

**REVIEWS!** RUGER SP101  
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**MAGAZINE**

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Not all firearms training takes place at the big schools, like Gunsite. Here, students learn on a freshly bulldozed private range on property belonging to one of the students.

# BECOMING A FIREARMS INSTRUCTOR

[ BY TOM GIVENS ]

*There is an enormous need in this country for education about firearms and their use.*

Entertainment such as television and movies, along with anti-gun press and politicians, leave the average American with no clue about the real use of firearms, either for recreation or more serious functions. Now, forty-nine of the fifty States in the U.S. have a civilian handgun carry permit system, and in my state five percent of the population has a permit to carry a handgun in public. Add to that millions and millions of citizens who have guns in their homes. All of this creates a real need for local, grass roots training opportunities accessible to the average person.

For the purposes of this article, I'm going to divide the target population into two groups. One group is what I call serious students. These are people who recognize the enormous responsibilities attached to carrying a firearm.

They seek to become truly competent, and to become capable of defending themselves and their loved ones against armed sociopaths. They seek knowledge and skill, and they practice to hone their craft. These people will make the commitment in time, money, and resources to attend major fixed facility schools like Gunsite or Thunder Ranch, and/or to seek out traveling instructors like John Farnam, Larry Vickers, and Dave Spaulding. These serious students comprise a tiny fraction of gun owners, unfortunately. I travel all over the country teaching and attending various training events, and I see a lot of the same faces everywhere I go. The pool of truly serious students is depressingly small.

The other group I'll call casual students. These are the typical carry permit holder, or the person who owns a gun

to defend the home, or the shooter who goes to the range once or twice a year as a form of recreation. These folks make up the vast majority of gun owners in this country, and they have a desperate need for basic firearms training for their own safety and that of those around them. This is the group that needs easy local access to competent basic instruction. That's where you come in.

To prepare yourself to help these folks become responsible gun owners, there are a number of steps you can take to ensure your success. The first is something aspiring trainers often overlook, which is to learn about public speaking. Join Toastmasters or some local civic organization, and learn to comfortably deliver a speech on some topic in front of an audience. Communication skills are critical. As a trainer, it doesn't matter how much you know about a subject if you cannot effectively transfer that knowledge to a student.

Some training in teaching methodol-

ogy, the theory of adult learning, and class preparation would be of great benefit. For this, there are several sources. The oldest and the most widely recognized source is the NRA. Frankly, the Basic Pistol Shooting Instructor certification is very weak, and I do not consider it adequate preparation to teach anything beyond a Boy Scout Camp familiarization outing. The newer instructor courses for Personal Protection in the Home, and Personal Protection outside the Home are great improvements, and would go a long way toward getting you ready to deliver instruction. If you are in law enforcement, the LE side of the NRA house offers detailed five day courses that can put you much further down the path toward competency as a trainer.

In addition to the NRA, some of the better known private training organizations offer instructor development courses. The Firearms Academy of Seattle, Larry Vickers, Paul Howe's CSAT school, and Rangemaster all offer three to five day programs to prepare shooters to teach other shooters according to that particular school's doctrines.

In addition to training geared specifically toward instructor development, take as many shooting courses as you can from a variety of trainers. There are enough well respected and highly competent traveling trainers now that regardless of where you live, there are solid training opportunities available to you. It is important to be exposed to different training styles. As a trainer, you may explain something to a new shooter three or four ways, and he still doesn't get it. Then, when explained one more way, the light bulb comes on and learning takes place. The best way to have several ways to explain technique is to see how different trainers put forth the information. I have been teaching firearms use for more than thirty-five years, and I still make a point of attending at least one course taught by someone else every year so I can steal—er ... I mean—research their methods.

Once you have gained a solid foundation in shooting technique, competitive shooting can go a long way toward helping you find out what works well and what doesn't under a bit of pres-

sure. Shooting for score in front of peers let's you develop the ability to function under some stress and provides a great way to see how a gun, holster, or carry method works under more realistic conditions than a static range session. Shooting in IDPA or USPSA matches will boost both your gun handling and

*Training Academy, the largest in the state. Tom's training resume includes certification from the FBI Police Firearms Instructor School, NRA Law Enforcement Instructor Development School, NRA Law Enforcement Tactical Shooting Instructor School, Gunsite 499 under Jeff Cooper, and more.*



shooting skills and your confidence in those skills.

Finally, attend some training conferences to network with other trainers, pick their brains, and generally broaden your training horizons. The discontinued National Tactical Invitational (NTI) was a great example of this, but there are still events like the NE Shooters Summit in New Hampshire, the Warrior's Conference (formerly the 1 Inch to 1000 Yards Warrior Conference) in Nevada, the Tactical Conference in Memphis, the annual ILEETA convention near Chicago, and others.

For years, the Latin motto of the American Society of Law Enforcement Trainers was, *Qui docet, discet*. In English, *Who teaches, learns*. The very best way to master a subject is to learn to teach it. Become a trainer and you will become a better shooter, all the while performing a vital public service. ★

*Tom Givens is the owner of Rangemaster in Memphis, TN. For over 30 years Tom's duties have included firearms instruction. He is certified as an expert witness on firearms and firearms training, giving testimony in both state and federal courts. He serves as an adjunct instructor at the Memphis Police Department*

Here is an example of the wealth of knowledge and experience available to draw upon at training conferences. This one gathering includes Massad Ayoob, Marty Hayes, Southnarc, Todd Green, John Farnam, Rob Pincus, Wayne Dobbs, Andy Stanford, Tom Givens and thirteen other professional firearms trainers.

## CONTACTS

NRA Law Enforcement  
Instructor Training  
[www.nrahq.org/law](http://www.nrahq.org/law)

NRA Civilian Firearms  
Instructor training  
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training/instructor.asp](http://www.nrahq.org/education/training/instructor.asp)

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