

PAUL PENG

THE BEGINNER'S TRIANGLE

BUILD SUCCESS FROM THE GROUND UP



CHOOSE WISELY

If you're just starting out, it can be difficult to decide how to invest your time and money in self-defense training. This will make those decisions a lot easier.

A Gallup survey conducted in October of 2021 found that 88 percent of gun owners considered “protection” the primary reason for owning a firearm. Seventy percent stated that “target shooting” was their primary reason, followed by “hunting” at 56 percent.¹ And when you combine that with the number of first-time gun owners — let alone brand-new concealed carriers — you can end up with a situation in which there’s a great need for training and a shortage of trainers. While nothing can replace time spent receiving instruction from a professional, the following is a quick rundown of the fundamentals for those who are new to self-defense firearms ownership. The basics can best be described as a triangle: foundational principles, situational awareness and realistic training.

FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLES

Academic coach Erika Oppenheimer said, “Without a solid foundation, you’ll have trouble creating anything of value.”

Pick a sport, any sport. In order to perform well and up to your full potential, you must be focused in on it. You cannot think about anything else except the specific task at hand. Marksmanship is no different.

Every time you pull the trigger, you must think of nothing else but you and your target. So, what makes up a strong foundation for marksmanship? There are three foundational principles upon which everything else is built: sight, trigger press and follow-through.

Sight, in a nutshell, is aiming. It is the process of obtaining a good sight picture by aligning the front sight with the rear sight. The front sight should be crystal clear, the rear sight slightly blurry and the target even more blurry.

Trigger press is, in essence, the proper squeeze of a trigger. Most striker-fired pistols require somewhere around 5 or 6 pounds of pressure to discharge, while double-action revolvers require between 10 and 15 pounds. For a semi-automatic pistol, the part of your index finger that goes on the trigger is the tip of



AN INVALUABLE ASSET

the top section of that finger. For a revolver, because of the increased poundage required to pull the trigger, your index finger will sink in to the crease after the first joint of that finger, causing you to have an offset grip.

It is important to note the two fundamental truths about trigger press here: First, once you fire, your finger does not leave the trigger. Second, slack is a mechanical function of the firearm, not part of the trigger press. So why is finger placement and understanding that slack is not a part of the trigger press important? Too much finger will mean that you will overextend your trigger, resulting in your shots ending up lower or to the right or left of center mass (depending on your dominant hand). If you release your index finger or allow it to come off the trigger after you fire, you will have inadvertently incorporated slack into your trigger press. Doing so will dramatically increase your chances of slamming your trigger (using too much force) and pulling your shots downward from center mass.

Follow-through is perhaps the most underrated of the three foundational principles. After you pull the trigger and experience the recoil from your firearm, it is important to hold the trigger back and not release it until you can achieve a proper sight picture. Then and only then do you release the trigger just enough to feel and hear the trigger reset or “wall.” Anything beyond this point is considered slack, which is not a part of the trigger press. You must hear and feel all of this before firing again. Then the process repeats: sight, trigger press and follow-through. Failure to perform follow-through will result in scattered shot groups, hitting lower (or higher) than center mass or missing the target altogether.

SITUATIONAL AWARENESS

Bestselling author Barry Eisler claimed, “The difference between being a victim and a survivor is often a low level of situational awareness.”

As stated earlier, self-defense is the biggest reason why Americans purchase firearms. Before a potential threat is engaged, it must first be properly identified. In most states, the only circumstance under which deadly force is authorized is

■ Bob Withers lives roughly six hours away from Las Vegas and has been a USCCA Member for two years. He recently had to make an unexpected trip to North Las Vegas for a family medical emergency. Before departing, he wisely reviewed the Reciprocity by USCCA app and the Nevada gun laws page on the USCCA’s website to make sure he wouldn’t encounter any unexpected laws. He was surprised by what he discovered.

“I go in there [the app], and sure enough, North Las Vegas, the place I’ve got to go, has that weapons code where they don’t recognize the state’s CCW per se, but they have their own,” he said.

North Las Vegas indeed has its own weapons code, which placed Withers, a lawful concealed carry permit holder for multiple states, in a position to violate the law. Had he arrived at the city without first checking its weapons law and been involved in a self-defense incident, it could have jeopardized his case for lawful self-defense.

Withers called the hotel where he had made a reservation to see if it would allow him to store his gun in a safe. The individual at the front desk transferred him to the head of security, who told Withers that no weapons were allowed on the hotel property. If he had arrived at the hotel with his firearm without knowing it didn’t permit guns, he would have been stuck trying to figure out how and where to legally secure it.

He sensibly decided to investigate the weapons code in North Las Vegas further and uncovered something else that was problematic. He measured the folding horse hoof pick in his vehicle, which also has a folding knife blade, and – sure enough – the blade was over the city’s permitted length. Even though Withers was forced to travel unarmed to North Las Vegas, the trip provided a valuable lesson.

“This is a good reminder that you need to do some research and a little bit of homework to find out what’s going on before you get into the middle of something,” Withers stated.

He said the USCCA helps its members immensely by providing accurate and “invaluable” research on state weapons laws and reciprocity.

“You couldn’t put a price on it at this point,” Withers declared.

– **Frank Jastrzembski, Contributing Editor**

when an individual can prove he or she is under imminent threat of death or great bodily harm. So how do you go about identifying a threat? How do you become more situationally aware in general? And how is being more situationally aware supposed to prevent you from becoming a victim?

Unfortunately, there is no textbook way to identify a threat. Many times, it comes down to intuition or a gut feeling in response to a person or environment. The most basic way to identify a potential threat is to establish a baseline. This means that you scan a given environment long enough to determine the general atmosphere or norm of the area, which usually takes about seven seconds. Once you’ve established a baseline, you can then scan for anomalies, items or individuals that seem out of

place that could potentially be a problem or threat. If you determine that something or someone is a problem, leave the area right away. We live in a world in which people are so glued to their phones that they’re no longer aware of their immediate environments. Don’t be like everyone else. Get your eyes up and get used to scanning your environment. Potential predators are always on the lookout for people who aren’t paying attention. People who aren’t paying attention are easy targets, so you need to make sure you’re a harder target. Stay alert and stay alive.

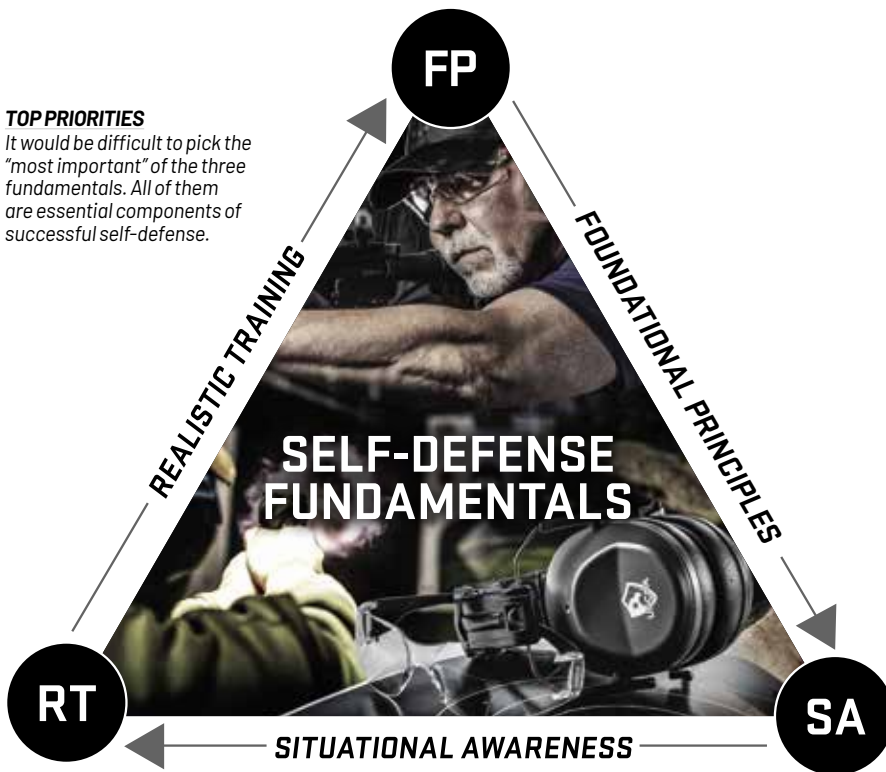
REALISTIC TRAINING

Famous World War II Gen. George S. Patton declared, “You fight like you train.”

When it comes to a skill, training is a must. It keeps one’s skill, mind, body and

TOP PRIORITIES

It would be difficult to pick the "most important" of the three fundamentals. All of them are essential components of successful self-defense.



reflexes sharp. Without training, many skills will deteriorate, making the practitioner less effective over time. However, one must also train for what may actually come to pass in a real-world situation. In other words, train like you fight. If you want to become a better boxer, you must have a sparring partner, not just a heavy bag and a speed bag. If you want to be a better NASCAR driver, you must drive with other racers on the track, not just by yourself. And if you want to get better at firearms-based self-defense, you need to practice the drills that may save you during a crisis, not just shoot from a static position on a target range.

You need to find a way to train in live-fire drills from the holster, shooting from retention, reloading while keeping your eye on your target, and "blue gun" (or plastic, non-firing replica gun) drills on safe movement while scanning and assessing your surroundings. No, no one can go to every shooting school and train with every instructor. But a beginner's course and a class on tactical movement can make a world of difference in keeping you safe.

THREE TO SUCCEED

It doesn't matter whether you are shooting a shotgun, rifle, semi-automatic pistol or revolver. Mastering the three foundational principles — sight, trigger press and follow-through — will make

you a competent shooter. Maintaining an appropriate level of situational awareness by scanning your surroundings at all times and noting anything that appears to be "off" will keep you and your loved ones safer. And engaging in realistic training will leave you far better prepared to defend innocent life than time spent on a square range slowly sending rounds into a static target.

You must get in the habit of questioning the training that is available to you with the aim of ensuring that it will make sense in your personal circumstance and that there is not, in fact, a better expenditure of your training resources. Your training is one of the most important investments you can make in your personal-protection plan. You have to train like you mean it, but before you can do so, you have to understand why you are training and be confident that the training you undertake is the right training for you. Otherwise, you risk wasting precious time.

ENDNOTES

(1) "In Depth: Topics A to Z: Guns," Gallup.com, accessed Feb. 24, 2023, news.Gallup.com/poll/1645/Guns.aspx.



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