



# SHOTGUNS FOR ROOKIES





## Intro

This introductory manual will cover the basics of shotgun use, ammunition types, terminology, and practical considerations. The purpose of this guide is to be a general overview. For specific information pertaining to your weapon and legality, further research on your part is required. Given the changing nature of laws, rules, and regulations, and the inherent hazards of electronic communication, there may be delays, omissions, or inaccuracies in information contained in this e-book. Accordingly, information contained herein is provided with the understanding that the authors and publishers are not herein engaged in rendering legal, or other professional advice and services. As such, it should not be used as a substitute for consultation with professional legal or other competent advisers. Before making any decision or taking any action, you should consult a legal professional and professional firearms training.

The shotgun is the multitool of the gun world. Self-defense, hunting, recreation, breaching, incendiaries, flares, and even non-lethal projectiles, there are not many tasks a good shotgun is unable to handle. A 12 gauge alone can take down animals from the size of doves all the way up to the largest animals in North America. The amazing amount of versatility is due mostly to the ammunition variety available. The wide variety of modifications, including rifled barrels, chokes, optics, and other accessories greatly contribute to its versatility as well. You can also purchase aftermarket products that will allow you to convert a breech action shotgun into a muzzle loader used with black powder, or even turn a 12 gauge into being able to fire .22lr. It really is an everyman's weapon platform, and an underrated firearm in today's modern world.

## Weapons Handling

Safety Rules:

### **Rule 1 - Treat every weapon as if it were loaded.**

When a person takes charge of a rifle in any situation, they must treat the weapon as if it were loaded, determine its condition and continue applying the other safety rules.

### **Rule 2 - Never point a weapon at anything you do not intend to shoot.**

You must maintain muzzle awareness at all times.

### **Rule 3 - Keep your finger straight and off the trigger until you are ready to fire.**

A target must be identified before taking the weapon off safe and moving the finger to the trigger.

### **Rule 4 - Keep the weapon on safe until you intend to fire.**

A target must be identified before taking the weapon off safe. This rule is intended to eliminate the chance of the weapon discharging by accident.



## Actions

### Break Action

*Break Action* involves having to push a lever or button to “break” open the firearm, manually extract the used casings, and reloading by hand. This is a very common style of shotgun configuration, especially for double-barreled and single-shot varieties.

Uses: Hunting, Sporting - Simple - Has to be reloaded every shot - Can fire any type of ammunition - Cheap plinking models vs. High-end sporting models

Budget (Less Than \$300): Legacy Sports Iver Johnson Rossi

Premium (More Than \$300): TriStar Chiappa Browning (over \$1000)

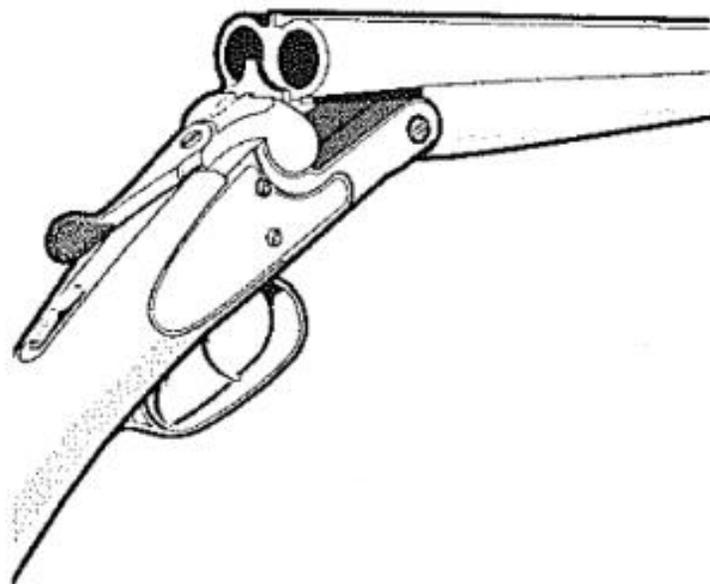
Double Barrel Uses: Hunting, Sporting, Home Defense - Simple - Can be fired twice before reloading - Can fire any type of ammunition - S/S vs O/U

Budget (Less than \$600): Century Arms Stoeger ATI

Premium (More than \$600): CZ Savage Benelli Pedersoli



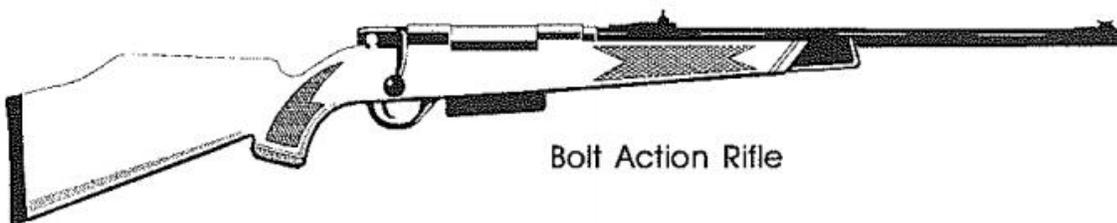
Hinge (or Break) Action Shotgun



Break Action – Opened Up

## Bolt Action

*Bolt Action* guns require you to manually cycle the bolt to reload or chamber another round. This style of action has fallen out of use for the most part when it comes to shotguns.



Bolt Action Rifle



## Pump Action

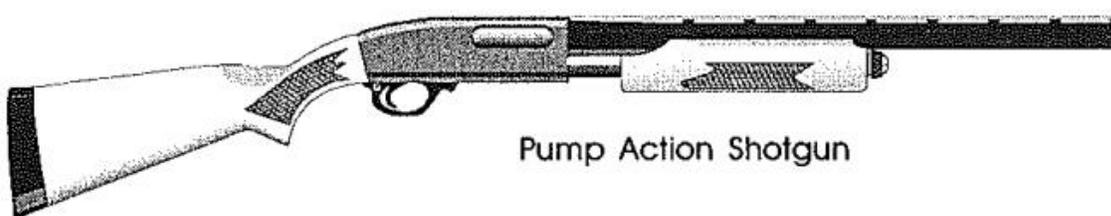
*Pump Action* is another manually operated style of action. It requires you to pump a hand grip to cycle the rounds. The forend can be moved forward and backward in order to eject a spent round of ammunition and to chamber a fresh one. It is much faster than a bolt-action. Once fired, the forend is slid rearward by hand and the expended cartridge ejected. It is then reloaded by manually moving the forend to the front.

You can find shotguns of every variety configured this way. Generally in shotguns, the weapon has a single barrel above a tube magazine into which shells are inserted. New shells are chambered by pulling a pump handle (often called the fore-end) attached to the tube magazine toward the user, then pushing it back into place to chamber the cartridge.

Uses: Hunting, Sporting, Home Defense, Military - Popular, reliable - Customizable - Fires most ammunition - Moderate to high ammo capacity - Moderate price

Budget (Less Than \$400): Maverick 88 Mossberg 500 Remington 870 Express Winchester SXP Used shotguns

Premium (More Than \$400): Mossberg 590 / 590A1 Remington 870 Police Ithaca 37



Pump Action Shotgun

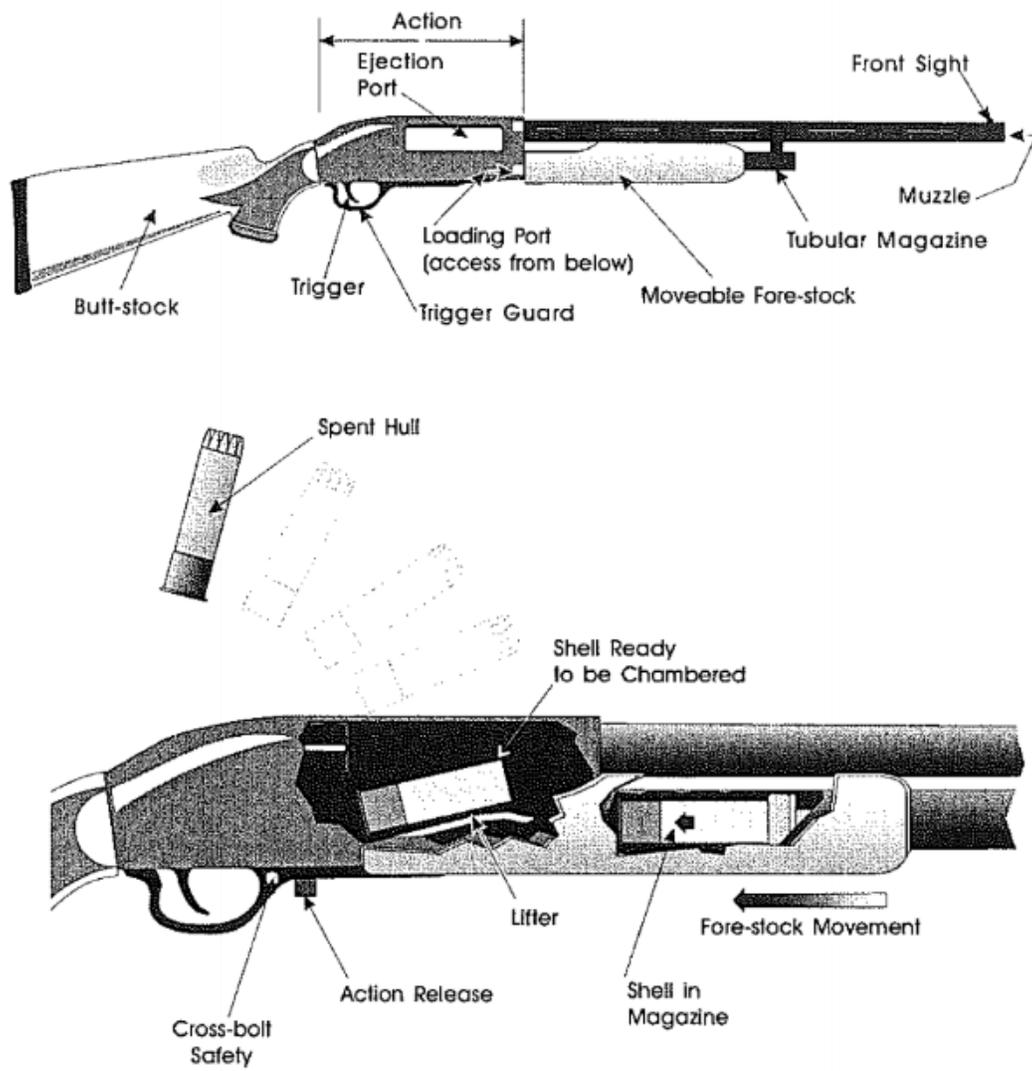


Figure 1. Pump Action Anatomy.



## Lever Action

*Lever Action* firearms are similar to pump action, except they require you to manually cycle the lever underneath the gun to load another round into the chamber rather than working the pump. As with bolt-action, this style has fallen out of use in modern shotguns.



Lever Action Rifle

## Semi-Auto

*Semi-Auto Action* firearms automatically cycle every time the trigger is pulled. No manual cycling of the gun is required. Each time the trigger is pulled, one round will fire. Shotguns can be configured this way as well.

Uses: Hunting, Sporting, Home Defense, Military - High rate of fire - Moderate to high ammo capacity - Less reliable, may not work with some ammunition - Expensive - Traditional vs AK Style

Budget (Less Than \$800): Benelli Nova Mossberg 930 Remington 1187

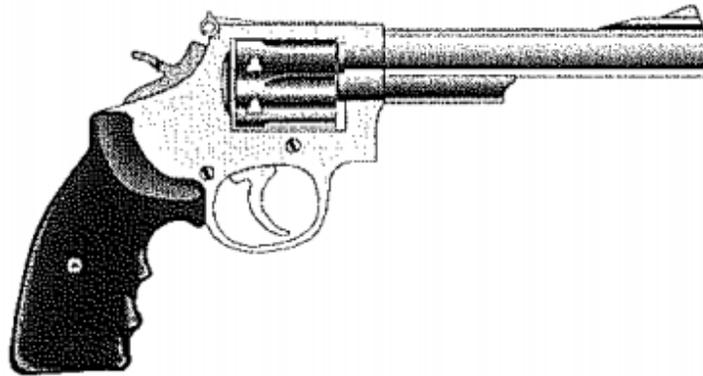
Premium (More Than \$800): Benelli M2 Benelli M4 Beretta Tx4 Storm Browning Auto-5 VPR-12 Saiga 12





## Revolver

Revolver handguns that fire .410 shotgun shells have become popular in recent years, the Taurus Judge being one example. A round is fired every time the trigger is pulled and no manual cycle of the action is required.



## Ammunition

Shotgun ammunition functions in very much the same way as brass cartridge ammunition: the hammer of the gun strikes the firing pin which strikes and ignites the primer. Shotgun shells are designed differently in that they fire **shot** rather than a bullet.

*Shot* is the charge of pellets fired from the firearm. Shot may be lead, steel, or other materials. Lead brings with it certain environmental concerns.

*Shot* comes in different sized pellets for different purposes. Smaller pellets are usually used for smaller or closer targets. Unlike other rounds, shotgun shells are generally measured in size by gauge rather than caliber. E.g. 12 gauge, 20 gauge, 10 gauge 16 gauge etc...

Sometimes a single large projectile known as a **slug** is fired from a shotgun. This is for hunting larger game or self-defense.

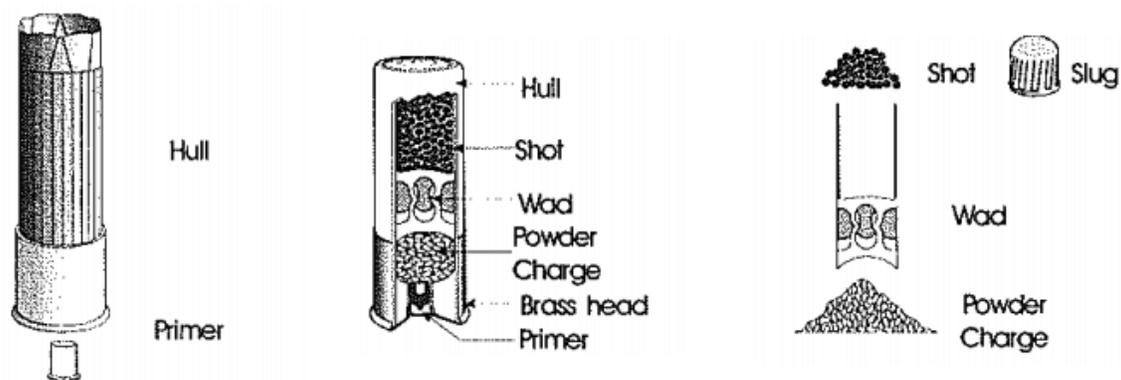


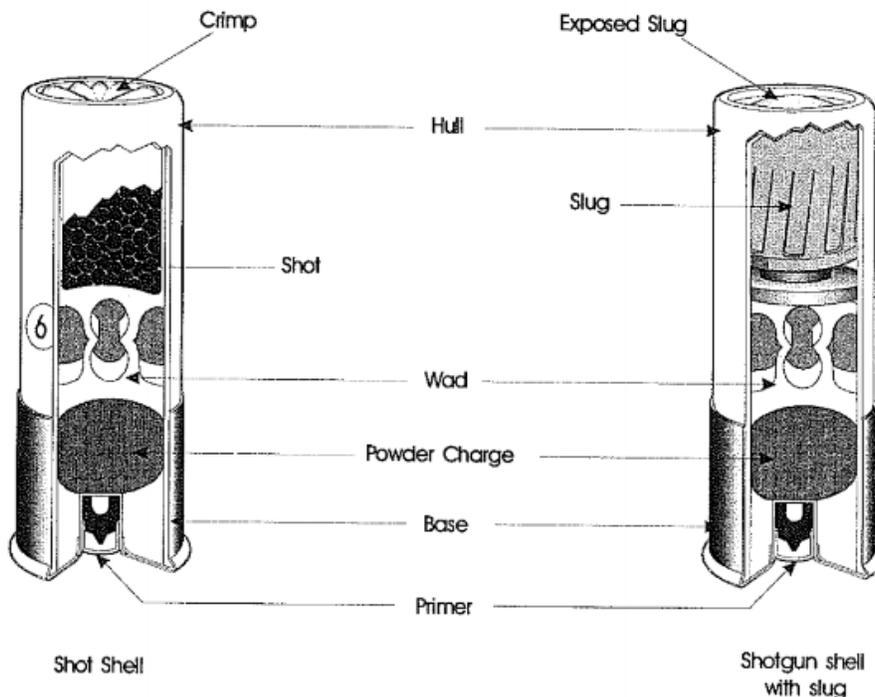
Figure 2. Shotgun Shell

Shotgun shells also contain one or more **wads**. The wad is made of paper or plastic. It separates the powder charge from the shot or slug.

The **powder charge** is ignited to propel the shot through the barrel.

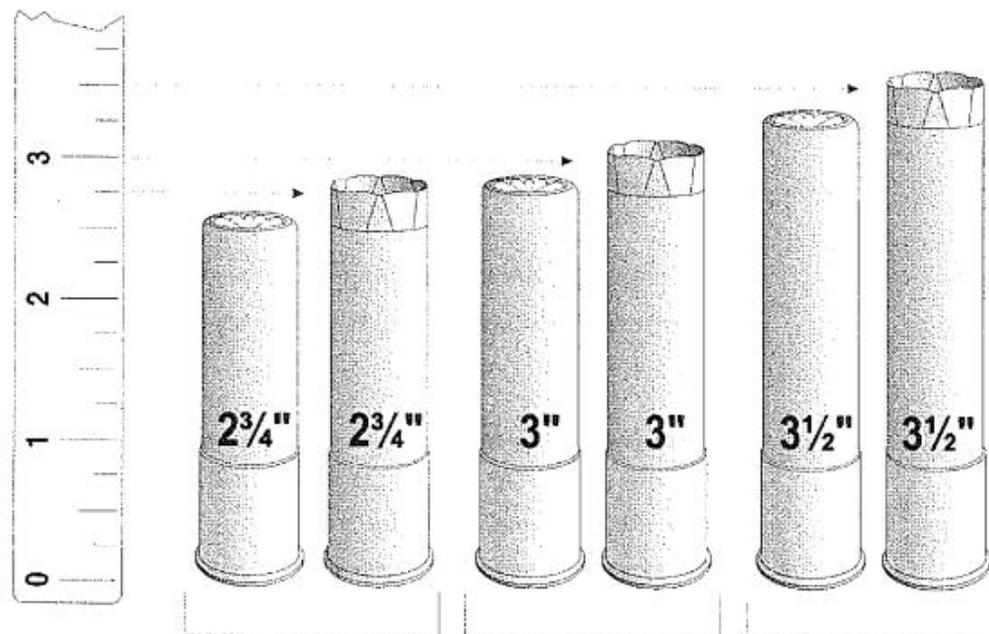
The **hull** contains the ammunition components. This is usually made of plastic.

The **primer** contains a chemical mixture that explodes when the firing pin strikes it, igniting the powder.





Various types of shells exist. They vary in length, gauge, shot size, and type of pellet. The length refers to the dimensions of the shell **after** firing.



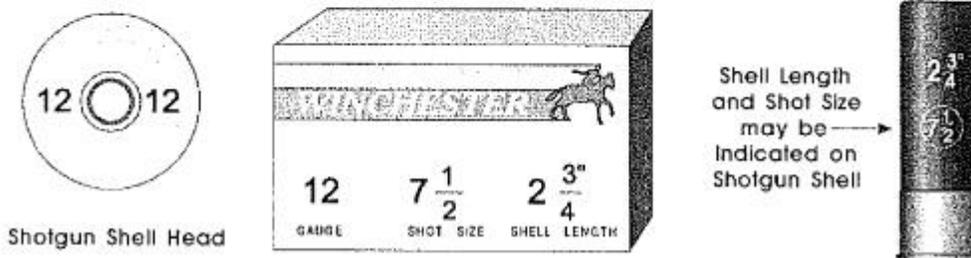
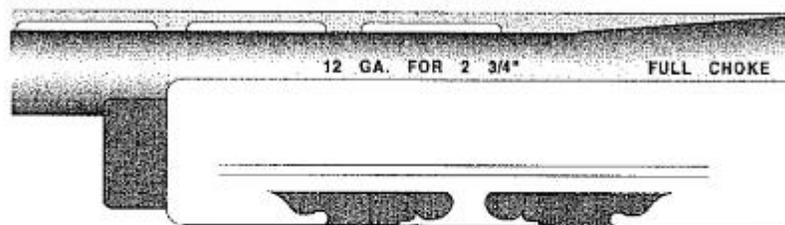
12 Gauge Shotgun Shells Unfired and Fired

The appropriate gauge and maximum shell length will be printed on the shotgun barrel. Failure to comply with the specifications of your firearm can lead to malfunctions or catastrophic failures that can damage the firearm or cause injury to humans.

The gauge of the shell is printed on the base of the shell. The gauge and shell length are also on the ammunition manufacturer's box. This information must match the shotgun firing the ammunition.



Data Stamp on Shotgun Barrel



## Gauge

The ***gauge*** of a firearm is a unit of measurement used to express the inner diameter (bore diameter) of the barrel. Gauge is determined from the weight of a solid sphere of lead that will fit the bore of the firearm and is expressed as the multiplicative inverse of the sphere's weight as a fraction of a pound, e.g., a one-twelfth pound lead ball fits a 12-gauge bore. Thus, there are twelve 12-gauge balls per pound, etc.

Because gauges are so varied, we will only cover the most popular varieties in this guide.

### 12 Gauge

This is the most common size in circulation with up to half of the shotgun market in the United States. Different gauges have different typical applications. Twelve gauge shotguns are common for hunting geese, large ducks, or other larger gamebirds; professional skeet and trap shooting; military applications; and home-defense applications.



## **20 Gauge**

The 20-gauge shotgun is favored by shooters uncomfortable with the weight and recoil of a 12-gauge gun and is popular for upland game hunting. Twenty-gauge shotguns are often used for gamebirds such as doves, smaller ducks, and quail.

## **.410 Bore**

The .410 bore (10.4 mm) is unusual, being measured in inches, and would be approximately 67 "real" gauge, though its short hull versions are nominally called 36 gauge in Europe. It uses a relatively small charge of shot. It is used for hunting and for skeet. Because of its very light recoil it is often used as a beginner's gun. Bolt action and even handgun versions of .410 firearms are readily available and in use.



## Shot Varieties

Most shotguns are used to fire "a number of ball shot", in addition to slugs and sabots. Shot comes in various size for different purposes. This shot size will be printed on the ammunition box and refers to the size of the pellets. The ball shot, or pellets, are for the most part made of lead but this has been partially replaced by bismuth, steel, tungsten-iron, tungsten-nickel-iron and even tungsten polymer loads. Non-toxic loads are required by Federal law for waterfowl hunting in the US, as the shot may be ingested by the waterfowl, which some authorities believe can lead to health problems due to the lead exposure.

Shot is termed either birdshot or buckshot depending on the shot size. Informally, birdshot pellets have a diameter smaller than 5 mm (0.20 in) and buckshot are larger than that. Pellet size is indicated by a number.

Shot Sizes						
Buckshot Sizes			Shot Sizes			
Shot Number	Diameter in Inches	# Pellets Typical Loads	Shot Number	Diameter in Inches	Pellets / oz. Lead	Pellets / oz. Steel
4	.24	27 34	9	.08	585	na
3	.25	20 24	8	.09	410	na
1	.30	12 16 20 24	7½	.095	350	na
0	.32	12	7	.10	-	420
00	.33	9 12 15	6	.11	225	316
000	.36	8	5	.12	170	243
			4	.13	135	191
			3	.14	-	153
			2	.15	87	125
			1	.16	-	103
			B	.17	-	na
			BB	.18	50	72
			BBB	.19	-	61
			T	.20	-	53
			TT	.21	-	na
			F	.22	-	na



## **Birdshot**

Uses: Hunting, Sport Shooting

Birdshot is made up of dozens or hundreds of tiny lead pellets called shot. When fired the shot forms a cloud of pellets. This gives you a better chance of hitting a small, fast-moving target like a bird, hence the name birdshot. Because of the shot's light weight, it doesn't travel very far through the air, making it usable on relatively small shotgun ranges in suburban and rural areas. This, as well as light recoil, makes birdshot ideal for sport shooting games like Trap and Skeet.

Because of its relatively low power birdshot is inappropriate to use for self-defense, as you are more likely to maim or blind an attacker than kill them outright.

Effective range: 15 to 30 yards Dangerous range: 100 yards

## **Buckshot**

Uses: Hunting, Home Defense, Military

Buckshot is made up of a handful of medium-sized lead balls, called shot. Similar to birdshot, buckshot creates a cloud of projectiles, however these projectiles are far heavier and faster moving. Buckshot is appropriate for hunting medium to large-size game, like deer, elk, and boar. It is also the most common shotgun round used for home defense and military applications, proving exceptionally lethal against human targets at close to medium range.

Effective range: 0 to 50 yards Dangerous range: 250 yards

Common Shot Sizes 000 Buck 00 Buck 0 Buck

#1 Buck

#4 Buck



## Slugs

Uses: Hunting, Home Defense, Military

A slug is a solid projectile made of lead, copper, or sometimes steel. Firing slugs turns a shotgun into essentially a large caliber rifle. Slugs are among the most powerful rounds fired from a shotgun and are often used for hunting large game like elk, moose, and bear. Slugs also have devastating effects on human targets and are capable of heavily damaging vehicles and walls.

Effective range: 200 to 400 yards Dangerous range: More than two miles

## Defensive Considerations

### Buckshot vs Slug

In most cases buckshot is the best ammunition type to use for home defense. Slugs are likely to over-penetrate the target or walls of a dwelling in the case of a miss. They are considered better suited for open areas while firing at greater distances than buckshot is capable of adequately reaching.

Any shot size over #4 buckshot should reliably cause fight-ending wounds at close range. It's important to remember that unlike shotguns in movies and video games, real shotguns firing buckshot still need to be aimed. As the shot leaves the barrel it begins to disperse in the air. The resulting cloud of pellets is known as the shot pattern. Many factors effect shot pattern, including gauge, shot size, barrel length, etc... Shot patterns firing buckshot can still be as tight as a softball at 10 yards. The spread of the shot is going to be insufficient to forego aiming at distances common in home-defense scenarios.

### Pistol Grip vs. ButtStock

Shotguns configured with a pistol grip rather than a rifle stock are common, one example being the Mossberg Shockwave. They look cool and they are fun to shoot. However, they are generally considered to be far less effective for recoil management, target acquisition, cycling speed, and ease of use than a shotgun with a buttstock.