

First Gun Purchase Checklist

What to know, ask, and do before buying your first firearm

Buying your first firearm is a significant decision. This checklist helps you approach it thoughtfully — covering the research, questions, and steps that lead to a confident, informed purchase.

Before You Shop

Research & Self-Assessment

- ☐ I've honestly assessed whether firearm ownership is right for my situation
- ☐ I understand the basic types: revolvers, semi-automatic pistols, shotguns, rifles
- ☐ I've researched my state's laws on purchase, ownership, storage, and carry
- ☐ I know if my state requires a permit, waiting period, or background check
- ☐ I've considered how a firearm fits into my overall protection plan
- ☐ I've budgeted for the full cost: firearm + safe storage + training + ammunition

Don't rush this process. A thoughtful purchase takes weeks, not hours.

At the Gun Store

Questions to Ask

- ☐ "Can I hold several different models to compare?"
- ☐ "What's the difference in recoil between these options?"
- ☐ "Is this a good fit for someone with my hand size/grip strength?"
- ☐ "What ammunition does this use, and what's the cost/availability?"
- ☐ "Do you offer a range where I can try before I buy?"
- ☐ "What's your return/exchange policy?"

What to Evaluate

- ☐ Can I comfortably reach all controls (trigger, magazine release, safety)?
- ☐ Can I rack the slide without struggling?
- ☐ Does it feel balanced in my hand, not too front-heavy or awkward?
- ☐ Is the grip texture comfortable (not too aggressive, not too slick)?

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- ☐ Can I see the sights clearly?

How it feels in the store for 30 seconds ≠ how it performs after 500 rounds. Ask to try it first.

Red Flags to Watch For

- ☐ Staff who steer you to "women's guns" without asking about your needs
- ☐ Anyone who dismisses your questions or talks down to you
- ☐ Pressure to buy today or buy something specific
- ☐ Claims that you "don't need training" or "it's not complicated"
- ☐ Stores that won't let you handle multiple options

If you encounter these, find a different store. You deserve respectful, knowledgeable service.

Before Leaving the Store

- ☐ I understand how to safely load, unload, and clear this firearm
- ☐ I've received a demonstration of all controls and functions
- ☐ I have the manual and know where to find additional resources
- ☐ I've purchased (or have at home) a secure storage solution
- ☐ I have a training plan — class scheduled or instructor identified
- ☐ I've purchased appropriate ammunition for practice

After Purchase

- ☐ Firearm is stored securely and inaccessible to unauthorized users
- ☐ Household members know the firearm exists and basic safety rules
- ☐ If children are present: had age-appropriate safety conversation
- ☐ Training scheduled within 2 weeks of purchase
- ☐ Practice ammunition purchased for ongoing training
- ☐ Considered: carry insurance / self-defense legal protection

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