

Longbow Coaching Ideas

By Hugh McBrien

- Encourage the use of the lightest bow which will reach the distances required – if in doubt, err on the side of caution, the novice longbowman will start at short distances, and can always buy a heavier bow when they are ready to go further.
- **KISS! Keep It Simple, Stupid!** But remember, the simplicity of the longbow is deceptive. Faults that can be easily tuned out of a recurve or compound shooter's form can be re-established in spades if the archer takes up longbow. Advise novice longbow archers to return to basics, for example, Roger Ascham's Five Points of Fair Shooting: standing, nocking, drawing, holding, and loosing.

Standing (Stance) – tall and four-square, but remember the bow-hand wrist is lower because of the simple bow-grip, and therefore that the balance point of the bow should press against the pad of muscle at the base of the thumb.

Nocking – usually the nocking point will be about ¼” above the right angle on the string; if it's too low the lowest fletching may score the bow-hand forefinger. Make sure the bow is held at the same point each shot.

Drawing – too slow a draw with a longbow will risk losing valuable yards of cast to hysteresis, too fast and control is lost. The ideal should be a strong but reasonably fast draw. With lighter bows a 'T' draw works well, but heavier bows may require a 'V' draw to make proper use of the back muscles in a draw that must start from a lower bracing height than is usual with modern bows.

Holding – any appreciable period holding at full draw exacerbates hysteresis in the bow-wood and further reduces cast. Additionally, the longer a longbow is held at full draw, the more likely it is to break.

Loosing – possibly the most important factor in good shot from a longbow is the loose; a smooth, dynamic release is essential for consistent results, and any “plucking” or “throwing the hand open” will result in a well-wide shaft.

- Unless the archer is intending to shoot field, the best results will usually be achieved if they are encouraged to use a mark on the bow to aim. Provided arrow flight is satisfactory, you do not have to aim at the gold, in fact at long distance this may be impossible – follow Horace Ford's advice “Aim should be concentrated on a point which will result in the centre of the target being struck, and this point of aim should be looked at, not the target.”
- Don't allow your charges to expect great things quickly; the longbow is very unforgiving, to hit at all is a success, high scores will follow in due course.
- Encourage experimentation, not with the bow, as the bow-maker should have optimised its performance for the client, but with the arrows used with it. It's fun to make different designs of arrows for different purposes, and they can improve the archers' scores.

Longbow tips and warnings

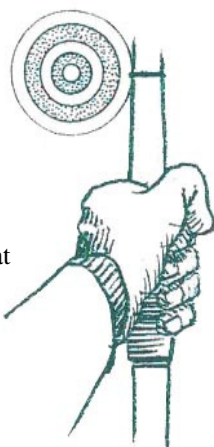
- Longbows are best stored lying horizontal, or failing that, hung from a ribbon or cord tied to the top nock.
- Regularly check the “Bowyer’s Knot” at the bottom nock of a bow with a single loop string, as that’s where it is most likely to fail.
- Regularly check the belly of the bow for “chrysalis” (compression failures), and the back for “lifts” (tension failures). Seek advice immediately.
- Exercise the bow as well as the archer before starting to shoot.
- If the archer looks to be in danger of drawing inside the bow, for example when trying to reach those last few yards at clout; suggest he may wish to fit a belly-wedge to the bow for safety.
- Keep the bow well-weatherproofed; a non-silicon beeswax polish is best, even for varnished bows. Rub the bow occasionally with a soft waxed cloth, especially on cold, damp days.
- Keep the nocks dry; if left wet, they will de-laminate and decay.
- Transport longbows in padded, breathable fabric bags.
- Don’t store a longbow near a heat source, or in a dry atmosphere, or in a car on a hot, sunny day.
- Don’t keep the bow strung after the Round is over; but don’t unbraced it between ends.
- Don’t dry loose, string walk, or hold for any appreciable length of time at full draw; these will all damage the bow in one way or another.
- Don’t allow the bow to be drawn beyond its tillered draw-length; for preference don’t let it be drawn by anyone other than the archer.
- Don’t use arrows of the wrong spine; these will slap against the bow and may damage it.

Aiming with Marks on the Bow

Complicated bow-sights are not allowed on longbows, but you can use a mark on the bow, such as a simple rubber band, to help you judge how high to hold your bow-hand for each shot.

For most right-handed people, it is best to line the left edge of the bow a little to the right of where you want your arrows to land – at medium distances it's often best to aim at or near the right-hand side of the target, with your mark on the bow about gold-high.

What you see should be a little like the first drawing to the right, although the bow-string and the arrow have been left out for clarity.



If you experiment with the spine of your arrows, you may be able to aim closer to the centre of the target, or even at the gold, but this might not work at all distances, especially the shorter ones.

Some people prefer to see more of the target anyway, so having a point of aim somewhere between the gold and the edge of the target is normal, and it allows you to adjust for a side-wind without having to “aim-off” the edge of the boss.

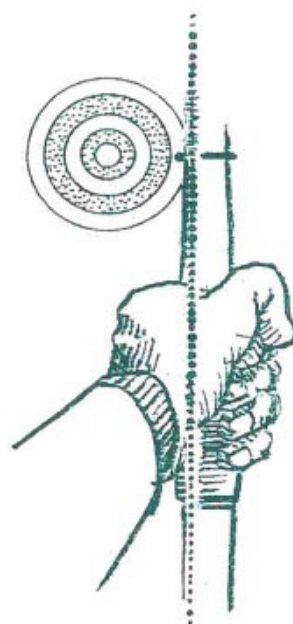


String Alignment

When you use a mark on the bow, you may notice that your arrows land at the same height more consistently, but that they still seem to spread out sideways. This can persist even when you're fairly sure you hold the bow in your hand the same way each shot, and that you pull the string back to the same reference point each time too.

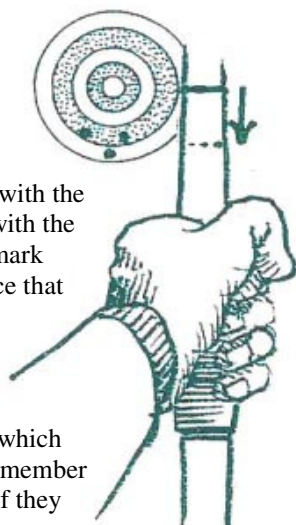
That's the time to think about what's called “string alignment” as you pull the string. Try to keep the string aligned with the left-hand edge of the bow as you look towards the target while drawing up to shoot. If your bow-hand position is right, you shouldn't see any sideways movement or wobble in your wrist as you draw the string back, and if you try to keep the fuzzy, out-of-focus string in your line of sight for as long as possible, you should ensure a consistent left/right line for each arrow.

Don't get fixated on watching the string, though; if it looks all right by the time you're about $\frac{3}{4}$ of the way to full draw, it'll probably be fine for the rest of the way, so concentrate on something else – like a good clean loose for example!”



Adjusting the mark

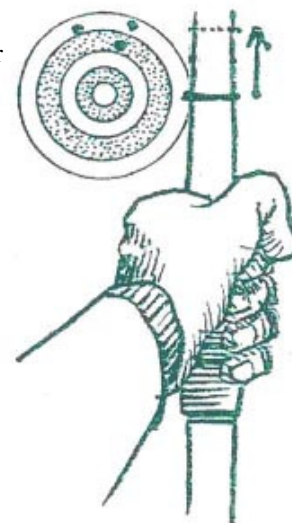
If you find your arrows are hitting the target low, extend your bow-arm full length towards the target with the mark on your bow level with the gold and then adjust the mark downwards by the distance that would take it level with where your arrows actually landed.



If you're confused about which way to move the mark, remember to “follow the arrows” – if they go low, lower your mark.

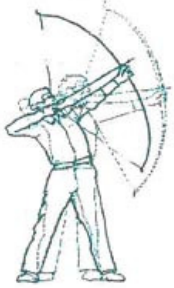
If the arrows go high, raise your mark. Use the same “bow at arm's length” method to judge how high to move the mark.

Resist the temptation to adjust the mark after every miss – there are other reasons why arrows can go a little wayward! Wait until you're sure your arrows are grouping in a fairly consistent way, then adjust the mark. If you do, you may miss with a few more arrows at the start of a round, but you'll hit with more later!



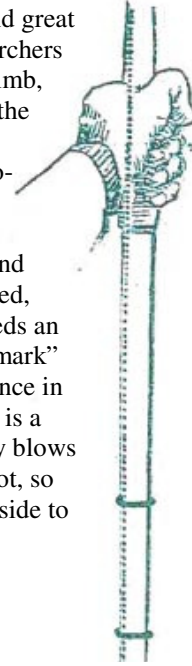
Clout Shooting

Although clout shooting looks very different from target archery, the principles and the mechanics of the shot are exactly the same. The archer's stance is slightly different, with the feet set further apart, and it's necessary to aim high in the air, but above the waist the relative positions for arms, shoulders and head should be just as they are when shooting at closer-range targets. This is done by "Unit



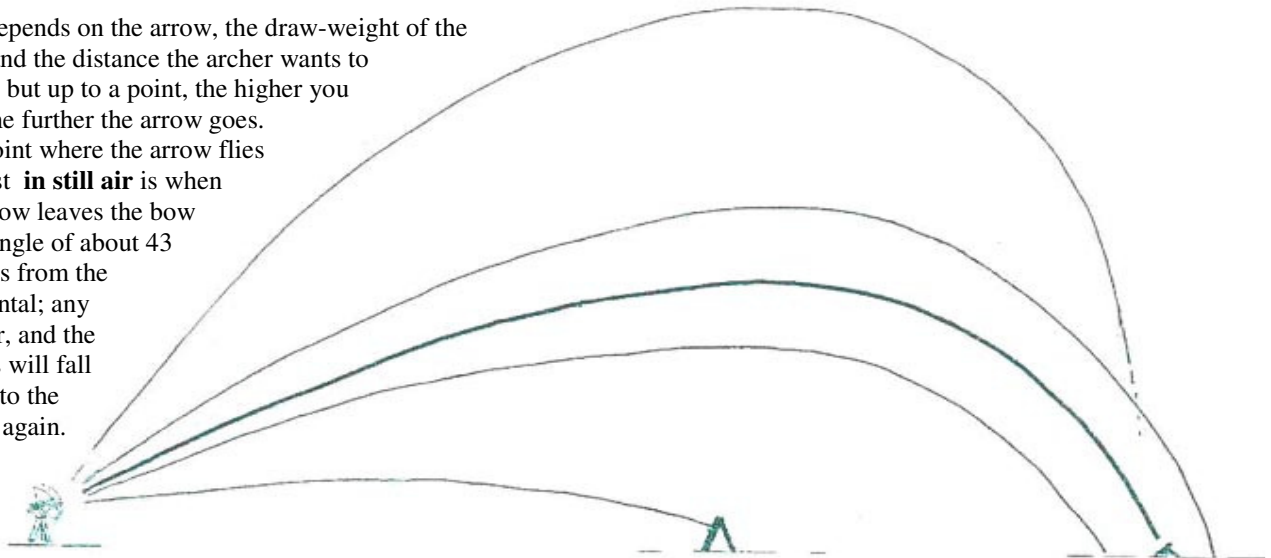
Aiming", where the whole of the upper body moves as a single unit. Usually the archer tilts backwards at the waist to bring the bow-arm up at the right angle of elevation to let the arrow reach the right distance, but some people prefer to bend their rear leg rather than tilt at the waist.

It is possible to aim at clout without using a mark on the bow, but it requires loads of practice, a lot of muscle control, and great awareness of your posture. Most archers choose to use marks on the lower limb, and usually have two, as shown in the illustration on the right. This is because longbow archers shoot two-way, and as the arrows are in the air much longer than when shooting at target, any headwind and tailwind effects are more pronounced, meaning that the archer usually needs an "upwind mark" and a "downwind mark" for shooting arrows the same distance in two opposite directions when there is a breeze. In addition, the wind rarely blows directly up and down the line of shot, so it's usual to have to aim off to the side to deal with crosswinds as well.



How high to aim

This depends on the arrow, the draw-weight of the bow, and the distance the archer wants to shoot, but up to a point, the higher you aim, the further the arrow goes. The point where the arrow flies furthest **in still air** is when the arrow leaves the bow at an angle of about 43 degrees from the horizontal; any steeper, and the arrows will fall closer to the archer again.



Shooting into a headwind

It's usually better to keep the arrows a bit lower, and to concentrate on a good, quick, clean loose. The extra power from that will give the arrow the best chance of reaching the target; if you elevate high into the air, the arrow will be up in the wind longer, and will get pushed backwards for longer, losing any benefit you might gain from the increased elevation. Look out for arrows landing at very steep angles (more than 60 degrees from the horizontal); they probably would have gone further if they'd been shot at a shallower angle.

Adjusting the marks on the bow

At clout this is not as easy as at target; it's harder to judge how much to move them. Ultimately, it's a matter of trial and error, and will depend on the bow, the arrow, and the archer, but for bows of average draw-weights the archer should move the mark about an inch down the limb for every four or five yards on average that the arrows are short of the target, and about an inch up the limb towards the handle for every four or five yards they are beyond the target. Small adjustments make little difference, concentrate on the shooting consistently, then **be bold**.