

The Right Tool For the Job

Part 5 in a multiple part series on the Safe and Proper use of your defensive tool

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FOAC News Letter

The cornerstone of all firearms training, no matter the context is safety. All Americans who exercise their 2A Rights must also exercise them responsibly; this requires an understanding of safe gun handling, responsible storage, but begins with choosing the right tool for the job.

No firefighter would run into a working fire with a mask that “kinda fits” them or one that works “most of the time”. However many family first responders carry defensive tools that don’t fit them or are terribly complicated. Sometime that complicatedness may even make their gun choice “less safe”. After all we carry our firearms so that we can defend ourselves from a potential attack and keep our loved ones safe. It is a piece of safety equipment. If it is overly complicated or unreliable then it may make us less safe.

Let’s begin by addressing “fit”. The gun must fit and have the ability to point naturally. When we drive the gun to [full extension](#) it should point where we are looking. We should strive to run the gun using the least amount of time, effort, and energy, and with the least amount of visual stimulus possible. We cover this in great detail in the [USCCA Defensive Shooting Fundamentals Classes](#).

To determine if a gun fits your hand, grip the gun properly with the strong hand high on the back strap, your [trigger finger off the trigger and above the trigger area](#) and your middle and subsequent fingers wrapped around the grip tight against the bottom of the trigger guard. The strong hand thumb knuckle *should be* on the support side of the gun. Factors that could affect this is gun thickness, double stacked versus single stacked, and of course your hand size. If the thumb is not on the support side of the gun then it will likely point somewhere other than where you are looking when you drive it to full extension. This is a set up for a potential failure in the context of a defensive encounter.

Next, consider grip angle. If the grip angle is such that when you drive the gun to full extension the muzzle points slightly high or slightly low, then that gun is not likely to point well for you. If you would like more info on this, check out [this article I wrote on Personal Defense Network](#). Some guns have interchangeable back straps or panels that might fix this issue. If you have to rely on visual stimulus to see the gun tipped high or low, *then* cognitively decide to correct the guns alignment, you are setting yourself up for a potential fail. So why not pick a gun that not only fits, but one that also points well.

Another factor to consider is the efficiency of operation and the ability to operate the gun using the least amount of time, effort and energy. Many gun designs are EXTREMELY complicated. Having to manipulate levers, buttons, and switches to operate a gun can lead to missteps. If grip and control of the gun is compromised to operate the gun, or if the gun doesn’t fire when you want it to, or if you don’t use the gun as designed because it is inconvenient, then you are making the *use* of that gun less safe.

As you look at the evolution of firearm design going back to single action semi-autos on up to modern striker fired semi-autos, some safety features are very necessary but may make one design less efficient than others.

Running a Single Action only 1911 “cocked” but not “locked” is grossly irresponsible because of its very light and short trigger press. It takes MANY MANY reps to consistently get the safety off when you need it. A defensive firearm that doesn’t go “bang” when you need it, is not a great choice for life saving safety equipment. Would you want to have an AED that only turns on “most of the time”? Can you train to get that manual thumb safety off when you need it?... hell yes, humans are amazing animals, however it will require a commitment of lots and lots of practice.

Double Action/Single Action (DA/SA) semi-autos often lack manually operated thumb safeties but when the gun is initially loaded the hammer is cocked mechanically by the slide setting the gun into “single action” mode which, like with the 1911, typically means a very light short trigger press. This would be a grossly irresponsible way to carry the gun. So to remedy this issue, most DA/SA semi-autos have a “decocking” lever which safely drops the hammer, setting it up for double action mode. The initial double action trigger press, out of the holster, is heavier and longer, and then all subsequent shots, being in single action mode, makes for an inconsistent trigger press. Most folks who use DA/SA’s will report “shanking” the first shot, and some might even report firing a second time, maybe with out intending to, because of the drastic difference of pressure required to make the gun go bang from shot one to shot two. Can you train to run this gun well... hell yes, humans are amazing animals, however it will require a commitment of lots and lots of practice.

What about double action revolvers? A DA/SA or double action only (DAO) revolver may be a viable option for somebody, however, a DA/SA revolver must be carried and run in double action mode for the same reasons as the DA/SA semi-auto. The “safety” of the revolver is the long heavy trigger press. Carrying it in single action mode, with the hammer cocked, is grossly irresponsible. Relying on your ability to cock the hammer before you need to defend yourself from a violent attacker in close proximity is unrealistic. The consistency of the heavy DA trigger press *is* a positive, however, I have worked with many folks who lacked the hand and finger strength to press the heavy DA trigger. Because of the heavy trigger, many folks have an extremely difficult time shooting the gun with any level of precision. This combined with limited capacity, shorter sight radius, and the fact that majority of defensive revolvers are gripped almost entirely with the strong hand with the support hand gripping the strong hand, not the gun, typically requires more muscle and brain power to control deviation and mitigate recoil. Can you train to run this gun well... hell yes, humans are amazing animals, however it will require a commitment of lots and lots of practice.

The modern striker fired semi auto that lacks a manually operated thumb safety is the most efficient design available to us in the 21st century. Many folks take issue with my next statement, but it is my belief that if [Col. Cooper](#) were alive today, he’d be carrying a modern striker fired semi-auto without a thumb safety, probably in 9mm. It is easy for me to say this because we really don’t know, however, much like the AR15 rifle platform, the polymer framed striker fired semi-auto pistol has, over decades, proven to be extremely reliable, it has a consistent trigger press one shot to the next, and as many lack an external thumb safety, they are much less complicated and easier to master in less time. Another added benefit is that because of the design of a striker fired pistol, using a striker (think of a plunger on a pinball machine) rather than a hammer hitting a firing pin, the slide is typically not as high, it is lighter, has less mass than a hammer gun, and is generally easier to mitigate recoil, settle the gun, and race to that “last shot” that ends the attack.

Can you train to run this gun well... hell yes, humans are amazing animals, and if you commit to lots and lots of practice you can run it even better!

I, and my colleagues, that see hundreds and maybe thousands of guns on the range each year will attest that some designs and models run virtually flawlessly and others not so much. With this said, my general recommendation for a defensive pistol is a modern striker fired semi-automatic with out a thumb safety in 9mm. They are the most efficient design available, requiring the least amount of resources to run, and they are much more consistently reliable. We will talk about validating your defensive system (gun and ammo) and choosing your defensive ammo in my next article. We also cover these topics in great depth in the [I.C.E. Fundamentals of Home Defense](#) and [USCCA Certified Concealed Carry](#) Courses that I teach.

Choose a gun that is reliable, fits you well, and is easier to run. This will help you to maximize your training resources and you might just become “better well regulated” with your particular tool of self-defense making you a more efficient family first responder.

Lastly, as I wrap up this installment, I remind you of “The Big Picture Rule”. Every time you take a gun from or put it back into a holster consider this:

Recognize that YOU are in control of a firearm, if YOU use this firearm carelessly, ignorantly, or with malice, YOU have the potential to harm or kill yourself or someone else.

Act accordingly. Don’t just be an armed American, be a responsibly armed American!

Stay armed, alert, safe, and be well regulated!