

Practicing for Improvement

The motivation levels of archers vary greatly. It is up to archers to motivate themselves. Practicing to improve your archery skill should be fun. To make it more challenging and fun, try being creative, and vary your practice routine.

When archers set goals to work on when they are practicing, they are more focused, motivated, and satisfied with how they've spent their time. All these things further increase motivation. Just "flinging arrows" is not only a waste of the shooter's time, but develops very poor physical and mental habits.

Discipline and Mental Toughness. Discipline and mental toughness are best learned when practice is a challenge. Most archers practice in their backyard, at the range, or out in the woods. They usually shoot alone. Most archers are also "fair weather shooters" which means they only like to shoot when it is not raining, too cold or hot, or windy. Why do so many archers shoot under these conditions? Most will say something like: *"I'm working on my form."* *"I'm trying to get my scores up."* *"I'm building my confidence."* *"I don't have access to any other place."*

It sounds good, but here's the problem with this type of practice environment: for those who plan to compete, this type of environment does not prepare you to deal effectively with the pressures and the distractions present at competitions. Remember, you are practicing to shoot well in competition, not practicing to shoot well in practice. For those who don't plan to compete, there is nothing wrong with being a fair weather archer. Following are some ideas to make your practice environment one which will best prepare you, mentally and physically, for competition:

- Shoot in the rain!
- Shoot when it's "too hot!"
- Shoot when it's "too cold!"
- Shoot in the wind — wind from the left, the right, behind, head on, swirling, gusty, and intermittent!
- Shoot alone only when there is an urgent need to focus on skill and technique.
- Use a light or timer for shooting ends and elimination rounds.
- Use a whistle to signal the beginning of an End.
- Overly focus on score — have someone call out your scores.
- When practicing head-to-head competition, have the two archers shoot alternately, as well as simultaneously.
- Practice shooting with enthusiasm when you really don't want to shoot at all. "Fake it" if you must.
- No whining. Ever.
- No blaming. Ever.
- Create distractions. Have everyone in the group stand too close together on the line. Whisper distracting things to an archer at full draw. Have archers stand on uneven surfaces. Shine a bright light towards their face or throw a glare on the target.