Checkmate To Danger: Here’s How To Always Win!

Have you ever thought how reading your emails in a public place reduces your chances to react and defy an attacker? How is this connected to the seat you’re choosing when entering a room, or the sitting cars in front of the building?

Well, there is a strong connection that you have to accept. It’s the one that helps you win when playing chess to danger, and it’s called situational awareness.

The meaning of the term “situational awareness” varies greatly according to context. Depending on whether you fly aircraft, enforce for the law, respond to emergencies, assess risk, work with power tools, work in cyber security, teach in a classroom or carry concealed weapon, your definition of the term likely differs from that of others.

To many, situational awareness is an idea or theory. To me, in the context of survival and emergency preparedness, situational awareness means maintaining yourself alert to threats to your survival and understanding those threats to the end of determining the most effective course of action to keep you and yours alive.

I would encourage you to treat the subject as a verb, an action word, something that you do, “to be situationally aware” as opposed to “read about situational awareness.”

What Is the Purpose?

Recent terror attacks might make this topic seem especially relevant, but I disagree. Complacency is the enemy of situational awareness. Situational awareness must be part of your everyday routine to be effective.

Also, it is one thing to have an academic understanding of situational awareness theory and quite another to apply it effectively in your daily life. I say this because you cannot stop at being alert, orienting yourself, assessing risk or making decisions.

We do these things in preparation to act. Thus, each step in the process should prepare you to act. Fortunately, there are many simple and effective tools to help you live and apply situational awareness as opposed to just reading about it.

Tactical Situational Awareness

There are many things that we do repeatedly in the course of day to day living. By turning them into techniques or drills, you can constantly train with nano-exercises in situational awareness as you work, run errands, travel and even as you just go about your life as we all do.

Like a game of chess, anticipate your options several steps ahead of what you are doing at the moment. Do not lock yourself into a predetermined course of action, but do be aware an autopilot setting to fall back on while you examine alternative courses of action.

For the tactical segment of survival situational awareness training, we will cover some tools for both your training and to have at the ready in your tactical toolbox.

1. Choose A Seat

When you decide to sit, choose a seat oriented so you can view what is going on around you and keep an eye on entries and exits and offers routes or space to escape or maneuver. Position yourself to better observe your surroundings and to fight or flee.

It may be with your back to a wall or corner which makes it harder for a threat to get behind you and allows you to

monitor exits and entries without having to turn your head as often.

2. Identify the Exits

How many times a day do you enter a room or building? Every time you do should be a nano-exercise in SA. Exits can be doors, hallways, windows or just open space. Exits are usually also entrances and fatal funnels that can be used to your advantage or to the advantage of your enemy, so it is a good idea to stay aware of what they are and keep an eye on them.

3. Identify Concealment and Cover

Concealment is anything that blocks your enemy's view but will not stop a bullet, like bushes or smoke. Cover is usually also concealment, but not always, such as in the case of clear bullet resistant glass, but cover provides ballistic protection against small arms, like a street curb or stone wall or the engine block on an auto.

As you move about your environment, identify cover and concealment and visualize maneuvering to place it between you and an imaginary or real enemy. Once you are in the habit, it will become almost automatic.

There is much more to this subject, such as how close to or behind cover you or your firearm should be, don't poke you firearm out from behind a wall or window like you see all the time in the movies, and so forth, but this is the part directly related to SA.

4. Scan Hands and Waist Bands for Weapons

The eyes may be the window to the soul, but your enemy won't kill you with his eyes. People are nearly always killed with weapons held in the hands. It takes very little effort to discreetly scan people's hands and waist bands for weapons as you go about your day.

I sometimes do this thousands of times per day and am no worse for the wear and can affirm that it does not result in paranoia. Quite to the contrary, knowledge is the bane of fear.

5. Notice Sitting Cars

When you pull into a parking lot, notice cars with people sitting in them. Are any of them backed in for a speedy getaway? Parking lots are for parking. You should take notice of people sitting in vehicles for any reason. They may be up to no good. Criminals like moral support too and they also like to have the numbers in their favor and a quick getaway.

Could you give a description of the vehicle and driver? Were plates visible? Are the numbers taped over with electrical tape or vinyl numbers that can be cut on machine that works just like a printer. Is the plate out of state? Plates in some countries display not only the state, but the city as well.

6. Behavioral Indications of a Possible Threat

Indicators are helpful but must be taken in context. What is abnormal under one set of circumstances may be very normal in another. For example, there are times when it is normal to be afraid. If everybody else is scared and you do not want to stand out, you should pretend to be afraid too, even if you are not.

- **Patting or touching** a spot on the body usually indicates the location of a weapon or contraband. Train yourself not to secure your sidearm to your body when you make a dash for cover from the rain or when you run to make the light for a cross walk. If it rains, just get wet. If you are vain, you might have to redo your hair, but you will be alive to do it. Don’t automatically put your hand on your firearm every time you feel threated either. Deadly force is not an appropriate response to all threats. It telegraphs your intentions, you will

expose your ace in the hole and in some jurisdictions even gesturing to your weapon is considered brandishing, possibly a felony charge.

- **Abnormal eye contact** is often an indicator of aggression or fear. We are adept at reading the human face. It is literally imprinted in our DNA. With a glance of the eye, we can often tell that an individual is a predator, be it a criminal, LEO or soldier.
- **Approaching** people should always be viewed with a degree of suspicion. They may be a diversion/distraction, using a ruse to close the distance or try to approach from a blind spot. Face them and non-verbally or verbally challenge them.
- **Following or pace matching** is an indicator that someone has taken an unhealthy interest in you. It could be a case of mistaken identity, road rage or something more nefarious and is easy enough to confirm.
- **2 or more men**, solitary or in groups, closing range at the same time often precedes an attack.
- **Looking both ways, checking their 6 or "shifty eyes"** is often a threat indicator because most bad guys get nervous too and it is harder than you might think to make sure nobody is watching without drawing attention. Not all of them are skilled in tradecraft.
- **Sweating** can be a sign of undue stress.
- **Being in a hurry** is sometimes an indicator of a threat. I was once selected for a little extra attention by US Customs because I was late for a flight and constantly glancing at my watch. The behavior was less effective. Because of the search, I missed the flight and had to reschedule more flights.
- **Exaggerated movements or "trying too hard"** when trying to perform what should be a routine task is often a sign someone is trying to fake it. Bad acting is not unique to Hollywood, terrorists can be overactors too.

7. Verbally Challenge Potential Threats

Before you draw your weapon, you need to establish intent, ability and opportunity to do death or grievous bodily harm. Ability is the tools to do the job: usually a weapon or disparity of force. Opportunity is whether the suspect could reasonably get away with the crime, such as you are alone in a parking lot at night as opposed to in a crowded party surrounded by a group of your friends.

Ability and opportunity are easy enough to establish. Intent can be harder because criminals usually rely on a degree of stealth to get close enough to intimidate or attack. Once you have established ability and opportunity, the verbal challenge forces the suspect's hand, revealing his intent. Yell, "Stop! Let me see your hands!" as loud as you can, in command voice.

At this point, his choices are, comply by stopping and showing his hands or continue closing, thereby manifesting his intent. You will also make it clear to anyone within ear shot that you are being attacked, not the other way around.

This will be important if you survive the battle for your life on the street, because you'll then likely have to battle in the court room for your freedom. Believe me, that is no fun either and once you have been through that, you will care about the law after that experience if you didn't before.

Don't be afraid to make a scene. Maybe he was going to ask you for a quarter, the time or a ride. Maybe asking you for something was his cover in the event that his attempt to rob you was thwarted.

If you are wrong, you made a scene and maybe made somebody uncomfortable. He can go find a tissue. If you were right, you very well may have saved your life. If he complies and you were successful, you may never know, and that's just fine. That may very well be the case because I can tell you first hand, that this technique is effective.

THE SENSE OF SELF-DEFENSE

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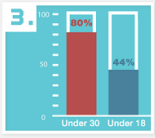
In the threat of an assault, a good self-defense can be a great offense. Unfortunately, in this day and age, women are often still the target of muggings, assaults, and violence. Knowledge and routines, combined with common sense and a few select weapons of defense, can go a long way to guarding against these attacks. Check out this infographic to show you the way to a safe and sound day, every day.

THE FACTS

While these numbers are awful and unnerving, there are multiple methods and tools for women to properly defend themselves.

1. **Every 2 minutes**, someone in the United States is sexually assaulted.

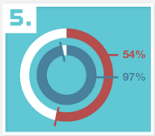
2. **1 out of every 6** American women has been the victim of an attempted or completed rape in her lifetime.

3. 

- 80% of victims are under age 30.
- 44% of victims are under age 18.

3. Roughly **2/3** of sexual assaults are committed someone known to the victim.

4. Victims are **6 times** more likely to suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder.

5. 

- 54% of sexual assaults are not reported to the police.
- 97% of rapists will never spend a day in jail.

SILENT SAVIORS

Self-defense moves and handheld weapons are important, but they're not the only things that can help ensure safety. The following tactics can help you fight off attacks without having to use a weapon or raise a fist.

1. BE AWARE
This is your first line of defense. Awareness of your surroundings and any potential attackers can lead to a successful evasion.

2. LISTEN TO YOUR INTUITION
Gut instinct is often right. If a situation or area feels wrong, don't enter it.

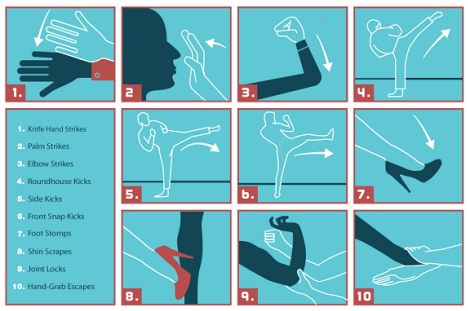
3. DON'T LEAVE
Never agree to go somewhere, even under duress. Yell for help, throw a rock, use blunt object — always stay in the principle scene.

4. KEEP THINGS LOCKED
Criminals tend to approach from a 45-degree angle (blind spot). When parked, or stalled, always lock your doors and keep the windows up. This avoids falling prey to a carjacking and potential assault.

5. USE LIGHT
A simple blast of high-powered, concentrated light can temporarily blind a potential attacker, allowing for your quick escape.

FIGHT TO FLEE

The most prominent option is to learn self-defense from professionals in various defensive arts, such as boxing, kickboxing, jiu-jitsu, and judo. Professionals can teach you the proper way to deliver basic escape-based defense moves.



1. Knife Hand Strikes
2. Palm Strikes
3. Elbow Strikes
4. Roundhouse Kicks
5. Side Kicks
6. Front Snap Kicks
7. Foot Stomps
8. Shin Scrapes
9. Joint Locks
10. Hand-Grab Escapes

HELPFUL HARDWARE

In addition to your knowledge of physical maneuvers, using a tool or weapon can help.

1. STUN GUNS & TASERS
Stun guns have an effective rate of 85%, whereas tasers are 100% effective.

2. MACE & PEPPERSPRAY
A concentrated chemical burst will temporarily blind and incapacitate any potential attacker.

3. MONKEY FISTS
A small, handheld weapon the size of a slightly larger keychain, this simple steel ball and wire is used to stun attackers when swung.

4. NOISE ALARMS
Alert those in the area to an impendingattack with a small, handheld alarm.

5. OPEN ASSIST OR SWISS ARMY KNIFE
Most states allow a person to carry a blade up to 3" on them. An Open Assist or Swiss Army knife can help ward off any attacker.

Although attacks occur on a daily basis, you are never defenseless.
Be creative. Be smart. be strategic. But above all, be active.

SOURCES:
rainn.org | myketech.com | survivalcache.com
powertochange.com | selfdefense-4-women.com

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8. Leverage Optics

Mirrors or glass in buildings can be leveraged to improve your field of vision in a discreet fashion. Ideally, your position should have multiple exits. Equipment-wise, a pair of sunglasses, monocular, pair of mini-binoculars, USB borescope for your smartphone, telescoping inspection mirror, or night vision monocular can also improve your odds of seeing without being seen if properly employed.

9. Cooper's Color Codes

If have received any defense training, you have likely been trained in Cooper's Color Codes. If you haven't heard of them, learn them, because they are mission-critical curriculum. They are series of colors developed by Lt Col John Dean "Jeff" Cooper and represent human psychological state of awareness to threat. I will summarize the system in my own words:

- White – A state of oblivion such as when you are asleep. You are unaware of any threats and therefore unprepared.
- Yellow – A state of relaxed awareness. You should be mentally alert, but relaxed and actively scanning for threats. You can live every waking hour of your life at yellow with no adverse psychological or physiological stress to your organism. You should always be at least at yellow when you are armed.
- Orange – A state of heightened alert. You have identified a potential threat and are preparing a fight or flight response.
- Red – You have tripped the mental trigger in your mind committed to violence of action and initiated a fight or flight response.

Many instructors teach some variation of this system, but I am sticking to the basics here. It is important to note that you can't be at Yellow and just bypass Orange and go straight to Red because arriving at Red is a process, not an event.

Trying to bypass a step results in a mental delay and delays are very deadly in combat. Consider that the vast majority of gun fights are over in 3.5 seconds or less. 3.5 seconds is plenty of time to do what you need to do, once trained, but it does not leave much room for delay.

10. OODA Loop

Observe, Orient, Decide, Act. The OODA Loop devised by USAF fighter pilot John Boyd was developed to teach air combat but has been influential not just in military circles, but also in business, sports, law and other fields. The OODA Loop seems deceptively simple at first glance but, like Cooper's Color Codes, it is a subject worthy of a book, much less a mention in an article. The faster a pilot can cycle this loop, the more effective fighter pilot they will be.

I would point out that the OODA loop end results in actions. The observation, orientation and decision are largely internal and one could master the first three phases of the loop only to fail in the action phase or in the application of the OODA "on the street."

11. Situational Awareness Obstacles

- **Reading and electronics use**, independent of the device or medium you use, focusing on electronics, texting or reading puts you in an "awareness bubble" that contains just you and what you are reading, leaving you vulnerable. However, you can turn them into a tool by "pretending" to be absorbed or to listen to headphones with the music off as you keep an imaginary beat. People may figure you aren't paying attention even though you really are.
- **Complacency**, whether resting on past laurels, underestimating your enemy or simple boredom, it comes in many forms, all equally deadly.

Strategic Situational Awareness

Strategic situational awareness is making sense of or understanding threats or “sensemaking” if you will.

We live in a connected world where most people are so connected that they become information addicts. They will take wild risks to get their fix. Just 150 years ago, waiting years for a letter from a loved one was routine. Many of us now overvalue trivial information and will risk life and limb in emergencies for access to information that is of little practical use or unreliable.

In long duration, large scope catastrophic events, people who understand this need sometimes create their false information, manufacturing news that is nothing more than lies created for profit, power or to further their agenda.

Are you an information addict? While accurate intelligence could make the difference in you getting critical supplies before they are gone or getting out of Dodge before it is too late, there is also a value to not taking any unnecessary risks.

Stay adaptable as the situation unfolds and ask yourself whether you really need information or are just an information junky in search of a fix. When you determine there is a real need for information, be alert to ways to get that information that involve less risk than others.

Collecting Information

You can collect intelligence passively or actively. Passive usually involves less risk and an example would be listening to a radio as opposed to broadcasting or heading in to town to hear the latest rumors, which are likely just that.

Intelligence can be collected with your five senses, through media outlets, using communications gear or through social networking … and I’m not just talking about Facebook here. I mean actually people you know such as friends, family and

colleagues. In a catastrophe, helpful information would be the scope or area affected, the intensity, the duration and any growth or other factors that may come into play.

Analyzing Information

This is the “sensemaking” part. You are trying to assess both the risk and your exposure to that risk. One of the most important aspects to this is understanding what information is relevant and what is not. In my experience, “experts” often get caught up in theory and overstimulated by more information than they can effectively apply.

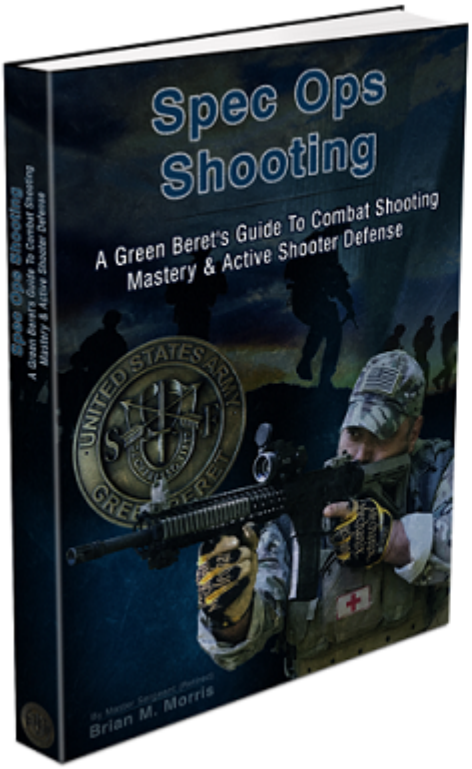
Nassim Nicholas Taleb uses the example in his book, “Antifragile: Things That Gain From Disorder”, of Wall Street economists betting that the war in Iraq would lead to an increase in oil prices, because war in the middle east must be bad for oil prices. While a very “street” trader, who had never eaten Iraqi food and therefore the country did not exist to him, bet against it because he knew that the move was already anticipated and therefore “in the price” of a barrel of oil, turning a few hundred thousand dollars into more than ten million.

Conclusions and Action

Information is analyzed to the end of making a decision or formulating a plan which will result in action. This may happen in weeks or in fractions of a second. Do not get bogged down in the process or overly complicated procedures.

Do formulate the plan with actual execution in mind. The benefit of theory is often greatly overstated by people with expensive tuition to sell or a salary to justify. Once you master the basic mechanics, come back and learn the theory, but if that consists of reading articles or short essays, you need to redraw your education road map and include plenty of dirt or street time, drills, reading books and the best training you can swing.

Learn from the experts the secret of self-defense. Click the banner below to grab your guide!



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This article has been written by ***Cache Valley Prepper*** *for* *Survivopedia*.