

## The 4 rules of firearm safety

1. **ALWAYS treat any firearms as though it is loaded**– even when you know it isn't. Follow this rule and if you have a negligent discharge of your firearm, nobody will be hurt.
2. **ALWAYS keep your firearm pointed in a safe direction**, such as towards the ground. Do not point your firearm at anything you do not intend to destroy.
3. **ALWAYS be aware of your target, and what is behind it before firing**. Even the smallest bullets can travel over 1.25 miles if they are not stopped, and larger rounds can travel up to 3 miles.
4. **ALWAYS keep your finger off the trigger until you are ready to fire**. Do not pull the trigger even if the safety is engaged, as a gun can fire a round later, when the safety is disengaged.

**Disclaimers:** This document is not exhaustive, but it is intended to be a jumping-off point for people completely new to shooting. It will outline some important keywords, put forth some food for thought, and give some general recommendations that strive to be objective. The author of this document is NOT a lawyer, law enforcement, or a professional shooter, gun reviewer, content creator, influencer. This document is not a manual, nor does it allow you to shirk your responsibility as a potential firearm owner. The author has only spent the time to make this document because they believe that responsible firearm ownership starts with being informed, and wants to help others make their choice. The author does not condone the use of violence.

## Glossary

**Caliber:** Casually, the size of the round fired by each specific firearm. A firearm designed to shoot a specific caliber can only fire that caliber (or rounds made to the same specifications as the designated caliber)

**Cartridge:** The cartridge, also known as a “round”, is the ammunition that is fired in a gun. Sometimes called “Bullets”, but pedantically the bullet is just the projectile that leaves the barrel of the gun, while the casing is the brass that is ejected.

**Chamber/ed:** The chamber is an internal part of a firearm that holds the next round to be fired; this round would be “chambered”. The term “chambered” can also inform the user of the caliber the firearm is designed to use.

**CCW:** Shorthand for Concealed Carry Weapon, and generally used to refer to the permit or license required by many states to carry a firearm on your person.

**“Duty” guns:** Generally refers to firearms carried by law enforcement or military personnel. Duty guns are usually full-size, as the aforementioned personnel are allowed

to open carry, and do not need to worry about concealing a large weapon. Duty guns are not LEO/Military specific, but can denote the size and (generally) reliability of a firearm.

**Magazine:** the ammunition storage device that feeds rounds into a chamber to be fired, usually operated by a spring. Pistols and Rifles use magazines, whereas shotguns generally do not.

**Model:** Just like cars, firearm manufacturers often produce more than one type of firearm, and have multiple models.

**Shell:** Unlike a pistol or a rifle, shotguns are not loaded with a cartridge containing a single bullet projectile (usually), but instead are loaded with shells, which contain multiple smaller lead projectiles called “shot”.

**X+1:** Refers to the capacity of the firearm, the X is a variable number, such as 10 or 15 for example, and the +1 indicates that the additional 1 round can be held in the chamber. In effect, this means the user can load their gun’s magazine until it is full, chamber a round, then remove the magazine and replace the chambered round with a new one. This is not required for operation, and merely allows for a small increase in available firepower. Doing so also means you have “one in the chamber” which removes an additional safety step to firing a round. Some users opt to carry their firearms with one in the chamber to reduce response times in an emergency while sacrificing a safety step.

### **First Steps**

Some of these steps can be done in any order, others should reasonably be done after others. Determine your situation and plan accordingly. Only you can make these choices for yourself.

#### **Step 1: Determine if a firearm is right for you.**

By law, all US citizens are allowed to own a firearm by default. On a national scale, this right is surrendered through a few circumstances, which can be found on the [website for the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms](#), the governing body that oversees firearms laws. You should also check your local laws. When doing your own research about firearms law, always try to find a .gov to reference. Lawyers’ websites or random forum comments may be inaccurate or outdated. NEVER consult ChatGPT or any other AI site about legal or safety issues, your life could literally depend on the accuracy of your information and AI are known to be inaccurate or make up information to fill the user’s request.

#### **Step 2: Consider the following**

If none of those legal stops apply to you, great! Now you must consider your own situation. General things to consider:

1. **Are you prepared to have access to a lethal weapon?** Be candid with yourself about your mental state and intentions. If you EVER begin to have doubts about your mental wellbeing, reach out to a trusted family member and ask them to assist you in making your firearm accessible to you until you are certain you are better.
  - a. By having a firearm accessible, you may one day be in a situation where you take the life of another living being– Are you prepared to have that responsibility?
2. **Do you have children or others in your house that cannot have access to your firearm?** If yes, you will need to purchase a safe or vault to bar their access. Firearms are not toys, they are lethal weapons, and only those who know the 4 rules of firearm safety should have access to them, even when supervised.
  - a. **Are there people in your life that are unaccepting or hostile to firearms?** Just because you have a second amendment right does not mean your roommates want a weapon in the house. You should prepare yourself for a candid conversation about firearm ownership with them.
3. **Can you reasonably afford a firearm?** Well-proven, reliable handguns for self defense generally MSRP around \$500, and ammunition has variable pricing, but can range from \$13-\$20 for a box of 50 rounds. There is personal protection equipment needed to safely shoot, some shooting ranges have daily fees, etc.
4. **What documents or permits do your local (state, county, city) laws require you to have before purchasing a firearm?** Some states require a Firearm Owners Identification (FOID), others do not. Local law generally supersedes federal, and applies when you cross state lines, so if you travel often you will need to be aware of the laws in all the regions you intend to bring your firearm.  
*For example: If you live in Florida, but break a firearm-related law in Georgia, you will be prosecuted under Georgia jurisdiction.*

At the end of the day, only you can determine if a firearm is the right choice for you; it's not for everyone. There are plenty of nonlethal options available if you are concerned for your personal safety, such as pepper spray (POM brand is highly regarded), stun guns, or martial arts. Always check your local laws regarding non- or less-lethal defense weapons.

### **Step 3: Determine Your Use Case**

If you have determined that you are willing to take the necessary steps to be a responsible gun owner, the real fun begins. This is where you can get easily overwhelmed by the mountain of information available online, and not all of it is important for beginners.

Firstly, think about what you are using your firearm for. Concealed carry, home defense, or hobby and sport shooting are the 3 most common uses for a firearm, and will largely dictate what kinds of firearm you should consider. These definitions are specifically written by the author, and there will always be “what abouts” to consider. Use your best judgement when making these considerations.

- **Concealed Carry Weapons (CCW)** are for a person to bring with them on their person (usually in a belt or pocket holster) for personal defense on the go. With CCWs, size and weight are paramount, as a heavy, bulky gun can be tedious and uncomfortable. A CCW is almost always a handgun, such as a pistol or revolver, as they are the most compact firearms around.
- **Home Defense** guns are primarily used to protect the user on their property, and therefore are highly dependent on each person’s situation. Things like gun weight and size are less important, as you will not be carrying a home defense gun for any longer than it takes to stop the threat. As such, you have access to any host of firearms such as handguns, shotguns, and rifles. However, you should always consider Firearm Safety Rule #3 when selecting a home defense gun; even the smallest calibers can penetrate multiple layers of drywall, go through windows, etc. Consider your neighbors’ safety and the layout of your home versus the penetrating ability of a bullet.
- **Hobby and Sport** firearms are generally used for hunting, target practice, and competition shooting. This document will not outline much for this section, as the uses are wide and varied.

#### **Step 4: Research Which Firearm Is The Best Fit**

Now that you have figured out your use case, you can start looking into your actual purchase. Here’s a non-exhaustive list of firearms to look into, with a budget in mind. Whether CCW or Home Defense, the most important things to consider are reliability and comfort. Reliability is paramount, as you are putting your life in the hands of your weapon; it needs to work all the time, every time. An unreliable firearm may be prone to jams, or failures, and the second it takes to fix a malfunction could be the second an attacker needs to bring you harm. Comfort is second, as a firearm that sucks to shoot (too much recoil, too big or small for your hands, etc) will disincentivize you from practicing, and a firearm you can’t use well is, in the best case, useless to you, and in the worse case, more of a danger to others.

A note on Ammunition:

In handguns, the caliber most commonly used is 9x19 Parabellum, or colloquially called 9mm, which is a good balance of stopping power, affordability, and size. All of the handguns listed will be chambered in 9mm.

In shotguns, the caliber most commonly used is 12 Gauge, colloquially written as “12ga”. Shotguns fire a shell usually containing a payload of lead pellet projectiles that scatter an area, as opposed to a bullet, which is a single projectile. The most common payload for home defense shotguns is called #00 Buck, which was designed with deer hunting in mind, but can stop other targets with an effective range of about 38 yards (114 feet, or 35 meters). Any shotgun listed will be chambered in 12ga, but will be available in 20 gauge if you desire reduced recoil.

In rifles, the most commonly used caliber is 5.56x45mm, or colloquially “5.56”, or “five five six” if speaking aloud. This round is the caliber used in almost all standard service rifles of the US military, and law enforcement, as well as civilian rifles such as the AR-15 platform. Any rifle listed will be chambered in 5.56.

Again, this list is not exhaustive, in no particular order, and attempts to be objective. Additionally, I can't account for everything that may apply in your situation, so this list is short, as this is a starting point for (and should not take the place of) your own research. The firearms listed below are from reputable brands and platforms that are proven to be reliable, and most of them should be available at your local gun store or big box store (such as Basspro/Cabela's or Academy Sports). Comfort is subjective; more on that below.

**Concealed Carry: Emphasis on small size and lightweight, pistols only. Almost all of these pistols have larger variants for home defense, but can fill that role just fine as compact pistols. 9mm from a compact gun hits the same as 9mm from a full sized gun.**

- **Glock G19:** One of the most reliable firearms ever made, the Glock G19 is used by military and LEO around the world. You can purchase the G19 with either 10+1 or 15+1 capacity, which allows either for lighter weight or more rounds to shoot, respectively.
- **Smith and Wesson M&P Shield:** Another duty pistol, the Shield comes in multiple trim levels, but the Shield Plus has a manual safety (which adds an additional safety step, but adds time before the gun can be fired), or the Shield EZ which requires less strength to operate the trigger and slide, a good choice with less hand and arm strength.

- **Springfield Armory Hellcat:** A “Micro Compact” pistol, the Hellcat is the smallest pistol on the list, and therefore hypothetically the most comfortable carry gun. Multiple capacity options available, as well as models with manual safeties.
- **Canik TP9 Elite:** With less aftermarket support, you may not have as many options available for holsters and you may not find additional magazines (should you want them) at big box stores, but the TP9 is a reliable sub-compact pistol with a 15+1 capacity.
- **Ruger Security-9:** The cheapest of the bunch without losing reliability, the Security-9 is advertised to also be extremely easy to operate, which can be a boon for new shooters who do not have strong hands, but requires diligence when operating so there are no negligent discharges. Comes with a manual safety.

### **Home Defense: Less emphasis on size and weight, full size pistols, shotguns and rifles available**

- **(Pistol) Walther PDP:** Available in Polymer framed (lighter) or Steel Framed (heavier) models, as well as the PDP-F, which is easier to operate for weaker hands, with 18+1 capacity for less reloads between shooting.
- **(Pistol) CZ P10-F:** Offers ambidextrous controls for left-handed shooters, and smooth operation. Aggressive texture on the grip allows the user to keep the gun firmly in their hand, but can be uncomfortable for those with softer skin.
- **(Shotgun) Mossberg 500 or 590:** a pump-action shotgun that also has seen extensive LEO and Military use. Features an ambidextrous manual safety easily accessible by your dominant hands’ thumb, and the 590 can come with an optional pistol grip for increased control.
- **(Shotgun) Remington 870:** The main competitor with the Mossberg shotguns, the Remington has nearly identical features, but has reduced weight and holds fewer shells.
- **(Rifle) Smith and Wesson M&PSport III:** The Sport III is generally regarded as a budget-friendly workhorse and excellent starter rifle..
- **(Rifle) Ruger AR-556:** For the new shooters, what sets rifles apart may be far too minute, so the AR-556 is included as it is available chambered in .300 Blackout, a cartridge that is quieter than the standard 5.56 for more comfortable shooting. However, the AR-556 is more expensive, as is .300 Blackout, so it is not as budget-friendly

### **Step 5: Determining The Best Fit For You**

You may see that a lot of these firearms are very similar to others in its class, and this is where comfort comes into play. These firearms all have different ergonomics; they feel different in your hand, weigh more or less than the competitor, etc. For this step, go to

your local gun store or shooting range and ask if you can hold a few of their firearms for sale. Always remember to follow the 4 rules of firearm safety. The store clerk will likely check to make sure the firearm is loaded before handing it to you, which is general safety practice. They also may not allow more than 1 or 2 firearms to be out of the case at one time to prevent theft. The clerk may be able to give you more in depth information about some of the guns available, but keep in mind that their opinions are their own, and only you can make this decision.

If there is a shooting range near you that has rental guns available, consider taking the time to go out and get some live fire experience if you feel comfortable doing so. It is the author's opinion that you should not purchase a firearm that you have not shot. You'll never know how that specific model feels until you go out there and shoot a few dozen rounds with it, and buyer's remorse on a \$500+ purchase is something to avoid. However, keep in mind that not all of the models listed here may be available at your location, so consider basing your research off what is available to you.

#### **A note on comfort and gun size:**

New shooters may gravitate towards smaller guns, like compact pistols, since they believe a smaller firearm will have less recoil. However, this is actually the opposite. A heavier firearm such as a full size pistol, or one with a steel frame (as opposed to polymer) will actually have less felt recoil, as the weight of the gun is counteracting the recoil and muzzle rise. The energy released by a 9mm cartridge is the same across all guns that can fire it; recoil is managed by grip strength, firearm accessories, ergonomics, and other options.

Many shooters recommend rifles as the best choice for the inexperienced shooter, as the combination of buttstock and handguard create two points of contact on the gun, which allows the user to retain more control and reduce felt recoil. However, a rifle is not always the best choice for every shooter. You may be able to find rifles chambered in the smaller calibers, such as .22lr, but these are not as suitable for self defense as they lack stopping power.

Should you find that you need a small caliber firearm but for your own reasons do not desire a rifle or shotgun, you may want to look into a Pistol Caliber Carbine (PCC), which have the ergonomics of a rifle but remain chambered in smaller calibers such as 9mm. However, PCCs are not as popular due to this "splitting of the road", so they are not always the most budget-friendly, and due to their size they cannot be easily concealed on your person.

#### **Step 6: Buying The Firearm**

This may seem like a daunting step, but if you have gone into your gun store of choice and spoken with the employees there, you have already gotten your foot in the

proverbial and physical door. Consider asking the clerks at the gun counter what the process of purchasing a firearm is like at their store, as it may differ from other locations.

Generally, you can expect to have a photo ID ready, fill out federal background check paperwork, as well as potentially have a 3-5 day waiting period depending on your location and local laws. Sometimes the waiting period can be skipped with valid ownership of a CCW, for example.

If bought new, your firearm should have everything you need out of the box to start shooting, with the exception of ammunition. Many handguns come with 2 or magazines and a padded case for storage, and some other odds and ends. Rifles and shotguns may come in a cardboard box, and a more secure storage device (such as a bag or case) will need to be purchased. If you are buying a used firearm, you are at the former owner's mercy as to what is supplied with your purchase, and you should be informed of this before the purchase.

Always read your firearm's manual and take the information in there to heart before using it. Each firearm model is different, and should be treated and operated as per the manufacturer's specifications.

#### **A Note On Ethical Consumption:**

It is the intention of the author that this information be disseminated to non-right wingers, and personally does not support obviously right-wing businesses. However, it is a fact that shooting is predominately pursued by right wingers, and new shooters will undoubtedly be exposed to them. You can decide your own limits as to who and what you can interact with.

As such, remember that your local gun store is publicly apolitical at best, or proudly supporting a fascist right wing at worst. If you choose not to support such businesses, national sporting goods stores like Bass Pro Shop/Cabela's and Academy Sports generally hold apolitical corporate beliefs, and that there is no ethical consumption under capitalism. It may be literally impossible for the money in your purchase to never reach the hands of a right wing person, but you choose how direct it may be; sometimes we just don't have a choice.

#### **Step 7 : Practice, Practice, Practice**

Now that you have made your choice and purchased your firearm, the next big step is the most fun: shooting it! Head to your local range, and start putting lead down the lane. It is highly recommended that you take a beginner's class, if available. Alternatively,



there are a lot of online resources that can point you in the right directions, especially on YouTube.

It is generally advised that a shooter practices with “live rounds” (i.e. real bullets) at least once a month, and “dry” (i.e. no ammunition involved) practices as often as once a day. The more practice, the better. A firearm in the hands of an inexperienced shooter is potentially more dangerous to *unintended targets* than they are to the intended target.

When dry practicing with your firearm, always remember the 4 rules of firearm safety, and additionally, if you have live ammunition stored nearby, to never leave your firearm unattended, and to check the chamber for a live round EVERY time you handle a firearm.

### **Step 7.5: A Clean Firearm Is A Working Firearm**

Ensure you maintain your firearm as per the manufacturer’s instruction manual. Clean your firearm using a cleaner or solvent of your choice (the clerk at your local gun store can suggest a good brand, the author uses Break Free brand “CLP” solvent). General advice is to “field strip” your firearm and clean it after every use, and fully disassemble it for a deep cleaning 1-2 times per year, or after prolonged period of disuse. Your owner’s manual or youtube can assist you with this process.

Firing your weapon expels gasses and excess gunpowder that can dirty the interior and exterior of your gun, which can lead to frequent jamming and failures to fire, as well as shorten the overall lifespan of your firearm. Much like a car, consistent care will generally allow you to avoid costly maintenance down the line.

### **Step 8: Other Sources/Get Involved**

Depending on your area, you may have access to a great firearms community. [The Pink Pistol Club](#) is a female- and LGBTQ-run 2A club that has chapters across the USA. You can also look into CASTL and Girl And A Gun for other minority-focused groups (their politics unknown as of writing).

You can also find an online community on Reddit via r/LiberalGunOwners, which is available for anyone (not just those who identify as Liberal) to discuss firearms in an accepting setting.

Many people avoid the National Rifle Association, a right wing lobbyist group that, in the author’s opinion, does not support an armed minority in America.

There are numerous firearm focused channels on youtube, but many of them are right-wing influenced. Always do your own research, but the author has found the following channels to be a good source of information:

- *Tacticool Girlfriend* is specifically LGBTQ friendly and despite no longer making videos, has a good backlog of informational videos regarding safety and firearm usage.
- *Honest Outlaw* posts regular top 5/top 10 firearm reviews and is generally apolitical.
- *TFB TV* is similar to Honest Outlaw but informs the viewer more on the firearms industry, as well as reviews.

As you become more confident and knowledgeable about firearms, look to teach and inform others. Do you have friends who seem interested? Invite them to the range with you! If you know someone is anti-gun but is potentially at risk of being a victim, consider discussing their personal safety with them if you feel comfortable doing so, and you feel as though your own knowledge base is sturdy enough.

#### **A Note On Community:**

Think back to Step 2 of this document, and your intended use for your firearm. In 2025, marginalized people may be fearing state-sanctioned violence more than ever. In the author's opinion, it is obvious that an individual cannot fight back against such acts, not without immediately and permanently endangering oneself, friends, and family, and consideration of using a firearm against law enforcement of any kind is not condoned.

A firearm is your defense against stochastic ("random") violence. Whether you have been targeted by another civilian or group of civilians for any number of reasons, this is why some people choose to carry a firearm or have one for home defense.

The best way to fight against state-sanctioned violence is to participate peacefully in local rallies, elections, marches, and the like. Get to know your like-minded neighbors, and look out for each other. You can never have too many people watching your back.

#### **Step 9: Miscellaneous Closing Thoughts and Considerations**

Owning a firearm is a responsibility that not everyone may be ready for. Periodically review your situation to determine if it is right for you. Always be aware of your local and national laws, and know that they may change at any time.

Shooting a gun can be a fun, exciting experience at the range, a skill to be honed, and even a gateway to a community. But always remember, a firearm is not a toy. It is a tool and a lethal weapon. By owning one, you enable yourself to be in a situation where

YOU are responsible for shooting and injuring or potentially killing another living being, whether or not that being is your intended target. This chance increases for those who choose concealed carry due to having access to your firearm while out in public.

Consider learning a martial art, or carrying non-lethal options, and always use those over lethal force if available. You may face any or all of legal trouble, psychological harm, and impact on your social life if you choose to use your firearm on another person. Lethal force should only be used as a last resort, and/or in life or death scenarios.

Remember that this document is not all-encompassing, but may be used as a good starting point for those who are interested or feel the need to look into firearms for the first time.

Always remember the 4 rules of firearm safety. Commit them to heart.

Written in January of 2025.