

## **Firearms, ammunition and related terminology**

Within the disciplines of firearms training, and the interdependent subject of ammunition and the related, there exists a myriad of terms, phrases, and “buzz words” that have been persistent for decades. Many of these are commonly misused, as in they are generalizations or “slang”, and are not specific enough for accurate use or don’t technically represent what they should.

In addition to this, many terms, phrases or “buzz words” have overlapping usage. They may be generally applicable in a variety of circumstances, but only employed with complete accuracy in a small number of specific instances.

The reasoning behind this article is to dispel some myths and take an indigenously confusing topic, which has propagated much consternation over the years, and simplify or streamline it into an easily understandable format.

It would be virtually impossible to list every word or short subject matter in an article of this scope. What I have attempted to do is assemble the most common areas of difficulty and focus on them alone. This snapshot highlights the ones I feel essentially important to us as trainers.

ACP: the letters stand for Automatic Colt Pistol.

Adjustable sights: Refers to sights that are moveable in incremental adjustments to change projectile impact on the target. They can be adjustable for windage (horizontal impact) or elevation (vertical impact).

Alibi: allowing a shooter to make up for lost or non-discharged rounds due to problems with the functioning of a weapon.

Assault rifle: the meaning of this term has changed over the years and is much a matter of perception. Common denominators of true assault rifles are their capability to fire in semi-automatic or fully automatic mode. They are usually less in size and weight than formally named “battle rifles” and shoot a smaller rifle cartridge than .308 but larger than pistol caliber ammunition.

Ball ammunition: a common term used to describe military ammunition or full metal jacket / full metal case ammunition.

Ball and dummy: a shooting drill that mandates the loading of the firearm with some live and some inert or “dummy” rounds of ammunition that establishes a situation in which the shooter does not know if he or she will encounter real or fake ammunition. The drill is designed to induce shooter error(s) and thus identify and allow for correction of them.

Ballistics: composed of internal, external and terminal. Internal being within the weapon, external being after the projectile leaves the muzzle and terminal being after the bullet impacts a target.

Blank: a unit of ammunition which has the top of the case shut instead of containing a bullet. The cartridge also has a powder charge that will produce a report upon detonation.

Blueing: a protective finish on firearms that appears dark blue or black in color. It is produced via controlled oxidation of the metal allowing for partial rusting.

Boat tail: a bullet designed to have above accuracy due to the rear portion of the projectile being tapered down and thus produce better external ballistics.

Bullet types: are basically three – deforming, non-deforming and fragmenting. Deforming designed to increase frontal mass upon impact, non-deforming designed to minimally change shape upon impact and fragmenting designed to break apart upon impact.

Caliber: the diameter of the bore (inside portion of the barrel) without taking into account the grooves of the rifling. Concerning ammunition it is the approximate projectile diameter at the projectile's largest portion.

Cannelure: the grooved portion around a projectile or cartridge case.

Carbine: a general term that refers to a rifle that is light and small.

Cartridge: one unit of ammunition.

Center fire: ammunition that has the primer of the cartridge located in the center of the base.

Chamber: of area of the barrel opposite the muzzle (where the projectile exits after a unit of ammunition detonates) where a unit of ammunition fits, or the movement of a unit of ammunition into the above-described area.

Charge holes: These are simply the chambers of a revolver, typically but not always six in number.

Choke: bore diameter of a shotgun barrel at the muzzle end that directly effects the spread or pattering effect of pellets. It also effects ballistics concerning slugs. Shotgun chokes are characteristically improved cylinder, modified and full. Combinations of these as well as different ones exist such as skeet, cylinder, improved-modified, modified-full and extra full. The larger the diameter, as in skeet choke, the more the pattern will widen. The smaller the choke, as in full, the less the pattern of pellets will spread.

Chronograph: a device that measures the speed of a projectile.

Clearance drill: The manipulation of the firearm in hopes of alleviating malfunctions. Clearance drills are usually necessitated by the weapon failing to feed, failing fire, failing extract or failing to eject. Clearance drills will not suffice when a weapon is mechanically incapable of continuing to operate.

Clip: a reloading device that holds units of ammunition and is placed into the magazine of a firearm or the charge holes of a revolver. There are several types. Clips are not magazines.

Closed bolt: firing of the weapon is initiated with the bolt closed or in other words the weapon is in battery. The firing pin is movable; it is not permanently in the forward position.

Command or cold line: the status of a firing range that allows for the loading of weapons only as directed by a range officer.

Cook off: ammunition detonation caused by a chamber which is too hot.

Decocking lever: serves two functions. It allows for the hammer to be decocked with the aid of a lever and also can be positioned to prohibit the firing of the weapon if the trigger is pulled.

Dominate eye: The eye to be used when shooting with one eye open and one eye closed and focusing on the front site. The test for the dominant eye can easily be attained by holding both hands at arms length and creating a medium sized circle with the hands directly in front of the face. Place the circle you have formed so that an object is in the center of it approximately ten yards away. Close one eye and then the other. The eye you are using when you can see the object in the circle is the dominant eye. Eye dominance has nothing to do with eye strength.

Double action: the pulling of a trigger which both cocks the hammer and fires the weapon.

Dum dum: terminology referring to a bullet which deforms upon impact.

Dump pouch: an ammunition carrier designed to unfold outwards and either present units of ammunition in a upright position for retrieval by the shooter or loosely place or "dump" all the units of ammunition in the reloaders hand.

Duty belt: a standard law enforcement equipment belt affixed to the pants belt by the aid of several belt keepers or straps. Usually 2 and ¼ inches in width. Generally referred to as a Sam Brown belt.

Feet per second: the speed a projectile travels once out the muzzle of the barrel.

Flier(s): a shot that is inconsistent with the rest of the shots taken to establish a group. This is usually do to shooter error and not problems intrinsic with the firearms or ammunition. They should be disregarded during sighting in procedures and definitely counted and analyzed for purposes of grading marksmanship when scoring targets.

Full auto: the firearm will reload and fire as long as the trigger is depressed.

Ghillie suit: garments made of various materials that assist personnel (usually snipers) in blending into the surrounding environment.

Glass bedding: this is a substance used to prohibit movement between the stock of a rifle and the portions of the rifle that fit into it. An increase in accuracy is the desired result.

Gunpowder: the propellant in a unit of ammunition that comes in several configurations – ball, tubular and flake.

Hangfire: delay in detonation of a unit of ammunition after the primer has been struck.

Hasty sling: placing the sling around the shooters non strong side arm and creating tension allowing for the sights to be held with less movement than normal.

Hot line: the status of a firing range that makes the reloading of weapons by shooters their own responsibility.

Incendiary: a projectile designed to start a fire upon impact.

KTW: an armor piercing bullet with a Teflon coating. The letters stand for the letters of the last names of the physician and two law enforcement officers who invented it.

Land: the portion of a bore which is raised in a barrel that has rifling.

Magazine: a reloading devise which has a spring and follower.

Magnum: ammunition which has an increase in the length of the case, or an increase in the weight of the projectile / shot shell load or an increase in chamber pressure.

Match grade: firearms, ammunition and related which have features geared towards competitive shooting and improving accuracy.

Minute of angle: the measurement of how accurately a weapon can be expected to shoot. A weapon which shoots one minute of angle at 100 yards will shoot groups of one inch at that distance.

Mushrooming: the process by which a projectile increases its frontal mass during the terminal portion of ballistics.

Muzzle flash: the illumination produced at the muzzle of the firearm and beyond due to ammunition being discharged.

Muzzle flip: movement of the muzzle of the barrel of a weapon due to the recoil produced when ammunition is discharged.

Night sites: commonly refers to sights that are viewable by the shooter in dark or no light conditions because of the tritium gas they contain.

O/C: Oleoresin Capsicum. The active ingredient in O/C is capsaicin. O/C sprays usually consist of peppers that go through a manufacturing process or emulsification and then have the remaining combined with a carrier and inserted into a canister with a propellant.

Ogive: The portion of a projectile where it begins to taper or become smaller.

Open bolt: a firing system that has the bolt of the weapon in the rearward position prior the weapon being fired. Upon pulling the trigger the bolt then goes forward and begins the firing process. Most open bolt systems have a firing pin that does not move. The firing pin is fixed in the protruding, forward position.

+P: the unit of ammunition is manufactured to a higher than normal pressure level in that caliber.

Parabellum: 9mm-pistol ammunition or 9X19. When ammunition is described in numbers the first number is the length of the projectile in metric terms and the second number is the length of the case in metric terms. 7.62 X 51 is the metric equivalent of the projectile length and the case length of .308 rifle ammunition for example.

Parkerizing: a mostly non-reflecting finish applied commonly to military weapons that is very durable concerning the elements.

Pistol: a handgun having the chamber as the rearward portion of the barrel and has the capability to self-load and shoots in semiautomatic mode.

Point shooting: has also at times been referred to as instinctive, reflexive, reactive, proximity, and others. The common denominators are the focusing of the eyes on the target and not one eye on the front sight. Designed for lethal confrontation at close distance (usually seven yards and in) allowing for a faster than normal first shot on the center mass of the threat and allowing for faster than normal follow up shots on the center mass of the target.

Porting: The process by which opening(s) are cut into barrel typically just shy of the muzzle and on the top which allow for gasses to escape in an upwards direction in efforts to reduce muzzle rise or flip due to the recoil produced when ammunition is discharged.

Power rating of scopes: they are usually designated by the letter X and preceded by a number. It tells the shooter how many times larger an object will appear through the scope in relation to how it would appear to the naked eye. 10X designates the object will appear ten times larger when viewed through the scope versus the shooter viewing it with the naked eye.

Primer: the ammunition component that ignites the main gunpowder charge in a unit of ammunition. Primers are typically berdan (one or more flash holes – not reloadable) and boxer (one flash hole – reloadable).

Rate of twist: The length in inches it takes the grooved portion of the bore to make one complete revolution in barrels that have rifling. A barrel that has a 1 in 12 twist, or rate of twist, will have the grooved portion of the rifling make one revolution in the space of 12 inches. The higher or faster the rate of twist is the less length it will take for the grooved portion of the rifling to make one revolution. A 1 in 7 rate of twist will take 7 inches of barrel length for the grooved portion of the rifling to make one revolution in the bore. The higher the rate of twist the more characteristics the barrel will have which allow for it to stabilize longer projectiles. If the rate of twist in a barrel is unknown put a tight fitting cleaning patch on the end of a cleaning rod and insert it into the bore of the barrel. When you are sure the bristles of the brush have adhered to the grooves of the rifling and the cleaning rod is turning when being pushed through the bore stop. Mark the rear portion of the cleaning rod and the portion of it that is directly in front of the muzzle of the barrel. Continue to slowly push the rod / brush assembly through the bore of the barrel until the mark on the end portion of the rod has completed one revolution. Mark the portion of the rod that is now directly in front of the muzzle. Measure the distance between the mark you just made and the first mark you made on the rod in front of the muzzle and you have your rate of twist.

Recoil: The movement of the weapon upon the weapon discharging one unit of ammunition. It is the equal, but opposite, force produced by the bullet and gases used to propel it.

Rifling: Rifling has been described as lands and grooves. The lands portion being the elevated portion of the bore which has no grooves cut into it and the grooved portion being the portion which has been cut. As a projectile passes through the bore a small portion of it adheres to the grooved area and this produces a spinning effect on the projectile which helps control it and increase accuracy.

Rim fire: ammunition that has the primer compound in the rim of the base.

Sabot: a cup or sleeve around a projectile designed to protect the projectile as it passes through the bore of the barrel.

SAMMI: Sporting Arms and Ammunition Manufacturers Institute. They set standards for specifications on ammunition etc.

**Security holster:** holsters which employ one or more retention features designed to assist keeping the weapon in the holster during physical movement and to assist in the prevention of the weapon being taken from the holster by an assailant.

**Select fire:** weapons that have a lever allowing the operator to fire the weapon in semiautomatic, multiple shot or full automatic mode.

**Shot:** the pellets that make up the projectiles in a unit of ammunition. This usually applies to shotgun ammunition although there are some rounds of this sort which are designed for handguns and rifles. The higher the number the smaller the individual pellets (as in 9 shot) and the smaller the number the larger the individual pellets (as in 2 shot). Buckshot is typically designated as 4 buck, 00 and 000 from smallest to largest respectively.

**Sight alignment:** The equation is the front sight exactly in the middle of the rear sight and thus producing equal amounts of light on both sides of the front site and the top of the front sight exactly even with the tops of the two blades of the rear sight.

**Sight picture:** to attain sight picture sight alignment must be in position first. Once this is established the dominant eye has to establish a relationship with three things – the rear sight, the front sight and the target. The dominant eye looks through the rear sight as it were a window to the front sight and focuses on the front sight alone. The front sight is placed in the center of a hazy, or out of focus, target and the firing process is initiated. The rear sight is hazy, or out of focus, the front sight is clear and the target is hazy or out of focus.

**Slug:** a projectile typically used in shotguns which is one piece as opposed to shotgun loads consisting of pellets or shot.

**Speed strip:** a reloading device that facilitates loading of a revolver by placing units of ammunition in position to be loaded into the charge holes of the cylinder one or two at a time.

**Stove pipe:** this malfunction occurs when a spent case, or a unit of ammunition that has been discharged leaving only the original case without the projectile in it, has not been completely ejected from the ejection port of a pistol. The case is positioned in a semi vertical position protruding from the ejection port of the weapon.

**Tracer:** a projectile that ignites and thus gives off a viewable trajectory.

**Trigger pull or trigger weight:** the amount of pressure measured in pounds that are required to move the trigger of a weapon a sufficient distance to fire the weapon.

Tueller drill: a concept originated by law enforcement officer Dennis Tueller that takes into account the time psychomotor skills (the cognitive or mental aspect and then physical response) take concerning the identification, evaluation and response to threat(s).

Wadcutter: a type of projectile which is flat at the front end and which products clean cut easily defined holes upon impact with paper targets.

Wildcat: ammunition that is custom produced and not commercially manufactured.

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