Ammunition for the Self-Defense Firearm

Author: Anonymous

Preface by Chuck Hawks

I decided to reproduce this rather long piece here partly because it is clearly the author's desire that it be widely disseminated. Another part is that it makes interesting reading, and I enjoy a good read as much as anyone. Although the author has some strong opinions and I don't necessarily agree with all of them, they are informed opinions and worthy of careful consideration. Actually, I have an idea about the identity of "Anonymous," which is another reason this piece appears here, but it is the author's desire to remain anonymous, and in any case I could be wrong.

Self-defense ammunition is a field in which improvements are continually taking place. In order to keep this article timely, in February of 2006 I took the liberty of revising some sections in minor ways to keep them up to date and to include recent information.

Enjoy *Ammunition for the Self-Defense Firearm.*

This is a guide to help you select the best ammunition for your defensive firearm. Most of these opinions are based upon the work of Massad Ayoob, Evan Marshall and Ed Sanow, police officers who have extensively studied the issue of firearms, ammunition and stopping power. I refer all interested parties to the excellent series by Ayoob ('In the Gravest Extreme, ''Stressfire,' 'The Semi-Automatic Pistol in Police Service and Self-Defense', 'Stressfire II: Advanced Combat Shotgun') and the comprehensive book 'Stopping Power' by Marshall and Sanow.

In particular, it cannot be stressed too heavily that all gun owners should own a copy of 'In the Gravest Extreme' and re-read it periodically. Once you have read it you will understand why. Buy it. (The Ayoob titles - and other items like Cor-Bon ammunition and Spyderco 'Clipit' folding knives - are available mail order ($9.95@ and $3.95 shipping and handling) from "Police Bookshelf," P.O. Box 122, Concord NH 03302; telephone # 1-800-624-9049. American Express, VISA, MasterCard, and Discover cards gladly accepted. Order today - you will be grateful.)

These three policemen are the world's foremost authorities on choosing ammunition for real-world defensive use. Their views are based on exhaustive review of thousands of police and civilian shooting incidents, autopsies, and ballistic tests.

Some other authorities rely entirely on the latter (e.g. Dr. Martin Fackler, the FBI Wound Ballistics Lab, the National Institute of Justice Ballistic Research Laboratory) which is insufficient to make reliable predictions. Human beings react differently to being shot than gelatin, goats, or other test media, and bullets that perform spectacular feats in the laboratory sometimes give mediocre results on the street.

A perfect example of this are the silly 1989-90 FBI tests which resulted in the FBI choosing the mediocre 10mm S&W Model 1076 and the 180 grain JHP round. For this reason, I have chosen to rely on Ayoob, Marshall, and Sanow when it comes to selecting my ammunition and strongly advise you do the same. What follows is essentially a distillation of their opinions. I urge you to research the sources listed for a more detailed discussion than is possible here.

I cannot stress too heavily that the primary determinant of stopping power is BULLET PLACEMENT. A cool, deliberate marksman with a little .32 Walther PPK will beat a panicky, inaccurate man with a .357 Magnum or $1200 customized .45 auto every time. Whatever firearm and caliber you select, you must practice firing hundreds - thousands - of rounds in realistic defensive scenarios until you can confidently make disabling hits on your target. Tactics and marksmanship win gunfights - not having the latest 'wonder bullet' in your gun.

Unfortunately, I cannot teach you tactics in this short essay, only recommend proven ammunition. You MUST seek out competent training in tactics and marksmanship from a qualified instructor in your area. In the meanwhile, studying Ayoob's great book 'Stressfire' will get you off to an excellent start.

Self Defense Ammunition Generally

American ammunition is the best in the world. Stick to Federal, Cor-Bon, Hornady, Remington, Winchester or CCI ammunition. Some foreign stuff is pretty good (PMC, IMI-Samson, Fiocci), some foreign stuff is great (Dynamit-Nobel, Norma, GECO), some foreign stuff is practice-only junk (e.g. Wolf, CDM - Mexico, military surplus), but no foreign stuff is anywhere near as good as domestic ammunition when it comes to vanquishing hostile attackers. Buy American.

Never use hand-loaded or re-loaded ammunition for self-defense! You may encounter some joker who says he can hand-load ammunition so powerful it will knock anything on two legs down for the count, but don't buy it. This junk will either misfire or ruin your gun. Use only fresh factory-loaded cartridges, period. There are NO EXCEPTIONS to this rule: use factory-loaded cartridges only.

Handguns

One should carry only hollowpoint ammunition in a defensive handgun. Hollowpoint ammunition has much better stopping power than full metal jacket or round-nose lead, and stopping power is what you need when being assaulted.

The point is not to wound or kill the adversary: the point is to stop him in his tracks and make him cease attacking you. "Stopping power" (sometimes called "knock-down power") refers to a particular bullet's ability to incapacitate an attacker - the greater that ability, the less chance that your attacker will be able to continue shooting, stabbing, or beating you after you have shot him.

Handguns are not death-rays; despite what you see in the movies, the vast majority of people shot with handguns survive (over 80%). Handguns are weak compared to rifles and shotguns, and thus you want every edge you can get. Great ammunition is no more expensive than mediocre ammunition, so carry the best. Rifles and shotguns have stopping power to spare; handguns do not. Thus you must select your handgun load very carefully, and the detail of the handgun ammunition section reflects this.

Hollowpoint ammunition is NOT more lethal than ball (full metal jacket) ammunition. You may have seen media hype about "killer dum-dum bullets" but this is nonsense. Hollowpoint bullets usually expand and stop in the human body, and thus the attacker absorbs much more of the bullet's kinetic energy than if the bullet had merely zipped through him and left two small holes. Hollowpoint ammunition is also safer for all parties concerned.

* You are safer because your attacker is more likely to be incapacitated after one or two shots and thus unable to fire back, stab you, or whatever. The decreased likelihood of your attacker dying from hollowpoint bullets saves you the moral and legal complications and expense you will experience from killing a man.
* Innocent bystanders are safer because hollowpoint bullets are less likely to exit the attacker's body and go on to injure anyone else. The ricochet danger is also much lower than that of ball ammunition, and hollowpoint bullets are less likely to penetrate walls or doors and strike uninvolved third parties. Furthermore, if your foe is incapacitated quickly he won't be spraying wild bullets around, endangering uninvolved third parties.
* Lastly, your attacker is safer because he is far less likely to die from one or two hollowpoint bullets than the five or six round-nose slugs you would have had to fire to put him down. Most gunshot deaths occur from shock and loss of blood, and ball rounds tend to make entry and exit wounds, whereas hollowpoints go in and stay put. An attacker shot twice with ball ammo will probably have four holes in him rather than two, and is thus in far greater danger of death from blood loss. If you can avoid killing your attacker you should, for both moral and legal reasons.

There are some exceptions to the "carry only hollowpoints in a handgun" rule. Some older or cheaper automatic pistols, will jam with hollowpoint rounds. With these guns one must use ball rounds (or "full metal jacket" rounds - the terms are synonymous), and I specify "reliable with ball only" models by caliber. It is crucial for you to test your pistol to make certain it is reliable with specific loads - don't rely on my advice. My life will never depend on the reliability of your handgun. Your life may.

Rifles

Generally speaking, fast expanding bullets are the best choice for rifles. Hollow point and plastic tipped bullets usually expand rapidly. Some soft-point designs are recommended, and these will be specified.

Shotguns

Use buckshot. Slugs and birdshot are useful in some limited and uncommon situations.

A Note On Exotic Ammunition

There are several exotic ammunition designs on the market today, such as the Glaser Safety Slug, Mag-Safe, GECO BAT 9mm, Thunderzap, et cetera. Generally speaking, I recommend that you avoid them. Exotic ammunition is expensive, inaccurate, and often unreliable. These rounds cost so much ($2-$4 each) that you will never practice with them and thus will not be certain of their reliability and accuracy in your gun. This is a big mistake: you should not carry a particular type of ammunition until you have fired at least 150 rounds through your semi-automatic gun to ensure reliable feeding (this doesn't really apply to revolvers, but you should still fire the ammunition you intend to carry to assure yourself of its accuracy).

'Glaser Safety Slugs' are one exotic round I can fully recommend, but only for revolvers in a few scenarios. The Glaser is a proven man-stopper and has very good quality control, but may not feed or cycle reliably in your automatic pistol. Because you cannot afford to fire enough Glasers to establish that it feeds reliably in your pistol (i.e. 100 test-fire rounds will cost $300), I cannot recommend them for pistol owners (if you insist on Glasers, carry one in the chamber and load the magazine with a proven hollowpoint. Be aware, however, that the Glaser may not have the power to cycle your slide, and thus you may be carrying a single-shot gun. You can always cycle the slide manually, of course, but this takes time and both hands; two things you may not be able to spare when fighting for your life. The Walther PPK, H&K P7 series and SIG P230 are notorious for this failure-to-cycle problem with Glaser Safety Slugs).

With revolvers feeding is not an issue, of course, but there are other factors to consider. The Glaser is designed for easy break-up and minimal penetration, which is great for cutting down ricochet and over-penetration dangers but drastically limits its ability to penetrate light cover between you and your foe. A car window, hollow-core door, or even thick winter clothing between you and your assailant can cause the Glaser to disintegrate and leave him unharmed. Bad news for you....great news for him.

There are some situations where the Glaser is a good choice, however. I keep my bedside .357 revolver loaded with .38 Special+P Glasers because I live in a thin-walled apartment building and want to be able to put down an intruder rapidly without worrying about injuring my neighbors. I chose .38 over .357 Magnums because I am likely to be in a just-awakened daze and would rather not be blinded and disoriented by the flash, kick and blast of firing a .357 Magnum in a (probably darkened) room. You may have a similar situation (e.g. retail store defense) where injury to third parties is of concern, and you'll likely be facing an assailant at extremely close range where the Glaser's inaccuracy and inability to penetrate cover will not be drawbacks. In these narrowly defined scenarios, the Glaser is a good choice, but keep a couple of speedloaders of hollowpoints handy, just in case. I do.

Glaser Safety Slugs are available in "Blue" or "Silver" versions. The latter are a little heavier for better penetration, but performance is similar. I would be happy with either, but Sanow prefers the Silver. It's up to you.

Mag-Safes are imitations of Glasers, and I cannot recommend them due to poor quality control. Reliability is the number one requirement of a self-defense handgun, and Mag-Safes don't make the grade.

GECO "Blitz Action Trauma" or BAT 9mm rounds from Germany are a proven design. Called the "GECO Action Safety" in Europe, this is a high velocity (1400 feet per second) lightweight (86 grain) hollow bullet that has proven itself to be very reliable and successful on the street. I recommend them, but they are very tough to find. Save yourself the trouble and use a good American-made hollowpoint.

Other exotics are best avoided. You may occasionally encounter "Thunderzaps," "Omni-Shocks," "Terminators," "Annihilators," "Kaswer Law Grabbers," and

other such marginalia in gun shops. Stay away. If you want to gamble, go to an Indian reservation. Don't gamble with your life, or the lives of others. Glasers and GECO 9mm BATs are the only proven exotics.

Terminology

I have tried to keep specialized technical jargon to a minimum, but it will be helpful for you to understand a few terms and acronyms:

- 'Ball' is round-nosed metal jacketed ammunition. It is used for self-loading firearms like pistols. All military pistol and rifle ammunition uses full metal jacket bullets. Synonyms for ball include FMJ ("full metal jacket"), MC ("metal case") and TMJ ("totally metal jacketed," a term used only by the ammunition maker CCI). Ball rounds do not expand and are always the worst choice in a defensive round. The military uses ball because it feeds well (i.e. rarely jams), penetrates far, and the military is required to use ball under the Geneva Convention. Fortunately, you are free to choose better ammunition, and should use ball for practice only.

- 'Wadcutters' and 'semi-wadcutters' are sharp-shouldered revolver bullets with an odd cylindrical appearance. True wadcutters are very weak rounds used for target shooting only. Unless you own a .38 or .357 revolver, forget about these.

- 'Jacketed soft-points' are jacketed bullets with exposed lead at the tip. These make poor defensive rounds for handguns but may be effective for rifles, due to the latter's high velocity. Never use JSP rounds in a handgun for self-defense. Never.

- 'Jacketed hollowpoints' are the best choice for handguns and most rifles. JHP rounds have a hollow cavity in the nose and usually expand (and stop) in the body of your attacker, transferring all their kinetic energy for maximum stopping power. They are the safest and best bullets available. JHP bullets are always best for self-defense.

-'Round-nose lead' (or RNL) are generally revolver bullets without any metal jacket around the bullet. These are worthless for self-defense, and I don't even use them at the range. If you come upon a bargain lot of RNL ammo, feel free to buy it for target practice. You will be scrubbing out your barrel until the wee hours, however, as all-lead bullets scum up barrels something fierce. Use 'Flitz' metal polish to scour out the grimy residue.

HANDGUN AMMUNITION BY CALIBER

(Note: for an excellent and comprehensive look at the best handgun rounds by caliber, see the article 'What Are The Best Loads For Defense?' by Ed Sanow in the July, 1995 issue of Petersen's 'HANDGUNS' magazine)

.22 LR (.22 Long Rifle)

You should really be using something bigger than a .22 for self-defense, but even a .22 beats nothing. There are some really nice .22 pocket autos, and they make a lot of sense for women reluctant to tote a bigger gun around. Choose any Federal, Remington, Winchester or CCI copper-plated 37 grain (or lighter) high velocity hollowpoint round. I recommend CCI "Stinger" 32-gr. or Remington "Yellow Jacket" 33-gr. hollowpoints, as they have been very reliable in my Beretta 21A and Walther TPH pistols and have the highest stopping power ratings.

Shoot a lot of rounds through your self-defense .22, the ammo is cheap and you want to be sure to pick a reliable round. If high-velocity solids don't cycle reliably try standard-velocity. There is little difference in power but it may improve your gun's reliability (e.g. Jennings J-22 pistols are more reliable with standard-velocity solids). Marksmanship is crucial with such a tiny gun, so practice drawing your .22 and firing it rapidly into a melon at ten feet or so. Also keep your .22 autoloader meticulously clean - these tiny guns cannot function reliably with much gunk in them. If you carry your .22 in a pocket, purse or ankle holster inspect it daily and brush off any dust or grit with an old toothbrush. Lubricate it properly, too. This is very important.

.25 ACP (6.35mm)

The best .25 load is the Hornady 35-gr. XTP-HP round. If it jams, use any Federal, Remington, or Winchester 50 grain ball round. Winchester has an odd 45 gr. "Expanding Point" round that should be OK if it is reliable in your gun (it seems to work fine in Beretta 950 pistols, for example), but don't expect any improvement in performance over the 50 grain ball rounds. The excellent Walther TPH .25 should be loaded with ball.

The Hornady 35 grain JHP should be considered only if it is 100% reliable in your pistol - fire 200 rounds through your gun to see. Ed Sanow recommends the MagSafe 22 grain "Defender" and Glaser 40 grain Safety Slug.

.32 ACP (7.65 mm Browning, 7.65x17mm)

Use the Winchester 60 gr. Silvertip Jacketed Hollow Point (X32ASHP) if it is reliable in your gun. I personally would only carry Silvertips in a Seecamp LWS .32. Most of the common .32 autos on the market are only reliable with 71 grain ball: Llama, Walther PP and PPK, Czech CZ-24 and CZ-70, Davis P-32, Colt Pocket Model, Mauser HSc, etc.

.32 Smith & Wesson Long

The best defense load for this obsolescent revolver caliber is the Federal 98 gr. lead wadcutter (32LA). Shoot carefully.

.32 H&R Magnum

Federal 85 gr. Jacketed Hollow Point (C32HRB).

7.62x25mm (a.k.a. 7.63mm Mauser)

If you're using this obsolescent communist caliber I can only assume that you have an old CZ-52 or Chinese Tokarev. Only 87 gr. ball ammo is available, so leave the cheap Chinese military stuff for practice and carry Fiocchi 7.63 Mauser ball in your gun.

.380 ACP (9mm Short, 9x17mm, 9mm Kurz)

Now we're getting into some decent stopping power. The three or four best .380 JHP rounds have better stopping power than ANY bullet fired out of 2" barrel .38 Special snub-nose. All of the Big Five make good hollowpoints for this caliber. The Remington 88 grain JHP is the most reliably-feeding hollowpoint but slightly less effective than the Hydra-Shok or Cor-Bon. Reliability is crucial, and thus you must test the rounds before carrying.

I recommend the following two cartridges above all others:

-Federal 90 gr. Hydra-shok (P380HS1 H) - the best standard-pressure .380 JHP load, period.
-Cor-Bon 90 gr. JHP - the most powerful .380 hollow-point, bar none.

These are the two best .380 loads, and I recommend them for these guns:
SIG/Sauer P230, Beretta 84/85, Browning BDA, CZ-83, H&K P7K3, Walther PPK and PPK/s. The Russian, East German, Chinese and Bulgarian Makarov pistols are apparently perfectly reliable with the hot Cor-Bon, and the strong all-steel construction of these guns should stand up to an infinite amount of these potent rounds. I have heard that the Colt does also well with the hot Cor-Bon JHP, which you should definitely look into if you own a Colt .380. You have better stopping power than any .38 snub-nose revolver (the long-time favorite concealment sidearm) when you load your .380 with these two rounds.

Other good .380 ACP jacketed hollowpoints:

- Remington 102 gr. Golden Saber BJHP (GS380M) - Another excellent .380 load (the BJHP stands for "Brass Jacketed Hollow Point"), the heaviest one available. I prefer the Cor-Bon and Hydra-Shok, but many (including Sanow) like this new Remington round for its deeper penetration. I'll stick with the Cor-Bon and Hydra-shok, but the choice is yours.
- CCI-Speer 90 gr. Gold Dot JHP A good all-around hollowpoint.
- Remington 88 gr. JHP (R380AI): A good high-velocity hollowpoint that feeds well in: Colt Government Model .380, H&K HK4, Taurus PT-58, older PP and PPK, Bersa .380, Beretta 70s, Makarov and Hungarian FEG. These are all good guns that might choke on other hollowpoints but they will probably feed the Remington fine. This hollowpoint was redesigned in 1993 and gives excellent performance while retaining its rounded shape for positive feeding. If your .380 chokes on other JHP loads, try fifty rounds of the Remington 88 gr. through your gun and see if it improves.

.380 ACP hollowpoints to avoid:

-Winchester 85 gr Silvertip (X380ASHP) I really cannot recommend this weak and jam-prone round. It works

reliably in a few modern European guns (e.g. SIG 230, Beretta 84F), but every load named above offers better performance. The Silvertip will likely jam in any American-made .380 automatic. Russian .380 Makarovs and PPK series guns may jam with the Silvertip, as well. The .380 Silvertip was once state-of-the-art, but has since been superseded by superior designs. It is also quite expensive. Look elsewhere.
- PMC-Eldorado Starfire 95 gr. JHP This round is similarly weak and jam-prone.
- Federal 90 gr. JHP (380BP) (see below)
- Hornady 90 gr. XTP-HP (9010) Both the Federal 380BP and the Hornady XTP-HP never expand and may jam many guns due to their truncated-cone bullet nose profiles. Pass by these two.

95 gr ball:

Davis P-380, Accu-Tek, EAA .380, Tanarmi, AMT/OMC/TDE "Back-Up," Heritage, FIE, Jennings, Bryco, Lorcin, Llama, or "other." Hollowpoints should never be used in these low-priced guns.

9mm Makarov (9x18mm)

-Cor-Bon makes an excellent 95 grain JHP that is totally reliable in all East Bloc pistols.
-Hornady offers a 95 grain JHP/XTP (#91002).

.38 Special

Loads for Full-Sized .38 Revolvers With 4" or Longer Barrels: The Numero Uno .38 Special defense load for your 4" barrel revolver is the Cor-Bon .38 Special+P 125 grain JHP. It is a very high-pressure load and should be used only in modern six-shot revolvers. It has less felt recoil and muzzle flip than the #2 choice, which follows. When I carry a 4" .38, I want it loaded with this cartridge.

The second-best choice is the .38 Special +P 158 grain lead semi-wadcutter hollowpoint (LSWCHP) available from Federal, CCI, Winchester and Remington. Ayoob has found the latter to have the greatest expansion, so I would choose Remington (catalog #R38S12). This unjacketed all-lead round (often called the "FBI load" or "Chicago load") is a proven manstopper when fired from a 4" barrel. Your fixed-sight .38 revolver it will usually shoot to point-of-aim with this load; lighter bullets will normally shoot low (some very low). All fixed-sight .38s are regulated at the factory to shoot accurately with standard velocity 158 grain bullets, as this was the weight of the long-time standard American and Canadian police load.

* Federal makes the FBI load in their Nyclad line covered with a thin Nylon jacket to prevent leading (#P38G). This is now a police only load. The all-lead version is #38G.
* CCI offers the famous FBI load in their economical aluminum-cased Blazer line (#3523). This is a bargain. What I really recommend, however, is that for practice you use the CCI Blazer 158 grain JACKETED hollowpoint (#3526) because it duplicates the ballistics and recoil of the FBI load without fouling your barrel with hard-to-scrub-out lead deposits. These are a bitch to clean (I use 'Flitz' metal polish with good results. It will also remove unsightly "burn rings" from the cylinder face of your stainless-steel revolver).

Note: .38 Special ammunition is loaded to two pressure levels: standard pressure and +P. Standard pressure loads may be used in any .38 Special revolver, but +P loads should be fired extensively only in steel-frame .38 Special revolvers. Firing a few (under fifty) +P loads in your aluminum-framed .38 Special revolver will not destroy it or cause it to explode, but will damage your aluminum-framed revolver if you fire more than a hundred rounds. The main problem with carrying +P .38 Special loads in an aluminum-framed .38 Special revolver is that the kick is nasty and slows repeat shots. Thus I recommend standard pressure ammunition for aluminum-framed .38 Special revolvers, as it is much easier to score fast hits.

Other .38 Special Loads for Your 4" Barrel Revolver:

IMI-Samson also offers a lightweight, very high pressure load, the 110 gr. +P+ JHP. This is said to be a ballistic duplicate of the law-enforcement-only "Treasury" load that T-men used to carry. Who cares? The Cor-Bon 125 gr. +P load is superior. And never use any 147 grain bullet in any caliber. They are cursed.

All major manufacturers catalog light .38 +P hollowpoints, from 95-129 grains. None of these are as successful as the Cor-Bon .38 Special +P 125 grain JHP or 158 grain +P LSWCHP, so why carry them? Light +P loads only make sense in a 2" barrel snub (more on

this later). The Federal Hydra-shok and Winchester Silvertip may look cool, but the boring-looking Cor-Bon and FBI loads do the job in a 4" revolver. Stick with them.

PMC makes a bizarre 66 grain tubular hollow bullet load. Some enthusiastic gun-shop salesman may try to sell it to you. Refuse politely. Also avoid the Remington 95 grain +P SJHP (R38S1) due to inadequate penetration.

The Glaser Safety Slug is a good choice for self-defense in a .38 revolver of any barrel length (see caveats under "exotic ammunition," above). It is crucial to keep the chambers and frame interior absolutely free of oil or solvents when carrying Glasers, as you don't want any Breakfree CLP or Hoppe's #9 solvent seeping into the primer pocket and deactivating the round. This is important for all rounds, of course, but the Glaser isn't known for particularly good sealing against such mishaps. You may also want to consider carrying two Glasers as the first rounds to be fired, and JHP loads for the rest. This gives you a bit of insurance if your assailant tucks himself behind a sheet rock wall or doorway or some other flimsy cover that JHP rounds can blast through.

A Special Note on Snub-Nose .38 Revolvers With 2" or 3" Barrels: The Cor-Bon .38 Special +P 125 grain JHP and 158 grain LSWCHP FBI load are not the best choice for 2" or 3" barrel revolvers. The short barrel does not provide enough velocity to ensure reliable expansion with these load, and the unpleasant and hard-to-control recoil hurts snub-nose accuracy (as well as your hand). Controllability is crucial, and I recommend non +P standard pressure loads, for the .38 snub-nose.

Good +P choices for a steel-frame 2" .38 snub-nose revolver are:

* Federal 125 grain +P Nyclad LSWHP (P38N) - my preferred .38 2" barrel snub-nose revolver load (a.k.a. the "Chief's Special" load, now available only to the police).
* Federal 129 grain +P Hydra-shok JHP (P38HS1)
* Remington 125 grain +P Golden Saber HPJ (GS38SB)
* Cor-Bon 110 grain +P JHP - I would recommend this high-pressure load only for the sturdy (and heavy) Ruger SP101 snub-nose .38 or .357 Magnum revolver.

Standard Pressure (non +P) Loads.

If you carry an aluminum-frame snub nose .38 (e.g. S&W Model 38 Bodyguard, 642, 442, 37, or Colt Cobra) I urge you to carry a standard pressure (non +P) .38 round. The best standard pressure .38 load is the Federal 125 grain Nyclad lead hollowpoint (P38M). This P38M hollowpoint - known as the "Chief's Special load" - was specifically designed to expand at lower velocities and is the industry leader in standard pressure .38 rounds. This load is now available to police departments only.

Another acceptable standard pressure .38 load is the Winchester Silvertip 110 grain JHP (X38S9HP). A third possibility is the Federal Low Recoil Personal Defense 110 grain Hydra-Shok JHP load (PD38HS3 H)

Note well: if you have a J-frame Smith & Wesson snub-nose .38 (i.e. the five-shot Model 36/37 Chief's Special, Model 38/49/649 Bodyguard, the 640/642/442/940 Centennial) you can greatly improve the controllability of your gun by installing Uncle Mike's "Boot Grip." This is a $14 godsend. The skinny little wooden grips that come on these guns are worthless. Installing good grips does wonders for your ability to control your .38 snub-nose revolver in rapid fire for more hits.

9mm Parabellum (9mm Luger, 9x19mm, 9mm NATO, or simply "9mm")

This is unquestionably the world's most popular pistol round. For this reason it has been the subject of a lot of experimentation, because 9mm ball - used by every army in the Western world - is a mediocre manstopper. Jacketed hollowpoints are a must if one wishes to rely on the 9mm as a defense round. Use ball ammo for practice only.

9mm ammunition is available in two pressure levels: standard and "+P." The latter should only be used in newer guns (made since 1985 or so), and is best used sparingly. I will deal here with only commercially available ammunition: there are specialized loads available only to law enforcement personnel. Civilians should not worry, as there are commercial loads as good or better than anything restricted to law enforcement usage.

I will now tell you the best 9mm Luger load for self-defense: it is the Cor-Bon 9mm 115 grain +P Jacketed

Hollowpoint. This is the most powerful and street-proven manstopper available in this caliber. It is a high velocity (1340 fps) and high pressure round, and more effective than any load restricted to law enforcement use (such as the Federal 9BPLE).

Unfortunately, it is also likely to jam many older guns. For this reason I add a table at the end of the 9mm section discussing round suitability for different guns. Modern hollowpoints may either (a) jam, or (b) be too powerful for some older guns. This load is suitable only for First Class pistols (see table).

The best standard pressure 9mm load is the Federal 115 grain JHP (9BP). Its effectiveness and accuracy make it the world standard. Buy several boxes. Other excellent standard pressure 9mm loads are the Winchester Silvertip 115 grain (X9MMSHP), and Federal 124 grain Hydra-Shok (P9HS1).

For guns that may jam with the Cor-Bon or Federal 115 grain hollow-points, the Remington 115 grain +P JHP is a good choice (R9MM6). For older guns I would use the Remington standard pressure 115 gr. JHP (R9MM1).

Now it is time to impart some crucial information: NEVER use 147 grain ammo in a 9mm pistol! There was a stupid fad for 147 grain hollowpoints a few years ago, and many were suckered into buying these weak, worthless and malfunction-prone rounds. I don't care what you've heard: never use any 9mm hollowpoint heavier than 125 grains. 147 grain hollowpoints often jam in many popular 9mm guns like the Browning Hi-Power, SIG, Beretta 92, S&W and Glock. Ignore the gun magazine hype and stick to what works. If you want to gamble, go to Reno. Don't gamble with your life. 147 grain ammo sucks.

Bad 9mm Loads to avoid (and certainly NEVER carry). Numbers given:

Federal Gold Medal 9mm 147 grain JHP (9MS)
Federal Hydra-Shok 9mm 147 grain JHP (P9HS2)
Winchester 147 grain 9mm Silvertip Subsonic JHP (X9MMST147)
Winchester 147 grain 9mm Super-X Subsonic (XSUB9MM)
Remington 147 grain 9mm JHP (R9MM8)
Remington 147 grain 9mm Golden Saber JHP (GS9MMC)
Remington 140 grain 9mm JHP (R9MM7)
Remington 88 grain 9mm JHP (R9MM5) This bullet is far too light.
CCI Lawman 147 grain 9mm PHP "Plated Hollow Point" (3619)

Table Of 9mm Pistols.

(Note: just because your pistol appears in Class 3, say, doesn't mean it is unreliable: it may indeed feed hollowpoints. But you must fire at least 200 rounds of your chosen JHP carry load to determine if your pistol will feed them properly. I have placed pistols in each category according to reputation and experience. These are only meant as guidelines - your pistol may feed JHP rounds better - or worse - than this table indicates)

First Class pistols are ultra-reliable and high-quality new guns than can feed any hollowpoint and tolerate +P loads with no problems: SIG/Sauer P220 series. Czech CZ75 and CZ85. Walther P5, P5C, and P88. Heckler and Koch USP and P7 series. All Glocks. All Ruger 9mm pistols. Taurus PT-99, PT-92 and PT-92C. Steyr GB. Beretta 92 series. Browning BDM and Hi-Power (if it says "Portugal" on the slide). All Smith & Wessons with a four-digit model number (e.g. 5906, 3913, 6904, 5903) and the Smith & Wesson 900 series. Star M28, M30, M31, and all Firestars, Megastars, and Ultrastars.

Second Class pistols are high quality guns that may not feed all hollowpoints reliably. Remington 115 gr. hollowpoints are recommended for these guns: Smith & Wessons with two or three digit model numbers (e.g. 659, 39-2, 469, 59, 39). Heckler and Koch VP70 and P9S. Beretta "Brigadier" M1951 and the Egyptian copy, the Interarms "Helwan." Colt M2000 "All-American" (now discontinued, for good reason), Colt Series 70 Government Model, Series 70 Commander. Astra A-70, A-75 and A-100. AMT "On Duty." Daewoo. Bersa 'Thunder 9'. EAA Witness, and all other CZ-75 copies (e.g. Tanfoglio, Tanarmi, Springfield Armory P9). Taurus PT-908. Walther P4. Star BK, BKM, Model B and 'Super.' Browning Hi-Powers without the word "Portugal" on the slide. Llama Model 82. IMI "Jericho" and "Kareen."

Third Class pistols should generally be loaded with ball for best reliability - experiment with your gun extensively before carrying JHP: Walther P38, P4 or

P1. Luger. Llama. Maverick. MKS Model JS. Intratec CAT-9, DC-9, KG-9, etc. SWD Cobray Model 11/9 and similar models. Scarab Scorpion. Kimel AP-9. Bryco Jennings Model 59. All KBI Hungarian pistols (e.g. GKK, PJ9C, P9HK and other "FEG" products). "Norinco" or "Sportarms" Chinese Tokarev pistols. Lahti. Radom. MAB P15 and Model 1950.

.38 Super

Cor-Bon, Winchester and Remington all make good jacketed hollow-points in .38 Super. I like the Cor-Bon 115 and 124 grain hollowpoints the best. The Remington will feed more smoothly in many guns, however, especially Colts and Colt M1911A1 copies like the Springfield Armory and Auto-Ordnance. The Llama .38 Super tends to jam with anything except ball.

.357 Magnum

The most effective handgun round on the market - regardless of caliber - is the Federal .357 Magnum 125 grain jacketed hollowpoint (357B). This load has more stopping power than any other handgun bullet (and this includes more powerful rounds like the .41 and .44 Magnums). I advise all experienced revolver men to carry the legendary Federal 357B in a .357 revolver, or the equally good Remington full-power 125 grain semi-jacketed hollowpoint (R357M1).

There is one caveat, however. The 357B and other full-power .357 Magnums have a lot of blast and kick. If you are not comfortable with the buck and roar of full-house .357 Magnums, I would strongly suggest that you use a lower-recoil round. Controllability is important, and you will be able to fire lower-recoil rounds more rapidly and accurately. All of these .357 loads have excellent stopping power, so don't worry that you are giving up too much.

In descending order of severity of recoil (i.e. the Silvertip kicks the most) I recommend the Winchester Silvertip 145 grain JHP (X357SHP), The Remington Golden Saber 125 grain JHP (GS357MA), Federal 110 gr. JHP (357D), Remington Medium Velocity 125 grain Semi-Jacketed Hollowpoint (R357M11) and the Cor-Bon 110 grain JHP. The latter two are excellent rounds I strongly recommend for .357 Magnum 2.5" and 3" barrel snub-nose revolvers like the S&W Models 66, 19, 65, 13, the Colt King Cobra, the Ruger GP100 and especially the small-frame Ruger SP101. If you still find that your .357 kicks too much, carry the Cor-Bon .38 Special+P 110 grain JHP discussed above. Two or three hits with good .38+P slugs beat any number of misses with .357 slugs.

Note well: if you are using the factory wood stocks on your S&W or Taurus .357 revolver, you should try a set of rubber replacement grips. Ruger and Colt .357 Magnums come factory-equipped with recoil-absorbing ergonomic rubber grips, and I have no idea why S&W and Taurus continue to put wood grips on their .357 revolvers. The difference in control is enormous. Get some good, compact rubber grips from Uncle Mike's or Pachmayr and slap them onto your .357 revolver ASAP. I used to cringe every time I fired a full-power load in my .357 Magnum snub-nose. Once I put some compact Pachmayr grips on it, however, I had no problem firing the 357B accurately and rapidly. These grips only cost twenty bucks. Buy some.)

Other good .357 Magnum loads.

The 125 grain jacketed hollowpoints by Cor-Bon, Winchester, and CCI are all good stoppers. The CCI Blazer 125 grain jacketed hollow-point is a very good buy, both for practice and self-defense use. The 110 grain jacketed hollowpoints by Winchester, CCI and Remington are all good for use in snub-nose revolvers, or for those sensitive to recoil. You never go wrong with a 110-125 grain .357 jacketed hollowpoint from the Big Five. All are great stoppers.

Don't carry off-brand ammo for self-defense.

Never carry soft-points, semi-wadcutters, or any of the 158 grain or 180 grain jacketed hollowpoints - these are solely for hunting or target use. Stick to jacketed hollowpoints under 150 grains in weight. The heavier bullets kick heavily and will shoot high and confuse you. All-lead bullets are okay for practice but you will have to spend twice as long cleaning your gun.

.357 SIG

I am unsure what advantage this caliber is supposed to have over the .40 S&W, but it is a good stopper. .357 SIG ballistics are quite impressive. Suggested loads:

-Federal 125 grain jacketed hollowpoint (P357S1)
-Hornady 124 grain JHP/XTP (#9130)
-Remington 125 grain JHP (R357S1).

.40 Smith & Wesson

This caliber has established an excellent track record on the street. Smith & Wesson and Winchester really did their research when they invented the .40 S&W. Your choice comes down to either the 180 grain jacketed hollowpoints or the 135-155 grain jacketed hollowpoints by Cor-Bon, Winchester, Federal, CCI or Remington. All are good stoppers, but the lighter weight bullets have the best stopping power records on the streets.

The real-world shooting database clearly favors the lighter 135-155 gr. JHP loads. I personally would carry the potent Cor-Bon 135 or 150 grain jacketed hollowpoint or the Winchester Silvertip 155 grain jacketed hollowpoint (X40SWSTHP). The 135-155 grain JHP kicks less and has higher kinetic energy and stopping power than the 180 gr. JHP loads. The 135 gr. JHP appears to be a real stopper.

In short, you cannot go wrong with the .40 S&W - unless you carry ball. Choose a good hollowpoint and stick with it. Leave the ball for practice (the CCI Blazer 180 grain TMJ is a good inexpensive practice round).

10mm Auto

The 10mm is not living up to expectations. It was thought to be the ne plus ultra of pistol rounds when introduced in the late 1980's, but hasn't turned out to be superior to the better 9mm, .40 S&W or .45 ACP jacketed hollowpoints. This isn't to say that the 10mm Auto sucks - it is a fine stopper. It's just that we hoped for so much more.

<>10mm Auto ammunition is available in two power levels, "full-house" and "medium velocity," as used by the FBI (sometimes called "10mm Lite"). The "full-house" loads should be left for hunting use: they kick heavily, blow right through assailants, and are very hard on your gun. Stick to the medium velocity ammo. I would pick the Cor-Bon 135 grain Nosler JHP, Federal 155 grain JHP (10E), or Federal Hydra-shok 155 gr. JHP (P40HS2). The "FBI load" is the 180 grain subsonic JHP, and Federal, Winchester, and Remington all produce good ones. Take your pick, but you are silly to ignore the superior real-world performance of the lighter 135-155 grain jacketed hollowpoints.

The potent Winchester Silvertip 175 grain JHP (X10MMSTHP) is close in power to the "full-house" loads, and may be a good choice for an experienced shooter who is used to heavy recoil. I personally would only carry the Silvertip or "full-house" loads in the field, where I might have to shoot big, cranky animals that seem interested in munching on my bodily parts. In this role the 10mm auto excels.

.41 Magnum

The best defense choice for this hard-kicking caliber is the Winchester Silvertip 175 grain JHP (X41MSTHP2). The Remington 170 grain Semi-Jacketed Hollowpoint (R41MG3) is also a good round.

.44 Special

By far the best choice for your .44 Special revolver is the Cor-Bon 180 grain JHP. Glasers or the Winchester Silvertip 200 grain JHP (X44STHPS2) are also good rounds, particularly for any 5-shot .44 revolver.

.44 Magnum

The blast and kick of this powerful caliber make it less than optimum for defense use, despite what you have seen in the movies. Cor-Bon's 180 grain or Federal's 180 grain (44B) medium-velocity JHP are the hands-down choices in this caliber. Glasers, the Winchester Silvertip 210 grain JHP (X44MSTHP2) or the Federal 240 grain Hydra-shok (P44HS1) are also acceptable choices.

.45 ACP (occasionally called "11.43x23mm" by some silly Europeans)

The .45 ACP is a recognized manstopper, and there are many excellent loads in this caliber.

Some of the best:

- Federal 230 grain Hydra-Shok JHP (P45HS1): a great load, and my #1 choice. It gives the most stopping power in this potent caliber.
- Federal 185 grain JHP (45C) another top-notch load

from Federal. I would choose this round for a compact, short-barrelled .45 like the Colt Officer's ACP or the S&W 4516. It has lighter recoil than the Hydra-shok or CCI 200 JHP, and its higher velocity makes it more likely to expand out of a short 3.5" barrel.
- Cor-Bon 185 grain Sierra JHP
- CCI Lawman 200 gr. JHP (3965). a.k.a. the "Inspector" or "Flying Ashtray."
- CCI Blazer 200 gr. JHP (3568). The "Flying Ashtray" in an economical aluminum case. Both of these CCI loads use a wide-mouth hollowpoint bullet that may jam some guns. It is 100% reliable in newer guns like the current production "enhanced" Colt 1911A1, the SIG/Sauer P220, Star M45 Firestar and Megastar, and all Smith & Wesson, Para-Ordnance, and Ruger .45 automatics and the Smith & Wesson Model 625 revolver. (Note well: if you are one of those knuckleheads who install light springs in your gun to get a lighter trigger pull you are asking for trouble. Never use CCI ammo in such a gun, as CCI uses especially hard primers and your hammer might not be able to detonate the round reliably, now that you have monkeyed with it.)
- Remington 185 grain JHP (R45AP2). This is the best choice for older guns that may jam with other hollowpoints. I would select this load for the Heckler and Koch P9S, Browning BDA, Springfield Armory, AMT and Thompson M1911A1, Llama, Star PD, etc.
- Cor-Bon and Remington .45+P 185 grain JHP (R45AP6). These are very powerful and hard-kicking rounds best left to the experienced shooter. They are pretty hard on your gun, especially an aluminum-framed pistol like the SIG/Sauer P220 or Colt Lightweight Commander. If you are sufficiently expert to confidently carry the .45+P you certainly don't need my advice on load selection. That being said, these +P rounds are second only to the famed Hydra-shok in stopping power. They really sledgehammer the bad guys down.

Other good .45 ACP loads.

The Winchester Silvertip 185 grain JHP (X45ASHP2), CCI Gold Dot and Remington Golden Saber (GS45APB) are all good choices. If you like them, fine, but they have no edge over loads mentioned above. I say stick to the tried and true.

Ball Ammo

Save the 230 grain ball (FMJ) loads for practice; carry FMJ ammo only if you must because your gun jams with hollowpoints. The Llama, Federal Ordnance, AMT, and Auto-Ordnance M1911A1 copies often jam with anything except 230 grain ball. Never compromise when it comes to reliability: if your gun only feeds ball, then ball is what you carry.

.45 Colt

I hope your self-defense .45 Colt is a good double-action design like the Smith & Wesson Model 25 and not some single-action hunting gun. Load your revolver with the Cor-Bon 200 grain JHP. The Federal 225 gr. Lead Semi-Wadcutter Hollowpoint (45LCA) or Winchester 225 gr. Silvertip JHP (X45CSHP2) are also good.

SHOTGUN AMMUNITION BY CALIBER (Gauge)

The shotgun is the ne plus ultra of manstoppers. No doubt you have heard a lot of nonsense about the lethality of "assault rifles" and "sub-machine guns" and the like. The fact is that the shotgun is the most effective firearm for short-range personal defense. For example: an Uzi or Heckler & Koch sub-machine gun has about 340 ft-lbs. of impact energy - a 12 gauge shotgun has 2500 to 3100 ft-lbs. of impact energy.

The shotgun is not a magic weapon that will slay all foes. Like all other guns, it must be *aimed* at a specific target. Buckshot loads will not "sweep" a room. "Close" still only counts in horseshoes. Aim your shotgun from the shoulder (like a rifle) if you intend to hit an aggressor.

I invoke the Ascended Master, Massad Ayoob: "It is perhaps the most efficient close-range killing machine in the world's arsenal of small arms." For a discussion of the shotgun's strengths and weaknesses I refer all interested parties to Ayoob's excellent and comprehensive book 'The Truth About Self-Protection' (truly the best $8.95 investment you'll ever make), which discusses every element of self-defense from locks, chemical sprays and alarms to defensive driving, firearms and defending yourself

against dogs. A more in-depth treatment of the issue may be found in Ayoob's book-length volume on shotgun technique, 'Stressfire II: Advanced Combat Shotgun'.

A Note on Terminology

Shotgun ammunition falls into three categories:

BUCKSHOT - shell loaded with large-diameter lead balls (.24" and up) used for big game hunting and self-defense. The number of pellets in 12 gauge buckshot varies from eight .36" balls in "000 buck" to 27 .24" pellets in "#4 buck". Buckshot ratings are archaic and hard to understand (as are shotgun specifications and ammunition in general), but thankfully there isn't much you need to learn. Simply write down the recommended loads, walk into your local gunshop and announce your desired ammunition (note that "00" is pronounced "double ought" and "000" is pronounced "triple ought." Don't say "zero zero" or "oh-oh-oh buckshot" in front of gunshop employees. Then practice with both your selected defense load and low-cost birdshot to fully familiarize yourself with the operation of your gun and its terminal performance (e.g. patterns at various distances, the startling effects of buckshot on ballistic melons).

BIRDSHOT- small-diameter pellets used for bird hunting. Its stopping power is poor, except when used at very close range - out to 20-30 feet. For that reason it is not generally recommended, except for home defense use.

SLUGS are solid lead bullets for shotgun use. These are big, heavy, fat hunks of soft lead that have enormous stopping power (e.g. a typical 12 gauge slug is .73" caliber and weighs 438 grains - a 9mm bullet is .355" and 115 grains). Slugs must be carefully aimed to be effective. It is important to remember, however, that shotguns must be aimed with shot, too. Do not for a minute think that you can simply point your shot-loaded shotgun at the foe and let loose. Shotguns must be skillfully aimed and fired just like hand-guns and rifles.

.410 Gauge

None of the above really applies in this weak caliber. The .410 is only a half-way decent manstopper with slugs. Choose the Federal Classic (F412RS) or Winchester Super-X (X41RS5) 1/5 ounce (88 grain) hollowpoint slug. Never use birdshot. American Derringer Corp has produced an odd buckshot load for .410 (with three 000 pellets), and I advise you to ignore it. Lose the .410 and buy a 20 gauge pump shotgun.

20 Gauge

The 20 is an excellent self-defense caliber, particularly for those who dislike the recoil of the 12 gauge. I recommend the 20 gauge over the more popular 12 for home defense. Choose the 20 gauge 3" shell Federal "Classic" #2 buckshot (F207-2-5PK) with 18 pellets, or the Winchester "Double XX" Magnum #3 with 24 pellets (X203C3B). If your gun cannot accept 3" shells choose the Remington #3 with 20 pellets (SP20BK5PK-3). All of these loads provide definitive short-range stopping power.

I specifically recommend the 20 gauge for women and recoil-sensitive men who dislike the blast and recoil of the 12 gauge. "Delivering roughly the ballistic force of two .44 Magnum rounds at once," comments the knowledgeable Ayoob, the 20 "delivers 75% of the lead for only 50-60% of the recoil". Many police departments have found their officers shoot much more accurately in realistic training exercises with the lighter-kicking but still potent 20 gauge.

If you are new to shotgunning and considering getting one for self-defense I strongly urge you to buy the reliable and reasonably-priced "Mossberg 500 Special Purpose" 18.5" barrel 20 gauge pump shotgun (catalog #50451). This tried-and-true workhorse is the standard shotgun of the U.S. Armed Forces and costs a little over $200. You'll be much happier with the lighter-kicking 20 gauge than the 12 gauge version used by the military, and - most importantly - you'll shoot the 20 more accurately and rapidly.

For an in-depth look at the 20-versus-12 gauge issue I recommend all shotgun owners (and potential shotgun owners) read 'Stressfire II: Advanced Combat Shotgun' by Massad Ayoob. Perhaps I am beginning to sound like a broken record on the theme of

Ayoob's books, but once you've read them you'll understand why I recommend them so highly (and repeatedly). Note: Ayoob dislikes the 20 gauge Remington 870 pump shotgun and recommends you choose the Mossberg 500 in 20 gauge for general self-defense and home-defense use. So do I.

For ultra-close range home defense birdshot will do the trick. Choose any #4, BB or larger high brass lead hunting load, and have the balance of the magazine filled with #3 buck in case the birdshot doesn't put them down fast enough.

Avoid slug use in 20 gauge; you are better off defending yourself with buckshot. If you must use slugs, pick the Dynamit/Nobel or Federal "Classic" (F203-RS) rifled slugs. Using slugs requires careful aiming and rifle sights: few 20 gauge shotguns have the latter.

16 Gauge

The 16 has slipped in popularity with Americans. As a result, no shotguns made specifically for defense are available in 16. If you have a sporting 16, however, it can do double duty as a great defense gun. Choose the Federal "Classic" #1 (F164-1) or the Remington #1 (SP16BK-5PK) buckshot load.

12 Gauge

If you simply want to know the best defense load, go out and buy: 12 gauge 2 3/4" shell 00 buckshot. You shall live happily ever after, as this is the most effective man-stopping firearm cartridge yet devised by man. I recommend the Federal "Classic" (F127-00), Winchester Super-X (X12RB5) or Remington Buckshot (SP12BK-5PK00) as the best double-ought buckshot defense rounds. One of these rounds is virtually equal to a nine-round burst from a submachine gun, with every round hitting.

Effective shotgun technique, of course, requires that one hits with each shot. Don't think that you can merely point the shotgun in the general direction of your attacker and let fly. Read Ayoob's book 'Stressfire II: Advanced Combat Shotgun' for the low-down on good shotgun skills and then practice, practice, practice.

Many experienced shooters prefer #4 or #1 buckshot to 00. I really cannot argue, but Lt. Marshall is on record as stating that 00 is superior, both in penetration and stopping power. Good enough for me, but if you have a #4 or #1 buckshot jones, go ahead (Ayoob favors #1). Stay away from 2 3/4" Magnum or 3" Magnum loads, however - the brutal kick of these rounds makes them a bad choice, and you gain nothing in stopping power over the 2 3/4" standard loads. Controllability is important, and standard 12 gauge shells have quite enough kick as it is.

A note on shotgun spread: firing your shotgun does not create a diabolical cone of doom destroying all in its path. If you have a typical defense or "riot" gun with an 18"-20" open-choked "cylinder" barrel, the pellets will spread out about 1" for every yard of range. This means that the spread of pellets fired across a large room (18') will be 6" or so, a circle the size of a coffee cup saucer. At 50 feet, the spread will be the size of a large pizza (16"). Test-fire your shotgun at various ranges, using big white butcher paper targets to get an idea of the pattern you can expect. It is a common misconception that blasting at foes ten feet away will take out two or three of them. The spread at that range is just three inches, so you can see that I meant it when I said that the shotgun must be skillfully aimed and fired just like handguns and rifles. The shotgun is simply more likely to hit - and stop - the attacker.

Slugs are potent manstoppers, but have limited application for self-defense. Slugs have ferocious recoil and often over-penetrate. There are special situations where slugs might be preferred over buckshot (e.g. road-blocks, barricaded foes), but if you are interested in the esoteric, I again direct you to Ayoob's masterful tome 'Stressfire II: Advanced Combat Shotgun'. This guide is for general civilian readers; policemen, soldiers, and gun enthusiasts should rely on Ayoob's in-depth expertise.

Don't be a knucklehead. Stay away from weirdo rounds like rubber buckshot or neoprene slugs. These are riot-control rounds designed for massed police use against violent mobs. Don't rely on such marginalia to save your life.

Two things to keep in mind about birdshot. The first is that birdshot is as lethal as buckshot at close range.

Don't believe for a second that you can just wound someone with birdshot and he'll go on to live another day. If you aren't justified in killing a man, you aren't justified in wounding him, either. Never "shoot to wound." I once again direct you to read Ayoob's 'In the Gravest Extreme' and learn the truth.

The second thing is that birdshot makes a lot of sense for home defense. I keep my home-defense 12 gauge loaded with two #4 birdshot rounds followed by 00 buck. Birdshot is much less likely to penetrate thin interior walls and kill innocent people on the other side, and has lower recoil than buckshot for faster follow-up shots (I live in a thin-walled apartment house, however - if I lived in a solid house with a lot of land around, I would definitely choose buckshot instead). The stopping power of birdshot should not be under-estimated: at ranges out to thirty feet or so, birdshot is virtually a solid column of lead. Choose any #4 or BB high brass lead hunting load. I like the Federal "Classic Lead Hi-Brass" #4 birdshot (HI26-4) and Winchester "Super-X" #4 high brass birdshot (X12-4), but there is little difference between the various choices. Buy whichever you please. If you're a bird hunter, use your favorite hunting shells as long as they are #6 or larger.

10 Gauge

Yow. Load your 10 gauge with whatever the hell you want.

RIFLE AMMUNITION BY CALIBER

Rifles aren't a great choice for most self-defense applications. Quoth Ayoob: "The rifle is not well suited to the sudden, close-quarters deployment and maneuvering that is required of a defensive firearm. On the battlefield, yes. In civilian close combat, no way." Ayoob adds that "the rifle is too bulky for maneuvering through doors and hallways, too long to quickly and surreptitiously pick up when the attacker drops his guard, and too easy for the criminal to take away if the homeowner's attention is diverted."

That being said, if all you have is a rifle then a rifle is what you use. Some liberal-infested cities ban handgun ownership (Chicago, New York, Detroit), so you are stuck using shotguns and rifles for home defense. Take some comfort from the fact that rifles have better stopping power, are a strong visual deterrent, and are much easier to hit with than any handgun. On a ranch or farm a rifle may be quite appropriate under certain circumstances today, just as it was on the frontier. Never use ball (FMJ) for self-defense in a rifle.

.22 LR (.22 Long Rifle)

A good .22 autoloading, pump, or lever action rifle like the Ruger 10/22, Marlin Model 60, Remington Model 572, or Marlin Model 39 can do the job when nothing else is available. Use any high-velocity round (I like the CCI Stinger, Remington Yellow Jacket, or CCI "SGB" hunting load, #0058) and fire repeatedly. Multiple hits are crucial with a .22: shoot and shoot and shoot some more. Stay away from the after-market large-capacity magazines made by Ram-Line, Eagle, Hot Lips, etc: these plastic nightmares are unreliable, jam-prone and easily breakable.

.22 Magnum (.22 WMR)

Any jacketed hollowpoint. Try the Winchester Super-X 40 grain JHP, CCI 'Maxi-Mag' 40 grain HP (0024), or whatever you prefer.

.223 Remington (5.56x45mm NATO)

This is the standard NATO rifle round and one of the best choices for a self-defense rifle. Many top-notch rifles are (or were) available in this caliber: the Colt AR-15, Ruger Mini-14, Steyr AUG, FN FNC, et cetera.

All .223 hollowpoints are good stoppers. I really like the Federal 40 grain P223V high-velocity hollowpoint (formerly called the "Blitz" round). Marshall says this is the #1 urban defense load. It is lighter than other .223 bullets, however, so you'll need to adjust your sights if you carry the P223V (it shoots lower than all other .223 loads).

If you want better penetration than the P223V offers, choose any good 55-69 grain hollowpoint from a big name manufacturer (I like Federal). Softpoints offer even greater penetration, probably more than you need.

Note: older .223 guns with a 1 in 12" rifling twist shoot more accurately with 55 grain bullets (as they were designed for the old U.S. Army M193 ball round). Newer rifles with a faster 1 in 7" twist (this includes the AR-15A2 and nearly all European models) prefer the heavier 60-70 grain bullets (like the M855/SS109 ball round). Ruger Mini-14 rifles have a 1 in 10" twist and do well with either bullet weight. This is only important at longer ranges. Save the cheapo ball rounds for practice.

7.62x39mm Soviet(7.62 mm Russian Short, 7.62 mm M43 Combloc)

Some prefer this East Bloc cartridge to the .223 for defense use. It is an excellent round, most commonly used in SKS and AK-47 derived rifles, as well as the Ruger Mini-30. Use any 123-125 grain softpoint from Cor-Bon, Federal, Winchester, or Remington. PMC makes a good low-priced 125 grain softpoint (PMC762B) you might like if you have a lot of magazines to fill.

.30 M1 Carbine

Never use ball in your M1 for defense! .30 Carbine ball sucks, but .30 Carbine hollowpoints work very well. Buy the Winchester 110 grain Hollow Soft Point (X30M1) and forsake all others. I mean it.

.30-30 Winchester

This hoary old round has survived so long for a simple reason: it works. Load your Winchester or Marlin .30-30 lever-action rifle with any hollowpoint - I recommend the Federal 125 grain (3030C). Leave the softpoints for hunting and practice.

.308 Winchester (7.62x51mm NATO)

This is an excellent rifle cartridge, perhaps the best. Over-penetration is the biggest problem. Use fast opening bullets of 150 grains or less. The Nosler Ballistic Tip, Hornady V-Max, and Remington Accu-Tip are examples of quick-opening bullets that are available in several brands of factory loaded ammunition.

9mm Parabellum

Generally the same as for pistols, above. Heckler & Koch, Uzi and Colt 9mm carbines will feed anything, so I recommend the Cor-Bon 115 or 124 grain +P JHP and Remington 115 grain jacketed hollow-points (R9MM1). Any reliable hollowpoint is a good choice in a 9mm carbine and the long barrel makes for high velocity and increased effectiveness.

.30-06 Springfield

This excellent and time-proven cartridge has too many top-notch loads to list. Choose the same bullets mentioned in connection with the .308 Winchester.

.357 Magnum

Follow the guidelines for revolvers, above. The .357 makes an excellent carbine round for urban self-defense in Marlin or Winchester lever-action or Action Arms/Israeli Military Industries "Timber Wolf" .357 pump-action carbines.

.44 Magnum

Pick any good hollowpoint, using the guidelines for revolvers (above). Don't be tempted to use softpoints; these hunting rounds will blow right through your foe.