



BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO

COMPOUND BOW ARCHERY

Everything you need to start shooting with confidence

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Equipment & Gear Selection

Choosing the right equipment from the start prevents bad habits and makes learning far more enjoyable. Visit a local pro shop rather than buying online — a trained staff member will measure your draw length and help you select a bow that fits you.

Component	What to Look For	Beginner Tip
Bow	Adjustable draw weight 15–70 lb; axle-to-axle 28–32 in	Buy from a pro shop so it can be fitted to your draw length
Arrows	Matched spine to draw weight; carbon or aluminium	Have the shop cut them to your draw length + 1 inch
Release Aid	Wrist-strap caliper for beginners	Avoids target panic and is easier to learn than fingers
Sight	Single-pin or 3-pin movable housing	Start with a 3-pin sight at 10, 20 & 30 yards
Arrow Rest	Whisker Biscuit or drop-away rest	Whisker Biscuit is forgiving and holds the arrow securely
Quiver	Hip or bow-mounted, 3–5 arrow capacity	Hip quiver is safer and more comfortable for new shooters

■ PRO SHOP ADVICE

Ask for a full setup and paper-tuning when you buy your bow. This ensures the arrow leaves the bow flying perfectly straight — something almost impossible to diagnose at home as a beginner.

Draw Length — Why It Matters

Draw length is the distance from the grip to the bowstring at full draw. An incorrect draw length causes poor form, inconsistent shots, and potential injury. Use this quick estimate: $\text{Wingspan (inches)} \div 2.5 = \text{draw length}$. Always confirm with a pro shop measurement.

Draw Weight Recommendations

Beginners often make the mistake of starting too heavy. A lower draw weight lets you focus on form rather than fighting the bow.

- **Youth / beginners:** 15–30 lb — ideal for learning form without fatigue
- **Adult beginners:** 30–50 lb — good balance of speed and manageability
- **Hunting (when ready):** 40–70 lb — check your local regulations for minimums

Safety & Range Etiquette

Archery is one of the safest sports when the rules are followed consistently. Every range operates on shared conventions; learning them on day one keeps everyone safe and earns you respect from fellow archers.

The Non-Negotiable Safety Rules

1. Never draw or dry-fire a bow without an arrow nocked — it can destroy the bow and injure you.
2. Always point arrows downrange, even when not shooting.
3. Never cross the shooting line while others are shooting.
4. Wait for the "All Clear" command before retrieving arrows.
5. Inspect every arrow before shooting — a cracked arrow can shatter on release.
6. Keep your finger off the trigger of your release aid until you are at full draw and on target.
7. Know what is beyond your target before you shoot.

■ DRY-FIRE WARNING

Dry-firing (releasing the string without an arrow) can cause the cams, limbs, or string to fail explosively. Always nock an arrow before drawing — no exceptions.

Range Commands You Must Know

Command	Meaning
"Archers to the line"	Move to the shooting line and prepare to shoot
"Begin shooting"	You may now draw and shoot
"Cease fire"	Stop shooting immediately — do not draw
"All clear / arrows"	It is safe to go downrange and retrieve arrows
"Walk"	Move downrange calmly to retrieve arrows

General Range Etiquette

- Arrive early, introduce yourself to the range officer, and ask about local rules.
- Never handle someone else's equipment without permission.
- Keep noise low while others are in the process of shooting.
- Help retrieve arrows that have overshot the target — it's common courtesy.
- Never walk in front of the shooting line while anyone is on it.

Stance & Form Basics

Good form is the foundation of consistent accuracy. The compound bow is a mechanical advantage system — when your body is aligned correctly, it does most of the work. Build each element methodically and do not rush to increase distance.

The Stance

- **Square stance:** Stand perpendicular to the target, feet shoulder-width apart, weight evenly distributed. Ideal for beginners.
- **Open stance:** Lead foot angled 30–45° toward the target. Reduces arm-clearance issues on release and is preferred by many experienced archers.
- Keep knees soft (micro-bend), not locked. Locked knees cause swaying.
- Hips should be square and relaxed — no twisting toward the target.

Grip

The bow grip is one of the most common sources of inconsistency. The goal is a relaxed, low-wrist grip — you are not squeezing the bow; the bow is resting against the meaty pad at the base of your thumb.

- Place the bow grip on the pressure point just below the thumb — NOT in the palm.
- Fingers should be relaxed and pointing slightly downward or curled loosely.
- Keep your thumb pointed away from the riser to avoid torque.
- A wrist sling allows you to relax your hand completely at the shot.

Drawing Arm & Shoulder

- Pull the string with your back muscles (rhomboids/trapezius), not your bicep.
- Keep your draw-side elbow slightly above the arrow line — this engages the back.
- At full draw, your shoulder blades should feel like they are moving toward each other.
- Your draw elbow should be in line with or slightly behind the arrow.

Bow Arm

- Extend your bow arm toward the target with a slightly soft elbow — not hyperextended.
- Rotate your bow-arm elbow outward (away from the string path) to avoid string slap.
- Your bow shoulder should stay low and relaxed, not raised toward your ear.

■ THE BONE-ON-BONE PRINCIPLE

The goal of good form is to use skeletal alignment to hold the draw weight, not muscle. When your skeleton is correctly stacked, you can hold at full draw almost indefinitely without shaking. If you are struggling, your draw weight is too heavy or your form needs adjustment.

Aiming & Shooting Technique

Once your form is stable, aiming and executing a clean shot become the primary focus. A compound bow's let-off (typically 65–85%) means you are only holding a fraction of the peak draw weight at full draw — use this window to aim carefully.

The Anchor Point

Your anchor point is the consistent position your draw hand reaches at full draw. Consistency here is critical — a 1 cm difference in anchor causes significant point-of-impact shift at distance.

- Common anchor: thumb knuckle touches the jaw bone, string touches the tip of the nose and the chin.
- Use a kissers button or a D-loop to make the anchor repeatable.
- Your eye, the peep sight (if fitted), and the front sight pin should all align vertically.
- Never anchor to a different point — if it feels different, stop and reset.

Using Your Sight

- **3-pin sight:** Typically set at 10, 20, and 30 yards. Use the corresponding pin for your distance.
- **Single-pin (slider) sight:** You dial the exact yardage. More precise but slower to adjust.
- Focus your eye on the sight pin, not the target — the target should be slightly blurry.
- Centre the sight pin within the peep sight aperture before aiming.
- The pin should bisect (or float on top of) the bull's eye, depending on your zero setup.

The Peep Sight

A peep sight is a small ring tied into the bowstring that aligns your eye with the front sight. At full draw, look through it naturally — your eye centres automatically. If you have to tilt your head to see through it, have a pro shop adjust the tie-in position.

Shot Execution — Step by Step

1. Nock the arrow, attach your release aid to the D-loop.
2. Take your stance, raise the bow arm toward the target.
3. Draw smoothly by driving your elbow back — engage your back muscles.
4. Come to your anchor point and confirm all reference points align.
5. Focus your eye on the sight pin and settle the pin on the target.
6. Apply steady, increasing back-tension — let the release fire without consciously pulling the trigger.
7. Follow through: hold the bow up and keep your eyes on the target for 2 seconds after the shot.

■ THE SURPRISE RELEASE

The most common mistake beginners make is anticipating the shot — jerking the trigger or flinching as the pin settles. Instead, apply continuous back-tension until the release fires by itself. This is called a "surprise release" and is the hallmark of a clean, consistent shot.

Follow-Through

- Keep your bow arm extended toward the target after the shot.
- Your draw hand should move naturally back along your jaw or cheek, not drop or flare.
- Resist the urge to drop the bow to watch the arrow — follow-through affects impact.
- Hold the position until the arrow hits the target, then relax.

Practice Drills & Progression Tips

Consistent practice matters more than long sessions. Thirty focused shots beat three hundred mindless ones. Use these drills to build muscle memory systematically before increasing distance.

10-Week Beginner Progression

Week	Distance	Goal	Shots / Session
1–2	5 yards	Perfect form, blank bale	30–40
3–4	10 yards	Consistent groups (6-in circle)	40–50
5–6	15 yards	Groups < 4 inches	50
7–8	20 yards	Groups < 6 inches	50–60
9–10	25–30 yds	Competition prep	60+

Drill 1 — Blank Bale (Weeks 1–2)

Stand 3–5 feet from a large foam bale with no target face. Focus entirely on form: grip, anchor, back tension, and follow-through. Because you cannot miss at this distance, your brain stops anticipating and you can build pure muscle memory.

Drill 2 — The Wall Drill

Stand facing a wall with your bow arm touching it. Draw with the release aid — the wall prevents you from leaning into the bow. This isolates back-tension and teaches you the correct drawing motion without the bow arm compensating.

Drill 3 — Blind Bale (Eyes Closed)

At a close distance, close your eyes after anchoring. Focus on feeling back tension build and allow the release to fire naturally. This eliminates aiming anxiety and reinforces a surprise release. Open your eyes only after the shot.

Drill 4 — Shot Process Card

Write your shot process on a small card and check each step before every shot in practice. The goal is to internalise the routine so it becomes unconscious during competition or hunting. Stop after any shot that felt wrong and repeat the mental checklist.

Tracking Your Progress

- Keep a simple log: date, distance, group size, and one coaching note per session.
- Photograph your target faces — visual records reveal trends your memory misses.
- Work on one form element per session, not everything at once.
- Group size is more important than score at the beginner stage — consistency before precision.

Common Beginner Mistakes & Fixes

Mistake	Likely Cause	Fix
Arrows hitting left (right-handed)	Torquing the grip	Relax hand; use wrist sling
Arrows low	Peeking / dropping bow arm	Commit to follow-through
Inconsistent groups	Variable anchor point	Use a kissers button
String slap on arm	Bow elbow not rotated out	Rotate elbow away from string
Shaking at full draw	Draw weight too heavy	Reduce draw weight 5–10 lb
Jerky release	Anticipating the shot	Practise blank bale + back tension

■ NEXT STEPS

Once you can group arrows consistently at 20 yards, consider joining a local archery club, entering a beginner indoor league (typically 18 m / 20 yards), or booking a lesson with a certified archery coach. Structured feedback accelerates progress more than solo practice alone.