

# 7 Signs a Gun Is Broken & Fixing Them in the Field

*When SHTF, you can count on Murphy's law to render your gun useless at the worst possible moment.*

Fortunately, not all problems mean the gun will never fire again. Nor do they mean you will need to locate a gunsmith to fix the gun. Knowing how to assess these 7 common reasons for gun failure and how to resolve them is very important. Studying your weapon and preparing your parts kit and tools now can be a life saver later on.

**BEFORE YOU BEGIN ANY KIND OF TROUBLESHOOTING FOR ANY REASON,  
UNLOAD THE GUN AND MAKE IT SAFE.**

Let's see the first safety steps to take when fixing your gun:

- For semi-auto pistols and rifles drop the magazine clear of the weapon and work the action to clear the gun of any ammo in the chamber.
- In bolt action rifles, open the floor plate of the magazine and remove the live ammo. Then work the action to remove any chambered rounds.
- In semi-auto and pump shotguns, unload the tube magazine with the barrel pointing in a safe direction.
- In pump shotguns this can be done by racking the slide backward and forward until all of the shotgun shells are out of the shotgun.
- In semi-auto shotguns work the bolt backwards and forwards, until all of the shotgun shells are out of the shotgun. Then check to see that the chamber is empty.

# 1. The Gun Will Not Fire

Most common causes are:

- Bad primers – If gun stops firing while shooting, check the spent brass or shot shells for splits or light indentations on the primer. If the primer is bad, the weapon will not fire on the first strike of the firing pin. It may take another try, but remember to wait 10 seconds before trying again. There can be a delayed firing of the gun due to a cool spark from the primer.
- Old or wet powder – To keep this from happening again check all of your ammo to see if it is clean and dry. If not get a better waterproof container for the ammo.
- Gun out of battery (ie. slide not aligned with receiver. See **Gun Bolt Does Not Lock up In the Receiver** chapter below).

# 2. The Gun Bolt Will Not Unlock

Most common causes are:

- Bolt may have jumped the carrier,
- Internal bolt parts may be bent or broken,
- Defective parts,
- Dirty,
- Wrong types of lubricant,
- Over/under lubricated,
- Over heating,
- Spent case may be in the chamber (see the chapter about the failure to eject.)

If you were just firing the gun, wait 1 – 2 minutes and feel the receivers to see if they are hot to the touch. Consult user's manual for specific instructions for your gun model. Disassemble weapon so the bolt and bolt carrier are easy to work on. Spray some good penetrating oil on the bolt and

carrier and let it soak. When the assembly is cool and unfrozen, remove the bolt and bolt carrier and inspect and replace broken, discolored, bent, or cracked parts.

Aside from this, on bolt action rifles, check the back of the bolt to see if it has slipped from its normal operating position. If it has, pull the back portion of the bolt out and return this part back to where it belongs. Then the bolt should open. After repairs thoroughly clean and lubricate the weapon and work the action.

If it these steps do not work, you will need to take the weapon to a gunsmith.

### **3. Gun Bolt Does Not Lock up In the Receiver**

In most cases, the bolt is not correctly seated on bolt carrier. If the bolt does not line up correctly, explosive pressure from the cartridge can blow the bolt back, causing a backfire and severe injuries to the shooter.

According to the type of the gun, the symptoms and fixes are:

- In bolt actions rifles, bolt handle may not go all the way down to locked position. Remove the bolt and inspect it. Check to see if it is correctly assembled. If not, follow user's manual to correctly assemble it and return it to the receiver. Test to make sure it works.
- In pump shotguns, the slide does not go all the way forward and lock. Pull back on front stock to open and inspect the bolt for broken, bent, or over-heated metal. Replace as needed and reassemble. Test for functionality.
- In semi-automatic rifles, ejection port may be open or exposed. Remove the slide, and remove the bolt. Then

inspect the bolt for broken or bent locking lugs, weak spring, or dirt. Clean and re-install the bolt in the slide. Put the slide on the receiver and function check.

- In semi-automatic pistols, slide is slightly back overhanging the frame. Remove slide portion, inspect barrel lug, slide release pin, and front bushings. If any one of these parts are misaligned, gun will go out of battery and will not fire. Realign and replace broken or bent pieces to restore function.
- In revolvers, cylinder does not lock into place in the frame because ejector rod may be bent. Replace ejector rod or cylinder latch.

## **4. You Only Hear a Faint, Metal/Snapping Sounding Click When Pulling the Trigger**

That sound will put terror in the heart of the strongest warrior. It is not the same sound as when the gun is out of ammo. This sound means the firing pin just broke on your weapon.

To fix, remove the bolt from the weapon and remove the firing pin from the bolt. Replace with a new firing pin from your spare parts kit and reassemble the bolt. Put the bolt back in the firearm in its proper place.

If you do not have a spare firing pin, you can make one from a strait nail just a little bigger than the broken firing pin. Use the broken firing pin as a guide to make the new one. When finished check to see if it fits. Heat treat the new firing pin by placing in hot coals until it turns red, then quickly drop the pin in a can of cold water. This will harden the new firing pin.

This is only a temporary fix until you can get a proper firing

pin. If the gun fires, use the weapon only for emergencies until you can get a new firing pin.

## **5. Gun Will Not Feed Ammo**

Most common causes and solutions are:

- Weapon is dirty. Clean and lubricate.
- A bad magazine. Inspect magazine, remove and replace any broken or weak parts. Never discard an old magazine since you may still be able to use some functional parts in the future.
- Feeding ramp in the chamber may need a little bit of polishing to make it free of marks that may deflect the bullet coming up the ramp. Remove marks by rubbing feed ramp with very fine steel wool.
- Ammo may have bent cases or projectiles. Simply discard the bad ammo.

## **6. Gun Will Not Extract Round Out of Chamber**

The major cause of this is a broken extractor. Since each gun model is slightly different, consult the owner's manual for specific removal and replacement instructions. Be sure that each of your weapons has a spare parts kit that includes a new extractor, and appropriate tools.

A broken brass case can also cause a gun to not extract a round out of the chamber. Follow user's manual instructions and use broken case removal tool to solve the problem. You should have at least one case removal tool for every caliber bullet that you own.

## 7. Slam Fire – Gun Fires More than One Shot with Each Pull of the Trigger

This problem is limited to semi-auto weapons only. If the weapon is very dirty the firing pin may be stuck with a portion outside of the bolt. This causes the weapon to fire on the closing of the bolt. Clean thoroughly to resolve.

Another cause of a slam fire is a broken catch sear or hammer sear in the trigger group. Disassemble this group in the receiver and replace all parts in the group even if only one part is broken.

Even though guns are meant to be strong and durable, simple things can cause them to appear broken. If you notice any of these problems, you may be able to fix them in the field, as well as take steps to avoid future problems. As with any other machine, proper cleaning and maintenance will prevent these 7 problems and more serious ones.



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