



Commonly used terms and acronyms in defensive shooting training.

Defensive shooting is a technical field, and like all technical fields it has its own jargon and acronyms. Newbies are frequently in the dark about these and are confused or baffled by Facebook posts and other media with these mysterious terms. Here are some of the more commonly encountered terms.

Accuracy- "accuracy" for the firearm and for the shooter is the ability to hit to point of aim (i.e. zeroed & on target). See also Precision

Action Types, Semi-Auto Pistols-

SA Single Action

SAO Single Action Only

DA Double Action, also TDA Traditional Double Action

DAO Double Action Only

Striker Fired has a striker instead of a hammer and a firing pin

AD/ND/UD AD= Accidental Discharge, a shot fired without input from the user, caused by mechanical failure.

ND= Negligent Discharge, a shot fired by the firearm's user through carelessness or improper gun handling

UD= Unintentional Discharge, for when we don't know whether it was an AD or an ND

AIWB- Appendix Inside Waistband A holster designed to be worn on a belt, inside the pants, forward of the hip, about where your appendix is.

Automaticity- Learning a skill to the point where it can be done correctly without conscious thought. The goal is to learn to perform shooting tasks while using our brain power to process information and make decisions in a tactical environment.

Ball- Practice and training ammunition with a fully jacketed bullet.

Ballistic Gelatin- A specific type of animal protein based gelatin that when properly prepared and kept at a specific temperature will simulate swine muscle tissue when struck by a bullet. It is NOT intended to replicate a body, which has skin, bones, fascia, muscle tissue, fluid filled organs and air filled organs. Just getting through human skin is the equivalent of 3.5 inches of penetration in gelatin, and bones

account for much more. This is why the FBI recommends from 12-18 inches of penetration for defensive ammunition.

Bill Drill- A standardized drill for checking recoil control and sight tracking. Usually it's drawing and firing 6 shots into an 8" circle at 7 yards, as quickly as one can get all hits.

BUG- Back-Up Gun A small second gun carried in case of loss of or failure of the primary sidearm.

Bullet Types, for Handguns

Ball full metal jacketed practice ammunition

FMJ full metal jacket, again, for training and practice

JHP jacketed hollow point

LHP lead hollow point

LFN lead flat nose

Wadcutter all lead, full caliber flat nose for cutting sharp holes in a target

Semi-wadcutter Like a wadcutter with a conical less than caliber nose, easier to reload a revolver with but still cuts sharp holes like a wadcutter

Frangible made of compressed metal, disintegrates on impact on steel targets

SP, or JSP soft point, or jacketed soft point. Intended to expand on striking a body. Works well at rifle velocities, not at handgun velocities

Card Drill, Card Challenge, Card Trick- A standard drill comprised of shooting a playing card, vertically oriented, at a distance of 5 yards. The usual standard is to draw from concealment and fire five shots. If all five hit the card in 5 seconds or less, you "passed". 5 yards/5 shots/5 seconds

Cardinal Precepts/Cardinal Rules- Muzzle Discipline and Trigger Finger Discipline. Keep your trigger finger in register when not actually firing, and be aware of where your muzzle is pointed at all times.

Carry Ammo- In pistols, normally a cartridge with a jacketed hollow point bullet, designed to expand and become a more efficient wounding shape as it penetrates into a body.

Cartridge- A self contained unit ready to put into a firearm and fire. Consists of a case, a primer, a powder charge and a bullet. One cartridge is often referred to as "a round" of ammunition.

Clean- To "clean" a course of fire or a drill means to shoot a perfect score on it, as in "I cleaned that bullseye course".

Clearing a Firearm- Must be done before cleaning, inspecting, adjusting, tinkering, or dry fire. Must clear a firearm before any non-shooting task, as above. To clear a semi-auto pistol:

Remove the magazine and set it aside or pocket it.

Eject the round from the chamber, whether you think there is one there or not.

Lock the slide to the rear and visually inspect the chamber and the magazine well.

Leave the gun locked open and empty while handling it.

Clip- A strip of metal that holds cartridges together for insertion into a fixed magazine, as in the C96 Mauser pistol. See illustration on last page.

Cold/Hot- A "cold range" is one where all participants have unloaded guns. The guns are only loaded on the firing line under direction of an instructor, and are unloaded before leaving the firing line. A "hot

range” is one wherein all guns are always loaded, on and off the firing line. There should be NO handling of the gun off the firing line. Cold ranges are by far more dangerous than hot ranges, as on cold ranges people tend to think of the guns as unloaded and therefore, not dangerous.

Cold- Cold performance refers to one’s ability to execute a skill, shoot a drill or CoF, or accomplish some other task without “warming up”; no practice or dry runs, just step up and perform. This is often thought to be the best way to check your skill, as skill usually improves after a bit of “warm up” and repetition.

Combatives- Term used to denote equipment and techniques meant for use in actual fighting against human adversaries. Used to delineate from sport techniques in both hand to hand and firearms programs.

Compensator- “Comp” A device attached to the muzzle end of a gun’s barrel. Slots or openings in the compensator direct high pressure gasses upward, which pushes the front end of the gun downward, countering the muzzle rise associated with recoil.

Course of Fire- COF, CoF- A collection of drills, as in a match or a qualification course. See Drill.

Cross Dominance- Refers to a person whose dominant hand is on one side, but the dominant eye is on the other side. For instance, right handed but left eye dominant, the most common version.

DGU- Defensive Gun Use, defending one’s self with a firearm

DHO- Dominant Hand Only

DTFS- Draw to First Shot The time, measured by stopwatch or electronic timer, that elapses from the start signal until your first shot. Usually measured as one shot to an 8” circle at 7 yards, but endless variations exist.

Drill- A brief shooting exercise designed to work on or measure a skill. For instance, drawing from concealment and firing 3 shots at 5 yards into an 8” circle within 3 seconds would be a drill. Sometimes more than one drill are run in sequence to test a variety of skills at one time.

Drill of the Month- DOTM The Drill of the Month is featured every month in Rangemaster’s free newsletter. Each month has a different drill, usually from 10-30 rounds. See <https://rangemaster.com/newsletter/>

Dry Firing, or Dry Practice- manipulating your handgun in various skills, such as presenting from the holster, empty gun reloads, etc using a verified UNLOADED gun, in your home. This helps build a high number of repetitions of a task without traveling to the range or expending ammo. MUST be done correctly for safety and skill development.

Dummy/ Dummy Round/ Dummy Ammunition- Inert, non-firing replica of a cartridge. Can be used to practice loading/unloading/reloading, clearing, and malfunction clearance skills in a non-firing environment like a classroom or your home.

ECQC- Extreme Close Quarters Concepts- Flagship course from Craig Douglas, combines elements of awareness, verbal agility, positioning, grappling, and in-fight weapon access. See MUC

EDC- Every Day Carry The gun/holster/belt etc that make up the gear you actually carry daily, as opposed to specialized competition or range training gear.

Etiquette- Range etiquette is simply maintaining behaviors that enhance learning and do not create safety hazards or detract from the ability of others in class to learn the material. See “How not to be That Guy”.

FAST- Fundamental Accuracy and Speed Test- devised by the late Todd Green, it is intended to be shot a couple of times a year to check progress.

FAST Coin- A commemorative coin issued to shooters who shoot the FAST clean in under 5 seconds, 2 times in a row, in a class run by Simon Golob, who took over Todd Green’s training operation.

FBI Course- The current FBI pistol qualification course. This is revised every few years. The current version is the PQC-19, adopted in 2019. 50 rounds, fired at various distances, with time limits.

FFL- Federal Firearms License A license issued by the BATFE to an entity that wishes to do business selling firearms.

Firing Pin- In semi-autos, a separate part struck by a hammer and driven forward to ignite a primer.

Grains- A grain is a unit of measurement of weight. There are 7,000 grains in a pound. Since handgun bullets are small and don’t weigh much, the weight of the bullet is expressed in grains. Examples- 124 grain, 147 grain

IDPA- The International Defensive Pistol Association- a competition organization founded in the 1990’s to encourage competition with actual carry gear. Usually involves less athletic movement than does IPSC/USPSA competition.

IDOL- Immediate Defense of Life What we carry a handgun for.

“In Register”- Refers to the shooter’s trigger finger resting in a specific, repeatable spot on the pistol, well away from the trigger, any time the pistol is not actually being fired, such as when at The Ready or while holstering. Preferably, the shooter uses a tactile indicator, such as the Glock’s take-down latch, or the flat of the pistol’s slide, to facilitate making this finger placement automatic.

IPSC- The International Practical Shooting Confederation A form of “action” pistol competition, involving shooting mostly silhouette targets at high speed, often while moving from point to point. USPSA is the US region of IPSC, which has numerous other regions around the world. IPSC was founded in 1976 by Jeff Cooper.

Iron Sights- Non-optic, non PMO, usually consisting of a notch in the rear sight and a front sight that appears as a post when viewed from the rear, as when aiming. The term is used to differentiate between a pistol with an optical sight and one that does not. See photo on last page.

IWB- Inside Waistband A holster designed to be worn on a belt, but inside the pants.

Jacketed Hollow Point- JHP A bullet made of two parts, a lead core and a copper jacket, with a cavity in the nose of the bullet (hollow point). When this bullet enters a body, fluid enters the cavity and puts hydraulic pressure on the thinner portion of the bullet's front, causing it to peel back and "expand".

LE- Law Enforcement

LEO- Law Enforcement Officer

LE Only- restricted to law enforcement personnel

LEA- Law Enforcement Agency

LGS- Local Gun Store

Load and Make Ready- A common command given in matches or classes to shooters on the firing line, preparing for live-fire exercises. Includes making sure you have a magazine in the gun, and a round chambered. Also includes ensuring eye and ear protection are in place and one is ready to shoot.

Magazine- In a repeating firearm, the magazine houses the ammunition within the firearm.

Fixed Magazine- not removeable from the firearm. Fed with stripper clips.

Detachable, or Box Magazine- A feeding device for the firearm, the magazine consists of a body, a floorplate, a spring, and a follower. Ammunition stored in the magazine is pushed upward by the follower, under spring power. The top cartridge in the magazine is fed into the gun's chamber from the top of the magazine. The inwardly curved portion of the magazine's body that hold the top cartridge in place are called the feed lips. See photos on last page.

Magazine Well, or Mag Well- A device added to the bottom of the magazine opening in the bottom of the grip frame of a handgun. The idea is to "funnel" the magazine into the butt of the gun, speeding up the reloading process.

MUC- Managing Unknown Contacts The core of Craig Douglas's ECQC coursework.

NDHO- Non-dominant hand only

NICS- National Instant Check System This is the computerized background check run by a federally licensed gun dealer prior to delivery of a purchased firearm.

NPE- Non-Permissive Environment A location where discovery that you are armed would lead to legal, employment, or social repercussions. Requires more diligent concealment techniques/equipment.

OIS- Officer Involved Shooting, shooting involving a police officer

Overlearning- Practicing a learned skill or technique until it can be performed correctly under stress and without conscious thought

OODA- Acronym for Col. John Boyd's reaction cycle, Observe/Orient/Decide/Act

Open Enrollment- A course open to private citizens, in addition to military or police personnel

OWB- Outside Waistband A holster designed to be worn on the belt, outside the pants.

Par Time- A time assigned to a particular drill. Usually, the par time is that amount of time in which we would expect a competent shooter to complete the given task. For example, the par time on the Casino Drill is 21 seconds. If you complete the drill with no misses in less than 21 seconds, you are pretty skillful. If it takes you more than 21 seconds, you have more work to do. A benchmark.

PCC- Pistol Caliber Carbine A shoulder weapon chambered for a pistol cartridge, usually an AR-15 or similar platform chambered in 9mm, but there are others.

Pinning, or Pinning the Trigger- Holding the trigger all the way to the rear when the gun fires, and waiting until the sights are back on target before re-setting the trigger. To be discouraged. Trigger should be re-set while the gun is in recoil.

PMO- Pistol Mounted Optic The best term for an optical sight mounted on a handgun. See RDS

PPC- 1. Practical Pistol Course, a term used by the FBI for decades to describe their silhouette based handgun qualification course. This distinguished that course from the bullseye course. The term practical meant that it measured skills used in fighting, such as drawing, reloading, and shooting from different positions. None of these are done in bullseye shooting.

2. Police Pistol, Combat A stylized form of law enforcement only competition shooting instituted by the NRA in 1960 to give police a practical competition venue.

Precision- “precision” for the firearm is a consistent predictable result (i.e. ability to group small). The definition of “precision” for the shooter is similar, with the consideration of how accurate and fast can they be when necessary. A smaller or more distant target requires more precision. See also Accuracy.

Presentation- The series of movements involved in bringing a handgun to bear on a target with the intent of shooting that target quickly and efficiently, whether drawing from the holster or coming up from a ready position.

Qualification/Qualification Course/ Q Course- Typically involves a standardized Course of Fire and a minimum passing score on that CoF. Often used to establish a baseline of competency in a law enforcement academy setting or in a firearms class. May determine eligibility for a job or a title.

Rack- A verb used to describe pulling a pistol’s slide vigorously to the rear, then letting it go.

RDS- Red Dot Sight Not the best descriptor for an optical handgun sight. Some have green dots, some have a circle reticle or a chevron instead of a dot, so a better term is PMO.

Re-set Refers to firing a gun, then letting the trigger go far enough forward to re-engage the sear and render the gun capable of firing again.

Rule 1- A “Rule 1 Gun” allows one to obey the first rule of gunfighting, “Bring a Gun”.

Safe Wall- A structural wall that would stop an unintentionally fired bullet, as in an unintentional discharge while conducting dry practice. Would need to be brick, stone, concrete or similar , NOT drywall or lathe/plaster.

SCD, or “the Gadget”- Striker Control Device, an accessory replacing the slide end plate on a Glock, allows the user to know if something is moving the gun’s trigger while holstering, a safety enhancement.

SHO/WHO- Strong Hand Only and Weak Hand Only See DHO/NDHO

Shotgun Ammunition Types-

Birdshot Tiny, lightweight pellets for shooting live birds or clay birds. There are about 400 pellets to the ounce in typical birdshot loads. Not for self defense.

Buckshot Larger, heavier pellets intended for deer sized game and self defense. A typical 00 load in 12 gauge has 8 or 9 pellets and is a standard for self defense.

Slug A single projectile, essentially a giant .73 caliber bullet in 12 gauge. For maximum penetration.

SME- Subject Matter Expert Someone with broad, deep training and experience in a particular field.

Striker- Essentially a beefed up firing pin that moves forward under spring power, rather than struck by a hammer.

Tac Con- The Tactical Conference, an annual conclave of serious practitioners of the defensive arts. Currently held in Dallas, Texas, the last weekend in March. Over 40 national level trainers provide concurrent training blocks for 400 attendees. Topics include live-fire with handguns and shotguns, emergency medical skills, empty hands skills, impact and edged weapons deployment, legal issues, and much more. Conducted every year for 25 years.

The Test- Fired on a B-8C or FBI IP-1 bullseye target at 10 yards. Start at Ready. On signal, fire 10 rounds in 10 seconds or less. So, it’s 10 shots at 10 yards in 10 seconds. Goal is to keep them all in the black, or to shoot 90% or above. Origin is credited to Ken Hackathorn.

Three Gun, or 3 Gun- A form of competition in which each competitor uses a shotgun, a rifle, and a handgun in the same match.

Timer- An electronic device that gives a start signal, usually in the form of a beep. It then uses the sound of the gunshots to activate circuits that record and display the time it took to fire the shot or shots.

Training/Practice- Training refers to the development of skills, techniques and procedures under the guidance and supervision of an instructor/trainer. Practice consists of accumulating repetitions of those skills and attributes learned previously in training, usually conducted alone or in small groups of peers.

TTP’s- Tactics, Techniques and Procedures

VCA- Violent Criminal Actor

May be “instrumental” or profit motivated, or
“expressive” motivated by emotion or psychopathy

Velocity- An expression of the speed of a bullet, usually expressed in “feet per second”. Most handgun ammunition has a bullet velocity between 700 and 1300 feet per second- 1100 feet per second (fps) equals 750 miles per hour. Pistol bullets don’t travel miles, so the smaller unit is used.

Vital Zone, or The Vitals- An area on the human torso usually described as from the collarbone to the diaphragm, between the nipples. On a grown man this is about an 8” square or circle.

Wadcutter- Used in some revolver cartridges, the bullet is almost entirely enclosed within the case, leaving a full caliber flat ended bullet just visible. The bullet extends well into the cartridge case. Cuts a very sharp, clean hole in a paper target, hence the name.

Zero, or Zeroing- The process whereby the gun’s sights are adjusted so that the bullet’s point of impact and the aiming point coincide, or “the gun hits where it looks”. Typically, we zero a pistol to hit dead on to an inch high at 25 yards. This gives us the ability to hold dead on a desired point of impact from 3 yards to 75 yards and hit fairly close to that point of aim.



See jacketed hollow point, JHP

See Drills, CoF



See Card Drill



See Iron Sights



Fixed Magazine and Stripper Clip



Detachable Box Magazine