

THE SIGHT OF THE STRING

ANDREW SMITH TAKES A LOOK AT AN IMPORTANT
— BUT OFTEN NEGLECTED — ASPECT OF SHOOTING FORM

Many archers wonder why their arrows are spread horizontally across the target, or their groups hit to the left and right of the gold from one end to the next, even on a still, sunny day. While there are many reasons why this might be happening, one of the most common reasons is a lack of attention to the string picture.

Everything we do at the back end of the shot – and by the back end I mean the reference or anchor point, position of the head, drawing arm, shoulders and elbow – all forms part of your back sight, where a single change from any of these will mean that you are not aiming at the same point on the target, even though the sight pin is hovering over the gold.

In this article I want to concentrate solely on the string picture and hopefully show how, by paying attention to it, you can improve your scores. This is relevant to all recurve disciplines where the string is shot off the fingers. Most compound archers shoot with a release aid and a peep sight, which is their back sight, however, for those compound archers that do shoot off their fingers the string picture is a very relevant part of the shot procedure.

STRING PICTURE

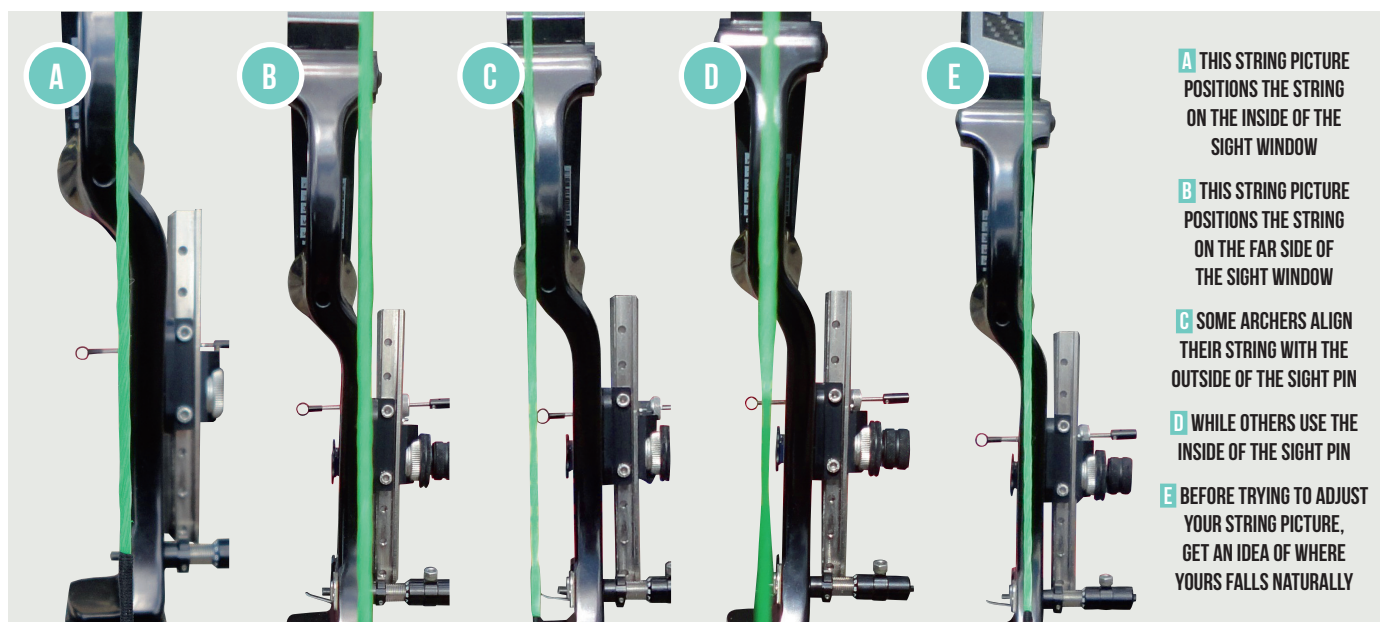
The string picture is the fuzzy, out-of-focus image (assuming the gold is in focus) of the string that you can see at full draw, along with its position in relation to your riser or sight pin. Its position is important to all recurve archers, whether you shoot with or without a sight.

The most important thing to remember is that from shot to shot the string picture should be in the same position. This is made all the easier with good posture and shooting form.

Good shooting posture will have you standing tall, shooting with relaxed shoulders, your head nice and level (not tilting forwards or backwards), and turned towards the target with the dominant eye looking over the bridge of the nose.

The anchor point, for an archer that is using a sight, ideally should have the hand under the chin and the string touching the tip of the nose and the centre of the chin. Some archers will run the string a little bit down the side of their chin, and will find what is most comfortable and repeatable depending on the size of their hands, their bow's string angle, and so on.

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It is important not to draw the string too far back along the jaw line, as this will lead to string deflections into the face when the string is released and a loss of sight mark as the hand runs up along the jaw bone, making the distance between the eye and hand smaller. This also has an effect on the position of the string in relation to the riser, and can make it difficult to position the string in line with the riser or sight.

WHERE TO ALIGN THE STRING

Before we look at where the string should be aligned, it is worth taking a step back and finding out where it is at the moment. This can be done by standing on the shooting line and drawing up your bow as if to shoot an arrow. At full draw do not proceed to shoot the arrow but close your eyes, count to five, open them, and focus on the fuzzy string in front of you and where it aligns on your bow.

If it does not align somewhere on your bow then you need to look carefully at your posture, form and feet position to find the element out of alignment and correct it. Or, if you shoot with both eyes open, re-check your eye dominance.

The most important aspect of the string picture is not forcing it into a position you cannot maintain correctly throughout a long shoot, and to ensure that it is in a position you can easily repeat every shot, even when you are tired. If you are unsure about where the position should be, then go with what I call your natural position that you found when doing the exercise above.

There are four common positions in which the string is often aligned. Two are on the riser: A) the inside of the sight window and B) on the far side of the sight window. The other two relate to the sight pin or ring: C) to

the left of the sight pin, and D) to the right of the sight pin.

All four are correct. In fact, there is not an incorrect position as long as you have a reference point to work to. Positions A and B are the easiest and most repeatable, with A being the most popular as this will correspond with having the string on the tip of the nose and centre of the chin. C and D again are popular, perhaps D more so than C, but you have to remember that, if you align to the sight ring, your string picture and head position will change each time you move the windage on your sight, so the windage adjustments are always quite small, yet show a big difference at the target and the longer distances.

SHOOTING IN THE WIND

I said earlier that it is important for accuracy and good grouping to ensure the string is positioned in the same position from shot to shot. An exception to this might be on windy days, especially when there is a gusty side wind. The normal options are to aim off or keep moving the sight pin windage. Moving the sight pin has its benefits; however, moving the sight pin is a reactive action and on gusty days it can catch you out if there is a lull half-way through the end, which puts your arrows further right or left than intended. If this is the case then it might be worth looking at just a small change in your string picture to the left or right, achieved by small (almost unnoticeable) movements of the head. This moves the back sight enough to allow for the

wind rather than a twist on the windage dial – it will be a very small adjustment but at 70m this change can have a big effect. It is more natural to aim at the middle, so this minor change should help you to shoot strong shots and keep a good line towards the gold – it does take quite a bit of practice but it can be worth it.

STRING COLOUR

String colour is often overlooked by archers, especially as there are many colour options available and colour coordination of equipment is very popular. But string colour is important as it can have an effect on what you see and how wide the fuzzy string looks. This is because light reflecting off the string can change the size of your pupil. I always suggest a dull string (such as black, blue, or red) for outdoor shooting and a lighter string indoors (such as white and fluorescent colours) but because all our eyes react differently to light and colour, it is something you will need to check for yourself.

PAY ATTENTION TO YOUR STRING PICTURE

So to conclude, the most important thing to remember, regardless of your shooting discipline (target or field), form or ability, is that the string picture should be in the same place for each shot. By doing this you will improve your scores, consistency and lessen those strange left and right shots. Over time, the action of checking the string picture becomes automatic, like most of your routine, and you will instinctively know when your form and the string picture are not correct. ☉

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