

How to legally use a knife in self defense

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There's a lot of hype, bullshit, solid facts and money surrounding the topic of using a knife for self defense purposes. The most common question is most easily answered: What's the best knife for self defense? Here are the 3 most important characteristics:

1. Is it good for stabbing (read Suarez [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#))? Usually this means point in line with grip among other, more minor, things.
2. Would you use this for everyday stuff (hat tip: [Marc MacYoung](#))? You don't actually have to use it (you can just oil it lovingly everyday if that's your thing), but if you're busted by a cop can you successfully claim it's a working/work-related knife?
3. Are you ok with dropping it down a drain on a whim? 2 things: 1 – non-synthetic materials (wood, paracord) tend to hold D.N.A. evidence much better than metal and plastics; 2 – I live in a country with an overwhelming majority of cops falling under the category of: ignorant of knife laws; uncaring about those laws and on a power trip; sadists with a desire to fuck with people's lives; apathetic to everything when the boss isn't looking. So if you see a roadblock/stop-and-search (i.e. extortion rackets) up ahead, you might have the chance to ditch what you're carrying and save the hassle of trying to explain that it is, in fact, legal for you to have that knife on you. A friend of mine had to "escort" the cops from the stop-and-search to the Station Commander's office before anyone would believe that it was ok for him to have a bowie on him. This is South Africa, so if my friend wasn't white the black cops would've just arrested him and made it someone else's problem besides theirs.

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Not the answers you wanted? Tough. You can go look at your H&K “Instigator” all you want, but imagine what the prosecutor would say if you ever have to use it. Custom knives? No – too expensive, too unique. Sharpened screwdriver? Sure. Something factory and common looking? Fine.

Now that the easy stuff's dealt with, we can move onto the more important things...

Things to know before you walk out your door every morning:

- What is my strategic mission? Get home tonight.
- What is my tactical goal? Escape anything as soon as it's safe to run.
- Does my pistol have a full mag?
- Does my pistol have a round chambered?
- Are the sights on target?
- In my knife sharp?

(this will be important in a bit)

Legally speaking

In most everywhere in the world I can think of, using a knife on someone (even a closed folder as an impact weapon) is considered lethal force. So if you want to scare the guy(s), show them your [war face](#), not your knife. Remember Rory Miller's words: Self defense is a thin list of things that **might** save your life when you're already screwed. One of the ways to enhance your (slim) chances of getting home alive is to keep the knife hidden until you use it. This maximises the chances of you winning. Rory Miller again: “If you threaten with a weapon and it does work, you **will** have to use it, or else it will be taken away and used against you.” Don't threaten. Keep your weapon hidden until you use it.

Incidentally, that's one of my pet peeves about carrying a folder – if you need to you a knife it's because you're probably about to die. In which case you probably want to get the knife out in a hurry. And folders, for all their wonderful attributes, do not lend themselves well to speed.

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Killing the other guy

If you can use a knife it means your life is in danger (or that of somebody else). If waving your knife at the guy and looking mean can save your life, then odds are good you don't need the knife, and something else would probably end the situation safely. For example, if you can access, draw, and point your knife at the BG and explain that he has the choice of death or aborting the attack he's about to launch on you, then odds are good you have the time to run away or PESTS him. Needing your knife means that he's actively trying to kill you. And I don't know about you, but if some guy is trying to stove my head in with a half-brick, then wiggling my knife near his face to scare him off doesn't seem like such an efficient idea. If you need to use a knife, then the knife is purely for killing. And this means stabbing. Lots and plenty. Because the half-brick attack will kill you, so you should hopefully kill him first. And if he's threatening you with the half brick, then he isn't trying to kill you (yet), so you don't need to use your knife (yet). Though keeping it handy might be useful in this situation.

Legally killing the other guy

Keep the fucking goal in mind! If your goal is kill the guy, then your focus is going to be KEEP STABBING! And then the magistrate/jury sees a video tape of you holding onto the guy and stabbing him on the ground. Don't be [Tim Roth](#) And get into it a bit too much. Your goal is ESCAPE. So the second you can, you run. Killing him is incidental. Don't give the BG more importance than that. It's not a "thing" where you must kill him. His death is incidental to you getting home. That's all the thought he warrants. And there's a decent chance that he'll see that in your face. Your goal isn't to kill the fly in the kitchen, it's to get back to doing what you were trying to when it interrupted you. Petty annoyance. So stab him. Hard. Keep stabbing him. And when it seems like there's no more forward aggression coming from him, go a different way. Above all else, **keeping your tactical goal in the forefront of your mind is what will keep your actions legal** (and keep you safer by making sure you don't stay engaged longer than you have to). By all means, focus on stabbing him, but just like chopping a root, or hammering something stubborn, once the job's done it's pretty easy to quickly pick up on the fact that you can stop now. Remember Marc MacYoung's words: "When he stops, you stop."

To end off I want to paraphrase Clint Overland (from Marc MacYoung's most mundanely named, yet most important to read "In the Name of Self Defense" - "I want to put the guy down as quick as possible. I don't want witnesses telling the cops how I went on and on beating this poor man."