

Various methods of Aiming the Traditional Bow

With all the recent discussions about the different methods of aiming a trad bow I took the time to take a few pics and add visual references to help explain how each method is done. Hopefully they will make understanding the various methods a little bit simpler.

Instinctive:

The instinctive shooter focuses on the target and nothing else. Visually, all that is seen is the desired target. Logically we know that the peripheral vision picks up external cues, however, the mind for all intents and purposes does not see them. Without getting into a variety of definitions the conscious mind relegates these things to the subconscious and adjusting for windage and elevation are done without any direction from the conscious mind. That is essentially the main difference between instinctive shooting and any reference aiming method. A reference shooter will be able to tell you, at some level, where the aiming reference they use was held. An instinctive shooter will not.

Getting into the reference methods...

All these methods are based upon learning the point on distance of the bow setup. The point on distance is the point where the shooters line of sight and the trajectory of the arrow meet. This will vary from shooter to shooter. Things like arrow speed, arrow length, anchor point, hold on the string (split finger or three under) will all affect the point on distance. This isn't an all inclusive list of factors. Many reference shooters will tailor the point on distance to the style of shooting done. Many short distance shooters like hunters, 3D and indoor archers will setup for a closer point on. Shooters who enjoy shooting long distance generally set up with a longer point on distance to minimize hold over on far targets.

Split Vision:

This method is a step up from instinctive shooting in terms of consciously referencing an aiming point. For many shooters this it is based more on an acquired sight picture. There may not be any hard and fast gaps or references but they are aware of the arrow, riser, etc. These things are generally seen in the peripheral vision and things are lined up until the picture looks correct.

Various Gap methods...

Gap at target: This method involves the shooter knowing the amount of trajectory the arrow has at various points until the point on distance. They will generally pick a spot above or below the target that coincides with the amount of trajectory they have to compensate for and place the arrow on that spot. For example, say a shooter needs to hold 12" below the target at 20 yards. They visualize that spot and place the arrow at what they perceive to be 12" below the target. The focus remains on the intended target but they are maintaining that gap in their peripheral vision. This method is very similar to pick a point.

Pick a Point: The setup the shot is virtually the same as gapping at the target. The main difference is where the focus lies. If a gap shooter maintains 90% focus on the target and 10% on the gap the opposite would be said of a pick a point shooter. 90% of the focus would be on

holding on the pre-determined spot with 10% the actual target. In essence, the shooter is using the point to try hitting a certain spot but the trajectory carries it to the spot above or below.

Short Gap (or Gap at Bow): This method is a little different from the gap at target method. It involves the shooter visualizing the target as being a spot that is directly in front of the arrow. Almost like a painting and the arrow is the brush. The point on distance is known. Above or below that the shooter would see the arrow (as a brush for my analogy) moving in very small amounts to compensate for trajectory. The archer moves the arrow in fractions of an inch at the bow. A picture is easier to explain but it involves seeing the target as a two-dimensional object. This can be difficult for some people because the brain sees in 3D and you have to see it as a picture and see the actual amount the arrow moves directly at the bow. This can be hard because while the arrow may only move a fraction of an inch at the bow the tip in relation to the target may move several inches or feet.

Gapping with the Shaft: This one's fairly self explanatory. The shooter utilizes the shaft as a measuring device for how much to hold over/under. Through practice a shooter will know how many shaft diameters above or below they need to hold. The advantage to this method is it breaks down the adjustments into easy to see units and do not require as much visualization. The downside is as distances grow the shaft becomes larger in relation to the target and makes fine adjustment a little harder. At 20 yards the tip may only cover a portion of the target. At 60 yards the tip may cover the entire bail and one shaft diameter may move the visual reference several feet.

Gap at Riser: This method utilizes various points on the riser as a rudimentary sighting reference. These references may be a side plate, a plunger, the arm of a rest, a lamination on the belly of the riser, the shelf of the bow or any point the shooter wants to use. A shooter estimates the yardage and at full draw will line up one of these references with the target. If the target is the correct distance and the correct reference is used the arrow will impact in the center of the intended target. This method may not be quite as precise as gapping at the target, short gapping or picking a point but it gives the shooter a concrete visual reference. You don't have to visualize arcs or trajectory, you simply line up the reference point and execute the shot.

Summary

Now, many of these methods may be used in conjunction with another. Perhaps you have a long point on distance. You may gap off the riser at shorter distances because the gaps at target are huge and you can't visualize a short gap. As the targets get further out you may transition to a short gap because you can see the difference between 1/4" and 1/2" or you gap at target. At point on you simply utilize the point directly on the bullseye. And once past point on you may transition to pick a point. You know how far the arrow drops past point on so you visualize a spot above the target the appropriate amount and aim at that, trusting the arrow will drop into the target.

These methods blur together. While one method will work for one shooter another may not be able to visualize the correct hold. This picture illustrates the actual hold remains the same but a shooter may utilize any of the above references to break down the aiming method into one the mind can use simply and effectively. That, in essence, is all these methods are. They are a means of compensating for the trajectory arrow and allowing the shooter to control the process. Some shooters will excel with the instinctive method because they aren't good at concentrating on a reference and the target. People like this are better off allowing the subconscious mind to take care of the aiming and allowing the conscious to run the shot. Yet, for all the people that are good at instinctive there are just as many people who feel out of control without some type of referencing system. Without something to focus on, they never develop confidence and never acquire the accuracy they desire. Shooters like this will do well to experiment with various aiming methods until they find one which suits there style.