

The Four Cardinal Safety Rules of Firing a Handgun

The very first thing brought up were four rules, that if followed strictly, will keep you and others safe so you can have a good time unloading a few rounds.

1. Always treat every firearm as if it were loaded. No ifs, ands, or buts. Even if you know the gun is unloaded, still handle it as if it were loaded.

2. Always keep the firearm pointed in a safe direction, a direction where a negligent discharge would cause minimum property damage and zero physical injury. According to Mike, even the most experienced gun handlers break this rule all the time. They'll take a gun and start pointing it all over the place while exclaiming, "Ah, sweet bro, this gun is kickass."

"They don't even know they're doing it," says Mike, "which makes it even more dangerous."

The safest direction to point a gun is always downrange (as long as there aren't any people downrange!).

3. Always keep your trigger finger off the trigger and outside the trigger guard until you have made a conscious decision to shoot.

4. Always be sure of your target, backstop, and beyond. You want to be aware of what's in your line of fire. This isn't usually a concern if you go to a professional gun range. They make sure that people and property stay out of the path of the guns firing downrange. Where this becomes a concern is when you go shoot with your buddy out on his property.

"Ask your friend what exactly is beyond the target and backstop you're shooting at, especially when you're shooting into a wooded area. Don't just settle for, 'Oh, don't worry. There's nothing back there.' Ask specifically if there are any houses, property, etc beyond your backstop. Err on the side of being overly cautious," says Mike.

How to Grip a Handgun

Alright, let's get down to business. How do you hold a handgun?

For beginners, Mike says a two-handed grip is a must.

1. The gun hand (your dominant hand) should grip the gun high on the back strap (the back strap is the back of the grip on the gun). This gives you more leverage against the weapon which will help you control recoil when you fire the gun.

2. Place your support hand (your non-dominant hand) so that it is pressed firmly against the exposed portion of the grip not covered by the gun hand. All four fingers of your support hand should be under the trigger guard with the index finger pressed hard underneath it.

Like you did with your gun hand, you should place your support hand as high as possible on the grip with the thumb pointing forward, roughly below where the slide meets the frame. Look at the back of your hands. There should be a distinct fit, like the fit of a puzzle, with your gun and support hand.

Assume the Extended Shooting Position

Stand with your feet and hips shoulder width apart. Bend your knees slightly. Mike calls it an “athletic stance.” It allows you to fire the weapon with stability and mobility. Raise the weapon toward your target.

How to Aim a Handgun

Use your dominant eye. You want to aim with your dominant eye. To figure out which of your eyes is the dominant one, perform a quick eye test by forming a one inch circle with your thumb and index finger. Hold the circle at arm’s length. Look at a distant object and look through your circle so that the object appears in the center of it. Keeping both eyes open, bring your circle toward your face slowly. Your hand will naturally gravitate toward one eye. That’s your dominant eye.

Align your sights. Your handgun has a front sight and a rear sight notch. Aim at your target and align the top of the front sight so that it lines up with the top of the rear sight. There should also be equal amounts of empty space on both sides of the front sight.

Set your sight picture. The sight picture is the pattern of your gun’s sights in relation to your target. When you’re aiming a gun, you’re looking at three objects: the front sight, the rear sight, and your target. However, it’s not possible to focus simultaneously on all three objects. One of the objects will inevitably be blurry when you’re aiming. When you have a correct sight picture, your front and rear sight appears sharp and clear and your target appears to be a bit blurry. Like so:

Correct sight picture. The sights are in focus and the target is blurry.

According to Mike, the further away your target is, the greater the need for a clear focus on the front sight.

Trigger Management (aka Pulling the Trigger)

To fire a gun, we often use the popular phrase “pull the trigger.” However, to fire a gun

properly, you don't actually want to pull the trigger, but rather press it in a controlled fashion so you don't disrupt your sights. Here's a brief and very basic rundown on proper trigger control when firing a gun.

1. Press, don't pull. Instead of pulling the trigger, press (or like my dad likes to say "squeeze") the trigger straight to the rear. Apply constant, increasing reward pressure on the trigger until the weapon fires. Ensure that you're only applying pressure to the front of the trigger and not the sides.

2. Take the slack out of the trigger. Squeeze the trigger to the point you start feeling resistance.

3. Surprise yourself. Keep pressing the trigger straight to the rear until the gun fires. Don't anticipate when the gun will fire. You sort of want to surprise yourself as to when the gun actually discharges.

And there you go. Now you can go fire a gun at the gun range and look like you know what you're doing. However, none of the information in this article can replace the instruction and supervision of a professional instructor. If you've never fired a gun before, we strongly suggest you visit a firing range and talk to an instructor who will walk you through the process.

Until Then - Train Hard!

-Mike