

# AN ILLUSTRATED GUIDE TO FIRING A BOW



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This article describes the western european style of archery. Other different styles exist; for example Arabian, Mongolian and Japanese archery. I won't attempt to cover those here.

When shooting with other people, always obey the commands of the range-marshall with respect to when to start and stop shooting; they will be watching for people or animals that might wander onto the range. People have been know to display remarkably little sense in this regard. Speak up if you're the first to spot a pedestrian. Stand in a line, neither in front of or behind the other archers. Stop when told to stop, even if you still have arrows, because the other archers will probably start walking towards the target at this point!





Grasp the string with the fingertips of the first two or three fingers on your string-hand. Pinch the arrow between the first and second fingers. Do not use your thumb!

If shooting alone, you must take responsibility for the range yourself, so keep a sharp eye out for pedestrians.

Examine your bow for cracks (or other obvious faults) before you begin. A cracked bow can shatter when drawn. Never fire your bow without an arrow on the string, because all the force will be re-absorbed by the bow, causing cracks to form over time.

Okay, assuming you've got this all sorted, you're ready to begin. Adopt a relaxed stance (but don't slouch). Stand side-on to the target, both your feet and shoulders should point towards it. If an arrow were layed across your sholders or your heels it should point at the target, or slightly to the side.

Lie the bow flat, and nock the arrow across the top. The arrow should be perpendicular (at right angles) to the string. Most arrows have three flights (feathers) in a "Y" pattern; the stem of the "Y" should point outwards (upwards) away from the bow. Usually, one of the flights (the cockfeather) is a different colour, to indicate that it points away from the bow.





Keeping your bow-arm (not the one holding the string) straight, raise the bow while pulling back on the string. Don't grip the bow too tightly, as this makes your arm shake when you release the string.

Raise your elbow as you pull back on the string. This allows you to pull with your shoulders rather than your elbow.

You might find this hard the first time. Don't worry, the muscles will strengthen with exercise; even a small adult should be able to draw a bow rated 30-40 pounds at 28 inches with practice. A bow rated 20-25 pounds at 28 inches is good for beginners.

Draw the arrow to your face. There are various points on the face which can be drawn to; e.g the mouth, the base of the ear. So long as you are consistent, you can draw it where you wish.

You may find at first that arrow falls off the side of the bow as you raise and draw it. This is probably because you're curling your fingers for better grip on the string as you pull. There are a couple of things you might do about this:



- Try and take a firmer grip on the string to begin with. This will make your release less smooth; don't grip past the first

- joint of your fingers.
- Raise the first finger of the bow-hand, to hold the arrow in place. Remember to drop that finger before shooting (unless you want to get a nasty paper-cut).
  - Keep the bow slightly tilted when drawn, so that gravity holds the arrow to the side of the bow.



One of the most common errors for beginners is for them to dip their drawing-elbow. Avoid this, keep your elbow up, both when drawing, and when fully drawn.

*It's been noted that this archer (above) has his elbow too high. A survey of photo's on the internet indicates that the elbow is generally held between lower ear and shoulder height.*

The other common error is to not stand side-on

<<< When the arrow is drawn, imagine an arrow drawn to your eyes, lying parallel to the real arrow. Keeping the arrows parallel, aim the imaginary arrow!

When aiming, move the bow arm, not the string hand, as if you were pointing at the target.

You're now ready to release the arrow. The first time you will probably miss. Don't be disappointed, this will come with practice. Concentrate at first on holding and drawing the bow correctly, until you're comfortable with it.

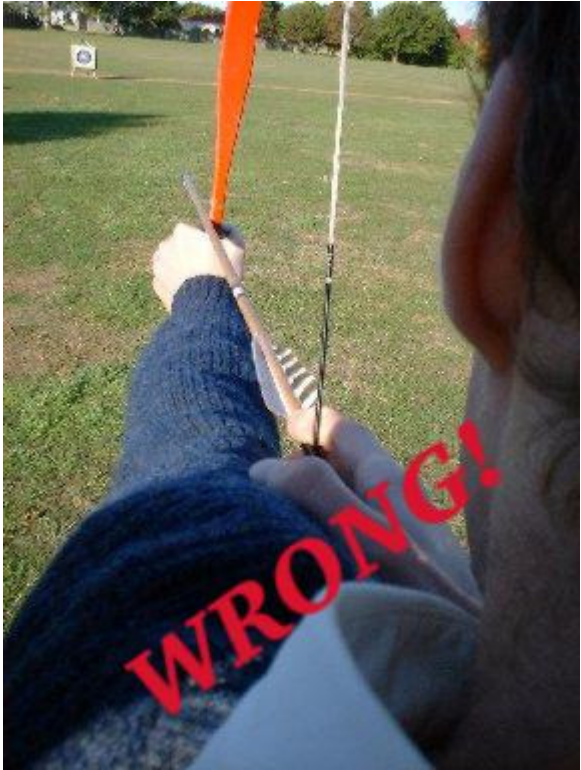
to the target properly. Think about whether you're doing one or both of these things; if you are, correct it! >>>



If you find the string slaps your forearm when you release it, you may find it helpful to wear an arm-guard like the one shown. However, this may be occurring because of a problem in your technique. The arrow should be drawn to the outside of your face, not up the inside of your bow-arm; making a triangle between your head and shoulder, bow-arm and the arrow. That way the string shouldn't strike your arm on the way through.



Notice that the archer in the picture (below) has lowered his elbow so the photo can be taken over his shoulder. Keep your elbow up!



Finally, you may find that the string rubs your fingers, and that if you shoot for too long it causes blistering. Either you can put up with this until you develop callouses on your fingertips, you can shoot for short periods of time, or you can wear a finger-guard. A simple type of finger-guard is shown below:



Some people find however, that finger guards interfere with their release.