

# Defensive Strategies



By Lyn Bates,  
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From time to time, I've provided information in this column about police qualification courses, or courses of fire that have become standard at top firearms schools. I'm guessing that none of you went rushing to the range to see if you could pass those tests. Am I right?

This time, let's forget tests. What can you do on the range to have fun and practice exercises that could help you in a defensive situation, or at least not get in your way. How does that sound? No qualification, no final exam, no tests, just useful practice — part of the course of fire that we use in one of AWARE's classes, Self-Protection with Handguns.

AWARE, Arming Women Against Rape and Endangerment, is the nonprofit organization that I have volunteered for for as long as I have been teaching shooting. Based in Massachusetts, AWARE has educated many people from firearms novices to stalking victims. Before allowing students to take the course described here, AWARE requires

## Range Exercises for Self-Defense Practice (Part 1)

that they have had basic firearms safety and shooting training, and a course that details many of the legal, tactical, and practical issues involved in using guns for self-defense. If you are a regular reader of this column, you have been exposed to some of that material.

So, what about actual shooting practice? Here are some exercises that you can do with a moderate amount of ammo (about 100 rounds) in a few afternoons at the range. All of these are intended to be carried out at 7 yards (typical self-defense distance), using an IPSC cardboard target or other large person-sized target, not a bulls eye target. You should turn your mind away from a perfect sight alignment under a perfect round target to an acceptable sight alignment in the middle of the largest portion of the target that you can see.

If you have a holster that you typically use for concealed carry, if you have been trained to use it safely, and if your range permits it, you can do all of these exercises drawing from the holster under your ordinary clothes. In our AWARE class, we use a bench instead of holsters because many of our students do not yet own guns, let alone holsters, because providing them with a holster would require a lot of time to learn to use it safely (a skill that would not necessarily transfer to their ultimate carry method), and because in a home

situation a gun is not likely to be in a holster to start with.

When should your trigger finger go on the trigger? As one is raising the gun to the target? No, though this is a bad habit ingrained in many shooters. The proper answer is not until the sights are on target AND the decision to shoot has been made. The instant you are finished firing, before lowering the gun, your finger should come off the trigger and rest along the side of the gun. Practice dry-firing with this trigger discipline for a while before you begin shooting. Now, on to some of the range exercises.

**Exercise: Speed Reloading.** Speed reloading is a good skill to learn and practice. You can do this if you have shot your gun empty, or if you have some ammo left but are in enough of a lull that you want to reload ASAP. Speed is the prime consideration, not conserving ammo or leisurely reloading.

If you have a revolver and are right-handed, you should have at least one speed loader filled with spare ammo handy. Here is the process: Open the cylinder. Immobilize the gun and keep the cylinder open with your left thumb and two fingers of your left hand through the frame. Point the muzzle straight up. Slap the ejector rod once, hard, with right palm. Let the empty brass and any unfired rounds drop to the ground. Turn the gun over

in your left hand so the muzzle points straight down. With your right hand, grasp the speed loader low, so your fingertips are on the cartridges, not just the plastic. Insert the tips of the rounds in the speed loader into the cylinder, jiggle it slightly if necessary to seat, release the cartridges. Do not toss the speed loader out of the way, let it fall away on its own as you close the cylinder with base of your left thumb, while bringing gun back into shooting position and reacquiring a two-handed grip.

If you have a semi-auto and are right-handed, here is the speed reloading process: Be sure fresh magazines are on your belt with bullets facing forward. Bring the gun toward you, keeping it high and at a slight angle (so you can watch the threat and still see the gun to reload), while you do all of the following. Put your support hand on a fresh magazine, with tip of the index finger just below the nose of the top round of ammo, and the base pad in the palm of your hand. Draw the magazine from the carrier (or belt or bench). Turn the gun in your dominant hand if that is necessary for you to release the magazine. If the magazine doesn't fall free, RIP it out with the middle finger of your support hand. Let it fall to the ground. Insert the new magazine, with your index finger straight along the front of the magazine (the side with the bullets), to help you find the magazine well. Slam it in hard so that it seats properly. If your slide has locked back, use the slingshot technique to pull it back and release it, then reacquire your two-handed grip, and the target. (Why don't I recommend using the slide release lever to load the first round? Because it is a small target that can be hard to hit under stress, and it is more likely to cause a failure to feed than the full

momentum of the slingshot/slide technique.)

Practice speed reloading without firing until you can do it smoothly, then try shooting a few rounds, speed reload, and shoot more. Can you do 12 rounds (6 before reload, 6 after) in 40 seconds? If so, repeat, in 30 seconds. Repeat, trying for 25 seconds. Did you remember your trigger finger discipline throughout?

Exercise: Scan Surroundings. This can be done without using any ammo. Bring your gun up on target, shoot, dry fire, or neither, your choice. Then bring the gun back to low ready and carefully scan the area to the left and to the right of the target, as widely as is safe at your range. Come back to the target as often as you wish, but always scan the area afterwards. This helps you learn to combat the tunnel vision that occurs during an encounter. Where there is one bad guy, there might be more, so you need to look for the others.

Exercise: Shooting Position. Try both the isosceles and the Chapman (modified Weaver) to determine which works best for you.

To get into the isosceles position, start by facing the target, feet shoulder width apart, knees slightly bent. It is generally better for the support foot to be somewhat forward of the dominant foot. Both hands grip the firearm and are pushed straight out toward the target, both arms straight from shoulder through elbows and wrists. This position provides great recoil control, particularly if you make sure your shoulders are in front of your hips; it is easy to assume under stress, and easy to remember in practice.

For the Chapman, face the target in a boxer stance (support foot forward and pointing at target; dominant foot at a slight angle). Your

body will be turned slightly away from the target. Straighten your dominant arm and bend your support arm at the elbow. (If the support elbow pointed to the side doesn't seem strong enough, try pointing that elbow at the ground). This position is good for cross-dominant shooters (right-handed but left-eyed)

From each position, try six rounds slowly for accuracy, then a speed reload and 6 rounds faster, scan side to side, do another speed reload and fire six rounds as fast as you can reliably hitting the target. Compare your isosceles hits with your Chapman hits. Which gives you faster, and acceptably accurate results? Choose that position for the rest of your practice. Did you remember your trigger finger discipline?

Exercise: Step Off the Line of Force. If someone is coming at you with a knife, club, or gun, standing still in front of them while you shoot is generally a bad idea. It has been shown that if you move, even one or two steps to the side, that action can make the person who is shooting at you miss. They are shooting at where you were, not where you moved to. The movement doesn't have to be big. (Of course, if there is cover, use it, but if there isn't, this technique could save your life.) Load up your gun, take a big step sideways to the left, stop and shoot one or two rounds; scan the area. Step to the right and repeat the process. If you have a friend with you, ask them to call out, "Left!" or "Right!" so you don't know in advance which way you will be moving. Be very careful to step, stop and then fire. Don't try

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that many of the 150,000 Mexican soldiers who reportedly deserted over the past few years apparently took their weapons with them. Those guns are now unaccounted for.

Fox News reporter William La Juenesse—speaking on the air with Seattle, WA, radio talk host Kirby Wilbur on Apr. 2—noted that because Mexican drug cartels can get “boatloads of guns” from so many other sources, it would seem odd that they would be largely depending upon guns bought through “straw purchases” or at gun shows in this country to arm themselves.

“Well funded anti-self defense campaigners, politicians and their ministers who enjoy taxpayer-funded protection, and a complicit media are propagating a lie in order to swindle you out of your rights,” Codrea recently alleged. “There is a way to get to the bottom of things, but you won’t hear it from them.

“Ask yourself who could be opposed to ATF officials—testifying under oath—as to the complete truth of what they know about Mexican cartel guns,” he continued, “besides someone who finds an advantage in suppressing the truth?”

**W&G**

## **Furor Over Illinois Gun Bill Targeting Section of Chicago**

An amendment to an Illinois gun bill that would raise the penalty for possession of a so-called “assault weapon” or a .50-caliber rifle in a specific South Side Chicago neighborhood has raised eyebrows in the Prairie State because the neighborhood is predominantly African-American and Hispanic.

The amendment, sponsored by state Rep. Andre Thapedi (D-32nd District), was added to House Bill 1966. It singles out six specific zip code areas of the Edgewood neighborhood in Chicago where possession of the described firearms would be a felony. Thapedi’s legislative district runs through all six zip code areas. Thapedi is black.

Richard Pearson, executive director of the Illinois State Rifle Association, told *Women & Guns* that “It’s hard to believe that Rep. Thapedi would be attacking members of his own ethnic community and trying to take their rights away from them.”

The six zip codes specifically targeted by Thapedi’s legislation

are 60619, 60620, 60621, 60629, 60636 and 60637, the neighborhood bordered on the north by Garfield and on the south by 95th Street, on the west by Cicero and on the east by Stony Island and Lake Michigan.

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to shoot while you are moving; that is too inaccurate, and also risks a dangerous fall.

Exercise: Verbalize. In the real world, some circumstances will permit you time to make a verbal challenge, such as “Stop!” “Don’t move!” or “Drop that weapon!” and some circumstances won’t. Since most of your practice has probably been without verbal accompaniment, it is time to practice your command voice. Pick the phrase you would like to practice so that it will come naturally to your lips if you meet an attacker tonight. Repeat the stepping off the line of force exercise, but add the verbal challenge, as loud and strong as you can make it, while you are making the step left or right. Fire sometimes, but not always; you don’t want to get in the habit of always firing your gun after issuing a challenge; sometimes the bad guy will stop what he is doing before you have to shoot him. When you fire, don’t always fire the same number of shots. Speed reload whenever you have to, or want to. If you have a friend with you, let the friend call out when you should fire, as well as which direction to move. Trigger finger discipline?

Next issue, we continue with more practical fun.

**W&G**

## **Woman ‘Chilis’ Invaders**

Wanda Bray of Claiborne, TN, didn’t submit easily to a home invasion robbery on May 12. When two men broke into her home to rob her, she fought back, according to [knoxnews.com](http://knoxnews.com).

“The woman fought them off,” said Capt. David Honeycutt of the Claiborne County Sheriff’s Department, of the 58-year-old Bray. “She threw a bowl of homemade chili and got after them with a broom.”

After Bray threw “household objects” at the robbery suspects, they fled the scene, a Sheriff’s Department press release states.

The victim told deputies the robbers ran into her home and demanded her medication. “They probably got away with some blood pressure pills,” Honeycutt said.