

Clearing Your House With A Firearm

This week's lesson is on clearing a building with a firearm. I have written guides on house/building clearing, but have never had illustrations to go with them. Recently, I was part of a collaborative group that DID have illustrations and the lesson below is the combination of my writing, the collaborative writing, and the collaborative illustrations:

Clearing or searching a building when someone may be in it (who may also have a weapon) is a very dangerous task, and should not be taken lightly. Police and military often have training for such circumstances, but the normal citizen may be less than knowledgeable on the subject. Two instructors who both teach this skill (who are both located in Utah, close to an international airport) are Randy Watt (www.srwsplops.com) and Chris Wilden (www.StrategicTacticalGroup.com).

The object of this article is to help educate those who may be clearing or searching a building alone. The average citizen will probably not call the police because of some unknown sound occurring at night. Maybe there is an obvious break-in, and the scream of a loved one occurs right after. A quick call to the police should happen, but a four-minute response time may be too long. What do you do? This article, for the purpose of simplification, we will assume you are in your house.

Before You Do Anything!

Being safely trained and armed is your first priority. Exploring your house for that unidentified sound in the night or to go to the aid of a loved one with empty hands is not a smart idea. Even if you are the type of person who does not jump to the worst conclusion in a situation like this, a firearm (pistol, shotgun, or rifle all work) leaves more options open in case you *are* a victim of a break-in.

1. **Choose an appropriate firearm.** The three main categories of firearms are pistols (handguns), shotguns, and rifles. The very first step is to intimately familiarize yourself with the [firearm safety rules](#). Pay particular attention to Rule #4: Be sure of your target **and** what's beyond it. Don't shoot your teenage son sneaking back into the house. Also, remember that most likely the bullets you are firing will go through the walls in your house, and could therefore strike loved ones.
 - o Read the beginning of [Tactically Prepare Yourself With a Pistol](#) for suggestions on pistols as they are a common choice for personal defense.
 - o An alternative, and highly recommended, firearm to have would be a pump-action shotgun. Shotguns have much better stopping power than a pistol. A pump-action is recommended as reliability is of the utmost importance, but you can read [How to Shoot a Shotgun](#) for more information on shotgun selection.

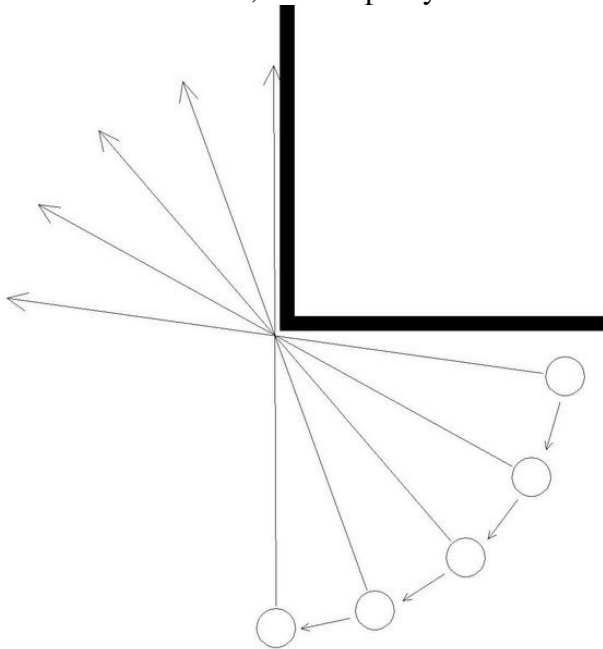
- Rifles are another option. Rifles, again, produce (even in some smaller calibers) significantly more stopping power than most pistols, but they require just as much precision. A magazine-fed, semi-automatic rifle is the suggested choice as two hands may not always be available, and the option to quickly shoot multiple rounds is often a welcome one.
 - For pistols, the largest pistol possible is recommended for the best stopping power and controllability, while for a rifle or shotgun (from now on they will be called "long guns"), the shortest length possible is preferred. These preferences are obviously "within reason", as a 4-foot-long freak-pistol, or a 12-inch-long long gun are impractical and defy the use of the specific weapons.
 - If you don't have a firearm available where you are, grab or improvise a weapon to escape or get to a firearm.
2. **Decide your course of action**, before you do anything. If you are the only one in the house, or everyone in the house is in the room you are in, then your choices are much easier. If you are sure there is a very-unwelcome guest in your house, call the local police. Lock the door to your bedroom (and any other entrances — if available), and be prepared. Do not move, wait for the police to come. Do not approach the police with a firearm in your hand, be sure to holster it or set it down once the police are in your immediate vicinity.
 - The reason why you wait in this situation is because searching a house is very dangerous, and nothing (other than loved ones) should be worth dying over. Plus, insurance should cover any stolen or damaged items.
 3. Read the rest of this article, it will explain what to do if you decide to search and clear (or confirm your house is clear). This should be done if you know an intruder is in your house and you have loved ones elsewhere in the house, be sure you call the police before you take any actions, and be sure to tell them you are armed, and you are going to try to retrieve or protect your loved one(s). The other situation may be that you are unsure about an intruder and you are just going to explore, to make sure there is no danger; in this case you should also arm yourself with a cell phone, as you may need to call the police while not near a landline.

Corners

The most common object in a house is a corner (and the most common solution for an object is the same as clearing a corner). The process of traversing a corner is often referred to as **slicing the pie**.

1. **Approach the corner**, start as close to the wall as possible without scraping up against the wall. Make sure that you are at least an arms length away from the corner. You don't want your firearm to stick out into the doorway.

(#Observe the corner, and keep in your mind that



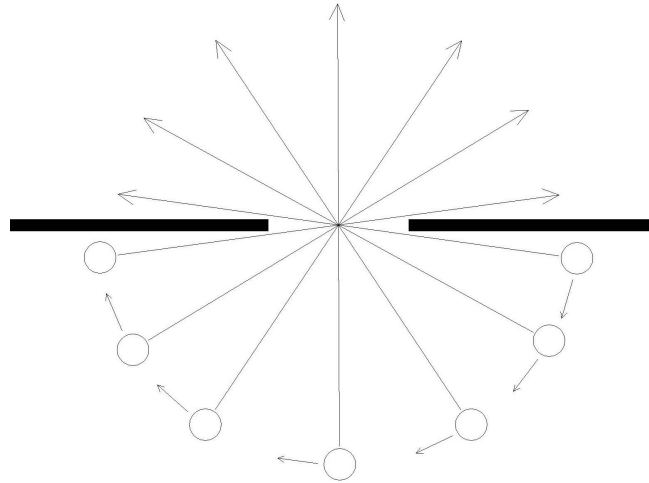
the pivot point will be the apex of the corner.

1. **Take a small step** 90-degrees away from the wall. This is the start of a semi-circle you will make around the corner (view the image for a picture of the process). Keep your elbows in and your front foot parallel to your line of sight so that neither will give you away.
2. **Pause and scan** the slice of the pie. Between each step taken you should scan from the floor at the corner to the ceiling — scanning each slice in a vertical motion.
 - Your form will be: a firm, two-handed grip on the firearm. You will be leaning slightly toward the direction you are stepping to allow your head (and your eyes) to be the furthest object, allowing you to see your target before he sees you.
 - If you are proficient with both hands, use whichever hand that will keep you most concealed.
 - Your feet should never cross, as it is a very unstable position, and if something (or someone) were to hit you, or you are forced to shoot mid-stride, you are in a bit of trouble. Instead, you want to move your lead foot (the foot in the direction which you are stepping), then follow with your trailing foot. Also, be aware of your feet; make sure you are not pointing your toes into the corner as they may precede your eyes, which means the suspect may be able to see you before you see him.
 - Practice by setting up a mirror in the room. As you are slicing the pie, check to see what you can see in the mirror. Try to adjust your form so that little more than your eye and your firearm are visible.
 - You can also practice with another person using flashlights. As soon as one of you sees any part of the other, shine your flashlight on them. The competitive nature of this drill will sharpen your form quickly.
 - ALWAYS point your firearm where your eyes are looking. This will allow you to react quicker than if you have your firearm at low ready. Arms extended or high-

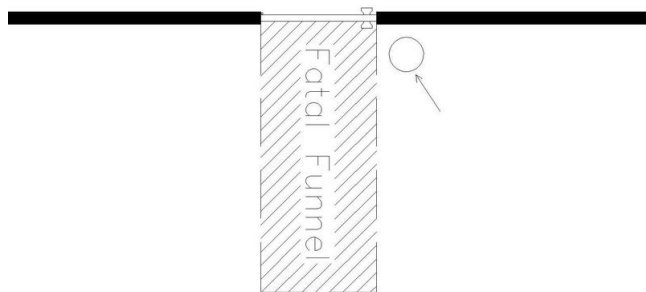
compressed ready are both good options. With high-compressed ready, make sure that your non-firing hand is behind the plane of the muzzle

Doorways

The "fatal funnel", as it is graciously known, is one of the most dangerous areas to be in when



traversing a building. This area includes



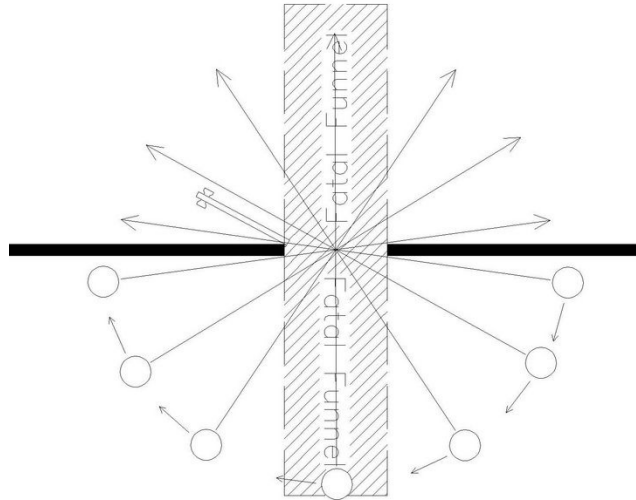
doorways and other portals which only allow a narrow area in and out of a room (such as narrow hallways and archways).

If you were picking a choke point for an ambush, fatal funnels would be perfect places to focus your attention.

It is in your best interest to spend as little time as possible in these areas. At a doorway, the *fatal funnel* is the area on either side of the door, as deep as the door is tall and just as wide. So standing to the side of a door does not count (obviously the *fatal funnel* is an imaginary area — an area which the intruder might not be respecting, so just because you are out of the *fatal funnel* doesn't mean you can't get shot).

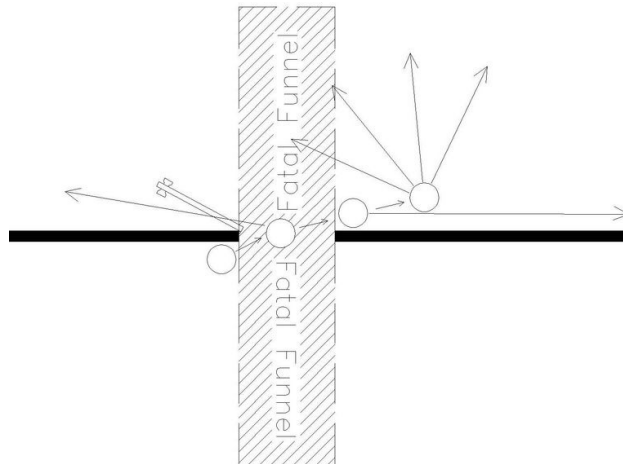
1. **Approach a closed door** on the side the handle is on.
 - o If you are unable to do so (for architectural reasons), you will have to place your body in the fatal funnel while you open it.

2. **Touch the handle of the door**, and "soft-check" the handle to see if the door is locked or not.
 - If this is your house, and you know this specific door does not have a lock, you can skip step.
3. **Bring your gun to close-contact firing position** as you reach for the door handle.
4. **Turn the handle** quickly and swing the door open.
 - If you are pushing the door away from you, be sure to swing the door



enough so to expose the whole room. If the door stops unusually short of the wall, it may be because something or someone is behind the door.

- If you pull the door toward yourself, the amount of throw is less important as even a small opening will allow you a peek in the room right away, and as you clear the room you can open the door the rest of the way.
5. **Step back** from the doorway immediately.
 - This keeps you and your gun away from someone who may be on the other side of the door ready to grab you or your gun.
 - Distance also favors the trained shooter, or in the case that you are the only one with a gun, favors the person with a ranged weapon.



6. **Scan the room** the same way you would go around a corner, but this time, you have to scan up to 180-degrees instead of only 90. Clear it with the *slicing the pie* technique. Be

sure to start at the wall the door frame is attached to clear as much of the room as possible. You should know all of the hiding places in your house and pay particular attention to them as you're clearing the room.

- When crossing the fatal funnel during the pie slicing, you may want to speed up your pace to spend as little time in the fatal funnel as possible without missing important parts of the room.
7. **Move into the room** once you have viewed as much of the room as possible. Start outside of the fatal funnel and move in toward the caddy-corner non-fatal funnel area.
 - This is a diagonal motion, and it should be done quickly, being sure you don't get hung up on the doorway.
 8. **Look over your shoulder** as you enter to view the corner you are not heading toward. If someone were hiding in the corner that you weren't able to see during the *slicing the pie* you will be able to see them now.
 - The corner you are walking toward is your first priority (view that corner before you look at the one behind you, also an assailant in the corner in front of you is a higher priority).
 9. **Clear the rest of the room** for any immediate danger.
 - This may include looking behind furniture and in closets. You do not want to leave an area unsearched, because as soon as you leave the room, you assume no one is behind you, when in fact they may be.

Self-Closing Doors

Self-closing doors include spring-loaded or hydraulic-closing doors. Common in most residential houses for the garage access door, this presents a set of problems when being approached from the non-hinge side.

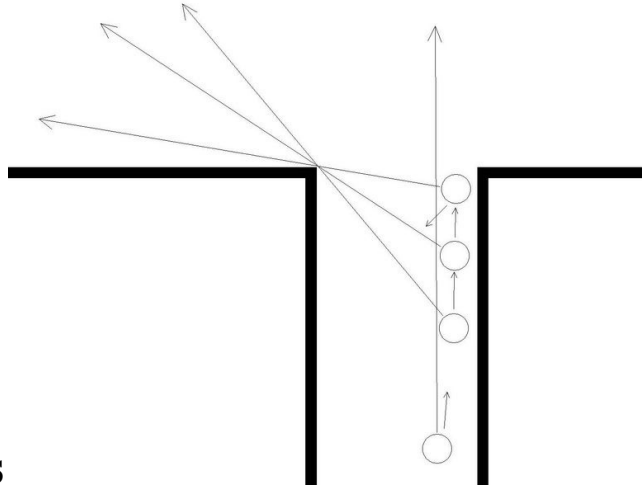
1. Approach the door on the doorknob side (as before). If the door opens toward you (you are on the hinge-side of the door), open the door and either use your shoulder or your foot to push it more open as you clear the room. If you are on the non-hinge side:
2. Push open the door open as wide as you can. Depending on the speed at which the door closes, you may have time to move to the opposite side of the doorway before you enter (which is best).
 - If you can move to the opposite side before you enter. This gives you a brief moment to very quickly scan the room for any obvious potential targets.
 - If you are unable to step to the opposite side of the doorway, you must zig-zag into the room.
3. Enter toward the doorknob side (just as the other doorways and openings) while the door is still mostly open.
 - Entering will take some quick thought and adaptation. You must be quick on your feet as you may not be expecting the the door to automatically close or it closes faster than you thought it would.
 - You must quickly commit to entering; this is the only way to retain any element of surprise you may have. The fatal funnel becomes many times more deadly if

- you allow the door to close before you go through it; now an intruder on the other side of the door knows you must approach that door again to open it.
- Use movement to your advantage. During high stress encounters, you and your adversary will likely have tunnel vision. Simply zig-zagging as you enter the room may cause you to completely "disappear" for a second or two.
4. View the corner you are walking to during the small window of time the door is closing; the door covers the corner to your back temporarily.
 - If you see this corner is clear before the door is close to closing you may have time for a quick scan of the room, but your priority is the corner behind the door.
 5. Turn and view the corner behind you, before the door closes.
 6. Clear the rest of the room as you would any other room.
 - Also be weary that many self-closing doors will be loud when they slam closed. Be patient and maybe spend a minute or more waiting in that room to see if someone comes looking for you.

Hallways

Hallways present some of the more difficult and most dangerous dynamic areas of a building. A partner or two in hallways with doors and T-intersections would be very appreciated as, at some point, you will be forced to turn your back on an area you have not yet cleared. You, as a private citizen, will likely have to clear it alone, thus you must keep your eye and ears open and balance multiple danger problems to keep your risk at a minimum. Don't be fooled though, this process, and the other processes in this article, all pose very high risk.

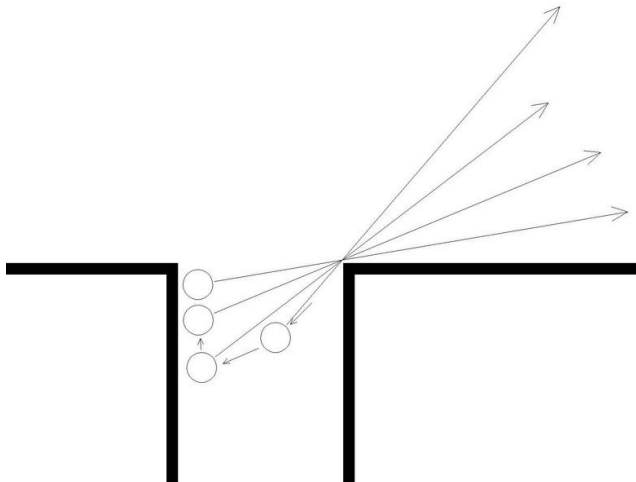
1. **Walk on one side of a hallway** or the other, never make your way down the middle of a hallway (but keep from touching the walls).
 - Hallways are similar to doorways, meaning that they are a narrow passage that an intruder may be expecting you to come through. The middle of the hallway is your fatal funnel.
2. Handle obstacles such as doorways the same as mentioned above, but be aware that stopping in a hallway to clear a room means that you have not cleared the rest of the hallway, and an unexplored (uncleared) area is now at your back.
 - Corners are no different, but what happens if there are two corners in two directions. This is a T-intersection.
3. Keep track of what areas you have cleared and which ones you have not. The areas you have not cleared still contain danger points and you should be splitting some of your attention toward the uncleared areas.
4. **Methodically clear hallways**, don't walk past one room to clear another. You now have a room at your back that is uncleared, a hallway in front of you which is uncleared and the room you are intending you enter is also uncleared. This presents an overwhelming amount of danger zones. Placing yourself in this situation is unjustifiably dangerous!



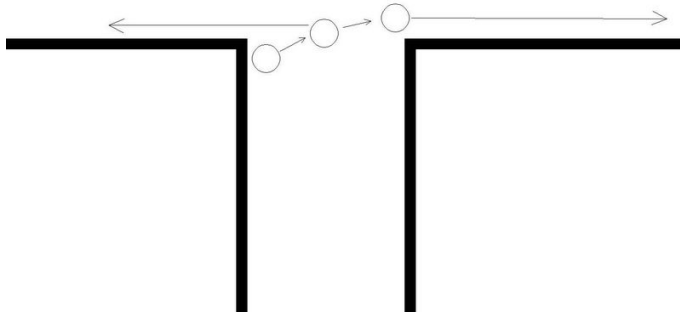
T-Intersections

T-intersections are where two hallways intersect and there are two separate corners to clear, neither of which grants better cover than the other.

1. **Start on the right side of the hallway** when approaching a T-intersections (this will be explained more later).
 - The number one rule is to not break the plane created by the intersecting hallway, but you still want to see as much as you can before you commit to entering the hallway.
2. **Keep an eye on the right corner** as you make your way toward it; make sure nothing is an immediate danger.
3. **Clear the left corner** as you would any corner, but do not place any part of your body past where the wall ends.
4. **Step back** and to the left.
5. **Clear the right corner** the same way you did the left.



6. **Decide to enter**, now that you have cleared as much as you



can without crossing the line, you must break through the plane.

- You will be entering to the right. The reason the order of the side is important is because you can turn faster toward your support side than your firing side. If someone ends up being in the corner to your left, you can, more quickly, spin to your left than your right. This is all assuming you are right-handed. Everything should be flipped if you are left handed.
7. **Proceed** in a fashion similar to a door. Go through diagonally, spotting the corner you are heading toward, and a look over your shoulder to the other corner.
 - View the images to the right for visual representations.

Stairs

Stairs create a problem when clearing a building alone, but seeing as a good portion of residential buildings contain stairs, they may need to be traversed at some point. The problem with stairs is that in the best situation, they have the same properties as a hallway, in the worst situation, they are a hallway with a T-intersection, they may have a landing or two with corners and possibly an overlook onto the stairs. All of this means that there are many danger-points simultaneously; only one of which can be covered at any one time. Stairs are dynamic, and some adaptation may be required to match the stair you may be on.

1. **Approach the stairs** as if it were a hallway. There will probably be a corner clearing before you get to the stairs. Clear as much of the stair as you can without getting onto them.
2. **Stay on one side** of the stairs (just as in a hallway). If there is a corner or other type of twist in the stairs, you want to be on the opposite side as the corner.
3. **Look above you** before you take too many steps (going up stairs). See if there is an overlook onto the stairs. If there is you will want to clear that as you walk up the stairs.
 - Keep in mind any corners that are ahead also, do not neglect those (as said before, there are multiple directions that will need your attention; a partner could easily cover the overlook, while you clear the corner).

4. **Watch any exposed areas** that may present themselves. Many stairs with switchbacks expose your legs before you can see around the corner. Move your body to allow yourself the best possible view of areas you are unable to see.
 - Some stairs in apartments or other buildings don't have covered rises in the stairs. This is a great way for someone hiding under the stairs to get cover and attack you while you are unable to do anything back.
 - The best thing you can do is practice this with a friend using a flashlight.

Target Spotted

If you spot your target, you have a couple options. In many states you are in your full right to shoot the person dead, but this, for most people, is a bit drastic. You must decide ahead of time (even before you own a firearm for personal defense) what your personal morals will allow you to do in this and many other situations (read some information on [tactical mindset](#) to help you decide).

1. **Identify Yourself** You need to give fair warning before shooting. If you have identified the intruder, and they have already tried to harm you, you may not need to provide additional warning.
 - Keep in mind there may be more than one adversary in the house; additionally, being shot is not synonymous with dying, so keep yourself behind cover as much as possible.
2. **Do not jump to conclusions**; if you are unsure of your adversary or do not know his intentions (realize an intruder may mask their intentions — and someone who broke into your house is not there to borrow sugar), another less recommended option is to present yourself (by surprise if possible), and order the target with short, firm phrases. Once you have gotten your targets attention with "STOP!" "Hands in the air!", for your safety, you should have him "Face away from me!" "Get on your knees!"
 - Having him face away from you and keeping him on his knees prevents him from retaliating against you, and keeps him from moving anywhere quickly without a good deal of movement.
 - If he has a firearm in his hand, be sure to tell him to drop it! If he does not comply immediately, he is only contemplating the best way to shoot you with it. Re-emphasize the point with "...else I will shoot you!", then take appropriate action. If he decides to *slowly* set it down, tell him to "STOP!" and "DROP IT!" There have been many police shootings which involved a person slowly setting down a gun, then changing their mind and shooting the police instead. It will take at least 1/8th of a second from the time they start to bring up their firearm until your brain can react. This is plenty of time for them to fire before you know what is going on.
 - If the person decides to disregard any of your commands, or (even worse) makes a sudden move (to possibly a weapon?). Do the right thing, eliminate the threat! Hesitating does not save your life; do you want the luxury of going to court? You may want to consider ALSO carrying either pepper spray or a tazer for these

situations. It will be much easier to defend your decision to spray or taze an intruder who is simply belligerent than it would be to defend shooting a belligerent intruder. There will likely be cleanup regardless of which option you choose.

3. **Wait for the police;** since you have already called the police, or have a cell phone on you, the police should not be too far behind.
 - If for some reason you do not have a cellphone on you, you did not already call the police, and a phone is not within visual range of the intruder, you can have him move while on his knees, be sure he doesn't turn to face you.
4. **Keep a close eye on the intruder on the ground, but be observant;** place yourself in a location of cover and be sure he doesn't have any buddies that may come around a corner. You have announced your presence to the whole house, so another adversary in the house will know exactly where you are, but you can't risk leaving the man you have left alone or out of sight.
5. **Allow multiple adversaries to enter a *fatal funnel*** of sorts (any small area where miss on one man, may be a hit on the other), if possible. Multiple targets add a great deal of complexity to a situation, but the truth is that most criminals do not work alone.
 - Telling multiple adversaries to "STOP!" is a very bad idea. By the time you are able to engage one for not complying, the other could have attacked you (but this must be decided in your mind what you will do ahead of time).

Reduced Light Accessories

Most situations which would have you creeping around your own house will likely happen at night. It is recommended that you keep the area as dark as possible as you clear your house. Darkness gives you a few advantages: you surely know your house better than an intruder, and if you have a flashlight with you, you have the ability to completely remove the intruder's night vision.

1. **Keep a hand-held flashlight next to your weapon** of choice. There is also the option to have an additional attached flashlight (most tactical, or combat, weapons have the ability to attach certain lights to the frame of the firearm).
 - The hand-held light gives you options that the attached light does not, so while an attached light is a great feature to have on a weapon, it cannot always replace the hand-held light.
2. **Outfitting nightsights on your weapon** is also a welcome feature as it allows you to line up your sights when there is no light.
 - This isn't a solves-all: if you can't see your sights you may not be able to see your target, and you will have an even more difficult time identifying your target (make sure it isn't your next-door-neighbor's son)!
3. **Laser sights.** Laser sights will allow you to see where your firearm is pointed without having to use the sights to aim. This can be very helpful if you don't have your corrective lenses in. As always, you must identify your target as hostile before firing, which means that you will want to have a flashlight, even if you are using a laser.

4. **Allow your eyes to adjust.** Your best "accessory" is your own body. If something happens while you are sleeping, your eyes are already adjusted, but if something happens and you are around light (but you must go into a dark area) be sure you let your eyes adjust before you proceed (this can take up to 30 minutes for your eyes to fully adjust).
5. **Practice dry fire and live fire using a light with your firearm.** Make especially sure that your muzzle stays in front of your light/hand and that your light is below your firing hand so that the slide does not hit your non-shooting hand/wrist.

Reduced Light

You are clearing a corner when you see a shoe sticking out from a wall. You know you have found the cause of the crash of the lamp stand only minutes earlier. What do you do now? As mentioned before, you should already have decided the fate of your target based on circumstances. But because you do not know who this guy is yet, you do not intend to jump in shooting.

1. **Be aware of your surroundings,** you do not want to be silhouetted against the light behind you, or highlighted by light on you. Try to approach danger areas from the shadows or from behind other areas of concealment or cover.
2. **Identify a possible target,** you are now able to temporarily blind him by flashing your light into their eyes. Aim the light right at the head and turn it on for only a moment (a flashlight with a temporary-on switch is preferable). You need a flashlight with at least 50 Lumens to temporarily disorient an attacker at night.
3. **Get a good look at the intruder** and with a bright enough light, the light-splash should allow you to see if he is holding a weapon.
 - o This action will also get a reaction which will give you an idea into the intruder's head. They now know you know where they are, and being blinded is not a comfortable situation. The chemicals in his eyes which allow humans to see in almost complete darkness will have been burnt away and will take up to 30 minutes to fully return, which gives you a big advantage.
4. Execute the *target spotted* section based on your circumstances.

Tips

- Your first goal should be for you and your family to survive, not to "get the bad guy." Always remember that you have the option to retreat and leave your own house. As unsettling as this is, it would be better to step outside if everyone can do so safely than to engage multiple targets and die protecting your house.
- Unless you are glancing over your shoulder to check a corner as you enter a T-intersection or a doorway, you should follow the "three-eye rule". This means that where

your two eyes are looking your gun muzzle follows as well. This cuts down on reaction time.

- While clearing a house is very dangerous, if you do things correctly and you see the enemy first or are taking the aggressive action through hallways and doorways, you are forcing the intruder(s) to be on the defensive which allows you to execute tactics in their reaction time. Thus, in an offensive maneuver, no hesitation and speed are essential.
- If you do shoot, do not shoot dumb, do not shoot blind! When you end up on the offensive, you must take the time to guarantee your hits. You need to [flash sight](#) to allow solid hits.
- If you use your flashlight on a target, you have not received the full blow of the light, but much of your night vision will be diminished. A technique so you do not destroy your night vision is to close your support-side eye (non-dominant eye) every time you turn on your light.
- When turning on your light, never let it trail to your position. Only turn it on when the light is on your target, or when you are exploring dark areas of a room. Turn it off as soon as you are done. You may be looking for an intruder, but if the intruder sees the light, they know exactly where you are.
- Whenever you approach an area which does not allow the firm use of both hands on the weapon you should bring your firearm in to [close contact firing position](#) (with long guns, this involves putting the stock under your arm). This allows your eyes to precede your muzzle and makes it more difficult for an intruder to get hold of your weapon.
- Tactics rarely require speed, take your time around danger areas. Stealth and surprise are your biggest assets. If you make an unintended sound, stop! Step behind close cover and wait for 20+ seconds, listen, watch, be observant and patient, if no target indicators present themselves, move on, but be prepared, you may have just announced your location to an intruder.
- After clearing a room, it may behoove you to lock the door as you exit. Only do this if it is possible to do it silently, quickly, and while your firearm is still at the ready. Remain observant and alert as you do this!
- One of the first places you should be intent on clearing is parts of the house where loved ones are known to be. Protect them first, then guard your house.
- Make sure you are familiar with your firearm.
- Practice, Practice, Practice. Both alone and with others.

Warnings

- Firearms can be very dangerous and even lethal (else they wouldn't be effective weapons). They should only be used for home or personal defense by experienced firearm users.
- Be sure to follow all state and local laws (though at times, decisions must be made for the sake of your life and those of loved ones). Note that many laws on firearms change drastically from state to state, and can even change between counties or even cities.
- Most firearm projectiles will go through residential walls and doors. Do not shoot toward areas where loved ones or neighbors may be.

- When clearing a corner or doorway, realize that an armed intruder may be able to shoot you through the wall or door. If they do not know where you are, they will not shoot you, but it is best to step back from cover to make randomly fired bullet less likely to hit you.
- Make sure you identify your target before firing on them. The police may have already made entry, and you do not want to shoot a cop by mistake. Even if you have not called the police, it's possible that a neighbor saw someone breaking into the house and called, or a police officer just happened to be driving by.
- When the police arrive, holster your weapon, put your hands in the air, and do exactly what they say so that you don't get shot. They don't know who you are and they have to assume that you are the bad guy.

Originally published at <http://www.wikihow.com/Clear-a-Building-with-a-Firearm>, where I am a contributing writer. There are several good firearms training articles here, written by myself (using both my name and pseudonyms) and other great writers.

Let me know your thoughts on this lesson below. If you have taken any building clearing classes, please mention them below along with your evaluation of the class.