

How to Begin Your Personal Defense Handgun Training

General: I am finding that many people are wanting to obtain their handgun carry permits before they have either purchased a handgun or have obtained any handgun training. Because of this trend, handgun carry permit instructors must provide their students with information, guidance, and other opinions that will assist these novice shooters in their search for an appropriate protection handguns and other gear. Also, instructors must be able to provide guidance to these same students regarding where they can obtain other competent firearms training. I believe that over 80% of firearms training can be done off of the live-fire range. I also believe that live-fire ranges are most useful for VERIFYING techniques previously learned off of the live-fire range, and for QUALIFYING on specific courses of fire.

Training Plans: Firearms training is best done with others who have similar interests. Identify other people that have similar firearms goals and train and practice with them. Discuss techniques and keep your training sessions from become bored. Identify specific training plans, techniques, and goals prior to each training session.

Also, find other more advanced or competent shooters who you can learn from. Pay a competent firearms instructor in the initial phases of your training in order to assist you in identifying other competent resources. You'll save money in the long run if your instructor can assist you in avoiding expensive mistakes!

Journal your training and experiences. This will assist new shooters in tracking their training experiences.

Purchase ammunition, targets and other disposable materials in such a manner as to have these materials available prior to each training session. Sometimes ammunition, firearms and other essential gear may be out of stock at some stores and become difficult to purchase due to market shortages. Plan ahead stock up when you can!

Recommended Reading: The only book that I have found that provides all the essential information that new shooters need is the NRA's book, "*NRA Guide to the Basics of Personal Protection Outside the Home*". This book covers the full spectrum of information useful to personal defense handgun shooters. The book is available directly from the NRA or from other major book sellers. I also favor the *American Hangunner Magazine* as a supplemental publication.

Airsoft: Not all handgun training need be done with a real firearm. Spring-activated Airsoft handguns are an inexpensive and reasonable aid for use in handgun training. The Airsoft handgun is a very useful training aid for all levels of instruction. New shooters can use these handguns when learning and practicing many types of techniques: draw & presentation, point shooting, aimed fire, one-hand shooting, two-hand shooting, shooting from barricades, tactical movements, addressing multiple threats, reloading drills, marksmanship, etc.

These Airsoft handguns can be purchased online from many vendors and at sporting goods stores. 6mm pellets are sold at many discount stores as well. These handguns are a very cost-effective way to train.

A bullet trap for these 6mm Airsoft pellets can be fabricated from a large cardboard box lined with cloth baffles for use indoors -you will certainly want to catch these fired pellets so they do not get into your carpets. These types of handgun can also be used outdoors with or without a bullet trap when using readily available biodegradable 6mm pellets. Since training with these types of firearms will be at relatively close range, copy paper or card stock can be used to fabricate your own personal targets - another cost savings.

Rim-Fire Handguns: New shooters who wish to move forward from Airsoft handguns to the next level may choose to purchase a .22 caliber handgun in order to begin their live-fire training. These more economical .22 caliber handguns can be useful in practicing both dry-fire and live-fire techniques. Small caliber rim-fire handguns are usually less expensive than larger caliber center-fire handguns. Even more important, .22 caliber ammunition is very inexpensive (when available). Reduced training costs results in increased training opportunities. Skills learned with rim-fire handguns are generally transferrable to center-fire handguns. Obviously, even .22 caliber firearms must be used on a live-fire range designed for this purpose. There are also bullet traps available that can be used with rim-fire ammunition. Check with local laws regarding discharging firearms in your area.

Center-fire Handguns: Once a shooter's training has evolved from the use of Airsoft and small-caliber handguns, they can then progress to a center-fire handgun. The most common center-fire calibers used for personal defense are: .380ACP, .38 Spl., 9mm, .40 caliber, .45ACP. There are several other calibers available. Currently, the 9mm is the least expensive of these center-fire cartridges. Firearms reviews can be found on YouTube, and in written articles in various publications.

Center-fire handguns are usually a bit more expensive than .22 caliber handguns. Some handgun manufacturers often make a .22 caliber companion pistol to their 9mm models. A good marketing ploy.

If possible, borrow or rent handguns in order to try them out before purchasing. Ensure [1] that your hands fit the handgun's frame comfortably, [2] that the sights are sufficient for your eyes to acquire, [3] that the controls are easy to operate/manipulate, [4] that it is concealable, [5] that ammunition caliber and capacity is appropriate, [6] that it is absolutely reliable and of good quality.

Holsters: Novice handgunners need a basic holster with which to begin their training. I recommend the Bianchi model 101 leather fold away belt-slides. These inexpensive (Walmart for around \$30) two-piece holsters are ambidextrous and they will accommodate many types and sizes of handguns (revolvers and semiautomatics). These are for outside the waistband carry.

Other Gear: Shooters need several other pieces of equipment in order to enhance their training experiences. Here are some basic items:

- **ear and eye protection** for yourself and others are essentials pieces of safety equipment
- **silhouette-type targets** add more realism to both -fire and live-fire training and qualifications for personal defense-type training. I buy my targets from Action Targets
- **staple gun** and staples, or **adhesive spray** for attaching targets to a cardboard backer
- I sometimes use standard and large index cards to paste over silhouette targets for specific training drills – colored **index cards** are good too.
- Dark colored **permanent markers** are great for modifying targets and for noting data onto targets before they are photographed. Large and jumbo size black and dark blue are best.

- A **multi-tool**, or small **tool kit** is essential for maintenance at the live-fire range. A steel 3-section .22 caliber gun **cleaning rod** is essential for clearing cartridges stuck in rifle chambers. I prefer the military issue-type M-4 rifle cleaning kits for this purpose.
- Firearms cleaning equipment, solvents, lubricants for maintaining your firearm.
- **Inert training cartridges** and **dummy magazines** are worth the money for improving your loading, reloading, unloading, and other immediate-action drills. For center-fire training cartridges I use ST Action Pro inert cartridges because they have metal cases which allow for more effective extraction (extractors chew up the rims of cheaper plastic inert cartridges). I use the A-zoom aluminum inert .22 cal. training cartridges.
- A **gear bag** is essential for organizing and carrying all of your essential range gear. I suggest purchasing a used bag at a thrift store until you determine how much training gear you will be carrying to the range.

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