

Then I admit my fear. When confronted by a high-stress shot, I admit to myself that I'm scared to death. At the same time I resolve that I'm going to make the best shot possible in spite of my fear. Surprisingly, this admission has a calming effect on me.

## RELEASE

Most events that ultimately control the accuracy of a shot occur in the fraction of a second that transpires between the time you release the string and the time the arrow leaves the bow. Whether you use a release aid or fingers, you must be mentally and physically prepared for the shot.

Mental preparation simply involves teaching yourself to believe the shot will go where you're aiming, and then concentrating until it gets there.

Physical preparation requires establishing and maintaining proper form during that critical millisecond between the release and the launch of the arrow.

If you use a release aid, you must squeeze the trigger and maintain some element of surprise when it fires. Many people have trouble doing this with an index-finger release. They tend to punch or yank the trigger. If you have these troubles, try a back-tension release (like the Carter Revenger or Stanislawski) or a thumb-triggered release. Shooting with fingers, you must learn simply to relax your fingers and let the string slip away. It should be almost as much of a surprise as with a release aid.

If release of the string does not come as somewhat of a surprise, the bow-arm side of your body tightens, anticipating the recoil of the bow, as the other side releases the string. Ideally, at the moment of release, you should not react in any way to the shot. Your body should stay relaxed, and the bow should be allowed to shoot the arrow with no interference from you.

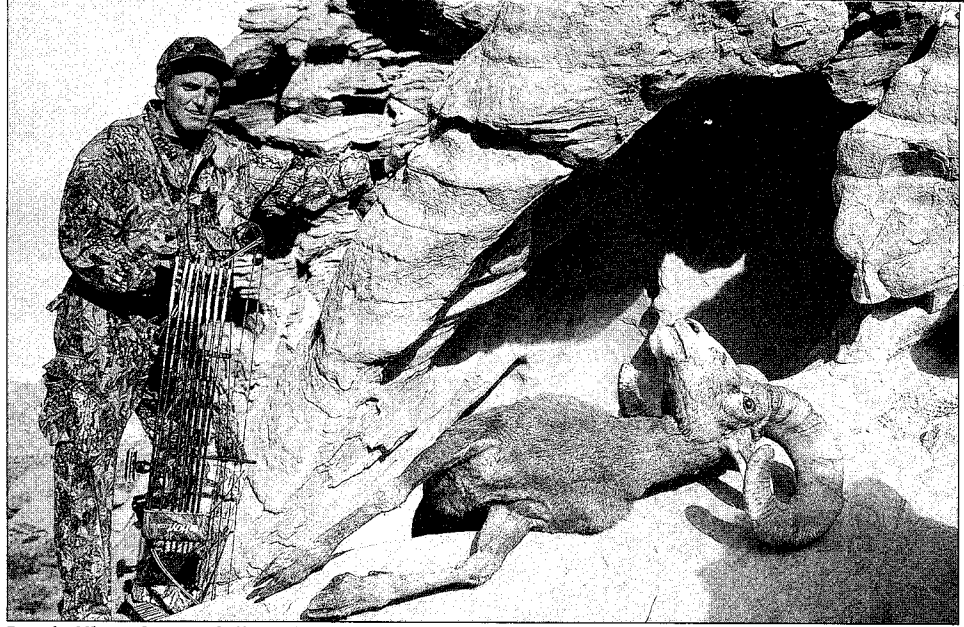
**Shooting Tip** *The only way you can "try harder" in archery is to focus harder. Recent studies show that even trained individuals have a very hard time holding their focus on one thing for more than 7 seconds. Beyond that you are talking genius status. This tells me two things: First, you have to execute the bow shot roughly within this time frame once you've started aiming (or you need to break your concentration, regroup, and then start over). Second, most people who think they are fully concentrating really aren't. Real concentration*

## Get Some Shut Eye

During my daily practice I shoot the first five arrows and the last five arrows with my eyes closed from a distance of 5 feet, not because I expect to sneak that close to a buck, but because I want to get in touch with my feelings and explore my relationship with my bow.

Sound like I'm a few arrows short of a dozen? Well, read on. Shooting a bow is an athletic event, similar to a gymnastic maneuver: If not as spectacular. Many small muscles in the upper arms and back must act harmoniously to perfect a shot.

During a normal shot, aiming and concern over where the arrow hits completely occupy the conscious mind, while the subconscious mind controls the shot process. To become more aware of what you are doing before, during, and after a shot you must eliminate concern over aiming and shot placement. Closing your eyes allows you to do just that. And it lets you feel the shot. As a result, you will soon discover things you probably never knew before, and eventually you will discover what the perfect shot feels like. Once you've felt the perfect shot with your eyes closed, you can try to repeat the feeling with your eyes open. If you can maintain this feeling, your shooting will improve rapidly. If you hit a slump, go back to shooting with your eyes closed until that perfect feeling comes back.



Randy Ulmer knows follow-through. He took this desert ram in the 11th hour of his hunt.

*is incredibly intense to the point of being almost exhausting. In archery, this kind of concentration is required at only one point: when you are actually aiming and executing the shot. If you approach the actual shot with the same air of objective detachment as the preceding steps of your pre-shot routine, you probably aren't concentrating hard enough. The actual shot should feel different. You really need to burrow in and "let your mind control the arrow."*

## FOLLOW-THROUGH

The shot is not concluded at the release of the string – the explosion. Rather, the shot concludes after the arrow hits the target. This is follow-through, and understanding this is critical for accuracy.

Good follow-through is nothing more than a natural conclusion of the shot. Don't do anything different or extra at the end of the shot, just continue doing what you were doing (before you released the string) until the arrow hits the target.

I break follow-through into physical and mental elements. Physical follow-through is merely the body's natural reaction to the release of the tension holding the bowstring back. I believe the bow should drop away slightly at the shot. Once the force holding the bowstring back is gone, the bow will naturally

fall forward and down slightly. Mental follow-through is a continuation of concentration until the arrow hits the target.

Some archers collapse completely at the release and the bow falls away dramatically. This disintegration of form is often preceded by a slower breakdown in form as the archer anticipates the shot. Good follow-through demands concentration and form from the moment of explosion until the arrow hits the target.

**Shooting Tip** *Because follow-through is an indication of how you were using your muscles at the moment of the explosion, by analyzing your follow-through on an errant shot you can often determine where you went wrong. For example, shoot several shots at a target while a friend videotapes you. Keep track of your good shots and your bad ones. I'll bet you can tell which shots are good and bad just from watching your follow-through on video. In my opinion, good follow-through is nothing more than a natural conclusion of the shot. You don't have to do anything extra at the end of the shot – just continue doing what you were doing before the shot until the arrow hits the target. As the explosion occurs, the bow pushes back against the hand as the arrow accelerates forward. The bow jumps forward and slightly left (for a right-handed shooter). The release-hand moves straight back along the line of the arrow and slightly right.*

REMEMBER, SHOOTING ABILITY is the most important skill a bowhunter can refine. No matter what other hunting skills you possess, if you can't make the shot when you have to, you'll never reach your true potential as a bowhunter. Build good shooting form. Your success depends on it. ♪

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**EDITOR'S NOTE:** ALL "SHOOTING GUIDE" MATERIALS WERE PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED IN BOWHUNTER MAGAZINE. RANDY ULMER'S "THE HUNTING ARCHER" APPEARED IN THE APRIL/MAY '00 ISSUE. RANDY'S "SHOOTING TIP" APPEARS IN EVERY REGULAR ISSUE.