

Defensive Strategies



**By Lyn Bates,
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A few months ago I produced a two-part article on range exercises that can be performed to enhance one's competence with a firearm for self-defense. The idea was to have fun learning new skills, to not develop any bad habits along the way, and to produce some good ones. Among those potentially life-saving skills was rapidly reloading your gun, whether it be a revolver or a semi-auto.

One reader, however, felt left out of the process, and asked, "How about us lefties?" The methods I had suggested for reloading were specifically for right-handed people.

Big oops! I know that about 30 million people in the US are left-handed, and that although more of those are men than women, there are still plenty of left-handed women. What works for righties, gun-wise, won't work for them. My apologies, lefty ladies.

"How About Us Lefties?"

This article is just for you.

Barbara Clorite, one of the AWARE (Arming Women Against Rape and Endangerment) instructors, is left-handed, and has graciously acted as a consultant in this matter. Having been trained at Lethal Force Institute, she is as good a shooter as she is an instructor.

Let's take revolvers first. I know of only one company, Charter Arms, that makes a revolver specifically for left handers. It is called the Undercover Southpaw, and was introduced in 2007. With that single exception, wheelguns were designed to be used by right-handed people. That should not keep a southpaw from choosing and using a revolver, however, because it is possible to become quite adept at handling this type of gun. We will assume you have one of these guns.

Now here's the process to speed reload when your dominant hand is your left one. Revolvers have the cylinder release catch on the left side of the frame, but this is no help for southpaws because no digit on your left hand is in position to press that release. So, the best thing to do is to the following:

Keep the gun firmly in your strong hand grip; remove your trigger finger from the trigger and place it firmly along the frame of the gun.

Move your right hand off the grip. Slide it up and over the backstrap until your right thumb can comfortably reach the cylinder release. Push, pull or press it, depending on your gun's manufacturer, and then press the cylinder open with the fingers of your right hand.

When the cylinder is fully open, raise the muzzle to point virtually straight up. This is to let gravity help you remove the empty brass. Bring your right hand around and above the gun, so that you can use the heel of your right hand to strike the ejector rod downwards. Strike it just once, don't pump it. The empty brass should fall free; if it gets caught on your left hand, you may have to readjust your left hand the next time before you start the reload process. With practice, the cylinder should stay completely open, and the brass should fall free.

(Important note: If the combination of your gun and fingers is such that you absolutely can't make the brass fall clear while you have your left hand controlling the gun, you can try switching the gun to your right hand after the cylinder is open, and using your left palm heel to hit the ejector rod. You might then find it easier to insert the speedloader with your left hand while the right continues to control the frame of the gun.)

Rotate the gun so that the muzzle points down at about a 45 degree angle, or even more toward the ground. This is to let gravity help you get the new rounds in.

With your right hand, reach for your speedloader, which should be in your right pocket or on the right side of your belt. Pick it up with your fingers far enough down to just touch some of the rounds.

Place the speedloader over the cylinder, allow the rounds to slip into place, and then release the speedloader with a twist or a push depending on the brand. Let it fall free; don't throw it away, as you bring the four fingers of your right hand to the left edge of the cylinder and your right thumb to the right side of the frame.

Close the cylinder as you are bringing the muzzle back to low ready position (or back on target). Slip your right hand back into its support position for a good two-handed grip. Now you can see your potential target and decide whether it is necessary to keep shooting, or not.

Now let's move on to semi-auto pistols. Lefties have a lot of choices here with respect to guns and their features. Barb suggests looking for a gun with an ambidextrous safety (or no safety), since safeties on the left side are rarely reachable with one's left hand. For magazine releases, she recommends avoiding a gun that has a left side lever mag release, because the lever can cut into your shooting hand, and the lever is nearly impossible to push with your left hand.

"A press-in button is easier on the left than a press down lever, but could be activated by the left hand if squeezed hard enough," Barb says. "I'd prefer a press-in

button that can be switched to the other side."

Glocks are wonderfully ambidextrous. So are Springfield Armory XD's, Smith&Wesson's MP9, Berettas and many other pistols that either come with ambidextrous safeties or can have them added. Many guns also have mag releases that can be converted to the right side of the gun.

For this article, I'll assume your gun has a press button on the left side.

As for slide releases, most are on the left side of the gun. The easiest way to activate the release is to reach under the trigger guard with your right hand. If you can get a gun with the slide release on the right side, you can operate it with either your left thumb or your right hand, depending on your hand size and strength. Dropping the slide with a slingshot action (grasp the rear of the slide with your right hand, pull back, and release it) is a better way to get a round loaded, since that method doesn't require fine motor coordination. The slingshot method is preferred by many experienced instructors as the best way to release the slide.

So, how do you do a speed reload?

First, remove your finger from the trigger and place it firmly along the frame of the gun. Safety on.

With your right hand, reach under the trigger guard and use your index or middle finger to press the magazine release. Allow the mag to fall free.

With your right hand, reach for your spare magazine, which should be in your right pocket, or on the right side of your belt. Remove it with the back of the

magazine along the palm of your hand.

Bring the spare magazine to the mag well, and insert it, rocking the back in first, then slamming it into place.

Assuming that your gun locked open before you started the reload, grab the gripping grooves on the back of the slide with your right hand, pull back, and let go. Make sure that your right hand does not cover the ejection port during this process, and maintain muzzle awareness.

If your safety is ambidextrous, you can release it with your left thumb. If your safety is only on the left side of the gun, you can use your index (trigger) finger of your left hand to do the job.

Finally, reestablish your two handed grip, bring the gun to low ready or up on target, and decide whether you need to shoot again.

There are many resources online for left handed shooters. A few of them are:

southpawguns.com;

www.gunweek.com/2000/lefties.html;

www.gweep.net/~daver/Velocity-Harris-LHtrain.pdf, and

www.sabretactical.com/lefthandedtraining.pdf.

I hope this helps to clear up some of the issues that left-handed women have shooting handguns. While more men than women are left-handed, it is pretty clear that more women than men are cross eye dominant. That means they are right-handed and left-eyed, or left-handed and right-eyed. It doesn't matter so much for handgun shooting, but if you are going to try long guns, ask your instructor to help you determine which of your eyes is dominant.

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