

.....THE GRIP.....

Before drawing the bow, position your hand on the grip and start pulling with your release hand to put pressure on the string. You are trying to find the exact spot for your bow hand to be in on the grip. You want to feel all of the pressure from the bow at one point on your bow hand when you're at full draw. Pretend there is a steel rod running parallel and exactly between the two bones in your forearm. Where that rod would exit your palm is where this point is. If you find this spot, it will help keep you from torquing the bow handle. A thin, vertical handle is best... less surface area for your hand to torque. Also, if you will rotate the bottom of your bow hand away from the bow a few degrees for your grip, you will clear a path for the bowstring and negate torque at the same time. Learn to find your grip before you draw the bow on every shot, but once you start your draw, do not move your bow hand AT ALL.

.....RELAXATION.....

At full draw, your release hand as well as your bow hand, should be completely relaxed. You don't want to be grasping or squeezing the barrel of the release or the grip of your bow handle. Also, do not force either of your hands open. Your fingers should be hanging limp and relaxed. I lightly touch my first finger and my thumb together around the bow handle, but some people use a wrist sling. Use the bones in your arms and the muscles in your back to hold as much of the weight of the bow at full draw as you can. Relax every muscle in your arms that you don't need to use to stay at full draw. That goes for the muscles in your shoulders, torso and legs, too. Remember; tension in your muscles is what causes your sights to wobble and jump around. If you can learn to relax everything that isn't needed to hold at full draw, your sight pins will barely even move. It is very important that your bow is set at the correct draw length though. If it is too long or too short, you will have a very hard time relaxing fully.

.....BACK TENSION.....

Next thing to work on is getting a surprise release. Learning this correctly, right from the start, is far easier with a back tension release. To make a back tension release fire, you flex or squeeze the muscles of your back so that your shoulder blades are trying to touch. To find these muscles, have someone stand facing you while you pretend to hold a bow at full draw. Have them grasp your elbows and gently try to force you to give them a hug... while you resist, all the while keeping your hands and arms relaxed. The back muscles you feel resisting are the ones you need to flex to make the back tension release fire. When shooting, you will flex mostly the release-side muscles of the back, leaving the bowarm-side mostly static.

.....AIMING.....

To aim, reach full draw with perfect T form, line up your bubble level, pick the right pin and center it all in the peep. Next, move your whole upper body to get on target. You don't want to just move your arm up and down or side to side. That introduces torque. At full draw, your upper body and arms should at all times form a perfect T shape. When everything is lined up, start consciously relaxing muscles. Hold the bow back with your back muscles. Start with relaxing your hands and work your way up your arms and through the shoulders. When you've shot this way enough, you won't have to even think about this step. Then go into aiming mode. Your full concentration switches to the spot and only the spot. The pin is blurry and it will still seem to float around the spot, but you need to forget about the pin. You will naturally try to keep it on the spot without even thinking about it. You should be focusing on the spot and nothing else. Keep your concentration while slowly squeezing through the shot, making sure to follow through after the release. The first few times the bow goes off, it will scare the heck out of you. Keep at it! You will get used to it and it's important to never be able to anticipate the shot. No cheating! Focus... concentrate on the spot you want to hit and just squeeze through until the shot breaks.

.....THE FOLLOW THROUGH.....

When you "follow through" after the bow goes off, people say you should try to keep the pin on the target or keep aiming until the arrow hits. I've always felt that that was a bad way to describe it. You can't keep aiming or even see the pin once you shoot. What I would say is... keep your T form until you hear the arrow hit, do not drop your bow arm or move your head, stay relaxed and let the bow go where it wants to with out grabbing it. Good follow through takes practice.

.....THE FIRST STEP.....

It's tempting to just go right out and try all of this on a target at 20 yards, but DON'T DO IT! When you start trying all of this for the first time, it is very important, and it will speed up the learning process... if you completely eliminate the aiming part of shooting the bow. Work on relaxation and a surprise release before you ever have to worry about aiming. You need to ingrain the feel of the shot process so that it becomes automatic... as in the term, "muscle memory." You do this with your eyes closed at first. Your target needs to be at the same height as your arrow. I hang my target from a rafter and stand close, so that the tip of my arrow is about 3 1/2 feet away from the target at full draw. After you reach full draw and have lined everything up, close your eyes, relax and think through every step of the shot.

.....THE FOUNDATION.....

When that feels VERY comfortable, move to a blank target that is 3 yards away and start shooting with your eyes open, but use no spot and try not to aim for a spot on the target... in fact, it would be better to just take the sight off your bow for this step. When you are so sick of doing this every day that you are ready to hang yourself, (something like 3 weeks later... at least 1000 arrows), move to 5 yards with a big spot and try it all while aiming. Over the next few weeks, use a smaller and smaller spot to aim at. Then work your way out to longer and longer distances, starting every session at the hanging target with your eyes closed. If you ever feel like your backsliding... anticipating the shot or doing something else wrong, don't be afraid to get close again. Don't cheat here! You are building a new foundation and you have to start from the bottom up. You don't want to re-cycle any of the weak, faulty bricks you used in your old foundation. Take your time and do this right! Any shortcuts you take right now will come back to haunt you! Guaranteed!

.....THE SWITCH TO AN INDEX FINGER RELEASE.....

Adjust your release so that the 2nd pad back from the tip of your finger is curled over the trigger. Don't use the tip of your finger. It is too sensitive and easy to move. The aiming process and shot sequence are exactly the same with an index finger release as it is with a back tension release. Put as much pressure on the trigger as you can without making it fire and then squeeze just your back muscles until it goes off.

.....THE MIND SET.....

When I was faced with target panic, I realized that I was going to have to change my thinking. I had always felt that I needed to "shoot the bow." Instead, I came to the conclusion that I needed to let the bow shoot itself! I had found a new philosophy in archery. To be static. A bow shooting machine. To just stay out of the way and allow the arrow to leave the bow with no outside influences working against it... namely me! After all, if my bow was being shot out of a shooting machine... the arrows would all be going in the same hole! Just that little bit of attitude adjustment, that little change in my approach to shooting, was all that it took to get my mind right. Shooting a bow in this way is truly amazing! It defies logic, really, and at some point in all of this process, you will know you are doing it right because your arrows will keep going dead center of the bull's-eye... even when you know the pin was not on the spot at the time your bow went off. Kind of like some kind of Zen-master ninja-jedi... no kidding!

Shooting a bow using this method is very nearly mandatory for consistent long range shooting, but it is amazing how much it helps in all facets of bow hunting. I've seen vast improvements in my shooting at long distances and at close range. I'm better out of a tree stand, in awkward positions and under pressure. It has even helped me with buck fever! After shooting like this for some years, my concentration and focus seldom abandon me in a hunting situation. Oh, I still lose it sometimes... this is bow hunting after all! But then there are the times when my sight pin is so still that it doesn't really seem fair to the game animals!

Now, you may be wondering... after learning this technique, do I kill every buck, bull and tom by shooting my bow exactly like this? No. I don't. Not exactly. In hunting, sometimes we need to be able to time the shot or otherwise shoot quickly. If you practice it, a trigger release can be shot very quickly while still using back tension and good form. I will tell you this... the basics of aiming and firing are always there. Now, if I need to shoot quickly, I do not punch the trigger or control the sight pin... I just use a quicker squeeze!

Learn this and I promise you, you won't be sorry. It will absolutely cure target panic if done properly and it really is the best way to shoot a compound bow with sights. I just wish I had known all of this when I was just starting out. As it turned out, I had to go through "target panic-hell" before I learned for myself!