

FIREARM SAFETY RULES

Work with someone certified as an instructor by the [NRA](#), [Rangemaster](#), the military, a law enforcement agency, or another recognized authority to understand and know how to apply the rules stated below. The rules below are to be followed at all times and, with the exception of the military's fourth rule (see below), apply to all firearms. There are additional rules for particular types of firearms, based upon how they operate. Also, certain events and ranges have additional rules. The rules are stated in bold face. Explanatory comments are in normal face.

NRA's Three Basic Rules

1. Always keep your gun pointed in a safe direction. – A safe direction is one in which, if the gun fired, its bullet would not hit anyone or anything it would be unacceptable to hit. (See discussion of Cooper's fourth rule, below.)

2. Always keep your finger off the trigger until ready to shoot. – Until you are ready to shoot, do not touch the trigger; instead, keep your finger outside and high above the trigger guard.

3. Always keep your gun unloaded until ready to use. – If you do not know how to unload a gun, get help from a firearm instructor certified by the NRA or another recognized authority.

Additional NRA Rules

* **Know how to use the gun safely.** – If you do not know, get instruction from an instructor certified by the NRA or another recognized authority.

* **Be sure the gun is safe to operate.** – Have an instructor show you how to perform a serviceability inspection and function check of your gun. You can also have the gun inspected by a professional gunsmith.

* **Use only the correct ammunition for your gun.** – The names of different calibers of ammunition are sometimes similar and can be confusing. Also, ammunition for modern firearms may be unsafe to use in certain older firearms in the same caliber.

* **Wear eye and ear protection as appropriate.** – Always wear both when shooting firearms.

* **Never use alcohol, over-the-counter drugs or prescription drugs before or while shooting.** – Some can dull your mental acuity, increasing the chance of a safety-related mistake.

* **Store guns so they are not accessible to unauthorized persons.** – A heavy lock box or gun safe is best. Theft is one of the primary ways that criminals obtain guns.

Jeff Cooper's Four Basic Rules – The late Marine Corps Lt. Col. Jeff Cooper founded a highly regarded firearm training center today known as the Gunsite Academy. Cooper's four rules, in wide use today, are:

1. All guns are always loaded. – Of course, guns are sometimes not loaded. (NRA's third safety rule, above, is "Always keep guns unloaded until ready to use.") Cooper used this rule to emphasize that you should never violate other safety rules, thinking a gun is unloaded, because people can think a gun is unloaded when it is not. (It is said that the most common excuse for a negligent discharge is "I thought the gun was unloaded.") By always handling guns as if they are loaded, we reduce the chance of a mishap and train ourselves to handle guns safely by habit.

2. Never let the muzzle cover anything you are not willing to destroy. – This is another way of expressing the NRA's first rule (above) and the military's second rule (below).

3. Keep your finger off the trigger until your sights are on the target. – This is another way of expressing the NRA's second rule (above) and the military's third rule (below).

4. Be sure of your target. Do not shoot at something until you are certain that it is a target. Also, realize that bullets can pass through targets and continue traveling with lethal force. Bullets that miss a target high, low, left, or right also continue traveling with lethal force. In a defensive situation, innocent people trying to escape danger might cross between you and the target. Be aware of who and what is in the general direction of your target, whether near or far. You are responsible for every shot that you fire.

The Military's Four Basic Rules – From time to time, these rules appear in slightly different form. Here is a typical example:

1. Treat every weapon as if it were loaded. – Some people caution that this rule is not helpful to people who do not know how to treat a loaded gun. The following three rules, the NRA's three rules, and Cooper's rules 2-4 (above) explain how to do so.

2. Never point a weapon at anything you do not intend to shoot. – Of course, a gun is always pointed somewhere. This rule has the same intent as the NRA's first rule and Cooper's second rule, both above.

3. Keep your finger straight and off the trigger until you are ready to fire. – This expresses the same intent as the NRA's second rule and Cooper's third rule, both above.

4. Keep your weapon on "SAFE" until you intend to fire. – This applies to a gun that has a manually operable safety. Rifles have them, but some pistols do not.