

**THE POLICE
HOW-TO
GUIDES**

**HOW TO
GRIP YOUR GUN**

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HOW TO GRIP YOUR GUN

When a shooter has a weak or loose grip on the semi-automatic handgun, it usually results in the firearm not cycling properly



Photos courtesy of Michael Rayburn.

Most of us will agree that properly gripping a firearm is an important element of fundamental shooting skills, but what is the "proper" way to grip a handgun? Over the years this question has spurred debate and controversy.

Preventing Malfunctions

Most firearms instructors will agree that you need to have a firm grip on the firearm, especially since most, if not all, of the country has made the switch to semi-autos. Having a firm grip on a semi-automatic handgun is key for a couple of reasons, the most important of which is to avoid what's commonly called "limp wristing" the gun. When a shooter has a weak or loose grip on the semi-automatic handgun, it usually results in the firearm not cycling properly, causing the gun to jam.

A semi-auto pistol uses the energy from the round that was just fired to blow back the action/slide on the gun. In order for this to happen properly, the shooter has to offer resistance against the action of the slide being blown backward. If not, the entire gun will move and may cause the gun to jam for a variety of reasons.

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Get as much "meat" on the firearm as possible for control, especially during rapid, multiple round firing. First, take your strong-side hand and form a V between your thumb and index finger.



Take that V and place it over the grip of the firearm. Your hand should be as high up the backstrap as possible.

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Wasting valuable seconds in the middle of a gunfight to clear a jam is not a good thing

It could be because the expended shell casing is not ejected properly, there is a failure to feed the next round from the magazine into the chamber, there is a double feed (two rounds attempting to enter the chamber at once), or the slide will not go all the way forward to bring the gun back into battery.

Clearing a jam and bringing the gun back into battery on the firing range is one thing, but wasting valuable seconds in the middle of a gunfight to clear a jam is not a good thing. It is therefore important to have a firm, solid grip on the firearm so your gun doesn't jam in the first place. How firm? As tight as you can squeeze it, called a convulsive grip. Grip that gun as if your life depended on it, because someday it just might.

This is where the controversy, and sometimes downright nastiness among some firearms instructors, comes in. We want officers to have a firm, solid grip on the firearm so the semi-auto handgun can function as it's designed to. We follow those instructions by telling officers to "slowly squeeze the trigger rearward until the round goes off and it's a surprise to you," and then to "pull the trigger straight back."

At least that's what most firearms instructors will say. I disagree with this advice, and I'll tell you why.

Debunking Trigger Control Theory

Let's first discuss the command to "slowly squeeze the trigger rearward until the round goes off and it's a surprise to you." First off, you are sending lethal projectiles downrange. That gun should never go off as a surprise to you. You should know exactly when each and every round goes off, whether you're on the firing range or out on the street.

Secondly, in order to "slowly squeeze the trigger rearward," you have to loosen your grip, which goes against the advice for holding that tight, convulsive grip that we've just discussed as being so important to the proper operation of the handgun. If you don't believe me, try this for yourself.

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To get a two-hand grip, bring your off hand up to the other side of the gun and place the meaty part of your hand below your thumb. Come into contact with the grip itself. Your two hands come together like two pieces of a jigsaw puzzle.



By placing your thumbs along the side of the pistol's slide, you are able to obtain that all important tight, convulsive grip equally with both hands.

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You can't physically exert maximum energy on the grip with your hand and expect your finger to act independently from the rest of your hand to slowly squeeze the trigger

Take a safe and empty firearm, and squeeze the grip as tightly as you can. As you're squeezing the grip as tight as you can, attempt to slowly squeeze the trigger rearward. As you slowly squeeze the trigger rearward, you'll feel the rest of your hand slightly loosen up on the grip. You can't physically exert maximum energy on the grip with your hand and expect your finger to act independently from the rest of your hand to slowly squeeze the trigger.

Don't Fight Nature

Some instructors will tell you that it's OK to loosen your grip slightly to have the proper trigger control. The problem with this theory is that we have a natural tendency to clench our fists under stress, especially under the high stress of an officer-involved shooting. In two separate officer-involved shootings in Michigan, officers recounted how tightly they had gripped their handguns.

In one incident, an officer's hand hurt so much that he assumed he had been shot in his hand. After the shooting, he tried to find the injury. As backup officers arrived on the scene, he had them check his hand for the painful injury he felt. There was no injury: He had squeezed his handgun so tightly during the shooting that he had strained the muscles and tendons in his hand.

In another incident, an officer recounted that he had "checkering" on his hand. He had squeezed the handgun grip so tightly during his shooting incident that the checkering from the grip had imprinted onto his hand and stayed there for several minutes after the shooting was over.

The second part of this trigger control theory is that it's important to "pull the trigger straight back." Well, the trigger only goes straight backward and straight forward; there is no other way to pull it. If the trigger on your handgun goes in any other direction than backward or forward, have your armorer take a look at it because something is wrong with it.

The other problem with this theory is that your finger does not work like a hinge. It doesn't go back and forth, it curls. The problem is that the phrase to "pull the trigger straight back" is used to teach the all important trigger control theory.

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Tons of time and paper have been wasted on teaching and writing about "trigger control." Let me ask you this simple question. Imagine I take your handgun, line it up on target on the range, and lock it into a heavy metal vise attached to a heavy steel and wooden table which is bolted into the concrete floor. Once I've secured the gun so that it can't move, I attach a piece of string to the trigger and slowly pull the string until the round goes off. Where will it go? If you said straight into the target, you are correct.

Now instead of slowly pulling that piece of string attached to the trigger, I jerk it as hard as I can. Now, where will your round go? Again, if you said it goes straight into the target, you are correct. Where else could it go but into the target? So what's more important: how you pull the trigger, or how you grip the gun? Obviously, how tightly you grip your gun is going to be more important.

One of the arguments that some firearms instructors bring up concerning this topic is, "Ask a sniper if trigger control is important." Well, if you think that a sniper firing a round out of a rifle from 300 yards away is under the same survival stress as an officer who is getting shot at from less than five feet away, then you should rethink your position as a firearms instructor. We need to train the way we fight, and that is to have a tight, convulsive grip on the firearm, and not worry about "trigger control."

If trigger control is so important, then why don't we care about it when we're doing force-on-force training using SIMS, Airsoft, or paintball? Can you recall during any realistic force-on-force training anyone ever "slowly squeezing the trigger?" Heck no! You pull that trigger as fast as you can to avoid getting hit by the bad guy, because those things hurt when you get hit. You react just like you would in real life, only in real life the stress of possibly getting shot with a real bullet is a lot higher.

My idea of trigger control is to stick your finger in the damn hole and pull the trigger. It doesn't matter how hard or how fast you pull that trigger, as long as you have that tight, convulsive grip on your firearm.

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The only thing you have to remember about your trigger is the trigger reset. You have to let the trigger out far enough for it to reset itself so that you can pull it again. You can easily find the trigger's reset point on the range by letting the trigger out a little bit after you've fired a round, then pulling it back again. If it doesn't fire, then it hasn't reset. Continue doing this, letting it out a little more each time until it has hit its reset point.

Getting the Right Grip

Now that we've established you need a tight, convulsive grip on the handgun, let's discuss how to do it. First, take your strong-side hand and form a V between your thumb and index finger. Take that V and place it over the grip of the firearm. Your hand should be as high up on the backstrap as possible. This high on the backstrap grip will allow you to control the gun, especially during rapid, multiple-round firing. Now wrap your fingers around the grip and squeeze it tightly.

To get a two-hand grip, bring your off hand up to the other side of the gun and place the meaty part of your hand below your thumb, come in contact with the grip itself. Your two hands come together like two pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. Both of your thumbs should be along the side of the slide. You want to get as much "meat" on the firearm as possible to help you control it and have that tight, vise-like grip on the gun. Once you've gotten your off hand in place, squeeze both hands together as hard as you can.

To have this vise-like grip out on the street when you're involved in a shooting, you need to train that way. Target shooting skills that require you to slowly squeeze the trigger rearward until the round goes off and it's a surprise to you, are not going to save your ass out on the street. Lose the target shooter's mentality, and trade it in for the real-world environment that you work in.