

GUN AND SHOOTING TERMS

These are commonly used gun, ammunition, and shooting terms.

ACP An abbreviation for Automatic Colt Pistol and is used with some pistol ammunition calibers, e.g. .45 ACP.

Action The part of a gun that loads and fires cartridges and ejects empty cases. In handguns there are three types: single action revolvers, double action revolvers, and semi-automatic pistols. In rifles and shotguns there are five types of actions: semi-automatic, bolt, break, pump, and lever.

Ammunition The cartridge or round used in a gun. It contains a case, primer or priming compound, gun powder, and bullet. It comes in various calibers to fit different caliber guns.

Barrel The tube that the bullet is fired through. The muzzle is the end the bullet comes out and the breech is the opposite end.

Blow-back The residue of burnt gunpowder, gasses, and lead that blows sideways out of the front of the chamber on a revolver when it is fired.

Bore The hole in the center of the barrel.

Breech The opposite end of the barrel than the muzzle.

Bullet The projectile in a cartridge of ammunition. They are usually made of lead and can come with or without a metal jacket. Bullets come in various shapes including wadcutters, semiwadcutters, round nose, and hollow point.

Caliber The measurement across the bore of a gun. Usually it is the distance between the lands. American calibers are measured in hundredths of an inch, for example .45 caliber. European calibers are measured in millimeters, for example 9 mm.

Cartridge A round of ammunition which includes a case, primer, gun powder, and bullet. They can be centerfire or rimfire.

Case The part of a cartridge that holds the other components. Often made of brass (and called brass), silver plated, or aluminum.

Centerfire ammunition Ammunition which has a primer in the center of the head of the case. The case head has a primer pocket for the primer to sit flush with the case and a flash hole for the ignition spark to pass through into the case body.

Chamber The part of the gun that the cartridge is placed into to be fired. In revolvers there are a number of chambers in the cylinder. In semi-automatic pistols there is one chamber at the breech end of the barrel.

Cylinder A barrel-shaped part of a revolver that contains a number of chambers to hold ammunition.

Cylinder release latch The device that when pushed releases the cylinder so it can be swung out for loading or unloading.

Decocking lever A lever that safely drops a cocked hammer into a double action position on a semi-automatic pistol.

Double action An action that causes the hammer to cock (move back) and then move forward when the trigger is pulled.

Double tap Shooting two shots in rapid succession at the same target.

Dry fire Shooting an unloaded gun.

Ejection port The opening on a semi-automatic pistol, rifle, or shotgun slide through which empty cases are ejected when the gun is fired.

Ejector rod A metal rod extending out of the front center of the cylinder of a revolver. When it is pushed down it pushes out the cases or cartridges from the chambers.

Firing pin The part of a gun that hits the primer causing the gun to fire.

Forcing cone A ring located on the inside of the frame at the breech end of the barrel on a revolver. It is funnel shaped and helps direct the bullet from the chamber into the barrel.

Grip The way a shooter holds a gun. The handle of a pistol or revolver.

Grip safety A safety mechanism located at the top back of the grip on some semi-automatic pistols. Holding it in releases the safety.

Grips The handle on a handgun.

Guide rod A metal rod in a semi-automatic action that assists in the operation of the slide.

Guide rod spring A spring that encloses the guide rod.

Hammer The part of the action that falls against the firing pin when the trigger is pulled.

Hammer block A small metal bar that lifts up between the hammer and firing pin to prevent accidental discharge of a handgun when the hammer is down.

Hammer spur The projection on the back of the hammer that allows you to manually cock the gun.

Hammerless A term used to describe some handguns that do not have a hammer spur.

Hangfire When the firing pin hits a primer and it does not immediately ignite, but ignites a few seconds later. If there is a click (not a bang) when you pull the trigger, wait a few seconds with the muzzle pointed down range before you eject the cartridge, in case it is a hangfire.

Hollow point A bullet that has a hole in the front end that allows the bullet to expand outward and increase its diameter when it is fired into a fluid.

IPSC International Practical Shooting Confederation is a shooting sport that involves timed shooting competitions that include drawing from a holster, shooting at multiple targets, moving targets, and steel targets, in a realistic or practical setting. It is governed by the United States Practical Shooting Association and competitions are available across the country year round.

Jacketed ammunition Ammunition that is covered with a metal covering. On full metal jacket ammunition the metal covers the whole bullet including its base.

Land The wide parts of metal between the grooves in the bore.

Magazine A metal case that has a spring with a top carrier that holds ammunition for a semi-automatic pistol.

Magazine release The button on a semi-automatic pistol that releases the magazine to empty the gun to reload.

Magazine well The opening in the grip of a semi-automatic pistol or in the frame of a semi-automatic rifle or shotgun that the magazine is inserted into.

Marksmanship The skill of being a good shooter.

Misfire The failure of a cartridge to fire after the firing pin hits the primer.

Mushroom When a hollow point bullet is fired into a fluid the metal folds out, increasing the diameter of the bullet, and looks from the side like the shape of a mushroom.

Muzzle The end of the barrel that the bullet comes out when the gun is fired.

+P (Plus P) Cartridges that are loaded to a higher pressure than standard ammunition.

+P+ (Plus P Plus) Cartridges that are loaded to a higher pressure than +P ammunition.

Primer The part of a cartridge that when it is hit by the firing pin, causes a spark that ignites the powder.

Prone A shooting position where the shooter is lying on his or her stomach either fully or partially rolled to one side.

Recoil The kick or movement of a gun when it is fired.

Revolver A handgun that has a revolving cylinder containing a number of chambers as part of its action.

Rifling The grooves cut in a spiral into the bore of a handgun or rifle barrel. The uncut higher spaces between the grooves are called lands. Rifling makes the bullet spin as it travels down the bore and when the bullet is in flight this spin makes it more accurate and travel faster.

Rimfire Ammunition which has a priming compound inside the rim of the case.

Roll by If a shooter doesn't pull the trigger all the way back on a revolver, the cylinder rotates partially and the hammer comes down easy, making it feel like a misfire.

Round A cartridge.

Safety A mechanical device that prevents a gun from firing when the safety device is in the safe position.

Semi-automatic A type of action that when the trigger is pulled it fires the cartridge in the chamber, ejects the empty case of the cartridge just fired, and loads the next cartridge into the chamber from the magazine. When the trigger is pulled only one shot is fired and a semi-automatic firearm requires one trigger pull for each shot fired.

Semi-wadcutter A lead plug bullet that has a small shoulder at the end of the case and a cone shaped protrusion with a flat end. It is a bullet for target shooting that makes a clean hole in a paper target that can be easily scored.

Serial number A unique number stamped onto the frame of a gun by the manufacturer.

Sight alignment Positioning the gun so you see the front sight in the notch of the rear sight in a way that the top of the front sight is level with the top of the rear sight and it is equal distance between the two walls of the notch in the rear sight.

Sight picture Sight alignment when it is in the center of the target.

Sights The mechanical parts on the top of the barrel that allow you to aim the gun. There is a front sight which is usually a post on the top of the muzzle, and a rear sight which has a notch in it. The rear sight may be an adjustable device on the breech end of the barrel or just a groove cut into the top of the breech end of the barrel.

Single action An action that requires the hammer to be manually pulled back in a revolver or moved back by the slide in a semi-automatic. The trigger pull causes the hammer to move forward.

Sitting A shooting position where the shooter is sitting on the floor or ground. The shooter may have his or her ankles crossed close in front or have his or her feet out away from the body with knees bent and elbows resting on the knees.

Six O'clock hold Sighting a gun so the front sight, aligned in the rear sight, is placed right at the bottom of the black circle of the bulls eye on the target.

Slide release The device that is pushed down to let the slide ram forward from a locked open position. It has a small projection that fits into a notch in the slide to hold the slide open when a semi-automatic is out of ammunition.

Solvent A liquid used to clean residue and lead from the bore, chamber, and other parts of a gun.

Squib A cartridge that does not have enough or any powder charge that sends the bullet part way down the bore. A shooter usually notices it because the shot is not as loud as normal and there is no recoil. The shooter must stop shooting, unload the gun, and remove the bullet from the bore.

Stance The position of a shooter's body when shooting.

Supine A shooting position where the shooter is lying on his or her back.

Trigger The device that is pressed to fire a gun.

Trigger guard A circular metal band that protects the trigger from accidental touching.

Trigger squeeze A smooth finger movement on the trigger.

Wadcutter A lead plug bullet that is flush with the end of the case. It is a bullet for target shooting and makes a clean hole that is easy to score in a paper target.