

# Defensive Strategies



**By Lyn Bates,  
Contributing Editor**

A reader asked this question recently, and the idea has been percolating around in my mind for a while, especially since, a few issues ago, my article was inspired by a firearms teacher I encountered whose knowledge was lacking and whose advice was somewhere between ill-advised and dangerous.

So, how can you distinguish an instructor who is above average from one who is well below average?

First of all, it depends on what you want to learn. If you are an absolute beginner, one of the best places to start is with a Basic Pistol class taught by a National Rifle Association (NRA) instructor. The curriculum for that class is well-established, and is available at many ranges and gun clubs around the country. That class is recognized as the safety training that is required for firearms license applications in many states, such as Massachusetts. The NRA

## How to Find a Good Instructor

website, [www.nrahq.org/education/index.asp](http://www.nrahq.org/education/index.asp), has an instructor locator page to help you find someone near you.

Most readers of this magazine are beyond the beginner stage. If you become interested in hunting birds, waterfowl or animals with a gun, you will need very specific training. Your state might have a department of wildlife management that provides instructors for would-be hunters. Another way to find a recommendation is to ask at stores that sell the type of gun you want to use for hunting, handgun, rifle or shotgun. Many states mandate a hunter safety class as a prerequisite for a hunting license.

If you want to learn to shoot in competition, there are many types of competition to choose from: IPSC, IDPA, Cowboy Action, PPC, Trap, Skeet, Sporting Clays, Silhouettes, Airgun, Precision Bullseye, and more. Each has its bevy of teachers, findable on the sporting organization's website, or through a shooting club that hosts your desired type of competition. Don't assume that just because someone is an expert shooter in some sport that they will be the best teacher for beginners in that sport. Although a number of top competitors are top-notch instructors, you might be better off with someone who specializes in coaching and teach-

ing rather than being a first rank competitor.

Finding a good teacher for self-defense training is harder, but even more important. Your very best option is to attend one of the major national schools such as (in no particular order) Defensive Training International, Firearms Academy of Seattle, Gunsite, InSights Training Center, Lethal Force Institute, SIG Academy, Smith&Wesson Academy, or Thunder Ranch. Those schools generally have many excellent instructors, teach reliable techniques, and give you more than your money's worth. The most comprehensive list of gun schools that I've found on the web, though without recommendations, is [www.martialartsresource.com/firearms](http://www.martialartsresource.com/firearms).

Don't go for someone who works by himself, claims to have invented the techniques he teaches, and offers to teach you those secrets. He is either fooling himself, or trying to fool you. Some teachers like to believe they have knowledge of something unique and special, but learning unproven ways of defending yourself is a recipe for disaster.

Don't go for an instructor who says that the particular way he/she is teaching is the only way to do something. The best, most experienced teachers can adapt to the needs of a wide variety of students; some even teach multiple

techniques so that you can try them and then choose the one that works best for you.

Many defensive shooting instructors have a background that has some involvement with either the military, or some branch of law enforcement. I'm going to make some generalizations here that don't apply to everyone, but might give you a way to determine whether your intended instructor comes from the background that fits you best. Both kinds can provide very high quality training. Military folk tend (not always, but tend) to have one favorite type of gun, or one favorite caliber, or one favorite stance. They tend to have large classes, with everyone doing everything on his command. Police or other law enforcement folk tend (not always, but tend) to favor smaller classes and are more willing to work with their students to modify equipment or techniques to find out what works best. Neither is better than the other, but as a student, you might resonate better with a military-influenced teacher, or a LE-influenced one. Some instructors have neither of those backgrounds. You can find out by asking questions like, "Where did you get your training? Where were you certified to teach? Do you have any military or law enforcement experience?" and so on.

Ask, ask, ask! Ask! "How many women have you taught?" or "How many students have you had who have arthritis in their hands," or "How many of your students are not young, strong and healthy?" If you are thinking about carrying concealed, ask if your instructor does that every day. Ask whether any of their students have ever had to defend themselves with a gun.

If you want to try a specific type of holster, especially a "non-stan-

dard" one like a purse, cross-draw, or shoulder rig, ask whether you will be allowed to use that in class, and how much experience the teacher has had with holsters of that type.

Ask how many rounds of ammunition you will be shooting in the class. If it is a large number for the number of class hours, you might be too fatigued at the end to learn well. Massive amounts of ammo might be fun to shoot, but any good class will have non-shooting time that is productive, too. There should be time to practice and learn verbal skills, how to avoid or disengage from a situation, and many more things other than just putting lead downrange.

Good instructors tell you not just what to do and how to do it, but why. They don't just explain, they aspire to inspire you to not

just be a better shooter, but to know a lot about personal protection. That means how to avoid having to use a gun if possible, and knowing what to expect in the aftermath of a defensive situation.

Once you have found a great teacher, you might want to stick with him/her for some advanced courses. If possible, though, try different teachers, and different schools. Most advanced classes require a certain level of competence and have prerequisites, so find out in advance whether your second teacher will accept the experience you acquired from your first. Being exposed to multiple good teachers gives you an even stronger background, and an increased ability to develop the skills you might need to defend yourself someday.

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