

"FINISH THE SHOT!" by Rick Stonebraker

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(Extend past the clicker)

by Rick Stonebraker

Imagine yourself standing still, concentrating on the ten in front of you. Your grip is correct, your holding arm is firm and you go over the release process in your mind. When ready, you execute your moves: One, two, three, four steps and you release the bowling ball down the alley. Your release hand forms a slow arc towards the ceiling and the ball rolls down the alley to the TEN - hopefully a strike. Wrong subject? Maybe! But the procedure is the same: you do not stop the hand immediately after releasing the ball, it has a follow-through and if it is smooth and consistent, the ball should roll where you want it to.

The same applies to releasing the arrow. What happens after a shot can directly involve what happens during a shot. When does the shot end? Certainly not when the clicker goes off or when you release the arrow, regardless of whether you use fingers or a release. If your whole world revolves around the clicker or the release, then you tend to program yourself to this critical point. Think beyond that point and you will have fewer problems.

The clicker was originally designed as a draw-check indicator. Its fundamental purpose was to ensure that the archer drew the bow the same length every time. Drawing less than intended will give less poundage which will result in low arrows. It may also change your line of sight which could make the arrow go left or right, depending on the situation. On the other side, drawing more than intended would cause more poundage which will cause the arrows to go high and right/left due to inconsistent string alignment.

Through the years, the function of the clicker has evolved from a draw-check indicator to a timing device. The draw-check merely let the archer know when they drew the arrow to the full length. They then held that draw, aimed at the target and released the arrow. As a timing device, we tend to draw, aim, then when the clicker goes off, release the arrow. We have moved from mentally releasing the arrow to letting a tiny piece of metal dictate when to let go. Which is all well and good but we have to go beyond that point.

As mentioned before, archers tend to use this "clicking" as the trigger mechanism to release the arrow and it is possible this is the "critical point." 'When the clicker goes off, release the arrow and that is the end of the shot.' Archers get programmed on this aspect and this needs to be changed. If the shot is extended past the "clicker" then the critical point is minimized to the point that there is no critical point. The shot then turns into a nice smooth sequence of events with no relative beginning or ending.

A proper follow-through can cure any of the three big problems when shooting: dropping the bow arm, peeking, an explosive release, or a combination of the three.

Dropping Bow Arm. Many archers tend to drop their bow arm after release. Whether the bow is too heavy (mass weight) or they just don't hold it up, the bow drops like a stone. Obviously, a dropped bow arm leads to low arrows

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and is a valid reason to work on a good follow-through.

Peeking. One of the most common causes of left/right arrows. The archer's being in a hurry to 'watch' the arrow in flight. Instead of keeping the head straight, archers will look away from the string to see what is happening. This is an inconsistency that a correct follow-through can cure.

Explosive release. When an archer shoots so violently that the release hand snaps back suddenly and the bow arm flies in a wild arc, they have little chance of a smooth follow-through. They are like a tightly wound spring or rubber band. There is no smooth transition from aiming to the end of the shot. It just explodes and it is over. There are several archers who shoot quite well with this method so I won't say that it can't work. But for most archers, finishing the shot smoothly works best.

When is the shot finished? I try to envision that point at which the arrow reaches the target. When I release the arrow, I keep looking at the target (without peeking) until the arrow reaches its goal. I also try to keep my sight on the target after I shoot the arrow, even if it is only for a split second. When I extend my shot to the target, then I am less likely to place all the value on the clicker or release.

Where is your sight after you release? I would be willing to wager that very few people know what they are aiming at AFTER the release. To determine what you see after a shot, aim at a target and when the clicker goes off, do not release the arrow but check to see if you are still aiming where you intended to. You may be surprised to see that you drifted far away from the intended point of aim.

Aiming exercise. An exercise to help in aiming after the shot. You may use any distance you choose but start up close, say 20 yards at the appropriate target face. Do all the same things you do when shooting but when the clicker goes off, do not release the arrow. Instead, look to see if the sight is still in the center of the target. If it has moved, that means there is movement exactly at the point of release. What happens directly after a shot has a bearing at what happens during a shot. Practice shooting without releasing the arrow. When you are able to aim at the center AFTER a shot, you will be much better at aiming DURING the shot.

Drifting If you drift while shooting, which direction are you drifting and how much do you drift? When you get to full draw and the sight is in the gold, close your eyes and continue your shot. Do the arrows go right or left and how much? The quicker you shoot, the less drift that can occur. A person who holds a long time may drift quite a bit. To eliminate or minimize the drifting, your best bet is to learn to shoot quicker. An alternative is to change your stance. Experiment with moving your back foot until the drifting is minimized.

Summary These are a few ideas to help with "finishing the shot". I am sure there are many more but work on these few basic exercises. There are no "tricks" or "shortcuts!" Simply work on the fundamentals.

Remember, archery is fun! RWS