



BEST FOOT FORWARD

A GOOD STANCE IS THE FOUNDATION FOR A GOOD SHOT, BUT IT'S A VERY PERSONAL THING THAT CAN TAKE SOME WORKING OUT. DUNCAN BUSBY EXPLAINS HOW TO FIND THE BEST STANCE FOR YOU

Your alignment, in all its elements, is one of the most important factors to shooting successfully; your shoulder alignment will affect how you draw and aim your bow, your arm alignment will affect your shot execution and your sight alignment will affect the accuracy of your results. Consequently most archers will at some point spend time getting these elements right, but they often overlook their foot alignment.

How you stand in relation to the target can have an enormous effect on your shooting, but this particular position is often oversimplified and rarely developed past the beginner's course. So why is it so important to get the position of your feet right, and how should you use this knowledge to improve your own results?

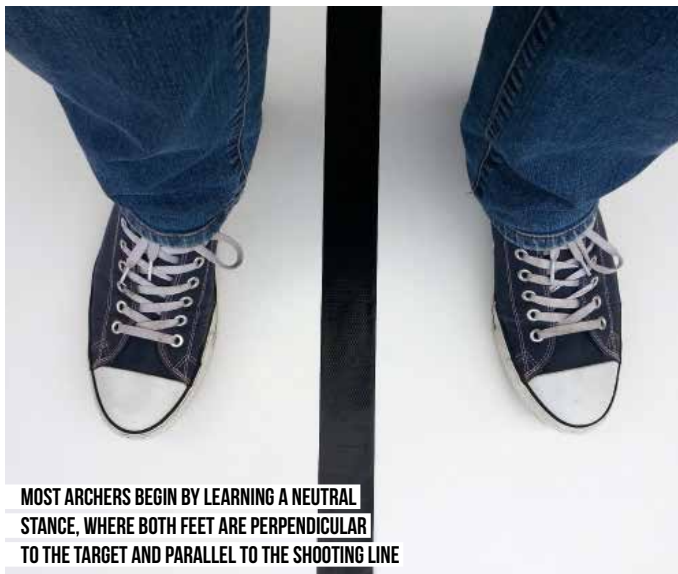
As a beginner you will have been taught to stand with one foot either side of the shooting line, shoulder width apart and at 90 degrees to

the target. This is a 'neutral' stance and it's the easiest and most consistent position to learn how to shoot. As your form developed you may have also tried an 'open' stance, where your feet are turned slightly more towards the target, or a 'closed' stance where your feet are rotated further away from the target. Most archers will move their position over time without much thought to the effects, but if you've ever found your sight wandering to the left or right or you've struggled to aim steady then you may not yet have achieved the best alignment for your feet.

Every archer is different and what works for one may not work for another; variations in body type, size and strength can all affect our shooting position. But you will find that however much time you spend accommodating your individual characteristics, you're unlikely to achieve a comfortable and repeatable shot unless you

get your stance right first. You should look at your body in two halves: the top part, your arms and chest, is your power unit; and the bottom half, your hips down to your feet, is your foundation unit. Getting your power unit in the correct alignment will make the processes of drawing, aiming and shooting your bow much easier and more successful, but if your foundation unit is not positioned correctly then your upper body will be fighting against your lower half and your entire shooting position will become unstable and more susceptible to injury.

As a result you'll find that a good stance will not only steady your aim, but it will also make your shot execution much easier, because when your body is in complete natural alignment you're more likely to use the correct muscles in your chest and back to pull through the shot. And when all of your muscles work together effectively, the entire



MOST ARCHERS BEGIN BY LEARNING A NEUTRAL STANCE, WHERE BOTH FEET ARE PERPENDICULAR TO THE TARGET AND PARALLEL TO THE SHOOTING LINE



AN OPEN STANCE SEES THE FEET TURNED SLIGHTLY MORE IN THE DIRECTION OF THE TARGET



A CLOSED STANCE TURNS THE FEET AWAY FROM THE TARGET

WHEN ALL OF YOUR MUSCLES WORK TOGETHER EFFECTIVELY, THE ENTIRE PROCESS WILL BEGIN TO FEEL MUCH MORE NATURAL AND EFFORTLESS

process will begin to feel much more natural and effortless.

So how do you ensure that your foot position isn't negatively affecting your shot? I'd recommend that you set up at target at a fairly close distance, stand on the shooting line and adopt a neutral stance. Now draw and aim your bow at the centre of the target, close your eyes and count for around three or four seconds, then open your eyes and make a note of where you're now aiming. Don't worry if your sight is sitting a little high or low – it's only the left and right position we're interested in. You should repeat this exercise several times until you can identify a consistent position. This should show you the natural alignment of your body at full draw without any conscious manipulation to counteract it. This is the position your body wants to sit in and where it will be at its most comfortable and therefore most consistent, if you fight against it and move your body into a different position you will need to use much more muscle strength to keep it there and remain steady. So move your feet around until your natural alignment allows you to remain on the centre of the target when your eyes are closed.

Most compound archers favour an open stance, when your body is rotated slightly towards the target, as this position helps you to recruit your larger chest muscles while allowing your bow arm to sit out of the path of your string. If this is your natural position your results will show your aim sitting to the right of centre on the target if you're right-handed, and to the left if you're a left-handed shooter. When making any adjustments you should remember to rotate both your feet towards the target, not just one, and only make small adjustments each time, as big changes don't require big movements.

Although less common, some archers favour a closed stance. If this is the case, your results will show your sight sitting to the left of centre if you're a right-handed shooter and to the right if you're a left-hander. Be careful not to turn your body too far away from the target though, as you're more likely to get contact between your string and your arm.

After every adjustment repeat the test until your sight naturally remains in the centre of the target and adopt this particular foot position every time you shoot. It's always worth re-doing this test every so often, especially as you make changes to your form and equipment throughout the season.

Some archers may struggle with this method, particularly if they get random and unidentifiable results. If this is the case then I'd recommend a process of trial and error with your foot position until you find a stance that is comfortable and that gives you the most consistent results. Just remember, you are looking for a natural position that allows you to make a strong and effortless shot.

You should also be aware that there are other factors that can affect your stability at the target, such as your draw length or stabiliser set-up, so you should make sure these are correct before you adjust your foot position.

Remember, we are all built differently with our own individual strengths and weaknesses. As a result we all require slightly different shooting forms, so don't just copy other archers, listen to your body and work with it to find the best position for you because a natural and stable stance will allow you to align the rest of your body much more easily, and once every element of your alignment is correct you will find a consistent and accurate shot much more achievable. ☺

For more information go to www.duncanbusbyarchery.com