

Taking a Beginner to the Range

Beginner Handout

Safety Rules:

These rules are the most important things to keep in your mind at all times. When you handle firearms regularly, these become natural, but they are not always natural for a first-time shooter. Before you even touch a gun learn, understand, memorize and practice these rules.

- **Rule One:** All guns are always loaded. Even if you are certain a gun is unloaded, treat it as if it is ready to fire.
- **Rule Two:** Do not point the gun at anything you are not willing to destroy. Always be aware of the direction the muzzle is pointed.
- **Rule Three:** Keep your finger off the trigger until your sights are on target. Guns don't "go off" by themselves.
- **Rule Four:** Be sure of your target and what's beyond your target. Remember that a bullet can travel for miles.
- **Rule Five:** The "Beginner Rule". When you are holding a firearm, and I say "stop", or tap you on the shoulder, you should freeze. Do NOT turn around. Make sure your finger is not on the trigger and the gun is pointed in a safer direction. I will offer further instructions.

Safety Gear:

At the shooting range, you must have your safety glasses and hearing protection on at ALL TIMES. It is also a good idea to make sure you are wearing appropriate cloths (no tank-tops or v-neck shirts), because semi-automatic firearms expel hot brass shells when you fire. A baseball cap or something similar is also a good idea.

Firearm Condition (for DA/SA pistol):

I will teach you how the firearm you will be shooting functions, how to load it, and how to fire it.

When you are holding a firearm, you need to be aware of its current condition.

For the semi-automatic pistol we are using, here are the basic conditions:

- 4) Unloaded. The magazine has been removed, and the slide is held open so that the firearm may be visually inspected by anyone. The safety must be engaged. You must still follow rules 1-3. This is the condition the firearm should be in when you are not actively preparing to fire it.
 - 3) Loaded Magazine, no round in the chamber. When a firearm is in this condition, you must rack the slide in order to chamber a round. Before you insert a magazine, verify that the safety is engaged.
 - 2) Loaded Magazine, round in the chamber, Safety engaged. When the firearm is in this condition all that is required to fire it is to disengage the safety and pull the trigger.
 - 1) Loaded Magazine, Safety disengaged, Hammer de-cocked. With this particular firearm, when the hammer is not cocked, the trigger pull will be heavy (This is known as "double action".) This is the state of the firearm when you take your first shot.
 - 0) Loaded Magazine, Safety disengaged, Hammer cocked. When the hammer is cocked, the trigger pull will be light (This is known as "single action".) You can manually cock the hammer, but it will automatically be cocked after you take your first shot. Activating the safety when the firearm is in this condition will safely de-cock the hammer, and return the firearm to condition 2.
- If the gun ever malfunctions (fails to fire, or jams up), keep the gun pointed downrange and ask for my assistance. I will either instruct you on how to remedy the problem, or I will carefully take the firearm from you.

Grip and Stance:

For your first time shooting, your grip is not particularly important, except that there are certain safety issues to be aware of. First, once you understand how the firearm functions, you will realize that the slide on the pistol slams backwards with each shot. With that in mind, you need to be sure that how you grip the firearm will not allow the sliding action to catch your hand in any way. I will demonstrate the proper way to hold a pistol so this will not happen, but you must be aware of your grip before you put your finger on the trigger. You also need to make sure you always have a firm grip on the pistol. There are numerous "correct" stances, but you don't need to concern yourself with them. Generally, as a new shooter, you should try to keep your arms semi-stiff, but not completely locked, with your elbows pointing down. You should also lean towards the target slightly.

Now relax and have fun!

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Instructors Notes

This document has been prepared as a guide for a firearms/shooting enthusiast taking a new shooter to the range. It is not all inclusive, and is not intended to be. You cannot hand a beginner the handout, and expect them to understand any of it, that is why you are there. This is also clearly not meant for experienced instructors. If you have been doing this for a while, then you don't need this document. My goal with this list is to provide a positive *VERY FIRST* experience only.

- Unless you feel comfortable with the responsibility of teaching safe firearms handling to someone who is completely new to firearms, then I would advise against trying. This document is primarily a guide to give you some major talking points, and at the same time, not overwhelm the beginner. There is a lot to learn when you are handling and shooting a firearm and it is pointless to try and jam too much in on their first trip to the range.
- There are only two important things that you should focus on. 1) *The experience must be 100% safe.* Injuries, damaged property or negligent discharges are not acceptable. These are the fastest way to turn someone off to shooting sports. 2) *The experience must be fun.* If your beginner doesn't have a good time, then they won't do it again.
- Be patient. Be kind. The only time you should put on your "serious face" is when there has been an infraction of one of the safety rules. Don't be shy about insisting on adhering to the rules, but as long as your beginner is acting safely, just let them have fun.
- Tell your beginner to ask you questions, especially about safety, even if they sound silly or stupid.
- Don't make assumptions about your shooter. For instance, it is a good idea to start out with a .22, or some other low-powered round, but don't assume just because you are teaching a woman that she'll prefer that to a .45ACP. In my experience, it is often the exact opposite. Don't assume that your beginner understands any of the terminology. Whenever you are explaining something, it helps to compare the topic to something your beginner will understand.
- Don't take a bunch of beginners at once. Ideally, just take one. The most important reason is safety, but it also puts beginners at least to have one-on-one instruction.
- Don't rant too much. A lot of shooting enthusiasts love to spout all kinds of political/tactical/technical/legal/ethical mumbo-jumbo. I'm guilty in the worst way. But try to limit yourself when dealing with a beginner. If they have questions, by all means answer them. If they have misconceptions, then correct them. But don't go on for an hour about fundamental rights, low light shooting, cartridge ballistics, self-defense law etc. When the time comes, they'll learn, but this is not helpful during their first trip to the range.

Steps and Tips

- **The Rules:** Before you even take any firearms out of its case, you need to make sure your beginner can recite the 4 rules. You also need to teach what they mean and why they are important. I usually use the concept of "layers of safety" when I discuss the rules. It helps a new shooter's confidence to say, "follow all of the rules, but if you accidentally break any one rule, nobody will get hurt." I personally focus on rules 1-3, because I shoot at an indoor range. If you are shooting outdoors, spend more time with 4 as well.
- **Rule 5:** I added an extra "Rule 5" to the generally accepted four. You can add dozens upon dozens of rules if you want, but the point is, this needs to be simple. Rule 5 is just a way to help keep them from accidentally breaking rules 2 and 4 while you are instructing them.
- **Other Rules:** I usually also ask new shooters to never load a gun until they are ready to fire, never hand anyone a loaded gun, to always leave the action open when they are done firing, and to always have the safety engaged when they are not firing. I don't even mention these until we are on the firing line, and they are getting ready to load the magazine because it is better for them to focus on the 4 major rules. Explain that these are really just good habits, rather than rules.
- **Range Rules:** Most ranges have their own specific rules as well, so make sure you have the beginner read these and explain anything they don't understand.
- **Safety Gear:** I find it helpful to describe and demonstrate the proper use of eye and ear protection before heading to the range. This is especially true for children, who may fidget with their safety gear. If the range doesn't have safety gear available, make sure you bring a set for your beginner. I also like to make sure my new shooter knows in advance to wear proper clothing, and optionally a baseball cap. I have had a beginner burn herself with hot brass, and while it didn't ruin her trip, some people are more sensitive. Once you are at the range, make sure your beginner realizes that eye and ear protection must be used at all times.
- **Firearm Condition:** You need to instruct your beginner on the proper function of the firearm(s) they will be using. I included a rip-off of Col. Cooper's conditions that has been customized to one particular pistol (in this case, it is a small caliber, simple blowback DA/SA pistol with a single manual safety.) Your beginner doesn't need to have a complete understanding of this, they just need to know how to safely load and fire. I use the conditions as a way to illustrate the function and use of the firearm as I teach the beginner the specifics. Remember, as you are teaching about the function of the firearm, you will also be demonstrating it. It is important that you make your own safe handling as obvious as possible so they can learn by example.
- **Grip and Stance:** I don't spend much time on these the first time out. In fact, I don't even discuss it until we are at the firing line. The beginner has too many other things in their head at this point. I really only stress having a safe grip (i.e. making

sure they have a firm grip, making sure their hands/fingers are clear of the slide, etc.) If they have fun, they'll want to do it again, and then you can teach them proper technique.

- **Targets:** Keep the targets close enough that the beginner will hit the bulls-eye. It is more fun that way. If they are able to hit in the black (with a pistol) at 5 yards, move it out to 10. Use the same logic for rifle shooting. Aside from that, don't worry about accuracy on this trip.
- **Before Firing:** Allow the beginner to handle the firearm, unloaded. Have them operate the safety, slide, magazine release, etc. This way, you can watch things such as where the muzzle is pointed and where their trigger finger rests, and correct them if need be. Some beginners also feel better if they can see you fire the gun first so they have an idea of what to expect.
- **First Shot:** Only load 1 round into the firearm. You have no idea what their first reaction will be, so this is the safest way.
- **Firing:** Don't constantly interrupt your shooter to correct their technique. If they ask for assistance, give it to them, but it is more important to let them have fun.