Git Gud: /k/'s Guide to Practicing Defensive Pistolcraft

Supplemented with information on equipment selection for home defense and carry

By: *Some anon who posts in the DOTM and /handgun general/ threads*
With credit to: *Some other anons who post in the those threads*
Why: *To encourage and enable meaningful practice*.

Results of the FBI Bullseye Course shot by some fucking guy with a Jennings JA-22. The course of fire involved ten shots at 25 yards in four minutes, five shots at 15 yards in 15 seconds (repeated once), and five shots at 15 yards in 10 seconds (repeated once). This anon exceeded the FBI's standards for a firearms instructor using a pistol commonly seen as a piece of shit. Git gud.

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The Obligatory Equipment Section

The Weapon

Any tool is a weapon if you hold it right. However, the pistol is the focus of this guide (and honestly 90% of what we care about on this board). Specific to pistols, the only consistency /k/ shows is its arbitrary and everchanging brand loyalty/hatred. Every day, we discuss such lofty topics as: ">plastic sights; >costs $550; >no front cocking serrations; WHY EVEN?" and ">squishy squishy." I'll avoid wading into that. Instead, I'll sketch out some rough parameters for what a good defensive should have. After that, I'll provide a brief and non-inclusive list of manufacturers and calibers that meet those criteria.

The makings of a good defensive pistol:

- **The first priority must always be reliability**. Simply put, these are lifesaving tools: they **must work** when called upon. What constitutes "reliable" is subjective to your comfort level. I prefer a pistol that has fed at least 500 rounds of practice ammunition and 200 rounds of the ammunition I choose to carry with no malfunctions with the carry ammo and no more than one non-shooter/ammo induced malfunction with the practice ammo. A well-reasoned competing view can be found here. Choose whatever metric helps you sleep at night.
- **A safe, workable trigger**. The trigger must provide a margin of safety – that is, it must allow you to control when it goes off while under a high degree of stress – while simultaneously remaining shootable. The generally accepted parameters are a trigger weight of no less than four pounds for single-action and striker-fired actions, and a trigger weight of between seven and twelve pounds for double-action actions. The length of travel is an additional element of safety: short single-action only pulls (and actions which attempt to mimic them) should be accompanied by manual safeties, while a longer pull can mitigate the safety concerns of low-weight triggers. **Note that trigger pull characteristics cannot replace safe gunhandling practices.** Human fingers under a startle response are capable of compressing well over 20 pounds – far in excess of any handgun's trigger pull weight.
- **Sights you can see**. You need to be using your sights. Sighted fire enables fast, accurate hits. And, from a legal perspective, we're accountable for every round we fire. Sending stray rounds off-target can have unacceptable consequences. You should have sights that are easy for you to see quickly. Some brands and types will be discussed later but, spoiler: USGI 1911 sights bad, Trijicon HD good.
- **A caliber known to be effective**. People have and will continue to successfully defend themselves with .22LRs. Assuming you live in the United States and centerfire pistols are readily available, that doesn't mean you should deliberately seek one out. In general: 9x19 or .38SPL should be your minimum for pistols ranging from service-sized (Glock 17 or S&W K- or N-frame or similar) through subcompact (S&W M&P Shield or S&W J-frame or similar). Calibers such as .380ACP and .32ACP can work but should be relegated to micro-pistols: with the options available today, there is simply no sound practical reason to choose a .380ACP Walther PPK over a 9x19 Walther PPS.

- **An overall package you can shoot well**. This is subjective and based on your skill. However, most people would agree that it's far easier to shoot a full-sized semi-auto to a high degree of skill than it is to do the same tasks with a Seecamp .32. What I'm suggesting is this: if the easier to shoot gun is an option that fits in your lifestyle, you should choose to carry that gun. In general, larger guns are easier to shoot well than smaller guns.

Current-Production Makes and Models Meeting this Criteria:

- **Subcompact revolvers**: Ruger LCR, S&W J-Frames, Colt Cobra (.38SPL+P, .357MAG, 9x19, .22MAG).
- **Pocket pistols**: Ruger LCP, Kel-Tec P3AT, Kel-Tec P32, Kahr (various), Glock 42, SIG P238 (.32ACP, .380ACP).
- **Subcompact single-stack pistols**: Walther PPS/PPS M2, S&W M&P Shield, Glock 43, Springfield XDS, Kahr (various models), SIG P938 (.380ACP, 9x19).
- **Subcompact double-stack pistols**: Glock 26 (various), S&W M&P-Compact, Springfield XD-SC, SIG P320SC, FN FNS-Compact, HK P30SK/P2000SK/VP9SK, Walther PPQ Subcompact/P99C (9x19, .40S&W, .357SIG).
- **Compact double-stack pistols:** Glock 19 (various), Beretta PX4C (prefer Compact Carry model), SIG P320C/P229/SP2022, HK P2000/USP-Compact/HK45C, CZ P07/P10C, Walther P99 (9x19, .40S&W, .357SIG, 10mm, .45ACP).
- **Service-sized pistols:** Glock 17 (various), Beretta 92-series/PX4, SIG P320/P226/P220, HK P30/P30L/VP9/USP/HK45, FN 509, Springfield XD/XDM, S&W M&P/M&P2.0, CZ P09, Walther PPQ (9x19, .40S&W, .357SIG, 10mm, .45ACP).
- **1911s:** As a general rule, for entry level guns stick to Springfield or Colt. For stocking semi-customs, go Dan Wesson. For custom builds, there are a myriad of shops. There are other good 1911s out there, but that would be an article in and of itself. I strongly advise reading this and this before choosing a 1911.

The Ban-State List

If you live in California, some of these may not be an option for you (or if they are right now, they may not be in a few months as models continue to fall off the handgun roster). This list was written with the idea of what I would choose if I were limited to ten rounds in the gun, not necessarily what is California-legal. My general theme is that I would not want a neutered capacity magazine, but rather a ten-round magazine designed to be a ten-round magazine. Often times the adaptation to a ten-round magazine brings with it reliability and durability issues, with Glock by far being the worst offender here (to the point where Glock themselves will not recommend their own 10-round magazines for police or security use). H&K is an exception in that their ten-round mags tend to share the same reliability as their full-capacity counterparts. While I do not personally believe them to have enough differences to matter against people, I would consider a larger caliber if in a ban state – may as well take whatever advantages *are* offered by the larger service calibers.

- 9x19: H&K P30SK/P2000SK/VP9SK, H&K USP-Compact/P2000; Glock 26/Glock 43; S&W M&P Shield; Walther PPS/PPS M2; SIG P225/P320SC; Walther P99C; Beretta 92-series gun; 1911.
- .40S&W: H&K USP-Compact/P2000/USP
- .45ACP: H&K 45/45C/USP-Compact, Glock 30/30S, 1911
- I would also consider a mid- or full-sized revolver in .357 or .38SPL+P from Ruger or Smith and Wesson. The Smith and Wesson will need the lock removed and plugged if it's a new production item/not a pre-lock.

Let's Piss People Off About Capacity!

Some people argue that capacity is largely irrelevant for private citizen self defense. There is some data to support that position. Others, including myself, believe that if we're drawing a firearm, we're already way the fuck outside the statistical bell curve, to the point that "normal" and "average" become rather unimportant. A competing view on capacity can be summed up as, "Ammo in gun = time in fight." Put another way, we have a lot more opportunities to fix a particular problem with a 17-shot semi-auto than we do with a 5-shot revolver given the same amount of time because, with the 17-shot pistol, we don't have to take the gun apart and put it back together again as often in order to keep it working.

Bonus material about spare mags and ammo, sourced from elsewhere, in response to the statement "Not carrying a spare magazine is just foolish; most malfunctions in the semiauto pistol are magazine related:"

> *"I have made this statement myself over the years, but in the last 12 months have begun to question it.*
>
> *Most people don't get into altercations in their daily life.*
> *Most altercations are survived by people who have their heads firmly planted up their asses and have no support gear.*
> *Some altercations can be stopped by yelling loudly or running.*
> *Some altercations can be stopped by the presentation of a white light.*
> *Some altercations can be stopped with the presentation or application of a less lethal tool such as OC.*
> *Some altercations can be stopped with the presentation or application of an edged weapon.*
> *Some altercations can be stopped with the presentation or application of a firearm.*
> *'Most' firearm involved incidents for civilians are low round count.*
>
> *Given the above, my current stance is that I'd rather have MORE OPTIONS in tools than more bullets for one tool. I carry a G26 or a G19, 11 and 16 rounds respectively. I've fired approximately 50,000 pistol rounds through Glocks in my lifetime. I have NEVER had a malfunction caused by a bad magazine.*
>
> *With the addition of OC spray, med gear, a flashlight, a knife, and my normal daily crap, fitting a spare magazine into the equation is quite difficult. I have actually removed a spare magazine in favor of carrying OC spray where the mag used to ride. I have attended two ECQC classes and participated in one. I have watched a lot of video of FOF scenarios*

and real gun fights. I have talked with a lot of individuals who have been in shootings in CIV/LE/MIL environments. Time or ability to access and change magazines midfight is extremely rare.

Given the above parameters, it is my opinion that being well rounded in tools and skills is a better approach than being heavy on only one tool or one skill. I see no problem in carrying a spare magazine if you can afford it, but I no longer use the statement that one 'must' carry a spare or they are breaking some sort of rule.

Support gear is all about possible risk and possible benefit. I have taken a hard look at my lifestyle and made the decision to expand my tools and skills rather than refine only one of them.

If we always planned for the worst case scenario (doing a reload mid gunfight), we also shouldn't ride motorcycles, smoke cigarettes, drive vehicles, eat cheeseburgers, work in dangerous occupations, etc. If carrying a spare mag is because 'it might be the difference in life or deat"' I can make a very clear case that sitting on your ass at home or driving across country on vacation might be the difference in life or death. You are more likely to die in your car than in your house.

We must live our lives and make our decisions on tools based on an honest assessment of our own risks and skills. FOR ME, more tools makes more sense than more bullets.

I am certain some others may disagree and I would like to read their thoughts. I come to [this forum] as a former 'gun guy' and am starting to question a lot of the common logic from that community. I make a portion of my living teaching firearm skills, so I am certainly not against the firearm as a self defense option. I just try to filter everything I see/read/say through the lens of what's probable in real life, and react based on that.

I want to eat hot dogs in Chicago with Larry and Paul, sell holsters to the Government in DC, and lay on a beach with my bride in the Bahamas. I can't legally do any of those with a gun in my pants. If I am without options in those scenarios, I am not truly paying attention to my so-called desire of self preservation. The simple fact is most guys carry guns because it is cool rather than a true desire for self defense. I started that way myself."

The point of all of that? It's not to dissuade you from carrying a spare mag or a high-capacity semi-auto. Quite the contrary, you should carry whatever makes you comfortable that you can also carry as often as possible given your lifestyle. The point is this: don't rely on a formula of having X number of bullets and Y number of spare magazines as a magic talisman to fix all of your problems. This is a plug for a more well-rounded skill set.

The Supporting Gear: Holsters, Belts, and Magazine Pouches

Considerations

- In general, true concealment is going to require you to carry inside the waistband if wearing casual clothing. This can vary seasonally.

- You will probably go through several holsters before finding "the one." "The one" can vary by firearm make and model. For example, I love the Kramer pocket holster for S&W J-Frames; I hate it for small semi-autos.
- The Equipment Exchanges/Marketplaces on various forums can help you avoid a long lead time with a custom holster maker (and save you some money). AR15.com, m4carbine.net, and pistol-forum.com are good sources for holsters and other gear.
- ***It is easier to find a good quality holster for a common firearm***. Being contrarian has an opportunity cost.
- Wearing a gun in a non-permissive environment (defined as a location where it is socially, financially, or legally inadvisable to be caught carrying a firearm) requires more creative methods. As somebody who does work in one such environment, I choose a mixture of pocket carry and a bellyband.
- If you choose to carry a spare magazine, a belt-mounted magazine carrier provides the most efficient and effective means of doing so. Pocket carry can conceal better for some, but it does come at the cost of speed (and having too much shit in your pockets).
- You should be using a proper gun belt if you choose to carry a firearm on your belt. The belt must be able to support the weight of the gun. Note that the weight of the firearm plays a part here: a Ruger LCP requires less support than a 1911. Some methods of carry favor stiffer belts (OWB, traditional IWB) while others can allow for a more flexible belt depending on preference (pocket, AIWB).
- On appendix holsters: appendix-specific features include 1) a belt wedge to lever the grip horizontally into your stomach; 2) a claw to lever the grip horizontally into your stomach; 3) a muzzle pad to lever the slide vertically into your stomach; 4) extended length to add stability for shorter guns (typically sub-4" barrels). A good holster will **almost always** have either option 1) or option 2). Option 3), the muzzle pad, is something I personally prefer to have for both concealment and comfort reasons and can either be built into the holster or something that's added later (typically it's a foam pad with Velcro on it, and it can either be bought from the maker or made with materials from Wal Mart for less than $8). Option 4) is really specific to things like S&W Shields and other similar small single-stacks. As counter-intuitive as it may seem, the extended length helps tremendously with those types of guns because it allows for a higher ride height while preventing the grip-heavy subcompact from being pushed out grip-first away from your body. When in doubt, if you have a subcompact (ex. Glock 26), buy a holster for the next size up version of that pistol (ex. Glock 19). All of the makers recommended for AIWB below include these features.
- On hybrid holsters: I generally do not like most designs as several common issues pop up: the muzzle is usually exposed (allowing the gun to be bumped partially out of the holster), the sweat shield is usually too broad (impeding the user from rapidly obtaining a full firing grip on the gun), the leather backing is often made of cheap, unboned cowhide (which, with wear, quickly becomes flimsy – presenting a reholstering hazard), and the clips are often of poor design. Having said that, many people carry these and like them. At a minimum, I would suggest ensuring that the sweat shield is cut for a full grip (as seen in the Galco KingTuk or CompTac MTAC).

Attachment Methods: Clips, Soft Loops, and Solid Loops

- I really like clip-on holsters even though they're "bad" by gun guy standards. Simply put, I love the convenience of them. However, clip selection matters if you want it to stay on your belt/pants during the draw. Unless it is this clip (metal – used by Blade Rigs, FIST, and Dark Star Gear among others. VERY grippy), this clip (plastic – increasingly common), or this clip (metal – I've only ever seen it on High Noon's offerings, also very grippy), it's probably not very good. These new metal clips show a lot of promise as well. The clip used here (plastic – very common) can be OK with a thicker belt but in my experience is not as good as the Eidolon overhooks or the two metal options I showed above. Additionally, it can slip off thinner webbing belts quite easily. On the linked-to Errand by Keeper's Concealment, Spencer's special sauce is that he stipples the inside hook of the clip in order to add more grippiness and it's actually pretty effective. If you do buy a holster with that clip, consider doing that.
- Soft loops share much of the convenience of clip-on holsters but they do require a belt to function. They're probably the best compromise of security versus convenience. A downside: as a rule, they print more than clips or fixed loops. In practice, they often printed more than the actual firearm for me. This can be mitigated slightly by trimming them down (they usually come long in order to allow you to adjust them to your belt size) but the snaps themselves also tend to form a hard angle that leads to printing.
- Fixed loops are almost always the most secure and stable option. The only downside they have is convenience: the belt must be threaded through them. Some people simply don't want to deal with that. I think it's less of an issue with appendix holsters than other holsters/locations because the belt opens up front and thus threading the holster on isn't very time consuming.
- A word about material: in 2018, if your attachment method is made of kydex, you're wrong. Kydex will break if you apply significant force to it (a gun grab or even repeated full-speed draws), and I've even had kydex fixed loops snap in normal use (Keeper's Concealment, JM Custom Kydex offerings). Kydex clips are especially bad and should be avoided entirely. Look for attachment methods made of metal, injection-molded plastic, or whatever that Kevlar-impregnated shit they make soft loops out of is called. Some companies, like JM Custom Kydex, will even make you a fixed set of soft loops (which eliminates the printing caused by the snaps of normal soft loops) and they're very durable. Sewn-on leather loops are especially durable options.

A sample of /k/-Approved Brands for Support Gear:

- **Appendix Inside the Waistband:** Dark Star Gear, JM Custom Kydex, Raven Concealment, KSG Armory, Keeper's Concealment, Custom Carry Concepts, JRC Leather, 5-Shot Leather (incredibly long lead times…), Garrity's Gunleather, Bawidamann (WML-capable AIWB).
- **Traditional Inside the Waistband:** Dark Star Gear, JM Custom Kydex, Raven Concealment, Keeper's Concealment, Custom Carry Concepts, JRC Leather, Galco,

Milt Sparks, Kramer, TT Gunleather, Comp Tac MTAC (hybrid), Galco KingTuk (hybrid).

- **Outside the Waistband:** In 2017, Raven Concealment discontinued the Phantom in favor of their new Perun injection-molded holster. It appears to be a solid choice but as of mid-2018 model selection is very limited. Bravo Concealment and other Raven Phantom clones (as long as they do not use kydex belt loops) remain sound choices. Others include JM Custom Kydex, Dale Fricke Gideon, CompTac International (IDPA), G-Code OSH, Blade Tech (IDPA), Kramer, Galco,
- **Retention Holsters:** First, no SERPAs allowed. The Marine Corps was fucking stupid for buying them. Second, define your needs. Do you just need something for the outdoors that'll keep the gun in the holster? A level 1 holster will be sufficient. Do you need to defend against gun grabs? You should be looking at a level 3. Third, if it's not Safariland, it's wrong. The Safariland 7377 is excellent for a level 1 – very fast and very intuitive. For those that truly need more, a Safariland 6365 or 7360 is sufficient for most uses. WML options are available if needed.
- **Pocket Holsters:** Kramer, AHolster, Galco, DeSantis, Uncle Mike's, RKBA Holsters, Pocket Concealment Systems.
- **Bellybands/Similar:** DeSantis, Galco, SmartCarry, Pistolwear.
- **Belts:** Any leather holster maker will make you a good gunbelt. Off-the-shelf options include The Beltman, Graith USA (formerly Mastermind Tactics), Ares Gear, Galco, and The Wilderness. Pay attention to sizing instructions!
- **Magazine Pouches:** Any of the above holster makers will make a quality magazine pouch. My second-favorite and most-recommended mag pouch is the Basic Mag Carrier by Custom Carry Concepts. For an off-the-shelf, fits-almost-anything OWB option, I suggest the Raven Concealment Copia. I like and have used a Dark Star Gear OWB mag pouch for the times when I do choose to carry a spare magazine. For appendix IWB, I suggest a JM Custom Kydex AIWB Single Mag Pouch (available as quick ship for an ever-increasing list of makes and models, but his lead time is ~2 weeks for mag pouches only). For IWB behind the hip, I have not found an option that I liked and have stopped looking so I have no recommendations. However, several of the kydex and leather makers listed above have options available. For pocket carry, I've heard good things about the DeSantis Mag Packer but I have no personal experience. I have experience with the Raven Concealment/MDTS Pocket Shield with a Blue Force Gear magazine pouch mounted and it can be a good option too.

Aftermarket Sights

There is a legitimate debate as to whether or not tritium is truly necessary. The proponents of the no-tritium (fiber optic) camp will typically state that a) you should always identify your target (which is true), b) in a home at night, that usually means using a flashlight (which is also true), and c) when a light is used, tritium sights show up as black-on-black sights just like everything else (which is generally true depending upon how the light is used). I personally fall in the camp of tritium being a good thing because there are lighting conditions where I have sufficient light to identify my target but not necessarily enough light to see my sights without assistance. There are solid arguments (and solid people making them) on both sides. Well-reasoned discussion on the first school of thought can be found here.

Well-reasoned discussion on the second school of thought can be found here, and a good video discussion on the merits of tritium can be found here.

Do whatever helps you sleep at night. There are two pistols I use for self defense which do not have tritium, and two that I use that do have tritium. I'm comfortable with all of them, though the one I keep in a bedside safe has tritium (and a flashlight next to it).

Some basic parameters for your decision on tritium-or-not:

- You have a legal and ethical requirement to positively identify your target regardless of your chosen sighting device.
- Most defensive shootings occur during hours of darkness. This is not the same as total darkness. Many of the common danger areas for violent street crime – gas stations, parking lots, and public streets – are actually quite well-lit.
- Conversely, while a home *can be* well-lit, most residential burglaries that occur while a victim is in the home occur at night. Making use of in-home lighting is a tactical decision.
- Lighting varies from location to location: it is entirely possible to be in a location where you can clearly identify your target while not being able to see your non-illuminated sights. Moving a few feet can change that condition.
- Lasers and red dot sights are objectively superior to any iron sight for low-light shooting.

The choice is yours. Personally, I do not view tritium as strictly necessary; however, I do use it on some pistols.

Considerations for aftermarket sights:

- They should draw your attention to the front sight. The front sight is what you should focus on when shooting with iron sights.
- They should not be overly-complicated. Most modern sights involve some variation of a plain black or subdued tritium rear sight with a bright, high-visibility front sight. These things are fucking dumb.
- They should provide a reasonable balance of speed and accuracy. For traditional notch-and-post designs, take into consideration the width of the front sight versus the width of the rear. In general, it's advisable to have a thinner front sight and a more open rear sight for speed (example: .125" front, .150" rear).
- Traditional three-dot sights with white rings around all three tritium vials are for plebs, and they also tend to have poor dimensions. Examples include OEM Glock night sights, Meprolights, and original Trijicon sights.
- You can mix and match if you know what you're doing. Like one company's front and one company's rear? Make sure the math fits and set it up.
- As with holsters and support gear, being a contrarian has an opportunity cost and it is significantly easier to find quality aftermarket sights for common pistols.
- Trijicon HDs, XS Big Dots, XS F8s, and Dawson Precision sights are available for the widest variety of pistols, followed distantly by everybody else. As of 2018,

Wilson Combat has their excellent sights available for Berettas, SIGs, S&W M&Ps, HK P/VP/45-series, and Glock.

A sample of /k/-approved aftermarket sights:

- **Night sights:** XS Big Dots, Trijicon HDs, Ameriglo (various), Warren Tactical, 10-8 Performance, Heine Sights, XS F8s, Wilson Combat/Vickers Tactical.
- **Fiber-optic sights**: Ameriglo (various), Warren Tactical, 10-8 Performance, Dawson Precision, Wilson Combat/Vickers Tactical.
- **Steel black-on-black sights**: 10-8 Performance, Dawson Precision, Ameriglo Defoors.
- **Adjustable sights**: Dawson Precision.

Ammunition

For practice, buy whatever's cheapest that reliably feeds in your gun. An extra $10 per case is worth not having to deal with constant ammunition-induced stoppages. Buy a small amount, shoot that, and if it works well, buy a case or six. Personally, I like MagTech.

For defense, there's all sorts of autism available. A common /k/ meme is that FMJs are necessary because muh penetration and JHPs are a gimmick. Here's reliable information:

- Misses are a massive hazard. Bullets go through walls, bullets go through car doors, and bullets travel downrange and hit people that don't need to be shot. This is true regardless of whether the shooter is using a JHP load or an FMJ load.
- Misses with FMJ that do not directly strike a bystander are arguably more hazardous because they are less likely to deform on impact and thus pose a greater ricochet risk.
- Saying that we should stop worrying about overpenetration through a human target because a miss will also hurt people is fucking dumb. We can (and should) concern ourselves with both issues.
- FMJs do not necessarily have better barrier penetration. Most FMJ is designed for economy and not penetration. The jackets are not bonded or otherwise well-attached to the lead cores. The result? When shot through glass, steel, drywall, and sometimes even into bone they often shed their jackets – thus dramatically reducing their ability to penetrate. Additionally, due to their rounded profile, they're far more likely to glance off of bone and other hard surfaces. Hardcast solid bullets are a different matter but they're largely reserved for defense against dangerous large game and thus outside the scope of this article. In general, quality JHP loads – especially bonded and single-material loads – offer dramatically superior intermediate barrier penetration when it comes to the things we're concerned about: outstretched limbs, household materials, and automotive materials.
- We use calibrated ballistics gel because it's a repeatable and standardized testing medium, and not because it's an accurate simulant of a human body. It closely mimics muscle tissue. There's lots of other stuff inside the body besides muscle (no, that doesn't mean YouTube backyard ClearGel tests with added chicken bones is valid. Also, experts have compared tests including bone to 4LD testing. The results

are not significantly different with more modern designs [1995 study - pay attention to the 147 CCI GD and 147 Rem GS results as those loads are relatively unchanged])

- We use 4-layer denim testing not because it's an accurate representation of expected clothing, but because it represents a repeatable and standardized testing medium that simulates a worst-case scenario for clogging a hollow point bullet.
- Bullets recovered from actual shot people tend to look almost identical to those recovered from 4-layer denim testing. This is what's called a clue.
- There is a strong correlation between bullets that perform well in 4-layer denim testing and bullets that perform well in actual shootings. Expanded bullets that reliably achieve the 12-18" of penetration mandated by the FBI standards tend to be recovered in one of three places in actual shootings: 1) under the skin, where an exit wound should be; 2) in the shot person's clothing; or 3) on the ground a few feet away from the body. Here is an actual example where retards erroneously identified this phenomenon as bullets being stopped by clothing and freaked the fuck out.
- On FMJ's supposed penetration superiority, there are documented cases of .45ACP FMJ failing to penetrate both ass cheeks of a victim shot in the ass and there are documented cases of it failing to penetrate chest rigs filled with AK-47 magazines. The assumption that FMJ will *always* achieve sufficient penetration is simply untrue.
- The risk of using FMJ is simple: there are documented cases of innocent bystanders being injured or killed by rounds which previously passed through the intended target. While there is no guarantee that JHP rounds will never do this, the likelihood of this happening is substantially reduced because the expansion dramatically slows the bullet inside the body and, if it fully penetrates, it does so robbed of much of its velocity and aerodynamic characteristics.
- Pistol FMJ creates icepick wounds that close up easily. It rarely yaws. JHP and other projectiles with flat faces create their wounds through a cutting action. This causes more blood loss and a wound cavity that's significantly less likely to close up.
- Ammunition marketed for self defense or law enforcement use typically receives better quality control and quality assurance procedures than most FMJ ammunition. If nothing else, dud primers, low or nonexistent powder charges, out of spec cases, and uncrimped bullets (all things I've personally experienced with store-bought FMJ loads) are all really bad for your marketing campaign in the age of the internet.
- Even if a modern JHP completely fails to expand it still performs… just like an FMJ, except with better barrier penetration capabilities. There is no downside whatsoever.

For more reading, see this thread.

Among the common service calibers, caliber wars are fucking dumb (bonus: fuck your .38 vs. .45 in the Philippines stories). If you want somebody dead, shoot them with a rifle or shotgun. A visual representation of the huge amount of power full-power duty ammunition has can be found here (using .40 S&W 180gr HST). Even with JHPs, these things are not death rays and depend entirely on proper shot placement. The role of the JHP is two-fold: first, it must ensure that the bullet reaches the vital structure, and second it must mitigate some of the risks of overpenetration after the bullet reaches that structure. Any additional terminal effects are a distant third concern. If a JHP design cannot do so, FMJ or another

solid substitute is probably the better substitute. If only there there were people who tested these things for us and made their information publically available…

Quick reference of known good loads that usually be found in chain stores:

- **.32ACP**: FMJ from a European manufacturer like Fiocci or S&B
- **.380ACP**: FMJ or a load with Hornady XTP bullets (not Critical Defense)
- **.38SPL+P**: 148gr target wadcutters from Remington, Federal, or Winchester; Hornady Critical Defense 110gr+P
- **9x19**: Barnes TAC-XPD 115gr+P; Hornady Critical Duty 135gr+P; Winchester PDX1 124gr+P; Winchester Defend 147gr; Federal HST 124gr
- **.40S&W**: Barnes TAC-XPD 140gr; Winchester PDX1 165gr; Federal HST 180gr
- **.357SIG**: Winchester PDX1 125gr; Hornady Critical Duty 135gr
- **.45ACP**: Hornady Critical Duty 220gr+P; Federal HST 230gr; Barnes TAC-XPD 185gr+P

Quick reference of known good loads that can be found easily online:

- **.32ACP**: Same as above
- **.380ACP**: Speer Lawman FMJ, Speer Gold Dot 90gr, above options
- **.38SPL+P**: Speer Gold Dot 135gr+P; above options
- **9x19**: Speer Gold Dot 124gr/124gr+P/147gr; Federal HST 124gr+P/147gr/147gr+P; Winchester Ranger/Ranger Bonded 124gr+P/127gr+P+;147gr; above options
- **.40S&W**: Speer Gold Dot 165gr/180gr; Federal HST 165gr/180gr; Winchester Ranger/Ranger Bonded 165gr/180gr; above options
- **.357SIG**: Speer Gold Dot 125gr; Winchester Ranger/Ranger Bonded 125gr; Federal HST 125gr; above options
- **.45ACP**: Speer Gold Dot 230gr; Winchester Ranger/Ranger Bonded 230gr/230gr+P; Federal HST 230gr+P; above options

For a full list of vetted, acceptable loads, see this list.

Building The System: Home Defense and Carry

You need a quality, reliable modern service, compact, or subcompact pistol or revolver, a holster of quality manufacture, a belt designed and able to hold your firearm securely, and the willingness to carry that item religiously. But, autism demands more detail than that. This section discusses recommended support gear. You should buy what you believe what works. The rest of the system is discussed below.

Home Defense

For a dedicated HD weapon, what I would want/need are:

a) Sights you can see, preferably with at least a tritium front sight.
b) A weapon-mounted light to illuminate my target.
c) A high magazine capacity – and I wouldn't frown upon a ~20-round extended magazine.
d) A safe trigger or an easily-used safety device (or both)
e) A supplemental handheld light to identify things.

Sights You Can See…

This is very important. You may be forced to use your handgun in reduced lighting conditions (you should *not* be using it in no-light conditions). There are a plethora of tritium sights available, but the current state of the industry trends towards a thin tritium front with some sort of high-visibility paint and a generous rear sight. Other types are viable as well. Recommended sights are discussed here.

I am of the opinion that lasers are a very good thing, though I would get a set of good sights before I got a laser. A laser in low-light shooting is about as close to cheating as you can get. Recognize that it is a supplemental aiming system: if you present the gun and it's there, use it, but otherwise don't waste your time fishing for it. Crimson Trace is my preference for lasers, but they do not make LaserGrips/LaserGuards for everything and in some cases (Glock LaserGrips being the most prominent example) their implementation absolutely sucks. However, WML/laser combos are also very viable in the HD role. The Surefire X400 series is the most bomb-proof of the bunch (and also the most expensive), but it comes with the same drawback as many combo setups in that the bore/laser offset is pretty massive. The newer Streamlight TLR-8 shows promise and has less offset (and is very reasonably priced). The Streamlight TLR-2 is another vetted option. The Surefire XC2 is an interesting design in that they moved the laser to the top of the unit (which mitigates the offset issue to an extent), but it comes with very poor switch design. You want a momentary-on option for this just as you would a WML. Ideally my home defense pistol would have a WML and well-designed Crimson Trace LaserGrips, but unfortunately CTC hasn't shown interest in making them for my chosen pistol.

I do not have relevant experience with MRDS-equipped pistols and have held off on getting into them because I do not believe the technology (reliability) is where it needs to be for pistol use and I do not personally have the time to dedicate to mastering their use (I'd be competing against 10+ years of experience and instruction on iron sights). However, my

understanding is that a MRDS-equipped pistol is basically cheating in low light, particularly when supplemented with a laser.

A Weapon-Mounted Light…

While I do *not* believe WMLs are necessary for CCW (and take a dim view of the current /k/ and P&S trend of attaching a WML to carry guns), I do think a dedicated HD weapon should have one. If you don't have one it isn't the end of the world – in my view, a handheld light should be prioritized and between having a WML only and a handheld only I'll take a handheld every time – but it is nevertheless a good thing to have. The purpose of the WML is to illuminate your target as you shoot at it. I do not personally view it as an appropriate search tool because I don't like to point guns at things (or people) I do not want to shoot, though some will say there are techniques which can be used to illuminate a room without pointing the weapon at anything important. Those techniques are valid, but they also require training and some pre-planning on your part – I would not attempt to employ them as a novice.

The modern trend is to have as many lumens as possible, and the newer generation of lights is getting up into the 1000 lumen range. There are people smarter than me out there who can better explain why the lumen race is a good thing, so I won't bother here. Some people will say that there is such a thing as too many lumens, particularly if your walls are lightly-colored. My counter to that is that I can blind myself with a 300-lumen light just as easily as I can an 800-lumen light in a practical setting inside the home. That's a technique and floorplan knowledge issue, not a lumens issue.

Good and well-vetted options here include the Surefire X300 series and the Streamlight TLR-1 series. Both have large government contracts under their belts, which in my view is an important consideration because it brings with it experience with QC/QA on a large scale. My personal preference is for the TLR-1 because I prefer the switches on that light. The Streamlight TLR-7 is showing promise and like its TLR-8 cousin (discussed above) is very reasonably-priced. There are reports of reliability issues with the Inforce APL series and they tend to be less bright than their competition; however, my understanding is that the FBI approved them for duty use and I happen to really like their switches.

A High Magazine Capacity…

Understand that for home defense, you will fight with what ammunition is in and on the gun. You likely will not have the time or opportunity to strap on a plate carrier or battle belt, much less your normal EDC setup which may or may not have a mag pouch. You may not even be wearing pants (or pants that have pockets). Your hands will, of course, be occupied doing other things. So your focus becomes what is in and on the gun.

In the shotgun world, people who know what they're doing use side saddles and butt cuffs to carry additional ammunition (people who don't know what they're doing use those stupid sling/bandoleers that drop shells everywhere). My home defense shotgun is configured with a 6-round side saddle and has four in the gun and six on the saddle for a total of ten rounds. If I used a semi-auto rifle for that purpose, I'd consider coupled magazines, a Redi-Mag, or perhaps one of the Magpul PMAG D-60 drums. I say this knowing that it's incredibly

unlikely that I'd even empty the four rounds in the tube, much less a 30-round AR mag. Nevertheless, having the capability to reload at minimal handling cost (or having an obnoxiously large amount of ammo on tap) is worthwhile for that additional capability.

Handguns don't have that option. You're stuck with what's inserted into the gun. So, capacity – assuming you live somewhere where that's not arbitrarily limited – becomes rather important. Remember that handguns suck at killing people (bring a rifle or a shotgun…) and may require multiple effective hits on target to force somebody to physically stop doing whatever it was that made you shoot them.

There's no concealment cost to an extended magazine in a home defense context so, assuming the magazine is reliable, there is absolutely no reason not to use such a magazine. But, before we get there, consider your choice in handgun: most modern double stack semi-autos hold between 15 and 20 rounds and your choice of handgun's native capacity should probably fall somewhere in or around that range.

But, why stick with native capacity if you don't have to? Get an extended magazine.

I have had some negative experiences with magazines with extensions installed. I have had three disassemble on me. Two occasions were dropped partially-loaded mags onto concrete. The most concerning to me, however, was the third: when getting out of my car, my seatbelt caught on my magazine, ripped the magazine out of its pouch, and the fully-loaded magazine ended up falling about three feet onto my driveway. I never found the spring. Because of those experiences, I have a strong preference for a single-body extended magazine. Examples of this exist predominately in the Glock world: Magpul and ETS both make 21/22 round single body magazines, and Glock finally released the magazine they should have released a decade ago for the 9mm (they've had a 22-round .40S&W mag available for quite some time, and the new 9mm version holds 24 rounds). H&K P30/VP9 variants are rumored to have a 20-round single-body magazine available with the L variants in Europe. Classic Berettas have had 20ish round magazines available for decades now, and even their newer models have such magazines available. And, if I only had a compact or subcompact pistol, I'd certainly consider keeping it loaded with a full-size magazine from the same family when kept for home defense (such as using Glock 17 mags in a Glock 19).

Unfortunately, not every make has these available. This brings us into the world of magazine extensions. In my experience or from reputation, Arredondo, Taylor Freelance, HK Parts, Dawson Precision, and Hyve all make good ones. Remember that the extension should have an extended spring included. If it doesn't, you'll need to buy one. Thoroughly test a magazine with an extension installed before use. The gun needs to feed and lock back as normal. If it doesn't, figure out the problem or go back to a native capacity magazine.

I am personally of the opinion that the ~30 round magazines for pistols are too much of a good thing. They simply add too much bulk to an otherwise compact package.

A Safe Trigger…

Remember that you may be awakened in the middle of the night to use your pistol. With that in mind, perhaps a cocked-and-unlocked 1911 isn't the best idea. I have a preference

for triggers with room for error: DA triggers and HK LEMs. However, a Glock or similar SFA trigger suffices for millions of people. I would personally avoid modifying the trigger in a way that lightens it significantly on such pistols – in general, a SFA pistol should have no less than a 4-5lb trigger.

If your firearm has a manual safety (I am not a fan of anything but a 1911-style safety), it should be easily activated and deactivated. It should be in a natural position to deactivate. In my opinion it should have one and only one function (i.e. not a combination safety/decocker). If it doesn't and your firearm is SAO, why are you bothering with it? If the safety doesn't meet that criteria and it's a DA/SA design, strongly consider leaving the gun decocked and off safe.

A Supplemental Light…

You should have a handheld light kept with your home defense pistol. End of discussion.

The reason for this is simple: with a WML, your light is slaved to your muzzle, and we don't point the muzzle at things we don't want to shoot. In context, you do not necessarily want (or need) to shoot everything and everybody in your home. For those with children or roommates, that bump in the night could just as easily be (and honestly, is significantly more likely to be) your drunk roommate coming home or your kid sneaking back in after going out with their friends. Your family members or roommates may have been awakened or alerted by that same bump in the night and may be in an unexpected place. That noise may well have been your pet (ever heard a dog knock over a trash can? From upstairs at 2:30am, it doesn't sound like a dog knocking over a trash can). Now let's add you, as stressed out as you've ever been, with a WML and a 5-lb Glock trigger. It's a recipe for a very bad outcome.

Handheld lights are for identifying and navigating. If you find something that warrants muzzling, deactivate your handheld, move somewhere else, and re-illuminate with the WML. If you don't have a WML, handhelds are also for shooting. Prioritize a handheld over a WML – you should buy a quality handheld before a WML.

Your handheld should be simple to activate. You want a lot of light when you need a lot of light, and multiple tailcap presses should not change the mode. Surefire was traditionally the gold standard; however, they have utterly failed to innovate relative to their competition. They still produce durable lights, but you're generally limited to high and low modes. That isn't necessarily a bad thing, but they are definitely lagging behind in the lumen race (but not the reliability race) and only just now getting into rechargables. Streamlight makes a quality light as well, and they're typically multi-function and programmable. Other Chinese brands of note include Klarus, Olight, and FourSevens.

I currently use a Surefire, since they decided this year to make a few handhelds that people actually want. It's momentary-only, no click switch, twist-bezel-to-switch-modes, and has lots of lumens – all in an easily-carried package. I've previously used a Klarus XT2C with very good results.

Strobes have merit, but not for giving people seizures. There are certain movement-masking techniques out there in which strobes excel. Strobes have generally fallen out of favor in the mainstream "tactical" crowd due to the absurdity of some of the things people were promoting them for in the early to mid 2000s, and mentioning them as useful on P&S will cause a shitshow from tactical nuthuggers. But, if you're going to use a strobe, it shouldn't be tailcap-based: it needs a separate switch. The Klarus XT2C is an example of a light set up like this.

Carry

Many of the same considerations for a home defense pistol apply to carry guns. For example, everything I said about sights in the Home Defense section is also applicable to carry guns. However, there are some different carry-specific considerations involved:

a) Concealability
b) Do you fucking lemmings really need a WML on your carry gun?
c) Trigger
d) Capacity

Concealability

Different things work for different people. While a good belt and holster combo can work wonders, there will guns that you personally cannot conceal to a standard that's acceptable to you. In my experience, more rounded pistols tend to work better. As an example, a P30's rounded grip conceals better on me than a Glock 19's grip – even though the P30 grip is a full half-inch taller than the Glock 19's grip. Likewise, the squared-off profile of a Glock (or Beretta APX or other similar blocky pistol) slide tends to print on me. Your mileage may vary and lots of people conceal Glocks every day (I did for years).

Grips should provide adequate traction while not snagging at cover garments or causing discomfort. Aggressive stippling on the side panels or grip tape or rubber grips can be a source of either.

Sights can pose an issue. Tall sights, such as Trijicon HDs, can print where factory sights would not. Sharp sights, such as Trijicon HDs, can stab the shit out of you and ruin your clothes (I hate the HD rear sight for a lot of reasons, but these are the two biggest ones). Ideally, rear sights should be angled forward slightly and dehorned to avoid these issues (Wilson Combat and 10-8 Performance being two examples).

Some people just can't pull off a double-stack pistol regularly, and that's OK (see the above section on capacity). For them, I strongly suggest the Shield/PPS/Glock 43/XDS style single-stack 9mms. Likewise, some people – sometimes, myself included, downgrade to a double-stack subcompact from a full-size pistol depending on concealment needs.

Understand, however, that it's incredibly unlikely that you will *only* be able to conceal that tiny little mouse gun. The overwhelming majority of people, men and women alike, can conceal a Glock 43 in their regular clothes.

WML Lemmings

Most self-defense shootings occur during hours of darkness. This is not the same thing as total darkness, or even low light. Your common hot spots for violent street crime are places like store parking lots, gas stations, and public streets. Those places tend to be quite well lit, and it's unlikely that you'll be unable to positively identify the guy moving on you across the parking lot setting up for a robbery or the guy three feet away who's actually robbing you.

As a private citizen, you have zero business entering dark buildings to clear them by yourself. You're probably not handling a K9 or a ballistic shield either. As discussed below in the training section, you need to identify your priorities and needs.

WMLs tend to come at pretty significant concealment and comfort costs – particularly when carried IWB – or in the alternative are small and significantly less capable to allow for concealment. Balanced against their CCW utility, it's really not a worthwhile tradeoff.

Trigger

As before, I have a bias towards triggers that allow room for error. The extra travel length provided by a DA or LEM pull allows me time to get off the trigger if needed in a fluid situation; likewise, I'm a lot more comfortable reholstering under stress with such a trigger.

Having said that, lots of people safely use striker fired or SAO guns. As before, I would advise against modifying the trigger to be lighter than factory specs – especially for a carry gun. If your gun has a safety, make sure it's ergonomic for you. For me, anything that's not an extended 1911 safety or a clone thereof sucks and I have no idea why more manufacturers haven't broken down and copied them.

Capacity

I recognize that this section will seem contradictory to the high capacity advocacy in the Home Defense section. However, the statements here also apply to that section. I advocate the high capacity there because it costs you nothing to have. However, I also believe that it will almost certainly be irrelevant.

Active Self Protection's "Lessons From Watching 12,000 Gunfights" yielded, among other things, exactly zero scenarios where a private citizen had to reload in a shooting *and* that reload made a difference in the fight. Reloads generally occurred when the fight was over. "Spencer Blue," a homicide and robbery detective in a major city who has the position of viewing a whole lot of civilian – criminal or otherwise – shooting investigations hasn't seen such a shooting either, and the max number of rounds fired in any shooting he's aware of was 11 (person emptied a fully-loaded Glock 26, though the fight was over well before that point). FBI statistics for their agency's shootings yield generally similar findings. The FBI is relevant to you because their agents generally work in civilian clothing and are often subject

to the same sorts of violent crimes as private citizens are exposed to – the assailants simply didn't know they were Feds.

My point? I wouldn't feel compelled to conceal an 18-shot gun and two spare mags. The situation where that would be useful is on the very far end of the bell curve, and I wouldn't get wrapped around the axle in trying to conceal a spare mag (often harder than the gun itself to conceal) if you have a hard time with it. If you feel it's personally necessary, so be it, but if that P30SK works better for you most days than the P30, I wouldn't sweat it one bit.

This is My Fucking Guide, and I'll for Advocate Shotguns for Home Defense if I Fucking Want To

Biden that shit up and drop $300 on a shotgun. Seriously. Shotguns are the most terminally effective firearm available at pistol-range distances. When you go to a handgun shooting class, they talk about trauma management and evacuation procedures in the event of an ND. At a shotgun class, they talk about amputations in the event of an ND. Given a choice between a handgun projectile that pokes holes in stuff and still overpenetrates like crazy if you miss and a load of buckshot that removes meat from bone at close range and also overpenetrates like crazy if you miss, there's no contest.

Buy a new-production Mossberg 500 or police trade-in Remington 870P, dealer's choice (I prefer the Remington, others prefer Mossbergs), or even a semi-auto if you want. You'll want to cut the stock to 12-13" LOP for more recoil management (or buy the GOAT Magpul SGA stock or the Hogue 12" stock) and add buckshot, some dummy shells, and perhaps a light. Your total investment will be around $5-600 for a pump-action gun and you'll be left with a **vastly superior ballistic tool to any handgun.**

This is a link to a bonus section on defensive shotguns for home defense.

Seeking Training

The bulk of my instruction has been in the Rangemaster doctrine as espoused by Tom Givens and his affiliates. Rangemaster is one of the older private-citizen training organizations and its students have a very successful (and documented) track record in real world shootings. I went down that road because in my view it is tailored towards private citizens rather than military and law enforcement. So, I am biased in that respect. I have also received training from a few others whose names some of you may recognize, Craig Douglas ("Southnarc") being one of them, as well as a few local instructors along the way. Knowing that, I decided to go into detail about seeking training – specifically what to look for, what to avoid, and where to start.

Before I do that, I'll note that Luckygunner has an excellent video on this subject.

First, in my opinion, your basic needs as a civilian defender are, in order of priority:

1. Recognition that some people victimize other people and willingness to fight when required
2. Acceptable verbal and social skills to head off unnecessary confrontation
3. Knowledge of when you may (or must) use force, and what force is appropriate for various situations
4. A rapid and efficient draw and presentation of your firearm from concealment
5. The ability to rapidly shoot into an acceptable target zone (the head and upper chest)
6. The ability to move out of harm's way, if necessary while shooting
7. The ability to rapidly fix a malfunction
8. The ability to rapidly reload
9. The ability to do all of these things in reduced lighting conditions
10. The ability to do all (or most) of these things one-handed

A good training class will address most or all of those needs in some way.

Priorities

Most (probably all) of you are not members of military special operations forces or law enforcement tactical teams. I say this not to demean whatever skills and knowledge you may or may not have, but rather to illustrate two points. First, what that means is, in the context of employing a firearm defensively, you do not work in a team environment. So, if – for example –your weapon malfunctions, what that means is that there is not an equally well-trained group of guys in the room with you ready and able to take up your slack while you fix it or transition. Second, what that means is that you are not actively seeking out contact. What I mean by that is that you aren't kicking somebody's door in and aggressively seeking to kill or forcibly restrain somebody who doesn't want to be killed or forcibly restrained (well, hopefully anyway – there was that SaigaMarine guy…). Your role is reactive. The reason these two points are relevant to your training priorities is this: if you can only seek out training sparingly, perhaps instruction from a guy whose background is military SOF or LE SWAT may not be as germane to your needs as you may think. Does that mean there is nothing to be learned from that crowd of instructors? Absolutely not – people like Kyle

Defoor, Frank Proctor, and Larry Vickers have an excellent curriculum and receiving training from them and applying it will absolutely develop you as a shooter. But, shooting is only one part of the equation: mindset and tactics also need to be considered.

Just as most of you aren't SEALs or SWAT cops, most of you probably aren't police officers either. Like the SOF/SWAT crowd, police officers have different needs from you. While they are more reactionary than those on tactical teams and thus may be a bit more relevant, they are (ideally) obligated – whether mentally or, hopefully, through policy – to actively seek out conflict when it presents itself. Examples of what I mean by this are be the Dallas PD officers who responded to the July 2016 BLM shooting, or the Garland, TX PD officers who responded to the terrorists who sought to shoot up the 2015 Draw Muhammad convention (and *not* that dipshit who stood outside at Parkland while teenagers were murdered inside). Your role is to avoid danger if possible and use force only as means to preserve your own life or those to whom you bear responsibility (note that this is not a debate about "should I intervene if a mass shooting happens?"). Likewise, you do not seek to forcibly restrain people who do not wish to be forcibly restrained. Finally, you operate under a reasonableness analysis derived from statutes and case law (a version of this was discussed in the original Git Gud Guide and I won't rehash it here); police officers generally operate under that same analysis, but they also often have policy considerations to contend with that you typically do not. Does that mean there's nothing to be learned from police instructors? Absolutely not – "Spencer Blue" is a homicide and robbery detective in a major metropolitan area who also happens to be very good at contextualizing his work experience for the civilian defender, and "Southnarc" (Craig Douglas) was a police officer for roughly 20 years. As with the military/SWAT crowd, simply remember your own priorities and understand that not everything that's taught about mindset and tactics may be applicable to you.

Finally, I'll address competition shooters. You will absolutely develop as a shooter from taking a class from Ben Stoeger, Bob Vogel, or Gabe White. As a matter of fact, this crowd of instructor tends to be among the best technical shooters in the world. But, a USPSA stage is a very different environment from a defensive shooting. Certain things are simply not applicable to your role as a civilian defender, and some of them are downright bad ideas. A personal pet peeve of mine is the emphasis on split times: most competition shooters are outrunning their headlights because they work in an environment where certain accountability factors are not present. They don't risk prosecution for reckless endangerment if their sub-2 second Bill Drill pace ends up in the berm, but you may well risk that if you shoot at the same pace and send rounds somewhere you shouldn't because you were shooting faster than your ability to process that your target dropped to the floor. Am I saying not to sign up for that Gabe White class? Fuck no, and I've already got the money set aside for a class with him once registration opens at a particular venue, because – like the other types of instructors I mentioned – there's definitely development to be gained from training there.

If you've gotten this far and have trouble identifying what your priorities should be, my suggestions are a) to visit the Git Gud Guide section on self-defense law and b) to read this article in its entirety.

If you think I'm full of shit, so be it. Train with whoever you want that isn't Voda.

Avoid Stupidity

Some training is better than none – but not to the extent where it may jeopardize you. Think of your training background as a resume, consider yourself a job applicant, and consider a criminal or civil jury as your employer. Also know that it meets the necessary evidentiary standard of relevance to cross-examine you to see whether you acted in accordance with your training. Wanna know how much fun I can have with that?

With that in mind, do you want your "employer" to see this video of James Yeager instructing on how to pistol-whip people? What about this neat video where he says he's going to start killing people if an adverse change in gun laws occurs? Perhaps you're more comfortable with this cool documentary where Gabe Suarez says he was going to light up his coworkers with his AK and was only stopped by God talking to him on the drive over? How about this neat article where he advocates holding people at gunpoint with your finger on the trigger, and as a testimonial of this technique's effectiveness, says that in all the times he's done it, nobody ever got shot who didn't have it coming?

And then there's Voda Tactical…

Clown shoes is out there. In my opinion, the YouTube/Instagram race for likes and views (and, until recently, advertising revenue) added fuel to the fire when it comes to saying ill-advised shit in public. And for some, the controversy is just what they see as their path to "relevance," Gabe Suarez being a prominent example. Unfortunately, Clint Smith – an otherwise well-regarded and well-credentialed instructor with a long track record of doing very good work – seems to have gone down that road lately as well. For better or worse, none of this stuff ever goes away. Gun blogs lap that shit up and gun forums and Facebook groups love to dogpile. Attorneys have Google too.

Here are two real-world examples, one fairly mild and one showing you just how bad it can get.

The first is the case of George Zimmerman. I took a professional interest in his trial and watched the overwhelming majority of it. One of the witnesses called was Zimmerman's concealed carry instructor. That witness was examined about his training and whether Zimmerman acted in accordance with that training during his version of his encounter with Trayvon Martin. He was also asked about the lack of a safety on Zimmerman's chosen weapon, and the instructor confirmed he advised him on selecting a weapon of that type (a point can be extrapolated about firearms modifications: if prosecutors and plaintiff's attorneys think it will matter, they can and will bring up characteristics of what they think is a murder weapon). Overall, Zimmerman was not done much damage by this testimony, but it illustrates the point that your training background can be recalled.

The second is the lesser-known case of Erick Gelhaus. Gelhaus was a deputy with the Sonoma County Sheriff's Department when he shot a 13-year old boy carrying an airsoft replica of an AK-type rifle. Gelhaus was also a part-time instructor at Gunsite – the oldest and arguably most prominent firearms academy in the United States – and a semi-prominent gun writer for various magazines. His background was dragged through the mud. Gunsite became a camp for right-wing racist extremists and his writings and advice were turned

against him – particularly his caution against hesitation to use force when force is called for. The picture painted of him was of a trigger-happy white cop with a background in Klansmanship willing and ready to shoot an innocent Hispanic teenager. I don't know Mr. Gelhaus, but I have a strong suspicion that characterization is inaccurate. Had he gone to trial in either a criminal case (which was contemplated for quite some time) or a civil suit (ultimately dismissed), the jury would have seen that sort of material. Very little of the press coverage on this subject had anything to do with the circumstances of the shooting itself, but that wouldn't be the reason a plaintiff's attorney would offer it into evidence. One of the things you learn in law school is that you can't un-ring a bell.

Again: your training and experience is a resume. You are a job applicant. The jury is your potential employer.

Don't Be Afraid to Shop Local

I have trained with a few of the big names in the firearms training industry, or at least the big names on pistol-forum. The "problem" with those people is availability and accessibility. They tend to travel around, and the venues they pick may not be convenient for you or may require a significant financial outlay to attend (travel and lodging costs, missed work, etc.) which can be almost as much – if not more – than the cost of tuition. They're also expensive: a two-day firearms class from a well-known instructor tends to run around $4-600.

If that is out of reach – whether due to finances, venue, or work/family commitments (or all three) – should you seek no training? Absolutely not.

The first class I went to beyond my carry permit was a local/regional company run by two SWAT cops from a county close to me. I think there's one or two videos of them on YouTube, and the company is unremarkable in its prominence. It cost something like $150. That experience was valuable. I've also taken two courses from a range that was local to me at the time, both of them costing less than $75. Again: value was there. I regularly train with somebody who is part of the Rangemaster instructor cadre who happens to be within an easy drive for me. His classes are a one-day format and generally no more than $120. He provides excellent instruction and I'd recommend him to anybody out there.

To put this in context, I have approximately 200 hours of documented firearms training across the years (I keep a spreadsheet and any certificates the classes issued for the reasons discussed above – again, it's a resume…). About 60 hours of that comes from people whose names any of you would recognize. An Instagram account with 50,000 followers is not a requirement for an instructor to be able to teach you something.

And yes, when you have the opportunity, you absolutely should take that class from one of the big-name traveling instructors. But don't forego development in favor of waiting around and hoping Ken Hackathorn comes to town.

Apply It

You should recognize that practice is different from training. Training is receiving information. Practice is applying that information to maintain proficiency.

Many of the drills and much of the information in the Git Gud Guide are designed to work those core needs discussed in the introduction or instill a baseline of the required knowledge (for the non hard-skill needs). You can and should practice these skills, and the purpose of the Git Gud Guide was and is to provide some tools to help you do that.

Likewise, you should practice the skills you learn at those courses. You should not be leaving that knowledge at the class. Skills atrophy with disuse. You should work to maintain them. Shoot the drills you shot, because they were chosen for a reason. Review your notes. Whatever you do, don't waste your training investment.

What Are You Training For?

The following is an edited article titled "Shooting Incidents: Common Factors Among Different Groups," posted in the June 2011 Rangemaster Newsletter:

FBI Agent Involved Shootings, 1989-1994

- *Average 20-30 shootings per year, typically in plain civilian clothing*
- *FBI agents don't do patrol work, don't police bars, don't answer domestic disturbance calls. FBI shootings closely parallel those of private citizens.*
- *Roughly one half of FBI involved shootings occur because of a criminal attempting to rob or assault what they think is a private citizen who turns out to be an FBI agent.*
- *92% occurred at 6-10 feet: conversational distances (confrontational distances).*
- *Average number of rounds fired: 3.2. The first few shots often dictate the outcome of the fight.*
- *At 21-50 feet the average number of rounds fired jumped to 6.36.*

Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) Discharge Report, 2007

- *56 incidents in which shots were fired.*
- *12 were accidental discharges, usually during cleaning.*
- *Of the 44 defensive shootings:*
  - *Average distance was 14.6 feet (about one car length).*
  - *Average number of shots fired: 5.*

Rangemaster Student-Involved Shootings

- *56 incidents to date (*2018 note: it's now in the mid-60s). *Of these, 10 were selected for a presentation at the 2010 Tactical Conference. Of those ten representative shootings:*
  - *5 of 10 involved an armed robbery by one or two suspects*
  - *3 occurred on mall parking lots.*
  - *1 occurred in a home.*
  - *In all but one, the range was inside the length of a large car/SUV.*
  - *4 out of 10 incidents involved 2 or more suspects.*
  - *Average number of shots fired: 3.8 (low: 1, high: 11)*

A review of the Active Self Protection YouTube channel will corroborate this information.

The following is a summation of points from Darryl Bolke's lecture "Training Secrets of Highly Successful Gunfighters," a lecture developed after extensive review of private citizen and law enforcement gunfights and interviews with people who have been prevailed in those fights. Bolke himself was involved in four shootings as a police officer.

- *"Advanced shooting" is just applying the fundamentals to more difficult problems.*
- *Train to an accuracy standard as well as a time standard. Train on acceptable targets. On a human, those targets are about the size of a grapefruit (note: coincides with the black of an NRA B8 bullseye target). The heart and brain are roughly the same size.*
- *Always be considering whether you need a headshot.*

- *Once you have decided to apply lethal force, the only thing going through your mind should be "front sight, press, and follow through."*
- *There is almost never a need to perform a slide lock or speed reload.*
- *Move at "natural human speed" (the speed your hands move to catch a sneeze). Don't be spazzy.*
- *It takes about .3 seconds to stop shooting once you've decided to. Why should we shoot faster than we can assess and faster than we can stop?*
- *If your splits are faster than .3 seconds, force science bears out that you'll fire unintentionally until the signal to stop makes it to your hands.*
- *Shoot at an assessment speed: the speed at which you can see, interpret, and choose where to hit a target. Ask yourself: "is my target still there?" "No?" Stop shooting. "Yes?" Keep shooting.*
- *The LAPD Metro Division (which includes their SWAT team) trains to a .5 second split standard.*
- *If you're slower than .3 second splits, practice shooting faster.*
- *If you're faster than .2, you don't need to focus on shooting faster.*

The conclusion I and others drawn from this information (and a lot more discussion elsewhere) is that you are primarily training for a car-length fight that will last for a short time, perhaps three seconds. Shootings are fluid situations that often occur in public places. The "know your target and what is beyond it" has a different meaning at the range than it does in the mall parking lot. You must shoot at a speed at which you can process information and react accordingly – some of the most proven gunfighters in the United States shoot at speeds which are painfully slow by USPSA standards. Finally, you must be accurate to be effective: it's not "you don't have time to aim in a gunfight," it's "fuck no, you don't have time to miss." This shouldn't be read to say that you will *never* encounter a situation which falls outside these parameters, but rather that this is the most likely threat.

The Five-Yard Roundup drill was created to encapsulate these points.

Safe Gunhandling Contextualized

An excellent example of what a safety brief should be can be found in this video.

All firearms training must start with a discussion of safety. Firearms are weapons. When mishandled they have the capability to kill or seriously injure a person. Physical harm is not the only thing that bullet carries with it, however: every bullet you fire has a lawyer attached to it and the financial consequences of a mistake can be devastating.

Originally espoused by Jeff Cooper, the Four Rules of Safe Gunhandling are the guidelines for firearms safety. They are: 1) All guns are always loaded, and you must treat them as such; 2) Do not point the gun at anything you are not willing to destroy; 3) Keep your finger off the trigger until your sights are on the target; and 4) Be sure of your target and what is beyond it. I personally advocate a slightly modified approach to those rules, as I will explain below. The purpose of this discussion is to contextualize those rules and instill safe handling habits.

Rule 1: All Guns Are Always Loaded…

The principle behind this rule is sound. Nearly all firearms accidents occur with "unloaded" guns. Encouraging people to treat them as if they were always loaded instills a mindset that one should not do something with an "unloaded" gun that they would not do with a loaded gun. However, you and I both know that not every gun is loaded. We can check the firearm to ensure it is not loaded. We can unload the firearm as necessary. Indeed, there are some activities – dry fire (discussed later) chief among them – that require us to violate this rule. But again, the principle is sound: don't do things with an unloaded gun that you wouldn't do with a loaded gun (within reason).

Status Checks and Unloading Procedures

Verifying a Pistol's Status*:*

1. Grip the gun in a proper firing grip with your finger well away from the trigger. Point it in a safe direction. Bring the slide close to your chest about three inches away.
2. With your support hand, grasp the rear of the slide and pull back slightly. Your fingers should be on the right (or left, if you're left handed) side of the gun and your thumb should be at the rear of the slide. Once your fist touches your chest, that's as far as you need to go.
3. Look into the chamber. If you see brass, it's loaded. If it's dark, use your pinky to touch inside the chamber.

Verifying a Revolver's Status*:*

1. Repeat step 1 as above.
2. (Right-handed) Use your strong hand thumb to work the cylinder release; use your index finger to push the cylinder out. Rotate the gun into your cupped support hand. (Left-handed) Transition the gun to your support hand and repeat the right-handed steps.

3. Look at the charging holes. If you see brass, it's loaded. (Right-handed) If it's dark, use your support hand thumb to work around the charging holes to feel for brass. (Left-handed) As above, do this part right-handed.

Unloading a pistol*:*

1. Repeat step 1 as above.
2. Drop your elbow to your rib cage, pointing the muzzle up.
3. Work the magazine release and remove the magazine.
4. With your support hand, work the slide.
5. Repeat steps 1-4 as above to ensure the pistol is now unloaded.

Unloading a revolver*:*

1. Repeat steps 1 and 2 as above.
2. As above, open the cylinder (lefties transition to right handed).
3. Using your open support hand, smack the ejection rod forcefully. You should see the cartridges falling out.
4. Repeat steps 1-3 as above to ensure the revolver is now unloaded.

Rule 2: Do Not Point the Gun at Anything You are Not Willing to Destroy

Again, the principle here is sound. Do not point the gun at anything you aren't willing to kill, injure, or pay for. Pets, television sets, walls, ceilings, and yes, people, have all fallen victim to violations of this rule.

The first point I'd like to make here is that you will be carrying a firearm on your person and, at some point throughout that process, whether during the holstering/unholstering process or during daily carry, the muzzle of the firearm can potentially be pointing at you. Sometimes this is unavoidable, but most of the time it can be easily avoided. It is **critically important** that you learn a safe method of drawing the gun from your holster which does not allow for the muzzle to cover your body unnecessarily. **You must practice drawing the gun safely!** If you cannot do it safely with an unloaded gun in the comfort of your own home, how do you think you'll do when under pressure?

The second point is that you need to practice **muzzle aversion**. Muzzle aversion is the process of actively seeking to prevent the muzzle of your gun from covering something you aren't willing to shoot. You cannot be lazy when the gun is in your hands. You must be aware of your environment. If you find your muzzle covering something you do not intend to shoot, *move it out of the way!*

Ready Positions for Muzzle Aversion (with pictures!)

There are several ready positions out there. Each has its pros and cons. In general, I suggest a mixture of low ready and high ready depending on the situation and when shooting is expected, whereas position sul and the temple index can be situationally useful purely for muzzle aversion. Photo demonstrations are below. Good discussion of ready positions can be found here and here. Here's what it looks like when shooting.

Low ready. The pistol should be pointed below the target's feet. This is also an appropriate ready position when you feel you may need to shoot soon.

High Compressed Ready. This is also an appropriate ready position when you feel you may need to shoot soon.

Position Sul. This is situationally useful when in a crowd, but not a vehicle (you'll be sweeping your legs if sitting).

Temple index. This is situationally useful when in a crowd or in a vehicle.

When you are not shooting and the weapon is in your hand, it should be in one of the four above positions. If shooting is immediately anticipated, either high or low ready is the appropriate position if safe to do so.

You should always strive to keep the muzzle pointed in a safe direction. You'll note that three of the four ready positions provided keep the muzzle somewhat aligned with where your torso is pointed. If you keep the gun in that space, you can control where the gun is pointed by pointing your torso. Put another way: when using one of those ready positions, if your torso is pointed in a safe direction, so is your gun. So, it's important to default to those locations when not shooting.

Rule 3: Keep Your Finger Off the Trigger…

Once again, the principle here is sound. I do, however, rephrase the rule as such: "Keep your finger off the trigger until you have made a *conscious decision to shoot*." I advocate getting the gun up into the eye line and using the pistol's sights – even if it's just the front sight – as much as possible. However, sometimes doing that is not possible or appropriate, particularly if your target is within arm's reach.

When handling the gun before a conscious decision has been made to shoot, you must keep your finger off the trigger. However, as noted in this video, "off the trigger" isn't necessarily the best way to leave things. So, we use…

Register Positions

Short and simple: if you need to be off the trigger, try to touch the ejection port. Why? It's about the fullest extension of your index finger you'll be able to get, it's textured (usually with a handy ledge to rest your finger on), it's a little hard to slip off of, and frankly it's a little bit uncomfortable. If you're using a revolver, touch the highest cylinder flute available with your index finger. However, if you decide not to do either of these things, you should remember: with a pistol, always be touching the frame above the trigger guard and keep your finger extended straight (at a minimum – prefer touching the slide) and with a revolver always be touching the cylinder. A video explanation is available here.

Rule 4: Know Your Target and What is Behind it

I have no changes to this rule. The one thing I'll point out is this: bullets pass through things. Remember that every bullet has a lawyer attached to it. While you should be carrying hollowpoint ammunition (which reduces the likelihood significantly), it is entirely possible for a bullet to completely penetrate a person and continue its flight with enough power to injure or kill somebody in the background. Similarly, bullets can penetrate through many walls, especially interior walls made mostly of drywall. In the home you have to be aware of where you're shooting into just as much as in public. Remember that your background in the mall parking lot is very different from your background on the range. There are some techniques to mitigate risk here that involve the angle at which you shoot but the best way to prevent bullets hitting things they shouldn't is not to miss. Hollowpoint bullets tend to stay in the body, and even if they penetrate fully they usually lack sufficient velocity to travel far.

Effective Dry Fire Habits

Dry fire is deliberate practice of gunhandling and shooting with an unloaded gun. It allows you to practice everything about shooting except recoil management. Done properly, it is a huge supplement to live fire and can save you valuable training time on the range. As an additional benefit, it allows you to practice inherently dangerous actions in a safe manner. Many ranges, for example, will not allow for drawing from the holster *at all*, and those that do are often going to ban you from shooting while moving, practicing from compromised positions, and otherwise limit the full scope of what you should be practicing. Even if you have access to a range that allows all of those things, best practice is still to practice with an empty gun before attempting live fire. Again, many of the things we do with a pistol are inherently dangerous, and it's better to work out the safety bugs in a manner that cannot result in anybody getting shot.

How to Dry Fire

Principles of Dry Fire:

- Allow no distractions – focus exclusively on the task at hand
- Keep muzzle in a safe direction
- Use correct trigger finger discipline
- Verify no live ammo is in the gun, on your person, or in the dry practice area
- Use dedicated dry practice targets that are put away until you consciously choose to begin dry practice, and taken down when you consciously end dry practice
- Use dedicated dry practice magazines and dummy rounds/inert training cartridges that stay in the dry practice area (if you use any magazine or cartridges)
- **Treat every dry shot as if it were a live shot**.
- **Strive for perfect repetitions**. Just like lifting weights, ingraining good form is necessary to progress in skill.
- Dry fire regularly. Most people should dry fire more often than they shoot.

Procedure:[1]

1. Unload gun in a location other than the dry practice area
2. Leave live ammo and loaded magazines completely outside the dry practice area
3. Enter the dry practice area
4. Verify gun is unloaded, that any magazines do not contain live ammo, and that any cartridges present are inert/dummy cartridges
5. Consciously choose to begin dry practice
6. Put up dry practice targets
7. **Do your dry practice**
8. Take down dry practice targets and put them away
9. Consciously choose to end dry practice
10. Exit the dry practice area and do something unrelated for a few minutes

[1] All credit for these procedures to Gabe White

11. Return gun to location and condition of your choosing

Dry Fire Tools

Creating Targets

While not strictly necessary, I like having a dedicated target (or targets) to dry fire at. In the past, I have used everything from pictures of me and others holding weapons in an aggressive manner to reduced-scale NRA B8 bullseyes. To gain the most benefit, however, most people will need to reduce the scale of the target in order to simulate distance in their home. For most people, a 1/3 scale target is an optimal balance of size and simulated range. As an example, a 7-yard shot only requires 7 feet in order to simulate that distance.

For a printable target, most programs (Word, Adobe Reader, etc.) will allow you to reduce its scale by a percentage when printing. Other printable targets designed for dry fire typically come pre-scaled and ready to print. Included below are a few examples:

1/3 Scale USPSA Metric Target (torso silhouette with realistic scoring zones)

NRA Bullseye Targets (full-size repair centers; must be reduced manually)

1/6 and 1/10 Scale USPSA Targets (torsos, classics, and competition poppers)

8" Circles at 7, 10, 15, 20, and 25 yards (to scale at 12 feet)

Timers

Real shot timers are an expensive (but good) investment. While I strongly suggest you eventually buy one I realize that many will not. Nevertheless, you do need some sort of time stress introduced once you've established good form. To add time pressure, use a series of par times. As an example: a novice would attempt his drawstroke in 2.0 seconds. Once that standard is consistently met in dry fire and confirmed with live fire, bump the par down to 1.8. Repeat this process until, over time, your drawstroke is happening in the time you want it to happen. Obviously, this can also be done with reloads.

In the age of smartphones, many shot timer apps are available. While I have not found one that reliably records live fire times (it's a limit of the phone's microphone, not the app), they work very well for setting par times in dry fire. I use and like a free app called **Shot Timer** put out by SureFire. Having said that, search your app store for shot timers: many free programs are available for both iPhone and Android. Don't bother paying for one that totally records every single live fire shot and is only a fraction of the cost of the real thing – the free ones will work just as well here. Again: I've tried many, and none of them are reliable replacements for a real shot timer in live fire.

A cheap app that can be useful for timing both dry fire and live fire is Shot Coach. Shot Coach records video of your practice and later allows you to analyze that video frame-by-frame. It can show split times based on the video. However, it does not provide the instant feedback a real shot timer would provide. Nevertheless, video analysis can be useful as it

allows you to view your movements and spot any errors or inefficiencies. I suggest videoing yourself periodically to check your work.

Drills

Below is a summary of common dry fire drills which will work specific skills needed in defensive pistol shooting. You don't have to do all of them in one session (and honestly, doing so is a recipe for boredom/getting stale). Vary things up. As you identify what your needs are, focus on those. Add in multiple targets. Verbalize dealing with an attacker. Work on a concealed draw stroke. Practice *not shooting*. Work different shooting sequences, such as two to the body and one to the head. Your imagination is the limit here. However, simply doing the below drills *will* improve your gunhandling and shooting.

There are other resources out there. In particular, Ben Stoeger's dry fire book is well-regarded. Some people also like dry fire cards.

Accuracy

Wall Drill: Procedure – with the muzzle roughly one inch from a blank wall (no target), obtain a perfect stance, grip, and sight picture. Breathe, relax, focus on your front sight, and press the trigger. The objective is to make a perfect shot without the distraction of a target. Ideally, your sights should not move as you work the trigger (note that some guns will shake as the sear releases – different from, say, a sharp jump of the front sight). Repeat as necessary.

Simulated Distance: Procedure – using a reduced scale target, obtain a perfect stance, grip, and sight picture (bonus rep: incorporate your drawstroke). Breathe, relax, focus on your front sight, and press the trigger. As with the Wall Drill, the objective is to make a perfect shot and your sights should not move when pressing the trigger. This drill familiarizes you with slow, deliberate fire at a small target and allows you to visualize the sight picture necessary for tight shots at distance.

Simulated Distance – Timed: Procedure – repeat the Simulated Distance drill, but add a par time for your shot. I would suggest starting from a low ready or your preferred ready position, moving the gun to the target, obtaining your sight picture, and then firing. The purpose of this drill is to start demanding accuracy under time pressure from yourself. In general, allow for no more than two seconds on a given shot (longer video discussion).

Simulated Distance – Strong/Weak Hand Only: Procedure – repeat the Simulated Distance drill using either your strong or weak hand only. I suggest doing this on a reduced scale target starting at a simulated 5-yard distance and, as you get better, start from ready positions and increase the distance. As you become more competent you should add a timer to the shot.

Drawstroke

The drawstroke is the single most important thing you can practice in dry fire. However, it's easy to do this wrong. Always strive to obtain a perfect grip (including all the grip pressure you would use in live fire). After you fire, always obtain a second sight picture and mentally prepare to fire a second shot. Don't simply draw, fire the shot, and immediately bring the gun back to start over.

A note on targets: don't cheat yourself. Always draw to small targets within your reduced-sized targets. For example, I use a 1/3 scale NRA B8 bullseye as my "chest" target, and that's taped on the chest of a 1/3 scale USPSA metric target. For head shots, I use the credit card inside the head box rather than the entire head box. Demand excellence from yourself here and you'll see the dividends on the range.

Basic Draw: Procedure – using a target and no timer, draw your gun with no attempt to go faster than you can perform the movement perfectly. Draw the gun and aim at a small target, such as a headshot. Repeat every time you practice your drawstroke, regardless of whether you later use a timer in the dry fire session. The idea is to "grease the groove," so to speak: always be building in perfect repetitions. Over time, this will automatically become faster. **Note: Video demonstrations will be provided in the next section.**

Timed Draw: Procedure – using one of the shot timer apps described earlier, set a par time. On the starting beep, draw your firearm and aim at an appropriate target such as the chest or head. Make every effort to complete the movement perfectly before the second beep. You should have a perfect grip and sight alignment. If you can do so with plenty of time to spare, decrease the par time until you feel more pressured. If you cannot do so in the time you set, increase the par time slightly. I suggest 2.0 seconds as a basic starting point for a novice. From there, work to decrease this time. A good goal post is 1.5 seconds for a simulated 7-yard shot, though you should always be working on finding your limit and pushing past it. Note that this process will take weeks or months of effort. Hard mode: vary the start position of your hands. Start with your extended hands at chest level (making a "fence"), simulate carrying shopping bags, start with your arms crossed, etc. etc. etc. Don't limit yourself to "gun guy on a gun range about to have a man-on-man draw competition" position – start with how you'd ordinarily be standing in a variety of normal-life positions.

Timed Draw – Multiple Shots: Procedure – using the same procedure as the Timed Draw drill, work to simulate multiple shots. Note that most guns require you to work the action in order to reset the trigger (revolver master race…). Don't break your grip to reset the trigger. Instead, simply let your finger out and simulate taking a second shot without a trigger. No, this isn't perfect, but it pays off later.[2]

Timed Draw – Side Step: Procedure – using the same procedure as the Timed Draw drill, draw and fire one shot while stepping quickly to the left or right. You must be drawing the firearm while making that movement; don't simply step to the left/right before drawing.

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[2] A trick I use is to count verbally as I pull the trigger. I know what the shot cadence sounds like for, say, .25s splits, .3s splits, and .5s splits. I'll "pull the trigger" on each count. A live fire example of this can be found here.

For a novice, add .2 seconds to the par time you can ordinarily draw and fire one shot in. As with the other drills, work to decrease this time.

Timed Draw – Violent Movement: Procedure – using the same procedure as the Side Step and Multiple Shots drills, draw and fire multiple shots while exploding into movement. Fire while moving laterally (keep walking while shooting). You should use your par time for the Side Step drill as a benchmark for the first shot when starting out. As you get more advanced, an example time would be: fire at least four shots in 2.5 seconds. Work to keep your sights on the target as you move and do your best to obtain good sight pictures (front sight must be somewhere in the rear notch).

Timed Draw – Strong Hand Only: Procedure – repeat the Timed Draw drill while using only your strong/dominant hand to clear your cover garment (if applicable) and draw the pistol. As a novice, add .2 seconds to your two-hand (freestyle) draw par time. As you become more competent, start including side steps, multiple shots, and violent movement. Hard mode: Simulate carrying something (or somebody) important with your weak hand, or simulate pushing somebody out of the way with your weak arm as you draw.

Timed "Draw" – Weak Hand Only: Procedure – place the pistol on the ground with the grip facing your dominant side (so, as if you had set it down with your right hand). On the start signal, reach down, grab the grip with your weak hand, rotate it to proper orientation, and then pick it up and fire. How I personally do this: grab the grip with my weak hand, press the slide into the ground and use this to pivot it to where the grip is now facing my weak side, then establish a firing grip with my weak hand. Start untimed. When you add a timer, add .5 seconds to your two-hand draw par time. Note: this is something that can probably only be practiced dry fire – most ranges get *very uncomfortable* with dropped guns and bending over on the firing line. Turbo mode: using the same par time and with the gun extended in a two-handed grip, drop the firearm on the start signal. From there, pick it up using only your left hand and complete the drill.

Timed Draw – Weak Hand Only: Procedure – draw your firearm using only your weak hand from a holster that is on your dominant side, press the gun out, and fire. I'll be honest, this is difficult as fuck, relatively unsafe, and you should only start practicing this after you have a well-developed drawstroke (in other words, prioritize the stuff above this!). How I personally do this (AIWB-specific): 1) clear the cover garment with the weak hand only; 2) grab the pistol's grip with my weak hand and lift it straight up out of the holster; 3) insert the muzzle straight down into my waistband, somewhere around my belt buckle; 4) using my weak hand, rotate the grip to my left side; 5) draw as normal. **Start this untimed and make damn sure you're getting it right**. For time, start by adding one full second to your two-handed drawstroke time (if you can't meet this, add time until you can). **You need to be <u>VERY</u> cognizant of where your trigger finger is throughout this process. I personally do not practice this live fire. Video demonstration will be provided in the next section.**

Retention Shooting

I am a fan of shooting from the "2" of a four-count drawstroke. Video demonstration will be provided in the next section. While all of this technically involves a drawstroke, I felt it

was best for organizational purposes to separate it into its own section. There are several retention shooting positions, each with their own pros and cons (though I personally believe that "2" is objectively superior for contact-distance shots where you may have an arm in play).

Retention shot: Procedure – on the timer, draw to your chosen retention position and fire. This should be completed strong-hand only as if you're using this technique, the opponent is at arm's reach and in real life you're probably going to be doing shit with your support hand (like fending). For the timer, use your standard two-handed drawstroke par to start and work your way down (faster).

Retention shot transition: Procedure – on the timer, draw to your chosen retention position and "fire" two shots. Simulating the target being stunned or creating an opportunity to break away, move to a two-handed grip below your sight line and continue to fire while backing away. As you back away, press the gun to full extension, obtain a sight picture, and continue to fire. **This should become one fluid movement sequence.** For time, only time your first shot using the same time as you'd use for your standard two-handed drawstroke; strive to do this as well as you can, as fast as you can. **Video demonstration will be provided in the next section.**

Reloads, Malfunction Clearance, and Misc.

1-reload-1: Procedure – start with the pistol's slide locked open on an empty magazine. Sight in on the target and press the trigger. Once you press the trigger, immediately drop the magazine, use your support hand to grab your spare magazine, reload the pistol, and press the gun out to extension and fire a second shot. Video demonstration will be provided in the next section. Suggested starting par time is 3 seconds. Work that time down as you git gud.

Tap-rack: Procedure – induce a malfunction with fired casings or dummy rounds (**DO NOT EVER USE LIVE AMMUNITION**). Pull the trigger, gun goes click or the trigger is dead. Immediately rotate the grip of the gun towards your support hand, smack the magazine, rotate the slide of the gun towards your support hand, and violently run the slide. Re-establish grip and get back on target. It's important to do this with snap caps to ensure that your technique is actually clearing the gun. Video discussion will be provided in the next section. Hard mode: do it while moving.

Double-feed: Procedure – induce a double feed by leaving a fired case or dummy round in the chamber with the slide locked open; with a second dummy around in the magazine, close the slide. Upon starting, first lock the slide to the rear. Strip the magazine out of the pistol (may require pulling it out). Rack the slide at least once, but most people teach several times. Insert a fresh magazine (will need a dummy round inside as well), run the slide, extend back onto the target, and fire. Hard mode: do it while moving.

Target transitions: Procedure – this requires two targets spaced some distance apart (or, it can be the chest followed by the head on a torso target) along with a little setup. Extend onto the first target and pull the trigger with a perfect stance, grip, sight picture, and trigger press. While holding the trigger to the rear (very important), break your grip and work the

slide with your support hand. Next, re-establish your full firing grip while sighted in on the first target. Now you're ready to begin: as you move the gun to the second target, let the slack out of the trigger until it resets. Ideally, you should be on the second target by the time the trigger resets. Shoot the second target.

Post-shooting sequence: Procedure – start with the gun at extension with the slide in battery. Breathe deeply. Scan the area. Look at yourself from toe to chest (check for bleeds). When you're ready, bring the gun in, release the magazine in the pistol into your hand. Stow that in a pocket or inside your waistband using your support hand. Grab your spare magazine and put the fresh magazine into your pistol. Scan the area once more. If "clear," reholster the pistol in a safe and deliberate manner. No timer. The purpose of this drill is to practice post-shooting actions. In order of priority, 1) is there anybody else who may need shooting?; 2) do I have any new holes in me?; 3) top the gun off to get ready to shoot again if needed; 4) if no further danger exists, stow the gun. Hard mode: after doing all of the above, pull out your cell phone and verbalize calling 911 (don't actually dial it…).

Challenging an intruder: Procedure – starting with the gun at your chosen ready position, extend the gun out onto the target and verbalize a command ("STOP!" or "DON'T MOVE!" or "DROP IT!"). Prepare to shoot, but don't always shoot when you do this drill. Hard mode: identify the target with your flash light first (see this article for a discussion on flashlight technique – scroll down, continues on next page) and only after identifying the target, point the gun at it. You are simulating challenging an intruder in your home. Don't always shoot – sometimes (most of the time, really…) it could be your roommate, your spouse, or your child.

Draw and challenge: Procedure – starting with your hands in a fence, draw your pistol to the low ready, pointed at the target's feet. As you do so, verbalize a command ("STOP!" or "DON'T MOVE" or "DROP IT!"). Prepare to shoot but do not touch the trigger. **Do not shoot**. Hard mode: before beginning the drill, set a random start delay on your shot timer. Also before beginning, flip a coin. Heads is fire, tails is do not fire. If the coin toss goes heads, when you draw to low ready, you will come up on the target from low ready and fire ONLY once the start beep goes off (or, if it goes off while drawing, immediately fire once on target). For a discussion on giving commands at gunpoint, this (1) series (2) of (3) articles (4) has very good information. Note: you can also run the random shoot/no shoot portion with a friend in live fire. With them holding the timer (or calling out commands), have them make the shoot stimulus (including when) once you've drawn to low ready.

Video Demonstrations of Critical Gunhandling Skills

Video can explain these techniques far better than I can with text, so that's what I'm going with. The late Paul Gomez's channel is fucking great for video demonstrations of gunhandling technique. While much of this can be learned at home (that's how I did it, though I later sought proper training), video is no substitute for in person training.

Grip

Modern isosceles stance with thumbs forward is king for semi-autos. Here is an example. Kyle Defoor has a good video as well, and here's Robert Vogel's take for good measure.

Stance

This isn't karate and there isn't a well-defined foot position that you must follow without any sort of exception. A demonstration of what you should strive for can be found here.. Ernest Langdon also has a very good presentation on grip and stance.

The Drawstroke as Taught by Gomez (and a lot of other people)

The four-count drawstroke. A benefit to this method is that it places the pistol under your dominant eye. As you extend the pistol out to the target, you will be able to pick up your front sight in your peripheral vision and steer it onto the target. This aids in speeding up your first shot. An appendix-carry specific version is also available. Dave Spaulding's version is also available here, and the dude from Lucky Gunner's high-production-value version is available here.

Strong-hand only follows the same principles, just with one hand.

Hard mode: Weak-hand only. Don't try this at home, kids… This method is optimized for being able to move while drawing the gun. As I stated in the dry fire section, I do not personally practice this live fire and I don't know of any public shooting range that would even allow you to do this.

A Different Take on Drawstroke

Gomez taught a version of the four-count drawstroke, and that method is commonly espoused by many "defensive minded" instructors today. A competing school of thought comes from competitions like USPSA, which argue that this drawstroke is inherently slower than another competing method I'll call the Direct Draw. Probably the best available in-depth video discussion of this technique can be found here. I personally use the four-count drawstroke as I find it to be a) more consistent and b) more applicable to a wider variety of shooting problems (SHO, WHO, retention shots), but you should try both and make up your own mind. Regardless of what you choose to do, do it safely.

Malfunction Clearance

Bill Blowers has an excellent video discussing his school of thought on this topic. Gomez's versions of the tap rack and the double-feed clearance are also available in video form. Gomez also shows how to do it one-handed. Tom Givens has an excellent, concise video of the tap-rack as well; he also shows just how easy it is to induce a malfunction or stoppage.

Reloads

Gomez's take on the speed (emergency) reload is available here. His version of the tactical (proactive) reload is available here. He also shows how to do it strong-hand only here and weak-hand only here. Bill Blowers also has an excellent video on this subject available here. Finally, here is a high production value tutorial by the dude from LuckyGunner.

Low-Light Shooting

An extensive discussion of handheld and weapon mounted light in video form. Here's some really cool shit you can do with a handheld light.

Retention Shooting

This is my chosen retention position, referred to as "2." This is what it looks like in context. You'll note the downward angle of the firearm means that, even though Gomez's left arm is being used to control the target, there's no way for that shot to go into his arm. This video demonstrates a good unarmed skillset ("the fence") that should be incorporated into your dry fire and live fire as a start position (and here is the fence as explained by its original proponent). Starting at about 1:20 in this video, you can see Gomez discuss "3" and "4," which is the transition you should move to upon breaking range. Starting at about 1:25 in this video, you can see a clip of that transition from "2" to "3" to "4" in context. Here's a really good video of Craig Douglass discussing accessing a firearm at contact distance. Spoiler: to git gud, start doing Brazilian Jiu Jitsu, but the skills Douglass discusses are pretty simple and can be practiced with a friend (**USING UNLOADED GUNS… or better yet blue guns or airsoft guns**).

This looks really cool on Instagram. In my opinion, that's about all it's good for. It's an older technique called the Speed Rock. Here is Kyle Defoor demonstrating a more consistent version of the Speed Rock which, in his method, is faster than going to "2" and safer than the above-linked-to Instagram gun guy. You'll note that when he does the shooting, he removes the timer from the target. Why he does this? If he fucks up badly, he'll put a hole in his timer. That problem is magnified when grappling with an opponent. While his demonstrated method provides for a more repeatable trajectory of fire (note that he doesn't lean back like Instagram gun guy), it's still nowhere near as consistent as the "2" position. Another reason I'm in favor of "2:" I can use my lats (which, no matter who you are, are among the strongest muscles you have) to pull back on the pistol in a struggle over the gun. Down low like Defoor shows, you're using your forearm to do that (much weaker) and the gun is closer to the guy who's trying to grab your gun. Try them both but I *strongly* recommend using "2" over the Speed Rock.

Yelling at People With a Gun in Your Hand

Verbal skills are difficult to teach over text. Nevertheless, they're still very important for what you do. Most problems you encounter will not be gun problems. Many potential gun problems can be headed off with good verbal skills. If they go to guns, some problems may be solved merely by presenting the gun. Only a few will end in a shooting.

This is a primer on Craig Douglass/Southnarc's "Managing Unknown Contacts" tutorial. His classes are very worthwhile. The material has been updated since that 2005-era article, but the principles are sound.

On issuing commands at gunpoint, a guy called Larry Lindenmann wrote this (1) series (2) of (3) articles (4) on a problem he calls "Managing the Don't Shoot Yet." Included are what sorts of commands to issue, how to issue them (tone), and how to hold somebody at gunpoint if you decide that becomes necessary (if at all possible, my thought is that you should avoid doing this). It's very instructive.

Effective Live Fire Habits

Musings

- Accountability is important. Get all of your hits. In dry fire, I encouraged you to use small targets and demand perfect repetitions from yourself. This is where it pays off. From a legal standpoint, misses cost you a lot more than a bruised ego.
- To completely contradict the above point, when pushing speed, don't be afraid to miss. The fastest way to go faster is to get faster. Sometimes that's going to entail missing. However, if you cannot maintain a speed without, say, hitting the target 90% of the time, you should dial your pace back slightly until you can.
- Track how well you do. If you don't have a record of your performance, you won't be able to measure your improvement.
- If you come across a drill that you cannot complete in the mandated time, **SHOOT IT ANYWAY.** You're going to fail at times and that's OK. Keep shooting it and you will improve. As a tie-in with dry fire: when you notice skills that need attention in live fire, dry fire the shit out of those skills. You will see improvement on the range.
- On shot timers: not having one will eventually limit your ability to track your performance, and unfortunately there's not really a good way around that. The Shot Coach app I mentioned in the dry fire section will allow you to review split times, but only well after the fact once you're at home. The phone shot timer apps I mentioned are usually really bad at accurately recording shots. One suggestion that can work is to use a phone shot timer to set par times (just like you do in dry fire) and attempt to complete a string of fire within the par time. Caution: this requires you to be honest with yourself. Shot timers don't lie but your memory and perception does – especially when you really want a given result. If you missed the par, you missed the par. Another caution: this can lead to some very frustrating experiences at times if your phone's speakers aren't very loud (missing hearing the second beep of the par time, and not realizing that you missed par).
- Many of these drills are timed. You may or may not be familiar with shooting under time pressure, and that's OK. When you don't know what your true capability is when starting out, I suggest you shoot the drill as fast as you can guarantee successful completion. Check that time and make that your baseline. From there, subtract a reasonable amount of time from that baseline time (this will vary from drill to drill. For example, try shaving off half-second increments from the Bill Drill discussed below) and make that your goal. Once you've met that, do it again until you're where you want to be.
- Don't have fancy range-style targets? That's OK. With a printer and paper you can get a lot of shit done. Examples of good non-range style (large sheet) targets include: printable NRA B8 repair centers (the black area is a good simulator for the vital areas of the chest), an 8.5"x11" sheet of paper (a USPSA A Zone is about 6"x11" – an easy way to make this is just to fold the paper to match that), a 3x5" index card (a good simulator of the important part of the head), and a 4x6" index card (a good simulator of the important parts of the chest). Some drills, like Dot Torture or the F.A.S.T. Test, even have official printable targets.

- Included in this section is a list of drills. I think they're all pretty great. However, remember all those drawstroke variations, reloads, and other things you practiced in dry fire? All of those can (and should be) practiced in live fire as well. Think of the drill as the test; think of those skills as the homework you use to prepare for it.
- Suggested core skills you should work live fire when possible (even if it's just one or two repetitions): 1) drawstroke (two-handed, strong-hand only); 2) speed reloads (slidelock); 3) firing multiple shots to the high upper chest; 4) firing a failure drill (two to the body, one to the head; another variation is four to the body, two to the head); 5) shooting while moving left/right; 6) drawing while sidestepping left/right; 7) clearing a basic malfunction (tap/rack); 8) transitioning from one target to another (multiple targets).
- On multiple targets: if your range will not allow for multiple targets, an easy way to create them is to shoot at a pair of reduced-sized targets (just like in dry fire) that fit in your lane/target backer. While you won't get the full effect, you'll still get most of the benefits. An example of this is the iHack version of the Hackathorn Standards.
- On drawing from a holster: many of these drills require starting from a holster. If you cannot yet do this safely OR your range does not allow for this, you should start from a ready position of your choosing. If the drill has a par time including the draw from the holster, you should reduce that par time by .5 seconds as a rule of thumb (unless otherwise specified).
- **From now on, go to the range with a plan. Identify what you want to shoot, where you want to improve, and work those things in live fire (and dry fire)!**

Drills

The Farnham Drill

Target: 8.5"x11" sheet of paper (hard mode: NRA B8 Bullseye).
Range: 7 yards (if you're having difficulty, move it up to 5 yards).
Ammunition: 9 live rounds, 1 dummy round.
Scoring: All rounds must be on paper, within the time limit (hard mode: all within B8 black).
Time Standards: 15 seconds (novice); 12 seconds (intermediate); 10 seconds (advanced).
Starting Condition: 6 live rounds and 1 dummy round loaded in the gun. The dummy round shall not be the round in the chamber, the first round in the magazine, or the last round in the magazine. On your person is a magazine loaded with 3 rounds. Gun is holstered.
Procedure: On the start signal, draw and fire until empty. Reload the pistol and continue firing until empty, at which point the drill is complete. When a stoppage occurs during the first magazine, you must fix it. Additionally, you must side step on the draw, on the stoppage clearance, and on the reload.

Darryl Bolke's Modified LAPD SWAT Qualification

Target: USPSA A-Zone (upper and lower), 8" circle and 3x5 card, or similar representation of the high upper chest and head. (hard mode: NRA B8 Bullseye black for body, 3x5" card

for head). The backing target should be a human silhouette of some sort, but this isn't strictly necessary.
Range: Varies.
Ammunition: 36 rounds (or 50 rounds).
Scoring: All rounds must be in the scoring zones, within the time limits to clean it. Any shots completely off the target constitute a failure. (hard mode: any shots outside the 8.5"x11" printout of the B8 repair center are failures, as are any headshots outside of the head box). Everything in between: needs work.
Time Standards: Varies.
Starting Condition: Low ready (hard mode: draw from the holster and shoot the drill in the same time standards. If this is too hard at first, add .5 seconds to each string's par time).
Procedure: String 1) At 25 yards, fire two rounds to the body target in 4 seconds. Repeat twice. String 2) At 15 yards, fire two rounds to the body target in 3.5 seconds. Repeat twice. String 3) At 10 yards, fire two rounds to the body target in 3 seconds. Repeat twice. String 4) At 7 yards, fire two rounds to the body and follow up with one shot to the head. Repeat once. String 5) At 5 yards, fire two rounds to the body and follow up with one shot to the head. Repeat once. String 6) At 3 yards, fire two rounds to the body and follow up with one shot to the head. Repeat once. (If your range allows shooting on the move, String 7) While moving from 10 to 3 yards, fire six rounds to the body followed by one shot to the head in 5 seconds. Repeat once).

Dot Torture

Target: This for double action/single action pistols, and this for everything else.
Range: Varies. Start at 3 yards. When you can shoot the target with no misses, increase the distance by 1 yard.
Ammunition: 50 rounds.
Scoring: Each hit is worth one point. A hit is any round which breaks the black line of a circle. Any round which misses its intended circle but lands in another circle is still a miss.
Time Standards: As fast as you can do everything properly.
Starting Conditions: As directed by the instructions on each circle. If your range does not allow for drawing from a holster, begin from a ready position of your choice.
Procedure: Follow the instructions for each circle.

Tom Givens Casino Drill

Target: This (or draw your own). A great multi-purpose target that allows for this drill is also available. This target is very common at public indoor ranges.[3]
Range: 7 yards.
Ammunition: 21 rounds.
Scoring: Each numbered shape must have the required number of hits inside.
Time Standards: 21 seconds or less.
Starting Conditions: A pistol with seven loaded rounds. Two spare magazines on your person each loaded with 7 rounds.

[3] Other places online may well have this cheaper; I was simply focused on finding an example for the article. Shop around -- $.85/pop for 100+ targets is pretty bad.

Procedure: A video explanation is available here. Draw, fire one shot at the shape labeled "1;" fire two rounds at the shape labeled "2;" fire three rounds at the shape labeled "3;" fire four rounds at the shape labeled "4;" fire five rounds at the shape labeled "5;" and fire six rounds at the shape labeled "6." All targets must be shot in that order. This drill will force you to reload twice. When a reload occurs, you must finish shooting the number of rounds required by the target you were engaging when it occurred before moving to another target. (Hard mode: sidestep on the draw and on each reload).

Todd Green's F.A.S.T. Test

Target: Official printable target here. 3x5" index card and 8" circle. These excellent multipurpose targets allow for it.
Range: 7 yards.
Ammunition: 6 rounds.
Scoring: Headshot misses add two seconds to your time, body misses add one second to your time. Note the rules on the official target for variations if you're shooting without concealment, from a duty (retention) holster, and/or with closed-flap magazine pouches.
Time Standards: 10+ seconds (novice); less than 10 seconds (intermediate); less than 7 seconds (advanced); less than 5 seconds (expert).
Starting Conditions: A holstered pistol loaded with two rounds. One spare magazine of four rounds on your person. Your hands must be at your sides.
Procedure: On the start signal, draw and fire two rounds to the 3x5" card. Perform a slide lock reload and immediately fire four rounds to the 8" circle.

The Bill Drill

Target: USPSA A-Zone, 8" Circle, 8.5"x11" sheet of paper, or similar.
Range: 7 yards.
Ammunition: 6 rounds.
Scoring: Each miss outside the scoring zone adds .5 seconds to your time.
Time Standards: Varies. A good starting point for an absolute novice is 5 seconds (two second draw, half second splits – as you improve even slightly this is *painfully* slow). A good goal post for a more advanced shooter is under 3 seconds. An excellent shooter will typically have a time of under 2.5 seconds.
Start Position: Gun in holster, hands at sides (variety: surrender position).
Procedure: On the signal, draw and fire six rounds into the scoring zone as fast as you can guarantee all of your hits.

The Bill Drill 2.0

Target: USPSA A-Zone, 8" circle, 8.5"x11" sheet of paper or similar.
Range: 7 yards.
Ammunition: 15 rounds.
Scoring: Misses add a half second to your total time.
Time Standards: A goal should be 10 seconds as a combined total time for all strings.
Start Position: Gun in holster, hands at sides.
Procedure: String 1) Draw and fire 1 shot; String 2) Draw and fire 2 shots; String 3) Draw and fire 3 shots; String 4) Draw and fire 4 shots; String 5) Draw and fire 5 shots.

Bill Wilson's 5x5 Skill Test

Target: 8" circle, USPSA A zone, 8.5"x11" sheet of paper, or similar + 3x5" index card (head).
Range: 10 yards (if this is too difficult, decrease the distance).
Ammunition: 25 rounds.
Scoring: Misses add one second to your total time.
Time Standards: 50 seconds or less for all strings combined (novice); 41 seconds (marksman); 32 seconds (sharpshooter); 25 seconds (expert); 20 seconds (master); 15 seconds (grand master).
Start Position: Gun in holster, hands at sides. Gun loaded with 5 rounds for all strings. For string 3, you also need a spare magazine of 5 rounds somewhere on your person.
Procedure: String 1) Draw and fire 5 shots to the body two-handed; String 2) Draw and fire 5 shots to the body strong-hand only; 3) Draw and fire 5 shots to the body two-handed, reload from slide lock, and fire 5 more rounds to the body; 4) Draw and fire 4 shots to the body and immediately follow up with 1 shot to the head.

Ken Hackathorn's The Test

Target: NRA B8 Repair Center.
Range: 10 yards.
Ammunition: 10 rounds (1911 variation: 7 rounds).
Scoring: Score the NRA B8 bull. 100 points possible. Shots completely off paper count for zero.
Time Standards: 10 seconds (1911 variation: 7 seconds).
Start position: Gun in holster, hands at sides.
Procedure: On the signal, draw and fire 10 rounds in 10 seconds. (1911s: 7 rounds in 7 seconds).

Ken Hackathorn's Half Test

Target: NRA B8 Repair Center.
Range: 5 yards.
Ammunition: 10 rounds.
Scoring: Score the NRA B8 bull. 100 points possible. Shots completely off paper count for zero.
Time Standards: 5 seconds.
Start Position: Gun in holster, hands at sides.
Procedure: On the signal, draw and fire 10 rounds in 5 seconds.

FBI Bullseye Course

Target: NRA B8 Repair Center.
Range: 25 yards and 15 yards.
Ammunition: 30 rounds.

Scoring: Score the NRA B8 bull. 300 points possible. Shots completely off paper count for zero.
Time Standards: Four minutes for string 1 (use all the time…); 15 seconds for string 2 (5 in 15 seconds x2); 10 seconds for string 3 (5 in 10 seconds x2).
Start Position: A ready position of your choosing.
Procedure: String 1) On the signal, fire ten rounds in four minutes at 25 yards; String 2) On the signal, fire five rounds in fifteen seconds at 15 yards. Repeat once; String 3) On the signal, fire five rounds in ten seconds at 15 yards. Repeat once.

The Humbler

Target: NRA B8 Repair Center. It's wise to use a new B8 bull for each string but not required.
Range: 25 yards.
Ammunition: 70 rounds.
Scoring: Score the NRA B8 bull. 700 points possible. Shots completely off paper count for zero.
Time Standards: See each string.
Start Position: See each string.
Procedure: String 1) Slow fire – 10 rounds, two-handed, from any start position. Ten minute time limit; String 2) Timed fire – Starting with your hands at your sides, draw and fire 5 rounds in 20 seconds. Repeat once; String 3) Rapid fire – Starting with your hands at your sides, draw and fire 5 rounds in 10 seconds. Repeat once; String 4) SHO Slow Fire – from a start position of your choosing, fire 5 rounds in 5 minutes; String 5) SHO Timed Fire – Starting with your hands at your sides, draw strong-hand only and fire five rounds in 20 seconds; String 6) SHO Rapid Fire – Starting with your hands at your sides, draw strong-hand only and fire five rounds in 10 seconds; String 7) WHO Slow Fire – Starting from the ready, fire 5 rounds in 5 minutes; String 8) Kneeling Slow Fire – From any start position, fire 5 rounds in 5 minutes; String 9) Kneeling Timed Fire – From the standing position with your hands at your sides, draw and kneel, and fire 5 rounds in 20 seconds; String 10) Prone Slow Fire – From any start position, fire five rounds from the prone in 5 minutes; String 11) Prone Timed Fire – From the standing position and with your hands at your sides, draw and move to the prone position, and then fire 5 rounds in 20 seconds.

Frank Garcia Dot Drill

Target: 6 2" dots.
Range: 7 yards, but if you cannot do this, start at 3 yards and, when you're able to clean it at 3, move to 5, repeat until you can clean and move to 7.
Ammunition: 36 rounds.
Scoring: Each shot that breaks the black line of the intended dot is a hit and counts for one point. 36 points possible. Any shots outside of par are misses. Traditionally, 36/36 is a pass and all else is a fail. But, you're probably going to fail. Keep working at it.
Time Standards: 5 second par time for each string.
Start Position: Gun in holster, hands at sides.
Procedure: Upon the start signal, draw and fire six shots to one dot. Repeat five times for a total of six strings.

iHack (indoor Hackathorn Standards)

Target: 3 2" dots.
Range: 5 yards.
Ammunition: 9 rounds.
Scoring: Each shot that breaks the black line of the intended dot is a hit. Passing is 7/9.
Time Standards: 3 second par time for each string.
Start Position: Gun in holster, hands at sides.
Procedure: String 1) Fire one (and only one) shot at each target, going from left to right; String 2) Fire one (and only one) shot at each target, going from right to left; String 3) Fire one (and only one) shot at each target, beginning with the middle target, next shooting the left target, and finishing with the right target.

AMRAP (As Many Rounds as Possible)

Target: 3x5" index card or similar; alternative is a NRA B8 Repair Center.
Range: Varies.
Ammunition: Varies.
Scoring: Each shot that breaks the edge of the card is a hit/each shot in the B8 black.
Time Standards: 3 second par time/varies.
Start Position: Gun in holster, hands at sides.
Procedure: Starting at 3 yards, on the signal draw and fire as many rounds you are able to fire at the 3x5 card while maintaining 100% hits. If you are successful at 3 yards, move to 5 yards and repeat the previous string. The ranges for this drill are 3yds, 5yds, 7yds, 10yds, 15yds, 20yds, and 25yds. Repeat this process until you either cannot make a hit on the 3x5 card in within the par time, or you have a miss. For variation, change the par time.

3x5 Walk Back

Target: 3x5" index card or similar.
Range: 3, 5, 7, 10, 15, 20, and 25 yards (or further if you want/are able to!).
Ammunition: Varies.
Scoring: Each shot that breaks the edge of the card is a hit. Your "score" is the furthest range at which you score a hit.
Time Standards: None required, but par times are encouraged as you develop.
Start Position: Gun in holster, hands at sides.
Procedure: Starting at 3 yards, draw and fire one shot to the 3x5 card. If you hit it, push back to 5. Repeat until you either hit at 25 yards or miss a card. Variation 1: set a par time of your choosing, and each hit must be made within the par time. Variation 2: with a par time, fire two shots to the 3x5 card until you either miss one shot or hit at 25 yards.

5-Yard Roundup

Target: NRA B8 Repair Center
Range 5 yards
Ammunition: 10 rounds.
Scoring: 100 points possible; the NRA B8 Repair Center.

Time Standards: 2.5 seconds for each string.
Start Position: Varies
Procedure: String 1) Draw and fire one shot from the holster. String 2) Beginning at a ready position of your choosing, fire four shots. String 3) Beginning at a ready position of your choosing, fire three shots strong-hand only. String 4) Beginning at a ready position of your choosing, fire two shots support-hand only.

The Other 5x5 Drill

Target: NRA B8 Repair Center – Black Portion Only (5.5" circle)
Range: 5 yards
Ammunition: 25 rounds.
Scoring: 250 points possible. Score the NRA B8. Shots outside the black do not count.
Start Position: Holstered (for novices, start at the low ready)
Procedure: At the signal, draw and fire five rounds at the black portion of the NRA B8 Repair Center. Repeat for a total of five strings and 25 rounds fired.

Legal Parameters: Attorney-Anon's Brief and Non-Specific Not-Legal-Advice

Disclaimer, About Me, and Introduction

I am a licensed attorney practicing in a jurisdiction somewhere in the Southeastern United States. This section does not constitute legal advice and should not be construed as such. Legal advice is something you pay for, and not something you take from anonymous people on the internet. Local laws, regulations, and prosecutorial climate vary by jurisdiction. If you desire legal advice, you should consult with a competent attorney in your jurisdiction. The purpose of this section is to identify the legal framework in which self-defense operates.

A brief summary of my relevant legal experience:

- As a law student admitted to limited practice: drafted a direct appeal in a felony attempted murder case involving an erroneous self-defense instruction; with co-counsel, argued that appeal before an appellate court; successfully obtained a new trial for the client.
- As a law student admitted to limited practice: interned full-time with a district attorney's office in a major city; I was assigned to a unit which exclusively prosecuted domestic violence offenses (stalking through first degree murder).
- Currently a prosecutor again with moderate experience. I have prosecuted various types of misdemeanor and felony cases from preliminary investigative stages through trial in a vertical prosecution role.

You can believe me or not. So, let's get started…

First, watch this video.

There is a ton of absolutely terrible information available on self defense law. By "absolutely terrible," I mean that it ranges from "incredibly misinformed" to "may result in a prison sentence if followed." The purpose of this section is to give you a framework for analysis, rather than a case-by-case "can I defend myself if X happens" checklist. The two main topics I'll cover are: 1) what is lawful self defense? and 2) how do I articulate lawful self defense after an incident? After that, I'll give a brief summation of how most "Stand Your Ground" and "Castle Doctrine" laws factor into your claim of self defense (or rather, how they don't), and some thoughts on dealing with the police.

1. What is Lawful Self Defense?

Self defense is what is called a **justification defense.** The definition of "justification" is:

> A sufficient or acceptable excuse or explanation made in court for an act that is otherwise unlawful; the showing of an adequate reason, in court, why a defendant committed the offense for which he or she is accused that would serve to relieve the defendant of liability.

What this means: in order to claim self defense, you must *admit to committing a crime.* This admission may (will likely) come during the course of the investigation, after consultation with an attorney. In the worst case scenario, it will be argued in a criminal trial.

Self defense is a traditional common law defense, meaning that it was created by the courts rather than the legislature. Historically it has been modified by appellate court decisions, and those remain the best source of law for detailed study of the matter. Most states now codify common law self-defense. They typically require the following prerequisites:

- You must not be engaged in unlawful activity
- You must be in a place where you have a legal right to be

What this means in practice: **you cannot be committing a crime** when the circumstances arise which force you to defend yourself. In other words, the guy robbing the gas station cannot claim self defense against the clerk who shoots at him. You must also be in a place where you have a legal right to be. In plain English, this means that you cannot be trespassing. In general, if you are **in a public place** you are considered to have a right to be there so long as you are not committing a crime by being there (an example of this can be if your state's "no carry on this premises" signs carry a criminal penalty for a violation).

In order to lawfully use self-defense, you must have a:

1. **Reasonable belief** that…
2. There is an **imminent danger** of…
3. **Death** or **serious bodily injury**

These elements make up what is referred to as "deadly force." Shooting somebody is considered to be deadly force, and thus **you may only use it to meet deadly force used against you.** Once these elements are met, **the law presumes that you are justified in defending yourself or (with some caveats) a third party.** The next section is devoted entirely to explaining these elements, but there are two things that you need to understand before we get there. The first is *how* the claim will be evaluated, and the second is *the process* of evaluating the claim.

Most states codify what is commonly known as the "**objective/subjective reasonableness test**," and this is the test police and the court system will use to evaluate your claim. In plain English, this test requires that you must satisfy both of the following elements:

1. You must genuinely believe that you are in imminent fear of death or great bodily harm; and
2. That belief must be reasonable in light of the totality of facts and circumstances of the situation

Your claim of belief of imminent death or great bodily harm cannot be pretextual. It must be genuine. Additionally, based on what actually happened, your belief must be credible. In other words, you shouldn't shoot the kid who was holding a Nerf gun. The presence of a per-se weapon (a knife, gun, bat, etc.) combined with aggressive behavior by the assailant

generally satisfies this. The problem of the "unarmed" assailant is what gets most people in trouble. Again, I will discuss the framework how to evaluate the assailant's actions in the following section. However, one thing that is noticeably absent from the above is this: a requirement that you be correct in your judgment of the situation. **Self defense does not require that you be right, but only that you be reasonable.**

The process of evaluating the self-defense claim is through a **criminal investigation,** which may lead to a criminal prosecution**.** A justifiable shooting is only that AFTER it has been reviewed. Until it's reviewed by:

- The responding officer
- Crime scene investigators
- The investigators handling the potential major felony
- The investigators again reviewing the crime scene report, witness statements, checking your Facebook page for the statements of how you were going stir up shit, etc. …
- Their superiors
- The prosecutor assigned to your case
- (Potentially, and in the worst case) A judge and, later, a jury

It's a homicide or aggravated assault under investigation or, in the worst case, a homicide or aggravated assault prosecution.

Note the transition I made from "investigation" to "prosecution." The distinction is important because once you cross the bridge from an investigation to a prosecution your odds of losing **increase significantly.** Police investigators and their friends at the District Attorney's Office serve as gatekeepers to the criminal justice system. They decide whether or not your case is deserving of prosecution. When the bridge from investigation to prosecution is crossed, it means that the police and the district attorney have reviewed your case and determined: 1) there exists probable cause to support a homicide/assault prosecution, and 2) **your self defense justification is not sufficient to avoid conviction**. In other words, for whatever reason you have failed to convince the authorities of your side of the story and your fate is now in the hands of a judge and twelve people with driver's licenses.

At this point, you are now "in the system." You will be arrested and formally charged with a crime. If you have not already gotten a lawyer by this point you will need one now. And if you already had a lawyer with you, your costs just skyrocketed – litigating a criminal case is significantly more expensive than representing you during a police interrogation. **Locally, homicides cost anywhere from $50-100,000** as a **minimum** for doing a trial from any defense attorney I'd trust to do the job, and it only goes up from there once you start factoring in the expert witnesses you may want (need) to help you tell your story. And that's if you win. Losing entails all of the costs above plus a prison sentence. Any post-conviction appeal will have you fighting on even more difficult ground, where the presumption of "innocent until proven guilty" is replaced by a presumption that the jury's verdict is correct. In sum, this is an extremely high-stakes game that **you do not want to play**.

In order to avoid ending up as the next George Zimmerman (who "won," and was left with a six figure legal tab, major media attention, protests, stress-induced mental issues, and a long series of death threats made against him) or Byron David Smith (who made a series of incredibly stupid, unreasonable, and illegal decisions and is now spending the rest of his life in prison because he was convicted of two counts of first degree murder), you need to know how to articulate to investigators that you were acting in lawful self defense. Remember that they are the gatekeepers to the criminal justice system: if you can convince them, you don't have to go to trial.

To recap:

- Self defense is a justification defense which requires you admit to committing a crime in order to claim it (so get it right).
- Claiming self defense requires that you have a reasonable fear of imminent death or serious bodily harm for yourself or a third party.
- Your claim of self defense must arise from an honest belief or fear, and that fear must be credible.
- Self defense only requires that you be reasonable in your judgment and actions, rather than correct (but still try to get it right – it makes life much easier).
- Your self defense claim is not valid until it has been reviewed and judged to be so
- Criminal trials are risky and expensive, so avoid becoming a defendant.

2) How a Self Defense Claim is Articulated

The previous section is useless to you if you cannot explain to investigators exactly *what* gave rise to your reasonable fear of imminent death or great bodily harm. There is not a checklist of things that must happen before you can lawfully act in self defense. Instead, the claim is evaluated using three different factors: ability, opportunity, and intent/jeopardy, and all three factors must be present in order for you to defend yourself. Each factor will be discussed in turn.

A) Ability

Ability simply means that somebody possesses the capability to kill or seriously injure you. Often, this takes the form of a *per se* weapon: a knife, a gun, a bludgeon, or a bat. Even without an obvious weapon, somebody can still satisfy this requirement: tools, bottles, bricks, and other common items can qualify as weapons when used as such. Specific to weapons, **there is no requirement for you to wait for it to be used against you**. An attempt to access the weapon – or what you reasonably believe to be a weapon, given the circumstances – such as with a quick movement to the waistband can satisfy the ability requirement.

However, there is **no requirement that a weapon be present**. You can lawfully defend yourself against an "unarmed" person when they are acting in a manner which may kill or cripple you. Common examples of this: two or more unarmed assailants assaulting you, one very large assailant assaulting a smaller victim, the victim being crippled or otherwise

disabled throughout the course of the assault, choking, or the victim being forced to the ground and kicked or punched in the head.

You cannot shoot somebody because you are losing a fight. You can, however, shoot somebody who is assaulting you in a manner which will likely kill or seriously injure you. A situation where the victim is on the ground is particularly dangerous because, unlike when you're standing, you cannot roll with the punch or kick when on the ground. Your body will be slammed into whatever (usually hard) surface is behind it. That's a recipe for broken bones, cracked skulls, concussions, and possibly death.

Regardless of whether or not the assailant has a weapon, the key is this: **the force used or threatened against you must have the capability to and be reasonably likely to cause or serious injury.**

B) Opportunity

Opportunity means that the circumstances are such that somebody is able to use their ability to cause death/great bodily harm against you. Even if somebody has the ability to harm you, it means nothing if they cannot bring it into play. The easiest way to explain this is through the use of examples.

Example 1: A has a knife. A is 50 yards away from B. Unless A moves closer to B, A has no opportunity to stab B.
Example 2: A has a knife. A is 3 yards away from B. A has the opportunity to stab B.
Example 3: A has a gun. A is 25 yards away from B. A has the opportunity to shoot B.
Example 4: A has a gun. A is a twenty-minute drive away and is threatening B via cell phone. A currently has no opportunity to shoot B.
Example 5: A is 6'5 and possesses significantly more upper body strength than B, who is 5'2. A is within five feet of B. A has the opportunity to kill or seriously injure B.

C) Intent/Jeopardy

Different people call this factor different things. The meaning is the same: the assailant has displayed the willingness to use deadly force against you, to the point that you reasonably believe you are now in serious danger OR the assailant is actively using deadly force against you. Intent is manifested in words and actions. Pointing a weapon at you would be an example of intent manifested in action, just as – obviously – using it would be. Using threatening language would be an example of intent manifesting itself in words. How intent manifests itself will vary based on the context. However, **you must be able to articulate precisely what it was about the assailant's actions that made you believe he or she would use deadly force against you.** The assailant's display of Ability and Opportunity is not sufficient without displayed Intent/Jeopardy.

3) The Effects (or non-Effects) of "Stand Your Ground" and the Castle Doctrine

Much has been made in recent years over the Stand Your Ground laws on the books in 30 states. In general, Stand Your Ground means that you have no requirement to retreat or

attempt to retreat prior to using deadly force in public against somebody who is using deadly force against you. The Castle Doctrine says the same thing, but it is applied in the home and in your car. The main criticism against these laws is that they supposedly encourage people to "shoot first, ask questions later." This isn't really the case, and it hasn't borne itself out in studies over the past twenty years. There is one point I would like to make, however, and it's that the lack of a duty to retreat is effectively meaningless in your use of force decision. Here's why:

First, while some say that we should return to the traditional rule that a private citizen has a duty to retreat before using deadly force in self defense, those same people forget the other part of the duty to retreat: you only have such a duty if retreat can be accomplished with complete safety to yourself and those you are responsible for (kids). The duty to retreat never required you turn your back on a knife or try to outrun a bullet. It was only required if retreat could be accomplished with **complete safety**.

Second, knowing the above: can you imagine a situation where you are fully justified in shooting somebody, but have the ability to retreat with complete safety to yourself , and yet you still decide to shoot the assailant? Neither can I, and neither can most people. Because of this, your use of force calculus **does not change**. If somebody has the ability, opportunity, and intent to visit deadly harm upon you, you may lawfully use deadly force in response. If you can leave with complete safety, you should do so – and indeed, most people will.

What Stand Your Ground did was remove the after-the-fact litigation of the question of whether a completely safe avenue existed for retreat, primarily because it often led to seriously unjust results (prosecutors arguing highly unreasonable "safe" avenues for retreat).

Perhaps the most important feature of Stand Your Ground is civil immunity. If you use force lawfully (i.e. you have no criminal liability for defending yourself), you are immune from a civil wrongful death or battery suit. The only exception to this is if you accidently or negligently hit an innocent third party (bystander) against whom you had no justification to use force. In practice, if that happened you would already be in jail. This immunity is particularly important because, prior to the enactment of Stand Your Ground, it was extremely common for the assailant's family to sue the person who defended themselves for wrongful death – which was expensive and, more importantly, unjust. If you are sued, you may raise the defense of immunity pre-trial. If you are successful the lawsuit will be dismissed and you will generally be reimbursed for loss of income, court costs, legal fees, and litigation costs.

4) Dealing With the Police

My thoughts are summarized as follows:

- Remain on scene if safe to do so. People move, crowds form, and witnesses loiter. Sometimes they do nice things like kick cartridge cases and dropped weapons down storm drains, and other times witnesses leave the scene.

- Be the first person to call 911 and/or file a complaint. Starting the investigative process from the side labeled "victim" is a good thing.
- At the scene, give a **very brief** statement of "what happened" ("That man tried to rob me. He had a gun and threatened me with it. His gun is right there. I defended myself."). You should point out any physical details (evidence) which may be present on the scene, such as a dropped weapon, torn clothing, or other evidence of an assault as well as any witnesses. After that, **stop talking.** Be polite, and make it clear that you will cooperate fully after consulting with an attorney, but otherwise **stop talking**. You need to simultaneously act like the victim while not divulging information which may later be interpreted as conflicting.
- If you are taken to a precinct for interview, make a statement **only by and through counsel of an attorney**. Your memory is simply not where it should be immediately after a highly stressful event, and this can cause trouble later (appearance of changing your story).
- **You are legally within your rights to stop talking to the police at any time (or not talk at all).**

Additional Resources

YouTube Channels

Gomez Training International (no longer updated – Gomez died unexpectedly May 2011)
Handgun Combatives (Dave Spaulding)
Lucky Gunner Ammo (high production value tutorials)
Primary and Secondary, LLC (modcasts + Bill Blowers' instructional videos)
John Lovell
Pat McNamara (get fit)
Ernest Langdon (especially useful if you're shooting a double-action pistol)

Blogs and Websites

The Tactical Professor/Claude Werner (fmr Chief Instructor at the Rogers Shooting School)
Pistol-Training.com/Todd Green (no longer updated – Green died of cancer March 2016)
Active Response Training/Greg Elifritz (instructor at Tactical Defense Institute)
Primary and Secondary, LLC (website + forum companion to the YouTube channel)
The Rangemaster Newsletter (Tom Givens + Guest Authors)

Sources of Drills

Pistol-Forum's Drills of the Week section
Pistol-Training.com's *Drills* section
A Compilation of Pistol Drills

Dry Fire

The Tactical Professor/Claude Werner (Listed again because he's pretty much the king of all dry fire)
1,000 Days of Dry Fire (Claude Werner's dry fire challenge Facebook group)
Ben Stoeger's 15-Minute Dry Fire Program
Ben Stoeger's Dry Fire Book
Dry Fire Training Cards
Your imagination (seriously)

2018 Bonus: Shotguns for Defensive Use

Shotguns are really cool because when you go to a shotgun course and they give you a safety briefing before class, the instructors will talk about amputations (or worse) for whoever gets hit in addition to the usual "you call 911, you throw him in the back of that truck and I'll drive to meet the ambulance . . ." They are arguably the most destructive and ballistically effective firearms in common private citizen use, and they absolutely dominate pistol-distance fights – which is why they've been a mainstay of home defense for over a century. Unfortunately, modern trends have shifted away from the shotgun, leading to unfamiliarity with and, frankly, ignorance of their use and capabilities. This section will hopefully set a would-be shotgun buyer on the right path.

Shotgun Buyer's Guide

The defensive shotgun is typically one of two variations: a semi-automatic tube-fed design or a pump-action tube-fed design. This guide will not address other designs though some of them can be viable.

Pump-Action Shotguns

Historically, the pump-action shotgun was "all you need" for home defense. It is easy to understand its operation: indeed, virtually anybody who has seen a movie with gunplay involved "gets it." The reality is their operation is a bit more difficult. Here's an on-screen example: at 0:15, Benicio Del Torro's character experiences a stoppage. That stoppage is entirely user-induced: he short-stroked the weapon and did not vigorously eject the spent shell. Del Torro clears the weapon and continues to fight (He also clears the weapon on-screen, which is unusual for an actor. The stoppage was unscripted, and Del Torro's subsequent actions reflect his instruction from Scott Reitz).

Pump-action shotguns are also fumble-prone to load and unload without appropriate training/experience and practice, particularly under stress. Even when everything is done right, they are very manipulation-intensive weapons. This video of Rolling Thunder, a common shotgun class drill, exemplifies that.

Models you should consider are the Mossberg 500/590 or the Remington 870. Note that Remington has suffered from poor quality control and cost-cutting measures since about 2008. While Mossbergs have had issues of their own, they haven't been as widespread and consistent as those affecting Remington. In particular, finishes are not particularly durable on the Express line, actions will generally be rougher, machining marks will be visible on the inside of the receiver, chambers may require polishing, and certain parts will not be up to par from the factory: the extractor, the carrier dog spring, the magazine spring, and the follower should all be replaced. The action may or may not require breaking in and the chamber may require polishing. Having said that, with those replacements and some minor polishing/break-in, an Express model is a perfectly functional weapon. All in, it's about a $50 investment on top of the price of the gun.

At current prices, there is absolutely no reason *not* to buy a police trade-in Remington 870P from the Good Old Days over a new Express. In fact, that option will almost always be cheaper than a new Express, and you will receive a superior quality weapon. You can also look for a used Wingmaster from the pre-2008 era; however, unless the gun comes with a 20" rifle sight deer barrel or the previous owner added an 18" barrel, it will likely come with a longer bird barrel. This will necessitate either a replacement barrel or cutting down the current vent rib barrel and installing a new bead.

If buying a used shotgun, regardless of the manufacturer, you should replace the magazine spring with a new Wolff unit and the follower with a quality aftermarket model. My preference is for Vang Comp, but there are plenty of acceptable options. Factory followers are almost always garbage regardless of manufacturer.

Setting aside the known quality issues with Remington, the differences between a Mossberg and a Remington are largely personal preference. I prefer Remington. Others prefer Mossberg. Pick one.

Other brands, such as the Winchester 1300 series or the Ithaca 37, can certainly be viable. However, you're giving up the aftermarket advantages of the two most widely-produced shotguns in the world. As with handguns, it's easier to find stuff for common shotguns – and there's a lot more of it to find.

Semi-Automatic Shotguns

Semi-autos have two main advantages over pump-actions: first, they usually recoil a bit less, and second they cut down on the ability of the user to interject failures into the shooting process. However, they come with problems of their own – while pump-actions are reliable with a broad spectrum of ammunition, semi-autos may or may not function with the low-recoil tactical buckshot that's currently state of the art. Note that several loads in this video failed to cycle in both a Benelli inertia action and a Beretta BLINK action – both of which are known to be very reliable.

Though semi-autos cut down on the required manipulation during the shooting process, they share the same pitfalls of pump-actions when it comes to other manipulations. Reloading – both emergency and proactively – is still fumble-prone, and in some cases more complicated than it is with a pump-action. A unique requirement of a semi-auto is an absolute requirement for a solid mount in order for the gun to have something to recoil against.

For brands and models, if looking at a semi-auto for defensive use, use the following guideline: if the manufacturer's name doesn't start with "B," end in a vowel, and isn't Italian, it's wrong. Benelli and Beretta are the state of the art options. For current production guns, you should be looking at a Benelli M2 or M4 variant. For Beretta, look at the 1301 Tactical or Competition variants.

Optimizing the Shotgun for Defensive Use

Historically, shotguns have been hunting weapons and their features were biased towards those needs. Even modern defensive models often retain features stemming from that hunting bias.

Barrel

Your barrel should be no more than 22" and preferably closer to 18" if using a non-NFA shotgun. A 14" barrel would be ideal for most users; however, not everybody wishes to go through the NFA process.

It should have a fixed constriction. There is no need to spend the money on a barrel threaded for screw-in chokes for a home defense shotgun. Look for a fixed cylinder bore or improved cylinder bore. A cylinder bore shotgun will produce a pattern approximately the size of a fist at 7 yards using standard commercial buckshot, which is more than sufficient for home defense use. At ranges beyond 10 yards, the pattern will open up significantly; you may or may not be able to reliably keep all pellets on target at 25 yards with such a barrel. However, for home defense, those ranges are irrelevant for most people.

A previous practice was to use a Vang Comp modified barrel to produce tight patterns. This is an expensive investment, totaling several hundred dollars on top of the cost of the barrel itself. The benefit provided is that a Vang Comp barrel will allow your shotgun to fire most types of buckshot in a relatively tight pattern – generally about 6-10" at 25 yards. However, the same thing can be accomplished with modern defensive ammunition from Federal or Hornady, both of whom license production of the FliteControl wad.

Ported barrels increase blast significantly. It's not very fun to be on a line next to one; walls only serve to magnify its effects. Recoil can easily be managed with technique and load selection.

Your barrel will determine your sighting system. While a more in-depth discussion of sights is provided in the following subsection, know that for barrels, your options fall into: 1) plain bead; 2) bead on a pedestal; 3) rifle-type; 4) vent rib; and 5) ghost-ring front sight. Your choice of barrel can limit your options for sights, so you should decide which sights you want when buying one.

Sight Selection

I'm just going to steal somebody else's work here, because while I agree almost everything said, he's already done the leg work:

People get 9 kinds of fucked up about shotguns due to persistent myths. The shotgun as typically used by hunters is shooting at a bird at 15-40 yards with a cloud of lead 5-10x times the size of the bird at 30 yards. The typical defensive use of a shotgun happens at closer range with a completely different munition.

The bead sight was designed for wing shooting...and that with a 24"-30" barrel on a gun with a stock that

has a length of pull of 14".

That same sight on an 18" or shorter barrel with a stock that has a 11"-13" length of pull is a very different thing altogether. This is why when the old school users of the shotgun as a defensive weapon fired it, they talked about a "belly button" hold...because the bead sights of the day sat so low that when they were visible in the sight picture on a shorter barreled gun the weapon was actually angled up significantly. You aimed at the belly button to hit dude in the chest.

The pedestal bead on the Remington 870 barrels can work...IF your ammo shoots to the point of aim of the bead (a lot simply won't) and IF you have enough experience mounting the shotgun to get a rock solid aiming reference in a hurry. This is not automatic. In the old days everybody grew up shooting shotguns...those days are no more. So you cannot count on people getting a rock solid reliable mount because they're doing something they've done since they were 10.

Knowing what a proper bead-sighted sight picture looks like is difficult to do in a hurry unless you have significant experience doing that...and most people do not have that experience.

If you want to see that in action, go to a shotgun class where they do some patterning. In my Home Defense Shotgun course I had the class pattern their guns at 15 yards. On top of loads that performed poorly, several of the students struggled to get a correct aiming reference under ideal lighting conditions in slow-fire. Some of the guns patterned off center. One fellow who showed up with a 14" 870 with a 12" LOP stock shot so high his patterns were barely on target.

You can do quality work with a bead IF your gun is set up right and IF you have considerable experience successfully using the bead. Even then, it's somewhat difficult if I take you out of a comfortable shooting position and make you use the shotgun the way Ed Mireles had to use his 12 gauge in the Miami Firefight.

For what we are trying to do, for the munitions we are using for defensive use of the shotgun, ***the bead is what I would consider an expert level sight****...as in you must be pretty damn handy with a shotgun to intelligently direct a decently patterning buckshot load or a slug into a target with one at any realistic defensive distance.*

I greatly prefer rifle-style sights on a defensive shotgun. I prefer them because having a visible rear reference takes the guess work out of the shot. I can get a shit mount because of an awkward shooting position, because it's sleeting and I'm wearing enough insulation to make me look like the Michelin Man, or because I just got woke up by my door getting smashed in and I fuck up the mount in all the excitement...and I can still get a quick read on how the gun is oriented, correct it, and then make the shot I need to make.

I can also adjust rifle style sights to match the point of impact of the load that I'm using so I don't have to try and remember any Kentucky windage when there's a dude trying to kill me. Remember that at typical defensive distances even shitty buckshot is going to be in a relatively tight pattern that you can miss with EASILY. Rifle style sights are the best bet for delivering the defensive payloads we are using reliably.

...which is why, when you think about it, shotguns dedicated to deer hunting typically have rifle style sights. Because putting a deer down humanely is fundamentally a very similar process to what we're trying to do in self defense with the shotgun.

The XS sights for the Remington 870 rifle sights work extremely well for our purposes. Think about it:

Express sights were mounted on big bore long guns to be used on dangerous game at relatively close range. That's pretty much exactly what we are trying to do with shotguns. At close range they provide a quick sight reference that you can use to reliably make head shots with ease out to 15 yards if your buckshot patterns well enough to hold that size of a pattern. Same with slugs.

The defensive shotgun is the one place where the XS sights make any sense.

Ghost rings also work well. Depends on your preference. My go-to 870's have Remington rifle-style sights with either XS sights or the Tru-Glo TFX pro sights on them:

https://www.truglo.com/firearms-tact...366B7DDEB2FF93

Whatever 870 rifle style sight you pick, use some blue loc-tite and put some witness marks on the front and rear with a silver sharpie so you can tell if anything comes loose.

My 1301's have the factory ghost rings and they're fine.

Red dots work on shotguns too, but most mounts keep them too high. The Aridus mounts are the best of the optic mount options because it places the dot of the optic directly in the center of your focus when you mount the gun.

A couple of follow-up points: vent rib barrels increase your rear reference somewhat over bead sights and additionally present fewer POI issues at close range on short barrel/short stock shotguns. Bead-on-pedestal sights mimic the height of a vent rib and are greatly preferred over bead-on-barrel sights. An XS epoxy-on Big Dot can also correct POI issues posed by bead-on-barrel sights – and provide a superior sight picture up close.

XS Express sights are not my choice for handguns or rifles. However for rapidly launching buckshot up close, I think the only thing comparable is a red dot – and in my experience the dot is actually a bit slower. In order of preference for sights, I go: 1) XS Express setup; 2) Rifle sights with wide pistol-type sights (i.e. not the thin factory Remington style); 3) Ghost rings; 4) Vent rib with bead (preferably XS); 5) Bead on pedestal (preferably XS). As you can see, I strongly favor having some sort of rear reference. Buckshot at close range patterns tightly. I want rapid target acquisition, but also want accuracy. Having a rear reference of some sort greatly helps you achieve both of those things.

My choice for sights is a factory Remington barrel with XS rifle sights pre-installed.

Stocks

Pistol grip-only shotguns rank only slightly above the Taurus Judge in defensive utility and should not be considered for serious defensive use. The current "firearms" made with 14" barrels and Shockwave Raptor grips are a slightly better option if you *must* have one, only because that grip manages recoil better than a true pistol grip will, but frankly much better results can be achieved with a stocked shotgun in almost every scenario – and especially for static home defense.

With that out of the way, understand that shotgun stocks are traditionally made for sporting use. Their length of pull facilitates shooting clays or other aerial targets. For most everybody, however, that 14+" length of pull does *not* facilitate recoil management when modern squared-off shooting techniques are used. For most people, a 14" length of pull necessitates a bladed stance – particularly when a pump-action shotgun is used.

For use with modern techniques, an 11-13" length of pull is more beneficial. Most companies make a youth stock of some sort, and the length of pull on those is roughly 12.5-13". Hogue also makes an aftermarket 12" length of pull stock for both Mossberg and Remington shotguns. The best shotgun stock available, in my opinion, is the Magpul SGA stock for reasons I will explain below. The SGA can be adjusted in half-inch increments to fine-tune length of pull, but most people will find the stock with no spacers to be ideal. It's available for Mossberg and Remington shotguns, and the Mossberg model can be used on the Benelli 1301 using an Airdus Industries adapter. Mesa Tactical makes the Urbino stock for several makes of pump-action and semi-auto shotguns if you prefer a pistol-grip stock. Wooden stocks can obviously be trimmed to an ideal length of pull for the individual user. Cutting a stock and fitting a grind-to-fit recoil pad is a basic skill for any gunsmith should you not know how to properly do these things yourself. Polymer stocks can be cut down as well, of course, but it does require more work to do properly. The Beretta 1301 is one of the few factory shotguns which has a stock suitable for defensive use right out of the box (though if I end up buying one, I'll likely still go the Airdus/Magpul SGA route).

Pistol grip stocks shotguns can be used effectively and are frequently available with appropriate length of pull. They're particularly good if you need to handle the gun one-handed at times. The downside to them is that they transfer much of the recoil to the web of your hand as the gun recoils. The Magpul SGA stock provides all of these benefits while maintaining a lower profile (no protruding pistol grip) and without the downside of transferring the recoil to the web of your hand, which is why I believe it's the best available.

Weapon-Mounted Lights

Shotgun WMLs can be broken down into three basic categories: 1) integrated lights (Surefire forends), where the light, switch, and forend are all one integrated unit; 2) barrel/magazine tube mounted lights; and 3) forend-mounted lights (rail on forend + WML).

Semi-automatics largely have it easy here because the forend is stationary. So long as there is a capability to mount a light somewhere on the forend, pick a light of your choosing and go with it. If for whatever reason there isn't (factory Beretta 1301 – at least until the aftermarket catches up), attach it to the magazine tube and run a tape switch to the forend. Surefire forends are an option for the Benelli M1/M2/M3 family (assuming you can find a used example); however, in my experience with the inertia guns, hanging additional weight on them has a direct and immediately effect on reliability. My Benelli

M1 demanded perfect technique and full-power buckshot when I mounted a Surefire and a sidesaddle; running it in the factory configuration allowed for a little more leeway in load selection and less-than-perfect technique. Test your stuff.

Pump-actions are where it gets a little harder. Each option has its weaknesses. While they're ergonomically second-to-none, the Surefire units are heavy. The barrel/magazine mounted lights require a choice between a) no light while working the action or b) a clicky light (which may inadvertendly activate under recoil). The forend-mounted lights typically beat up your hand under recoil and generally don't have the most ergonomic placement.

For Surefires, the newest models are supposedly the best out there. I'm perfectly content with my second generation model as it fills out my hand well. Some people have a preference for the first generation model. If buying a used older model, consider buying a LM-2 or Malkoff drop-in head to convert the unit to LED if that hasn't been done already.

Choices for magazine-tube mounts include: Elzetta, the "Tactical Shotgun Mount" sold by Brownell's, and a wide variety of options from GG&G. These mounts generally allow you to mount a 1" diameter handheld light, such as a Surefire Fury variant.

Mounting the light on the forend itself will require a forend with some sort of mounting solution. This FAB Defense model is actually quite good in that role and with the bottom rail cover installed it closely mimics the factory Remington police forend. This MAKO model for the Mossberg family is quite similar (and probably made by the same people who make the FAB Defense 870 model). You can also use the Magpul MOE furniture and attach a rail segment. From here, add the light mount of your choice and install your light.

When adding a light, it *must* be shock-proof. You want a true weapon light here, or one that's at least rated to go on firearms – shotguns generate a lot more recoil than an AR-15. Higher-end Surefires and Streamlights generally suffice here. Many people also use the Inforce WML with some success. Know that clicky tailcaps may sometimes activate themselves under recoil. Loctite all mounting screws.

Small Parts

For reasons unknown, shotgun manufacturers typically skimp on the follower. Remington and Mossberg both use a flimsy plastic model by default. Luckily, superior options are a cheap investment: Vang Comp, Brownell's, GG&G, and Scattergun Technologies all produce good options. If you buy a magazine extension, it will often come with a follower from that company.

Springs are another cheap piece-of-mind investment. Wolff Gunsprings is the go-to company here. I typically use their extended tube spring regardless of whether I use an

extension. Note that factory Remington 870Ps with 4-shot tubes come with the 6-shot spring for the same reason: vigorous ejection of the shell from the mag to the carrier.

Safeties are a nice ergonomic addition but not strictly necessary for the Remington 870. As I do not use a safety on my shotguns, my preference is for the Vang Comp unit – simply because it's impossible for me to touch the trigger without deactivating the safety, which covers me if I inadvertently activate it. Other quality options for the 870 include Scattergun Technologies and S&J Hardware. If using a Mossberg, I would definitely replace the plastic unit with a metal one from Vang Comp.

If you bought an 870 Express model, replace the carrier dog spring with this part (factory-installed on all 870Ps and 11-87s). Its purpose is to ensure reliable and vigorous movement of the shell lifter. Wolff extra-power hammer and firing pin springs aren't a bad idea either to meet/exceed 870P spec, but they're nowhere near as necessary as the carrier dog spring.

Adding Capacity

Shotguns are "low capacity" weapons in that they typically only hold four to seven shots in their magazines, compared to the 30-round magazine common to various intermediate-caliber semi-automatic rifles. However, know that shotgun shootings tend to be relatively low round-count affairs due largely to their ballistic effectiveness. Furthermore, compare the one to two hits required from a load of 00 buckshot to the modern carbine doctrine of shooting repeatedly until the target falls. When you're trained to put five to seven rounds (or more) in every target, the amount of "servings" that AR-15 has on board ends up being about the same as a pump-action shotgun.

Nevertheless, people freak out about shotguns being "low capacity," so they buy extensions.

Your serious options here are Vang Comp and Scattergun Technologies for durability purposes, followed by Nordic Components. Nordics are available for a wider variety of shotguns but, while they provide modular capacity, also require several pieces to assemble. The Vang Comp and Scattergun Technologies units are all single-piece extensions, leaving fewer parts to work loose under recoil. The Nordic units will require a barrel clamp for stability if two or more rounds are added; neither the Vang Comp nor the Scattergun Technologies units provide this. Note that on a Beretta 1301, simply removing the magazine spring retainer will allow for an extra round to be loaded into the tube without compromising function.

I personally prefer a 5-shot tube on an 18" barrel gun. For Mossbergs that means no extension, and for Remingtons it means a +1 extension. In my opinion this allows for a bit better balance.

Note that some trainers advocate leaving a shotgun magazine tube downloaded by one round, as they claim the springs will set and weaken with time. I'm not sure where I fall

on that as I've heard all the arguments over downloading pistol mags before and I'm aware of what the scientific answer is. Nevertheless, some very experienced shotgunners advocate this practice. Additionally, for those concerned with doing a slug-select, leaving that extra space for a slug is probably the easiest way to go about it with a pump-action.

Remember that any fighting you do with a shotgun is likely to be done with only the ammunition in and on the gun. While having to reload a shotgun is incredibly unlikely, some people prefer to keep ammunition with the gun. The best way to do this for ease of reloading (but not balance) is to use a side saddle of some sort. Velcro side saddles are currently in vogue and come with some significant pros. Remember to use industrial strength 3M Velcro for the receiver and do proper prep work. Good shotgun cards can be found from Esstac, 3-Gun Gear, and SOE Gear. My preferred solution is a Vang Comp DSAC unit, which is an aluminum plate with Velcro on it that installs like a permanent side saddle. In my opinion it's a more durable solution than relying on adhesive backing. For fixed saddles, TacStar and Mesa Tactical are the best available. Aridus Industries makes an aluminum quick-detach carrier which performs a similar role to the Velcro models in a more elegant fashion. Finally, don't forget buttstock shell carriers – which offer better balance at the expense of slower reloads. With any carrier, my preference is to not tempt gravity and recoil and carry my rounds brass-up.

Slings

Slings are largely unnecessary for a home defense shotgun. You can put one on there if you want, but realize that it may pose a snag hazard. Single-point slings can be very viable here since you won't be doing a lot of movement with the weapon slung. However, modern two-point adjustables also work well. I really like the Blue Force Gear single-point sling, though I only use it for classes and range work.

Ammunition

Your ammunition should be buckshot for indoor use. Birdshot is for birds. Slugs are effective but unnecessary and pose a significantly greater downrange hazard if you miss.

Some, myself included, favor tight-patterning buckshot exemplified by the Federal FliteControl line. Others, including trainer Steve Fisher, favor a slightly wider – yet predictable – pattern for home defense, with a view towards increasing hit probability on moving targets. In my experience, most non-FliteControl buckshot will pattern into a fist- or hand-sized group at 7 yards. FliteControl type buckshot tends to pattern into a 2" diameter circle at that range.

In 00 buckshot, 8 pellet loads typically pattern better than 9 pellet loads – it has to do with the way the shot column is distributed as it flies down the barrel, but slightly wider patterns and flyers typically result. This holds true even for FliteControl loadings – the 9-pellet 00 buckshot loading does pattern wider than the 8-pellet variant, and even with the FliteControl wad often produces a flyer or two. Note that a tight entry pattern does not

necessarily mean the pellets stay together once inside the body; gel tests demonstrate buckshot's tendency to spread once striking soft tissue, leading to an increased area of permanent crush cavity.

Ballistics expert Dr. Gary Roberts has written in favor of #1 buckshot as both providing ideal terminal performance and also as being the minimum buckshot size for law enforcement use. However, #4 buckshot has a long track record of successful use for both law enforcement and home defense roles. While it may not provide ideal performance in a law enforcement role, I am relatively confident in the effectiveness of 24+ .22 caliber pellets fired at close range on an unobstructed target. I do not, however, believe that #4 buckshot provides less of a downrange hazard to matter – and furthermore, in my experience it patterns a bit worse than larger buckshot. As more pellets are in the air, that's more opportunities for a flyer to hit something I don't want shot. While I would personally choose a 00 or #1 buckshot load over #4 buckshot if available, I would not feel undergunned with a shotgun loaded with #4 buckshot.

I personally see no need to bump up to 000 buckshot. 00, #1, and #4 all get the job done extremely well, and I don't see the larger shot size as providing a significantly greater terminal benefit.

Known good loads include the Federal FliteControl offerings in 8- and 9-pellet plated 00 buckshot and 15-pellet plated #1 buckshot, the Hornady TAP loadings in 8- and 9-pellet lead 00 buckshot, and the Hornady Critical Defense 8- and 9-pellet 00 buckshot. Each of these loads uses a licensed version of the FliteControl wad and all offer similar performance. Each manufacturer offers both low-recoil and full-power variants. Low-recoil loads are preferable in pump actions and, if your gun runs them, semi-automatics as well – the full power velocity is unnecessary at close range indoors and provides no significant terminal benefit, and the full velocity can hinder your ability to make follow-up shots (and your willingness to practice repeatedly with the buckshot). Modern low-recoil buckshot presents similar recoil to commercial target loads, thus allowing for similar-feeling rounds to be fired in practice. If a non-FliteControl load is desired, my preference is the Remington 8-pellet law enforcement low recoil load which, in my guns, patterns at about 4" at 7 yards. Other low-recoil 8-pellet loads would obviously suffice. If none of that was available, I would not feel undergunned with the various commercial 00 buckshot loads readily available at box stores and gun shops. I would choose a major domestic manufacturer, fire enough to know how the buckshot patterns from my gun and ensure reliable ignition, and call it good – again, in my experience, most commercial buckshot patterns to within a hand-sized group at 7 yards.

Modern non-Foster penetrating slugs, exemplified by Brenneke and Federal Truball Deep Penetrator types, are for penetration of difficult barriers. They are very effective against vehicles and other common barriers encountered in the United States. Likewise, they are effective against dangerous game. A Foster slug – which is often the inexpensive slug you'll find from Remington, Winchester, and Federal in most stores – is a solid lead slug which tends to break apart in tissue, providing good penetration (though not to the extent of the penetrator-type slugs discussed above) and soft tissue damage; they are also less

likely to exit the body, and if they do, much of their momentum will be taken away. While they are effective for use against humans, they are best relegated to hunting use rather than use in a home defense role. Certain slugs, such as Federal Hydrashok, are basically a very large hollowpoint bullet. These too can be effective against tissue, but carry significant downrange hazards if you miss. Other slugs, such as the Winchester PDX1 or certain "buck and ball" type slugs marketed by small companies, combine a slug with a small amount of buckshot. They do not do slug stuff significantly better than other slugs (and often offer worse slug performance due to the smaller, lighter projectile), and the amount of buckshot carried in the payload is relatively insignificant and unlikely to pattern well. If you need a slug, select a slug – but for use indoors for personal defense, buckshot is both extremely effective and safer downrange.

There is all sorts of neat novelty stuff you can launch out of a shotgun. Avoid it for serious use.

Again, remember that birds are for birds. There is a reason that no credible shotgun trainer or ballistics expert recommends anything less than #4 buckshot for home defense use.

You **must** pattern whatever load you choose in your gun. Shotgun barrels are unique special snowflakes. Each one patterns differently, and the published specs for a twelve gauge barrel allow for some pretty significant variations in bore size.

Git Gud (Or at least basically competent)

Buy at least five dummy rounds. The Brownells version is excellent.

- Practice presenting the gun from a ready position of your choosing (low or high ready). Use this stance and technique.
- If using a pump action, practice working the action *with the dummy rounds* over and over. You need to get to a point to where you don't short-stroke the gun. Vigorous movement all the way to the rear, vigorous movement all the way forward.
- If using a pump action, incorporate the above practice with your trigger press. Immediately after pressing the trigger, rapidly work the action. Repeat until the tube is empty, reload, then do it again. "BOOM – chuck-chuck" is the mantra from shotgun school. Work that in your dry fire. ***Re-acquire your sight picture before every single trigger press.***
- If using any shotgun, you should store the weapon with the tube full and the chamber empty. They are not drop-safe and should not be stored with a loaded round, even with the safety engaged (many people, myself included, do not store them with the safety engaged). Practice retrieving the gun and working the action immediately upon doing so (charging handle if semi-auto, slide if pump-action).
- If using a side saddle or butt cuff, begin practicing emergency loads. This video is an excellent primer on vetted techniques. Practice both emergency loads and topping off the tube.

- Practice the following: fire two rounds, replace the fired rounds in the tube. Vary the round counts as you progress. ***Re-acquire your sight picture before every single trigger press.***
- Practice shooting the gun empty and emergency-loading a single round from your chosen ammunition carrier. ***Re-acquire your sight picture before every single trigger press.***
- Set up two dry-fire targets. Present the gun to one target, fire, and while transitioning to the second target work the action. Press the trigger once on the second target.

When you can do all of this competently in dry fire, verify with dry fire. Pattern your gun with your chosen buckshot. The live fire familiarization can be done in as few as 50 rounds. This LuckyGunner article/video has some excellent drills for maintaining your skillset. Work them dry, then shoot them live.