Generally speaking, hunter education instructors are a believable group. We are serious about firearm safety and hunter’s responsibilities, and we demonstrate our respect for firearms.

Students, especially the younger ones, tend to believe what instructors teach them. The fact that we stand before them with that instructor patch representing a state or provincial wildlife or safety agency makes us credible.

Hunter education instructors take great care to accurately explain the details of calibers, gauges, chokes, and the importance of matching ammunition to firearms. However, sometimes instructors make comments to students that simply are not factual. Maybe those comments are honest errors of fact or maybe they are passed along as information they have heard from other instructors. Regardless, inaccurate information presented to a class as fact will certainly cause a credibility gap for that instructor. If the class does not believe what you state as fact, they are not likely to have much faith in the rest of your instruction. Here are some common but incorrect statements from hunter education classes.

How many times have you heard instructors say “Canadian geese?” That’s inaccurate! The species is correctly named “Canada” geese. Scientific name Branta Canadensis. They should be accurately referred to as Canadas or Canada geese.

How about instructors who refer to deer antlers as horns? We should know better than that. I’m sure the majority of your students do.

There is a world of inaccurate information regarding muzzleloaders. I have heard these comments in a classroom. It takes a one hundred grain charge of powder to kill a deer. Untrue! Muzzleloaders kick harder than other guns. Untrue! Muzzleloaders are not as safe as repeaters. Untrue! Pistolas cannot fire if there is no powder in the pan. Untrue!

It is imperative that any hunter education instructor study to be knowledgeable in the field he is teaching. Here are a couple of my favorite often-heard inaccuracies from instructors.

A can of gunpowder is equal to (insert number here) sticks of dynamite. Where’s the study that shows that? Do you have any sort of proof? Or a can of gunpowder is more dangerous than a can of gasoline. Again, how do you prove that?

That is just a statement of opinion!

Here’s another favorite of mine. A (insert caliber here) rifle is so powerful that it will knock a deer off its feet. According to Newton’s Third Law, for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. Simply put, if a rifle is powerful enough to knock a deer off its feet, the shooter holding the rifle will also be knocked to the ground.

The key to being a credible instructor is to be familiar with what you are teaching. Take the time to study the details. An instructor citing wildlife laws, court cases, or news releases had better make sure to get it right. Never tell a class you think you are quoting the right information. Offer to research the details and let the class know the correct details later. Keep a current copy of your state or province’s game laws with your class materials available for quick reference.

Credibility in the classroom goes beyond just imparting correct knowledge. Your manner of speech, actions, and dress can lend or take away your credibility. If you dress inappropriately, act immature, or use profanity in your speech, you probably will not have the respect of the class. The old saying, act like a professional even if you aren’t one applies here.

There is another place to maintain your credibility. That is with your state or provincial agency when it comes time to file your class reports. When you complete your course make sure to turn in required reports in a timely manner. Your class is not over until the paperwork is done. Keep credibility with your hunter education administrators.

Hunter educators are respected folks in most communities. Let’s keep our course presentations accurate, factual, and professional. Be a credible instructor.

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