

Training Yourself in the Use of Defensive Handguns

1. **Subscribe to a magazine:** It is important to begin learning about handguns and their use. The fastest way to accomplish this is to read about the subject. With time you will begin to focus on types of articles and information that relate specifically to your training/learning goals - Defensive Handgun Use. There are many good magazines which provide this information; The *NRA's Rifleman*, *The Police Marksman*, *Handgunner*, *Guns & Weapons for Law Enforcement*, *Guns & Ammo*, *Shooting Times*, etc. You may also identify with authors who you feel speak to your personal interests. Keep articles that appeal to you and that you wish to review again. Magazines such as the *NRA's Rifleman* and *The Police Marksman* are provided to these members who have joined these associations (you will have to join in order to receive these magazines). Locate a bookstore that stocks a good selection of firearms-related magazines. Consider buying some different magazines (other than the ones you subscribe to) once in a while in order to continue your search for new information. Many gun ranges will have copies of most firearms magazines in their lounge areas for their customers to read.
2. **Do your homework:** Identify those books and periodical magazines which cater to defensive handgun use. Try out the techniques and advice presented in these articles, and determine if they will actually work for you. Keep what works for you, discard what doesn't work for you. Make note of the valid information that you wish to retain and use on index cards, computer file or a journal for later review. If you find a magazine writer who you believe writes well about what you are interested in, seek out any books that this author may have written. These books may provide you with more information and insight about specific topics, and also provide more useful illustrations and photos. Books may also allow the writer enough space to integrate ideas and more fully explain ideas than would be possible in a magazine article. Discuss new information with others who have both similar interests and more knowledge on the subjects than yourself. Ask questions.
3. **Join an Association:** Join the **National Rifle Association** (toll free 800- 672-3888). The NRA has three magazines that you can subscribe to (one comes with the membership). **The Police Marksman Association** (1(334) 271-2010) also offers an excellent magazine for law enforcement Use of Force Professionals (and any serious personal defense handgun user). These associations will provide places and circumstances where you can meet other shooters and exchange information. These clubs and associations usually put out a newsletter that can also be a source of information on events, gear and techniques. If you are going to get involved, you are going to need to communicate with others who share similar goals. For example, Glock owners and shooters have the **Glock Sport Shooting Foundation** (PO Box 1254, Smyrna, GA. 30081). The Foundation sets up competitive shooting matches throughout the US and they put out an informative newsletter *The Glock Report* that keeps its members in touch with their pistols.
4. **Obtain some formal training:** In order to ensure that your training evolves properly, you will need to provide yourself with an appropriate foundation of information on which you can continue to build. Solid information concerning safety, nomenclature, terminology, marksmanship and history are all very important topics for your foundation of learning. At the very beginning of your learning process, you will want to attend a state-sponsored firearms safety class or some other classroom training specific to handguns. There are many basic safety and operation principles and techniques that you will need to acquire that are rarely discussed in firearms magazines and books. A good basic course can provide you with the necessary foundation on which you will be able to add new and more specialized information. Most public shooting ranges will have available the names and business cards of firearms instructors. Seek out an instructor/trainer who is knowledgeable in the use of **defensive/tactical handguns** (*if possible*). Your state Department of Natural Resources (*Game Wardens*) will also have information about firearm safety education. Many law enforcement agencies also have certified firearms instructors who teach outside of their organization. Obtain and review the teaching credentials of potential instructors if available.

5. **Join a gun club:** You need a place to practice in order to learn. Some of your practice will have to be done at a live-fire shooting range. Many outdoor gun clubs offer more advantages than shooting at local commercial indoor gun ranges. Many clubs are insured and are more reasonably priced when you consider what the yearly cost is versus your frequency of use. These facilities are usually well maintained, and the other shooters (*members*) are a very good resource of information for a new shooter. I find that the open, casual "club atmosphere" more conducive to the exchange of information - most members want to share their wealth of knowledge with another new member! Club newsletters are also a place where you can solicit information, gear or assistance in developing your defensive shooting skills.

6. **Find a mentor:** All shooters started out with no information or skills. They all learned by doing and asking questions. Identify one or more shooters who have skills and information that you would like to possess. Spend time with them on the range. You will learn from what they do, and you will be in a position to ask questions about how they do it and why they do it. Let your mentor know what your goals are and ask their advice on all matters that concern you. Everybody has something that they can offer. As your skill level rises you should seek mentors who will be compatible to your learning needs. You may find one author/writer that you feel speaks to you in regards to your self-training efforts. This author may also be considered to be a mentor due to the writer's position in your future training.

7. **Organize your training information:** Collect defensive handgun shooting articles and other written materials and place them into specific files to review at later times. Set up the files by specific topics. The following are the types of files that you may want to set up:

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| * <i>presentation/drawing your handgun</i> | * <i>gripping the handgun</i> |
| * <i>stances; isosceles, Weaver, kneeling, etc.</i> | * <i>sight alignment</i> |
| * <i>target acquisition</i> | * <i>trigger manipulation</i> |
| * <i>target analysis</i> | * <i>breathing control</i> |
| * <i>concealed-carry</i> | * <i>safety</i> |
| * <i>courses of fire</i> | * <i>handgun tactics</i> |
| * <i>loading, re-loading, unloading</i> | * <i>post shooting trauma</i> |
| * <i>use of force judgments (when to shoot)</i> | * <i>liability</i> |
| * <i>adverse weather</i> | * <i>low light</i> |

Create additional topic files as needed. Scanning-in articles and other written information and illustrations & photos onto your computer's floppy discs can make your review quick and convenient.

8. **Plan your training sessions:** Set aside time to practice and mark it on your activity schedule. Hold to your schedule. Plan for both **live-fire practice** at the range and for **dry-fire practice** at home (*or other locations*). Identify 3 or 4 techniques or drills that you will be working on during a given practice session. Try to incorporate as much entertainment into the session as possible (*music, props, challenges, etc.*). Practicing with a friend will also help you commit to a scheduled session. Practicing alone is less stimulating.

Do not fall into a practice routine at the firing range where you shoot two boxes of ammunition at the same distance, at the same target, the same stance, the same firing hand, the same speed! You may improve your marksmanship skills, but you will not be acquiring the defensive handgun skills that could really make your marksmanship skills meaningful. You can use **index cards** as a training topic aid. Write a specific training technique or practice drill on each index card. You should have a deck of these cards once you have reviewed your articles, notes or lesson plans and transferred the information onto the cards. Keep the information simple. You can place the topic on one side of the card, and then you can note the correct elements of this technique on the reverse. Select the number of cards that you wish to work on for each training/practice session - a few techniques can fill an hour quite easily. Keep track of what techniques you trained on by using a journal. Split

your training time between reviewing old information and trying out new information. Revise your index card topics as needed. Other structured training plan systems may work equally well for you depending upon your individual goals.

9. **Acquire a handgun:** If you plan to acquire personal defense handgun skills, you will need to shoot a real handgun. If you already own or have access to an appropriate handgun you are set. If you do not have a handgun, you will have to assess your needs and resources. How much money are you prepared to invest in a handgun? New, used, small caliber or large caliber? All are important considerations. In general, I would recommend that if you have not acquired a personal handgun at this point that you should consider buying a good .22 LR caliber semiautomatic pistol to train with before you evolve to a larger caliber handgun. Almost all of the important elements of marksmanship and tactical shooting can be performed and practiced with a .22 lr caliber pistol. I can recommend the **Firestorm 22** semiautomatic .22 caliber pistol. The **Firestorm 22** (mfg by Bersa in Argentina) .22 LR caliber double-action pistol also has some advantages for tactical training. The price is very reasonable for both the pistol and the ammunition (use only *Remington* gold hollow point ammo).

You may also look at the new pistols that are used by personal protection professionals. There are some good values out there like the Ruger P series of pistols with the nylon frames. These pistols are well made and noticeably less expensive than Glocks, Berettas, Sigs, Walthers, Smith & Wessons, Kahr, Heckler & Kochs, etc. Used guns can sometimes be found at reasonable prices. It would be wise to have a knowledgeable person inspect any used pistol before you purchase it. I prefer 9mm caliber handguns over .40 S&W caliber due to the cost: most shooting is practice and by using the 9mm my practice costs are reduced. Both calibers are appropriate for personal defense.

There are .22 LR caliber conversion kits for several major brands of firearms: Glock, Beretta, Colt AR15, Ruger Mini-14, etc. These adapters can save a shooter a lot of money in training ammunition over time. The idea is to operate the pistol's trigger as often as possible.

10. **Acquire appropriate training gear:** No matter what type of handgun training you will be doing, there will be specialized gear to assist you in your efforts. A lot of good training can be done without the use of a real handgun. I spend a considerable amount of time with new shooters using a **Gamo**, CO2 powered BB pistol (.177 cal.) and with **Speer** brand .38 special caliber plastic target ammunition in various .357 magnum revolvers. The various models of **Hop Up** (6mm plastic pellet) air-soft handguns are also very good for indoor practice. These non-live ammo-firing handguns allow me to conveniently shoot at home. At some time you will want to verify that what you have been practicing at home is effective, and this will require a real handgun at a real shooting range. If you do not own a real handgun, you may have access to one through a friend or relative, or you may have access to a shooting range that rents handguns. All of these choices will involve a cost to you - everybody's budget has a limit!

A **gear bag** is a necessity (I use two). It should hold your handguns, ammunition and other accessories. Other necessities you will need at the shooting range are **eye and ear protection**. These items of safety equipment are not optional! You may want to wear both earplugs and ear muffs in order to reduce more noise. I like using an Uncle Mike's or Fobus hard plastic **hip holster** when shooting out of doors or for practicing holsterwork (*unloaded*) at home. Inexpensive, functional and durable. A holster is an excellent place to put your handgun when re-loading in the field. Some indoor shooting facilities will not allow you to draw & shoot from a holster for safety reasons. A good zippered **gun rug** or box is what your handgun should be transported in while in your vehicle (*unless you have a concealed-carry permit*). I use Daskocil plastic **handgun boxes**. They are hinged, can be locked, protect handguns well and come in several colors (about \$10). Some things that I carry to the range with my primary gear are: blue or yellow 3"x5" **index cards** for note taking and to use as aiming points when stapled onto targets, **staple gun** & staples, small **screw driver**, **cleaning supplies** (*Break Free*,

cleaning rod kit & tips, rags), Gerber **pocket knife & multi-pliers**, Avery brand large dark blue **circular stickers** to use as target dots/aim points on target (I find orange/red too hard on the eye), paper **silhouette-type targets**, 50 foot **tape measure** (*for outdoor shooting*), **scotch tape**, black **permanent marker & pen/pencil**. Discuss future gear purchases with mentors and others before spending your money. I've bought things on impulse only to later discover that it wasn't really useful. Ask around before you spend money.

11. **Shooting Attire:** I have found over the years that military-style pants work very well when I'm on the shooting range. The many cargo pockets of the military BDU's (*battle dress uniform*) are well suited for keeping spare ammunition, small tools, marker pens, stapler, spare magazines, target dot stickers, etc. on your person while you are on a live-fire range. These pants now come in several colors besides the woodland camouflage. For shooting out of doors, a hat can provide some comfort in sunny or cold weather. A loose long-sleeved shirt can provide some protection from bugs, sun and cold temperatures. Footwear that will keep your feet both dry and warm is also strongly recommended. Uncomfortable weather conditions can provide unneeded distraction to your shooting (*unless you want the added challenge of shooting in adverse weather*). If you are not having fun, you are probably not learning as much as you can from your shooting session.

12. **Attitude:** You have to want to improve your skills. Handgun shooting skills are 'perishable' and practice is the cure. Go to the range with a purpose and a plan. Do not get stuck in a rut by shooting the same way at each visit to the range. Work on different aspects each practice session. Challenge yourself by adding either time, distance or other complex demands to your training. Incorporate games and competition to these sessions. Keep evolving – keep improving.