

By Larry Wise

Can your customers or students answer these important questions?

Why did you practice last Wednesday?

What did you accomplish?

What score did you have?

What part of your form did you work on?

What bow tuning did you do?

Are you better now than you were two weeks ago?

Or a month ago?

And the really big one,

Why don't you know the answers to the first seven questions?

If you are serious about improving your archery skill level then, of course, you know the answers to all of these questions. You know them because you know how to properly build a practice session and keep track of your progress. You know the "whats" and "whys" for all the practice you do.

PRACTICE STRUCTURE

Here's what you need to tell your customers who don't know what to do with their practice sessions. A good practice session has the following parts:

A warm up/stretching period.

A blank bale/no sight/no target period.

A scoring round.

A practice-ending blank bale session.

Bow tuning as needed.

Stretching/cool down.

Let's look at each of these ingredients to see how many arrows need to be shot, what scoring needs to be done and the record keeping needed to hold it together and keep an archer moving in the right direction.

Practice with a Purpose

THE WARM UP: Starting cold is your enemy. Starting time is the most likely time you'll injure yourself because your muscles aren't ready to work at their highest efficiency. To shoot your best at tournaments or when a big buck comes within range you must practice at your best and that means warming up your muscles a little before your first arrow.

I like to take a short walk before practice during which I swing my walking stick. Start slow and gentle and as you walk swing the stick back and forth with increasing range and

speed. Do this with each arm for ten minutes and you'll find your arms and shoulders loose, warm and ready to shoot.

Stretching with a rubber exercise band or spring-exerciser is a very good warm up technique. There are lots of articles already in print on how to use the stretch band to prepare for practice and tournaments. You can find these devices in sporting goods stores that handle exercise equipment or therapy supplies. Having the discipline to do it is what you have to work on with your student-customers.



Most injuries occur when archers start shooting without warming up their muscles. The stretch band is the best way I know to do this. A short jog or walk is also a great way to get loose before you shoot.



Every practice session should begin and end with some shots at a blank bale from close range. For best results close your eyes so your conscious mind stays more focused on the particular objective of that practice session – open your eyes and you'll start aiming and your conscious will join your eyes.

BLANK BALE PRACTICE: This is where real archers are made, in front of the bale with no target, no sight and a plan. Without the plan of what to work on, blank bale shooting won't help a thing except conditioning for endurance. Your biggest job as a dealer/coach is to get your customers to make a plan for each practice session. In fact, they should have a plan for the full week of practice and even longer if they have a tournament they're preparing for.

The plan, of course, must be geared toward form improvement. It

Several practices each week should incorporate a scoring round of some sort. It might be a standard archery round or one you invent. Pick a favorite distance and set spot size to get started. Then as you improve, move further away or shrink the spot size.

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must also have a beginning phase, middle and end phases which focus on the parts of a student's form that need attention.

I'd recommend starting with a step of their form close to the beginning of the shot sequence. In my form development method of Core Archery the first step is "stance". If their stance is adequate then move to the next form element which is "nocking" the arrow and then on to "bow hand position". I find that 98 percent of the students coming to me need to improve their bow hand so I know that's a good place to start for your students.

Build form step-by-step until each step is correct. Then, and only then, move to the next. For example, my students working on bow hand position will have written plans to follow for the next four weeks. That plan will focus on hand position and shooting 30 blank-bale arrows to open each practice session, and ten more to end the session.

During these practices they

must focus only on hand position. They must make sure they set their hand properly at the first touch of their hand to the grip area. "Feeling" is what they must establish and engrain into the subconscious and it can't be done well while aiming. It is best done while shooting with no sight and no target. In fact, you should even practice with your eyes closed to be most effective.

Much research has been done on the subject of practice and it points to the fact that humans need about 20 days to establish a new habit. So plans to improve a form step must be at least that long. Here's where it's nice to have a coach to check on progress. You have to tell them if they are getting it right or not. And if not, you have to get them back on track again, send them home to the blank bale and hope for the best. If no coach is available (maybe you're too busy to help him or her during peak selling season) archers can always use a video camera to help themselves. A look at yourself every week can help you determine if what you think you are doing is what you are really doing.

After three or four weeks of progress you may help them to introduce a second form change into their blank-bale sessions. It would be the form element next in line in their sequence. Always build in sequence like building a house from the ground up and always build in front of a blank bale.



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Thirty to 40 arrows are sufficient for a blank bale opening practice. More can be shot after they do bow tuning and a scoring round. High quantity is not your priority here, quality is. They should focus on each arrow and how they should set up for the particular form element that they are rebuilding.

To get best results they should shoot four or five arrows per end and take their time with each arrow. In fact, if they can manage four or five short practices each day they would learn and retain more, quicker. But that's not convenient so most archers build form on one effective daily session. The important thing to remember is staying focused on each shot.

THE SCORING ROUND: We practice to get better. And if we practice properly we will get better but will we know it? Only if we shoot for score regularly and keep a record of it. Scoring is the only measure we have of our shooting improvement or decline so we must have a place for it in our short-term and long-term practice plan.

Choosing an appropriate round to use is not easy. As dealer/coach you'll have to be careful about advice on which round a student should use. Indoor archery offers some good standard rounds to use and I'd recommend using one of those when indoor practice is all you can do.

For outdoor scoring you can invent your own. I like shooting 30 arrows at 50 yards using the NFAA hunter target with a four-inch spot. I also like shooting 30 or 36 arrows at 70 meters using the 122cm FITA target. Your students may not be ready for those measuring standards so maybe recommend 30 arrows at 40 yards using an 80cm FITA target. Or just make a 5-inch spot and put it at a comfortable distance. Whatever the round, keep records and when your student shoots perfect scores on that round, change the round a little by choosing a longer distance or using a smaller spot.

The target size and distance is not as important as keeping record

of the scores. Over a season of practice I like looking over my records to see not only scores but also arrows used, bow used and tuning changes made. Checking old notes can help you find that little ingredient that gets you back to the top again.

A score doesn't need to be shot every practice session. Two scores a week are sufficient to monitor progress. Some nights, in my basement, I'll just shoot for rhythm and not keep score. But when I go to my local club I always shoot a serious scoring round like I'd do at a big tournament because that helps me prepare my mental game.

END-OF-PRACTICE BLANK BALE SHOOTING: Every practice session should end as it began, shooting at a blank bale. Your students start each session working on a certain form element and when ending that session they once again should work on that same element. As before, no target or sight should be used during this practice phase so the desired "feel" of the new skill being learned can be gradually engrained into the subconscious mind. Total focus needs to be placed on that one form element and all those that come before it. Your customer must do this practice with total discipline if they expect results. Just mindlessly shooting arrows at a blank bale does nothing to improve a person's form; closing their eyes and thinking intensely about how the shot feels gets the best results.

This closing phase doesn't need to be long. Ten or fifteen well-executed shots are sufficient to pass along the muscle actions to the subconscious. Closing with that "feeling" is important and doing it four or five



At the end of a practice session make several draws of your bow with your non-dominant side to stimulate and condition those muscles. Use your stretch bands if that is more to your liking.

times a week over 20 days will enable them to learn and retain that new habit called "good form".

COOL DOWN: When they're all done shooting arrows your students need to stretch their warm muscles before quitting. This can be done with stretch bands or with isometric type stretches. A short walk or run is good, too, if you're also building stamina.

I like to draw my bow with my left hand when I'm done shooting. I draw ten to 20 times to stimulate my opposing muscle groups to help prevent stress on my spine and also keep all my muscles in tone. Developing muscles on both sides of my body and getting good chiropractic care has helped me improve strength and stability and that's important for young and old alike.

BOW TUNING DURING EACH PRACTICE: You and I both know that bows need to be tuned. Some more than others because we're trying to get the most out of them and we sometimes push the limits on arrow size and weight. So, when you're tuning you have to test-shoot to check for positive or negative results and that shooting has to be done during practice.

Testing and tuning can be done before scoring, during scoring or after but not while shooting at the blank bale. Your students can make

changes to the bow and test before they score to determine if it's satisfactory then proceed with scoring. If the score is significantly worse they'll know to reverse that adjustment and make another tuning change. If the bow is better then the score will show it as well.

As dealer/coach you'll have to stress record keeping of all tuning that is done. That way an archer knows why a certain score is not as good as the previous. He will be able to determine that certain tuning changes always have a certain outcome and that can be important for the future. And when a bow gets out of tune because of something your customer did to it, good records help you get it back in tune.

Getting the bow to be reliable is important. Then and only then can your customer shoot several consecutive scores and monitor their progress. If you are constantly making changes to the bow you'll never know if you're getting better and that's what is so perplexing about archery sometimes.

TRAINING CYCLES

I didn't compete much this year because I wasn't able to practice regularly – it hurt too much. So I shot just enough to keep myself happy and to keep in touch with the new bows I had. But now my body is doing better and I'm thinking about next year. Yeah, I'm thinking about a year from now and about shooting the NFAA Field Nationals that will be here in Pennsylvania, only fifty miles away.

What that means is that I'm thinking about a "macrocycle" in my training. That's a cycle that is about a year long. If I'm going to get serious about it I'll have to divide that long cycle into eight to ten "mesocycles" each four to six weeks long and then divide each of those into seven to ten-day "microcycles". Using this structure we can most effectively manage our training to reach our peak performance level for that long-range goal a year away.

What I have to do first is the same thing any of your customer / students must do first, print out a

calendar page for each of the next twelve months. Once I mark the NFAA Nationals for the last week on the 2009 July calendar I can begin planning from that date back to the present.

BACKWARD PLANNING MESOCYCLES:

I know that the last two mesocycles prior to the tournament I must be primarily focused on scoring field rounds. 3-D shooters will need to be shooting rounds for score and judging distance while indoor shooters will want to shoot scoring rounds and also work on the start and end mental game. And don't forget the basics, since maintaining basic form elements must



To build a macrocycle plan you can start with at least a twelve-month calendar. This one was built with Microsoft Publisher.

always be a priority for every archer. The two mesocycles prior to that I'll need to be shooting outdoors



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whenever possible and getting in a few scoring rounds on my own short field course, weather permitting. Prior to that I will be working on conditioning and basic form during the two or three mesocycles that will mark the winter indoor season. I might squeeze in a few practice sessions at 40 or 50 yards if I can find a place indoors that is suitable or if weather permits – I gotta know if my bow is grouping at long range and how my bow shoulder will stand up to holding the bow higher.

That leaves the next half-year to plan out. This is the part that is most critical but most don't recognize it as that and blow it off as not important. Your serious customer/students will know already that their training methods during the late summer and fall will set up their indoor training and, ultimately, next spring's success.

THE FIRST FIVE MESOCYCLES: I have a great shooting bow, my PSE MoneyMaker. It aims steadier than any bow I've had, it groups well and is a dream to shoot so I don't anticipate having to beat my brains out trying to get a bow to shoot well. That puts the pressure

squarely on my body, my brain and me. I've always had a strong mental game so I've got to be careful in my physical training. I don't want to beat up my body to the point where it won't be able to perform – I've got to train smart.

For the next four months I'll continue shooting three or four times a week. I'm drawing only 42 pounds and I only shoot about 30 to 40 arrows so I don't damage either shoulder. I will focus on quality and not quantity – I'll deal with quantity next spring after I've had the coming months to continue my physical conditioning.

When hunting season arrives I'll be shooting less but with a higher poundage bow. To be careful I'll use a soft-draw cam so I can still draw 56-58 pounds when I've been still and cold . . . and nervous! I'll get the target bow out once a week during this stretch just to stay familiar with the feel and to keep my long-range goal in my head. As soon as hunting is over in December I'll be back to the target bow four times a week.

THE MICROCYCLE: This short training cycle is about seven to ten days long and involves more detailed planning. Here's a sample for ten days in midwinter:

30 shots @ blank bale => bow hand & release hand + 10 @ 20 yd five-spot target.

20 @ 20 yd five-spot target + 10 bb (blank bale).

No shooting.

Score 30 @ 20 yd @ local club

No shooting.

Score 30 @ 20 yd @ local club

20 @ blank bale => head, neck & shoulder posture.

No shooting.

20 @ 20 yd @ five-spot target + 10 bb.

30 @ 20 yd @ local club.

Younger shooters will shoot more arrows than this but everyone must pay close attention to resting their bodies. No one can maintain a high level of training over a long period and expect to get better. What happens to everyone is a breakdown in muscle conditioning unless those muscles get time to rest, a time to restore themselves and to grow to a higher level of strength and performance. Every microcycle must have two or three days of rest built into it.

Every microcycle must also have variety. The activities must be varied, the focus must vary and the length must vary. This variety is good for both the mind and body so that neither gets stale or over-conditioned to one specific activity.

A sample microcycle for next summer may look like this:

MESOCYCLE PLANNING CHART
OBJECTIVE: _____
START DATE _____ **END DATE** _____

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31	32	33	34	35
36	37	38	39	40	41	42

A mesocycle calendar spans at least six weeks. You can build a customized calendar of any size or length using the "TABLE" command in Microsoft Word.

DAILY PRACTICE LOG

DATE _____ BOW _____

OBJECTIVE _____

DISTANCE	# SHOTS	SCORE & COMMENTS	BOW TUNING
BLANK BALE			
BLANK BALE			

Your students can use a regular calendar to build their microcycle plans. This one comes from the online service at "TIME-ANDDATE.COM" where you can customize calendars to include as much or as little information as you choose and to incorporate as much box-space as you need.



20 @ blank bale => bow hand & release hand + 30 @ 50 yd @ 4" dot (record score).
 14 field targets for score, + 10 bb.
 Rest
 14 field targets for score, + 10 bb.
 Rest
 28 field for score.
 Rest
 20 bb => shoulder/head posture
 30 @ 60 yd uphill for score, + 10 bb.
 10 bb + 30 @ 50 yd for score.

Some of this shooting has to be with a backup bow so I'm sure I can make a switch if necessary. I also know what that switch will feel like because no two bows feel the same. A backup release aid will have to be tested as well.

The intensity of consecutive microcycles must be varied. If the sample cycle above is of greater total load (intensity+ length + effort) than the previous cycle then the next cycle must be of lesser intensity so the body can recover from the work load. During this recovery a stronger and more developed body will emerge. Without a decrease in workload the body will not recover and may, in fact, regress.

The last week before the big tournament I need and your customer / student needs to get some rest. A rested body will stand a better chance of performing to the high level of practice it was subjected to in the previous mesocycles. If you planned well then you'll get the performance. Plan your work, then work your plan!

RECORD KEEPING

Record keeping is the glue that holds all of this hard work together. Good records, when used, prevent a person from wasting time relearning a lesson they learned six months ago. They can't humanly remember everything so they need to write down the important stuff.

Develop a form of your own for customers to use or have them buy a small notebook in which to record their practice sessions. It doesn't have to be fancy or take a lot of time to do. In fact, the simpler, the better as long as they write down the important information.

At right is a form I've developed for my CoreArchery Academy students. Feel free to use it and make changes to it to suit your own store's needs. If you have a good idea to improve it let me know.

Good luck coaching,
 Larry

EDITOR'S NOTE: Larry's books are available from Larry Wise Archery, Rural Route #3, BOX 678, Mifflintown, PA 17059 for \$11.95 + \$1.50 S & H. Titles available are "Tuning Your Compound Bow", "Tuning and Silencing Your Bowhunting System", "Tuning and Shooting Your 3-D Bow" and "Bow and Arrow: A Complete Guide". Larry is also available to conduct one and two day CoreArchery Academies on shooting form. To contact him by email, use larrywise3x19@embarq-mail.com. The new phone number for Larry Wise Archery is (717) 436-9168.

←
 Keeping notes is essential for archery success. Use customized calendar pages or just a simple spiral binder. Just be sure to keep enough notes to chart progress and eliminate duplication of effort.

DAILY PRACTICE LOG

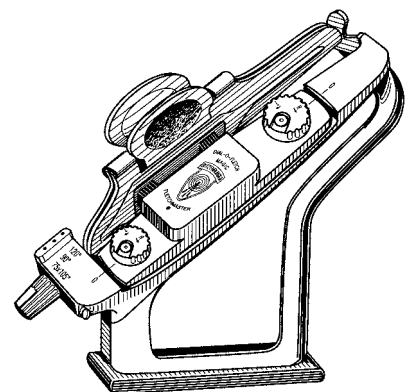
DATE _____ BOW _____

OBJECTIVE _____

DISTANCE	# SHOTS	SCORE & COMMENTS	BOW TUNING
BLANK BALE			
BLANK BALE			

Every daily practice session should begin and end with blank bale shooting geared to reinforcing a particular objective. Keep notes simple and to the point. This sample chart was made using a Microsoft Word "TABLE".

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