

ACTION TANK

How to speak about firearms with credibility

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Why does it matter?

Too often, those who try to advance evidence-based policies to address gun violence are discredited for the language they use when they speak about firearms. This sheet will give a basic overview of the parts of a firearm and language to use when speaking with policymakers and gun rights advocates.

Is it a firearm or gun?

While all firearms are guns, a firearm is defined as a device which utilizes an explosive charge (gunpowder) to fire a projectile. Guns have any projectile expelled and can include multiple forms of force including compressed air or CO2 (pellet and paintball guns). The term firearm is a better choice when speaking with policymakers and advocates. It is the preferred term by law enforcement and military service members.

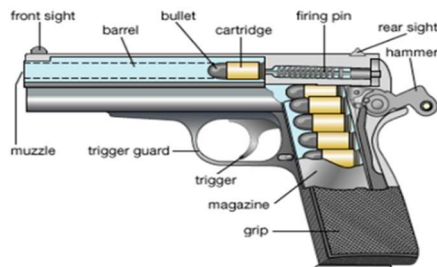
What types are there?

Semi-automatic and **Fully-automatic**: Semi means pull the trigger, the gun fires, the gun cycles itself, and is ready to fire the next time you pull the trigger. Fully-automatic means the it will keep firing and cycling itself until the trigger is released.

Pistols or **handguns**: Small and can be held in one hand. Subtypes include revolver and semi-automatic.

Shotguns: Long barrel and require two hands. Often used by hunters. Can fire "shot" (number of small spherical pellets) or "slugs" (large solid projectile).

Semi-Automatic Rifle or **Carbine**: Often incorrectly referred to as "assault rifles." This type includes the AR-15. The majority of civilian owned, legally purchased rifles by civilians are semi-automatic. In the 2017 Las Vegas shooting, a "bump stock" allowed for the rate of fire to be similar to an automatic weapon.



Assault Rifle: This type of firearm is generally only available for military-use. These are selective-fire weapons that can be used as semi-automatics, automatics, or burst. These firearms include the AK-47, M16, and M4.

Machine Gun: These firearms are fully automatic to fire cartridges in rapid succession from an ammunition belt or magazine. They are typically "crew served" meaning it requires two individuals. One to feed the ammunition and one to fire the weapon. Note, not all automatic weapons are machine guns.

Any other parts to know?

Barrel: Long tube the bullets fly down. The longer the barrel, the more stable and faster the bullet is upon exit.

Chamber: Part of the barrel where round waits to be fired.

Magazine: Detachable container to hold ammunition which attaches to or fits inside the gun. Sometimes inaccurately referred to as a clip. A clip is used to load a magazine.

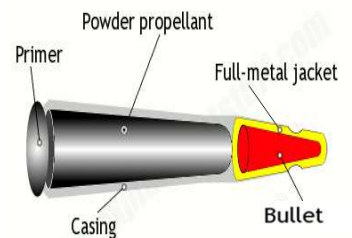
Stock or **buttstock**: On rifles and shotguns, this is the part you put up against your shoulder when firing.

Grip: Part of the weapon that is held.

Safety: A mechanical lever that blocks the gun from firing.

Any other terms to know?

Round or **Cartridge** vs **Bullet**: A round or cartridge refers to the entire package of bullet, casing, powder/propellant, rim and primer. Ammunition is the plural of rounds/cartridges. Bullet only refers to the solid projectile (tip) propelled from the end of the cartridge when the gun is fired. Therefore, bullet is seldom the correct term to use. Instead use round.



Caliber: Size of the round.

High-capacity Magazine:

Defined by state law. Eight states ban magazines based on the ability to hold a certain capacity of ammunition. Pennsylvania does not define or prohibit the sale of high capacity magazines.

Hollow-point: Concave nose to increase expansion, increase damage on the target.

Silencer vs Suppressor: These devices attach to firearms to reduce noise from firing. The term silencer has been used longer, but gun rights advocates are more likely to use the term suppressor. They state that there is only a reduction in sound and not total silence. Therefore, the term suppressor may be more appropriate in certain settings to gain credibility.

Colt AR-15 Semiautomatic Rifle

