When I started making blanks some years ago I discovered something right off the bat. There was little or no info anywhere in regards to the subject. I looked everywhere to no avail. If there was something written about blanks I was unable to locate it. Anyway I applied the same methods that I used for designing bullets or other oddball projects I engage in, trial and error. There was plenty of error believe me but that’s how you learn. After some searching I found some blank powder at a gun show but no instructions as to how much to use in a given cartridge. Factory blanks are sometimes available but hard to find. I don’t see blanks listed in any of the national catalogs that list live ammo. Now and then Old Western Scrounger has a few but not in every caliber. Navy Arms sells 5 in 1 blanks but they are plastic and jam in some guns particularly lever actions. There are a couple of companies that produce them but they are sometimes hard to locate. Searching the web may produce results. Occasionally blanks may be offered in publications such as Shotgun News and Sarco sells some blanks.

Almost any gun can be made to fire blanks. Westerns use replica guns that look and function like the originals. Needless to say the antiques are too valuable to use in movies. They frequently get dropped or thrown and with a gun valued at several grand that isn’t a good thing. Semi autos are the hardest to make blanks for. You need to have a blank adapter to cycle the action. It takes a little more work to make it fit and get the desired noise level though it is a doable project. There are some guns that are made to shoot blanks only. Some of them are pot metal junk that I would hesitate to shoot. They have a shield in front of the cylinder that does nothing but create a hazard. You can get a buildup in front of the cylinder that can in the least jam the gun. I have tried a couple and my comment is thanks but no thanks. Personally I prefer the regular guns for my blank shooting. Shooting blanks in your regular gun has another benefit. Any gun handling is a benefit in maintaining proficiency with that firearm.

The first thing was to obtain or make dies. Most companies don’t sell them however blank crimping dies can be bought from C H Tool and Die Company. They come in an assortment of calibers and I imagine they will make a custom size for an extra fee. They are
necessary if you plan on crimping any cases. They run from about $60 to $100 depending on caliber. 5 in 1 dies are the most expensive though they will fit most budgets. In order to do rifle blanks they are absolutely necessary in order to have cases feed. If there is another company out there that makes blank dies they have kept it a secret from me. Hornady however has recently introduced a blank die. I have one but haven’t used it enough to comment on it. Any regular loading press can be used, mine being the RCBS Ammo master single stage press. I use a Rockchucker for smaller blanks as they don’t need as much leverage or stroke length. One of my dies the 30 caliber I shortened to be able to crimp such cases as the 32 short cases. When I do 30-06 blanks I have to back up the insert so I can get the necessary leverage and feel when doing those blanks. Some of my other blank dies are also shortened to make them more versatile.

My first project was 45 Colt blanks. Requirements were that they be loud and not put any holes in a single sheet of newspaper at 5 feet. Also they could not be crimped. After some trials with different materials I ended up with sheet Styrofoam. The sheet was an inch thick and 18 X 48”. To cut wads I used a 50-70 case with the primer pocket drilled out and a nail with a big head to push it out of the case once cut. A chamfering tool keeps the case sharp for good cutting. I modified a bullet-seating die to put the wad down in the case against the powder with an extended seating stem. The ideal load was 8 grains of this powder. It gave a good loud noise and disintegrated the wad as required. This load also does not have a crimped case. I do slightly crimp the case mouth to facilitate feeding. It makes a difference if the case is straight or slightly crimped. The problem with making blanks for revolvers is if they are not strong enough the gun will jam. The primer backs out and doesn’t seat back into the case which will stop the cylinder from turning. The only way to over come that is to make the blank stronger.

Some people don’t like crimped cases because sometimes a piece of brass might come off acting as a projectile. While that is possible if the gun is pointed in a safe direction no one should get hurt. Heavy duty clothing helps but don’t count on it for protection especially at close range. There have been actors that have been seriously injured or killed by the careless use of blanks such as Bruce Lee. Starline makes 45 Colt cases especially for black powder blanks. The flash holes are larger giving better ignition to them. The cases are head stamped for blanks and should not be used for loaded ammo with smokeless powder. The extra ignition can cause a dangerous pressure spike with smokeless powder. Using them for black powder ammo shouldn’t cause any problems which I have done.

Blanks should never be fired at someone at close range. This is especially true at the facial area. Doing so can seriously injure or even kill someone. Blanks produce muzzle blast and expel projectiles mostly unburned powder for a short distance. Stay back at least 10 feet and aim at a body that has heavier clothing on. Better yet aim to the side of them.

Blank powder is very fine and has to be well sealed in the case to avoid leakage. As a note never use blank powder for live ammo it will certainly destroy the gun and maybe part of you. It is simply way too fast to be used as a propellant. The 45 Colt can be loaded with black powder to good effect. If you crimp it sometimes it sticks in the cylinder. To avert that I size case in a 38-40 die load full about 30-32 grains of FFFg black powder will suffice. Ditto for Clean Shot or Pyrodex. Crimping a case in a blank die will shorten its reloading life. You can also fill with black powder and use a Styrofoam wad, which works pretty well. It won’t however destroy the wad like the blank powder load will so keep that in mind. The wad may act as a projectile for a short distance. Also may be light up so watch for fire
hazards in dry areas. In the south western US where I live that is a real concern. Thin cork wads may work for you if you can find them. Gasket material can make a decent wad. You might seal the cork with some varnish or similar material which will help out especially if you carry them around in your pocket. Keep in mind that doing that may create a projectile for a short distance and plan accordingly. Some folks put wax over the powder which can work ok though I would hesitate to pour hot wax in a case full of powder. You can mold the wax and seat much like you would a bullet. The 44-40 and 38-40 can be loaded using the same methods. The bottom line is you can tailor the blanks to your specific needs.

45 auto blanks can be made from 30-06 cases cut to the same length as a loaded 45 round. Just cut down case size as normal and load. You need a 45 crimp die and will have to adjust as needed to feed in gun. If you use blank powder watch out for leakage as it is very fine. If you have leakage problems that persist try some clear nail polish on the opening as that will usually correct that situation. Try Red Dot until you get the noise you want probably 8 to 10 grains. Red Dot and other flake powders have the advantage being not as likely to leak because of their construction. Anther advantage to using them is they are easy to ignite. Like custom ammo loading blanks requires some experimentation.

With 38 special cases I use either 5 X blank powder with a Styrofoam wad or 8 X Red Dot with a crimped case. Crimping a case with blank powder is difficult because of leakage. You could put a slender piece of Styrofoam at the top of the case as you are crimping it. Correctly done that will prevent leakage. Since blank powder is hard to find I looked at flake powders to fill the need. They ignite easily and due to the large flake shapes much less prone to leakage. They do require more powder and have to have a certain amount of resistance in order to work well. The principal is the same as live ammo. The powder has to have a certain amount of push against it to perform properly. When loading 38 cases I fill it as much as possible and give it a good crimp. I get good noise that way. Wads by the way seldom work with regular powder. They just don’t put up enough resistance to burn the powder properly. The effect is the same as loaded ammo. I also size the 38 cases in a 30 Luger die. That adds resistance and prevents the case from sticking in the gun. With black powder I just fill up the case and crimp. Gives lots of noise and smoke. The 38 S & W cases as well as 38 short and long Colt I use FFFFg filled to the top and crimp it. It works well that way. Blanks for 32 revolvers can be done the same way.

Whenever you are shooting blanks it’s a good idea to check the barrel for obstructions. Sometimes a build up can occur creating a hazardous situation. Shooting like that is like shooting any obstruction out of a barrel. Damage to the gun can occur as well as injury to a shooter or bystanders. That’s also true with weapons that have blank adapters.

The 5 in 1 blanks can be made from 445 Super Magnum cases or Starline makes 5 in 1 cases. I only use black powder or Clean Shot when loading these. Size the case, fill up about ¼” from top of case with powder and properly crimp. The 5 in 1 cases from Starline look very much like 445 super magnum cases. The only real difference is the size of the flash hole. I don’t recommend using the Starline cases for smokeless loads. Doing so could be courting disaster as the enlarged flash hole could over ignite the powder. They will fit a 44 magnum 38-40, 44-40, 45 Colt and a 45-70 in most cases. They will cycle through a lever gun with no problems. The 5 in 1’s have been around for quite a while being popular in Hollywood for westerns. It’s really convenient to have a blank that fits all. You can find out more about blanks at www.obsoleteammo.com.
In doing 223 blanks I size and prime case as normal. I use between 7 and 8 grains of Red Dot. That gives it a good loud noise and is consistent. I use a C H crimp die to finish it off. Occasionally the shoulder will buckle a bit so I size it a little so it will feed in all semi-auto 223 weapons. Of course you can adjust the powder charge for noise level. I had a client that has an attachment on his 223 that allows him to launch golf balls about a half mile with strong blanks. I am not sure what he got out of it but evidently he enjoys that activity and it is harmless. I have had others who want to launch dummy grenades which require strong blanks using powder similar to live ammo loads. People like that make the world interesting.

I have done some 7.62 X 53 Russian rounds. With those I pull the military bullets as commercial brass while available isn’t necessary for blanks. I use 15 grains of Unique to obtain a nice loud report. If I notice the shoulder buckle a bit I just resize a bit. They work fine. When you crimp the neck it puts a strain on the shoulder much the same a crimping a bullet. Too much can buckle the shoulder. Sometimes it’s necessary to crimp the necks tightly to prevent leakage. Adjust your die to crimp enough but not too much.

Nine-millimeter blanks can be made from 9 mm magnum cases. Size and prime as normal and load with Red Dot or Bullseye. Get as much as you can in there then crimp with a 38 C H crimp die. Done correctly they seem to feed and make a nice noise. A blank adapter would be needed to function a semi-auto pistol. In theory a 380 can be made from a 9 X 23 case but the base is a tad too big. If you really need 380 blanks then get a case sizing die that sizes the entire body down to a 380 head size. Magma Engineering in Queen Creek AZ makes one and you would have to specify die size. They make it because the 40 auto case has to be sized that way in order to have good reloaded ammo. I made 40 auto blanks out of 10 mm magnum case. Probably 10 grains of Red Dot and crimped should do the trick. The idea with making these blanks is to make the front end shaped as much like a bullet as possible so they will feed from a magazine to the chamber without jamming.

I have not been able to find brass suitable for loading the 30 carbine. The regular cases are too short. When they are crimped they won’t fire as they go too far in the chamber. At a later date I plan on rectifying that situation. The most promising cases are the 222 Remingtons. It is close to the length of a 30 carbine. Probably can swage the body to the same diameter as the carbine case and load as needed. The problem is you would need serious leverage to swage that case. You would also have to set the shoulder. If you want 30 carbine blanks the 223 case also can be used and is cheaper though you would have to trim it. A regular 30 carbine case will work in a revolver such as the Ruger by leaving it straight.

With the regular 30 calibers such as the 30-30, 308 and 30-06 I use cases that were previously sized and were found to be too long for regular ammo. I also use cases that I consider seconds and not fit for regular ammo. I have loaded the 30-30 with 12 to 15 grains of Unique depending how loud I wanted or black powder. Both work fine. The 308 gets 15 grains of Unique while the 30-06 gets 15 to 18 depending on required noise level. They seem to fit and feed in most magazines although occasionally the magazine may need some modifications. They are crimped with a C H die to the point that they won’t leak. Over crimping will buckle the shoulder. If I am making a quantity then the Dillon 550 is called into play. I load them similar to regular ammo though in place of the bullet seating die I put the crimping die. I set it to crimp hard which sometimes buckles the neck a little. I overcome that problem by having a sizing die in the finishing station which returns the shoulder to its correct dimension. That is important as a
slightly buckled shoulder will impair chambering. I have made a lot of 223 and 30-06 blanks that way successfully. I neck some my 30 caliber blanks to 7 mm prior to crimping. It helps with leakage and puts less strain on the shoulder. The smaller caliber snouts don’t hurt feeding either. Here again you have to see what works best for your situation and adjust accordingly.

You can try Red Dot or Green Dot and get similar results. If you need a longer 308 blank try a 7 x 57 case. The long snout will aid in feeding especially in semi auto arms. They can be necked up or down as needed. Like loading live ammo some thought and customizing may have to be put into the blanks needed. In many cases blanks can be more difficult to make then ammo. There are times that cases must be cut down to fit a specific load. You just have to fit the blank to your needs.

The 45-70 cases can be loaded with FFg black powder and crimped to make a nice blank. Also 15 grains of blank powder under a good tight Styrofoam wad also works well. You can crimp it with 20-22 grains of Unique for a smokeless blank. The powder charge can be adjusted for noise level. Blanks shot inside should have a lower noise level to protect every one’s hearing. Outside the noise have more places to go hence dissipating it better. I have loaded the 45-70 with 40 grains of FFg black powder over a Styrofoam wad. The purpose was to produce a line-throwing load. Black powder loads should be shot outside because of the smoke and smell.

Making 8 mm Mauser blanks is simple. They can be made from 30-06 cases with the shoulders pushed back so it will chamber. I find that if I use the 7mm-08 sizing die I can make 8mm, 7.5 French or 7.7 Jap depending on where I set the shoulder. I have a billion 270 Winchester cases which are also fine for blank making. The 6 mm case makes nice 308 blanks. With the 8-I neck down to 7 mm caliber and load 12 to 15 X Unique depending on the noise level wanted. If I was going to make blanks for a 7 X 57 or similar round I would neck it down to 6 mm to facilitate feeding. Frequently you will have small wrinkles on the cases after forming. They are nothing to worry about as they don’t hurt the performance of a blank. They feed in a Mauser fine. Semi or full auto firearms need to have slightly different blanks. They need to be long enough to feed and chamber and strong enough to work the action. Of course most of them have a blank adapter fitted to the barrel. That creates more back pressure thus operating the gun ok. Again the load may have to be customized to operate that particular firearm. A weak recoil spring is sometimes used with the same results. That’s where a custom blank maker comes in handy. Since military 308 and 30-06 cases are cheap and plentiful I use them where ever I can. They are even cut down for 45 auto blanks. I generally use (seconds) which are cases that have been fired a lot or are military cases. Cases with odd or undesirable head stamps can also be used. Even cases with tiny splits at the mouth can be used. For 7.62 X 54 Russian I usually pull military bullets and use them. Once a case is used for blanks it’s no longer fit for reloading typical ammo. So old cases and Bearden primed cases are fine for making blanks while the good stuff is used for live ammo. One of the more unusual requests that I had is a client wanted blanks for an 11 mm French Gras rifle for a parade. Brass for that while obtainable is very expensive thus impractical for blanks. The solution was to use the much more common 8 X 50 Lebel case which is based on the 11mm. It’s shorter but the rim is the same so it worked perfect. With any old military rifle with hard to get cases you can usually figure out how to use something more common and inexpensive. Almost any case can be made into making blanks. At a customers request I pulled bullets from 500/450 cases and loaded them with black powder to be used in a parade. After pulling the bullet I crimped with a regular 45 caliber crimp die. They worked fine.
Twelve gauge shotgun shells can be used well. I load 50 grains of FFFg behind a Styrofoam wad cut with a brass 10 gauge shell. With blank powder I need 35 grains in order to produce a loud noise. The muzzle blast is tremendous and should never be pointed at anyone at ranges under 25 feet or so. They should never be shot indoors unless everyone has hearing protection. The wads should be cut for a tight fit to prevent leakage and produce a good noise. I use a MEC reloader to push the wadding tight against the powder then crimp down the crimp into the shell. The smaller gauges as well as the 10 gauge can be made the same way. Clean Shot also works well giving the smoke without the corrosion. I load Clean Shot by volume using the same amount of space as black powder. Pyrodex also works well in most blanks. If you want to fool with blank powder it can work just have a tight wad. Start at 20 or so grains depending on gauge and adjust to noise level. That gives it a good tight fit. I push the crimp down into the shell. Like live ammo the powder used in blanks has to have some push against it in order to work well and make a loud noise. They feed and work fine.

Another type of blank sometimes encountered is the wood blank. They have a wood projectile that is the same shape as a bullet. The theory is since they are much lighter then bullets they won’t travel far. Also the rifling should help tear them apart lessening their range. While that’s true I would not recommend aiming them at anyone unless at extremely long ranges 50 yards or so. At close range they can easily inflict a serious or fatal wound. They would be good for shooting up in the air or on a range for training purposes. I have seen them in everything from a 6.5 Jap to a 45-70. Some publications advertise them in the 6.5 X 55 Swede. That could possibly be fired in the 7.5 X 54 French rifle as they are the same basic case. If you know someone who has wood working tools then you can make wood blanks to suit your needs. You might luck out and find wood rods in a hardware store that are the right diameter and go from there.

Blanks are used for many things the most obvious being movies. In the western part of the U.S. cowboys put on many shows doing mock gunfights. They are entertaining as well as funny in some cases. Tourists flock to Tombstone Arizona and other western cities to watch the mock gunfights that put them on all the time. They are frequently humorous and fun to watch. Another advantage of blanks is you can fire a gun into the air without worrying about falling bullets. Don’t do it in town unless you want to risk being arrested for discharging a firearm in city limits. Most constabulary doesn’t know the difference between blanks and live ammo. They can be used for some training purposes. I have a good friend who trains his bird dogs with blanks I make for him. That is the usual method of training them. I imagine that they can be used for test firing in some instances where using live ammo isn’t practical. That would include testing a firing pin. All in all blanks can be fun as long as they are used safely. Just remember they are not toys.

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