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# HANDGUNS 101



**American Gun**  
ASSOCIATION

# HANDGUNS 101



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# INTRODUCTION TO HANDGUNS 101

**Welcome to Handguns 101!**

**In this course, you will develop a clear understanding of what a handgun is, what handgun ownership entails, and how to advance your skills beyond the utmost basics of handgun usage.**

By taking multiple aspects of these topics into consideration, we're aiming to better equip handgun owners of every skill level and walk of life to not only become better handgun users, but also better advocates for our Constitutional right to gun ownership and use.

The Second Amendment codifies and protects this right, but it is the responsibility of every gun owner to exercise this right in a safe manner.

For this reason, we attempted to focus on how handguns should be handled. We believe by being living examples of responsible handgun users, we become living testimonies to the self-evident and inalienable rationale behind the Second Amendment.

And while this is not meant to be a manuscript on the political gun rights vs. gun control debate, it is inextricably linked to the topic at hand.

As the stress fissures of the partisan divide on gun ownership in America become more and

more apparent every day, it's more important than ever to ground ourselves in fact and shun the myths perpetuated by misinformation in the media.

These facts dovetail with the core concepts of handgun ownership and responsible use, with this connection being no more obvious than when it comes to defensive shooting.

Gun ownership in America is not only our Constitutional right (balanced with the responsibility of safe, skillful use), but is increasingly becoming a patriotic act in the face of Unconstitutional gun control movements.

While it is not necessary for you to make the most of this course, you might find it beneficial to also have a copy of *The Heart and Soul of American Patriotism*, made available through our sister platform the American Patriots Association.

This is what we hope you will take away from this course more than anything else - the ability to live as an example of what a responsible handgun owner is and ought to be.

Thus, as proud and responsible handgun owners ourselves, we invite you to use this course as the foundation for your handgun ownership and usage.





# CHAPTER 1: GETTING STARTED

**Whether you're a long-time handgun owner, have only recently purchased your first handgun, or are looking to do so soon, there are a few universal truths we can all benefit from knowing.**

You might have prior knowledge of the topics covered in this chapter, in which case it will serve as a supplementary source for revising your understanding of handguns. And in any case, as responsible handgun owners, it serves us well to not neglect these basic, but fundamental concepts.

## **WHAT IS A HANDGUN?**

Knowing exactly what a handgun is will make the rest of this chapter - and indeed the rest of this course - more streamlined and focused. It's a very basic set of knowledge often overlooked in the community, yet it serves as the very foundation of

handgun ownership and use.

So what is a handgun?

It might seem obvious to you that, as Merriam-Webster's dictionary puts it, a handgun is "a firearm (such as a revolver or pistol) designed to be held and fired with one hand."

But is this all there is to handguns? Is the term merely a descriptive means of designating a collection of firearms based on their size? We don't think so - and history can back us up on this one.

You see, before Samuel Colt patented his Colt Paterson revolver in 1836, handguns were not as common as they are today. In fact, they were so expensive to produce they were considered something of a badge of office, much like swords had been (despite the popular misconception

that swords were the most common weapon of the Medieval Period).

Handguns are obviously no longer considered a badge of office in America, though this might still be true in some other countries where their use is limited to that of law enforcement. Instead, handguns developed into primarily a firearm of self-defense - the topic of Chapter 3.

This is not, of course, to dismiss the use of handguns in competition shooting! But this is why our understanding of handguns hinges on the word "primarily." Even when used as a secondary weapon by military personnel, a handgun is primarily a defensive firearm.

So what's a better definition of a handgun?

We think it should be "a handgun is a



firearm (such as a revolver or pistol) designed to be held and fired with one hand, though better stabilized when the second hand cups the first, primarily carried and used for self-defense.”

## **A BRIEF HISTORY OF HANDGUNS**

While understanding the history of handguns is not strictly necessary for handgun owners, having this knowledge helps foster a greater respect for the firearm. And having a healthy respect for your firearm is, of course, always beneficial.

### **Chinese Innovation**

It all starts with the discovery of the first gunpowder by Chinese alchemists, circa 850 CE. Originally a mixture of potassium nitrate, sulfur, and softwood charcoal, the black powder was concocted in the alchemists’ attempts to develop an elixir of life. In fact, for many years, its primary use was in the treatment of wounds.

The ingredients were experimented with for a while before a more effective mixture was developed and the powder’s explosive qualities discovered.

A Chinese Buddhist who practiced alchemy reportedly wrote “Some have heated together the saltpeter, sulfur, and carbon of charcoal with honey; smokes and flames result, so that their hands and faces have been burned, and even the whole house burned down.”

Shortly after, the powder found a new use in fireworks. The military applications were quickly experimented with to develop the world’s first primitive cannons (likely comprising hollow bamboo loaded with gunpowder and a large projectile) and grenades (likely bags or even pots of gunpowder).

### **Matchlock Pistols**

Matchlock handguns first appeared in use by the Ottoman army’s Janissary corps sometime between 1394 and the 1440s CE.

While the Chinese Heilongjiang hand cannon of the mid-13th century and the fire arrow launchers of circa 969 CE China might be considered the first forays in handgun design, the matchlock was the first such firearm to truly facilitate the older handguns most of us are familiar with.

To fire a matchlock, the trigger had to be released to move a spring-loaded lever known as the serpentine.

The serpentine held a slow-burning match, typically lit at both ends, which would be lowered into the flash pan and held a small quantity of gunpowder acting as a propellant. These could be likened to the firing pin and primer of modern handguns.

Once the primer was ignited, the force of its explosion propelled the projectile (typically a small metal ball).

### **Wheellock Pistols**

Around 1500 CE, the matchlock’s design was improved by the invention of the wheellock, which gets its name from a rotating wheel. The steel wheellock is forced to spin when the trigger is pulled; creating friction against a piece of pyrite to generate sparks. These would then ignite the gunpowder primer and cause the weapon to discharge.

The wheellock pistol can actually be thought of as the first true handgun matching the dictionary definition. While the matchlock required both



hands to operate, the wheellock could be readied and fired effectively with one hand.

### **Flintlock Pistols**

Flintlock pistols were developed in the 17th century and used a flint-strike as their ignition mechanism.

The hammer held a piece of flint and was cocked back to ready the firearm. Pulling the trigger released the mainspring, bringing the hammer down at a rapid speed so the flint struck against a piece of steel called the frizzen.

This would create intense sparks, which were actually tiny flakes of steel that burned at an incredibly high temperature. When these came into contact with the gunpowder primer, held in a pan, the flintlock discharged.

### **Caplock Pistols**

Caplock pistols replaced flintlocks in the early 19th century. Instead of a flint striking against a steel frizzen, the hammer struck a “nipple” (also called a “cone”), which was a small protruding piece of steel that contained a percussion cap.

The percussion cap held a small amount of mercury fulminate, which acted as the primer. When the nipple was struck, the mercury fulminate exploded, igniting the gunpowder charge in the barrel and propelling the loaded projectile.

Caplocks removed the flintlock’s powder pan smoke, which preceded



the actual discharge by long enough for birds to escape the shot. It was also more weatherproofed than the flintlock, as well as more reliable.

### **Revolvers**

Revolvers have a long and fascinating history of their own, but it all started with the one we mentioned earlier: the 1836 Colt Paterson.

The Colt Paterson was the first handgun that could be practically mass-produced. Once the hammer was released by the trigger, its strike ignited the black gunpowder charge held in the first chamber of the revolving cylinder. This in turn propelled the bullet, either a .28 caliber or (starting in 1837) a .36 caliber.

Colt went on to improve the design, starting with a loading lever and capping window in 1839. In 1846, Colt and Captain Samuel Hamilton

Walker designed the Colt Walker, which added a sixth chamber and used .44 caliber lead rounds. It remains the largest and most powerful revolver in history.

However, the 1857 Smith & Wesson Model 1 was the first revolver to use metallic rimfire cartridges, with self-contained primer and projectiles.

Colt’s Model 1889 (named after its year of introduction) then became the first true double-action revolver, as well as the first to use the “swing-out” cylinder rather than the prior “top-break” and “side-loading” cylinders that preceded it.

### **Derringers**

Derringers were first developed in 1852 as single-shot pistols using a muzzleloading action and percussion cap. They were designed to be used as self-defense firearms and have become synonymous with the terms

“pocket pistol” and “palm pistol” used to describe similar handguns produced by others.

Modern variants include the 1983 four-shot COP .357.

### **Semi-automatic Pistols**

Semi-automatic pistols first emerged in 1896 with the Mauser C96 “Broomhandle.” Like all semi-automatic firearms, the spent casing is ejected after a round is fired, and the next round is automatically chambered. The Mauser C96 used recoil energy to chamber the next round.

Blowback was first introduced as a semi-automatic reloading operation with the 1929 Walther PP. Rather than using recoil energy, blowback pistols used the casing ejection’s energy to load the next round.

Semi-automatic pistols are the most common handguns in modern use, though there are of course modern revolvers too.

### **Fully-automatic/Machine Pistols**

Machine pistols, like all fully-automatic firearms, are capable of firing a round, ejecting the spent casing, automatically loading the next round, and repeating this process for as long as the trigger is compressed (held down).

Pistols that offer selective-firing (the ability to switch between semi-automatic, burst mode, and/or fully-automatic) also fall under this category.

Fully-automatic pistols first emerged in Austria during World War 1 with the Steyr Repetierpistole M1912/P16.

Such handguns are notoriously difficult to use effectively with any measure of sustained aim. For this reason, most have an attachable shoulder stock, while others (such as the Beretta 93R) have a forward handgrip for two-handed use.

It’s worth pointing out it is currently illegal for citizens of any state to own a fully-automatic firearm

manufactured after 1986, as per the Firearm Owners Protection Act of that year, which builds onto the National Firearms Act of 1934.

Fully-automatic firearms produced before 1986 need to be registered with the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (ATF). The manufacture, selling, and ownership of fully-automatic firearms requires a special license, issued by ATF, which involves a lengthy and extensive background investigation.

### **UNDERSTANDING CARTRIDGE TYPES**

Cartridges - the self-contained combination of primer, gunpowder, and projectile (most commonly a bullet) - are differentiated according to the primer’s placement, the cartridge’s caliber, and its casing.

It’s important to understand these differences because they can (and will) influence the type of handgun you use.

The primer’s placement is typically divided into two categories: rimfire and centerfire. Rimfire cartridges have their primers built into the casing’s rim, whereas centerfire cartridge primers are placed in the center.

Centerfire cartridges are further divided into two subcategories: boxer and Berdan primers. Boxer primers tend to be self-contained and channel their charge through a narrow gap in the divide between the primer and the projectile’s propellant (gunpowder). Berdan primers, on the other hand, aren’t self-contained and feature







## CHOOSING THE RIGHT HANDGUN FOR YOU

Now that you know what a handgun is, have a basic understanding of the firearm's history, and understand caliber, it's time to start thinking about what the right handgun for you is.

This section is specially designed for those looking to buy their first handgun. However, even if you're a long-time handgun owner, you might find this information useful in helping guide your next purchase.

First, when setting out to choose a handgun, don't simply ask your gun friend. While they're likely to be enthusiastic about the matter and might have a wealth of knowledge to impart, their advice is ultimately going to be shaped by their own experience, likes, and dislikes.

No matter how good their intentions are, they're not really going to think about what's right for you as an individual. At best, they might approach the matter thinking about what might be right for you as a beginner instead.

You also don't want to take the advice of the guy behind the counter too literally. Again, they might have a wealth of knowledge and good intentions, but ultimately they're looking to make a sale. This means their recommendations might be influenced (even on a subconscious level) by the handguns that yield the most profit per sale and/or the models they're struggling to sell.

a small centerpiece that further separates the divide between primer and propellant into two small gaps.

Next, you get different calibers. "Caliber" refers to the barrel's internal bore diameter and is typically measured in either inches or millimeters. This, in turn, dictates the diameter of the cartridge.

Here are the 5 most popular handgun calibers (bear in mind many others do exist):

- 9mm
- .45
- .40
- .380
- .22

Finally, we come to casings.

Jacketed hollow points are highly similar to the open-tip, but have some fundamental differences beyond the scope of this text.

As a handgun user, you're most likely to be using hollow points for defense and full-metal jacket cartridges for practice. This is an unwritten rule, but one that makes sense, as full-metal jacket rounds tend to be significantly cheaper. Hollow points are also less likely to over-penetrate (go right through your target), as they expand inside the target.

With that said, your handgun will also handle slightly differently depending on the casing used. So it's still important to practice with hollow points, even though using full-metal jacket rounds are cheaper.

There are other casing types (including soft tip, ballistic tip, open tip, and jacketed hollow points), but you aren't as likely to use any of them with a handgun. An exception would be the use of ballistic tips in competition shooting.

By all means, sit and discuss your options with them. But first, and most importantly, answer the following questions for yourself before making a decision.

### 1. What's the Intended Use?

You probably have a good idea of the answer to this question already. After all, it's likely what shaped the decision to get a handgun in the first place.

There are many different uses for handguns, but they all boil down to one of two things: sport and self-defense.

Sport might include competition shooting (something first-time gun owners may want to leave for later) or simply spending time at the range. Self-defense might include home defense, personal defense while in public, or work-related reasons for needing a firearm.

As a general rule, low caliber

pistols are better suited for sport-related use. Examples include a .22, .32, and .380. These calibers and the handguns made for them tend to have less felt recoil, making them easier to handle and more comfortable to use.

For defensive shooting, on the other hand, you might want something that packs more punch. While a low-caliber handgun can still be used effectively at close quarters, a higher caliber - such as the 9mm, .40, and .45 - is generally more appropriate.

### 2. What's Your Budget?

Remember you're absolutely going to get what you pay for. Even if you're a first-time gun owner, your budget should ideally fall between \$400 and \$800.

This way, even the cheaper models falling into this price range are going to have a proven track record of reliability, be ergonomically

designed for comfort, and are more likely to have an excellent warranty.

As an example, the Springfield Armory XD Service 4" 45 ACP costs in the region of \$470. It's a lightweight, basic model that's easy to load and has a convenient guide on the fixed rear sight. The drawback is it has fairly strong recoil, the safety features aren't as easy to set up, and the firearm requires some extensive cleaning and maintenance.

A little higher up the price range is the Glock G19X G5, a 9mm Luger with an extended 17-round magazine and a price tag of around \$600. The benefits include better grip and a built-in night sight to assist in aim, though it still requires regular cleaning.

If you have more experience with handguns, a more expensive model with more extensive features will be more appropriate. However, you shouldn't feel compelled to increase your budget if you're quite happy with a handgun that falls in the same \$400 to \$800 price range.

### 3. What's Your Experience Level?

If this is your first handgun and you're using it to learn how to shoot as a complete novice, then you're better off choosing a handgun that's relatively comfortable to use. This is because, as a first-time shooter, using a firearm won't be exactly comfortable to begin with. Comfort will come with time and practice.





You also want to steer away from compact and subcompact handguns. While their smaller size makes them a lot easier to concealed carry, they have a higher level of felt recoil making them harder to control as a beginner. You're better off sticking with a full-frame model instead.

On the other hand, if you already have a decent level of experience with full-frame handguns and are looking for something more compact, don't hold back. As long as you have a relatively high level of competency with full-frame firearms, a compact or subcompact could be the new challenge you're looking for.

You should also take the safety and decocking mechanism into consideration when considering a handgun. The more complicated these are, the steeper your learning curve will be.

This is also where the price range tends to increase.

#### 4. New or Second-Hand?

This is largely down to your personal preference and purchasing habits.

Buying a second-hand firearm can help you shop for a handgun in the higher price range at a lower price. Most used handguns sell for 25% or even 50% off the original price, so it can help your budget.

However, you still want to stick to

a known and trusted brand, as most of them offer lifetime warranties that are attached to the gun rather than the owner. You're also less likely to end up with a problematic handgun this way.

Additionally, when buying a second-hand firearm, it's always good practice to ask if the seller is willing to accompany you to a firing range so you can test the handgun. This isn't always possible and may not always be practical though, so don't walk away if the seller isn't able to accommodate this kind of request.

#### 5. How Does It Feel?

Perhaps the most important question to ask yourself at the end of the day is how the handgun feels when you're using it.

It doesn't matter whether you're buying new or second-hand. Do yourself a favor and rent a handgun to practice with on-site, if the option is available. It's best if you have a few different models in mind, based on your answers to the previous questions, in case you find you don't like the feel of the one you originally chose.

This way, when you make the investment of purchasing your handgun, you already have a fair idea of what your experience using it is like.

With the basics out of the way, it's time to move on to Chapter 2, where you'll learn how to use a handgun safely and improve your skills through dry firing.







## CHAPTER 2: **DRY FIRING AND HANDGUN SAFETY**

**In this chapter, we're taking a look at dry firing, a technique used for decades to practice your shooting skills (and improve them) without needing to spend money on range time and ammunition.**

Dry firing isn't only free, though - it's also safe and easy, provided you do it correctly.

Before we dive into how you can (and should) use dry firing to advance your handgun skills, we need to properly establish the safety aspect of the technique. And to do that, we need to start with the core rules of gun safety for handling firearms of any type.

### **HANDGUN SAFETY - THE CORE RULES OF GUN SAFETY**

If you're a new gun owner or still approaching your first firearm purchase, then you should know this section of Handguns 101 is easily the most important.

These are the core rules of gun safety, regardless of whether you're sticking to handguns or expanding to the use of other firearms.

If you're a long-time gun owner, you should already know these rules. However, human memory is an infallible thing, so we encourage you not to skip this section of the course. As with everything related to guns and their use, it's always worth reminding ourselves of what we've already learned.

And while there are many, many other important gun safety rules, these are the most important - the Golden Rules, if you will.

1. Always keep your gun pointed in a safe direction. This means never have the muzzle aimed toward anything you do not intend to shoot. Keep things like ricochet and the fact bullets can potentially pierce through walls and ceilings

in mind as well.

2. Your firearm should be unloaded when not in use. This one actually has a pretty big exception we'll cover after listing all the rules, but as a beginner especially, consider it a steadfast rule that shouldn't be broken. Load your handgun at the range and unload it again before leaving.
3. Treat every firearm as if it were loaded. Even if you just unloaded it yourself and know for a fact there aren't any cartridges chambered or otherwise contained in your handgun, act as if it were fully loaded and ready to fire. When passing your handgun to someone else, or someone else is handing you a firearm, immediately open the action and make sure it's unloaded. If someone is passing a firearm to you, perform this check even if they already did the same right

before handing it over.

4. Always keep your finger off the trigger until you're ready to fire - and don't rely on your handgun's safety mechanisms. This boils down to always treating your firearm as if it could fire at any time. And not only are the safety mechanisms mechanical devices that could malfunction, but you could also mistakenly think it's engaged when it's actually off.
5. Know what your target is and be aware of what's behind it. This kind of builds onto the first rule by forcing you to think about what you're aiming at and intending to shoot. Once you pull that trigger, you lose all control over where the bullet goes and what it strikes. Even if you're using hollow points, there's always the risk your shot will over-penetrate by passing through your target and hitting whatever (or whomever) is behind it. A good rule of thumb is to bear in mind the distance your bullet will travel if you miss or your shot ricochets.
6. Understand how your handgun works. You should learn its basic parts and their function, including how to safely load and unload it. This ties in with the next rule.
7. Always make sure your handgun is safe to operate. The better you know how all of its parts work, the better you're able to assess whether it's in a safe operating condition before and during use. To aid in this, you should



regularly clean your handgun, store it properly and safely, and have it professionally serviced at least as often as the manufacturer prescribes.

8. Never make any alterations or modifications to your handgun. Besides being illegal (depending on the type of alterations and modifications in question), you could compromise the firearm's integrity as well as void the warranty. If you want to have your handgun modified with an extra safety feature (or features), for example, consult a professional gunsmith who can advise you on the proper procedure and handle the modification on your behalf.
9. Only use the correct ammunition. Most modern handguns will have the correct ammunition type stamped onto the barrel for easy reference. It only takes one cartridge of the wrong caliber to destroy your handgun and

cause serious injury to yourself and potentially those nearby. You should also store your ammunition correctly to prevent damage, which can have the same effect. Make it a habit to inspect each cartridge as you charge (load) your magazine.

10. If your handgun fails to fire, hold your firing position for several seconds (30 seconds is a good rule of thumb). After a safe amount of time elapses, lower your firearm so it's pointed in a safe direction before opening the action, unloading, and disposing of the cartridge in a safe manner.
11. Always wear eye and ear protection as appropriate. Especially in enclosed spaces (like an indoor range) and where multiple firearms are being used (like an outdoor range), the sound of guns firing can cause hearing damage. Firearms can also emit hot gases and small debris, which



can lead to eye injuries as well.

12. Never use your weapon after consuming any substances that are likely to impair your normal mental and physical capacity, such as alcohol and medication. This doesn't only apply to firing your handgun, but to loading, unloading, and cleaning it as well.

## **PRACTICE AMMUNITION AND DEFENSE AMMUNITION**

The one exception to rule #2 is a handgun used for self-defense should not be regularly loaded and unloaded, other than for cleaning and dry fire practice.

There are several reasons for this, the most obvious being if you need to draw and use your self-defense handgun, you likely don't have enough time to load it and chamber the first round. When seconds count, the police are "only" minutes away. But perhaps the most important reason you shouldn't be loading and unloading your self-defense handgun is because cycling rounds that have been chambered degrades the primer and can lead to malfunction.

So what should you do, especially if you're going to use the dry firing method to advance your skill level?

Have two separate sets of ammunition. One set is for defensive use and the other set - which should be stored separately and clearly marked - is for practicing with at the range. This is especially easy if you stick to using hollow points, even

though full metal jacket rounds are cheaper for using at the range.

### ***Here's what to do:***

1. If your handgun is currently loaded with defense ammunition and you need to unload it for cleaning and/or dry firing, eject the magazine and store it with your other defense ammunition. Then eject the chambered round and store it with your practice ammunition. Remember to charge the defense magazine with one new cartridge from your defense ammunition storage.
2. If your handgun is currently loaded with defense ammunition and you need to unload it because you're heading to the range for live fire practice, eject the magazine and store it with your other defense ammunition. Then load a magazine that's been charged and stored with your practice ammunition, leaving the chambered round in place. The chambered round can be used as your first shot.

3. If your handgun is currently loaded with practice ammunition and you need to unload it for cleaning, dry firing, and/or to load defense ammunition, follow the same instructions as in point 1 above. The only difference is you can cycle the chambered round by charging your practice magazine with it, which is then stored with your other practice ammunition.

When you visit the range, you may as well fire all of the practice ammunition you have loaded. This way, you can clean your handgun again before reloading with your defense ammunition.

These steps also ensure your defense ammunition is far less likely to cause a misfire (if the gun fails to fire) when you need to use your handgun for that exact purpose - self-defense.

With that out of the way, let's dive into dry firing!

## **WHAT IS DRY FIRING?**

Dry firing is a technique where you practice firing your handgun





while it's unloaded, i.e. without any ammunition. It's most commonly practiced at home, which helps eliminate the distractions encountered at the range. These distractions include the sound of other firearms (as well as your own) discharging, reciprocating slides, and ammunition shells being ejected.

By eliminating these and other potential distractions by practicing dry firing at home, you're creating an environment where you can focus on your technique. Distractions pull your focus away and can lead to bad habits creeping in through muscle memory.

This is not to say you can't or shouldn't practice dry firing at the range as well. Nor should dry firing replace live firing at the range. In fact, dry firing should be a supplemental practice method that compliments your live fire practice sessions at the range.

At the end of this chapter, we'll discuss how you can combine the two by bringing dry fire practice into the range as well.

Moving on, dry firing can be practiced with almost any firearm, not just handguns. However, you should be aware dry firing with any rimfire weapon will damage your firing pin and ultimately result in an expensive replacement. There are some exceptions, but as a general rule, never practice dry firing with a rimfire gun.

You also shouldn't practice dry firing with older models. Revolvers that

have a firing pin attached to their hammer should also not be used for dry firing. Modern semi-automatic pistols and revolvers that have a transfer bar and hammer block are safe to use, however.

## **DRY FIRING SAFETY RULES**

Just because there's no ammunition involved, doesn't mean you can neglect any of the gun safety rules covered in the previous sections. All of these rules continue to stand 100%. Remember: rule #3 dictates that you treat all firearms with the assumption they're loaded, even if you unloaded (and confirmed) the gun yourself.

This section can serve as a safety checklist you should go through every time you practice dry firing. You can copy this section (or grab it from our posted article on the American Gun Association blog), print it out, and keep it at hand for easy reference.

1. Have a designated dry firing area where you will practice exclusively.
2. The only time you practice dry firing somewhere other than in your designated area is if you practice dry firing at the range.
3. A safe designated dry firing area is one capable of stopping a bullet if you accidentally fire your handgun with a live round chambered. An exterior wall made of brick is a good example.
4. Use a designated dry firing target. This could be a commercial

target, one you've hand-drawn, or one you've printed off the internet. If you're using dry firing gear, such as Laser Ammo, the manufacturers typically have designated targets designed to work with their product (for example a Personal Electronic Target).

5. Your designated dry firing target is for use while practicing with the dry firing technique only. Don't use a target that's identical or very similar to the targets used at your firing range. This helps you mentally segregate dry firing practice from live firing training.
6. If you have a body-armor vest, use it as a backstop behind your target. This serves as an additional safety method in case you accidentally fire a live round during dry firing practice.
7. Before entering your designated dry firing area, unload and clear your handgun. The magazine (or speedloader if you use one) should be removed, chambered rounds ejected, and your pockets free of ammunition. Remember to keep your practice ammunition and your defense ammunition separate from each other and clearly labeled.
8. After entering your designated dry firing area, clear your handgun a second time. It's always better to err on the side of caution.
9. Many gun safety experts recommend keeping the action

open when your handgun is unloaded. Whether you do so or not, using a chamber flag (which generally retail at about \$11) will serve as a visual reminder your gun is unloaded and safe to use for dry firing. If you do use a chamber flag, store it in your designated dry firing area so you can insert it after clearing your handgun the second time.

10. Your dry firing session should last a maximum of 15 uninterrupted minutes per day. If an unavoidable interruption occurs, end the session, deal with the interruption, then start again or call it a day.
11. Have a designated dry firing time slot of 20 to 30 minutes, with the extra time used for clearing and reloading your handgun. This slot can fit anywhere in your daily schedule where you will not have any anticipated distractions. Ideally, try to keep your time slot consistent from one session to the next.
12. At the end of your dry firing session, tell yourself: “This session is now over. No more practice for today.” Do so out loud and repeat it several times before leaving your designated dry firing area.
13. After leaving your designated dry firing area, you may choose to take time to clean your handgun, depending on how recently you’ve done so. Finish cleaning your handgun before reloading, to avoid multiple reload/unload

cycles in a day.

14. Once you’re 100% in the mindset that your dry firing session is over for the day and you left your designated area, you can proceed to reload your handgun. After doing so, tell yourself out loud: “This weapon is now loaded. No more practice for today.” This helps mentally cement the fact the session is over and prevents “maybe just one more shot...” thinking, which leads to accidents.
15. Once your handgun is loaded, store it safely. If you’re not practicing everyday carry (concealed or otherwise), you should only store your home defense firearm while loaded. Any other firearms you use should be stored unloaded.

## **HOW TO USE DRY FIRING TO ADVANCE YOUR SKILLS**

Dry firing helps supplement live fire training and practice in five areas, only three of which we were able to cover in our online blog post.

### **Trigger Control**

Trigger control is a common problem for new gun users. Focus on how the slack takes up, the trigger breaks and resets, and how all of this affects your aim. Your sights should still be 100% on target after you hear the “click.”

To make this easier, you can balance a small coin (a penny is a good choice) on the front sight. The coin will fall if your trigger control is off.

Alternatively, there are commercial products such as the MantisX Firearm Training System that attach to your firearm’s accessory rail and link to an app via Bluetooth. Using this kind of system, you can get real-time performance evaluation to help identify problem areas.

### **Drawing**

Drawing is an incredibly important skill to master, whether your primary use of a handgun is for self-defense or not. There are three basic steps to drawing: the draw action, presentation, and firing.

While dry firing, especially as a handgun novice, start slowly by practicing the techniques taught at the live training you’re attending. Focus on your grip, draw action, presentation, and aim. This helps develop muscle memory of the correct technique.

As you improve over time, start increasing your pace. The muscle memory will continue to build to the point where the correct technique - practiced often enough in dry firing and live firing sessions alike - becomes second-nature.

### **Reloading**

Dry firing sessions are only going to help you practice and perfect your reloading technique if you do one of two things: remove the spring and follower from a spare magazine, which you store in your designated dry firing area and never charge, or

purchase and use a training magazine, such as the appropriately named DryFireMag.

If you have either of these tools at your disposal, you can include reloading practice in your dry firing sessions.

### **Eliminating Flinches**

As a new gun user especially, flinching in reaction to recoil can be a common issue.

While dry firing won't be able to teach you recoil recovery, the muscle memory you're building up will be of firing without recoil. As a result, you'll likely find (over time) you no longer flinch in anticipation of recoil during live fire training and practice.

### **Positioning**

When practicing dry firing, practice firing from different positions. Switching between positions - like sitting, standing, kneeling, and prone

- will make you a more rounded shooter.

If you're able, set up some form of cover for yourself so you can practice engaging your target from behind it. A word of caution, though - this is best left for when you've been using the dry firing technique consistently over an extended period of time. Trying to learn better trigger control, for example, while also changing positions too often, will get in the way of identifying and correcting the smaller mistakes.

### **DRY FIRING AT THE RANGE**

As promised, to end the chapter, we're going to talk about how you can bring dry fire training into the range.

Some instructors encourage doing so, as it helps you become more comfortable using your handgun while others are live firing. The noise - which could otherwise be a potential distraction - becomes part of your

training, getting you used to the sound of firearms discharging.

This way, you're also less likely to have your concentration thrown off by the sound of your own handgun's discharge.

A great technique to use is to start your range time with a dry firing session. This helps reassure you of technique and correct any small mistakes that come up while you're getting used to the noise.

After your dry firing session is over (it can be shorter than your sessions at home, but never longer), switch to live fire. Your muscle memory has been jogged and the noise of firearms discharging should no longer be as much of an issue, so you'll likely find your aim has improved somewhat - even if you just finished your first ever dry firing session.


Then end your day at the range with another 10 minutes of dry firing. Switch straight from live fire to dry fire. This will help you better identify and correct any mistakes you're still making while firing live ammunition.

Once you're done, you can spend some time cleaning your handgun (if you haven't done so recently) and, if you everyday carry, reload with your defense ammunition.

Now that you have a better understanding of gun safety and how dry firing can be used to effectively supplement your live fire training, it's time to move on to Chapter 3, where we discuss defensive shooting.







## CHAPTER 3: DEFENSIVE SHOOTING

As mentioned before, self-defense is one of the main reasons given for gun ownership.

For some gun owners, it's a matter of potential security – the knowledge that if SHTE, they have a means of defending themselves and their homes. For others, it's a realized security, having the experience of needing to use their firearm in self-defense in the past.

In this chapter, we're going to take an in-depth look at defensive shooting, including what it is, what it entails, and what the law says about it.

### WHAT IS DEFENSIVE SHOOTING?

Defensive shooting actually begins with defensive gun use, which can be broken into two parts: presenting your firearm in order to discourage a

threatening person/s from acting on their intent and firing your weapon to stop a threatening person/s who is acting on their intent.

Whether or not self-defense is your primary reason for owning a handgun (or contemplating your first purchase), the fact remains: defensive shooting is a necessary skill for every gun owner to have.

### DEFENSIVE GUN USE AND THE LAW

Defensive gun use laws differ from one state to the next, which makes them difficult to quantify in a general sense.

The first thing you need to look out for is making sure your handgun is legal in your state of residence or any state you visit and may need to use it defensively in. While the legal

requirements for defensive gun use to be recognized as such differ from one state to the next, this much is true across the nation: if your particular model is illegal in that state, your use of it is also illegal.

This is one of the reasons why you shouldn't modify or otherwise alter your handgun without the express guidance of a registered gunsmith. Your actual firearm may be perfectly legal, but the modifications you add to it might be a different story.

You also need to take a look at what your state (or any state you visit) says about how firearms can be carried.

Concealed-carry laws are difficult to get straight, as they also differ from one state to the next. If you're carrying your handgun illegally, your self-defense argument might not hold up in court. And even if it does, you

might still be penalized for illegal carry.

## The 4 Varieties of Concealed-Carry

It's worth taking a quick look at the 4 types of concealed-carry. Because their status by state tends to fluctuate, we won't be including a list of examples of states for each type. We do, however, have an article of the same name as this subsection that does include such a list, which we try to keep updated as changes come about.

The first (and arguably most Constitutional) type of concealed-carry is the Unrestricted Right-to-Carry. In states that implement this variety, you do not need to have a special permit to concealed-carry, though you do still need to comply with any other local requirements for legal gun ownership.

A second variety is the most Unconstitutional of all: no-issue. In

no-issue states, concealed-carry is banned across the board. Thankfully, no-issue states are slowly becoming a thing of the past as they begin to adopt one or the other of the remaining two concealed-carry varieties.

The first of these is the may-issue concealed-carry stance, which dictates every application for a concealed-carry permit needs to be considered on an individual basis by either the state or local authorities. Applicants are also required to show "good cause" (an ambiguous concept) for wanting to exercise their Constitutional right to bear arms via concealed-carry. The authorities have full ability to approve or deny applicants at their own discretion.

Finally, we have shall-issue, which is sometimes a state's stance while individual counties take up the may-issue or even stick to the no-issue variant. In shall-issue jurisdictions, the state and local authorities review individual applications against a set of

predetermined requirements.

They have to adhere to these requirements and are not allowed to approve or deny applicants at their own discretion. Additionally, applicants do not have to supply "good cause" reasoning for wanting to exercise their Constitutional right to bear arms via concealed-carry.

## SELF-DEFENSE BY LEGAL DEFINITION AND REQUIREMENTS

Let's assume your handgun and the way you carry it is fully legal according to the state law. Your defensive use of it may not be. Traditionally, for a court of law to recognize your gun use as an act of self-defense, you first need to have attempted to deescalate the situation. This can be a little tricky, as the legal code tends to give preference to those who retreat over those who use any kind of physical defense.

And if retreat isn't possible, you need to demonstrate you used the minimum amount of force reasonably considered necessary in order to defend yourself and/or create an opportunity to retreat.

If that sounds ambiguous to you, you're not alone.

It's problematically ambiguous, as a judge and jury of staunch gun control nuts might decide defensive gun use - even mere presentation - doesn't count as using the least amount of force necessary to defend yourself... even if you were up against a similarly armed



attacker.

As a general guideline, however, these next few subsections will help you mentally prepare yourself to legally defend your defensive gun use.

### **Ability to Retreat**

Ideally, if your defensive gun use ends up in a court of law, you'll have a jury of your actual peers in session. But even if you do, they still need to examine the evidence (including your testimony and that of any witnesses) to try objectively determining your ability to retreat or otherwise deescalate the situation.

Remember: even if every jury member is a gun owner too, when someone with a gun uses their firearm recklessly, it hurts all of us in the public eye. Your peers are not there to give you a get-out-of-jail-free card if you unnecessarily escalate the situation. Their presence is intended to help the court reach a fair and objective ruling.

Ability to retreat can be understood in a few different ways, though. If the attack was ongoing, you did not have the ability to retreat. This includes situations where you did attempt to retreat, but the attacker pursued you.

Likewise, if you were cornered or otherwise trapped, with no possible escape route available other than by getting past your attacker, then you did not have the ability to retreat without resorting to physical defense.

And that's where the concept of

reasonable force comes into play.

### **Reasonable Force**

If there are no other options left - you can't merely shove your attacker out of the way or throw them with a nearby object, for example - you may resort to defensive gun use.

This always starts with presenting your firearm as a means of trying to deescalate the situation before resorting to firing it.

It's worth noting anyone ignorant of how defensive gun use works might attempt to paint presentation in a negative light, calling it "intimidation." But so long as your attacker had some form of deadly weapon as well and your handgun was the only viable defensive tool available to you at the time, this kind of argument typically won't hold up in a court of law.

Even if your attacker doesn't have a lethal weapon, presenting your firearm and giving a verbal warning that you will shoot if necessary can still be defended in a court of law. However, you will still need to satisfactorily demonstrate your inability to retreat and/or use any other weapon (improvised or otherwise).

If you're unable to do so, you might still face intimidation charges because you unnecessarily escalated the situation.

### **Firing Your Handgun in Self-Defense**

If your attacker is attempting to use or is reasonably threatening the use of a deadly weapon in their possession - be it another gun, a knife, a baseball bat, or anything else capable of inflicting deadly trauma - firing your handgun in self-defense should be recognized as such in a court of law.

However, if you do fire your gun, then shoot to stop. If you merely try to injure the attacker or fire a warning shot, then you will almost certainly be charged with misuse of a lethal weapon. It gives the impression you weren't truly fearful for your physical safety or even your life.

Remember the first rule of gun safety: never point the muzzle of your handgun in the direction of anything you do not intend to destroy.

### **The Castle Doctrine and Stand Your Ground Laws**

If you're using your handgun to defend your property against a home invader, then you can justifiably use the "castle doctrine" defense. This dictates you should not have to retreat from your own home.

Likewise, some states have "stand your ground" laws.

Similar to the castle doctrine, this allows you to present (and potentially fire) your gun in self-defense without the need to first attempt retreating. However, you still need to demonstrate you had reason to believe your physical well-being was endangered - and you might need to additionally demonstrate no other



defensive weapons were available to you at the time.

And as always, unless your attacker comes in guns blazing, remember to present your handgun with a verbal warning before you start squeezing the trigger.

## **DEALING WITH LAW ENFORCEMENT AFTER DEFENSIVE GUN USE**

Whether you merely presented your handgun or resorted to firing it, call 911 immediately after (or at least as soon as it's safe for you to do so).

Stick to the bare, basic facts.

Inform the operator you were attacked and were forced to draw your handgun in self-defense. Let them know whether your attacker was wounded or killed in the process, but don't go into detail. If your attacker retreated, wounded or not, say so.

Finally, provide your name and location.

That's it. Don't say anything else, but stay on the line if requested to do so. Politely but emphatically insist you have your legal representative present before providing any further details.

Before law enforcement arrives on the scene, engage your handgun's safety mechanisms and either holster it or otherwise store it safely away. Once they arrive, notify the officers your handgun is holstered or otherwise stored.

Keep your hands in clear view at all times, avoid making any sudden movements, and narrate your actions before and during if they require moving your hands out of clear view.

Be cooperative and polite, no matter what the officers do. If they want to take your handgun into evidence and/or handcuff you, make a mental note of the fact and comply with the request.

Do not add anything to what you said over the phone. Politely but emphatically repeat your insistence that your legal representative be present before answering any questions. This is to protect you from yourself - you'll be under psychological stress and might accidentally misrepresent what happened.

## **PROPER DEFENSIVE SHOOTING TRAINING**

Moving onto the last topic in Chapter 3, to properly train yourself for defensive shooting, you need to seek out qualified instructors. There's only so much you can learn online or from resources like this course, and none of it is capable of replacing actual guided training.

You might only do one or two class sessions - that's okay. Soak up all the techniques you can and then practice them, both at the range and with dry firing.

Things to focus on include effective combat marksmanship techniques, your grip, the 3-point draw, and

maneuvering in all directions with your handgun on target.

You also need to practice for a variety of situations by varying the distance of your target. A good rule-of-thumb is to start with 3 feet (for home defense) and gradually move up to 15 or even 20 feet (for personal defense).

We also find most self-defense situations occur in low-light conditions, with the exception of dealing with an active shooter. For this reason, you should practice in low-light conditions as well. This allows you to take back the slight upper hand assailants assume they gain by targeting victims in low-light conditions.

If your handgun doesn't have a built-in night sight or a rail for you to attach a light, then one skill that will become even more important to learn is shooting with only one hand. This allows you to hold a tactical torch in the other, which gives you an extra advantage by potentially (albeit temporarily) compromising your attacker's vision.

One-handed shooting is one of the skills covered in the final chapter.



## CHAPTER 4:

# ADVANCED HANDGUN SKILLS EVERY OWNER NEEDS TO HAVE

In this final chapter, we're taking a look at some of the more advanced handgun skills every gun owner needs to have, know, and practice regularly. These skills are ambidextrous shooting, one-handed shooting, and shooting with both eyes open.

### AMBIDEXTRIOUS SHOOTING

Ambidextrous shooting is a skill that will benefit you in multiple ways - and it works hand-in-hand (pardon the pun) with one-handed shooting.

There isn't really any proven method for becoming an ambidextrous shooter. However, what we do know is if you can teach yourself to become ambidextrous and then practice using your firearm as both a right-handed and a left-handed person would,

you're in the clear.

We'll cover the 10 most common steps used to become ambidextrous to help you along the way.

### Why Would You Want to Become an Ambidextrous Shooter?

You might be asking yourself how becoming an ambidextrous shooter could possibly benefit you. After all, expertise with one dominant hand is surely better than being mediocre with both hands. Right?

While this is true for the most part, there are also many situations where being an ambidextrous shooter will give you the upper hand. In a self- or home-defense situation especially, you don't always have a choice in the angle you need to shoot from.

You could find yourself cornered in a space where the easiest way to get a clear shot without compromising the amount of cover protecting you is to use your non-dominant hand.

The same applies if your dominant hand is injured. There's no reason for you to not continue shooting - especially if you trained yourself to be an ambidextrous shooter. Once again, this can be a literal lifesaver in defensive situations.

Consider this: between 70% and 90% of the world's population are right-handed. About 10% to 30% are left-handed. Only 1% are ambidextrous, whether by nature or by training.

So if you train yourself to "become" ambidextrous with your handgun, you'll have an advantage of a

significant portion of the population.

## HOW TO "BECOME" AMBIDEXTROUS

*Here are the 10 steps you should follow to teach yourself ambidexterity:*

1. Exercise your non-dominant hand and fingers with strength training. Grip exercisers are very effective here, though don't neglect weight training.
2. Move your computer mouse so you're forced to use it with your non-dominant hand and keep it there. You can get an ambidextrous computer mouse, but it's going to be more beneficial (and cheaper) to use your regular mouse. This also trains you to use right-handed tools with your left hand (or vice versa if you're left-handed).
3. Start performing small tasks with your non-dominant hand, like brushing your teeth, cleaning, or even opening doors. It'll feel awkward at first, but the more you practice the more natural it becomes.
4. After a few days following step 3, start cooking and eating with your non-dominant hand, performing the same tasks as your dominant hand normally would. Start slowly - there's a greater risk of injury here than in step 3!
5. When it's safe and convenient to do so, tie your dominant hand

behind your back. This forces you to start relying on your non-dominant hand more often, removing the temptation (or the natural inclination) to use your dominant hand.

6. Start practicing writing with your non-dominant hand. It helps if you watch yourself in the mirror while using your dominant hand, as it gets your brain used to the visual of holding the tool in your non-dominant hand and reduces the mental block.
7. Following on from step 6, get one of those kids' books for tracing the alphabet. This helps your non-dominant hand get more familiar with the shapes.
8. Once you're reasonably happy with the results, start writing free-hand and drawing simple shapes with your non-dominant hand.

9. Move on to writing words and sentences. A good place to start is to write a paragraph of 3 to 5 sentences every day, starting with your name and address.
10. Keep practicing! It can take a little over a month to become truly comfortable using your non-dominant hand as well as your dominant hand. Perseverance breeds results.

And remember to make slow forays into ambidextrous shooting.

It's technically easier with long-barrel firearms (like rifles and shotguns), but the sooner you start training yourself to use your handgun with your non-dominant hand, the easier it is to be at least very nearly as proficient an ambidextrous shooter as you are with your dominant hand.







## ONE-HANDED SHOOTING

The concept might seem strange to you - after all, if the adage about cupping your handgun with your second hand to make your shooting more stable and secure is true, why bother learning how to shoot one-handed?

But as already mentioned, one-handed shooting dovetails nicely with defensive shooting (remember the tactical torch?) and ambidextrous shooting (assume one hand is injured).

It's actually as simple as holding your gun properly and locking it in place. Okay, to be fair, it's easier said than done.

You'll need to practice, practice, and practice some more to get it right with your dominant hand, let alone your non-dominant hand. But with that said, many professional competitive

shooters say thanks to the rules and drills of many major competitions, they actually shoot better one-handed with their non-dominant hand than with their dominant one!

There are two simple techniques you can and should use to master one-handed shooting. Find the one that works best for you by practicing with dry-firing, building up your muscle memory, then hitting the range to hone your skills with live fire training.

### Option 1: The Finger Point

With your pistol (or revolver), jut your hand out as if you're pointing with your finger. This is the most natural way to hold a handgun in any case - you're just keeping your second hand at your side or against your chest.

Your handgun will have a bit of a tilt to it when held in this position. That's perfect - it brings the sights perfectly in line with your eyes.

### Option 2: Vertical

Start in the finger point position described above, but then rotate your elbow toward your body so it points to the ground, rather than to the side. Then point your thumb and lock your wrist, using body posture to lock your arm into position to properly absorb recoil.

This doesn't feel as natural as the first option - you might even find it uncomfortable. But either method works equally well with enough practice. And you might end up finding the vertical position becomes more comfortable than the finger point!

## SHOOTING WITH BOTH EYES OPEN

This is another skill that might not make much sense right now. There's no immediate benefit to shooting with both eyes open, after all, and it feels more natural to have your non-dominant eye closed to give you a clearer sight picture.

But when you're using a handgun (or any other firearm) - and especially when in a self-defense situation - your body is pumping a lot of hormones and chemicals into your brain. Some of these cause your pupils to dilute, as your brain is trying to absorb as much information as possible.

Closing one eye limits your brain's capacity to do so.

Not only that, but your body wants

you to have both eyes open - trying to forcibly override that natural instinct is a distraction you can do without and one you shouldn't subject yourself to. In a defensive situation especially, it can be detrimental to your survival.

The sooner you start learning to shoot with both eyes open, the easier it is. But even if you're already a competent shooter, it's still fairly easy to train yourself to shoot with both eyes open.

All you need to do is follow these steps.

### **1. Confirm Which Eye is Dominant**

Bring both hands up to form a triangle using your thumbs and index fingers. Frame an object about 15-feet in front of you so it's in full view while both eyes are open.

Now close one of your eyes - either one will do. If the object is still in full view, then your open eye is your dominant eye. Chances are you already have a good idea which of your eyes is dominant, so you might get it right in the first attempt.

### **2. Practise Focusing With Your Dominant Eye**

Don't think you can simply jump straight into shooting with both eyes open just because you know which eye is dominant. This will lead to some serious issues while trying to line up your sights.

You first need to train your brain to focus with your dominant eye while your non-dominant eye provides peripheral vision (which helps with situational awareness). To do so, you can smear some chapstick over your non-dominant eye's lens on your shooting glasses. This blurs that eye's vision enough to force your brain to focus using your dominant eye.

If you prefer not to keep cleaning your shooting glasses, or you don't want to get a second pair to switch between the two, you can use the open-shut method instead. This is actually a better way to train your focus, though it's also more involved.

Line your shot up as normal, with your non-dominant eye shut. Squeeze the trigger just enough so you've taken the slack out, then open your non-dominant eye.

If your focus habit is to use the front sight, you'll see two targets.

The target on the side of your dominant eye will be the correct one. Conversely, if you're focused on the target rather than your front-sight, then the handgun on your non-dominant eye's side is the correct one.

Either way, close your non-dominant eye again to confirm your target, then re-open it before taking your shot.

### **3. Practice, Practice, Practice**

Using the open-shut method (which we recommend over the chapstick method), take your first 50 shots. Then take your next 50 shots with both eyes open the entire time, so you don't become overly reliant on checking and re-checking your aim.

Remember, in an active situation where seconds count and the police are only minutes away, you don't have time to do so.

If you're taking more than 100 shots during your live-fire session, then keep switching between the open-shut method and keeping both eyes open the entire time. But be sure to still use the 50/50 rule for your first 100 shots!

You're not going to master shooting with both eyes open in a single session, or even in a week where you visit the range every day. It's going to take time and dedication - just like any other skill worth having.

# CONCLUSION

That concludes Handguns 101!

In this learning resource, we covered a lot of information, starting with the correct definition of what a handgun is, their history, cartridges, and how to choose the right handgun as a first-time owner.

Chapter 2 introduced you to handgun safety and one of the best supplementary training methods available: dry-firing. We then moved onto the topic of defensive shooting in Chapter 3, before wrapping up with 3 slightly more advanced handgun skills in Chapter 4.

By now, you should have a good understanding of and appreciation for handguns and their prevalence as a self-defense weapon.

This is, after all, the very spirit of our Second Amendment right to keep and bear arms - not only to defend ourselves from smaller, local threats, but also to defend ourselves from our own government, should that ever become necessary.

**We trust you found this resource to be a valuable asset and that it will continue to be one throughout your life as a handgun owner.**



# HANDGUNS 101



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