

# THE BASIC EQUIPMENT & SKILLS NEEDED FOR ARCHERY

By Valerie Parson

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## Archery: An Overview

Archery is a very fun and demanding sport. But for the love of the game, any enthusiast would and should learn the basics. This newsletter will briefly cover the physical and mental aspects of all the possible skills.

## Different Types of Archery Sports

Enthusiasts of the sport made and remade rules according to how they wanted to use the weapon. To date, there are many different types of the sport. The more popular ones are the following:

- 1 **Bow hunting.** This type of archery involves the use of the bow to hunt game.
- 2 **Clout Archery.** In this form of archery, participants shoot at a flag. Each shot is scored according to the distance of the arrow from the marker. Scoring is based on concentric circles with the flag at the central point.
- 3 **Crossbow Archery.** This is the most different form of archery because the weapon used is horizontal instead of the traditional vertical bow. This creates more weight on the archer but is better for balance.
- 4 **Field Archery.** This is the type of archery wherein the setting is realistic like in bow hunting but the targets are simulated.
- 5 **Flight Archery.** This is probably the simplest type of archery if you do not take physics into the equation. The aim in this type of archery is to cast the arrow to the farthest distance possible.
- 6 **Target Archery.** This is the most common type of archery. The target used is circular with a bull's eye at the center and concentric circles with corresponding points.

## Understanding the Mechanics of Archery

### A. The Rules of the Game

Just like any sport, archery has a set of rules promulgated and governed by different organizations. Since archery has many branches or variations, there are steps to follow for every type:

- **Target Archery.** This form of archery is governed by the International Archery Federation or the Federation Internationale de Tir a l'Arc (FITA). Olympic rules are based on the bylaws set by FITA. Target has both indoor and outdoor categories. For indoor competition, 18 and 25 meters are the distances used. For outdoor competition, distances vary from 30 to 90 meters. The competition is divided into sets called *ends*, each requiring 3 or 6 arrows. After an archer has finished shooting, he or she retrieves his or her arrows. The target consists of a circular board marked with 10 concentric circles. The X ring or the innermost ring has a value of 10 points. And the next inner ring is given 9 points. Following this trend, every ring is scored from 10 to 1 from the innermost to the outermost. The size of the target face differs with each round or each distance. A 40 cm face is used in indoor target archery, and a 122 cm face is used in outdoor games.
- **Field Archery.** Field archery involves shooting in a rough and often varying terrain. There are three common types of rounds: the field, the hunter, and the animal. Two units of 14, making 28 targets all in all, make up a round. Field rounds employ even distances. These many vary up to 80 yards. Short distances are measured in feet. Hunter round targets are placed at uneven distances, with the longest distance at 70 yards. The scoring in both hunter and field rounds are the same, but the hunter rounds use an all-black-faced target with a white bull's eye. Animal rounds are called such because these use targets that are life-size game but are only two-dimensional. The scoring in this round is different from the two previously mentioned. In the animal round, a shooter aims at a first target and if he or she misses, he or she will get another chance at a second round. The vital area (the highest scoring area) is given 20 points if hit during the first round. If the archer misses the first and hits the second 2D animal target, the vital area is only given a score of 18. European Professional Archery competitions use IFAA Field and International rounds.
- **Clout Archery.** The object of this kind of archery is to hit the flag or hit the ground nearest the flag. The scoring is similar to target archery, but the scores range from 5-1 depending on which circle the arrow lands. The flag is used as a marker around which circles are drawn. The innermost ring is given 5 points and is usually colored gold. The next ring is given 4 points and is colored red. Blue is the color of the third ring with a corresponding 3 points. The remaining two rings are black and white with 2 and 1 as respective scores. Distances range up to 180 yard for the men and 140 yards for the lady participants.
- **Flight Archery.** The main aim in this form of archery is to shoot the arrow the farthest distance possible. In most competitions of this type, the archer shoots for every end and then searches for his or her arrows. After each end, the archer marks his farthest arrow and the judges score these.
- **3D Field Archery.** In this type of field archery, the setting is similar

to the ordinary field archery except that the targets used are three-dimensional mockups of animals normally considered as game.

- There are other archery sports like **Archery Biathlon**. The rules of which are governed by the International Biathlon Union. This type of archery is based on cross-country-track-skiing mixed with archery. There are two main positions in this game: the kneeling and the standing position. The size of the target face is 16 centimeters in diameter, and the athlete should shoot from a distance of 18 meters. If an archer misses a target, he or she is required to ski a loop with a distance of 150 meters.

Other forms of archery are Popinjay Bearsault, Wand Shoot, and Roving Marks. These are not very well known and are only commonly practiced in Belgium, France, and England.

## **B. Getting to Know Your Archery Equipment**

1. **Bows.** The re-emergence and diversification of archery as a sport have caused an evolution in the way bows are made. In the recent decades, the science of physics and the careful study of engineering have revolutionized the making of bows. A variety of bows are available to choose from depending on the type of archery an enthusiast wants to practice and learn. The longbows of the past have since evolved into so many forms. These forms came into being because archers who practice different forms of archery prefer different bows. One thing that also matters when looking for the perfect bow is the draw weight. Every archer has his or her own capacity and preference when it comes to this. Certain things must be taken into consideration like the musculature and the build of the archer, the strength of the archer, and of course, the type of sport that the archer wants to get into. Some of the basic forms of the bow are:

- **Longbow.** This is the oldest type of bow and often the simplest to make. It has been known that the distance that an arrow can travel depends on the length of the bow from nock to nock. The most popular type of longbow is the English longbow. This length of this bow is almost as long as the height of the archer. This category of bow is usually made of wood. The cross section is either circular or D-shaped. In the D-shaped longbow, the thickness is advised is 62.5 percent of the width of the cross sectional area. The length of the bow usually allows a draw that is at least until the jaw. The materials commonly used for the longbow are yew, osage orange, and mulberry. Most modern longbows are laminated. This means that two different materials are used and glued together. The first material is usually a good compression wood yew or lemonwood, and the second material is usually a good tension wood like hickory or bamboo.
- **Recurve Bow.** The recurve bow is a development of the

longbow. Since archers usually found it cumbersome to carry a bow almost as long as they are tall, the recurve bow was designed. This bow is typically a longbow with the upper and lower tips curved outward. The direction of the curve is away from the archer. This makes for a bow as just about the same length as the longbow from end to end but easier to wield around because the tips are curved. The common materials used for the recurve bows are carbon, fiberglass, and wood. Some recurve bows include a clicker, a kisser, a plunger button, and weight-bearing rods. What makes a recurve bow similar to the longbow is the apparent similarity in the length of the string. The curved arms allow for a great distance in arrow flight and a more comfortable lugging.

- **Compound Bow.** The compound bow is the most modern type of all the bows. This includes a leverage system with a set of pulleys and cables. The function of the cables and pulleys is to make the drawing of the string easier without compromising the distance of the arrow flight. This bow is usually preferred in competitive archery and is used by both pros and beginners alike. The great thing about the compound bow is that you can load it up with add-ons that depend on your preference and your liking. Modern engineering has paved the way for the development of compound bows. The materials vary with each type and with the use of the bow. Because of the setup of the cables and pulleys, the compound bow is shorter than the longbow and the recurve bow but has as much or even more power. This is the type of bow usually employed by target archers, 3D, and field archers. The add-ons that can be put on this bow also make this popular among bow hunters. But the compound bow extras are regulated depending on the competition and on the rules of the sponsor body.

These are the basic types of bows. Modern scientific study and engineering have helped to develop these three bows. Gone are the days when the Bowman sweated over different types of wood and labored to chisel the perfect bow shape and length. Most bows are made with modern material already. The choice remains with the archer. The bow also helps define what variety of archery one can enter into.

2. **Arrows.** Of course, archery would not be complete without the projectile that is fired from the bow. In as much as the bow is important, the arrows are too. Here are some points one should know about the arrow:

- An arrow should be chosen by its material. It should also fit the type of bow used. Arrows can be made from wood, carbon, and aluminum. Wood is usually preferred by beginners because of its price. This is also used for practice. Competitive archers though use carbon or aluminum arrows because these are more durable and precise. This means they are more suitable for competition purposes. Some arrows are also made of alloys.

- Another point to consider when looking for arrows is the weight of the arrow. The weight of the arrow is usually dependent on the type of material used and should match the draw weight of the bow. The draw weight of the bow is the maximum amount of pressure that the archer puts on the bow when the archer draws the string. The most common draw weight for women is around 100 pounds and around 160 for men. The recommended weight of the bow should be around 6 grains per pound of the draw weight capacity of the archer. Of course, these vary with the body type and musculature of the archer.
  - Apart from the draw weight, another key thing is the length of the arrow. The length of the arrow varies with the draw capacity of the archer. The higher the draw weight capacity of the archer, the longer the arrow needed. Like arrow weight, the arrow length is usually dependent on the physique of the archer.
  - Fletchings. Fletchings are the featherlike things attached at the end of the arrow. These can either be of natural bird feather or plastic. The number of fletchings varies from 2 to 4 feathers per arrow. This also depends on the preference of the archer. The main use of the fletching is to aid the velocity and accuracy of the shot when the arrow is in flight. The main fletching is usually called the cocking fletch and is aligned to the nock when at draw. This makes sure that the arrow does not hit the arm when released. It is common knowledge that a slight change in angle and pressure can change the direction arrow. And this could mean the difference between hitting and missing the target.
3. **Target.** The target usually varies with the type of archery. In 3D archery, for example, the type of target used is (as the name so aptly suggests) a three-dimensional mockup of different game animals. These are usually marked with score areas. The vital areas get higher points than the less vital ones. But the most common type of target is the flat, circular one. This target is usually made of cork, rags, and cardboard that is glued together in layers. Most targets for target archery consist of several concentric circles. Each circle has a corresponding number of scores. Higher points are usually given to the innermost circles and lower points are assigned to the outermost rings. The bull's eye or the center circle is usually given the highest point since the aim in target archery is precision. The same type of target is used in field archery with a different set of corresponding points. Another type of target is the flag in clout archery. In this game, the object or the aim is to shoot the arrow and hit the flag. Concentric circles are drawn around the flagpole, and each circle (drawn on the ground) is given a certain number of points. And like the other forms of archery, the innermost circle is given the highest score.

Targets used for practice can be made at home using materials that are readily available. One can use 2x4 or 4x4 pieces of wood as a tripod and attach circular targets made of cardboard and rags.

The circular markers can be painted different colors for easier reference

when scoring.

## **Archery Skills and Attributes**

### **A. Physical Skills**

#### **1. Hand-eye Coordination**

This is a special skill that can be developed. But it is advised that the draw arm of the archer should be the one on the same side as his or her dominant eye. This means that to maximize one's hand-eye coordination, if one's dominant eye is the left eye, the bow hand should be the right hand and vice versa. There are some people who have natural hand-eye coordination talent, but this can be developed as a skill. In archery, there are different ways to approach and handle a shot, but the most often used is the one that takes advantage of the hand-eye coordination.

#### **2. Body Control**

Being able to control one's body allows one to achieve far greater things than one normally would if one did not exercise this control. This skill is physical as well as mental. Training one's body for any sport requires a combination of physical endurance and mental tenacity. Body control can be learned. This is essential when learning archery. Having body control ensures that one can overcome any obstacle because one is fit, not only physically but mentally to handle any difficulty.

#### **3. Trained Muscles**

For anyone who is wondering, the picture of a good archer would be an Amazonian woman. The etymology of their names is not very certain, but one of the theories is that the word "Amazon" came from the root word "amazos," meaning *without breast*. During the period of Classical Greece, these females were the epitome of being an archer. It was believed that they would cut off or burn their right breast to free themselves of the obstruction that this physical attribute would create. It is no wonder that in *Iliad*, Homer referred to the Amazonian women as "Antianeira" or *those who fight like men*. They were renowned especially for their skill in archery. And as with any good athlete, they trained their bodies for this—they trained their bodies for war and they trained their bodies for game.

Although archery does not require a specific body type, if one is dedicated, it would be best to be physically fit. Of course, this does not demand that one should burn or cut off a breast. It just means that the body should be toned in such a way that there is as little hindrance as possible. Hindrance here is anything that would cause one's aim to be less precise or anything that would threaten to throw off one's aim.

Some of the muscle groups to take particular note of are:

- **The Back Muscles.** These are best toned and attuned to the rigors required in pulling the string and keeping the bow stable. The use of the bow necessitates that the lats or back muscles are strong and steady. The primary motion of drawing the string demands quite a strain on the lats. These have to be worked out (possibly in cross training sessions) to maximize their use. A strong back equates to a solid and level drawing of the string and results to a cleaner and more precise aim.
- **The Upper Arm Muscles and the Core.** The upper arm muscles are basically the deltoids, the triceps, and the biceps. The shoulder muscles or the deltoids work together with most of the other upper arm muscle groups for a more fine-tuned draw. Simply put, the more trained the upper arm muscles are, the more steady the draw. And of course, the steadier the draw, the better the release of the arrow. Thus, the equation ends with a more precise shooting. The core is basically the upper body (including the back). Balance is crucial in archery. The reason for this is that a slight change in position when one is on the stage of releasing the arrow will change the direction of the flight. Another key benefit of training one's core is that one will have a higher level of endurance. For archery competitions, it is necessary that one has the ability to cope with the conditions. This is vital especially in forms of archery like 3D and Archery Biathlon. In both types of archery, the terrain is something to be reckoned with and to be prepared for. This is because aside from the challenge of hitting the target, one has to be in the best condition to manage the environment.
- **The Hands and Finer Motor Skills.** One might question the need for the development of finer motor skills. But if one were to delve into physiology, it would be easier to understand the reason for this. Think about the instant that the arrow is about to be released. The fingers play a very important role here. A slight twitch or an uncontrolled release would result to a very perceptible change in the flight of the arrow. The development of the hands and of the finer motor skills is appreciable in target archery and 3D archery. This is because in these forms of archery, a slight change in angle could mean the difference between hitting the bull's eye and hitting the outer rings.
- **The Legs and the Lower Body.** This is to complete the equation. The logic behind this is that when trying to maintain balance, the upper body or the core cannot stand alone. The legs are especially important in Archery Biathlon and in forms of archery where the terrain is a factor.

#### 4. **Drawing of the Bow**

Drawing the bow looks simple enough. But in reality, the bow can be

drawn in many ways. The dexterity and strength of the fingers are important as these can affect the form of the draw and consequently, the flight of the arrow. A person may choose how he or she draws the string of the bow depending on how he or she is comfortable. Another factor to be considered in drawing is the strength of the lead finger. Knowing what draw grip to use is important in the avoidance of the string pinch. Here are commonly preferred types of draw:

- 1 **The Pinch Draw or the Primary Release.** This is the type of draw grip that comes naturally for beginners since this is the most comfortable. In this draw, the thumb and the side of the forefinger hold the string and the end of the arrow in a pinch-like position (thus, the name). Using this draw results to a very clean release. The pinch draw or the primary release has variations. These arose because the pinch draw requires a lot of strength from the forefinger and the thumb to control the release. One variation is the use of the middle finger and the ring finger to hold the string while the forefinger and the thumb are used to hold the arrow end. Another variation is that the forefinger is used to hold both the string and the arrow with the ring and middle fingers assisting the forefinger in drawing the string. In both variations, the additional fingers used are employed mainly because the weight of the string is too much for the forefinger to work alone. The use of this draw allows the arrow to be placed on either side of the string.
- 2 **The Mediterranean Draw or the Mediterranean Release.** In this draw, the forefinger is placed above the arrow, and the ring and middle finger are placed below the arrow. All three digits grip the string. This is the most popular method of drawing at present. Recurve, traditional, and bare bow shooters prefer this type of grip because it makes for a more relaxed position of the fingers just before the release of the arrow. One variation of this release is the use of only the forefinger and the middle finger. This kind was used by Eskimo archers long ago.
- 3 **The Mongolian Draw or Mongolian Release.** This is one of the more difficult draws to master because in this draw, the thumb holds the string and is supported around its back by the other digits. The actual position of the fingers and the hand looks like a fist with the thumb inside the pocket created when the other digits are closed. This helps to avoid the "string pinch" and foul. The foul draw occurs when the fingers are not synchronized when releasing the arrow. The Mongolian draw was used by Ishi for his short bows.

## 5. Hand Relaxation

In the sport of archery, the hands play a key role. The draw hand should be steady, while the lead hand should be relaxed. Hand relaxation exercises can be learned. Simple stretching of the muscles can aid in this endeavor. The reason why the bow hand should be

relaxed upon release of the arrow is because a too firm grip would cause a torque on the bow. Even the slightest torque can cause a missed shot. A slight twitch in one's grip can cause a change of the angle in the flight of the arrow. Even the smallest change in angle could mean centimeters off the mark. And with target faces as small as 40 centimeters and distances as far as 70 yards, even a 5-degree change in angle could mean the difference between a bull's eye and a miss.

## **6. Steadiness**

The draw hand should be kept steady to maximize one's performance ability. The slightest quiver or shake in the hand could mean a miss. The motion of the hand should be such that the aim would be steady and not erratic. Being able to keep the fingers of the draw hand stable could save the archer from a potential pinch string or a wayward arrow or even a foul draw.

## **B. Mental Skills**

In order for one to achieve what it is he or she wants to achieve, one should exercise mental skills. More often than not, when two individuals of similar abilities are tested, the person with better mental control, focus, discipline, and confidence wins. It goes without saying that if one can see something in his mind, he can hold it in his hands. This applies in archery too. Mental skills are necessary when one is training and aiming to be a good athlete. Some of the greatest athletes in the world did not have the perfect physique right off the bat. They had to train and work hard to get where they currently are. Dedication is something that should be included in the equation when one is aiming for a goal. The crucial mental skills are as follows:

### **1. Control**

This is a mental skill that can be learned. In a study involving kids, it was found that those who learned to control their desires became more successful later in life. This can be applied in archery. Being a good athlete not only means developing the physical self but the mind as well. Being able to endure rigorous and often tiring training is central to being at par or even above the best. Control entails the ability to plod on even when one wants to quit.

### **2. Focus**

This is one very critical thing for success. And this does not only apply to archery and focusing on the target but in every other area in life. Being able to focus one's thoughts, desires, and energy toward a goal is of the essence. An individual who knows how to focus will not lose sight of his aim. And if he does by some outside force, he will be able to regain his focus by using mental control over other physical, emotional and mental factors.

### **3. Discipline**

Discipline can be learned. And discipline should be learned. This is one thing that should be fundamental to an archer. Discipline involves that certain ability to withstand the temptation of quitting. In this sport, one will not always have accurate shots. Often times one would get easily disappointed and quit. What sets the best archers apart from the rest is their discipline—to withstand the disappointing shots, the difficult terrain, and the challenge of the competition.

#### 4. **Confidence**

Confidence is as simple as being able to trust one's self to perform well despite the challenges present. Again, when one is able to see one's self performing well, it is more likely that one will perform well. It is also similar for the negative equation of the formula. When one sees one's self failing, there is a greater chance of one failing. Imagery is one of the things one can use to improve one's confidence. An archer who can picture himself hitting bull's eyes will most likely hit bull's eyes because what the mind thinks, the body almost automatically tries to follow or produce.

### **Archery Shooting Techniques**

Each archer has his or her own set of shooting techniques, but the most important things to take note of are the following:

- A. The bow should be just the right for your arm length and for the strength of your draw. A bow that does not suit your physique would cause a less precise shooting and aiming and quite possibly injuries. When buying a bow, a person should make sure that he or she knows what draw weight he or she is comfortable with. The best draw length that would suit an archer should be measured in a ready position where the length is measured from the tip of the knuckles holding the bow until the hand gripping the string almost touches the string.
- B. When drawing, one should use a comfortable stance and grip to make sure that the potential energy just before the release is maximized. The arrow should be placed on the string, pulling back (drawing) until the arrow snaps into place. The upper part of the projectile should be resting on the guide. The guide is the top part of the hand holding the bow. The type of draw used also affects the release of the arrow and will determine whether the arrow shot is clean or not. The different ways of holding the bow are the Pinch, the Mediterranean, and the Mongolian.
- C. When drawing, the archer should make sure that the arrow is not squeezed tightly as this may affect the release. The arrows developed in the recent years snap on to the string so it is not necessary to hold the arrow.
- D. Wear a finger guard or finger tabs when shooting to avoid injuring the skin and the area around the fingers when drawing and releasing.
- E. One technique to keep the arrow steadily in place is to use the forefinger of

the lead hand as a guide when drawing by putting it lightly above the tip of the arrow. This practice is vital especially in those who are still new to the sport because an arrow that accidentally slips off when still in the process of drawing could be potentially dangerous. But the finger should be eased back into position as the archer is at full draw length and ready to fire.

- F. Just like in any other form of shooting, in archery, safety is important. It is encouraged that when a shooter is drawing an unfamiliar bow, or even his or her own bow, the direction of the bow and arrow should be facing the ground. This will prevent accidental firing and will ensure that any wayward arrow will not fly off and cause any injury.
- G. One of the things that most archers miss is the release. Of course, when shooting, an enthusiast always makes sure that his draw is okay. But what shooters sometimes do not take note of is the hand holding the bow. This lead hand should not hold the bow tightly when the other hand is releasing the arrow. The logic behind this is that a very firm grip on the bow may cause a certain torque on the body of the bow and thus make one's shot less precise. The lead hand of the archer should be relaxed just before release. It is understood that one should hold the bow with a steady and firm grip but the grip should not be so that when the arrow is shot, the lead hand might make an almost imperceptible twist. It should always be remembered that the slightest shift can cause centimeters. And in archery, even the smallest measurements matter.

## Getting Help with Archery Accessories

The best bow and the best arrows can only get one so far. It should be kept in mind that practice makes perfect. The best performance enhancer is to always repeat and repeat something until one gets it right. But that development is within the scope of human control. That is, practicing is within one's capacity to do. Getting the right accessories is another thing that will help one's performance. Here are some of the extras that can be added to enhance performance:

- 1 **Sight.** This can be added to the bow to help mark a predicted point of impact. The archer should make sure that they draw the bow with their hand on the same side as the dominant eye.
- 2 **Release Aids.** These are mechanisms attached to the string to hold it steady before release. These also determine the full draw length. This can also come in the form of a trigger that allows a steady aim.
- 3 **Bracer.** This is an arm guard worn on the bow hand to protect the arm and to prevent the clothing the archer is wearing from catching the string.
- 4 **Finger Tab or Ring.** This is used to protect the lead finger used when drawing the string. Apart from the protection it provides, it also aids in the drawing of the bow. These come in different shapes and kinds as there are different ways to draw the string. The most common are the leather finger tabs. There are also thumb rings fashioned for the same purpose. One may choose any of these for one's own convenience at draw.
- 5 **Bowstring.** The bowstring is important in archery. This may give the archer his best shots ever or leave him at his worst. The bowstring should

be strong enough to withstand the maximum draw plus more, but it should be supple enough to last long.

## **Summary**

Being able to aim and shoot with precision are the products of hours of practice and mental exercise. Every athlete should know how to handle his or her equipment to be able to maximize their use. In the sport of archery, the number of choices for the bow alone can leave one scratching his head. It is important to know what type of archery one wants to learn and be good at. It is also vital for one to know one's physical strengths and attributes to be able to determine certain particulars like draw weight and draw length. Another factor to be taken into consideration is the handedness that will match one's dominant eye. And of course, there should be physical training to ensure that the body is capable of executing skills well.

Also as important as the physical aspect of the sport is the mental aspect. Again, the most important mental skills are control, focus, discipline and confidence. Physical training can only get one so far. This should be coupled with mental training and discipline.

Archery can be a way of life. And it can have the most positive effects on one's well being. Plus, aside from it being a challenging sport, it is also fun. The only things you should arm yourself with are your bow and arrows and your practice and mental control.

## **Additional Resources:**

To get the [latest archery news](#) or read product reviews of the archery bows on the market today for the beginner, intermediate or expert archer, visit my website <http://www.archerybowsforsale.com>. While you're there, check out my [online archery store](#) for all of your archery equipment and accessories.