

Law Enforcement Firearms Instructor Certification

Recommended Standards



National Law Enforcement Firearms Instructors Association

In Cooperation with



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Law Enforcement Firearms Instructor Certification – Recommended Standards

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National Law Enforcement Firearms Instructors Association (NLEFIA)

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STANDARDS REVIEW COMMITTEE

The members of the Standards Review Committee are diverse, representing different parts of the country and different organizations that either conduct firearms instructor certifications and/or provide continuing training for law enforcement firearms instructors. Committee members have extensive experience certifying individuals as law enforcement firearms instructors in one or more firearms disciplines.

Jason Wuestenberg – Committee Chairman | Executive Director, National Law Enforcement Firearms Instructors Association (NLEFIA)

James Mac Gillis – Committee Member | Representative for International Association of Directors of Law Enforcement Standards and Training (IADLEST)

Gregory LeCompte – Committee Member | Representative for Washington State Law Enforcement Firearms Instructors Association (WSLEFIA)

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John Krupa – Committee Member | National Trainer, Owner of Spartan Tactical Training Group

Mike Boyle – Committee Member | National Trainer, Retired from New Jersey Division of Fish & Wildlife Law Enforcement Bureau

Liam Duggan – Committee Member | National Trainer, Police Commander at City of Prior Lake

Mark Wittie – Committee Member | Instructor/Training Coordinator for South Plains College (TX) Law Enforcement Program

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INTRODUCTION & OBJECTIVE

Law enforcement firearms instructors across the nation are NOT certified to the same standards. In fact, most law enforcement firearms instructor certification courses fit into one of three categories:

1. 40-hour 1-gun instructor certification course (pistol, shotgun, rifle, etc.)
2. 40-hour 2-gun instructor certification course (pistol/revolver, pistol/shotgun, pistol/rifle, etc.)
3. 80-hour 3-gun instructor certification course (pistol/revolver/shotgun, pistol/shotgun/rifle, etc.)

There is a growing trend of training companies and organizations offering 40-hour 3-gun instructor certification courses. The more firearm disciplines that are introduced into an instructor certification course, the less time there is spent on each discipline thereby lowering the standard of knowledge and skill an instructor should have with each discipline.

This committee was created to offer a minimum standards recommendation for various law enforcement firearms instructor certification programs. While most firearms instructors across the nation would agree that more training is better (as long as it's impactful towards learning objectives), this committee focused on the minimum standards necessary for a newly certified firearms instructor to be capable of conducting the following tasks for the firearm disciplines in which they were certified:

1. Be able to provide firearms safety to recruits/in-service personnel
2. Be able to provide basic firearms training to recruits/in-service personnel
3. Be able to provide remedial/skill builder training to struggling shooters
4. Be able to administer a firearms qualification course of fire

Firearms instructor certification courses are simply an academy for new firearms instructors. Graduates may have more knowledge and skill than those who have not attended a firearms instructor course, but they should not be considered experts at that point. They are new instructors on the firearm disciplines in which they were certified. They may lack the in-depth knowledge, coaching skills, and experience that only come with time and additional instructor development training.

The objective of this document is to bring law enforcement firearms instructor certification program standards, conducted by various training organizations across the nation, into closer alignment and to ensure newly certified law enforcement firearms instructors have the minimum knowledge, skills, and capability to provide the necessary tasks an agency requires from its firearms instructor staff.

SCOPE OF STANDARDS

This document will address five main areas of concern regarding recommended minimum standards:

1. Minimum pre-course requirements to attend
2. Minimum recommended training hours for certification
3. Minimum required topics to be covered
4. Minimum task requirements to graduate
5. Recommended training methodology and course format

This document does not dictate how a certification course should be presented hour-by-hour or day-by-day. How the listed recommendations are implemented into a certification course is up to the training organization. However, a sample syllabus is provided as a guide (Addendum A, attached).

This document is not retroactive, nor does it imply that any past or previous firearms instructor certification programs are invalid.

This document is not intended to be a recommendation for civilian firearms instructor certification, but may be used as a guide to improve any civilian firearms instructor certification course.

SECTION 1: MINIMUM PRE-COURSE REQUIREMENTS

The committee members determined that a Semi-Auto Pistol/Handgun Instructor certification course should be the first firearms instructor certification course any law enforcement officer should attend and complete, as this firearm is the core weapon system the vast majority of law enforcement officers carry on duty. All other firearm disciplines should require a Handgun/Pistol Instructor certification as a prerequisite to attend.

The committee members also determined that before a candidate attends a Semi-Auto Pistol/Handgun Instructor certification course, they should have successfully completed a “General Instructor” course containing these minimum requirements:

1. A minimum of forty (40) training hours
2. Covers various adult learning principles
3. Covers curriculum and outline development
4. Covers classroom presentation and various classroom learning aids
5. Conducts practical exercises on outline development
6. Conducts practical exercises on classroom presentation/public speaking

This course does not have to be law enforcement oriented. This course can be provided by any law enforcement agency/academy, a private training organization, or a community college.

If a General Instructor certification course is a prerequisite to attend a Semi-Auto Pistol/Handgun Instructor certification course, then practical exercises in outline development and classroom presentations are NOT required to be conducted by candidates in any firearms instructor certification courses. The committee members determined the time spent on outline development and classroom presentation is better spent on instructor development exercises on the range.

SECTION2: MINIMUM RECOMMENDED HOURS FOR CERTIFICATION

The committee members agreed the following minimum training hours and prerequisites should be required for each of the listed firearms instructor disciplines. The training hours listed below are based on a full class of twenty (20) candidates covering the recommended topics listed in Section 3 of this document.

Instructor Certification Course	Prerequisite
Semi-Auto Pistol/Handgun <i>Minimum Training Hours – 40 hours</i>	Graduated police academy or 40-hour Handgun Operator courseand..... Graduated 40-hour General Instructor Development/Certification course
Revolver <i>Minimum Training Hours – 24 hours</i>	Semi-Auto Pistol/Handgun Instructorand..... Graduated 16-hour (minimum) Revolver Operator course
Pump Action/Semi-Auto Shotgun <i>Minimum Training Hours – 40 hours</i>	Semi-Auto Pistol/Handgun Instructorand..... Graduated 16-hour (minimum) Shotgun Operator course
Semi-Auto Rifle/Carbine <i>Minimum Training Hours – 40 hours</i>	Semi-Auto Pistol/Handgun Instructorand..... Graduated 16-hour (minimum) Rifle/Carbine Operator course
Select-Fire/Full-Auto (Rifle/Carbine/SubGun) <i>Minimum Training Hours – 40 hours</i> <i>Exception – 24 training hours if Semi-Auto Rifle/Carbine Instructor certification is also a prerequisite</i>	Semi-Auto Pistol/Handgun Instructorand..... Graduated 16-hour (minimum) Select-Fire/Full-Auto Rifle/Carbine/SubGun Operator course
Precision Rifle (Bolt Action/Semi-Auto) <i>Minimum Training Hours – 40 hours</i> <i>Exception for Semi-Auto Precision Rifle Only – 24 hours if Semi-Auto Rifle/Carbine Instructor certification is also a prerequisite</i>	Semi-Auto Pistol/Handgun Instructorand..... Graduated 16-hour (minimum) Precision Rifle Operator course

SECTION 3: MINIMUM TOPICS TO BE COVERED

The committee members agreed the following major topics and associated sub-topics should be covered in all 40-hour law enforcement firearms instructor courses.

Topics marked with an asterisk () should be covered in a 24-hour instructor certification course.*

Major Topics	Sub-Topics
Firearms Safety*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Firearms safety rules • Classroom & range safety • Intentional, unintentional, and mechanical (accidental) discharges • Injured persons protocol / the need for medical equipment & training
Duties of a Firearms Instructor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Common tasks • Responsibilities • Authority
Legal Topics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training the use of deadly force (elements) • Failure to train case laws • Use of force case laws • Common challenges to firearms instructor programs in court
Shooting Fundamentals*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marksmanship fundamentals • Proper gun-handling skills • Practical shooting vs precision shooting • Dry-fire practice
Weapon Design & Function*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nomenclature • Various operating systems • Disassembly & assembly • Maintenance & function check
Weapon Accessories*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Common accessories related to each weapon system
Ammunition*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Components & types • Problems with ammo • Inspection of duty ammo • Ballistics (internal, external, terminal)
Zeroing Sights/Optics*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Iron sights • Red dots / variable powered scopes • Back-up sights / co-witnessing • Bore/Sight (mechanical) offset

Major Topics	Sub-Topics
Ready Positions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High & low ready • Depressed muzzle / safety circle / Sul • Other “ready” variations
Loading & Unloading*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Various methods • Loaded chamber verification
Reloads*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partial mag (with retention) • Empty gun
Malfunction Clearance*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Malfunction types • Clearance procedures
Positional Shooting*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Traditional – standing, kneeling, prone • Unconventional
One Handed Shooting / Bi-Lateral Shooting*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pistol / Revolver: one handed (primary & support) • Shoulder-fired: bi-lateral
Transition to Handgun*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For shoulder-fired weapons
Use of Cover	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cover vs concealment • Braced/supported • Unbraced/unsupported
Low Light Shooting*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weapon-mounted lights • Hand-held flashlight techniques • Light manipulations • Weapon manipulations (reloads & malfunctions) • Target identification
Movement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Static turns • Tactical steps • Dynamic moving & shooting
Injured Officer Techniques*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weapon presentation • Reloads • Malfunction clearance
Conducting Qualifications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instructor responsibility/integrity • Turning targets vs static targets & shot timer • Qualification vs skills standards test
How to Run Line Drills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Role of lead instructor and adjunct instructors • Brief the drill / demo • Run the drill / check targets / repetitions • Debrief the drill • Running relays

Major Topics	Sub-Topics
Working with Struggling Shooters*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifying physical and mechanical issues • Diagnosing (determining proper psychomotor skill/activity to overcome deficiency) • Applying proper corrective action and instruction • Problem shooter drills
Documenting Your Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Curriculum development • Reviewing/revising outlines, drills, and courses of fire • Unification of terminology with other use of force options • Records retention
Outdoor vs Indoor Shooting Ranges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overview and characteristics of each • Advantages, disadvantages, and limitations • Lead/hearing – exposure/protection
Decision-Making and Verbalization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How to conduct a decision-making drill • How to debrief the drill/decision • Preparation to defend your training in litigation
Range Equipment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hearing & eye protection • Shot timers and how to use them • Paper target selection • Steel target overview, use, and safety
Duty Gear Selection, Evaluation, Positioning, and Maintenance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss basic principles
Live-Fire Shoot House, Video Simulation and Force-on-Force training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Firearms instructors are often tasked with conducting this type of training • Formal training/certification in these areas are not provided in a basic Firearms Instructor course and should be obtained through other courses before conducting
Creative Drill Design (Optional, if time permits)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Common “tips and tricks” for improvising when creating drills without particular gear. Making something out of nothing.

SECTION 4: MINIMUM TASKS REQUIREMENTS TO GRADUATE

The committee members agreed the following tasks should be completed to successfully graduate a law enforcement firearms instructor certification course.

TASKS	REQUIREMENTS
Pass a shooting qualification on Day 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimum of 90% to pass • Ensures focus is on instructor development instead of shooter development
Conduct one-on-one coaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coach/shooter line drills • Dry-fire or live-fire • At least five times
Conduct group teaching (groups are no larger than five candidates)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One candidate teaching a topic to a small group of 3-4 shooters • Dry-fire or live-fire • At least three times
Conduct team teaching (teams are no larger than four candidates)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A team of instructors (one lead instructor and 2-3 adjunct instructors) running line drills • Each candidate must be a lead instructor at least once • Must be live-fire line drills
Design, document, and safely conduct a shooting drill as part of a 3-4 man instructor team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of instructor teams is based on size of the class • Must maintain proper instructor/shooter ratio (1:5) • Develop the drill during the course • Conducted on last day of the course • Brief the drill, demo the drill, conduct the drill safely at least twice, and debrief the drill
Pass a written test	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Last day • Minimum of 80% to pass • Ensure technical knowledge is retained
Demonstrate safe weapon handling skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Each day throughout the course • Repeated violations can be cause for dismissal

SECTION 5: RECOMMENDED TRAINING FORMAT & METHODOLOGY

The committee members agreed the following training methodology should be utilized in a law enforcement firearms instructor course.

Class Schedule: A 40-hour certification course should be on a 5/8 schedule (5 days/8 hours per day). A 4/10 schedule (4 days/10 hours per day) should be avoided as the repetitive long work days may result in diminished retention of information. Lunch breaks do NOT count towards total training hours.

Class Size: While this document is based on a class size of twenty (20) candidates, a class size of 12-16 is preferred to ensure every candidate receives plenty of repetitions performing as an instructor.

Instructor/Student Ratio: A certification class should maintain a 1-5 instructor/student ratio (or less) to maintain proper development oversight, safety, and controllability.

Classroom Training: Classroom training is necessary to obtain and retain both technical and theoretical information related to the specific firearm discipline. Classroom training should not extend beyond 16 hours in a 40-hour certification program. Training that is usually addressed in the classroom can often be conducted on the range.

Range Training: Range training should dominate the majority of time in a 40-hour certification program. During range training, candidates should be placed in instructor roles as much as possible to gain experience. This can be done three different ways...

1. **Coach/Shooter** – During line drills, candidates will pair up into coach/shooter pairs. As one candidate is shooting, the other candidate will be the coach that observes the shooter and provides feedback and target analysis. Course instructors run the line drill.
2. **Group Teaching** – Candidates are placed into groups of 4-5. Each candidate is given a topic to teach to the other candidates within the group. This can be done as dry-fire training sessions or live-fire training sessions. Course instructors do NOT run the training session. They overwatch the candidates and interject as needed.
3. **Teaching Teams** – Candidates are placed into teams of 4-5. Each team will run line drills. One candidate will be the “lead instructor” to run the shooting line (give commands) and the other candidates will be the “adjunct instructors” to work the shooting line (coach the shooters). Course instructors do NOT run the training session. They overwatch the candidates and interject as needed.

SUMMARY

The role and importance of the law enforcement firearms instructor cannot be overstated. The title alone represents a position of leadership. And as such, they have the power of influence. Therefore, firearms instructors must be technically proficient as trainers and coaches in the discipline(s) in which they are certified. That starts with a solid foundation of training in their certification course.

The trend of sacrificing the length and quality of training for the purposes of saving time and money to get certified as an instructor in more than one discipline has to change or law enforcement agencies will pay the consequences in the future. Instructor development/certification is one area where the law enforcement community cannot afford to cut corners.

State-level oversight organizations, law enforcement agencies, and law enforcement training organizations should ensure their firearms instructor certification programs meet or exceed the minimum standards outlined in this document.

GLOSSARY

Firearms-related terminology is not the same across the nation. This glossary is provided as a resource to help minimize confusion and to ensure all readers fully comprehend the text and meaning within this document.

Bolt Action	Rounds are loaded and extracted from the chamber by manually manipulating the bolt
Carbine	A light rifle
Coach/Shooter Methodology	Instructor candidates are grouped into pairs. During training one person is the shooter and the other person is the coach/instructor. Each drill must be conducted twice to allow the pairs to switch roles
Curriculum	Any documentation such as a syllabus, training outline, lesson plan, rubric, etc. that supports learning outcomes
Firearms Instructor	A person trained and qualified to provide firearms training to shooters and conduct the tasks of a Range Safety Officer
Fully Automatic	“Full-auto”; continuously fires rounds as long as the trigger is pressed to the rear
Group Teaching Methodology	Instructor candidates are divided into group of 4-6 people. One person within the group teaches a specific topic to the remaining members of the group
Handgun	Pistol; a firearm designed to be shot with one hand
Outline	A document containing specific teaching points for each topic covered in the training course
Pistol	Handgun; a firearm designed to be shot with one hand
Pump Action	Manual loading method for shotguns
Rangemaster	A person of leadership/authority that is responsible for the day-to-day operations of a shooting range, supervises training staff, and manages training programs
Range Safety Officer	A person trained and qualified to run a shooting line and observe and correct safety issues. Range Safety Officers are NOT qualified to provide firearms training to shooters
Revolver	A pistol with revolving chambers enabling several shots to be fired without reloading
Semi-Automatic	“Semi-auto”; fires one round only with each individual press of the trigger
Syllabus	A document or schedule that outlines the major topics covered in each hour of a training course
Team Teaching Methodology	Instructor candidates are divided into teams of 3-5 people. Each teaching team has a lead instructor and multiple adjunct instructors and conducts drills for the other candidates
Training Hours	Hours spent on training course curriculum, does not include lunch break or any breaks longer than 10 minutes. A 10-minute break is acceptable during every hour of training

APPENDIX A

Sample Syllabus

40-Hour LE Firearms Instructor Certification Course

This is a sample syllabus that can be used for any weapon discipline. Topic order can be rearranged and modifications may be needed to accommodate various disciplines.

Day/Hour	Major Topics Covered	Training Methodology
Day 1/Hour 1	Firearms Safety	Classroom
Hour 2	Role of a Firearms Instructor	Classroom
Hour 3	Documenting Your Training	Classroom
Hour 4	Entrance Qualification	Range
Lunch Break	<i>Release qualification failures from the course</i>	
Hour 5	Legal Topics	Classroom
Hour 6	Weapon design & Function	Classroom
Hour 7	Weapon Accessories Ammunition	Classroom
Hour 8	Shooting Fundamentals	Classroom
Day 2		
Day 2/Hour 1	Ready Positions Loading & Unloading	Range Dry-Fire Coach-Shooter
Hour 2	Shooting Fundamentals/Platform	Range Live-Fire Coach-Shooter
Hour 3	Positional Shooting – Traditional	Range Live-Fire Coach-Shooter
Hour 4	Zeroing Sights/Optics	Range Live-Fire Coach-Shooter
Lunch Break		
Hour 5	Reloads	Range Dry-Fire Group Teaching
Hour 6	Malfunctions	Range Dry-Fire Group Teaching
Hour 7	Injured Officer Techniques	Range Dry-Fire Group Teaching
Hour 8	One-Handed Shooting/Bi-Lateral	Range Live-Fire Group Teaching

Day 3/Hour 1	How to Run Line Drills	Classroom
Hour 2	Conducting Qualifications	Classroom
Hour 3	Indoor vs. Outdoor Ranges/Instruction	Classroom
Hour 4	Low Light Shooting	Classroom
Lunch Break		
Hour 5-8	Low Light Training – Review marksmanship, flashlight manipulation, reloads, malfunction clearance, decision making	Range Live-Fire Teaching Teams
Day 4/Hour 1		
Hour 2	Decision-Making & Verbalization	Classroom
Hour 3	Range Equipment Creative Drill Design	Classroom
Hour 4	Working with Struggling Shooters	Classroom
Hour 5	Working with Struggling Shooters	Range Live-Fire Coach-Shooter
Lunch Break		
Hour 6	Use of cover Positional Shooting - Unconventional	Range Live-Fire Group Teaching
Hour 7	Movement	Range Live-Fire Group Teaching
Hour 8	Teaching Teams Drill Development	Classroom
Day 5/Hour 1		
Hour 2	Teaching Team 1 – Drill Presentation	Range Live-Fire Teaching Teams
Hour 3	Teaching Team 2 – Drill Presentation	Range Live-Fire Teaching Teams
Hour 4	Teaching Team 3 – Drill Presentation	Range Live-Fire Teaching Teams
Hour 5	Written Test	Classroom
Lunch Break		
Hour 6	Review Written test	Classroom
Hour 7	Teaching Team 4 – Drill Presentation	Range Live-Fire Teaching Teams
Hour 8	Teaching Team 5 – Drill Presentation	Range Live-Fire Teaching Teams
Hour 9	Range clean-up/Course Debrief Graduation	Range