

## Focus

by Rick McKinney, President of Carbon Tech Arrows  
and U.S. Representative for Win & Win Archery

Focus is a key ingredient for successful competitions. I am sure we all focus to some extent but do we focus too much or too little or just right. How can you focus too much? We know it is easy to focus too little since our brain is not very disciplined so it bounces all over the place over a small time period. Let's say we focus (or pay attention) to the wind while shooting. All of a sudden your mind wanders to that bird that flew in your periphery causing you to break that focus or maybe a bee is flying around your sight pin. Maybe a car horn sounds in the distance or you hear mom or dad or wife or husband talking with a friend behind you. Just at the moment in time that your broke your focus the clicker clicked! You can be assured that arrow will not hit what you had planned for it to hit. You might even be lucky to hit the target. One of the biggest challenges an archer has is to do is focus on the right thing at the right time. Darrell Pace used to say you only had to be good for about 1/2 second and that meant being focused at that time when it was most important.

But what should you be focused on? How can you be too focused? These issues crop up at some of the most inopportune time. There are certain things to focus on and there are certain things that will interfere with that focus, thus you have to train your mind to stay focused for a longer period of time. Usually your brain can stay focused for about 1-2 seconds then it will start to wonder on to focus on something else. Paying attention to what you focus on can be difficult but you can learn

to find out what you are focusing on by just observing. Just because you are looking at something doesn't mean you are focused on it either.

***One of the reasons coaches like to get you to have a specific routine is that you can channel that focus on the right things while other and simpler things can be "subconscious" actions.***

Let's start with items to focus on. First of all as a recurve shooter, you focus on things such as bow hand tension, draw finger tension, moving through the clicker by reaching or pulling or both, while the sight pin is positioned on the target. You might be focusing on the wind flag or the change in cloud positioning which could cause your pupil dilation to deviate, which will change your string alignment. You might be getting ready to come through the clicker making sure your aim is just right while the wind is blowing thus analyzing the amount to aim off. You could be focusing on the fingers that might be slipping a bit more than you want on the string. You could be checking your inhale or exhale that allows you to be fully aware of the strength you are using to stay solid. You might be focusing on where you think the arrow might go, but more importantly you are preparing for the "click" in order to execute that super smooth follow through to achieve your goal of a solid shot. All of these items could be what



**Rick**

you are focusing on within the few seconds it takes to pull up, aim and execute. Unfortunately you could be focusing on what's for dinner, what plans you have for tonight, what your coach is thinking (will you disappoint or satisfy), what your parents or thinking, what is your best friend doing, the sound of the camera going off, the car moving back behind the targets at a distance or just plain thinking about anything other than what you should be focusing on and then the clicker clicks! A lot of times there is a fear of not putting the shot where you want, thus focusing on trying "not" to shoot a bad shot.

There are many individual items you might focus on. The key is to focus on the right amount, training your brain to focus and stay focused for at least 5 seconds. This is a big challenge but can be accomplished by practicing the art of focusing. If you focus too narrowly then you might do something that could hurt your performance. One guy used to focus so intensely that he would shoot the wrong target. It did not matter on the right side or left, he just could not keep all of his arrows on his own target. He was aiming good and executing great shots (most of the misses were 9's or 10's on the wrong target!). His field of view narrowed too much and forgot to either line up on his target thus picking any "gold" out there! Another issue that archers

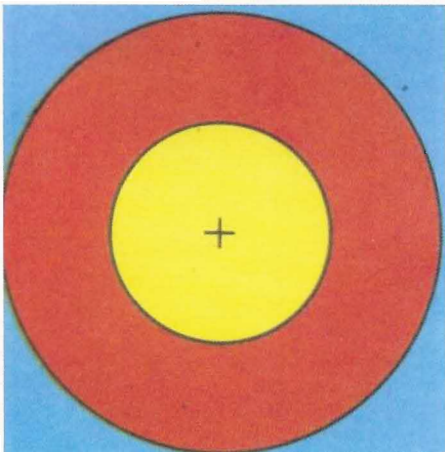
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narrowly focus is when they do not pay attention to the wind and the many different variances of the wind patterns. It is interesting to listen to them complain that they are just off and keep shoot arrows just out of the gold to the right and to the left, not realizing that the wind is causing them to drift out just enough to hurt their performance and their confidence.

The key to focus is finding what gives you the better performance. I know it appears as a "cop out" explanation, but most archers need to find what gives them the consistency they are looking for. It might be just focusing on a relaxed bow hand and then "pulling" through the clicker with the secondary observation of wind/wind flag. It could be the breathing while coming through the clicker. It could be the "reach" of the bow arm while aiming. You will have to find what makes you consistent and deadly accurate. If you develop a routine that you follow each time you load your bow, it will allow you to become more consistent and easier to focus on what is most important.

How do you learn to focus? I used to use a small target face and look at it at all times of the day. However, I would first start in a quiet place and look at it and try to imagine what to focus on. I would spend about 15 minutes practicing this each day to learn how to focus. It is not easy.



Most of the time your mind will wander off and it could get frustrating in the beginning but if you continue practicing looking at the target and focus on your archery thought process, eventually it will become easy. Is it boring? Yes. Is it a motivator? No. However, if you want to be good you must learn to focus. This process has helped me in so many ways. You learn to block out noise, visual and tactile issues and shoot a shot like nobody else. Once you get past this practicing of 15 minutes, then play with it every chance you get. If you are standing in line for something and it is going to take a few minutes, then whip out the target and focus. Try to stay focused with all of the things going on around you. You continue this and you will see a difference.

As like all other mental training, it takes time and you must have patience. It will pay off in dividends. Do not be frustrated

in the beginning. It takes practice and patience. Next time we will discuss visualization, which will help your focus even more!

Good shooting!  
Rick

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