TODAY'S HANDGUN
SAFETY BASICS

A Guide to Responsible and Safe Handgun Use and Ownership

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS OF HANDGUN SAFETY

1. **Watch that muzzle!** *Keep it pointed in a safe direction at all times.*
2. **Treat every handgun with the respect due a loaded gun.** *It might be, even if you think it isn't.*
3. **Be sure of the target and what is in front of it and beyond it.** *Make sure you have an adequate backstop—don't shoot at a flat, hard surface or water.*
4. **Keep your finger outside the trigger guard until ready to shoot.** *This is the best way to prevent an accidental discharge.*
5. **Check your barrel and ammunition.** *Make sure the barrel and action are clear of obstructions, and carry only the proper ammunition for your handgun.*
6. **Unload handguns when not in use.** *Leave actions open, and carry firearms in cases and unloaded to and from the shooting area.*
7. **Point a handgun only at something you intend to shoot.** *Avoid all horseplay with a gun.*
8. **Don't run, jump, or climb with a loaded handgun.** *Unload a handgun before you climb a fence or tree, or jump a ditch. Pull a handgun toward you by the grip, not the muzzle.*
9. **Store handguns and ammunition separately and safely.** *Store each in secured locations beyond the reach of children and careless adults. For added safety, also use a locking device such as a trigger lock or a cable lock.*
10. **Avoid alcoholic beverages before and during shooting.** *Also avoid mind- or behavior-altering medicines or drugs.*

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Introduction

Introduction
Why Handgun Education? 4
How to Use This Manual 4

Introduction to Handgun Education
Learning About Handgun Uses 5

Know Your Handgun Equipment
What Is a Handgun? 6
What Is Ammunition? 8
Understanding Common Features of Handguns 9
Matching Firearms and Ammunition…Correctly! 12
Knowing Your Handgun's Range 12
Cleaning Your Handgun 13
Storing Your Handgun 14

Basic Handgun Skills
Developing Good Marksmanship and Accuracy 15
Learning Handgun-Shooting Techniques . . . 17
Using Handguns at the Shooting Range 20

Handgun Safety
Understanding Why Safety Is Important 21
Safely Loading and Unloading Handguns 22
Safely Transporting Handguns 24
Taking Additional Safety Precautions 25
Resolving Conflicts Without Violence 25

Handgun Laws
Obeying Handgun Laws 26
Learning Federal Laws 26
Learning State and Local Laws 27

Chapter Review Exercises

Why Handgun Education?

- Many people actively participate in shooting sports. Of these, a large percentage are handgun enthusiasts.
- As more people become handgun owners, learning how to use handguns legally, safely, and responsibly has become increasingly important.
- Whether you are a beginner just learning how to use a handgun or an experienced user who wants a review, this manual can help you become more knowledgeable about handguns. It covers a wide variety of information, including:
  - General information about handguns and handgun equipment
  - Information to improve your shooting skills
  - Ways make your handgun experience safer and more enjoyable
  - Laws pertaining to handgun ownership

How to Use This Manual

1. Study the learning objectives at the beginning of each chapter to help you understand why certain material is covered.
2. Read and review each chapter of this manual. Keep in mind the learning objectives as you study.
3. Complete the corresponding Chapter Review questions at the end of the manual.
4. Check your answers against the key following the Chapter Reviews.
5. Review the information you may have answered incorrectly.
6. Continue in this manner until all the chapters have been covered.

Introduction to Handgun Education

You should be able to…

- Describe five uses for handguns.
- Tell what the second amendment to the U.S. Constitution guarantees.
- Explain why you should know the laws pertaining to handguns.

Learning About Handgun Uses

In general, the use of handguns will fall into one of the following categories.

- **Sport:** Competitive shooting is one of the few sports where people of both sexes and all ages can compete regardless of physical strength or size. Shooting is part of international sporting competitions as well as local, state, and regional contests.
- **Recreation:** Some people use their handguns for informal target practice while others prefer to collect handguns.
  - Informal target practice is commonly called "plinking." The term comes from the sound a bullet makes ("plink") when it hits a tin can. When using handguns for target shooting:
    - Follow all gun safety rules.
    - Never shoot at glass. The flying glass splinters are dangerous, and the glass fragments litter the area.
    - If you are shooting at steel, use only steel targets that are designed for this purpose. With some types of steel, bullets may ricochet and injure those in the area.
    - Make sure you have a backdrop that will prevent bullets from striking or ricocheting toward populated areas or unintended targets.
    - Always clean up the area and remove all plinking targets when finished.
  - Hobbyists enjoy collecting historic and other types of handguns.
- **Hunting:** Handguns may be used to hunt small game or to control populations of nuisance animals. Many states also allow hunters to use certain caliber handguns for big game hunting.
- **Metallic Silhouette Shooting:** This is a type of shooting game where metal targets in the shape of animals are set up at various distances. Silhouette competitions include rules about the types of firearms and ammunition, the construction and placement of the targets, and other equipment that can be used.
- **Protection:** This use of handguns is the one most regulated by state laws. If you should face a possible life-threatening situation, you must consider carefully the decision to use a handgun for personal defense. You could be:
  - Disarmed and fired upon with your own gun.
  - Charged with criminal misuse of a firearm if circumstances do not warrant that level of response.
  - Sued in civil court even if you are found not guilty in a criminal court.

Handgun Laws

- Before using a handgun for any purpose, make sure you know the law.
  - Although the second amendment to the U.S. Constitution guarantees citizens the right to keep and bear arms, federal laws regulate the interstate sale and transportation of handguns. In addition, every state government and many local governments have laws that govern and define the use of handguns.
  - You should know your rights and responsibilities under your state's laws pertaining to self-defense and the use of force.
  - Ignorance of handgun laws is not a valid excuse for violating them.
- More information on handgun laws is included in Chapter Five.

Never forget that one result of using a gun for protection could be the death of another person.

Know Your Handgun Equipment

You should be able to…

- Define "firearm."
- Identify the basic parts of a handgun.
- Identify the basic components of handgun ammunition.
- Explain what rifling is and its effect when shooting a handgun.
- Identify and explain a handgun's caliber.
- Name the types of sights found on handguns.
- Identify the types of handgun actions.
- Identify the location(s) of safeties on handguns and explain how they are used.
- Correctly match ammunition with firearms.
- Explain how ammunition is fired from a handgun.
- Explain why it is important to know your handgun's range.
- Demonstrate cleaning procedures for a handgun.
- Demonstrate how to make a handgun safe for storage.

A Short History of the Revolver

Samuel Colt did not invent the revolver. Instead, he did for handguns what Henry Ford did for automobiles. Colt was the first manufacturer to use standardized parts and mass produce a handgun. He did, however, win a patent for a handgun with a rotating cylinder. His 1836 "revolving pistol" was a six-shot muzzleloader. In the 1850s, Roland White made an improvement on the Colt revolver design. White was awarded a patent for drilling the chambers clear through the cylinder. This chamber design allowed metallic cartridges to be seated. Soon thereafter, Horace Smith and Daniel Wesson bought White's patent and produced a handgun that would fire one of their own inventions—the metallic cartridge.

Basic Revolver Parts

What Is a Handgun?

A firearm is a mechanical device that uses pressure from a burning powder to force a projectile through and out of a metal tube.

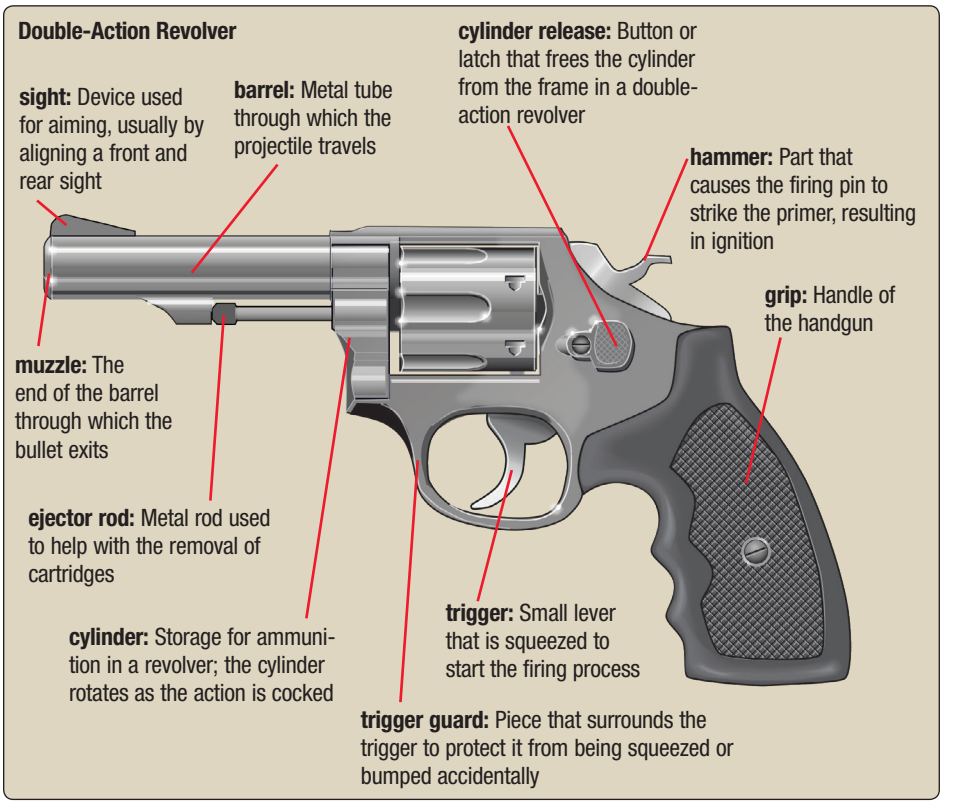
- Handguns are short firearms that are designed to be held in one or two hands while being fired. There are three basic types of handguns—single-shot pistols, revolvers, and semi-automatic pistols.
- To appreciate fully the importance of handgun safety, you first must understand how handguns work. This includes knowing the parts of the handgun, the types of ammunition, how ammunition is fired, and the ranges of handguns.

Basic Parts of a Handgun

- All modern handguns have three basic groups of parts.
  - **Action:** The action, also known as the trigger group, contains the parts that fire the cartridges. Several types of actions are used in modern handguns.
  - **Frame:** The frame is a metal housing that also serves as the handle (grip) of the handgun. All other parts are contained within it or connected to it.
  - **Barrel:** The barrel is the metal tube that the bullet travels through. The handgun barrel is much shorter than a rifle or shotgun barrel because the gun is designed to be shot while being held with one or two hands, rather than being placed against the shooter's shoulder.
- Repeating handguns (revolvers and semi-automatic pistols) hold more than one round of ammunition. A revolver uses a cylinder to store the ammunition, and a semi-automatic pistol uses a removable magazine that fits in the grip.

Parts of a Revolver and a Semi-Automatic Pistol

Below are the parts of a double-action revolver and a semi-automatic pistol.



Other Handgun Parts

bore:
Inside of the handgun barrel through which the projectile travels when fired

breech:
Rear end of the barrel

chamber:
Base of the barrel used to hold the cartridge ready for shooting

firing pin:
A pin that strikes the primer of the cartridge, causing ignition

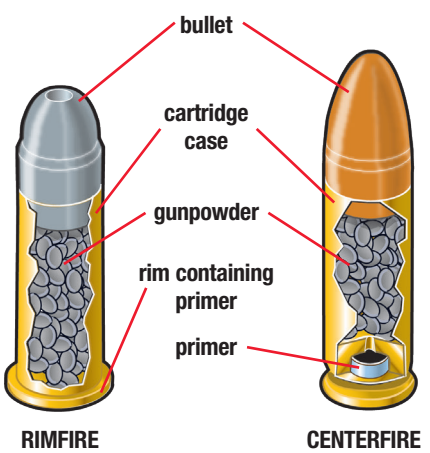
receiver:
Metal housing for the working parts of the action

cartridge:
Ammunition used in modern handguns; a case containing primer, gunpowder, and a bullet

Centerfire and Rimfire Ammunition

- Centerfire ammunition is used for rifles, shotguns, and handguns. In this type of ammunition, the primer is located in the center of the casing base. Most centerfire ammunition is reloadable.
- Rimfire ammunition has the primer contained in the rim of the ammunition casing. Rimfire ammunition is limited to low-pressure loads. Rimfire cartridges are not reloadable.

Handgun Ammunition



Remember...
Reloaded shells may have wrong information or have been improperly reloaded. It's important to mark reloaded shells clearly. Use only shells or cartridges that you have reloaded yourself or that have been reloaded by a person whom you know is competent.

What Is Ammunition?

Modern ammunition varies depending on the type of firearm. Handguns use a **cartridge** that typically contains a single projectile (bullet).

Basic Components of Ammunition

The basic components of ammunition are the case, primer, powder, and projectile.

- **Case:** The container that holds all the other ammunition components together. It's usually made of brass, steel, or copper.
- **Primer:** An explosive chemical compound that ignites the gunpowder when struck by a firing pin. Primer may be placed either in the rim of the case (rimfire) or in the center of the base of the case (centerfire).
- **Gunpowder:** A chemical mixture that burns rapidly and converts to an expanding gas when ignited.
- **Projectile:** The object expelled from the barrel. A bullet is a projectile, usually containing lead, fired through a handgun barrel.

Handgun Cartridges

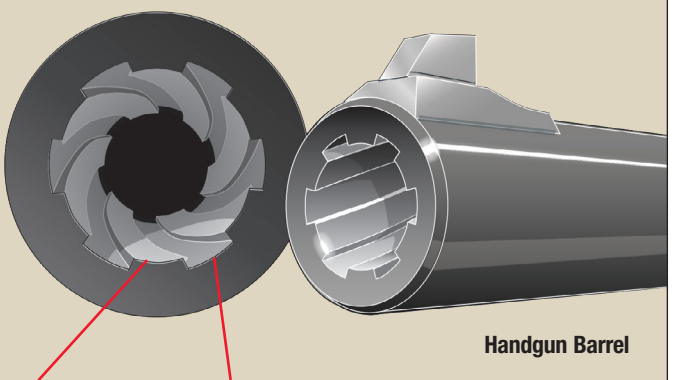
- It's critical to select the correct cartridge for your handgun (see the section "Matching Firearms and Ammunition...Correctly!").
- Bullets used in handgun cartridges come in various designs, sizes, and weights. The bullet usually is made of lead and may have a jacket made of copper, brass, or another metal. Bullets used for hunting, law enforcement, or personal defense may have soft or hollow points designed to expand (mushroom) upon impact. Bullets used for target shooting usually have flat or solid points that make a clean hole in paper.
- Common types of handgun bullets are roundnose lead, full metal jacket, semi-wad cutter, hollowpoint, and wad cutter.

Rifling in the Handgun Bore

- Most handgun barrels have spiraling **grooves** cut or pressed into the bore. The ridges of metal between the grooves are called **lands**. Together, the grooves and lands are called rifling.
- When a handgun is fired, the rifling in the barrel puts a spiral spin on the bullet. This spin keeps the bullet point-first in flight, increasing accuracy and distance.

Handgun Bores

The bore of a handgun is grooved, which puts a spiral spin on the bullet for greater accuracy.



Caliber

Caliber is used to describe the size of a handgun bore and the size of the cartridges designed for different bores.

- Caliber usually is measured as the diameter of the bore from land to opposite land and is expressed in hundredths of an inch, thousandths of an inch, or millimeters. For example, a .357-caliber handgun bore measures 357/1000ths of an inch in diameter between the lands and has a larger bore diameter than a .30-caliber handgun. However, there is no standard established for designating caliber. In some cases, the caliber is given as the diameter of the bullet, which is the distance between the grooves.
- Every handgun is designed for a specific cartridge. The ammunition must match the data stamp on the firearm. If you cannot find the caliber stamped on the handgun, take it to a qualified gunsmith.

Understanding Common Features of Handguns

All types of handguns have sights and actions, and they may have safeties or magazines.

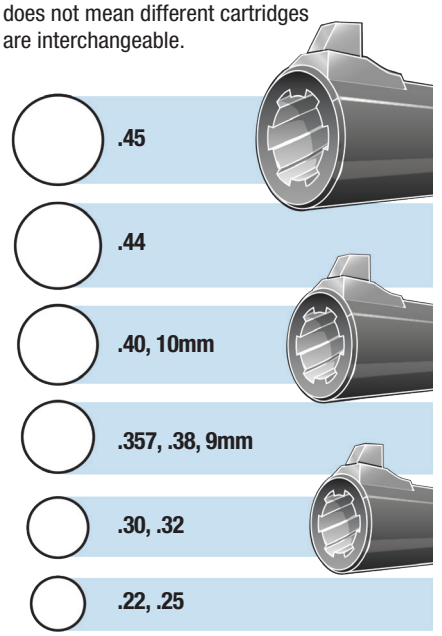
Sights

A sight is a device used to line up the muzzle with your eye so that you can hit the target. Most handguns have an iron sight, although some specialized handguns have a dot, a laser, or a telescopic sight. Read more about sights in Chapter Three.

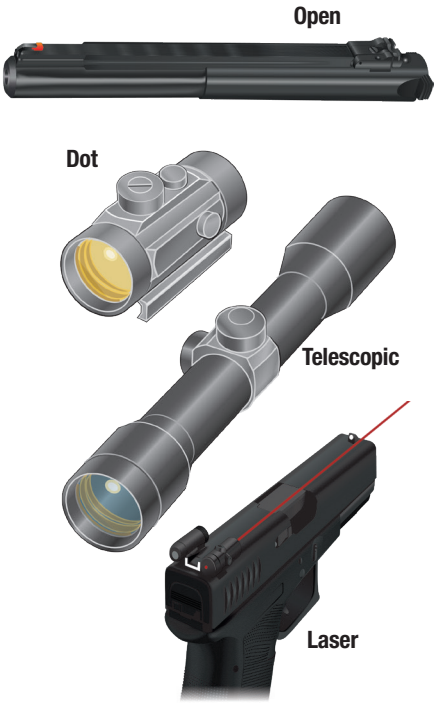
- **Iron (Open) Sight:** Combination of a raised front sight and a notched rear sight. These sights are simple and inexpensive. Iron sights allow quick sighting. To aim, you center the top of the bead or post within the notch of the rear sight and line up on the target. Iron sights can be fixed or adjustable.
- **Telescopic Sight (Scope):** Small telescope mounted on your firearm. The scope gathers light, brightening the image and magnifying the target, and does away with aligning rear and front sights. The aiming device inside the scope is called the "reticle." To aim, you simply look through the scope and line up the crosshairs, post, or dot with your target. Handgun scopes are designed to withstand the recoil that occurs when using powerful centerfire cartridges.
- **Dot Sight:** Small device mounted on your handgun. A dot sight uses electronics or optical fibers to project a glowing dot or other mark on a lens in front of your eye. Some dot sights also magnify like telescopic sights.
- **Laser Sight:** Another type of small device that can be mounted on your handgun. Like a laser pointer, the laser sight projects a glowing dot on your target. Instead of using a laser sight, you can replace the manufacturer's grip with a laser grip.

Handgun Calibers

The circles show bore sizes of common calibers. Having the same bore size does not mean different cartridges are interchangeable.



Types of Sights



Safety Tip

Always ask a competent gunsmith to install a telescopic sight on any handgun.

Typical Handgun Actions

Single-shot pistols are usually break actions. Repeating handguns include the semi-automatic and revolving action types.

Break-Action Pistol
(Single-Shot)

Semi-Automatic Pistol

Single-Action
(Hammer-Cocking)
Revolver

Double-Action
(Trigger-Cocking)
Revolver

Actions

Handguns can be classified by their action type. The action of a handgun is made up of parts that load, unload, fire, and eject the cartridge. Actions are either single-shot or repeating styles. Single-shot handguns (single-shot pistols) must be reloaded each time the handgun is fired. Repeating handguns (revolvers and semi-automatic pistols) have extra cartridges ready in a magazine or cylinder.

- **Break (or Hinge) Action:** The break-action handgun operates on the same principle as a door hinge. Break actions may be found on single-shot pistols or on revolvers.
  - Simple to load and unload, a hinge action is often chosen as a first handgun.
  - To open the action, point the barrel at the ground. A release is pressed, and the barrel drops downward. This allows the cartridges to eject or to be removed manually if the handgun is loaded.
- **Semi-Automatic (or Autoloading) Action:** As each shot is fired manually, the case of the cartridge is ejected automatically and the chamber is reloaded automatically.
  - To open the action, you must pull back the slide. On most semi-automatics when the slide is pulled back, it will lock in the open position if the magazine is empty. If the handgun does not lock open, it means that a cartridge from the magazine has gone into the chamber, making the gun ready to fire. A few semi-automatics do not lock open and must be held open to check the chamber.
  - To unload, *first remove the magazine* and lock the action open. Then make sure it's unloaded.
    - Visually check the chamber for an additional cartridge.
    - Put a finger into the chamber to physically make sure the chamber is empty.
  - When closing the action for loading, pull back to unlock the slide and then let go, allowing it to travel forward on its own. Do not guide it forward with your hand because it may not seat properly.
  - On a semi-automatic, the trigger must be pulled each time a shot is fired. This makes the semi-automatic different from the fully automatic firearm, which fires continuously as long as the trigger is held down. ***The fully automatic firearm may not be used for hunting or sport shooting.***
- **Revolving Action:** The revolving action takes its name from a revolving cylinder containing a number of cartridge chambers. One chamber at a time lines up with the barrel as the handgun is fired. Revolving cylinders may rotate either clockwise or counterclockwise, depending on the manufacturer. Revolving actions are referred to as either "single action" or "double action."
  - **Single Action:** Will fire only after the hammer has been cocked manually.
  - **Double Action:** Pulling the trigger both cocks and releases the hammer. A double-action revolver typically also can be hammer-cocked like a single-action revolver.

Safety Mechanisms

A safety is a device that blocks the action to prevent the handgun from shooting until the safety is released or pushed to the "off" position. The safety is intended to prevent the gun from being fired accidentally. However, safeties should never be relied on totally to protect against accidental shooting. Safeties are mechanical devices and subject to mechanical failure from wear and other factors, and can fail when least expected. Also, safeties can be unknowingly bumped from the safe position as your handgun is being handled or as it catches on clothing or tree branches.

Not all handguns have a mechanical safety. On a handgun with a safety, the safety will be located around the receiver and is usually easy to spot. Common types of safeties are:

- **Pivot Safety (Thumb Safety)**
  - Found on some semi-automatic pistols
  - A pivoting lever or tab that blocks the trigger or firing pin
  - Located on the frame (blocks trigger) or on the slide (blocks firing pin)
- **Grip Safety**
  - Another safety found on some semi-automatic pistols
  - A bar that blocks firing until you grip the gun and compress the safety
  - Located on the grip
- **Half-Cock or Hammer Safety**
  - Found on single-action revolvers
  - Positions the trigger at half-cock, away from the firing pin
  - Engaged by placing the trigger at half-cock
  - While not a true safety, it sometimes is described as a mechanical safety device by firearm manufacturers

Magazines

In semi-automatic handguns, the magazine is the place where the cartridges are stored. When you work the action, a cartridge is picked up from the magazine and placed in the chamber ready to be fired.

- Magazines are designed with a spring and follower that push against the cartridges to move them into the action. When checking a magazine to make sure it's empty, you must be able to see and feel the follower; if you cannot see or feel the follower, there may be a cartridge jammed in the magazine, which can be dangerous.
- Magazines may be detachable or fixed.
  - Detachable magazines allow you to remove extra ammunition from the firearm simply by removing the magazine. The magazine release is typically a button or lever located on the right or left side of the frame behind the trigger.
  - Fixed magazines require the ammunition to be removed manually from the gun itself.

Safety Tip

Knowing where the safety is and how it works is not always as simple as it might seem. There are many types of safeties. Sometimes people alter or modify their guns to disable the safety. This is very dangerous, especially if the gun gets into the hands of an inexperienced shooter. Be sure you know how the safety works on your own gun or any others you handle. Never alter or modify your firearm yourself. Have an experienced gunsmith look at your gun if the safety does not work or if anything else is wrong with it.

Typical Locations of Safeties

The orange outlines indicate where safeties may be located on semi-automatic pistols.

Remember...

You should never replace safe firearm handling by trusting the safety on a firearm. A safety is a mechanical device that could fail.

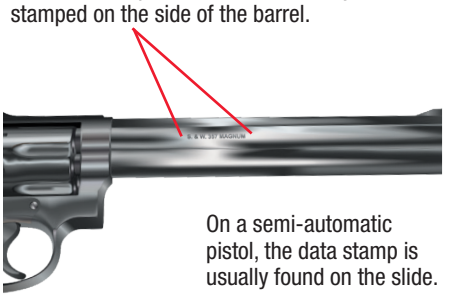
- Don't release the safety until just before you shoot.
- Even with the safety in the "on" position, be aware that a loaded handgun still may fire if the gun is dropped or struck sharply.
- Carry older single-action revolvers with the hammer down on an empty cartridge chamber.

Safety Tip

Some handguns have a mechanical safety, and others do not. In either case, the best way to avoid accidental firing is to make sure the gun is unloaded and the action is open. On a handgun, you can do this by making sure the slide is locked back (semi-automatic action), the cylinder is out (revolving action), or the gun is broken open (break action).

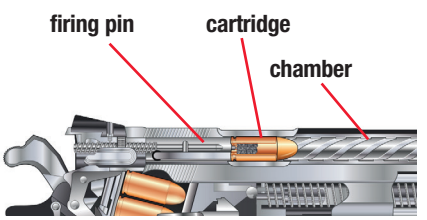
load:
The amount of gunpowder in the cartridge together with the weight of the bullet

The data stamp of a revolver is usually stamped on the side of the barrel.

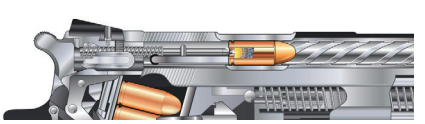


On a semi-automatic pistol, the data stamp is usually found on the slide.

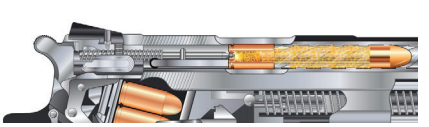
How Ammunition Is Fired



- A cartridge is inserted into the chamber. The action is closed, and the firing pin is held back under spring tension.



- When the trigger is squeezed, the hammer falls and hits the firing pin. The firing pin moves forward with great force, striking and igniting the primer in the cartridge base.



- The spark from the primer ignites the gunpowder, generating gas pressure. The pressure from the expanding gas forces the bullet forward and out of the barrel. The bullet's speed and escaping gases produce a "bang."

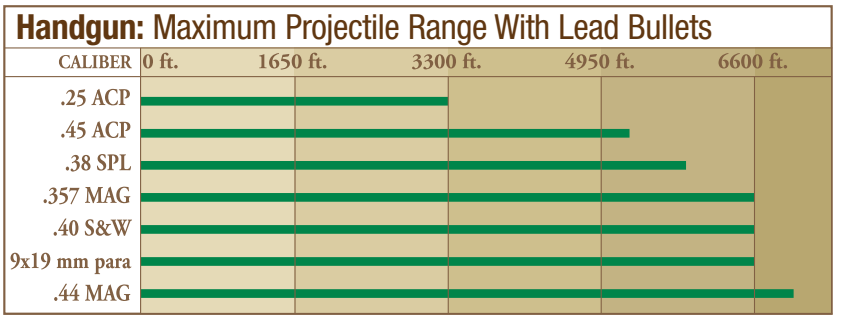
Matching Firearms and Ammunition…Correctly!

With so many kinds of firearms and types of ammunition, it's not always easy to match the proper ammunition to your handgun correctly—but getting it right is critical. If you match the wrong ammunition to your gun, you can cause an explosion, injuring or possibly killing yourself and any bystanders.

- To match the proper ammunition to your handgun correctly:
  - Read the specific caliber designation on the side of the barrel or slide. Match that designation *exactly*. For example, if it says ".45 GAP," you cannot use ".45 ACP."
  - Carefully read the information on the lid of the ammunition box. Always check to ensure it matches the data on the barrel or slide.
  - Finally, match the information on the barrel to the information on the cartridge *before you shoot*. If in doubt, ask a more experienced shooter or a qualified gunsmith. Some store clerks, although they sell ammunition, may not know about the differences in sizes or the type of handgun you shoot.
- For safety, follow these practices.
  - Purchase only the correct ammunition for your handgun. Buy the exact caliber of ammunition for which your handgun was designed.
  - When purchasing ammunition, buy only from a reliable source and read the manufacturer's instructions.
  - Carry only the correct ammunition for the firearm you're using. Never mix ammunition such as carrying a caliber your companion uses.
  - Never use old ammunition. Contact your local law enforcement agency for advice on destroying it.

Knowing Your Handgun's Range

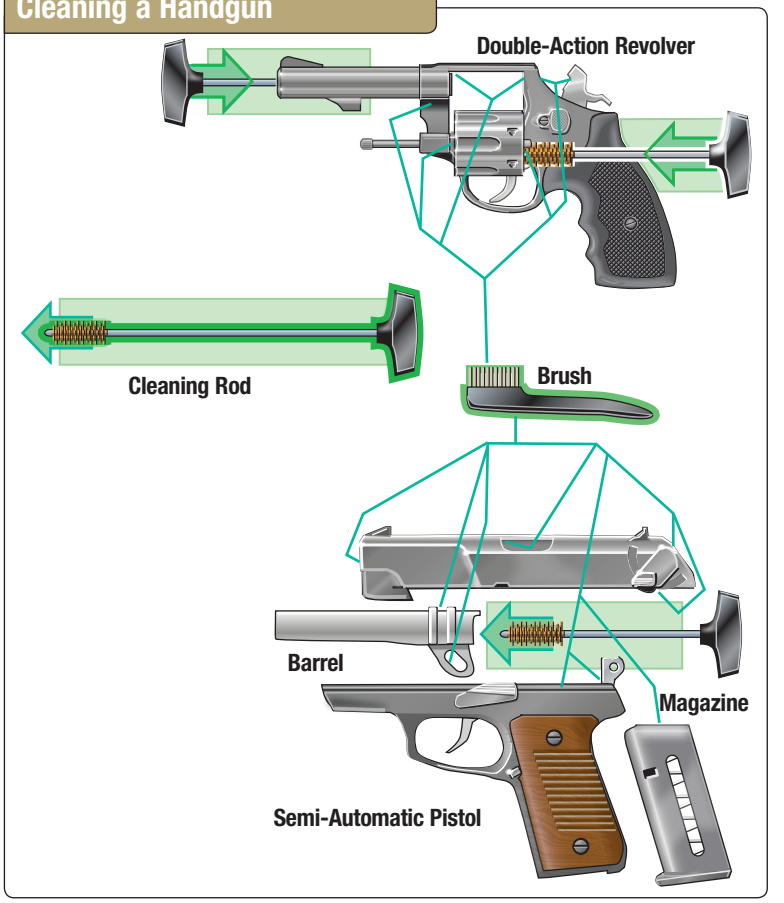
Knowing your handgun's "maximum projectile range" is critical to being a safe and responsible handgun user. The maximum projectile range tells you at what distances your handgun's projectile could cause injury or damage to people, animals, or objects.



Cleaning Your Handgun

- Clean your handguns after every use to keep them in top condition. Every owner should have a complete cleaning kit.
- Work on a cleared table or bench. Always give cleaning your full attention. Never clean a handgun while doing something else.
- Follow these basic steps to clean your handgun.
  - Point the muzzle in a safe direction, and make sure the gun is unloaded.
  - Remove all ammunition from the cleaning bench.
  - For the most thorough cleaning, field strip the handgun as directed in the owner's manual. Then clean each part separately.
  - Follow the instructions in your cleaning kit. If possible, clean the barrel from the breech end, using a bore guide and a cleaning rod holding a bore brush or patch, wetted with solvent. Pass the brush/patch all the way through the barrel. Repeat several times with fresh patches. You may need a larger brush for the chamber. Use a hand brush to clean the crevices where powder residue accumulates. Follow with a dry patch, and finish with a lightly oiled patch for the barrel. Use a cloth for the other parts.
- Clean your ammunition by wiping it with a cleaning cloth. If the ammunition is not clean, particles of sand or dirt can scratch the bore.
- Use cleaning solvents in a well-ventilated area and only as directed.
- If cleaning from the muzzle end, use a muzzle protector so that you don't damage the rifling near the muzzle.

Cleaning a Handgun



Cleaning Kit

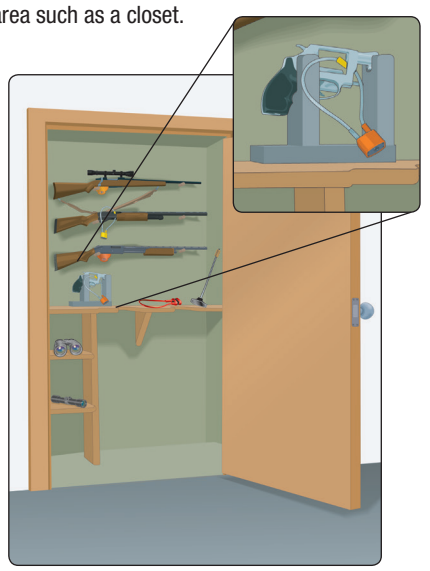
- Assorted rod tips—brushes, mop tips, slotted tips, jag tips
- Bore light
- Clean cloths
- Cleaning rods
- Cotton swabs
- Dental mirror
- Gun grease
- Gun oil
- Gunsmith screwdrivers
- Patches appropriate for the caliber of the handgun
- Pipe cleaners
- Solvent
- Stand to hold the handgun securely in a horizontal position
- Toothbrush

Remember...

For safety, keep children out of the cleaning area unless you are teaching them the proper way to clean a handgun.

Storing Handguns

Store handguns with a locking device if stored in an accessible area such as a closet.



Storing Ammunition

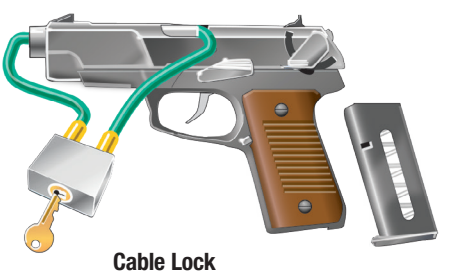
- Store ammunition, reloading supplies, and firearms in separate locked compartments.
- Keep all ammunition away from flammables.
- Store ammunition in a cool, dry place to prevent corrosion. Corroded ammunition can cause jamming, misfires, and other safety problems.

Remember...
Hiding a loaded gun does not keep children from getting access to the firearm.

Storing Your Handgun

- Firearms must be stored *unloaded* and in a *locked* location, *separate from ammunition*. The storage area should be cool, clean, and dry.
- Store guns horizontally, or with the muzzle pointing down. When guns are stored upright, gravity pulls gun oil downward into the action, which forms a sticky film.
- Displaying guns in glass cabinets or wall racks is an invitation to thieves and curious children. Ideally, guns should be hidden from view and locked. **Never leave a handgun in a place where a child might pick it up.**
  - A good place to store a handgun is in a handgun storage box or carrying case. Most of these can be locked.
  - Storage devices with hidden compartments are available.
  - For the best protection against theft and fire damage, purchase a safe.
- If your handguns are stored in an accessible location such as a closet, use a locking device to prevent the gun from being fired accidentally. This is especially important if children are around.
  - Trigger locks are designed to fit around the trigger guard of a handgun.
  - Sometimes, a padlock may be used as a substitute for a trigger lock. Slip the shackle through the trigger guard behind the trigger. This may prevent the trigger on some handguns from being squeezed far enough to fire the gun accidentally.
  - A cable lock prevents the action from closing on a live cartridge. To use a cable lock:
    - Open the action on your handgun.
    - Run the cable through the openings.
    - Lock the cable.

Trigger Lock



Cable Lock

- You may be able to get a free safety kit, including a cable lock, from Project Childsafe. For more information and to see if the program is available in your area, visit the website at: **www.projectchildsafe.org**.

Basic Handgun Skills

You should be able to…

- Define "good marksmanship."
- List the three fundamentals of good marksmanship.
- Define "sight alignment" and "sight picture."
- Demonstrate how to determine your master eye.
- Explain the basic steps to sight-in a handgun.
- Explain six handgun-shooting techniques that will help improve accuracy.
- Demonstrate the one-handed and two-handed grips and shooting stances.
- Explain how to use handguns correctly at the shooting range.

Developing Good Marksmanship and Accuracy

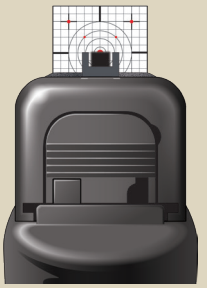
One of the essential handgun skills is good marksmanship, which is accurately and consistently hitting the target where planned. Good marksmanship is built on three fundamentals:

- Proper sight adjustment or patterning
- Proper shooting technique
- Practice

Sight Alignment

Sight alignment is the process of lining up rear and front sights. It is especially important in handgun shooting because of the shorter distance between sights.

- The sight picture is the image you see when the sights are aligned correctly with the target.
- To ensure that the bullet will travel to the target in your sight, it's necessary to sight-in your handgun.

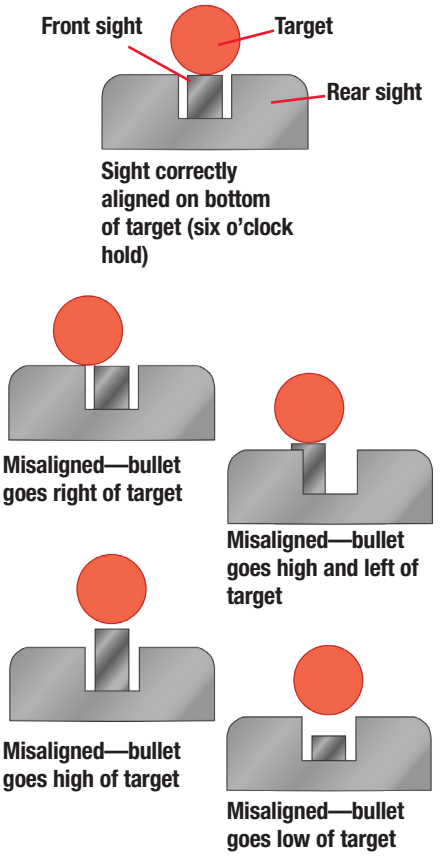


With an iron sight, you place the top of the front sight level with the flat top of the rear sight. The front sight must be centered between the sides of the rear notch. When using a center hold as shown here, the sights are on the center of the target.

With a telescopic sight with a crosshair reticle, you line up the target with the crosshairs of the sight.

With a telescopic sight with a dot reticle, you line up the target with the dot of the sight. The dot must be centered.

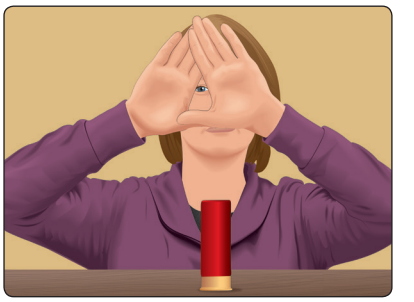
Aligning an Iron Sight With a Six O'Clock Hold



Remember...
Good vision is the foundation for good shooting and safety. Have your eyes examined on a regular basis.

Dominant or Master Eye

- Just as you have a dominant hand, you also have a dominant eye. You need to aim with the dominant—or master—eye for the most accurate shooting. Usually your dominant eye is the same as your dominant hand, but not always.
- You should determine which is your dominant eye before you sight-in your handgun.

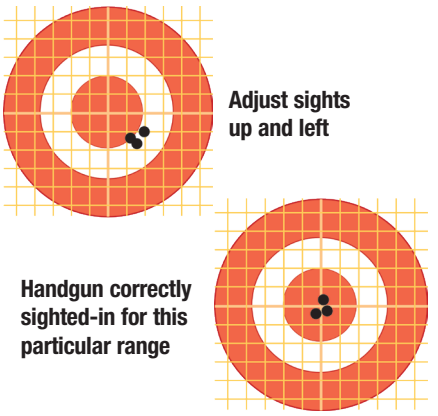


- To determine your dominant eye:
  1. Form a triangular opening with your thumbs and forefingers.
  2. Stretch your arms out in front of you.
  3. Focus on a distant object while looking through the triangular opening and keeping both eyes open.
  4. Bring your hands slowly to your face, keeping sight of the object through the opening; the opening will come to your dominant eye naturally.
- If you're not sure, close one eye at a time. The weak eye will see the back of your hand; the strong one will be focused on the object in the triangle.

Sighting-In Procedure

"Sighting-in" is a process of adjusting the sights to hit a target at a specific range.

- Sight-in instructions are printed on some targets available from retail outlets or manufacturers. Most handguns are sighted-in at 50 feet. The basic steps involve firing at least three shots carefully and consistently at a target. If the bullets form a relatively small group of holes on the target, but not where you were aiming, the sights will have to be adjusted.
- When adjusting telescopic sights, the rear sights or dials are adjusted by a certain number of **minutes-of-angle** or "clicks" in a certain direction. Read the sight's instruction manual to see how much each click changes the sight.
- The rear sight is moved in the same direction you want your shot to move on the target. Moving shots from side to side is "adjusting for windage." Moving shots up or down is "adjusting for elevation."
- Specific instructions about trajectory and what fractions or inches you should be above the bull's-eye at various distances are usually included on sight-in targets. You also might consult a ballistics chart or get help from an experienced shooter.



Use a sight-in target to adjust your sights.

minutes-of-angle:
The standard measurement unit of shooting accuracy; one minute-of-angle (MOA) is 1/60 of one degree, or approximately one inch, at 100 yards

Remember...
You must sight-in your handgun with the ammunition you plan to use. Be sure you sight-in and practice firing your gun before you go shooting.

Learning Handgun-Shooting Techniques

Using correct shooting techniques will help you improve your accuracy.

Grip

Your hand position on the grip of a handgun is vital to hitting the target. Although the grip configurations of the revolver and the semi-automatic pistol are different, the gripping procedure is the same.

- For a right-handed shooter, the right hand is the "shooting" or "strong" hand and the left hand is the "support" or "weak" hand. For a left-handed shooter, the shooting and support hands are reversed.
- Hold the handgun high on the grip so that the recoil is directed back to the hand and arm in a straight line. This allows better repeat shots and more accurate shooting.
  - With a semi-automatic, the rear extension of the frame limits how high your hand can be placed.
  - With a revolver, your hand might be able to hold onto the gun quite high.
- To grip a handgun properly:
  - Grasp the gun under the frame and trigger guard with your support hand. Do not cock the gun, and do not touch the trigger.
  - Open your shooting hand so that your thumb and index finger form a V.
  - Place the V as high on the frame as possible so that the grip of the gun rests firmly in the palm of your shooting hand.
  - Curl your fingers around the gun's grip with your index finger extended along the side of the gun and off the trigger.
- Use a two-handed hold whenever possible, applying pressure from front to rear with your shooting hand and from side to side with your support hand.
  - The two-handed hold is typically more stable than a one-handed hold.
  - To use a two-handed hold:
    - Follow the steps above to grip the gun with your shooting hand.
    - Wrap your support hand around your fingers on the shooting hand.
    - Place your thumb on your support hand over or beside your thumb on your shooting hand so that it is roughly parallel to the barrel of the handgun.
  - To improve your steadiness and accuracy, push forward with your shooting hand and pull with your support hand.
  - When using a two-handed grip with a semi-automatic, NEVER cross the thumb of your support hand behind the slide and hammer. Doing so may result in painful injury when the slide is pushed back by recoil.
- On both revolvers and semi-automatics, make sure you place the part of your hand between your thumb and index finger in an area on the gun's grip where your hand will not be pinched or cut by the hammer during recoil.

Body Position

Correct grip and body position are key to making shooting more comfortable so that it's easier to concentrate on aiming and firing. Using a support adds stability and reduces body movement, resulting in greater accuracy. When outdoors, use a tree trunk, steady limb, or other stable object as a rest. Placing some padding, such as a hat or a jacket, on top of a hard rest helps with your aim.

Four Fundamentals for an Accurate Handgun Shot

1. Aim carefully, aligning your sights.
2. Take a deep breath, and then exhale.
3. Squeeze the trigger slowly.
4. Follow through.

Handgun Grips

One-Handed Grip

Two-Handed Grip

Safety Tip

The slide and hammer of a semi-automatic gun can deliver a bruising blow when held too close to the body. All handguns should be fired at arm's length.

Body Positions

One-handed grip

Two-handed grip
isosceles stance

Two-handed grip
weaver stance

Remember...
Always keep your finger outside the trigger guard until you are ready to shoot.

The standing body position you use depends on whether you are using a one-handed or a two-handed grip.

- **One-Handed Grip Body Position:** Follow these basic steps to use this position.
  - Turn your body away from the target at about a 90-degree angle.
  - Spread your feet about shoulder width apart at approximately a 45-degree angle to each other.
  - Keep your weight evenly distributed on both feet with your knees straight but not locked.
  - Grip your handgun with your shooting hand and raise it to the target. Put your support hand in a comfortable position that is out of the way such as in a jacket or pants pocket.
  - Hold your shooting arm straight with the elbow comfortably locked but not strained. Your gun should be held out as an extension of your arm as if you were pointing your finger.
  - Keep your head up as you turn to aim at the target.
- **Two-Handed Grip Body Position:** Two different body positions work with the two-handed grip—the isosceles stance and the weaver stance. Due to the stability it provides, the weaver stance is popular with "action" gun competitors and also works for hunters.
  - To position your body in the isosceles stance:
    - Face the target straight-on.
    - Keep your feet parallel and comfortably separated.
    - Hold the gun with the two-handed grip.
    - Hold both arms with your elbows fully extended and comfortably locked.
  - To position your body in the weaver stance:
    - Keep both of your feet parallel as in the isosceles stance, or place your support-side foot slightly ahead of your shooting-side foot.
    - Turn your shoulders at about a 30- to 45-degree angle to the target.
    - Bend both of your elbows.

Aiming

- At the shooting range, many handgunners use a sight picture that places the bull's-eye on the top of the front sight, rather than placing it in the sights over the center of the target.
- Scopes with long eye relief have become popular with handgunners. Scopes may take longer to align on a target than open sights, but they're usually more accurate.
- As you aim your handgun, follow these guidelines.
  - When using an open sight, focus on the front sight. The target and the rear sight should appear blurred or fuzzy.
  - If you are a beginner, aim at the bottom center of the bull's-eye. This is known as the "six-o'clock hold" because the location matches six o'clock on the face of an analog clock.
  - Aim with your dominant eye, but keep both eyes open. This will give you more light and better depth perception.
  - Realize that you cannot hold the handgun completely still while aiming. To reduce the amount of movement, rest between shots and do not grip the gun too tightly.

Breathing

- Your breathing can move the handgun just enough to throw off your shot. Proper breathing helps you steady your hold on the gun and maintain a correct sight picture.
- Practice with these two methods to see which one works best to control your breathing and keep the gun steady. When you are ready to shoot:
  - Draw a deep breath and exhale about half of it. Then hold your breath as you squeeze the trigger.
  - Take several deep breaths. Then squeeze the trigger after you exhale one breath and before you inhale the next breath. This is known as your natural respiratory pause.
- Bear in mind that if you hold your breath too long, your heart beats faster, which increases your pulse and causes the handgun to move. If you notice this happening, take more breaths and start over.

Trigger Squeeze

- Jerking the trigger or abruptly clenching the trigger hand can move the gun enough to cause a miss.
- To squeeze the trigger without jarring the gun:
  - Place the pad of your index finger on the trigger. This is the part of your finger that is halfway between the tip and the first joint.
  - Apply slow, steady pressure until the gun fires. Do not slap or jerk the trigger.
  - Squeeze the trigger directly toward the rear of the gun. Uneven pressure on the trigger can shift the sight picture and cause the shot to go wide of the target.
- When a revolver is fired, powder flashing at the front of the cylinder can cause burns. Be sure to keep your fingers away from the front of the trigger area.

Follow Through

- Following through prevents you from jerking the gun before the bullet has left the barrel and improves your accuracy.
- After the bullet fires, do not lower the gun immediately. Instead, follow through on the shot. For at least two or three seconds:
  - Keep squeezing the trigger ***and…***
  - Hold the sight picture.

Remember…

Practice makes breath control and proper trigger squeeze habitual.

Diagnostic Targets for Handgun Shooting

If your shots do not hit where you were aiming, you may need to adjust your shooting technique. For help, you can use a diagnostic target like those based on information from the U.S. Army's Marksmanship Unit Training Guide.

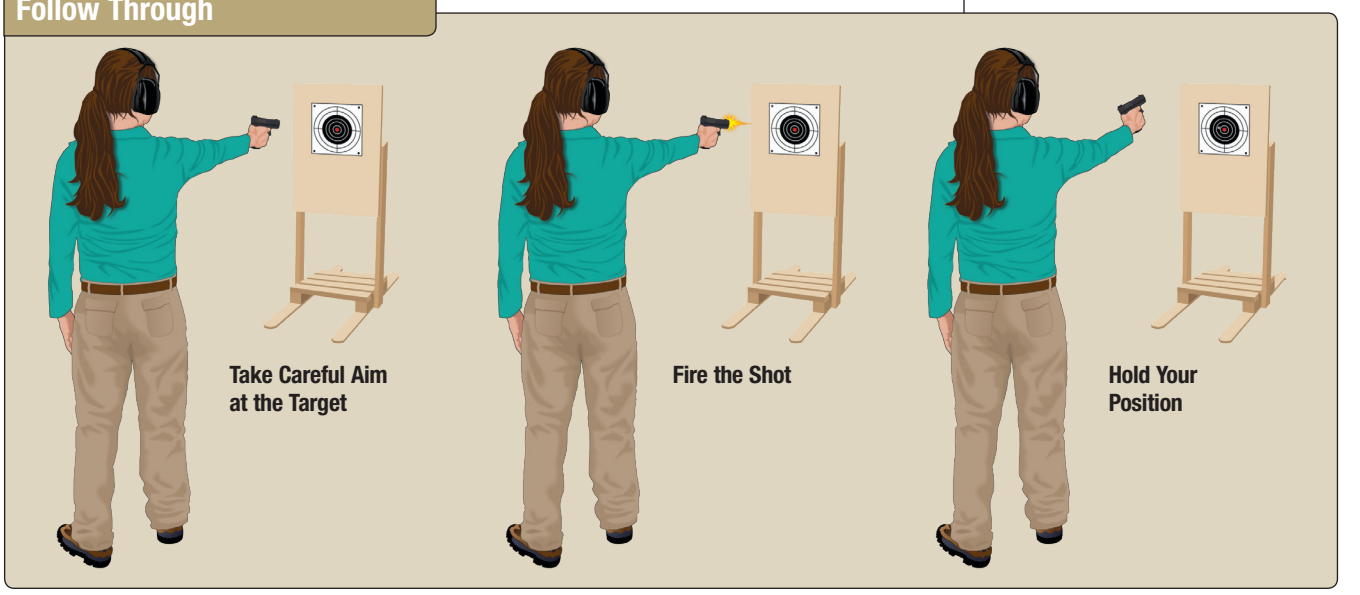
- Typical targets are divided into sections labeled with information such as:
  - Having too little (or too much) trigger finger
  - Jerking or slapping the trigger
  - Gripping too tightly while pulling the trigger
- These targets work best when shooting from a distance of 25 feet.
- After shooting, you check the target to see what might have kept your shots from hitting the bull's-eye.
- Diagnostic targets can be downloaded and printed from the Internet. They are available for both right-handed and left-handed shooters.

Dry Firing

"Dry firing" involves going through all the shooting steps but without using live ammunition. It may be used to teach beginners or to help more advanced shooters eliminate flinching and jerking. When dry firing:

- Use spent cartridges or commercially available dummy cartridges to avoid damaging the firing pin.
- Always obey the rules of safety.
- Never dry fire at a target you would not shoot at with live ammunition.
- Treat every gun as if it were loaded.

Follow Through



Safety Tip

- Permanent hearing loss happens gradually with each handgun blast. Choose an ear protection device with a high Noise Reduction Rating (NRR).
- Eye protection is essential when shooting a handgun to prevent damage from a ruptured shell or firearm malfunction. Wear eye protection also whenever disassembling or cleaning a handgun.

Outdoor Shooting Ranges

At an outdoor shooting range, make sure:

- The backstop is adequate. The best backstop is a high dirt bank or berm that is free of rocks or stones.
- There is a safety area behind the backstop. The size of the area should equal the actual distance the bullet travels when fired at an angle of elevation of 30 degrees.
- Shooters fire in a northern direction. This direction provides the best light and keeps the sun out of your eyes.

Remember...

Learning to hit your target accurately with a handgun requires meticulous training and constant practice.

Using Handguns at the Shooting Range

Recreational shooters may go to the shooting range to take target practice or to participate in an organized competition.

Range Rules

Many of the rules that govern safe firearm handling in the field apply to the shooting range. To make sure all shooters are doing the same thing at the same time, everyone must follow established safety procedures and obey all commands immediately. Here are some additional requirements for the shooting range.

- Read all range rules that apply to the type of shooting you will do that day.
- If there is a range master, be sure to follow his or her instructions.
- If your gun fails to fire or misfires or if any other unusual situation occurs:
  - Stop immediately and call the range master.
  - Do not risk an accident by continuing.
- When not shooting, unload your firearm and leave it on the range line or bench until you're given further instructions.
- Don't handle your firearm while other shooters are downrange. Step away from the firing line or bench until the range is clear and the range master instructs you to approach the line or bench.
- If no range master is present, all shooters must decide on safety commands beforehand so that it's clear when someone intends to go downrange.
- Before any person goes beyond the firing line or downrange, unload your firearm and step away from the line until the other person returns.
- Under no circumstances should you shoot a firearm when someone is downrange or past the firing line.
- Always wear hearing and eye protection, even if you're watching others shoot.
- Respond immediately to anyone calling for a "cease fire."

Range Commands

At the shooting range, a group of shooters firing at the same time is called a relay. All commands are given by the range master. Here are some commands and what they mean.

The range master commands:	The command means:
"Relay No. __ , Match No. __ , on the firing line. The preparation period starts now."	Shooters have three minutes to move to the firing line and get ready.
"With five rounds, load."	Shooters load their handguns.
"Is the line ready?"	If someone isn't ready, the shooter will notify the range master.
"Ready on the left, ready on the right, ready on the firing line."	The range master is making a final check.
"Commence firing."	Shooters begin firing and continue until they have fired all shots or until the range master calls for a cease fire.
"Cease firing."	Obey instantly. Stop firing immediately even if all rounds have not been fired.
"Unload cylinders, open actions with slides back, remove magazines, guns on the table."	Unload your handgun and make certain your neighbors also unload their guns.

Handgun Safety

You should be able to…

- State four practices for handling and storing handguns safely in the home.
- Demonstrate the four primary rules of firearm safety.
- List safety information you should discuss with your family.
- List the steps to load and unload a handgun safely.
- Explain how to transport handguns safely in vehicles.
- Explain what to do if a hang fire or misfire occurs.
- Explain why self-control, target identification, and accuracy are critical for shooting safely.
- State five functions needed for handgun shooting that are impaired if the shooter consumes alcohol or drugs.
- Explain how to resolve a dispute without using violence.

Understanding Why Safety Is Important

Whenever handguns are being handled, an incident can occur if the gun is not handled responsibly. Gun safety rules are meant to eliminate the chance of an incident.

- Obey the Ten Commandments of Handgun Safety listed on the inside front cover of this manual.
- Use common sense.
- Be responsible with your handgun.

Handgun Safety at Home

Statistics show that more than half of the fatal firearm incidents reported each year occur in the home. Since almost all incidents are caused by carelessness and lack of knowledge, it's the owner's duty to help prevent firearm mishaps in the home.

- Most importantly, lock guns away where children can't reach them, and store ammunition in a separate location. Check to see that a firearm is unloaded before allowing it in any building or living area.
- Practice these safety rules if handling a firearm in the home.
  - Immediately point the muzzle in a safe direction when you pick up a firearm.
  - Keep your finger off the trigger.
  - Always check to see that the chamber and the magazine are empty.
  - If someone shows you a gun are not familiar with, do not handle it until the action is opened and you are certain the handgun is unloaded.
- If a gun is taken from storage to show friends, be sure they understand safe gun handling rules.
- When you are with others, pay attention to what everyone is doing, particularly children.
  - Know where everyone is at all times.
  - Anticipate when and where they will move.

The Four Primary Rules of Firearm Safety

- Point the muzzle in a safe direction.
- Treat every firearm with the respect due a loaded gun.
- Be sure of the target and what is in front of it and beyond it.
- Keep your finger outside the trigger guard until ready to shoot.

Always store your guns in a locked location where children cannot reach them. **Never leave a handgun lying in a place where a child might pick it up.**

Remember...
Everyone, including children, always should remember that once you pull the trigger, you cannot bring the bullet back.

Safety Tip
Make sure that children cannot access any handgun that is stored in your home or another location. In addition:
- Make sure all guns are stored unloaded.
- Put a locking device on each gun, and also store all guns in a locked location.
- Keep all ammunition in a separate, locked location.

Eddie Eagle GunSafe® Program

For more information, visit the NRA's Eddie Eagle Program website: **eddieeagle.nra.org**

Handguns and Children

All family members, not just the gun's owner, should know the rules of firearm safety and how to handle a handgun. This includes children.

- Remember that children are curious and may play with a handgun if they find one.
- If your children could be around handguns in your home or some other location, remove the mystery surrounding guns by covering safety information with your family.
  - Point out the parts of the handgun and tell what the parts do.
  - Demonstrate how to handle the gun safely.
    - Explain the safety rules about treating every handgun as if it were loaded and never pointing the muzzle at anyone.
    - Explain how the handgun's safety works.
    - Show them how to unload the gun safely and how to release a cocked hammer.
  - Make sure children understand that guns can kill themselves or others.
    - Emphasize that they should never handle a gun unless they are with a responsible adult.
    - Teach them the rules to follow if they find a gun when an adult is not around. Adapted from the National Rifle Association's Eddie Eagle GunSafe® Program and used with the NRA's permission, these rules are:
      - Stop, and tell others who are with you to stop.
      - Do NOT touch the gun.
      - Leave the area.
      - Go tell a responsible adult.
  - Take your children with you when you shoot. This will:
    - Help satisfy their curiosity.
    - Help prevent them from trying to handle the gun on their own.
    - Give them the opportunity to make up their own minds about becoming a shooter.
- Encourage your children to take a handgun safety course.

Safely Loading and Unloading Handguns

Even something as simple as loading or unloading a handgun can result in tragedy if it isn't done properly. Here's how to do it safely.

Loading

The loading procedure depends on the type of handgun.

- **Revolvers**
  - **Single-action revolvers** typically load through a gate on the right side of the frame. To load a single-action revolver:
    - Point the muzzle in a safe direction.
    - Open the action; make sure the barrel is unobstructed.
    - Load a cartridge into each chamber. To rotate the cylinder, pull the hammer back to half-cock.
    - When the chambers are loaded, close the action.

- **Double-action revolvers** have cylinders that are swung outward to expose all chambers for loading. To load a double-action revolver:
  - Point the muzzle down and in a safe direction.
  - With your right hand, release the cylinder latch. This frees the cylinder from the frame.
  - Swing the cylinder out and away from the frame with the two middle fingers of the left hand.
  - Make sure the barrel is unobstructed.
  - Load a cartridge into each chamber. After a chamber is loaded, rotate the cylinder with the left thumb and two middle fingers.
  - When the chambers are loaded, make sure the hammer is down (uncocked). Gently swing the cylinder back into the frame, and make sure it locks into place.

Double-action revolver ready for loading

Semi-automatic with magazine

- **Semi-Automatic Pistols**
  - Semi-automatics usually fire rounds stored in a magazine that is inserted in the grip or handle.
  - To load a semi-automatic pistol:
    - Point the muzzle in a safe direction.
    - Make sure the barrel is unobstructed.
    - Put the safety on if the gun can be loaded with the safety on.
    - Remove the magazine from the grip by depressing the magazine release button. This button is typically located on the left side of the frame, behind the trigger.
    - Pull the slide to the rear to make sure the chamber is empty.
    - Place the pistol in a stable location with the muzzle pointing in a safe direction.
    - Load the cartridges into the magazine by firmly pressing them down and toward the rear of the magazine. Do not force them. Forcing the cartridges could damage the lips of your magazine.
    - Hold the magazine in one hand, and pick up your pistol with the other hand.
    - Insert the magazine into the grip until it clicks securely into place.
    - Pull the slide all the way to the rear and then let it go forward. This picks up a cartridge and slides it into the chamber.
    - Put the safety on if you were not able to do so before loading.

Unloading

The unloading procedure also depends on the type of handgun.

- **Revolvers**
  - You remove the fired cartridge cases using the **extractor**. An ejector rod is connected to the extractor. Pushing the ejector rod causes the extractor to remove the fired cases from the cylinder chambers.

Remember...

Removal of ammunition from the magazine or removal of the magazine from a semi-automatic pistol does not mean the handgun is unloaded!

extractor:

A device to remove the fired cartridge cases from the chamber in revolvers or pull the empty case clear of the barrel in semi-automatic pistols

Typical Handgun Cases

Padded, Soft-Sided Case (Pistol Rug)

Material: Canvas, nylon, neoprene, polyester, or leather

Advantages:

- Light, easy to handle and store
- Less costly than hard cases

Disadvantage:

- Less protection than hard-sided cases

Lockable, Hard-Sided Case

Material: Aluminum or composite

Advantages:

- Lightweight but sturdy
- Meets airline standards
- Can include deep foam padding that holds handgun in place and cushions impact
- Composite models can be molded to fit handgun
- Available in waterproof models

Disadvantage:

- Bulkier and costlier than soft-sided cases

Range Bag

Material: Nylon, leather, polyester, or canvas

Advantages:

- Holds handgun(s), ammunition, magazines, and accessories in separate padded sections
- Keeps all equipment in one location for transporting it easily to the firing range

Disadvantage:

- Not for use as a storage location since the handgun(s) and ammunition would be stored together

Holster

Material: Leather, nylon, or combination of materials

Advantages:

- Often used as a second case to carry a handgun from a vehicle into an outdoor shooting area
- Come in variety of styles, letting you select the one that meets your needs and personal comfort

Disadvantages:

- Must get your gun first, then get holster to fit
- Usually requires some type of carry permit

- **Single-action revolvers** are unloaded through a gate on the right side of the frame. To unload a single-action revolver:
  - Point the muzzle in a safe direction.
  - Keep your finger outside the trigger guard.
  - Push the ejector rod. The fired case is ejected out of the chamber. Rotate the cylinder and repeat this operation for every chamber.
  - Make sure the gun is empty by visually checking both the chamber and the cylinder.
  - If the gun is cocked, uncock (decock) it. Hold the hammer with your thumb, pull the trigger, and slowly lower the hammer until it is in the uncocked position.
- **Double-action revolvers** are unloaded by releasing the cylinder. To unload a double-action revolver:
  - Point the muzzle up and in a safe direction.
  - Keep your finger outside the trigger guard.
  - Release the cylinder latch to allow the cylinder to swing out from the frame.
  - Push the ejector rod downward, forcing out the fired cases.
  - Make sure the gun is empty by visually checking both the chamber and the cylinder.
  - If the gun is cocked, uncock (decock) it. Hold the hammer with your thumb, pull the trigger, and slowly lower the hammer until it is in the uncocked position.

■ **Semi-Automatic Pistols**

- Semi-automatics usually have cartridges stored in a magazine.
- To unload a semi-automatic pistol:
  - Point the muzzle in a safe direction.
  - Put the safety on if it is not already on.
  - Keep your finger outside the trigger guard.
  - Release the magazine and take it out of the pistol.
  - Remove the cartridges from the magazine.
  - Pull the slide all the way to the rear and then let it go forward to eject any cartridge that may be in the chamber. Repeat this several times to make sure the chamber is empty.
  - Make sure the pistol is empty by visually checking both the chamber and the magazine.

Safely Transporting Handguns

Transporting handguns properly involves both legal and safe practices. In addition to federal laws, there are regulations that vary from state to state. **Know your state's law and obey it.**

General Rules

Always unload and case firearms before transporting them. In many states, this may be the law.

■ The action should be open or the gun broken down, whichever makes the handgun safest if it's mishandled.

■ The handgun should be locked in the trunk of your car or in an area of the vehicle that is not immediately accessible to anyone in the vehicle.

- You may not store the gun under a seat or in a door pocket.
- Some states prohibit putting handguns in the glove compartment of a vehicle for any reason.

■ Ammunition should be kept separate from the handgun.

Taking Additional Safety Precautions

Self-Control and Target Identification

- Some shooters may become overly anxious or excited, which can lead to careless behavior. They may fire at sounds, colors, movements, or unidentified shapes, or simply shoot too quickly. In the excitement after hitting their target, they may swing a loaded firearm toward their companions or run with the safety off toward the target.
- Self-control is an essential aspect of safety. Only shoot when you know that no people, domestic animals, buildings, or equipment are in the zone-of-fire.
- Slow, careful shooting is not only safer, but it also produces a higher degree of success.

Accuracy

Shooting accurately is a key safety factor. Some incidents, often deadly ones, have occurred when stray bullets have hit people out of the shooter's sight. Be sure you have a proper backstop before you shoot.

Alcohol and Drugs

- Consuming alcohol before or during shooting increases the risk of incidents because it impairs coordination, hearing, vision, communication, and judgment.
- Drugs can have a similar effect. If you have to take prescription medicine, check with your physician to see if it's safe to take while shooting a handgun.

Resolving Conflicts Without Violence

Anyone with a concealed handgun permit always must try to avoid conflicts and take the necessary steps to resolve any disputes that occur without using violence.

- To avoid a conflict, try to stay calm when communicating with the other person.
- If the situation starts to get out of control, walk away if possible.
- If you cannot avoid a conflict, you should use a dispute resolution method.

Using the LEAPS Method

One method that can be used for dispute resolution is LEAPS. The word "LEAPS" can be used to help you remember these steps.

- **L**isten to what the other person has to say.
- **E**mpathize with the other person by trying to understand his or her feelings.
- **A**sk questions to get more information from the other person. Possible questions include asking who, what, when, where, why, and how.
- **P**araphrase what you have heard to show the other person that you are listening and you understand what he or she is saying. For example, you can say, "Let me make sure I heard you correctly. You said _____."
- **S**ummarize by giving a possible solution to the situation. For example, you can say, "From what you've said, let's _____."

Hang Fires and Misfires

Hang fires happen when the firing pin has struck the primer and there is a delay before it fires. This can occur for several reasons, such as a faulty firing pin or spring, defective primer, or other cartridge-related problems. A misfire is when the primer fails to ignite the powder.

Always treat a "misfire" or "hang fire" as if the handgun is going to discharge at any second.

- Keep the muzzle pointed in a safe direction at all times.
- Do not attempt to fire the gun again.
- Leave the action closed, and retain your shooting position. Wait for at least 30 seconds.
- If the gun has not fired after 30 seconds, open the action and remove the cartridge. Also check the gun for obstructions but do not attempt to clear it unless you have experienced help.
  - On a revolver, check both the barrel and the cylinder.
  - On a semi-automatic pistol, clear the chamber and check the barrel.

Failure to follow these safe handling practices could result in a tragedy.

A DEADLY MIX

The best thing you can do for your safety and the safety of others is simple…

Don't drink and shoot!

Because you can drink faster than your system can burn the alcohol off, there is an increasing level of alcohol in your blood. This level is referred to as Blood Alcohol Concentration (BAC).

Handgun Laws

You should be able to…

- Give federal, state, and local laws pertaining to handgun ownership and use.
- Explain the regulations you must follow when transporting a firearm on a commercial aircraft.

Remember…
Handguns are regulated under federal, state, and local laws. Ignorance of the laws is not a valid excuse for violating them.

The Castle Doctrine

The Castle Doctrine, also known as the castle law or defense of habitation law, is a long-standing American legal concept. It is based on the idea that "a man's home is his castle."

- The Castle Doctrine protects the right of an individual to act in self-defense in a manner that is appropriate for the circumstances. More specifically, you are likely protected from legal prosecution if:
  - You are using force to defend yourself against an intruder **and…**
  - The intruder is within your residence or any legally occupied place, vehicle, or workplace.
- The Castle Doctrine is not a defined law that can be invoked, but a set of principles which may be included in the law in many areas.
  - In some states, the law might say a person has a duty to retreat to avoid violence if he or she can reasonably do so.
  - In other states, the Castle Doctrine laws might specifically contain a "stand-your-ground" clause. If so, the use of deadly force may be permissible to prevent felonies from being committed in one's home or to protect against an assault in a place where that individual has a right to be, such as within one's own home or garage. Deadly force may be justified and may provide a defense of justifiable homicide in cases when the resident reasonably fears imminent peril of death or serious bodily harm to himself or herself or to another person.
- In addition to providing a valid defense in a criminal case, many states with a Castle Doctrine law, particularly those with a stand-your-ground clause, also have a clause which gives you some immunity from civil lawsuits filed on behalf of the assailant for damages/injuries resulting from the force used to stop the assault or intrusion.
- Since the Castle Doctrine and stand-your-ground laws vary by state, make sure know what is legal in your area.

Obeying Handgun Laws

Since the federal government, states, and many local governments have different handgun laws, you must find out what is legal in your area. In addition, if you are taking your handgun with you to another location, you must:

- Make sure you follow the laws regarding transporting a handgun.
- Check the state and local laws for the area where you will be shooting your gun.

Learning Federal Laws

Various federal laws regulate handgun ownership and usage. These include the following.

- **Second Amendment to the U.S. Constitution:** As ratified by the states in 1791, the second amendment to the U.S. Constitution states: "A well regulated militia being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the People to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed."
- **U.S. Code of Federal Regulations:** Federal laws regarding handguns and other firearms are included in several parts of the U.S. Federal Code. For example, Title 27, Part 479 discusses registration, identification, and transfer of ownership of firearms. Other parts of Title 27 cover additional laws pertaining to firearms.
- **Gun Control Act of 1968:** This Act is found in Title 18, Part I, Chapter 44 of the U.S. Code and includes provisions that:
  - Control the mail-order sales of firearms.
  - Prohibit those categories of individuals listed in the Act from owning a firearm.
  - Require individuals to purchase handguns only in their state of residence.
- **Firearm Owners' Protection Act:** This Act also is found in Title 18, Part I, Chapter 44 of the U.S. Code and was passed to amend many of the provisions of the Gun Control Act of 1968, including clarification of which categories of individuals are prohibited from owning a firearm.

Air Travel Regulations

When you are transporting a handgun or other firearm on a commercial airline, you must follow these regulations.

- All firearms must be unloaded.
- All firearms, ammunition, and firearm parts must be:
  - Declared at the ticket counter during the check-in process.
  - Packed in a hard-sided, locked container.
  - Checked with your other luggage.

Other requirements also apply. Check with the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) or your airline for more information.

Learning State and Local Laws

Laws pertaining to handguns vary by state and locality.

- Be sure you know the laws for your area or any other area where you might travel with your gun.
- Some information on state laws can be found under "Gun Laws At a Glance" and "State Gun Law Profiles" on the National Rifle Association's (NRA) Institute for Legislative Action website at **www.nraila.org/gun-laws.aspx**.
- As you review the topics below, use the sidebar space to make notes on your state's laws and regulations.

Carrying a Handgun

In many states, a concealed handgun includes any handgun that a person is carrying that is totally or partially hidden from the ordinary sight of another person. Before you carry a concealed and/or an open/unconcealed handgun, make sure you know:

- The definition for a concealed handgun in your area
- The license/permit requirements for a carrying a handgun
- If you are required to carry your handgun license/permit with you
- If your handgun license/permit allows you to carry a concealed handgun and/or an open/unconcealed handgun
- If your handgun license/permit is valid in other states you plan to visit
- Any other related laws and requirements for your area

Learning License/Permit Requirements

To get a license/permit to carry a concealed handgun and/or an open/unconcealed handgun legally, you must meet your state's requirements such as:

- Age
- Residency
- Mandatory education
- Safe handling demonstrations
- Shooting qualification
- Renewals

Knowing Ownership and Permit Restrictions

- **Ownership Restrictions:** States and local areas often have laws stating that some persons are not allowed to own a handgun. These restrictions may include persons who:
  - Have committed certain types of crimes, including domestic violence.
  - Are convicted felons or charged with committing a felony.
  - Have been arrested for drug and/or alcohol abuse.
  - Are mentally impaired.
  - Are delinquent in paying certain debts such as child support.
- **Permit Restrictions:** States and local laws may also specify which persons cannot get a handgun license/permit. For example, a person might not be eligible to get a license/permit if he or she:
  - Is ineligible to own a handgun under federal or state laws.
  - Has been charged with or convicted of a crime that involves homicide, serious bodily harm, kidnapping, sexual abuse, or sexual assault.
  - Has been convicted of carrying a handgun while under the influence of alcohol.
  - Has been convicted of carrying a handgun in an area where guns are prohibited.
  - Is mentally impaired.

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Knowing Where Handguns Can Be Carried

Most states and localities have laws that say where you can and cannot carry a handgun legally, including whether or not the handgun must be concealed. Be sure you know the laws for your area.

- **Legal Locations:** Some places where you may be allowed to legally carry a handgun include:
  - Your residence or other private property
  - Your place of business
  - A campsite
  - A motor vehicle if the state's requirements are met
- **Prohibited Locations:** Some locations where you may be prohibited from carrying a gun include:
  - School grounds
  - Courthouses and/or other government buildings, including libraries, post offices, and law enforcement offices
  - Military bases
  - Secured area of an airport
  - Banks
  - City, county, or state parks
  - Places that sell or serve alcohol
  - Trains
  - Sporting events
  - Hospitals or nursing homes
  - Churches or other places of religious worship
  - Private residences unless you have the owner's consent
  - Areas posted with signs that prohibit concealed and/or unconcealed weapons

Using Deadly (Lethal) Force

- Understanding when you may use lethal (deadly) force legally includes knowing how "deadly force" is defined in your area. Before you face a situation where you might have to consider using deadly force, you should know:
  - The laws for your area regarding self-defense, defending others, and defending property
  - It is always illegal to use deadly force if you are involved in a non-deadly attack
- **Using Deadly Force for Self-Defense:** To know when you are allowed to use deadly force for self-defense, you should find out:
  - Your state's definition of "self-defense"
  - Whether or not you are required to retreat from a threatening situation
  - When you have the right to defend yourself
  - The situations when deadly force would be considered to be necessary
  - Locations where deadly force might be allowed (such as in your home)
  - Limitations on the use of deadly force
  - Alternatives to the use of deadly force, including non-violent dispute resolution
- **Using Deadly Force to Defend Others:** Learning when you are allowed to use lethal force to defend others includes knowing:
  - If the "alter-ego" rule pertaining to the amount of force a third party would use to defend himself or herself applies
  - If your relationship to the other person affects whether deadly force is allowed

- **Using Deadly Force to Defend Property:** Before you use lethal force to defend property, you should know:
  - Which areas are included as property—home, business, vehicle (Castle Doctrine)
  - If a protective/restraining order must be in effect
  - What circumstances would justify the use of deadly force
  - If the laws vary for different types of property
  - Any exceptions to the laws

Avoiding Prohibited Acts

In your area, be sure you know which types of acts are illegal. Examples of acts that may be illegal are:

- Drawing or displaying a handgun
- Threatening others on the highway
- Firing a gun at a building or a means of transportation (automobile, airplane, etc.)
- Using or carrying a firearm while under the influence of alcohol and/or drugs

Responding to Law Enforcement Officers

If you are carrying a handgun and are approached by a law enforcement officer, make sure you know and follow the correct procedure. Requirements may include:

- Keeping your hands where the officer can see them
- Telling the officer that you have a gun
- Showing the officer both your driver's license and your handgun license/permit
- Staying in your vehicle unless the officer asks you to get out of it

Understanding Laws Related to Children

If children are in your home, you should know other handgun laws that will apply to you, including:

- Definition of "children"
- Requirements for unloading
- Storage requirements
- **Child Access Prevention Laws:** Many states have child access prevention (CAP) laws that are intended to prevent children from having access to firearms.
  - The specific laws vary by state. However, the CAP laws in many states hold adults criminally liable if children have unsupervised access to firearms.
  - Make sure you know the CAP laws that apply in your state or in any other state where you might be visiting and have a firearm with you.

Selling or Transferring Firearms

Before you sell or transfer a firearm to another person, be sure you know the laws for your area such as:

- Completing a waiting period
- Verifying proof of residency
- Checking on the frequency of sales or purchases
- Completing a criminal history check
- Meeting age requirements/not selling to minors

NOTES

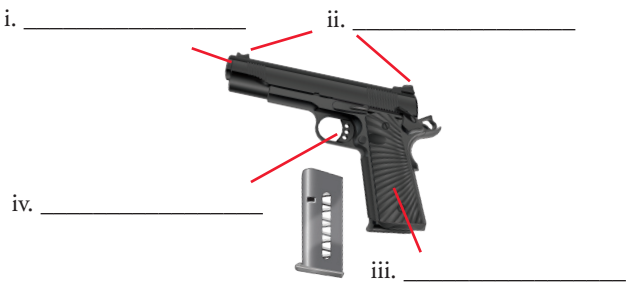
Chapter Review Exercises

Chapter 1

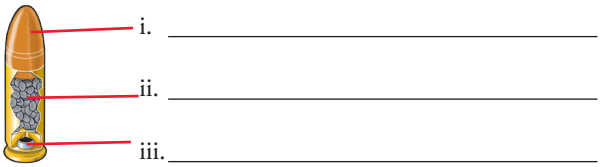
1. List five uses for handguns.
   i. _____
   ii. _____
   iii. _____
   iv. _____
   v. _____
2. The second amendment to the U.S. Constitution guarantees citizens the right to _____.
3. Ignorance of handgun laws is a valid excuse for violating them.
   True _____ False _____

Chapter 2

1. The three basic parts of a modern handgun are _____.
   a. cartridge, frame, and barrel.
   b. action, frame, and barrel.
   c. frame, trigger, and action.
   d. barrel, chamber, and muzzle.
2. Label the indicated parts of a semi-automatic pistol.



3. The component in ammunition that ignites the gunpowder when struck by the firing pin is the _____.
4. Label the indicated parts of centerfire ammunition.



5. The design feature that causes a bullet to spiral, which increases accuracy and distance, is called _____.
6. When referring to handguns, "caliber" is _____.
   a. the length of the handgun's barrel.
   b. always expressed in hundredths of an inch.
   c. used to describe the size of the handgun bore and the size of cartridges designed for different bores.
   d. all of the above.
7. The type of sight found on most handguns is the _____.
8. The action of a handgun is made up of parts that _____.
   a. block the trigger or hammer to prevent accidental firing.
   b. hold ammunition before it's loaded into the chamber.
   c. load, unload, fire, and eject the cartridge.
   d. serve as the handle of the handgun.
9. List three types of handgun actions.
   i. _____
   ii. _____
   iii. _____
10. If a handgun has a safety, the safety is located around the receiver of the handgun and _____.
    a. ensures that the handgun can never be accidentally fired.
    b. is a device that blocks the action to prevent accidental firing.
    c. is always located either inside or on the trigger guard.
    d. all of the above.
11. You should only use ammunition that exactly matches the caliber specifications marked on the _____ of your handgun.
12. Knowing your handgun's range is critical—it allows you to _____.
    a. determine which caliber of ammunition you need.
    b. make accurate shots at any distance as long as they are within your handgun's range.
    c. know at what distances your handgun could cause injury.
    d. all of the above.
13. Firearms should be stored _____, in a _____ location, and separate from _____.

Chapter 3

1. Good marksmanship is _____.
   a. being able to hit your target at least 50% of the time.
   b. correctly marking your target.
   c. being a good sport if you miss your target.
   d. hitting your target accurately and consistently.
2. Sight alignment, the process of lining up rear and front sights, is especially important in handgun shooting because _____ _____.
3. The most stable gripping procedure for handgun shooting is the _____.
   a. one-handed hold.
   b. two-handed hold.
   c. adjusting for windage hold.
   d. adjusting for elevation hold.
4. All handguns should be fired at _____ length.
5. Due to the stability it provides, the _____ stance is a popular two-handed grip body position.
   a. 90-degree angle
   b. 180-degree angle
   c. weaver
   d. isosceles
6. To help you steady the handgun when you're ready to shoot, you should control _____ as you squeeze the trigger.

7. The proper technique for pulling the trigger when shooting a handgun is to _____.
   a. pull the trigger quickly, moving only your finger.
   b. squeeze the trigger slowly.
   c. jerk the trigger.
   d. slap the trigger.
8. To make sure all shooters are doing the same thing at the same time, everyone at the shooting range must _____.
   a. obey all commands immediately.
   b. use the same ammunition.
   c. follow established safety procedures.
   d. both a. and c.

Chapter 4

1. To minimize the risk of a firearm incident in the home, you should *never* _____.
   a. point the muzzle in a safe direction.
   b. keep your finger off the trigger when handling the firearm.
   c. store the firearm and ammunition together.
   d. check that the chamber and magazine are empty.
2. List the four primary rules of firearm safety.
   i. _____
   ii. _____
   iii. _____
   iv. _____
3. _____ should know the rules of firearm safety and how to handle a handgun.
   a. Only the gun's owner
   b. All adult family members
   c. All children in the family
   d. All of the above
4. If children find a gun when an adult is not around, they should _____.
   a. leave the area.
   b. go get their best friends.
   c. make sure the gun is unloaded.
   d. shoot the gun for practice.
5. To unload a handgun safely, you should always _____.
   a. keep your finger outside the trigger guard.
   b. dry fire the handgun before loading and after unloading.
   c. point the muzzle in a safe direction.
   d. both a. and c.
6. _____ is *not* a safe way to transport a handgun.
   a. Unloaded
   b. Under the seat in your vehicle
   c. With the action open
   d. In a gun case
7. List five functions that are impaired if you consume alcohol or drugs.
   i. _____
   ii. _____
   iii. _____
   iv. _____
   v. _____
8. One method you can use to resolve conflicts without violence is "LEAPS," which stands for:
   L. _____
   E. _____
   A. _____
   P. _____
   S. _____

Chapter 5

1. Federal laws that regulate handgun ownership and usage can be found in the _____.
   a. Uniform Commercial Code.
   b. Tenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.
   c. U.S. Code of Federal Regulations.
   d. Declaration of Independence.
2. When transporting a handgun on a commercial aircraft, it must be _____, packed in _____ container, and checked with _____.
3. The Castle Doctrine:
   a. is a federal law that allows you to act in self-defense in all situations.
   b. protects your right to act in self-defense in certain circumstances.
   c. always requires you to retreat to avoid violence.
   d. always includes a "stand-your-ground" clause.
4. The laws pertaining to handguns are the same in every state and locality.
   True _____ False _____
5. It is always illegal to use deadly force when:
   a. you have the legal right to defend yourself in threatening situation.
   b. the person attacking you is your spouse, child, or other relative.
   c. the person attacking you is in your home.
   d. you are involved in a non-deadly attack.

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