaning tool and push the projectile out. If this does not work, or if you are not comfortable doing this, ask for assistance.



* This cutaway illustration shows how a round has become stuck in a barrel (most likely due to poor quality or little or no propellent). The pressure from the primer is often enough to move the bullet from the case but usually not enough to push the bullet out of the barrel, and a squib load results.

# CLEANING TIPS

Taking the time to clean isn't at the top of my favorite-things-to-do list. But I know it's a task that must be done — whether it's cleaning the refrigerator, my teenager's closet, the trunk of my car, the kids themselves or my firearms.

Technically, handguns should be cleaned and lubricated as soon as possible after being used if they are going to be stored and put away. And they should be cleaned regularly if they are shot often. Defensive firearms and your everyday carry guns should follow a strict cleaning routine as well. This includes cleaning them immediately after hitting the range, storing them clean and also checking them about once a month for any build-up or problems.

Check the owner's manual before cleaning any firearm. They're all a little different. So be sure to understand your pistol and the tools needed for disassembly and reassembly, and look for instructions and tips regarding how and where to clean and lube your gun. A little planning and knowledge can help you avoid damaging the gun … or yourself. This will help prevent leaving key sections unlubricated, losing a tool or part or launching a spring into the unknown.

Here are some basic steps to follow:

1. Before you begin, be sure to check (and double-check) each gun to ensure that it is empty and clear — and always pointed in the safest direction. (IMPORTANT: NO AMMO ALLOWED in the same room while you are working on any firearms.)
2. Prepare the area; be sure to have a clear work space and good ventilation.
3. Field-strip your semi-automatic pistol to its basic components (typically frame, magazine, slide, barrel, recoil spring and guide rod). If you're cleaning a revolver, press the cylinder release and swing it open.
4. Use cleaner/degreaser/bore cleaner to remove as much of the carbon deposits as possible from the slide, barrel, frame, cylinder, chambers, etc. (Test a small area with your intended cleaner to make sure it's safe for your firearm's finish.)
5. Clean, scrub and wipe components clean (using rags, patches, toothbrushes, bore brushes, bore snakes, etc.) Don't leave any oily residue inside the barrel or chambers.
6. Lightly apply lubricant (check your manual to verify, but usually you should apply to the "moving pieces" — where parts rub together and cause the most friction and wear).
7. Reassemble your pistol, then cycle the slide a few times (wipe off any excess product).
8. Optional: Apply a light coat of oil to the gun to protect the finish. Also, apply a light coat inside the barrel if you intend to store it. (This helps to prevent corrosion, but be sure to remove the excess oil before you shoot your gun again.)
9. Not optional: Sit back and enjoy the fruits of your labor: a clean firearm!

## Mechanical Malfunctions

Mechanical malfunctions occur when there is a problem with the gun's mechanisms, causing it to disrupt the cycle of operation and function improperly. Mechanical malfunctions can be caused by a variety of issues, such as dirt and rust, damage to parts, poor maintenance, lack of lubrication, bad design, etc. In this case, it's important to remember to take care of your firearm and follow the steps in your manual to keep your gun in good shape.

Some of the subcategories include:

- **FAILURE TO FEED:** Failure to feed occurs when a round does not properly load into the chamber due to a mechanical problem. This can happen for a variety of reasons, such as the magazine wasn't properly seated (inserted into the firearm), the shooter didn't properly manipulate the slide, or there are damaged parts or debris in the firearm that caused it not to feed the ammo properly.
- **FAILURE TO EJECT:** With this malfunction, the round was fired, but due to some mechanical problem (or possibly due to a weak or improper grip), the empty case could not be ejected out of the gun properly. Sometimes this can cause what is referred to as a stovepipe jam (because the case sticks straight up), or sometimes the case may be lodged in the chamber.
- **FAILURE TO EXTRACT:** This means the fired cartridge case could not be extracted properly and, as a result, a second cartridge is loaded into the chamber without the first one being removed from it. This can result in a double feed.

## How to Avoid Malfunctions

Whether you're dealing with ammunition malfunctions or mechanical malfunctions, you can take a few steps to avoid these problems:

- Buy quality ammunition from reliable sources.
- Store ammunition properly and use it in a timely manner.
- If you reload your own ammunition, confirm that all your rounds are consistent.
- Use quality, brand-name magazines and replace old/worn ones.
- Insert the magazine into your handgun firmly and be sure it is properly seated.
- When racking or releasing the slide, do NOT hang on to it or "ride" it forward. Firmly pull the slide back all the way and then quickly let it go.
- When shooting, use and maintain a proper grip.
- Be sure to maintain and clean your firearm.

* Nearly every firearm type and caliber can be cleaned with the Otis Cleaning Kit — from a .22-caliber handgun to a 12-gauge shotgun. Properly cleaning and lubricating your firearm after each use will maintain its value and ensure that it works when you need it.

## How to Clear Malfunctions

Now that we've talked about the problems that can occur and how to avoid them, the next logical step is to share the solutions. With a revolver, one of the biggest advantages is that most malfunctions can be solved by simply pressing the trigger again. Your trigger press will revolve the cylinder and (hopefully) allow another round to fire. The struggle with a semi-automatic is that a malfunctioning cartridge may be blocking the next cartridge, so you have to know how to clear the malfunction so you can continue shooting.

Your first response if you hear a "click" and not a "bang" should be to **slap, rack and roll**. This should clear most misfires and failures to eject. (By the way, people call this technique a lot of different things, so if you hear "tap, rack, bang," or "slap, rack, assess," or "tap, rack, ready," it's the same idea.)

1. Firmly **SLAP** or tap the bottom of the magazine with your palm to be sure it's seated properly. (Many malfunctions in semi-autos actually come from a magazine not being fully inserted and dropping out of battery. If this is the case, a good, stiff rap at the bottom can clear it up right away.)
2. **RACK** the slide to eject the problem round and/or to chamber a fresh round. (Your round may not have ejected fully or properly, and cycling that action firmly can get it out of the way.)
3. While racking, **ROLL** the gun on its side approximately 90 degrees to help remove the problem round, if necessary.
4. Visually check that the slide is in battery and ready to fire again.
5. Continue shooting.

If these steps don't clear the malfunction, try the following to solve what might be a double feed. This clearance procedure can be summarized as **unload, clear, reload**.

1. Remove the magazine from the grip (note that it may be stuck and may require more than just the pressing of the magazine release; in other words, you may have to yank that magazine out).
2. Lock the slide back to the rear. (In some situations, it's better to lock the slide back first in order to take some of the pressure off and remove the magazine more easily.)
3. Let gravity help clear any loose rounds or cases from the gun, or carefully remove the problem rounds or cases with your fingers.
4. Rack the slide three times to be sure it's clear.
5. Visually check to make sure the firearm is clear and free of blockage. If it's still blocked, do NOT attempt to fire.
6. If the gun is clear, insert a fresh magazine.
7. Rack or release the slide to chamber a fresh round.
8. Continue shooting.

At the very least, remember that the end goal for any of these techniques is to ensure that your gun is safe to use. If you encounter a malfunction that you cannot clear, do NOT try to use your firearm. Ask for help or advice from a range safety officer, another competent shooter or a gunsmith. And, as always, remember to keep your gun pointed in the safest direction at all times — with your finger off the trigger.

## SLAP

Firmly **SLAP** or tap the bottom of the magazine with your palm to be sure it's seated properly. (Many malfunctions in semi-autos actually come from a magazine not being fully inserted and dropping out of battery. If this is the case, a good, stiff rap at the bottom can clear it up right away.)

## RACK

**RACK** the slide to eject the problem round and/or to chamber a fresh round. (Your round may not have ejected fully or properly, and cycling that action firmly can get it out of the way.)

## ROLL

While racking, **ROLL** the gun on its side approximately 90 degrees to help remove the problem round, if necessary. Visually check that the slide is in battery and ready to fire again, then continue shooting.

# HOLSTERS AND CONCEALED CARRY

Just like finding the firearm that fits you best, you'll want to find the holster that works best for you, for your gun and for your lifestyle. But keep in mind that women don't just like options — we need them. In fact, you probably won't find one magic holster that works for every item in your wardrobe, every weather condition and every activity or event. So your goal may be to narrow down the possibilities to the two or three holsters that you like the best and to train and become competent in the techniques and methods required to use them effectively.

For the purpose of this class, we'll cover some of the most popular locations and options for women to carry a personal-defense handgun, and we'll also discuss what you need to think about and look for when you select a holster (or two). Just like with the topic of choosing the gun that's right for you, we could use up a whole class to discuss concealed carry for women. So consider this to be some of the important introductory information you need to get started.

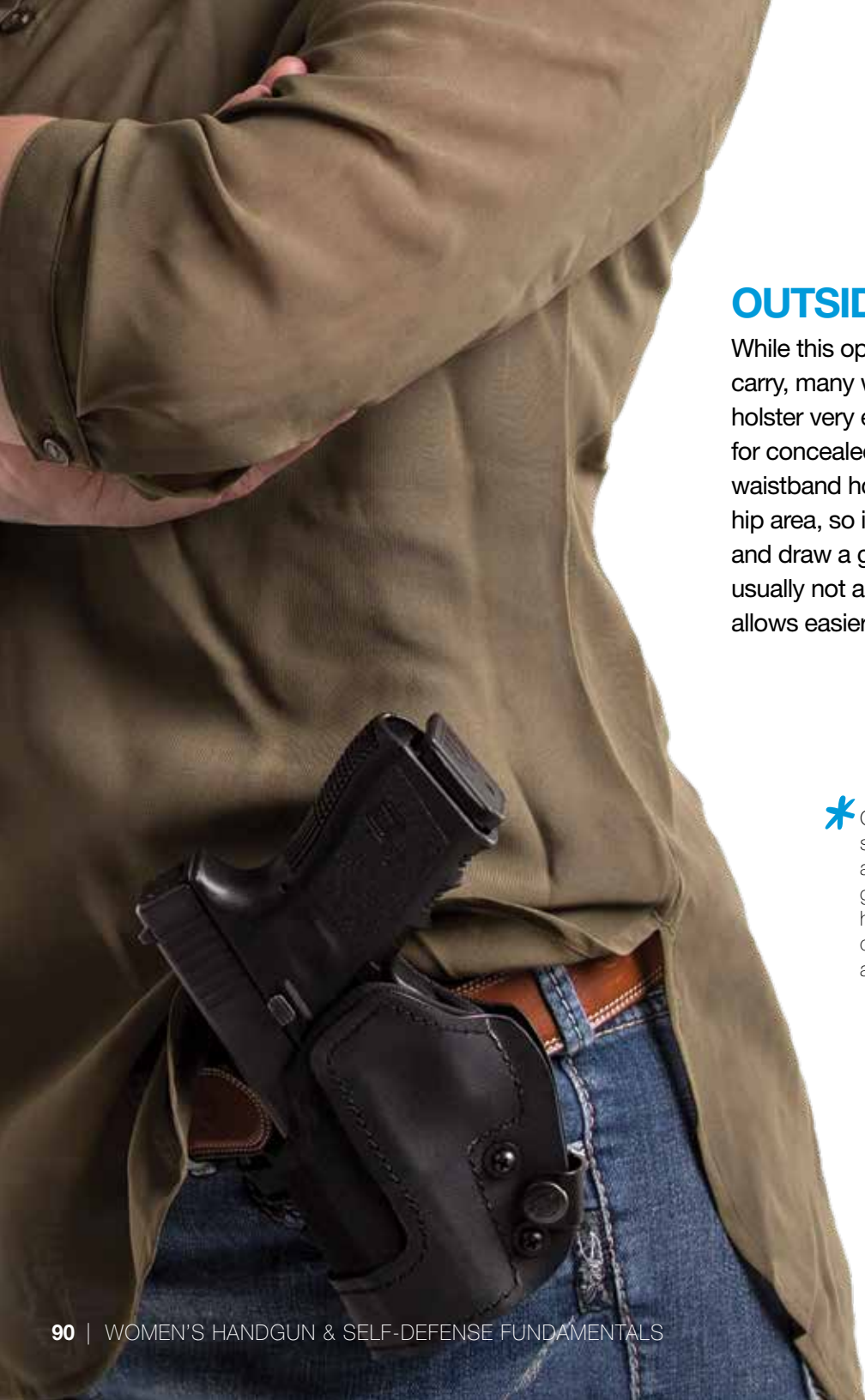
There are a lot of effective, comfortable and even fashionable holster options available, but with each selection comes some advantages, some disadvantages and everything else in between. Weigh the carry locations carefully. Think them through. Some options may sound perfectly feasible, while others feel downright questionable. As with choosing a firearm, your personal preferences and lifestyle choices need to be considered to determine which holster works best for you.

## INSIDE THE HIP OR WAIST

It's not surprising that the most popular concealment option among women is to carry their personal-protection firearm around the waist or hip area. It's a fairly natural place to hold and draw a gun, and it's often the safest and easiest location to reach. The numerous holster options that work in this location fit a wide variety of body types and gun types and may be able to be used in multiple positions (simply by turning or shifting the holster around where it fits best or attaching it to the spot on your body that is most comfortable and effective). Most people highly recommend finding something that works in this area of your body.

## CONCEALED CARRY BAG

Concealed carry bags of all shapes and sizes are a very popular holster option for women, and they likely aren't going to go away, despite their shortcomings. For many women, a concealed carry bag is a convenient, safe and simple choice. The features for these holsters vary greatly by manufacturer, so be sure to test out your selection to make sure it addresses your concealed carry needs. While a bag is a very fashionable and common concealment choice, you should complete an honest assessment of your personal habits prior to making this off-body selection to confirm that you will never lose immediate control of your bag or your firearm.



## OUTSIDE THE WAISTBAND

While this option may be more typical for open carry, many women find an outside-the-waistband holster very effective, simple and comfortable for concealed carry as well. An outside-the-waistband holster is still located around the waist/hip area, so it's a natural and simple place to hold and draw a gun. Since clothing and outerwear are usually not as much of a hindrance, this option allows easier access for a fast and efficient draw.

* Carrying outside of the waistband is not synonymous with open carry since the holster and firearm can be concealed with an outer garment. Although an inside-the-waistband holster is considered easier to conceal, an outside-the-waistband holster can offer easier access to the firearm.

* Carrying a firearm on the hip, outside of the waistband, doesn't mean that little hands can get access to the firearm easily. Many holsters, including the one shown on this page, effectively lock the gun in the holster — either through a top strap or a locking button that must be disengaged before the firearm can be drawn from the holster. In addition, like all good holsters, the one shown to the right and on the opposite page completely cover the trigger and trigger guard, ensuring there is no chance of the trigger being pressed while the gun remains in the holster.

## LEG (THIGH OR ANKLE)

While not an overly popular concealed carry option, a thigh or ankle holster can solve some big concealment issues, especially for a woman who wants to wear a skirt or a dress and still carry her firearm on her body every day. That said, the clothing options that work with this type of rig are somewhat limited. You'll have to pay close attention to the holster's functionality/retention and be sure to consider how to best access the gun if it's ever needed.

## BRA OR UNDERARM

Shoulder-holster rigs, concealed carry shirts, bra holsters and underarm holsters may not be the first choice for many women, but these locations and holster types can offer benefits that other holsters may not. They often allow a user easy access to her firearm while seated, and they usually conceal very well. But as with many other options, certain clothing styles and types need to be considered for effective and safe everyday carry.

* While not the most practical of all holsters, a thigh holster may be the only option when you're armed and wearing a dress or skirt.

## JUST THE FACTS, MA'AM

With holster options and locations in mind, it's time to start researching and shopping. Here are five tips to help narrow down the possibilities while keeping your holster **FACTS** straight:

### F FUNCTIONALITY

No, the "F" doesn't stand for fashion! While a trendy look or a unique style is certainly noteworthy to most women, it is imperative to focus on the functionality of the holster. Ask yourself: What, exactly, is this holster designed to do? How does it work? Where does it go? Will it work for my body type? How is it used? Does the gun just slide into the holster, held in place by friction and gravity? Does it use a strap or button to secure the firearm? Remember that some holsters will be crafted or molded for your specific firearm. Others are interchangeable. And some will fit a wide variety of guns. Most importantly, ask yourself if you like the holster's particular features and functions. Don't select something that feels difficult or strange. Go with what works best for your specific needs and lifestyle.

### A ACCESSIBILITY

Your holster is not going to do you much good if you have to go through some complicated motions or awkward contortions to get to it. Keep in mind how easily you can reach — and unholster — your firearm and be aware of any little tricks or steps that are necessary (with your clothing or with the holster itself) before you can access your gun. These extra tasks take time, and when you are in a self-defense situation, every second counts. Of course, you don't want your firearm to be within easy grasp of little hands or unauthorized users either. Find a good balance between the two extremes, then be sure to practice drawing your unloaded gun from concealment so you can work out all your questions and overcome any difficulties ahead of time.

### C COMFORT

The "C" in FACTS stands for comfort because this is unquestionably a major factor when choosing a holster. If you aren't going to wear a holster every day because it happens to be itchy, pinchy, heavy, too tight or too loose, then that's definitely not the best option for you. If you're constantly pulling or tugging at a holster or attracting unnecessary attention to it, move along. But if you have to make some compromises with your holster, make some compromises in the "comfort" area. You may feel odd or uncomfortable at first, but wearing the holster will become more natural. So find something that disappears into your wardrobe and fades into the back of your mind. And keep in mind the clever notion that carrying a concealed firearm is not meant to be comfortable … it's meant to be comforting.

### T TOUGHNESS

A lot of holster options that are specifically designed for women are constructed of more feminine fabrics. You don't want any overly delicate styles falling apart because of constant use or wearing down because of weekly trips through the wash cycle. From elastic and lace to thermoplastics and leather, look for strong materials and well-constructed stitches and/or components. Make sure that your gun is always snug and secure and not on the verge of falling out. When it

comes to totes, purses or other concealed carry bags, be certain that the handles, straps and closures are sturdy, reliable and long-lasting. Just be sure to check for wear and tear on whatever holster you select. It's definitely worth the money to buy a new holster and not place your hope in something that's worn out or broken down.

## S SAFETY

Technically, this piece of advice should come first in the list, but that would mess up the FACTS acronym. So, just think of this as saving the best tip for last. Above all, your holster option for day-to-day concealed carry needs to be safe and needs to keep your firearm safely secured — *at all times*. If it rolls, moves, falls or fails, it's time to look at something else. Additionally, your holster selection needs to completely cover the trigger and the entire trigger guard area. It also needs to be something that you can effectively wear and proficiently draw from without causing any injury to yourself or innocent bystanders. Remember, the four basic gun safety rules must always be in play, no matter if your firearm is in your hand or in your holster.

* From elastic and lace to thermoplastics and leather, look for strong materials and well-constructed stitches and/or components.

# ESTABLISHING BOUNDARIES

One of the most important things that anyone can do to ensure her safety is to establish personal boundaries and use situational awareness. This involves consciously, deliberately and actively making decisions and purposefully moving about through daily events and activities.

Of course, it's almost impossible to talk about personal boundaries and situational awareness without mentioning Colonel Jeff Cooper's Color Codes of Awareness. Col. Cooper, respectfully known as "the father of modern pistolcraft," took the military's codes and tweaked them so they could easily be adapted to regular folks in their everyday lives. Here's what the Color Codes mean and how they can apply to *your* world.

## WHITE: UNAWARE

- Look around you. You may discover that most everyone is living life in Condition White: unaware, distracted, preoccupied and oblivious. Think a minute about how dangerous this is. A person who is glued to his or her smartphone has no clue what's going on outside of that small area of focus. Someone meaning to do harm looks for this exact kind of person. Criminals don't want a challenge; they want easy prey. And what's easier than attacking a man, woman or child who is completely absorbed in a technological haze of games, emails, texts or social media?

- Condition White can be very dangerous. It means that you are not paying attention to people, things or situations around you. If that's the case, you could miss a whole lot of cues or clues that bad things are about to happen. Condition White is really only appropriate when you are asleep. Even when you are "safe" in your own home, that's not an automatic, turn-off-the-brain mode. Condition White is a condition of heedlessness. It's the "I-never-thought-it-could-happen-to-me" mindset that we want to prevent. Don't be the heedless, preoccupied daydreamer who welcomes criminals to attack because you are always unaware.

**UNAWARE**
This individual is preoccupied with her smartphone and is *completely* unaware of her surroundings.

# YELLOW: RELAXED STATE OF AWARENESS

● You should make the conscious decision and effort to always be in Condition Yellow, especially if you choose to carry a firearm. So what is Condition Yellow? Condition Yellow simply means that you are consciously aware of what's going on in your immediate area. This is not paranoia; it's preparedness. It means using common sense and paying attention. Think about moving around through life in your imaginary bubble. What's inside your bubble? Are there people in the bubble who are too close to you? Is there anything or anyone that seems out of place? If so, remedy those things!

● Condition Yellow has been described by well-known trainer Massad Ayoob as a "state of relaxed alertness." You're not darting your eyes around and cowering or crouching behind every corner. But you are taking notice of everything — and everyone — in your environment. You're not allowing anything to take you by surprise. You may be looking around, playing the "What if?" game, keeping your mind alert and considering the possibilities. You are also aware of possible exits and escape routes. Your demeanor, actions and behaviors communicate alert and assertive attention. This may be evident, specifically, in a confident, meaningful walk and in a casual (but observant) eye contact with those in your area.

***A RELAXED STATE OF AWARENESS**
This individual is consciously aware of her surroundings and anyone within an imaginary bubble surrounding her and her vehicle. She makes eye contact with anyone approaching her to let him or her know, "I see you."

## ORANGE: HEIGHTENED AWARENESS

● Condition Orange is an alert phase. Something is not right, and you've noticed it. You may have gotten a chill or a flutter in the pit of your stomach. Your heart may be beating faster. There may be a person or people nearby who have made you uncomfortable. Pay attention to that gut feeling. It's often right. This is no longer the "What if?" game; this is reality. You are focused on a situation and formulating a plan. You are trying to recognize and concentrate on the threat. Stay alert and be ready. You may start to think about accessing your firearm. You may have to shout a command, such as "Stay back!" or "Don't move any closer."

● I know that if I have a bad feeling about someone, I'd rather err on the side of caution. If I feel someone is too close, I'll move away and watch what he or she does. If I think someone is following me, I'll change my direction and see if he or she continues to follow. If you feel unsafe at any time, your best bet is to leave. In some situations, that may not be easy or possible. So you may grab your cellphone or your keys … or put a hand on your firearm. You don't have to unholster it or use it. Nine times out of 10, after a few minutes of ready observation, you'll discover that there is no reason for being alarmed by someone's odd behavior, movement or comments, and you can go back to Condition Yellow without escalating to the final condition.

**A HEIGHTENED STATE OF AWARENESS**
This individual is suddenly aware of a possible threat, and she uses both body lanquage and verbal commands to tell the threat, "Stay back!"

## RED: ACTION

Condition Red is a condition of action. If, after assessing a situation, you believe there is an actual threat, you will reach Condition Red. You may not have to use your firearm, but your focus has moved from recognizing the threat to engaging it and stopping it. This could involve anything from moving to cover, unholstering your gun or confronting an attacker. Hopefully you have already thought through and decided what course of action to take, as this is not the time to think; this is the time to act. Your main goals are to keep yourself and anyone with you safe and to STOP THE THREAT.

**ACTION**
In this example, the individual points her firearm at the attacker. She is ready to take whatever action is required to stop the threat.

## SURVIVOR MINDSET

It's important to note that situational awareness is not about superior strength or physical conditioning. Yes, all that can help, but situational awareness is mostly about using all your senses and paying attention to people, places and things around you; identifying potential threats and dangerous situations; and making wise decisions on how to be safe. Ultimately, it's about having the right mindset. Don't be someone who thinks: "I never thought it could happen to me." Be the person who prepares ahead (physically and mentally) and who makes a conscious decision that "it will never happen to me."

One of the first steps to accomplishing this mindset is to simply acknowledge the fact that bad people do exist and bad things could happen. I don't have to tell you that our world is flawed (and that the people in it are often worse). People may be known to do outstanding acts of self-sacrifice and love, but people are also capable of terrible horrors. Just because our circle of friends and family has never experienced an attack or assault doesn't mean it could never happen.

Another important step is to recognize that YOU are responsible for your own safety. We can't always depend on others, like family members or law enforcement officers, to watch out for us. As I mentioned, it's not about paranoia; it's about preparedness. It's about living your life with determination, purpose and resilience. If you can make that decision every day, then you are ahead of the game — and you are making yourself into someone bad guys won't want to target.

### Be the "Wrong" Person

If you are paying attention — using good situational awareness, establishing personal boundaries and living in Condition Yellow — and if you have the right mindset in your everyday life, then you have a better chance of presenting yourself as the "wrong" person. Who is the wrong person? She's the woman a stalker, attacker or criminal does not want to mess with because she is too alert and aware of her surroundings and because she appears to be prepared and ready. She's *you*.

Just like the NRA's "Refuse To Be A Victim" program teaches, one of the most important steps toward ensuring your personal safety is making the conscious decision to refuse to be a victim. You stand a much better chance of preventing criminal attack if you develop a safety plan right now — *before* you ever need it. So I encourage you to choose right this moment to be the wrong person.

Along with that, I hereby give you permission to be mean, nasty, brutal and unrelenting. That's right! You heard me! If someone is making you uncomfortable, treating you poorly or threatening to hurt you, you do not have to use good manners, treat them kindly or worry about their expectations for you or their perceptions of you. No one ever thinks she will find herself in a life-or-death struggle, but just in case … please make sure you have already made the decision to throw all niceties aside, to do whatever it takes and to give it everything you have to survive.

* Carrying a firearm and making eye contact with those around you doesn't mean you're looking for a fight; it means you want to avoid one.

## SHOOTING FUNDAMENTALS REVIEW

Just as a quick review, we learned in *Women's Basic Pistol* that there are seven basic shooting fundamentals. These are the important steps or building blocks that we need to focus on and use for effective training and practice. And while there is a "right" way to present each one of these skills, there are also some modifications or alterations that each one of us can make based on elements like skill level, strength, preferences, limitations, and even firearms selection. (And, yes, there are some important modifications to make between shooting revolvers and semi-automatic pistols!) Just remember: As long as you are safe and proficient in your shooting, we won't tell you you're doing it wrong. Rather, we may add helpful suggestions or ideas for improvement or for consideration.

* While you do not want to wrap the support thumb around the back of a semi-automatic, that is a perfectly acceptable grip when firing a revolver since you do not want your fingers or thumbs to interfere with the rotation of the cylinder.

The seven shooting fundamentals include the following:

1. **STANCE:** Remember that a good stance will be the platform for your shooting. You should be firm and steady but also comfortable, and that is a unique balance that will be all your own. We recommend the isosceles stance since it closely mimics what the body does when reacting to stressful situations. But you may modify this stance for your own needs and preferences. Just do NOT lean back while you shoot.
2. **GRIP:** In *Women's Basic Pistol*, we covered the proper grip when using a semi-automatic, but this grip will be slightly modified when shooting a revolver. Since you do not want your fingers near any moving parts, you will need to grip a revolver with your thumbs further back or even crossed over one another at the grip so that your fingers and thumbs do not interfere with the rotation of the cylinder.
3. **SIGHT ALIGNMENT:** The sights may be completely different from one gun to another, but the concept is the same. Line up the front sight in the middle of the rear sights so they're even across the top and even in between (think "equal height and equal light").
4. **SIGHT PICTURE:** If possible, sight picture should always focus on the front sight, no matter what kind of handgun you are shooting. In a defensive situation, this may not be an option, but whenever you are training, remember to have a blurry target, blurry rear sights and a sharply focused front sight.
5. **TRIGGER MANIPULATION:** Isolating your trigger finger and remembering to press it slowly and smoothly all the way rearward without adding movement to the gun is always the overriding goal. Sometimes the trigger pull may be a bit "heavier" or more difficult though, especially with a firearm that's double-action. Just don't struggle with the trigger or force it. You may have to adjust your grip a little and really focus on that trigger press!
6. **BREATHING:** In most cases, just remember to breathe as you normally would. Don't get too distracted by techniques or too caught up with breathing. Unless you are working on precision shots at a distance, normal breathing should suffice.
7. **FOLLOW-THROUGH:** A good follow-through mostly involves being ready with sights on target as soon as you've completed a shot and assessing what you've done right or wrong or what still needs to be accomplished.

## GAP Method

For shooters who are comfortable with the fundamentals, here is a quick and easy way to remember the important steps as you are shooting. It's called the **GAP** method. Just remember **G** for Grip; **A** for Aim; and **P** for Press. If you can tell yourself these three things as you are getting ready to fire, you will cover the most important elements of good shooting: getting a correct and firm grip on your gun, aiming properly with sight alignment and sight picture, and pressing the trigger so as not to add any additional movement to the gun.

Give this method a try next time you shoot, especially if you find yourself struggling. Take a few moments to tell yourself: "Grip. Aim. Press." Say it out loud if you have to! See if this helpful mantra enables you to better focus on and improve your shooting skills.

# PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

It's time to step up our training a bit and get away from some of the bad habits we may fall into when we're static shooting at the range. The following drills are designed to apply some of the things we've mentioned in class and to build on your basic skills but also to get you to think about some of the more difficult challenges and obstacles you might face, especially in defensive situations.

Marksmanship is definitely important. We want to accurately and consistently hit our target. But we also need to think about defensive shooting and how these skills translate into life-or-death situations. That's why standing still and shooting one round at a paper target may not be the best way to train. We need to mix things up and add some layers of difficulty so we can better prepare both mentally and physically.

## LOADING AND UNLOADING

Let's start with two basic skills you need to be able to do without much thought: load and unload your gun. In the classroom, we will load and unload dummy rounds (or snap caps) instead of live ammunition first. Then we will load live rounds when we are on the shooting range. Be sure to load and unload both a semi-automatic pistol and a revolver, no matter which gun you have or which gun you prefer. You need to be familiar with how both types of firearms work.

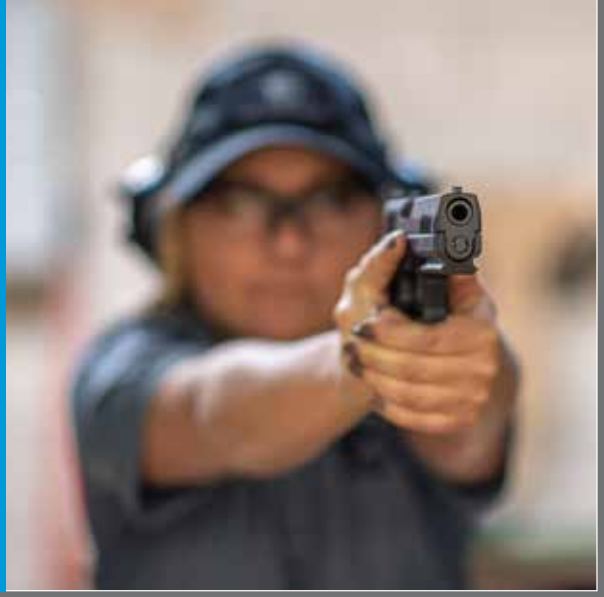
### Loading a Semi-Automatic

Loading a semi-automatic pistol involves loading rounds of the correct ammunition into the gun's magazine first (which we covered in *Women's Basic Pistol*) and then inserting the magazine and properly seating it in the magazine well, which is typically in the grip of the gun. This is accomplished by holding the magazine in the non-dominant hand, lining it up with the magazine well and pushing it into the magwell with enough force that it securely clicks into place. Then, rack the slide or close the slide (depending on if it's in a locked-back "baby bird" position or if it's completely closed). Don't forget to perform these tasks in your "work space," which is typically close to your body and somewhere between your abdomen and your eyebrows (as if you were applauding).

### Unloading a Semi-Automatic

As outlined in *Women's Basic Pistol*, to unload a semi-auto, first press the magazine release to "drop" or remove the magazine. Next, use your non-dominant hand to pull back the slide while you use your thumb on your shooting hand to lock the slide

# RANGE COMMANDS



Besides the four universal gun safety rules, there are often some rules that are specific to various shooting ranges. So you'll have to pay attention to what is allowed or not allowed wherever you are shooting. In addition, there are some basic range commands that will help you have a safe and successful training time. These are not suggestions; these are commands, and you will probably hear most of these whenever and wherever you train.

- **"THE RANGE IS COLD."** A cold range means that no one is accessing firearms. A cold range is typically a time when people are going downrange to check or change targets. So when the range is cold, you are not touching guns, clearing malfunctions or even putting guns away. All firearms are to remain untouched.

- **"THE RANGE IS HOT!"** A hot range means you can access and use your firearm. This is a time for loading magazines, getting your gun ready and, of course, shooting.

- **"CEASE FIRE!"** A cease-fire command may be given by ANYONE on the range at any time, and its purpose is to immediately stop all shooting. The command is usually said multiple times in a loud voice. If you hear the cease-fire command, stop firing IMMEDIATELY, holster or put down your gun and stay that way until someone tells you what to do. There may be a problem with the firing line or with the targets, or there may be an emergency or an issue that needs to be addressed. Whatever it is, something has happened and all shooting needs to stop.

- **"MUZZLE!"** This is more of a warning, but this command means you need to immediately check that you have your gun in a safe direction because you have swept (or are about to sweep) the muzzle of your firearm across a part of your body or another shooter or have it pointed in a direction where it should not be.

- **"LOAD AND MAKE READY."** This command means that you can load your magazine into your semi-auto or close your loaded cylinder. When you follow this command, your weapon should be loaded and ready to fire, with the safety engaged.

- **"SHOOTER READY?"** The instructor or range safety officer directs this to shooters to check if all is well. If you are NOT ready to participate (something didn't load right, something feels wrong, etc.), this is your chance to tell say "No," explain the issue, get assistance, etc. Do not begin shooting just because everyone else does; make sure you are truly ready.

- **"COMMENCE FIRE."** Begin shooting. (DO NOT PRESS THE TRIGGER UNTIL THIS COMMAND IS GIVEN!)

- **"UNLOAD AND SHOW CLEAR."** This command means that you need to unload your firearm. For a semi-automatic pistol, drop the magazine, lock the slide back, hold the gun in your dominant hand and the magazine in your support hand and hold them next to each other so the instructor or range safety officer can clearly see a removed magazine and an empty chamber. For a revolver, swing the cylinder open and remove all cartridges. Hold it so the instructor or range safety officer can clearly see the empty cylinder.

in place with the slide lock/release (or slide stop). It is important that you do these actions in this order to properly unload the firearm. To check that the semi-automatic pistol is clear, always remove the magazine and lock the slide back. Then, with the firearm in a safe direction, look down into the firearm and toward the barrel. Everything should be clear and empty.

## Loading a Revolver

To load a revolver, you need to press or slide the cylinder release and push the cylinder out to expose the individual chambers that hold rounds of ammunition. Slip the middle two fingers of your non-dominant hand through the frame so you can securely hold the gun

and keep the cylinder open. You can then insert one round at a time into each chamber (as shown in the photo above) or use a speedloader or speed strip (see the opposite page for the steps to load a revolver using a speedloader). When every chamber is filled, simply close the cylinder so it snaps into place and wiggle it slightly to be sure it's aligned properly with the barrel.

A speedloader (shown above) or speed strips (shown on the opposite page) can dramatically speed up how quickly you can load a revolver. At the range that may not matter, but in a fight it might.

Hold the revolver in your non-dominant hand and the speedloader in your dominant hand.

Align the rounds in the speedloader with the chambers on the revolver's cylinder and insert them fully. Most speedloaders release the rounds with a slight twist of the knob on top of the speedloader.

## Unloading a Revolver

To unload a revolver, press or slide the cylinder release button and then press the ejection rod to force the empty cases or unused ammo up and out of the cylinder. Gravity can be your friend here, so don't be afraid to tilt the gun up slightly (as long as you keep your fingers away from the muzzle).

To be sure a revolver is clear, rotate the cylinder as necessary to look at each one of the chambers. They should all be empty. Don't forget that when loading and unloading a firearm and checking it is clear, it should always be pointed in the safest direction and your finger should be off the trigger.

(Note: Not all revolvers or semi-automatics will load and unload this way. For this reason, before working with any gun, we highly recommend that you read the manual for specific instructions for your firearm.)

Open the cylinder by pressing the cylinder release button.

While pushing the cylinder release button, swing the cylinder open by pushing it with the fingers on your support hand.

3

Press the ejection rod to force the empty cases or unused ammo up and out of the cylinder. Gravity can be your friend here, so don't be afraid to tilt the gun up slightly (as long as you keep your fingers away from the muzzle).

4

To be sure a revolver is clear, rotate the cylinder as necessary to look at each one of the chambers. They should all be empty. Don't forget that when loading and unloading a firearm and checking it is clear, it should always be pointed in the safest direction and your finger should be off the trigger.

# RELOADING

## Reloading a Semi-Automatic

Reloading involves taking a new, full magazine or new rounds and quickly and efficiently getting them into the firearm. This is very much like loading and unloading, but the goal here is to get this ammunition into the firearm fast. You need to hone this skill for a couple reasons. First, you'll need to reload if you run out of ammunition (in a shooting competition, during training or in a fight for your life). Second, you could reload if you were in a dangerous situation in which you already fired your gun but you had a few moments to insert a full magazine.

To reload a semi-automatic pistol, let go of the gun with your support hand and press the magazine release with the thumb on your shooting hand. You may have to rotate the handgun slightly to release the magazine. (Note: Not all guns work this way. Some have a magazine release located underneath the trigger guard. And if you are a lefty, you may have to improvise which finger to use for the release if the gun is not ambidextrous.) As you do this, bring the firearm into your work space, with the gun tilted just enough so you can see part of the inside of the magazine well. Grab the full magazine with your index finger outstretched along the front side. (This "indexing" technique enables you to ensure the magazine is facing the right way and use your index finger to help "guide" it into the magwell easier.) Line up the magazine and slide it in securely with the palm of your hand and rack the slide, if necessary. Walk through these motions slowly at first. Practice it a few times deliberately like this, then speed up when you are ready.

By the way: It's OK if the empty or used magazine drops to the floor or onto the ground. You can try reloading with retention or reloading a fresh magazine while keeping and stowing the removed magazine. It's a little bit of a juggling act, but it can certainly be done.

And just so you know, you can also practice reloading the magazines into your semi-auto without having to use any ammo or snap caps. This would be a great skill to practice at home. Be sure to keep the gun pointed in the safest direction. Keep your finger off the trigger. And keep ammunition in a separate room.

## Reloading a Revolver

We don't want to ignore revolvers, but I will admit that reloading a revolver quickly can be tricky. There are several different methods that people have adopted or adapted for very specific reasons (e.g. competition or self-defense). Just note that while you can simply open the cylinder, press the ejector rod and then add new rounds one by one, there are tools, such as speedloaders or moon clips, that enable shooters to load their entire cylinders at once (with most modern revolvers).

To reload a revolver, press the cylinder release with the thumb on your shooting hand, then transfer the gun to your support hand as you push the cylinder open with two fingers (as discussed earlier). Tilt the muzzle up so gravity can help while you press the ejector rod to release the empty cases. Then use your dominant hand to load one round at a time or use one of the loading tools that work with your gun to insert the rounds all at once. Finally, close the cylinder.

## MULTIPLE SHOTS

We do ourselves a disservice if we line up a target, take only one shot and then look to see if it was a hit or a miss. Especially when we consider defensive pistol techniques, we never know how many shots it could take to stop a threat. For this reason, it's important to train using more than one shot. We sometimes call this shooting "controlled pairs" if we take two quick, consecutive shots. We also want to be sure we are ready with good follow-through.

Let's practice a few controlled pairs. Load and make ready your firearm. Get in a comfortable stance, with a good grip, and aim at the center of mass on a silhouette target. On the instructor's command or at the sound of a buzzer, take two quick, consecutive shots at the center of mass. You'll probably notice that your second shot is not as easy or as controlled as the first one. Don't be frustrated if that second shot is not lined up perfectly. (In defensive shooting, perfectly lined up pairs aren't necessary; we just want defensively accurate hits on target.) Remember to focus on good shooting fundamentals, especially a firm grip and a good stance, since you are having to steady yourself and readjust after the recoil of the gun.

For now, don't worry too much about speed. Worry about how it feels to take two quick shots while staying on target. As you get better with controlled pairs, you can focus more on speed (as long as safety and accuracy are not suffering). And for more advanced practice, you can start this drill with drawing from a holster.

After you've gotten comfortable with controlled pairs, let's add a third shot. On your silhouette target, take two shots to the body, just like before, and add one shot to the head. Now you're not only having to readjust your second shot after the recoil, you're having to find a whole new target for that third shot. Don't rush this. Line up your sights properly to ensure your bullet goes where you intend. And be sure to press the trigger smoothly, even though the adrenaline is pumping and you're anxiously getting ready for those second and third shots! You don't want to flinch or "anticipate" the recoil. That will pull your shots off target.

Just like before, don't focus too much on how quickly you can accomplish your shots. Get used to the drill first. Practice until you are comfortable and confident — and *then* add more layers of difficulty or challenge (like using a shot timer, increasing the target distance or even using quick, unsighted "hammered pairs") when you are ready.

## MULTIPLE TARGETS

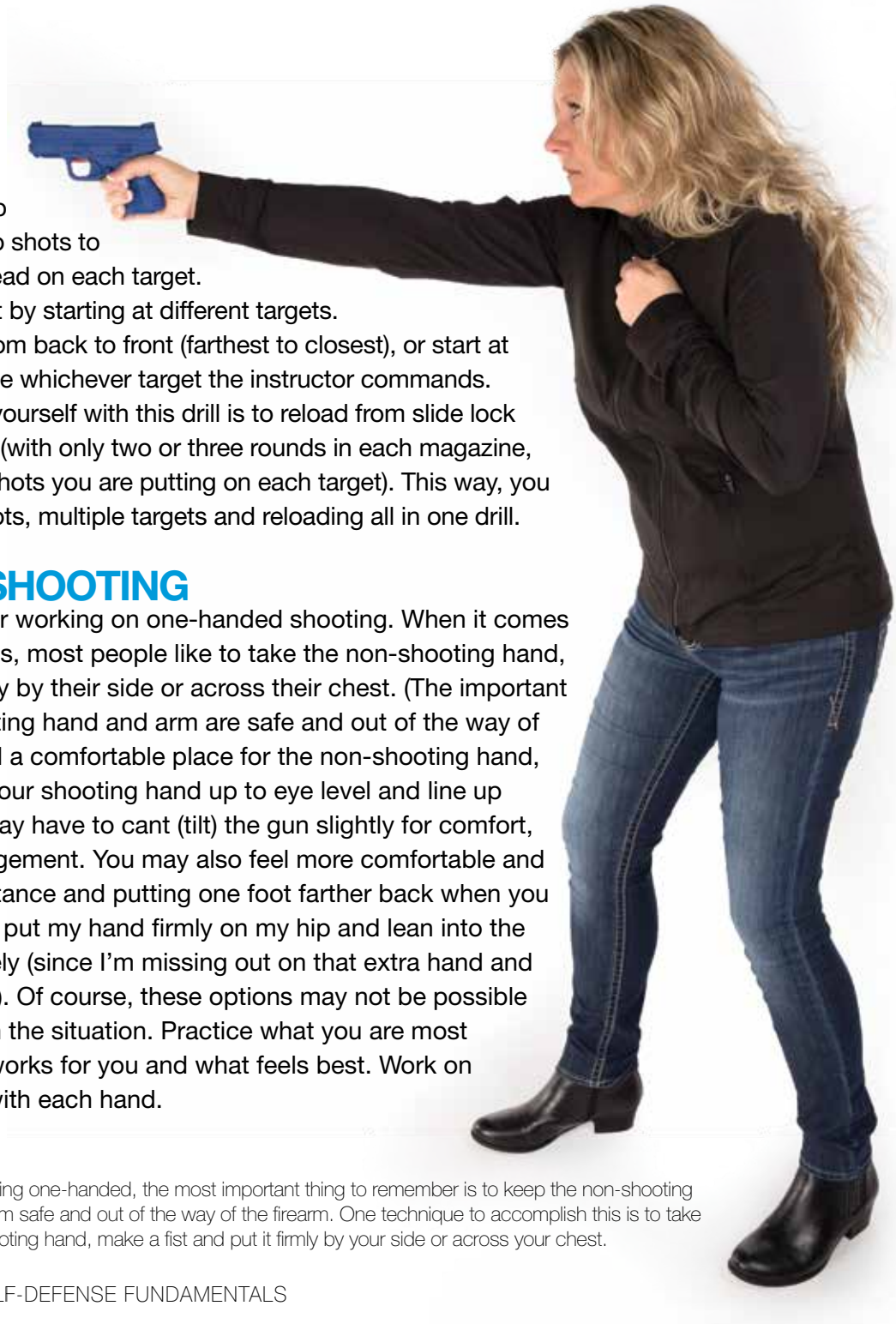
Target transition is another important skill to work on for shooting. Firing at the same piece of paper or steel plate all day does not give you the opportunity to adjust your eyes or your body to different positions and distances.

To work on this important skill, we will set up three silhouette targets at three distances (3, 6 and 9 yards). You will remain standing in one place, but you will have to shift your arms and upper body to engage the different targets. On the instructor's command or at the sound of a buzzer, the shooter will engage the closest target (3 yards), transition to the middle target (6 yards) and end with the farthest target (9 yards). All the fundamentals of shooting are still in play, but you will have to adjust your body and your focus to be able to move from target to target quickly and efficiently.

After practicing this drill a few times, you can add controlled pairs to each target. Then step it up even more by requiring two shots to the body and one to the head on each target. You can mix things up a bit by starting at different targets. Try engaging the targets from back to front (farthest to closest), or start at the middle and then engage whichever target the instructor commands. Another way to challenge yourself with this drill is to reload from slide lock after engaging each target (with only two or three rounds in each magazine, depending on how many shots you are putting on each target). This way, you get to practice multiple shots, multiple targets and reloading all in one drill.

## ONE-HANDED SHOOTING

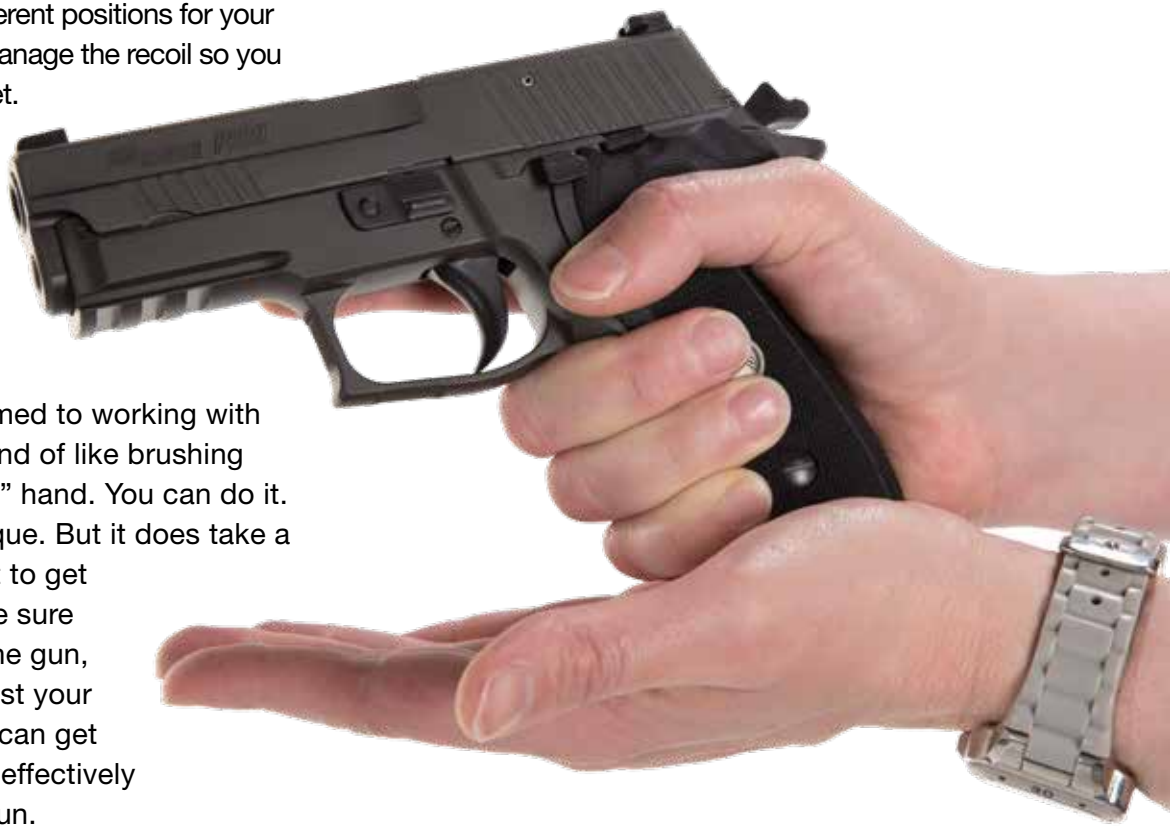
Here's a quick overview for working on one-handed shooting. When it comes to methods and techniques, most people like to take the non-shooting hand, make a fist and put it firmly by their side or across their chest. (The important thing is that the non-shooting hand and arm are safe and out of the way of the firearm.) Once you find a comfortable place for the non-shooting hand, grip the gun firmly, bring your shooting hand up to eye level and line up the sights as usual. You may have to cant (tilt) the gun slightly for comfort, accuracy and recoil management. You may also feel more comfortable and stable by changing your stance and putting one foot farther back when you shoot one-handed. I often put my hand firmly on my hip and lean into the shot a bit more aggressively (since I'm missing out on that extra hand and arm to help with the recoil). Of course, these options may not be possible in "real life," depending on the situation. Practice what you are most comfortable doing, what works for you and what feels best. Work on a firm grip and accuracy with each hand.



* When shooting one-handed, the most important thing to remember is to keep the non-shooting hand and arm safe and out of the way of the firearm. One technique to accomplish this is to take the non-shooting hand, make a fist and put it firmly by your side or across your chest.

For the one-handed drill, start with your dominant hand first and take one shot at the target (paper or steel). Be sure you have a firm grip and readjust as necessary. Continue to shoot slowly and deliberately, and don't be afraid to try different positions for your arms, legs or body to help manage the recoil so you can keep your shots on target.

When you are comfortable, do this same drill with your non-dominant hand. Just be careful. It may feel awkward and take extra focus because your mind and body are not accustomed to working with your "weaker" hand. It's kind of like brushing your teeth with the "wrong" hand. You can do it. It's the same exact technique. But it does take a little more conscious effort to get it done right. As always, be sure you have a good grip on the gun, and don't be afraid to adjust your body or your hand so you can get your firearm on target and effectively manage the recoil of the gun.



* Remember that the first step in clearing a malfunction is to ensure that the magazine is fully seated in the firearm by slapping (or tapping) upward firmly.

## CLEARING MALFUNCTIONS

It's inevitable. If you continue to shoot, you will experience a malfunction … sooner or later. So it's important that we not only address possible problems but that we also practice how to fix them. With a semi-automatic pistol, we will practice the slap, rack and roll and the unload, clear, reload that we learned earlier. To accomplish this without having any real malfunctions to worry about, we will use snap caps or dummy rounds to simulate a malfunction. Sold in sporting-goods stores everywhere as well as online, snap caps are an inexpensive and safe way to practice dry-fire, reloads, malfunctions clearance and other drills. Best of all, you can load them with live ammunition in a magazine and they will chamber just like any other cartridge. Of course, they will not fire or cycle.

First, let's address the slap, rack and roll. While keeping your gun pointed in a safe direction (with your finger off the trigger), slap (or tap) the magazine upward at the bottom to make sure it is seated properly in the firearm. Next, firmly rack the slide to eject the malfunctioning round. When the slide is all the way rearward, let it go forward on its own; do NOT hold onto the slide as it moves forward. As we mentioned before, be sure to roll the firearm to the side at about 90 degrees so the pull of gravity can help strip out the bad round.

Once you are comfortable with the basics, we can speed things up and, when on the shooting range, even add live-fire to the drill. Take two or three dummy rounds and insert them randomly into two identical magazines with three or four live rounds of ammunition, and then conduct a course of fire. When you come across the snap caps, use slap, rack and roll to simulate clearing a malfunction and continue shooting. This will simulate a hangfire, misfire or failure to extract very nicely. (Just don't forget to collect your dummy rounds after the line is clear so you can use them again.)

* The next step is to firmly rack the slide and roll the firearm to the side at about 90 degrees so the pull of gravity can help strip out the bad round. When the slide is all the way to the rear, let it go forward on its own; do NOT hold onto the slide as it moves forward.

As we discussed, sometimes the slap, rack and roll will not work to clear your malfunction, such as with a double feed or a failure to feed. In those cases, we will use the unload, clear, reload technique. To work on this, practice dropping the magazine, locking the slide back, racking the slide firmly three times and inserting a new magazine. As always, be sure to follow the four universal gun safety rules at all times while working on these exercises.

After you have worked on the basic steps of unload, clear, reload, we are going to set this malfunction up in a drill. This can be simulated with the help of an instructor or a safety officer who will lock the slide

back, manually load a snap cap into the chamber, insert a magazine with more snap caps and then ease the slide forward. For the drill, you will have to unload the firearm by releasing the magazine (yank it out if you have to!), lock the slide back, let gravity help the snap cap drop out if it's still there (or remove it manually), rack the slide firmly three times, insert a new magazine (if available), drop or rack the slide to chamber a round and get back to shooting. Remember that if you cannot drop the magazine right away, lock the slide back first and *then* continue the proper steps for clearing the malfunction. (As long as you're on the shooting range, you can also use live ammo for this malfunction drill. Just be very careful to ease the slide forward on the live round so the primer in the chambered round isn't struck with enough force to set it off.)

* Snap caps or dummy rounds mimic the size of actual rounds. They can be used for dry-fire practice off the range or for simulating malfunctions while conducting live-fire drills on the range.

## CONCLUSION

One fascinating thing about learning is that the process constantly shows us how much we do not know. I hope that this thought isn't discouraging to you. Rather, I hope that this motivates you to want to know even more. I know that I feel that way — I have an insatiable desire to discover and practice and learn — even after every time I teach a firearms class! This is a lifelong process that takes time and dedication. But it's certainly worthwhile. You will never lament the preparation and planning it takes to protect yourself and your loved ones.

As I mentioned at the start of this section, going to the range once a month isn't going to cut it. Taking a few firearms classes here and there isn't going to be enough either. And while I do hope that *Women's Intermediate Pistol* has refined and sharpened your skills, what I really hope is that it has gotten you even more excited about your training and even more interested in finding additional practice that can work for you.

Of course, *Women's Defensive Pistol* is right around the corner … but whatever you decide to do, keep it up. And don't give up. Learning to protect yourself is never a skill you'll regret!

# 3 LEVEL **THREE**

# WOMEN'S DEFENSIVE PISTOL

- Introduction
- Mindset
- Avoid, Escape, Defend
- Use of Force
- Be Responsibly Armed
- Cover Versus Concealment
- Voice Commands
- Marksmanship Versus Defensive Shooting
- Drawing Technique
- Drawing From Concealment
- Drawing From a Bag
- Loading and Reloading
- Practice With Purpose
- Armed With Children
- Safety Briefing
- Putting It Into Practice
- Conclusion

Over the years, I've written a handful of posts and columns about my experiences as a competitive shooter. I've tried my hand (and my guns) at various IDPA, USPSA, Steel Challenge and 2- and 3-gun matches, and I was honored and excited to be invited to join the inaugural TWAW Competitive Shooting Team. But here's the thing: I don't like competition. It makes me anxious and uncomfortable. Often, my nerves are so bad that I'll drag my feet and try to come up with any excuse to NOT go to a match. But I know how beneficial this kind of practice and training can be, so I push myself to continue to participate in competitions. And I realize that even though I'm not taking home many trophies or titles, I am getting in valuable practice time, and I am learning something every time I shoot.

But do you want to know what one of the most interesting things about competitive shooting is for me? My husband (who competes with me) often takes photos and videos of my stages. And he loves to point out my facial expressions. Because of how nervous I always get, you'd think that I'd have a furrowed brow, an angry scowl or a painful grimace. But it's actually the complete opposite; I am almost always smiling. Apparently, I'm not only learning when I shoot in stressful but controlled situations, I'm having a blast as well!

I'm fairly certain you'd agree with me that shooting can be a lot of fun. Even for the nervous or the novice, it's very invigorating, motivating and satisfying to put holes in a paper target downrange. And while I certainly don't want to strip any of the enjoyment away, I believe it's very important for us to recognize that there's more to shooting than standing still or hitting steel. Indeed, there's a somber and serious nature to some of the topics we need to cover when we're learning about being safe and responsible with firearms. And as we're improving our skills and

working on fundamentals, it's vital that we think about defensive shooting too.

Defensive shooting requires a different set of techniques and tactics and, of course, a particular mindset. For this, we need to come to terms with the fact that we are learning how to use a tool that may be utilized to save lives. Unfortunately, there's a flip side to that. But always keep in mind that you, your family and your loved ones are worth protecting. And it is your right to do whatever it takes to stop the threat and to make sure that you are safe from a violent attack.

Maybe you're interested in *Women's Defensive Pistol* because you've been through the *Women's Basic Pistol* and *Women's Intermediate Pistol* courses. Perhaps you've been shooting for a while and you're tired of standing still, shooting at paper bullseyes. Or maybe you've realized that the concealed carry lifestyle is something you're willing to commit to — and this is your chance to train with a more defensive outlook. Any of those reasons are to be celebrated.

*Women's Defensive Pistol* will continue to develop and build on fundamental shooting skills. We will add more advanced layers such as drawing and reloading techniques, shooting on the move and using cover. But this course has a slightly different focus, as we will work on developing the right mindset for self-defense with a firearm. We'll look at how we must be prepared physically and mentally. And we will learn the differences between marksmanship and defensive shooting.

The bottom line is that you have chosen to train, to practice, to do more and to learn more. And that is something wonderful. On this journey of safe and responsible gun ownership, it's imperative that you're always challenging yourself and working to advance your skills.

# MINDSET

There's a lot to be said about the power of the right mindset — about positive visualization and planning ahead. I am fascinated by this line of thinking and by this line of study. One of my favorite examples of the power of positive thinking comes from research done in 1989 investigating the effects of mental imagery on free-throw performance for basketball players.

The investigator in this study used a pretest/post-test design consisting of three treatment groups and a control group. A total of 120 subjects were randomly assigned to one of these four groups: 1) Mental Free-Throw Practice; 2) Physical Free-Throw Practice; 3) Combination of Mental and Physical Practice; or 4) No Practice at All.

According to the researcher, "Results demonstrated that the mental-imagery group did improve their free-throw shooting, although it was not statistically significant. However, the combination of physical and mental practice proved to be statistically significant when compared to the control group." This research (along with countless other studies) shows us that mindset makes a big difference. And I think it's pretty impressive to know that you can improve a skill (even shooting baskets or bullets) by practicing physically — *and* mentally!

* In a 1989 study on the effects of mental imagery on free-throw performance, it was demonstrated that mental imagery, combined with physical practice, had a statistically significant benefit when compared to physical practice alone.

Throughout the decades, many theorists have attempted to explain how mindset and visualization affect behavior. One theory, the psychoneuromuscular theory, suggests that vivid imagery actually excites parts of the brain enough to mimic the neuromuscular responses of an actual experience. This means that thinking about or focusing on all the motions of a task is almost as good as actually doing the task. Just consider the ice skater who visualizes her entire routine in her mind before a performance or the pianist who practices a sonatina in his head before a recital. There is ample research (and documentation) that shows that these mental tasks are very beneficial. Imagining yourself doing something now can actually prepare you for doing it later.

That's one reason why the correct mindset for training and for defensive shooting is imperative. If you tell yourself NOW that you can do this — that you will get better, that you will not be a victim, that you will defend yourself and your loved ones, that you will never give up or give in — you are much more likely to do these things in real life.

So how do you prepare yourself? How do you train and get into the right mindset? It may be different for men and women and from person to person, but there's something that occurs — that just clicks in your mind — that enables you to take on a task like defensive handgun training. And there is a host of emotions and thoughts you have to manage, accept or address in order to train effectively. Some of the following steps may sound familiar; hopefully, some of them shed light on getting into the mindset for training.

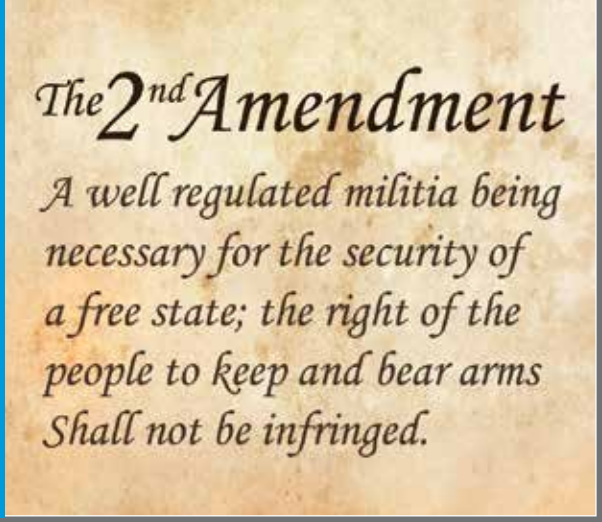
## Focus the Fear

For me, personally, being able to step on the shooting range involves the ability to activate the worst-case-scenario center in my brain (but to do so in the most rational and focused way possible). Most moms and dads can relate to this wearisome segment of a parent's brain. It's the part that causes you to wake every 47 minutes during the night, convinced that your baby has stopped breathing, or to check out the window every two minutes because the bus is late and your first-grader isn't home from school yet. This fear factor is actually a useful tool for marksmanship. Researchers and psychologists have indicated that it's the "good" stress that motivates people to do their best under difficult circumstances. And this fear is what compels us to take a deep breath, use the adrenaline rush and work on this potentially lifesaving skill.

## Embrace the Differences

I'm not afraid to share that sometimes it can be a little awkward when I'm training. My fuzzy purple vest and blonde ponytail give me away among the long line of men and boys who know each other by name (and have probably been shooting most of their lives). I know that I do not always sport specialized shooting gear. I've worn the wrong shoes for this occasion many times. And some of my dangling bracelets and bangles may have gotten in the way of the perfect, concentrated grouping now and again. But that's life. I may be attending a banquet in an evening gown when there's a need for me to put my skills to the test (God forbid). And who really cares if my style and my stance aren't exactly like everyone else's? I can't let all

2ND AMENDMENT




I'm not an expert on the U.S. Constitution. But what if I told you that the Second Amendment does not give you the right to protect yourself or your family? It does not grant you the right to keep and bear arms either. The Second Amendment does not give you the right to do anything. That right exists with or without the document. The Second Amendment to the United States Constitution protects and guarantees the right of individuals to keep and bear arms. It affirms our right. And what the Second Amendment was designed to do is prohibit government from infringing upon that right. If we don't recognize this truth, a problem arises in the assumption that if we didn't have the Second Amendment, no one would be allowed to own any kind of firearm unless the government provided that right. But the Second Amendment is not a reward or a possession to be given (or to be taken away, for that matter) by anyone or anything. Our right to keep and bear arms — to protect ourselves and our loved ones — existed before the Bill of Rights was drafted and passed, and it exists no matter what man or government may say.

Basically, our Constitution holds a set of specific instructions (and limitations) for our national government. Perhaps that's why so many big-government supporters seek to destroy it or change it or to pretend it's not even there. And while our government can claim that the Second Amendment doesn't mean what it says, and they can pass laws that go against it, the right to keep and bear arms is an inalienable right. And in that regard, the Bill of Rights is meant to safeguard our rights from our government. The Constitution (including its amendments) lists the specific powers and authorities of our government, and anything not specifically granted to government is for the states (or for WE, THE PEOPLE).

Another powerful insight into the Second Amendment is the use of the word "infringe." The word can be defined as "to wrongly limit or restrict; to encroach upon in a way that violates law or the rights of another; to enter by gradual steps or by stealth into the possessions or rights of another." This word was not chosen by accident. It was purposefully crafted into the document to warn against powers attempting to block, challenge or chip away at our right. It was written to warn against tyranny.

As Thomas Jefferson so aptly declared, "No free man shall ever be debarred the use of arms. When governments fear the people, there is liberty. When the people fear the government, there is tyranny. The strongest reason for the people to retain the right to keep and bear arms is, as a last resort, to protect themselves against tyranny in government."

The Second Amendment is a wonderful part of the Constitution of the United States, a part of America … past, present and future. In its pages, those celebrated "certain inalienable rights" were expressed as never before in history. But the words contained therein have no power on their own. It depends on the willingness of WE, THE PEOPLE to back them up with our actions. So although I noted that the Second Amendment gives us nothing, I suppose that it actually gives us everything. It gives us hope, and it gives us cause. And it gives us reason to pay attention, to learn, to understand and to continue to stand firm for the protection of our absolute, nonforfeitable right to keep and bear arms.

the glaring differences derail my mindset for training. Instead, I embrace them — or ignore them — and put my attention on the task at hand.

## Recognize Your Skill Level

I'm no expert. I'm not a master of precision shooting. I didn't grow up with guns. And I realize that I am my own worst competition … and my own worst critic. So I try to just keep the rude comments and snide remarks to myself, safeguard that inner monologue and accept the fact that there is always room for improvement. My goal is simply to be the best me that I can be and, hopefully, to keep increasing my shooting proficiency every chance I get.

## Challenge Yourself

It's true; after shredding a paper zombie target at the range, I have felt a little guilty — but in that proud, sly kind of guilty way that spreads a wide, Cheshire-cat-like grin squarely across my face. You see, I know that handguns and training are serious stuff. This is NOT playtime. And I certainly don't want to mix messages (especially when it comes to my children) and have people wonder why my actions and my words don't seem to match. Nevertheless, as I stated earlier, I have come to terms with the fact that training can be an exhilarating challenge. It's fun to shoot. It's fun to be on target. And it's fun to have the opportunity to improve my skills with my husband, my family, my friends or even my students by my side.

## Be Prepared

The right mindset for training and for defensive shooting involves being prepared — not just mentally but also emotionally, physically, financially and legally. That may sound a bit overwhelming, but it just means that it's not enough simply to visualize success or to get in some practice at the range. We also must consider how we may be affected in other ways and in other areas. This may require that we make some important decisions now about how we would deal with the aftermath of a defensive situation. Have you thought about that? Have you considered how your life would change and what you would need to do after the fact? For this reason, I firmly believe that USCCA's legal and financial protection for the responsibly armed is a form of defense that undoubtedly deserves your attention and consideration.

## Remember the Goal

Ultimately, no matter what random emotion or thought escapes the recesses of my mind as I prepare for training, as I shoot, and as I contemplate my efforts afterward, I know that this activity is a significant part of my ability to protect myself and my family. Every shot I take at that bullseye could very well be the shot that is taken in a crisis situation. The significance of this thought reminds me of a Vince Lombardi quote: "Practice doesn't make perfect. Only perfect practice makes perfect." So there's certainly nothing wrong with preparation. Of course, my family doesn't live in fear, constantly looking over our shoulders. But we do take precautions. And we believe, just as author Stephen King once wrote, "There's no harm in hoping for the best as long as you're prepared for the worst." For me, that means practicing with a defensive mindset and embracing my Second Amendment right to protect myself and my loved ones.

“A FREE PEOPLE OUGHT NOT ONLY TO BE ARMED, BUT DISCIPLINED...”

George Washington

## AVOID, ESCAPE, DEFEND

I love the quote to the left from our first president. It sums up very nicely the job of the responsibly armed — that we should not just have the right to protect ourselves but that we should also have the ability, the intelligence, the training and the self-control to understand HOW, WHY and WHEN it’s proper to use force for the protection of ourselves and the ones we love. This is why we always teach to avoid, escape, defend (in that order, every time).

No matter the circumstances, there’s only one surefire guarantee that you will walk away safely from a deadly encounter: Avoid it in the first place. That sounds like common sense, but we often get so caught up with life and responsibilities that we forget to consider the basics. This would include using situational awareness and being aware of all your surroundings and steering clear of uncomfortable or unsafe environments or situations.

Don’t go somewhere alone if you’re unfamiliar with the area or if you know it to be dangerous. Don’t take the shortcuts that lead you down dark pathways or set you apart from the rest of the crowd. Don’t approach strangers or let them get too close to you. Be aware. Make smart choices. Turn around and go back if you have to. There is no shame in being careful. That’s what avoiding a bad situation is all about. Think and plan ahead, and listen to those gut feelings. As I mentioned in *Women’s Intermediate Pistol* when talking about situational awareness, your instincts are there for a reason. And they are often right!

Of course, if you’re already in a little deeper than you wanted to be — or should have been — you

still have the option to back out. We don't always have the benefit of avoidance (or the foresight to do so). But you can still have a decent chance of walking away safely. So if something just looks, sounds or feels wrong, leave. Get out! Perhaps a large crowd of people is starting to get antsy or angry. Maybe several folks nearby are yelling or even engaging in a pushing/shoving match. Those are your signs to escape. Seek out the nearest, easiest or best escape route and make your quick exit. You are not responsible for what happens after you leave. You are responsible for yourself and, perhaps, whoever might be with you, especially your own children. Make sure they are safe. Don't stick around to see if things escalate. Maybe they never will. But by that time, it could be too late, and you may have lost your chance.

If that happens to be the case, and you cannot remove yourself (or your friends and family) from a dangerous situation, then you have to be ready to defend yourself. This could involve a series of steps, including yelling for someone to stop, warning someone to stay back, running to cover, drawing your firearm or even shooting to stop a threat. (It might even involve all of the aforesaid.) Humans are naturally designed to protect themselves from harm. But all of your mental prepping and physical training will be tested as adrenaline rushes through your body. So this is not the time to make the decision to protect yourself. You have already done that. This is the time to take action. As we discussed in the section on Col. Cooper's Color Codes of Awareness in *Women's Intermediate Pistol,* this is Condition Red! And your life — and the lives of others — may be at stake.

## USE OF FORCE

I've heard it said many times that before you do anything risky — especially as it pertains to concealed carry and personal protection — ask yourself: "Is this worth dying for? Is it worth killing for? Is it worth going to prison for?" This holds true tenfold when it comes to making the choice to defend your family or yourself with a gun. Unfortunately, television, movies, video games and even books have provided some very unrealistic and unsafe ideas about how, when and why to use guns for self-defense. It may surprise you to know how many factors come into play when deciding whether or not someone was justified in taking the life of another human being.

Sure, just about anyone would agree that self-defense is an acceptable answer for using a firearm in a violent encounter. That's how just about any reasonable person would act in that kind of a dangerous situation. But that's where the four rules governing the use of deadly force come into play. I'm not referring to what law enforcement officers have to think about when dealing with criminals. This is what everyday, responsible gun owners need to think about before getting involved with a shooting. This is what helps us plan ahead for violent encounters. And this is what helps us wade through the legal gray areas. Obviously, it is safe to say that no two violent encounters are going to look exactly alike. There could be years of background information and experiences involved between the participants, or random encounters could have led to the event. While the details can vary wildly in every situation, there are some basic ideas to keep in mind, across the board, that help us recognize and justify the use of deadly force.

In a nutshell, you, as a reasonable and innocent person, are justified in the use of deadly force when there is an immediate fear of otherwise unavoidable death or serious bodily injury. And if you want to maintain your freedom and return home safely to your family, you should always do everything possible to avoid using deadly force. Since avoiding (or even escaping) a violent attack or encounter isn't always possible, you can at least program these aspects into your head now and hopefully be able to evaluate your actions before you do something you shouldn't. The problem is, the instant you draw your gun in self-defense, you'll need to make hundreds of decisions in just moments. And before you pull the trigger (and really even before you leave your house with your gun), you must understand the following four rules governing the use of deadly force. You MUST be able to reasonably justify that:

1. You were in immediate fear of death or serious bodily harm for yourself or another person.
2. You didn't initiate or escalate the incident. (In other words, you were an innocent party.)
3. No lesser force was sufficient or available to stop the threat.
4. You had no way to disengage or escape from the threat.

All of these factors must be present. This is what law enforcement officers, lawyers, juries and judges will be paying close attention to. So plan to never, ever, shoot anyone. But if you must shoot to stop the threat, do so wisely. And make sure you pay attention to and follow all the deadly force rules.

Of course, even though there are definite rules to follow, there are also Marine Corps veteran Clint Smith's famous common-sense thoughts to consider: "The two most important rules in a gunfight are: Always cheat and always win." These words of advice don't disrupt or disregard the legal use of force, but they do remind us that we don't need to be polite or considerate when we're fighting for our lives. Whether you use your voice, your body, a weapon of opportunity or a firearm, you should be prepared to do what it takes to stop the threat.

## BE RESPONSIBLY ARMED

What does it mean to be responsibly armed? Being a gun owner automatically brings a whole new level of responsibility to your life. And you should take that seriously! You should also take it to heart that you can make a big difference and make a positive impact on countless other people by choosing the higher road and by always being responsibly armed.

People will be watching you. They'll want to know if your actions or your behaviors change because you have a gun. They'll want to see if you can keep your cool in heated situations. And they'll want to see if you move through your normal, everyday life in a respectable, purposeful and peaceful manner. After all, the choice to carry concealed is a lifetime commitment as well as a lifestyle commitment.

While there are many things you should — or should not — do to be responsibly armed, here are a few action items to keep in mind:

- **Always follow the safety rules.** A responsibly armed individual follows the rules at all times. There are no exceptions. There are no excuses. And there are no short cuts. She never puts herself or others

in danger. She never jokes around with guns or takes safety lightly. She respects firearms, and she respects those who carry (as well as those who do not). The responsibly armed woman is a role model, and she leads by example, whether at the range in front of her friends or at home in front of her children. Safety is always a priority.

- **Seek out new knowledge and information.** An individual who is responsible with firearms never stops learning. (After all, this whole experience, as they say, is a journey, not a destination.) She isn't a know-it-all, patronizing those who are beneath her level of gun-and-gear knowledge. She is simply a perpetual learner. She sees her limitations and seeks out solutions. And she embraces consistent, regular training — whatever fits into her schedule — to keep sharpening her gun-handling and self-defense skills both physically and mentally.
- **Obey the laws.** A responsibly armed citizen definitely wants to carry everywhere it's safe and legal. She doesn't want to break any laws and she certainly doesn't want to stir up trouble. Even if the rules or requirements seem limiting or unjust, she will follow through on certifications, permits or even registrations, but she will also make decisions based on what's best for herself and her family. Part of being responsibly armed means being in control of your actions — and being held accountable. The responsibly armed woman knows she can't do anything stupid. And she certainly can't do anything stupid with a gun.
- **Watch your words and your actions.** As I mentioned, people are watching you … probably more than you think. And when you take a strong stand for something that many others are boldly against, people will try to catch you being rude, losing your temper or making a mistake. Being responsibly armed means being firm and assertive — but not insolent and aggressive. It's important to stand firm in your beliefs and stand up for your rights, but it's also important to treat others courteously and respectfully, even if they have differing opinions from yours. That's part of life! After all, you probably won't win anyone over to the pistol-packing side by yelling, pointing fingers or slinging insults.
- **Remember the defensive mindset.** A responsibly armed American has often been compared to a sheepdog. We're not sheep, being passively or mindlessly led wherever someone takes us. We're not wolves, either, using cunning or divisive methods to deceive or attack others. We're sheepdogs, being attentive and helpful and always on guard. But this mindset is a choice, a matter of mental and physical training. So use all the tools you have and all the things you've learned and apply them to your life. Being responsible with a firearm doesn't mean you need to be the hero, but you should be willing to face danger and stand up to corruption to help others and to help preserve the fabric of our communities.
- **Support the Second Amendment.** You don't have to sport an AR-15 T-shirt or participate in IDPA pistol matches (unless you want to, of course), but you can — and should — let your voice be heard whenever and wherever you can. You can also continue to vote for Second Amendment supporters and pass the word about safe gun ownership and the right to bear arms to others in your family, your workplace and your community.

## COVER VERSUS CONCEALMENT

When we're talking about the defensive mindset and being prepared, we need to be sure to understand the usage of — and the differences between — cover and concealment. Both of these can be used to avoid, escape or defend. But while concealment only hides you from an enemy, cover can actually protect you from the enemy's bullets.

Concealment could be just about anything that hides you visually (or perhaps auditorily as well): a closet, wall, piece of furniture, etc. Basically, you disappear from view, and hopefully you don't make a sound either. Concealment can be a great option for getting away from a scary situation. And it can offer some protection if the bad guy cannot see or hear you (and that means ANY part of you, whether that's your shoe, your hair or even your shadow).

Cover can not only keep you hidden from a bad guy, it can also can stop projectiles from penetrating and striking you. Clearly, something that stops bullets is the better choice of the two. With that being said, how often do you find yourself near cover … real cover? Take a moment to think about your daily life and activities. How often do you find yourself near bulletproof glass, a steel door, a reinforced wall or an engine block? We certainly want to look for cover when we're out and about and consider the possibilities, but we also need to realize that cover is not that easy to come by. As many trainers have pointed out, we don't want cover to become our coffin. Staying put in one place may not be the best option. Different situations will dictate different actions. Always be looking for the opportunity to escape.

We will incorporate some drills later that give us a feel for shooting around barriers and objects that may be used for cover or concealment.

## VOICE COMMANDS

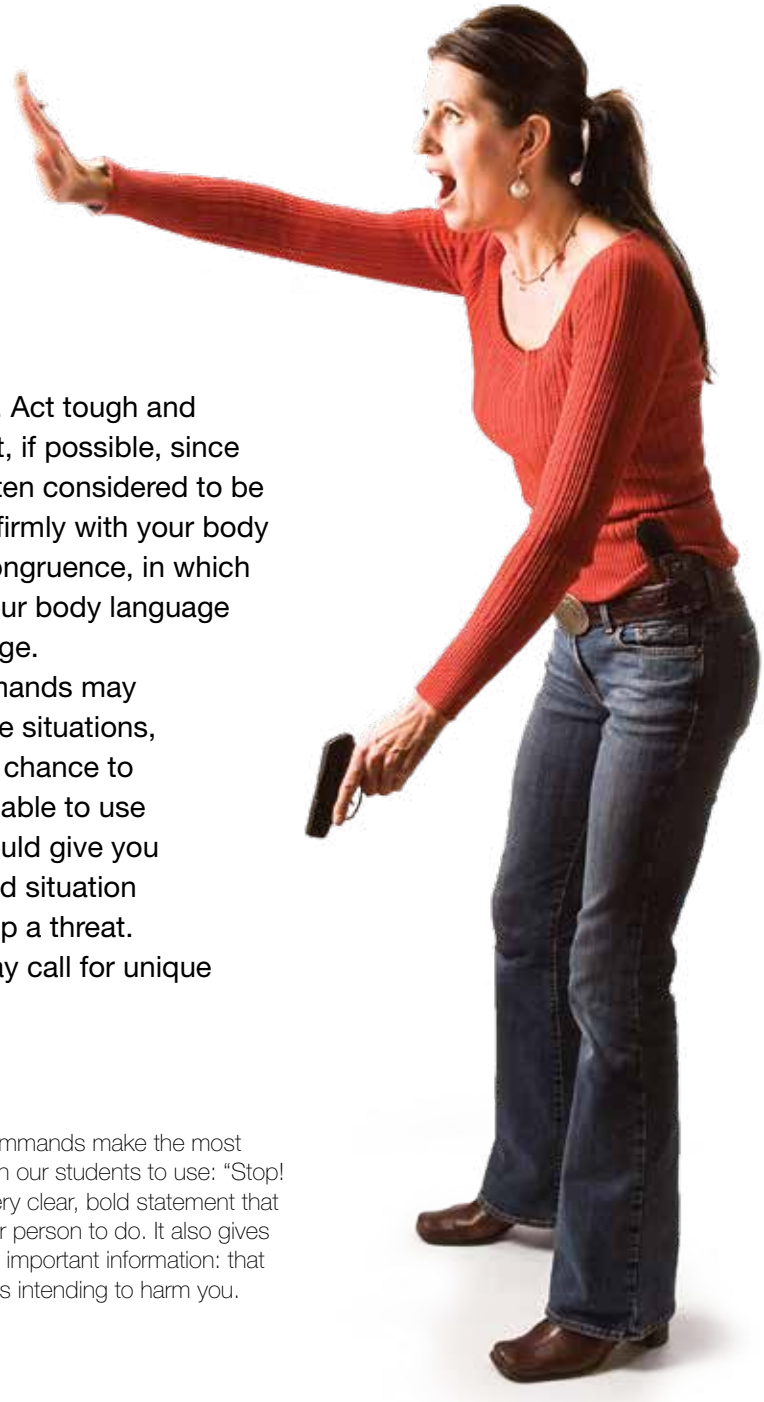
I know that we've been told for most of our lives not to raise our voices since doing so can cause others to become uncomfortable (or to become suddenly interested in what's going on). But both of these reactions could be useful in a defensive situation. In fact, your voice is actually one of the first tools you have to protect yourself. You can use your voice to:

- Startle an assailant
- Alert others nearby
- Increase your adrenaline
- Engage your core muscles
- Ensure you are breathing
- Help you remain emotionally present

The most effective voice commands to use for defense are direct and short. We also want to avoid using foul language or making threats (in case someone else hears you and decides to use your words against you). Unfortunately, some commands ("No!" or "Back off!") might not be enough to get your point across. While you can use whatever commands make the most sense to you, we prefer to teach our students to use: "Stop! Drop your weapon!" This is a very clear, bold statement that specifies what you want another person to do. It also gives others who may be nearby very important information: that this person has a weapon and is intending to harm you.

All in all, assailants are looking for people they can overpower or intimidate, which they often determine by submissive body language. So it's not only important *what* you say but *how* you say it. You must be direct, make your demand and never apologize. Match your tone of voice and volume to suit the situation. Act tough and show no fear. Make direct eye contact, if possible, since the inability to make eye contact is often considered to be a submissive gesture. Yell loudly and firmly with your body upright and agile. You're aiming for congruence, in which your words, your tone of voice and your body language are all sending the exact same message.

Keep in mind that using voice commands may not always be the best option. In some situations, being quiet and unheard may be your chance to avoid, escape or defend. You may be able to use silence to remain unnoticed, which could give you the opportunity to get away from a bad situation or to draw and use your firearm to stop a threat. Each scenerio will be different and may call for unique tactics or responses.



* While you can use whatever commands make the most sense to you, we prefer to teach our students to use: "Stop! Drop your weapon!" This is a very clear, bold statement that specifies what you want another person to do. It also gives others who may be nearby very important information: that this person has a weapon and is intending to harm you.

> REMEMBER THE FIRST RULE OF GUNFIGHTING... HAVE A GUN.
>
> Col. Jeff Cooper

## MARKSMANSHIP VERSUS DEFENSIVE SHOOTING

We learn about shooting fundamentals, the universal safety rules and all the different skills and techniques because we want to be able to effectively hit a target. Of course, when we are at the shooting range, we have the opportunity to set up, plan and take our time as well as reflect on what we did right or wrong — and then make any necessary changes. More than likely, those steps will not be possible if we are involved with a defensive shooting. But that doesn't mean that shooting skills or safety rules automatically go out the window. It just means that we have to know how to maneuver differently, to think differently and possibly to shoot differently. This is why we need to learn the differences between marksmanship and defensive shooting (or the differences between sighted shooting and point shooting).

Marksmanship, or sighted shooting, is what we have been discussing thus far, what we have practiced and what we continue to strive to do. Defensive or point shooting is relying more on our natural ability to aim. It involves bringing the gun up on target and pressing the trigger, often without seeing the front sight at all. Just to clarify, defensive shooting is not unaimed shooting; it is simply unsighted shooting. And we want to practice and prepare ourselves for defensive shooting since this reaction is what will happen if we are ever involved in a life-or-death situation.

Here's an example from Col. Rex Applegate's book *Kill or Get Killed.* Using the scenario of a man and his enemy, Applegate, who is a known authority on modern close-combat and combat shooting, helps paint a picture of what a defensive encounter looks

and feels like — and what can happen to sighted shooting in a life-threatening situation:

*"It is dark, he is in an alley, a poorly lighted street or a room in a building. He can hardly see his gun at arm's length, to say nothing of the sights. His muscles are tense, his nerves keyed up to a fighting pitch.*

*Suddenly the enemy starts shooting at him from an unexpected quarter.*

*Even if he could see the sights, would he take the time to line them up and fire at the enemy's gun flash? Does he take up the trigger slack and squeeze off the shot as he has been taught to do in target shooting?*

*Will he make sure that his feet are properly positioned and that he is breathing correctly? He certainly will not! He will grip his gun convulsively, raise it, point or shove it in the general direction of the enemy, and pull (not squeeze) the trigger.*

*…In daylight he will do exactly the same thing."*

This is only one example, but countless real-life scenarios have shown us that no matter how much we practice or how hard we try, when the adrenaline is pumping and when life is at stake, we will most likely resort to a more instinctive point-and-shoot method. This does not negate practice and preparation though. On the contrary, if we continue to work on the correct mindset and constantly hone our skills, we can improve our chances of shooting well in a defensive situation. As the saying goes, "We don't rise to the level of our expectations, we fall to the level of our training." And since I'd prefer to fall to the best level of training possible, all this example does is validate how effective and valuable good training can be!

# DRAWING TECHNIQUE

Drawing from a holster is a very important skill to have and to practice. It's one of the many things you can practice at home, just about any time, as long as you have a safe direction, the firearm is unloaded and checked for clear, and you don't have any ammunition in the room with you. (Those are just the basic safety precautions we can take to be sure we never become too comfortable or complacent.)

Of course, for women especially, the drawing technique may have to change from gun to gun, from holster to holster and even from outfit to outfit. Even though the USCCA highly encourages carrying the same way every day, I understand that this is not always possible. So it's imperative to not only have a gun that fits you and a holster that covers all the FACTS but also a safe, effective and controlled draw.

Let's go over the basics of an effective draw. You can modify these steps based on your size and stature, your preferred location for carry, your type of gun and holster, and the clothing you are wearing. We will also go over drawing with concealment garments and drawing from a purse or bag. Keep in mind that while this technique is broken down into steps and may feel a bit choppy, a good draw should become one smooth motion. This will take some time and practice, but safely and deliberately concentrating on one step at a time can help you build the correct muscle memory required to become faster, smoother and more confident with your draw.

Just remember that the safety rules must be in the forefront of your mind when you are drawing your firearm. If you need to draw from a bag or from beneath clothing, there are extra steps to consider. In addition, some holsters have different levels of retention, so you may have to move a flap or twist your wrist to get the gun out of the holster.

**GRIP** the handgun properly and firmly (with shooting hand in "high handshake" grip and trigger finger straight alongside the side of the holster). Note that the non-shooting hand and arm stay safely out of the way.

**MEET & MOVE** the support hand to the shooting hand at approximately the center of your body and complete a two-handed grip for support (switch safety off, if there is one). Finger is still off the trigger!

2

**LIFT & PULL** the handgun straight up and out of the holster with your elbow held high, close to the body and pointed backward.

3

**ROTATE** the handgun up and out to face the target (by moving your elbow down to your waist) without sweeping your support hand or arm.

5

**EXTEND & DRIVE** your arms and the gun straight out toward the target with good sight alignment and sight picture. Do not sweep the gun up or down or incorporate any arc to your movement. The gun should be driven straight out.

## Reholster

Reholstering your gun should never be something you hurry to do. But when you are ready, and when it is safe to do so, follow these steps (which are very close to the reverse steps of the controlled draw technique):

1. **BRING** the firearm in toward your body (often called a high compressed retention ready position) and engage the safety (if there is one).
2. **REMOVE** your support hand and place it back on your abdomen (or safely out of the way).
3. **ROTATE** your elbow on your shooting hand backward and move the gun toward the holster.
4. **REHOLSTER** slowly and deliberately while maintaining a proper grip.

During the reholster, your trigger finger will remain alongside the frame of gun. As the gun is placed back in the holster, your finger will become indexed alongside the outside of the holster. Do NOT allow your trigger finger to enter the holster. In addition, although it's good to train yourself to reholster your firearm without looking at it, feel free to sneak a peak to be certain you are in the right spot and that nothing is in the way.

# DRAWING FROM CONCEALMENT

As we covered in *Women's Intermediate Pistol,* there are many different kinds of holsters and holster locations. This means that the basic steps for your drawing technique may have to be altered, especially when we consider the types of clothing (jackets, vests, sweaters, blouses, skirts and dresses) we often have on. All of these types of clothing require the garment to be cleared first for quick and easy access without encumbrances. It seems like a very simple procedure, but it can be much more than just flinging your coat out of the way or holding your shirt up to get to your gun. You need to be sure to not "sweep" yourself by inadvertently pointing the handgun at your support hand during the process. In addition, to reholster a concealed gun, you must always look to make sure that there is nothing in the way that could get caught on the gun or snag the trigger.

To accomplish this, there are several techniques to use and much practice to be done. While each instructor or shooter favors his or her own particular method, remembering these basics will help you smoothly and efficiently draw from concealment.

## Open Garment

One technique for clearing an open garment requires that you place the fingers of your shooting hand on the side of your chest or abdomen and drag them rearward toward the holstered handgun, always maintaining contact with your body. Your fingers and/or thumb should contact the garment and shove it or sweep it aside and allow the rearward momentum to get the clothing back and out of the way. (This is the method I prefer and most often use.)

Another technique for clearing an open garment uses the four fingers of your shooting hand to make a hook and simply grab the open garment at about the same location as your handgun's grip. Once your hand moves back and is even with the gun, you then turn your hand into the gun and secure a firm grip.

When wearing an open garment, such as a jacket or other outerwear, the garment can be swept aside with the shooting hand prior to the draw. To begin, place the fingers of your shooting hand on the side of your chest or abdomen.

Drag your hand rearward (toward the holstered handgun), maintaining contact with your body. Your fingers and/or thumb should contact the garment and shove it or sweep it aside to get the clothing back and out of the way.

After the garment is cleared from the holster, the firing hand will transition to the firearm to gain a proper grip.

## Closed Garment

If you are wearing a “closed” garment, such as a sweater, a tucked-in blouse or a buttoned jacket, a technique for efficiently clearing that concealment involves using both hands. You will reach across your body (using your support hand) to grab the bottom hem of the garment and vigorously pull it high and out of the way. This technique, invented by master firearms instructor Ken Hackathorn, requires that you grab the garment very near the holster. Pull the garment up and keep holding it until your handgun is completely clear of the holster to avoid any catching or snagging during the draw. After the gun is cleared, release the garment, establish a proper grip and continue the steps of the draw process.

You can also try a method that involves grabbing the garment with your non-shooting hand from behind your back. Reach around and vigorously pull the clothing up and over to the side to expose your holster and firearm. Then follow through with the remaining steps for your draw.

If you are wearing a closed garment, such as a sweater, a technique for efficiently clearing the concealment involves using both hands.

Reach across your body with your support hand and grab the bottom hem of the garment. Vigorously pull it high and out of the way. Be sure to grab the garment very near the holster.

After you have pulled your garment up, keep holding it until your handgun is completely clear of the holster to avoid any catching or snagging during the draw. After the gun is cleared, release the garment, establish a proper grip and continue the steps of the draw process.

## DRAWING FROM A BAG

To draw your firearm from a bag or purse, first unzip or open up the dedicated holster compartment. Rotate your body and/or turn the bag to safely point the gun in the right direction (always toward the target). Follow the same basic steps for drawing, but be sure to hold the bag firmly in your support hand and even rip it away as you grip your firearm and then lift and pull it from the bag. This will clear the gun and allow you to complete the draw steps and get into a firing position.

Please note that drawing from a bag or a purse will also depend on the style of the accessory and how you choose to hold it. You may have to work more with a cross-draw (across your body instead of straight out from the strong/shooting side) or you may have to drop the bag altogether as you grip and unholster your gun.

Undoubtedly, all of these drawing techniques and methods take practice and patience. Don't rush through the steps, especially if this is your first time trying a new method, and don't give up if your draw doesn't work the first time through. Keep working at it until you refine the motions that work safely and efficiently for you.

* If you select a purse as your method of carry, you should choose one that has a sturdy strap, and you should use a cross-body method rather than just carrying it on one shoulder, if possible. The purse holster shown to the left includes an optional thigh strap, which can help ensure that the owner never loses control of the purse or the firearm.

Unzip or open the dedicated holster compartment to draw your firearm from a bag or purse.

Rotate your body and/or turn the bag to safely point the gun in the right direction (toward the target).

Reach into the dedicated compartment and gain a proper grip on your firearm.

Follow the same basic steps for drawing, but be sure to hold the bag firmly in your support hand as you grip your firearm and then lift and pull it from the bag.

“IF YOU’RE NOT SHOOTIN’, YOU SHOULD BE LOADIN’. IF YOU’RE NOT LOADIN’, YOU SHOULD BE MOVIN’...”

Clint Smith

## LOADING AND RELOADING

Happiness is a full gun. And keeping your handgun full is a good thing. Sometimes your gun will shoot until it locks back and shows that it’s empty, like a baby bird looking for food. Other times, you will have to clear a malfunction and load a new magazine. You may also need to reload in a defensive situation when the magazine is not yet empty. In that scenario, you need to hold onto the mag since it still holds rounds of ammunition. Whatever the case, there are several different types of reloads that a shooter should learn to recognize and use. As a reminder, we are going to practice in our work space. Your work space is not straight out in front of you but rather close in, where you have good control of your body and arms and can see what you’re doing.

### Emergency or Slide Lock Reload

This reload is completed when the pistol’s slide is locked back, all rounds have been fired from the magazine and chamber and the gun runs out of ammo. There are no rounds left in the chamber; both the gun and magazine are empty. An emergency reload can also be done when there is a malfunction or a stoppage.

How it’s done: While keeping the gun in your work space, press the magazine release to release the empty magazine. Next, insert the new magazine by placing the index finger of your support hand on the front to guide it into the magwell and secure it in place (as discussed in *Women’s Intermediate Pistol).* Finally, release the slide forward by using the slide lock/release button or, preferably — since it’s a gross motor skill rather than a fine one — by racking the slide.

*An emergency or slide lock reload occurs when you've run out of ammunition and the magazine's "follower" (the plastic piece that pushes the rounds up) has pushed the slide lock into place. On most semi-automatic handguns, you'll know you've reached this point when the slide has locked back into its "baby bird" position.

## Speed Reload

A speed reload occurs when the magazine is not completely empty, the slide is forward and not locked back and the gun is in battery with a round in the chamber. The partially empty magazine is released from the gun and allowed to fall to the ground, and a full magazine is placed into the gun. The purpose of this reload is to keep your pistol completely loaded to full capacity (and recharge it during a dangerous encounter when you have a chance to do so). Use this reload when there's a temporary calm, a lull or a lack of activity or movement. Your gun remains in battery or loaded the entire time.

How it's done: While keeping the gun in your work space and scanning for possible threats, press the magazine release to eject the partially empty mag to the ground. (In a speed reload, the gun is still in battery and loaded with a round in the chamber, so you do NOT have to rack the slide.) Right before or as you press the mag release, your support hand should grab a new, fully loaded magazine from where it is stowed. Insert the magazine by placing the index finger of your support hand on the front to guide it into the magwell and slam it into place. (Remember that the slide is NOT locked back in a speed reload, so you will have to use force to seat the magazine properly! Don't be afraid to slam it and be sure it's locked into place. Sometimes I'll even give the end of the magazine a quick tug to make sure it's not loose — and to make sure I get a "bang" and not a "click.")

## Tactical Reload

As the name suggests, a tactical reload is a very strategic reload. It is also the most difficult to maneuver because it requires the manipulation of two magazines at the same time with the same hand. When there is a round in the chamber and you have a partially empty magazine during a break or lull in the action, it may be necessary to switch out your partially empty magazine with a full one.

* Regardless of the type of reload, you need to become skilled at accessing and pushing the magazine release. Requiring a fine motor skill, most shooters find it easiest to push the magazine release if they twist their hand slightly on the grip so that the thumb can reach the button and press it firmly.

In this case, you want to retain and keep the magazine that has a few rounds left in it while quickly inserting a fully loaded magazine into your gun. (These few rounds could be utilized at a later time. That's why we want to use a tactical reload instead of a speed reload.) The shooter will grab a full magazine with the support hand, move it toward the gun and then release the partially empty magazine from the gun to the same hand (where it's held as the full mag is inserted into the magwell). You heard that right! You will be holding two magazines in your support hand at the same time. At this point, the partially empty magazine is stored. (For this kind of reload, a magazine pouch is definitely a handy tool to have; otherwise, you may be struggling with magazines in your pockets.)

How it's done: Grab the new, full magazine from your pouch or pocket FIRST with your support-hand thumb and index finger and move it toward your gun's magwell. Eject the partially empty magazine into your support-hand fingers (which are together to form a pocket to catch the ejected mag). Do NOT eject or drop the magazine to the ground.

There are some different options for where to put the ejected magazine, such as between your middle finger and ring finger or between your ring finger and pinky. It's a personal preference. You just have to be able to effectively manipulate two magazines in your support hand at the same time, so practice whichever works best for you. (You may have to try it a few ways, then consistently practice whichever one you choose.) Keeping a good hold on both magazines, insert the full magazine held by your support hand's thumb and index finger into the magwell. As we learned before, use your support hand's index finger extended straight alongside the front of the full mag to guide it and insert it into the magwell. Now store the partially loaded magazine that you removed from the gun somewhere on your person (in a magazine pouch or pocket or even in the belt or waistband of your pants). The gun will still be in battery and loaded, so there is no need to rack the slide to chamber a round.

(Note: This is a difficult skill. If it's not working for you, then don't do it! It is a nice trick for the shooting range, but it's nothing that can't be achieved just as well with a reload with retention.)

## Reload with Retention

A reload with retention is very similar to a tactical reload, but you do not have to juggle two magazines in one hand. Instead, you first release the partially empty magazine into your support hand, stow it somewhere (do NOT let it fall to the ground), then get a full magazine and place it in the gun. This is a more basic and efficient reload method compared to the tactical reload since there are fewer manipulations and only one (support) hand is used, but it is a bit slower since there are more back-and-forth movements with your arm.

How it's done: Eject the partially empty magazine from the gun into your support hand and stow it in your pouch, pocket or appropriate place on your body. Grasp a full magazine with your support hand and insert it into the magwell. (As with the tactical reload, the point of this type of reload is to keep those extra rounds in case you need them rather than just drop them to the ground.)

## PRACTICE WITH PURPOSE

I started playing piano when I was about 5 years old. My mom made me do it. I can't say that I had much enjoyment plunking through those 30 minutes of torture — I mean practice — every day. Even as I got better (and started to enjoy playing for the sake of playing), I didn't change my outlook on practicing. It was work. It was aggravating. In many ways, it seemed pointless — until I started to practice with purpose. Instead of just making my parents happy (and passing the required time away), I started to focus on learning more difficult songs, memorizing pieces all the way through and refining skills such as trills and dynamics. Eventually, instead of just playing the piano, I was training my mind and my body to play as accurately as possible (not always perfectly, mind you) and with increased confidence and significance.

With that in mind, I have an important question for you: Are you training … or are you just shooting?

Going to the range for a girls' night out or for a date night with your significant other is a wonderful thing. It's great to enjoy annihilating a zombie target or trying your hand at a shooter's version of Battleship. But there comes a time when that's just not enough. We all need to be sure that we are carving out time to practice with a purpose: to set a goal, to learn a new skill, to perfect a technique or to become better at protecting ourselves with our handguns.

As USCCA Executive Editor Kevin Michalowski explained, "Time is valuable, and most of us say we don't train enough because we don't have the time. If that is true, then make sure every minute at the range is dedicated to improving your shooting skills." Since time is valuable, it's important to make an effort to see every shooting opportunity as a training opportunity. That focus and purpose will not only make you a better shooter, it will bring meaning to your range time.

## ARMED WITH CHILDREN

This topic was originally published in *Concealed Carry Magazine* and shares some important points about protecting ourselves and our children. For the moms taking this course, we are often the ones who spend the most time with our kids. It's imperative that we start thinking about and planning ahead for keeping them safe, especially if we have chosen to be responsibly armed.

On July 21, 2015, around 10:30 p.m., a young couple was walking back to their home with their one-month-old son after visiting a neighborhood friend. As they pushed the stroller along, a dark sedan drove past and stopped about 10 yards ahead of them. Two men jumped out and pointed guns at the man and his wife, demanding that they get on the ground.

Scared for their lives, the couple cooperated with their attackers, begging for them not to harm their child. Then one of the men grabbed the diaper bag from the stroller, knocking it — and their newborn son — to the pavement. The two men bolted. Thankfully, the baby and his parents were uninjured, but the couple was quite shaken by the alarming encounter.

Did these parents do the right thing?

A few years earlier, on November 10, 2010, another young couple encountered a frightening experience at a gas-station parking lot. As the couple stopped at a Phillips 66 for a stretch break and for a quick chat with relatives who were

traveling with them in separate vehicles, a man jumped into the driver's seat of their running car … with their 6-month-old daughter in the backseat.

There was no way this mom and dad were going to let a carjacker drive off with their child. They knew that if they couldn't stop the vehicle immediately, they might never see their baby girl again. Using all of her strength and a push from her husband, the mother broke the passenger-side window. As she was being dragged away by the moving car, her husband jumped through the shattered window and started kicking the carjacker as hard as he could. The criminal finally gave in, exited the vehicle and ran off. Except for some bumps and bruises, the parents were not seriously injured, and their daughter, though scared and crying, was safe and unharmed.

Did these parents do the right thing?

No matter what your answers are regarding the actions of these two couples, for both sets of parents, these incidents were terrifying wake-up calls. Even in our own communities or with our own families, we can still become victims of crimes. And these families' negative experiences, though positive in outcome, can serve as powerful testaments to the enormous strength of parents' love for their children. As well, these offenses can serve as cautionary tales for those of us who carry concealed firearms for the protection of our loved ones.

Clearly, there is no way to predict when, where or how a crime may occur, and there is no way to calculate the best course of action for every situation. But the goal for parents in any of these circumstances is always the same: Protect our children. So outside of a quick course in Brazilian Jujitsu or the use of full body armor, how do we keep ourselves and our families safe in violent encounters? It's important to take some extra precautions … and to put in some extra thought.

## Prepare Mentally

Neither of the couples from these stories had firearms with them at the times of the incidents. And a good guy or gal with a gun could have completely changed the game. Even so, the No. 1 priority if a child or children are involved in an attack is to make sure that they are safe. In some cases, depending on the ages of the children and depending on the situation itself, that might mean NOT unholstering or using a weapon. There are so many variables involved that there is no way to present a "right" answer.

Even so, for any parent with a gun, it's important to think through what you would do to protect your family right here and now — before anything ever happens. And this mental preparation may involve making choices to avoid potentially dangerous situations altogether. It could mean checking and double-checking your surroundings before leaving a building or even leaving your home. It could mean making extra phone calls, taking a different route or leaving a situation that makes you uncomfortable.

Just always keep your guard up. Don't let life's distractions prevent you from possibly spotting or eluding a problem before it even occurs. You must make a conscious commitment to ensure your family is safe at all times and make a firm decision to do whatever is necessary to stop the threat.

## Act Quickly and Efficiently

It's impossible to map out a safety plan for your family from start to finish, but no matter what happens, you should always be prepared to act immediately and resourcefully. For this, we can take some cues from nature. George Harris, president and CEO of International Firearms Consultants, mentions that parents can depend on their natural instincts for a purist form of preservation. He states, "Look at it from this simple perspective: Preserve your little ones and yourself using whatever methods you can."

Some of these quick-thinking, fast-acting methods can be observed in wildlife. If you've ever witnessed animals in danger, you may have seen the youngsters scatter. Or you may have watched them quickly move to find cover and hide. Meanwhile, the mom or dad leads the predator away and/or fights off the attacker. Those are some of the basic methods and instincts.

Luckily, we can also add in all the human advantages. "Consider all the mechanical devices and tools we have available to us that animals don't," Harris says, "and then factor in all the other things we can use for self-defense." And be sure to act immediately with whatever tool you have — be it a purse, a stick, hands, legs or a firearm. Use whatever means you have (physical and psychological) to fight back. And don't ever trust the aggressor. If you have kids with you in a vehicle, it may very well be the time to push the gas pedal and run into or over something … or someone.

You can also use one of nature's best and most effective deceptions: feigned compliance as a distraction. "Be like the momma grouse who flops about on the ground as if she has a broken wing and is pleading for her attacker not to hurt her," Harris states. "Break the mindset of the attacker, if even briefly, in order to gain the advantage. Then get out of there or do what you must do. Just do it quickly. Timing is everything."

## Act Wisely

I know that as a mother, my first instinct when my children are in danger is to grab them and pull them in close to me. That would work perfectly to help them with a boo-boo, to calm them during a storm or to get them away from a scary animal. But it's a terrible idea if someone is coming at you with a weapon.

While it may feel like you're doing the wrong thing, you may have to push your baby's stroller behind a wall or set down that infant carrier by a tree and run in the other direction. In some cases, your precious cargo may be safer left in a car or hidden in a nearby building. Just don't pull your children into you or try to hide them behind you while you are attempting to defend yourself (unless that's your only option).

You might think that you are acting like a shield, but it's best for them to get away from you and to get to safety as quickly as possible. This protects them and you … on many levels. Your children won't be witness to the event, and they won't be in the line of fire. In addition, you won't have to worry about or be distracted by little ones around your feet or behind your back if you need to draw or use your firearm to stop the threat.

## Plan Ahead

Besides mentally preparing yourself, in order to plan ahead, you should do as much talking and training with your kids as possible. Talk to them

* When it comes to kids and guns, you have two choices: education or isolation. But here's the reality: If you take the ignorance approach, your kids will get their firearms "education" from movies, video games or their friends. While we're not advocating that you take your 4-year-old out shooting, we are advocating that you answer your children's questions about your firearms and allow them to interact at a level that's safe for their age group.

about situational awareness, about being observant and safe, and about being an extra set of eyes and ears for you as you go about your everyday lives.

Of course, what you talk about and how you train will depend on a variety of issues, such as how old your children are, what they comprehend and how disciplined they might be. But you can come up with a trigger word or a code word that they can recognize as a time to give you their immediate attention or to take specific action. Practice your chosen word to get them in the habit of following orders closely. And plan ahead so that when your kids hear this special alert, they know that they need to run away from danger (to go to where the bad people aren't) and to keep going until they find someone to help, such as a police officer, a firefighter, a person of authority, a store worker or a trustworthy friend or family member.

You can also teach your family about cover and concealment (which materials protect them from bullets and which ones don't). Should you ever have to draw your gun, you can use your alert word and instruct family to get away from you and call the police. But if they aren't able to get away, teach them to get behind cover and to continually look for possible exits or better cover … or opportunities to escape. With this, you can also teach older kids to carry, guide or help the little ones.

If your children can't get away from an aggressor, teach them to yell, scream, punch, kick, hit or do whatever is necessary. If the kids are old enough, they can take self-defense classes or participate in martial-arts training. But you can also talk to them about looking for weak or sensitive spots, such as poking a bad guy in the eyes; punching or kicking him in the nose, throat, solar plexus or stomach; or hitting him in the knees, ankles or wrists.

Whatever you do, be sure to explain to your children that you give them special permission to not be polite, quiet or nice in a violent encounter … but to do whatever they need to do to get away. Make sure that they understand that it's OK to say "No!" and to run away from dangerous or uncomfortable situations and find help.

In many scenarios, when people forcefully, purposefully and immediately fight back, their attackers are taken by surprise. And they may realize that they have much more to deal with than they bargained for. That temporary disability or distraction may be the deciding point for them to back off or go away … or it may be the break you need to draw your firearm and protect your loved ones.

Unfortunately, when it comes to violent encounters, there are no right or wrong answers … except to do what you need to do to stop the threat and to keep your family safe. But taking precautions now can help protect you and your children in unpredictable circumstances. Use your best judgment and experience. Do what's right for your situation. And have a course of action for you and your family to take in the event of an unsafe situation.

“OUT OF THIS NETTLE, DANGER, WE PLUCK THIS FLOWER, SAFETY.”

William Shakespeare

## SAFETY BRIEFING

Have you heard the four universal gun safety rules once or twice … or 300 times? Good! Let’s review them again:

1. **Treat all guns as though they are loaded.**
2. **Never point your firearm at anything you are not willing to destroy.**
3. **Keep your finger OFF the trigger and outside the trigger guard until you are on target and have made a decision to shoot.**
4. **Always be sure of your target and what’s beyond.**

### Range Rules and Expectations

In addition to adhering to the universal safety rules at all times, there are also some range etiquette basics you can follow no matter where you are. This includes (but is not limited to) the following common courtesy — and common-sense — items:

- **Follow all range-specific rules and guidelines.** Not all ranges operate the same way, so be sure you know what’s expected of you. Some of things you might want to check are: What are the operating hours? Can you draw from a holster? Can you collect brass? Are the firing lines moveable? What types of ammunition and/or firearms can be used?
- **Know basic range commands.** Be familiar with the types of words and phrases you’ll hear at the range, such as “hot” and “cold” range, “cease fire,” “load and make ready” and “unload and show clear.”
- **Listen to instructors, range safety officers and/or other range staff.** Always respect and obey the authority on any range; they are in charge for a reason.

- **Wear eye and ear protection.** Even though some ranges may not require ear protection or eye protection (or both), we know that they're vital for proper safety and health.
- **Keep yourself and any guests safe.** You are responsible for your own behavior and for the behavior of your guests. Don't let anything get out of hand.
- **Be courteous and aware of other shooters around you on the range.** Unless you're the only shooter at the range, you need to be checking to see where others are, especially at an outdoor range where setup may be a little less structured.
- **Respect the range's property and anyone else's possessions.** Basically, do not bother other people or their stuff. (Kind of sounds like something we learned in kindergarten!)
- **Ask questions when you are unsure.** Don't be afraid to ask the staff, a range safety officer, an instructor or even another experienced shooter any questions you might have. They're there to help.
- **Clean up when you're done.** I've always heard that you should leave a location in better shape than you found it. This holds true for the shooting range. Clean up your gear, throw away trash, put equipment away and leave the range in safe and pristine order when you are finished.

# PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

This is what *Women's Defensive Pistol* really boils down to: PRACTICE. It's time to use all the shooting fundamentals and knowledge we have gained thus far (along with the all-important safety rules) to get some serious training under our belts. Just remember, we are building and growing.

If you don't get it right the very first time, don't be discouraged! I'll be the first one to admit that it takes me some serious time and effort to really "get" a new skill or drill. I always think back to when I was practicing martial arts. My husband and I took Aikido together, and he was always exceptional at everything. He could watch a new technique on video and immediately start to do it (near perfectly) in real life. It didn't matter how much I watched a new technique on TV or in person; I could not do it. But it would take me mentally working through it and physically doing it over and over (and over) again before it started to stick! So wherever you fall on that spectrum, from watching a skill and picking it up quickly to requiring time and repetition to get something new to sink in, remember that we're all in this together. We can all learn and grow if we make goals for ourselves, if we focus on our training and if we truly put all our efforts into practicing with a purpose.

> “A LADY BEGINS TO KNOW SHE IS SHOOTING WELL WHEN THE MEN STOP TELLING HER SHE IS.”

Sir Joseph Nickerson

## Drawing

We’ve talked about effective draw techniques and methods. Now let’s give it a try. If this is a brand-new skill, start out with an empty and clear firearm, with no ammunition nearby, and work on the basics. Don’t be afraid to break down the movement into separate steps. If it helps, talk yourself through it as you go: grip, lift, rotate, meet, extend (or whatever words or phrases work for you to remember and to practice effectively). Keep working on this until the movement makes sense to you. Your draw does not have to be perfectly smooth or fast at this point!

To practice drawing on the shooting range, we will use a drill that incorporates a voice command (like we learned about in a previous section), and we will add a little movement as well. A silhouette target will be set up around 3 yards. On the instructor’s “threat” command, yell, “Stop! Drop your weapon!” while drawing your firearm and moving one step to the right or left, per the instruction. (We call this “getting off the line” or “moving off the ‘X.’”) Then take two controlled shots at the target. Don’t worry too much about accuracy here. The goal is getting used to moving off the line and drawing the gun as efficiently as possible while being safe and effective. (At this distance, and if simulating an attacker, you may be point shooting anyway!)

When you are done, move your firearm into the high compressed retention ready position, and scan for threats by swiveling your head in a controlled manner from side to side to see around you and behind you. When this scanning step is

complete, reholster your firearm. Just remember that even though reholstering is almost as important as drawing, there is no need to do it as quickly. Use a second or two to gather yourself. Keep your support hand safely out of the way and look at your holster if you need to. And remember to keep your finger off the trigger and along the side of the gun, then move it to the side of the holster.

Next, let's try drawing from concealment. For our training purposes, we will try an open vest or jacket as well as a closed garment. Run through the steps of the drill the same way, but be sure to clear the garment FIRST (using whatever method we learned that works for your situation). Upon the instructor's "threat" command, yell, "Stop! Drop your weapon!" while moving one step to the right or left, per the instruction, and either sweep the open garment to the side and back or yank up the closed garment out of the way to get to your gun. Then complete the drawing steps and engage the target with two controlled shots. After firing, move your firearm into the high compressed retention ready position and carefully scan for threats around you and behind you. When ready, reholster your firearm, being careful to clear your garments and keep anything from getting stuck in the holster or in the trigger guard. (Do not sweep yourself!)

Finally, let's practice our draw from a purse or bag. Remember that the most important step will be to safely clear the bag. On the instructor's "threat" command, yell, "Stop! Drop your weapon!" while moving one step to the right or left, per the instruction, and reaching into the bag and firmly gripping the firearm. Turn your body and/or the bag to be sure you are pointing the muzzle downrange. Then, draw your firearm by holding the bag tightly with your non-shooting hand and even ripping it aside if necessary. Complete the drawing steps and engage the target with two controlled shots. After firing, move your firearm into the high compressed retention ready position and scan for threats. When the scanning step is complete, set the gun on the shooting table or bench. (Reholstering a firearm in a bag or purse is not as quick and clean as in most traditional holsters. So we will not incorporate that into the drill. We will simply reholster the gun safely when we need to set up the drill again.)

If you want to challenge yourself more with this drill, you can increase the distance to the target to 5 yards, 7 yards and 10 yards so you'll be forced to quickly get a good sight picture before firing. You can also add more targets and perform the same drill while engaging multiple threats.

When you have time on your own, make sure you practice drawing from all types of garments, bags and holsters that you plan to use. And remember that you don't always have to practice at the range with live ammo; you can practice drawing your firearm from your various holsters and garments from home with snap caps and with dry-fire practice. Not only do I often practice my draw at home, every time I put a gun and holster on, I dry-fire and take a few practice draws (in a separate room, away from ammunition) to be sure I can safely get to my gun and to make sure everything is working — before I load the firearm and before I leave the house.

## Shooting From Retention

Shooting from retention means shooting one-handed (without the full extension of your arm) while retaining possession of your firearm. This is a type of defensive shooting since it is unsighted. Clearly, the form and technique for this type of shooting will be very different from what we typically cover and practice.

To begin, we will practice with a SIRT pistol or an empty and clear gun (with no ammunition nearby) in your holster. Keeping your finger off the trigger, you will grab your pistol firmly with a high handshake grip, lift it out of the holster and rotate the gun toward the target while pressing your elbow firmly into your side and tightening your muscles. This will help you retain possession of the gun, help you control it and also absorb recoil from the firearm. Be sure that you're not caught on any clothing and that the firearm is away from your body, not muzzling anything or leaning into your side. (Either of these things could result in the gun being taken out of battery and subsequently being unable to fire.) You may have to angle or cant (tilt) the gun slightly for comfort or for better aim.

For training purposes, look down at your gun and check where the muzzle is facing. Is it angled too low? Is it too high? If it's not lined up with the target,

* Since shooting from retention is an advanced skill, you can begin training on this technique using a SIRT pistol, which will provide immediate feedback on whether your muzzle is too high or too low.

make necessary adjustments. Keep practicing this way until you are more comfortable and until you are more accurate with the muzzle direction. Then practice shooting from retention with live-fire on the range.

For this drill, get up close and personal (about 3 feet away) to a paper silhouette target and get into a proper stance (with your gun in the holster). When the instructor commands you, draw your firearm, being sure to lock your elbow into your side. (Your non-dominant arm should be out of the way, across your chest or abdomen. You may also use a high elbow, close to your head, for protection or for defense.) Once you're in position and the muzzle is on target, fire one round into the target. (Remember to hold the gun firmly since you will be shooting one-handed and to keep all moving parts away from your body and clothing.)

You will notice that shooting from retention is VERY different from "normal" shooting. With the gun so close to your body, you will experience the recoil very differently, and you likely will feel the percussion from the blast. It's an odd sensation at first. You may also notice that your rounds are not hitting the center of mass. Again, you may need to look at your gun to see how the muzzle is oriented and adjust it up or down accordingly. Of course, at this distance, what we're really hoping to see is any hit on a man-sized target. (In a self-defense scenario, this would represent an up-close fight for your life. You are attempting to get the bad guy away from you and get some distance between you. You can get good position and worry about better shots later.)

If you are comfortable and confident with this drill, you can add another layer to it. Load a magazine with six rounds. As you are shooting (with at least one shot from retention), back up from the target. Keep shooting (slow, controlled shots for now) as you back away, eventually bringing in your support hand and extending your arms into a traditional shooting stance as you continue firing until slide lock. We can also add a second target and some reloading to this drill. Load three rounds into each of two separate magazines. The first target will be engaged while shooting from retention and backing up, as just described. You will continue to back up and shoot until you are in your normal shooting stance and the slide locks back. Do a slide lock reload and then engage the second target with the remaining three rounds.

## Reloading

To practice the reloading techniques we talked about, we will set up the range with three silhouette targets set at 5, 10 and 15 yards (various heights). This setup will enable us to practice the different reloads as we work on point shooting and sighted fire as well as recoil management.

For the emergency or slide lock reload, start with five rounds in the gun and two spare magazines that each have five rounds in them. At the instructor's "threat" signal, draw and fire on the first target as quickly as possible until the gun is empty, then quickly reload (keeping the firearm in your work space and the muzzle pointed in a safe direction). Engage the second target until empty, then engage the third target until all rounds have been fired. For the speed reload, we will use the same range setup as before, but fill your spare magazines to capacity, and this time, on the command, fire four rounds

into the first target. Then, while transitioning to the second target, perform a speed reload. Engage the second target with four rounds, reload, then transition to the third silhouette and shoot four more rounds into the final target. Shooting only four rounds at each target but using full magazines will require you to use enough force to get the magazines seated properly.

We will perform the same drill as above using both the tactical reload and the reload with retention. But be sure to practice both of these first with an empty and clear gun and no ammo nearby. The tactical reload may require some extra attention and trial and error before you practice it in a live-fire drill. Work slowly and deliberately until you find what works for you. (Refer back to that section for additional assistance and details.)

When ready, follow the same drill as before for the tactical reload and the reload with retention. Be sure to try both tactical and retention reloads using various stowing methods (i.e. try getting the magazine back into the mag pouch, pocket, waistband of your pants, etc.). Make sure you try to retrieve the magazines from the various storage locations as well. The goal in the beginning is not so much speed but rather efficient movement and accurate hits on each target. You can increase speed at a later point. When you are ready to add another layer of challenge or difficulty, try the reloading drill while moving forward, backward or laterally. You can also add head shots instead of just center-of-mass shots or you can have someone insert a couple of snap caps (dummy rounds) in some of your magazines so you are forced to clear a malfunction during the drill.

## Using Cover/Concealment

We may not have any real cover for this drill, but we can use some barriers (competition wall or barrel, for instance) to help us practice our shooting using concealment. To accomplish this, we will use a technique called “slicing the pie.” This basically means we remain hidden (behind cover, but carefully leaning out enough to get the gun clear of barriers) while engaging targets in order of how they appear while moving and using cover. As the illustration on the opposite page portrays, it’s referred to as slicing the pie because of the angles that are created as you switch positions to engage different targets.

To work on this skill, we will set up three silhouette targets (at roughly 5, 7 and 10 yards) as well as a barrel or some form of cover. On the “threat” command, lean out from cover (keeping as much of your body behind the barrier as possible) and engage the targets, one by one, in order of “slicing the pie” (two shots each; center of mass).

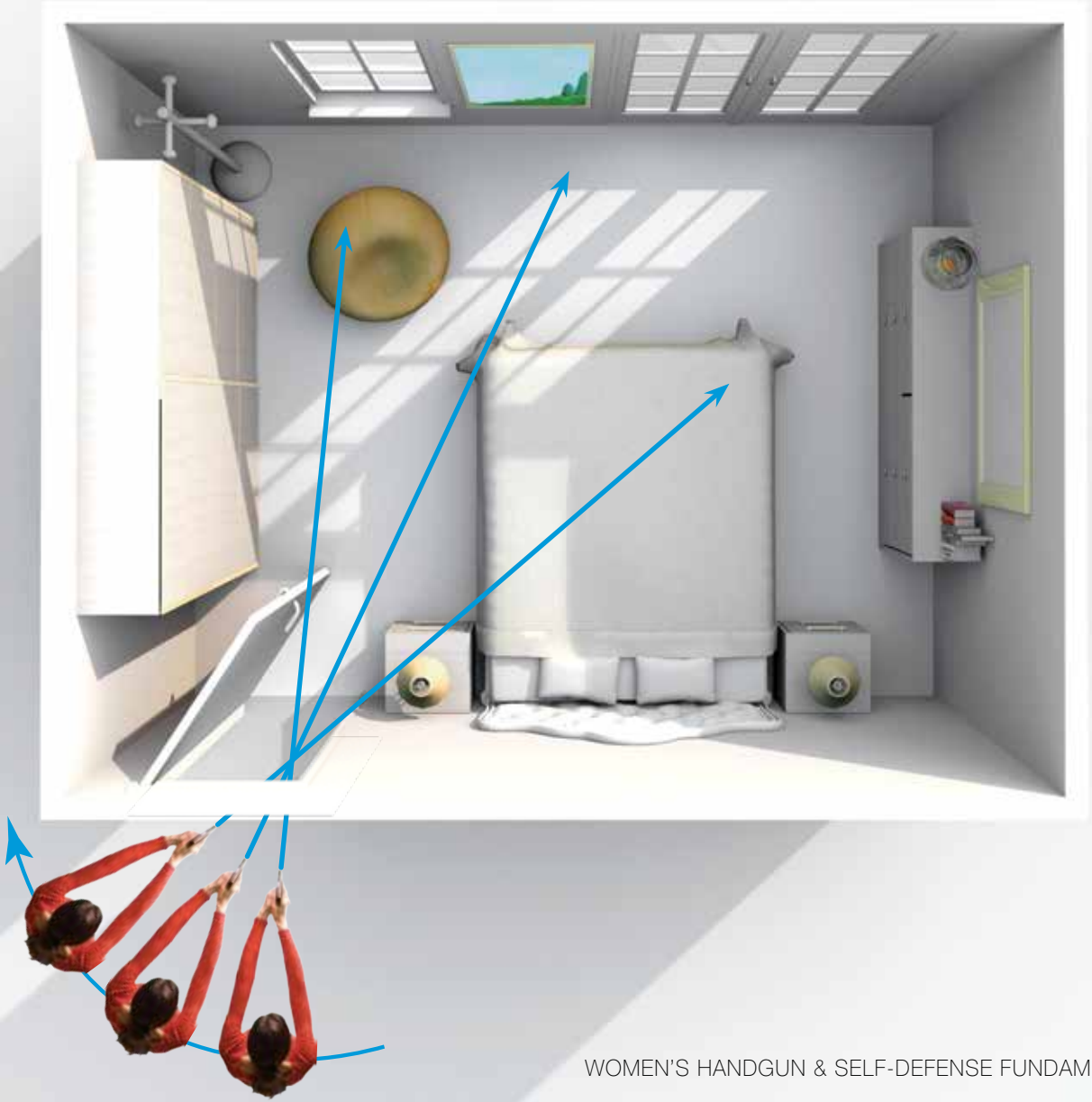
Switch things up a little in this drill by trying the following:

- Take a knee before shooting (which we will discuss soon).
- Shoot one-handed; use your dominant hand only or your non-dominant hand only.
- Add a “hostage” (a no-shoot target) that you need to avoid while engaging the other targets.

## Shooting on the Move

Shooting on the move is an important skill for defensive purposes and for competitive shooting (if you are ever inclined to give it a try). We have

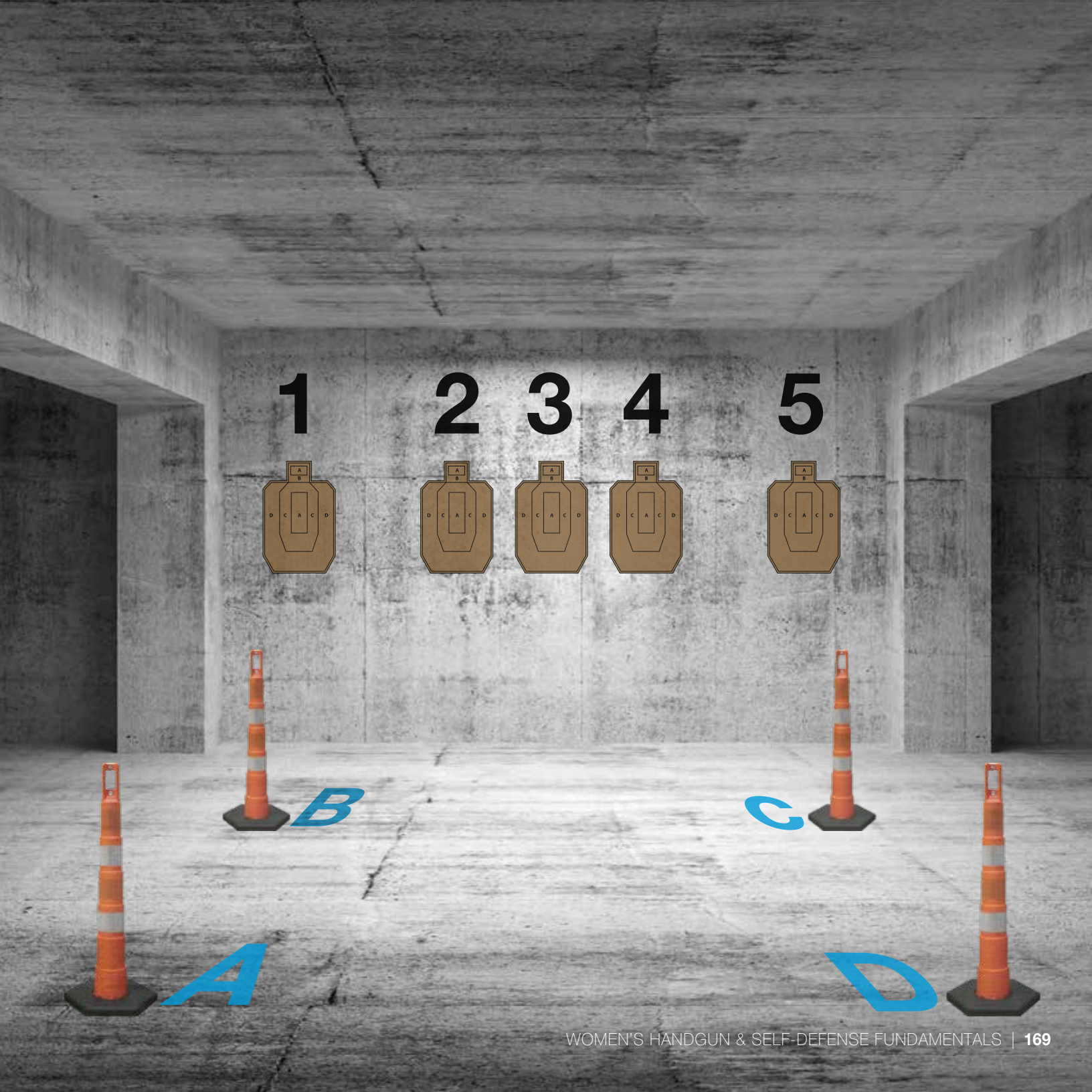
* A room or hallway can be simulated by using a competition wall, barrels or even traffic cones. This will allow you to remain hidden behind "cover" while carefully leaning out enough to get the gun clear of any barriers and engage targets in order of how they begin to appear. In the example below, the shooter would start on the right and use the barrier as cover/concealment as she "slices the pie" by moving slowly to the left, which gives her a greater and greater view of the "room," allowing her to engage targets as they come into her view.



experienced a little movement with getting off the line as well as with moving backwards after shooting from retention. Next we'll focus on moving while shooting. This is not a simple task because the movement of your body is going to add movement to the gun. (And, as we know, additional movement to the gun can pull our shots off target!) So, if this is a new skill to you, take it slowly and deliberately. Focus on keeping your upper body, shoulders and arms as stiff as possible, and try bending more at the knees while you walk to help absorb some of the extra motion. As well, be sure your muzzle is facing downrange at all times, no matter where or how you are moving!

For working on moving and shooting, we will set up five silhouette targets and mark off a square or a rectangle with traffic cones or tape. (The dimension/distance will vary according to space limitations and/or skill level.) Start with three magazines loaded with five rounds each (15 rounds total) and a loaded pistol in a holster.

On the instructor's "threat" command, draw and move forward from the "A" to the "B" corner while engaging Target 1 with three rounds. Move sideways from "B" to "C" and engage Target 2 and Target 4 with three rounds each. Then, move backwards from the "C" to the "D" corner while engaging Target 5 with three rounds. Finally, move from "D" to "A" and engage Target 3 (center) with the last three rounds. Reload as needed during the course of fire. You can make the decision when to reload and when to transition. For added but controlled stress, consider being on the clock.


1
2
3
4
5
B
C
A
D

## Kneeling and Prone Positions

Unfortunately, we don't get to plan out the circumstances of a dangerous event. Therefore, we don't always end up shooting from a standing position. For this reason, it's important to practice shooting in different ways. We will try a drill that requires shooting from prone, kneeling and standing. Prone position means that the shooter will be lying on her stomach or slightly to one side. This would typically be useful if shooting from under some sort of cover. A kneeling position (one or both knees) could also be useful if hiding behind cover. All of these positions require the same shooting fundamentals (good grip, trigger manipulation, sight alignment and sight picture). And all of these positions still recognize the gun safety rules.

Before we begin a live-fire drill, let's practice safely getting into a kneeling position and a prone position (if you can) with a blue gun, SIRT pistol or other inert training handgun (or with your gun unloaded and clear and no ammo nearby). For kneeling, draw your firearm as you normally would, then drop to one knee (keeping the gun straight out in front of you or in a high compressed retention ready position and always pointed downrange). You can then go to both knees if it's comfortable and/or if the situation calls for that.

To get into the prone position is a bit trickier. For our purposes, we are going to focus on the low-impact prone technique as taught by championship shooter Julie Golob. The step-by-step procedure is shown to the right.

**DRAW** the firearm from the holster and ensure it is pointed downrange and in a safe direction at all times.

**AS YOU FALL FORWARD,** use your support hand to ease yourself onto the ground. Extend your firing hand forward and rest the gun on the ground.

2

**DROP** to your knees.

3

**LEAN FORWARD** and bend at the waist while extending your support hand out in front of you.

5

**WHEN YOUR BODY HAS MADE FULL CONTACT** with the ground, move your support hand to acquire a two-handed grip on your firearm.

For a drill using the kneeling and prone shooting positions, we will use one target, and the shooter will start at a distance of 5 yards, with six rounds in the magazine and the pistol in the holster. On the instructor's "threat" command, the shooter will draw and engage the target with two rounds, center mass, while standing. Then she will carefully move backward to the next distance (10-15 yards), get into the kneeling position (one or both knees) and engage the target with two more shots, center mass. When complete, the shooter will carefully maneuver into the prone position and engage the target with the last two shots.

Please be sure you don't rush any of these movements! Unless you have practiced and trained with kneeling and prone before, it can feel awkward and uncomfortable. Take your time and think things through. Make sure that you keep your finger off the trigger when moving and that you keep your muzzle pointed downrange at the target at all times.

(Note: Please be extra careful when shooting from low positions. As mentioned in *Women's Basic Pistol,* you are responsible for every bullet that leaves your gun, and we don't want any projectiles flying over the berm or backstop. If your facility does not have a setup that can handle shooting from prone, just try the standing-to-kneeling version only.)

## CONCLUSION

Undoubtedly, for those who have firearms and for those who choose to live a concealed carry lifestyle, it is not enough simply to have a gun. It is not enough that we know, understand and abide by the firearms safety rules either. We need to know how to safely and effectively use this defensive tool. We need to train! And even though this course is complete, I hope you have a strong desire to continue your journey to learn more. This doesn't mean that you need to master shooting from prone, become a competitive shooter

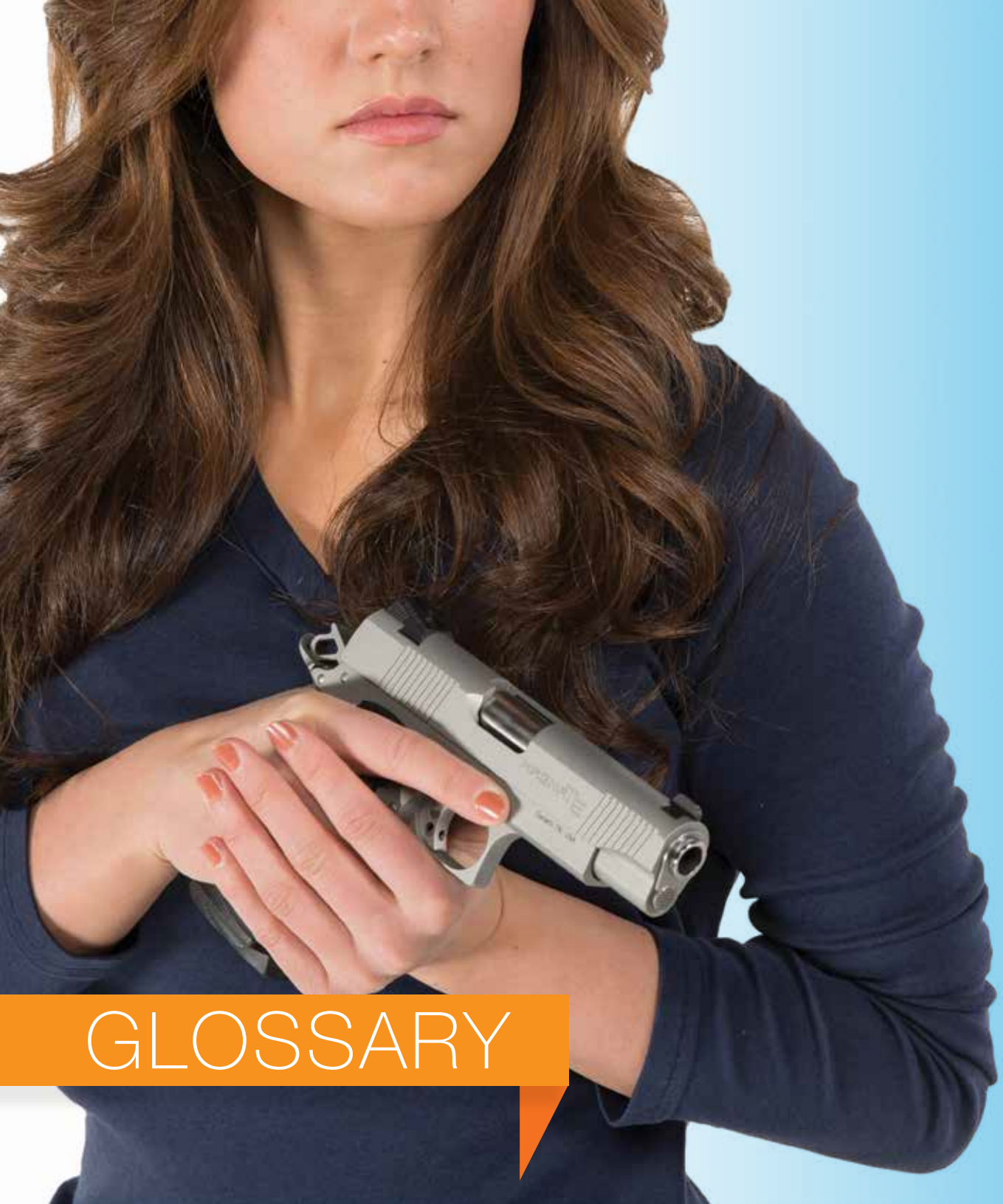
or train like a Navy SEAL (unless you want to do all of those things, of course!). But it does mean that you should find classes and instructors in your area so you can learn more about guns, build good muscle memory and practice what you know so you can be better prepared in the event you ever needed to use that otherwise useless chunk of metal in your holster.

There are all sorts of classes about all sorts of things taught by all sorts of trainers. You can start by searching the USCCA's website for reputable certified instructors or training counselors in your area. Just don't rely solely on a family member or a friend to "show you the ropes." Sometimes it's difficult to learn from someone you know too well; other times it's challenging to learn from someone who isn't effective at teaching. We've all been there! While these folks may have the best intentions, it's often best for everyone if you seek out a class that fits your skill level (and your needs) and find a trainer whom you like. I can't describe what those elements will be for you since different people prefer different things. But if you would rather participate in a class of only ladies, seek out that class. If you want to learn from a female instructor, look for that person. Whether you are male or female, young or old, individual or group, neophyte or experienced, there is a class out there for you.

> "THERE IS NO END TO EDUCATION. IT IS NOT THAT YOU READ A BOOK, PASS AN EXAMINATION AND FINISH WITH EDUCATION. THE WHOLE OF LIFE, FROM THE MOMENT YOU ARE BORN TO THE MOMENT YOU DIE, IS A PROCESS OF LEARNING."
>
> Jiddu Krishnamurti

Even if some sort of firearms training is not required for a CCW permit in your state, you need it. Trust me. Everyone should be comfortable and capable with his or her self-defense gun … and with the mental, emotional, legal and financial aspects that may go with that. And that doesn't happen overnight — nor does it happen by osmosis. (That's one reason I highly recommend USCCA's *Concealed Carry and Home Defense Fundamentals* course as well as our defensive pistol classes.)

Just be sure to challenge yourself. Challenge yourself to overcome any fears or setbacks. Challenge yourself to incorporate both quality training and quantity training (as in, practice effectively … and practice as often as you can). Without proper training and practice, your gun is useless. So treat firearms training as a journey, not a destination. And remember that there's always room to learn more!



# GLOSSARY

# GLOSSARY

- **ACTION**
  The main part of the gun; includes the moving parts that load, fire and eject the cartridges.
- **BACK STRAP**
  The rear part of the grip on a handgun.
- **BARREL**
  The metal tube on the firearm through which a projectile is fired.
- **BORE**
  The inside of the gun's barrel through which the projectile travels when fired.
- **BRASS**
  The empty, fired case that is ejected from a semi-automatic pistol.
- **BREECH**
  The area of the firearm that contains the rear end of the barrel, where the cartridge is inserted.
- **CARTRIDGE**
  Synonym for a round or ammunition/ammo; includes a bullet, powder and a primer, all contained in an outer shell or case. (Note: People often call the round a bullet. This is not correct. The bullet is only the end — the projectile — that exits the gun when fired.)
- **CHAMBER**
  An area of the barrel into which ammunition is inserted.
- **CROSS-DOMINANCE**
  When the dominant eye does not match the same side as the dominant (shooting) hand.
- **CYLINDER**
  The part of a revolver that holds cartridges in separate chambers. The cylinder of a revolver rotates as the gun is cocked, bringing each chamber into alignment with the barrel.
- **CYLINDER RELEASE**
  The mechanism that, when pressed or pushed, opens the cylinder for unloading and reloading.
- **DECOCKER**
  On double-action, semi-automatic firearms, the lever that lowers the hammer without firing the gun.
- **EJECTION ROD**
  The mechanism that, when pushed, ejects the empty cases from the cylinder on a revolver.
- **EYE DOMINANCE**
  Also known as ocular dominance, this determines which eye is providing the most accurate/reliable information to your brain (or which eye your brain pays more attention to since it can't focus on two pictures at once).
- **FRAME**
  One of the basic parts of a handgun where the action, barrel and grip are connected.
- **FRONT SIGHT**
  Located at the muzzle end of the slide; often (but not always) in the form of a dot or a blade.
- **GRIP**
  The handle or area of the gun held by the shooting hand. (Also refers to how a shooter holds the gun).
- **HAMMER**
  The part that strikes the firing pin or the primer directly.
- **HAMMER SPUR**
  The exposed part of the hammer.
- **ISOSCELES STANCE**
  A shooting stance in which the gun is held straight out from of the body, with both arms straight.
- **MAGAZINE**
  A spring-operated holder for ammunition that automatically feeds the ammo into the chamber of the gun. (Note: It is not called a clip. That term is used incorrectly all the time!)

- **MAGAZINE RELEASE**
  A button or lever that releases the magazine from a semi-automatic firearm.
- **MAGAZINE WELL**
  The opening in the base of the grip into which a magazine is fed (sometimes shortened to "magwell").
- **MECHANICAL SAFETY**
  A device incorporated into the firearm that, when engaged, should prevent the discharge of the firearm.
- **MUZZLE**
  The open end of the barrel out of which a projectile is shot.
- **MUZZLE FLIP**
  The tendency of the muzzle to move upward when the gun is fired.
- **RACKING THE SLIDE**
  Pulling the slide back to its rearmost position and then letting it go forward under its own spring tension. Racking the slide loads the chamber and prepares the gun to fire in a semi-automatic handgun.
- **REAR SIGHT**
  Located at the back of the slide nearest the shooter; may be in the shape of a square notch, a "U," a "V," a ring or simply two dots designed to be visually placed on either side of the front sight while shooting.
- **RECOIL**
  Sometimes referred to as "kick." The tendency of a firearm when fired to move backward and a little upward as a reaction to the force of the projectile moving down the barrel. The mass of the firearm provides some inertia to counteract the momentum of recoil. What remains is absorbed by the shoulders/arms and the hands. The heavier the gun, the less the felt recoil. The more powerful the cartridge, the more recoil.
- **REVOLVER**
  A handgun with a multi-chambered cylinder that rotates to successively align each chamber with a single barrel and firing pin.
- **SEMI-AUTOMATIC PISTOL**
  A type of firearm which, utilizing the energy and movement of the gun when fired, cycles to place the gun in position for another shot with nothing more than another press of the trigger.
- **SIGHT ALIGNMENT**
  The manner in which the sights are lined up properly in front of the shooter's eye to form a straight path to the target.
- **SIGHT PICTURE**
  What the shooter sees when looking through the sights at the target.
- **SLIDE**
  The upper portion of a semi-automatic pistol that houses the barrel and contains the portions of the firing mechanism. As its name states, it slides along the top of the frame during the recoil process.
- **SLIDE LOCK/RELEASE (SLIDE STOP)**
  Typically refers to a lever either on the left or right side of a pistol's frame that is used to lock back or release the slide to a closed/forward position.
- **TAKEDOWN LEVER**
  The mechanism used to field-strip or take apart the gun.
- **TANG**
  The curved part of a handgun's grip where it meets the slide.
- **TRIGGER**
  The small lever on a firearm that one presses to cause the gun to fire.
- **TRIGGER GUARD**
  The rounded part of the gun that covers and protects the trigger.

## ABOUT THE BOOK

Created and led by USCCA Associate Editor and Senior Training Counselor Beth Alcazar, *Women's Handgun and Self-Defense Fundamentals* is a welcoming and engaging training guide with multiple layers of instruction. Featuring three distinct levels (*Women's Basic Pistol, Women's Intermediate Pistol* and *Women's Defensive Pistol*) that can be separated or used in combination, the book and course are designed to reach students who are brand new to firearms (and maybe have never picked up a gun before) through those who are ready to learn more about defensive shooting and take the next step with their firearms skills, tools and mindsets. Alcazar introduces, reviews and builds upon the fundamentals of shooting and explores the universal safety rules, situational awareness, common types of handguns, ammunition types, marksmanship skills, advanced firearms handling, defensive pistol fundamentals and the use of deadly force. Specifically, *Women's Handgun and Self-Defense Fundamentals* is all about sharing the basics — along with the fun, the seriousness and the importance of being a responsibly armed female. After all, we are worth protecting.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Associate Editor of *Concealed Carry Women's Magazine* and author of the *Pacifiers & Peacemakers* blog, Beth Alcazar has enjoyed nearly two decades of teaching and working in the shooting/outdoors industry. Beth also enjoys representing her state, Alabama, as a member of the D.C. Project. She holds degrees in language arts, education and communication management and uses her experience and enthusiasm to share safe and responsible firearms ownership and usage with others. Beth is certified through the NRA as a Training Counselor, Chief Range Safety Officer and instructor for multiple disciplines. She is also a Certified Instructor through ALICE Training Institute, D.R.A.W. School, I.C.E. Training, SIG Sauer Academy and TWAW and is a USCCA-Certified Instructor and Senior Training Counselor.

90000>
9 781532 340468

AN OFFICIAL PRODUCT OF

USCCA