

# Archery for Beginners: How to Get Started

If you'd like to get into archery as a hobby but you have no idea where to begin, we absolutely understand how you feel. A *lot* of people are really excited to grab a bow and start shooting, but get confused by all the terms and equipment and measurements. You want to dive in, but it all seems a little overwhelming.

With that in mind, we put together this post to help you get started. It's a way of presenting the "big ideas" of archery, and introducing you to the sport, little by little.

On this page, we'll provide all the basic info you'll need as a new archer. There's a lot here, but by the end of the post, you'll have a very clear idea of how to begin your journey with the equipment and knowledge that you'll need.

If you have any questions, please hop over to our "Contact" page and drop us a line, and in the meantime, good luck—and welcome to the incredible art of archery!

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## First Things First: The Two Main Types of Bows

First up in your "archery for beginners" class is BOWS.

There are two main types of bows: recurve bows and compound bows.

(If you're an experienced archer, we can already hear you arguing with us—yes, there are many types of bows, such longbows, crossbows, composite bows, Japanese yumi bows, and so on. Relax! We'll get there. We're talking in generalities here).

Recurve bows look like this:



These are the types of bows you see in the Olympics. They have a sleek, graceful design and they're mostly used for target shooting, although some experienced hunters use them for bow hunting. They're a great option for new archers, because they're a little simpler than the next type of bow, which would be...

Compound bows. Compound bows look like this:



These bows are a favorite among bowhunters, because they are able to shoot with incredible speed and force. That said, there are plenty of people who use compound bows for target shooting and competition shooting, like the woman below:



If you look at the top and bottom of the bow, you'll see that there are rounded wheels that hold the draw string. These are called "cams." They are part of a levering system that includes cables and pulleys that allows the bow to multiply (or "compound") the force used to push the arrow forward.

Sound complicated? It is! The compound bow is a technological marvel that was created only recently—they were invented in 1966, and when you consider that we've been bow hunting for tens of thousands of years, that's a pretty recent development.

You don't really need to know about the science of compound bows right now; if you're interested, we've written extensively about the physics of compound bows, and you can read

about that later on.

If you go to an archery range—and we'll talk about ranges in a second—you'll see archers using both types of bow.

## Parts of a Bow: The Basics

Before we get off the topic of bows, here are some terms you'll hear when you talk about bows. The parts below refer to both recurve bows and compound bows:

- **The Riser.** This is the handle of the bow; it's what you hold when you shoot. Risers get complicated, but here's what you need to know right now: the riser features the arrow rest, which is where you place your arrows before drawing. Recurve bows usually have an elevated rest (which is basically just a platform that the arrow sits on—you can [see one here](#)), and compound bows usually have a containment rest (which you can [see here](#)). One of the most popular types of containment rests is called a "[whisker biscuit](#)."
- **The Limbs.** These are attached to the riser; they form the actual bow, with the top limb attached by the bow string to the bottom limb. You'll often hear the term "takedown bow" when you're talking about recurve bows—this is a bow where you can detach the old limbs, and replace them with newer, heavier limbs. Takedown bows are great for beginners, because you can put new limbs on the bow as you develop strength and accuracy.
- **The Bow String.** This is the string that connects the top limb to the bottom limb.
- **The Nock Point.** This is the spot on the bow string where you place the end of the arrow. The nocking point needs to stay in the same place, so that you can aim and shoot consistently.
- **The Bow Sight.** The bow sight is kind of like the scope on a rifle—after you adjust it properly, the sight allows you to aim at your target. Many bows come with sights, but many archers opt for an upgrade. Sights are usually attached to the riser, and you can attach/detach them whenever you want.

If that all seems like a bit much, don't worry about it! You'll understand the details of those terms in no time.

## Which Type of Bow Should You Use When You're Starting Out?

That's up to you! If you're drawn to compound bows, use compound bows; if you like the look of recurve bows, start with a recurve bow. There's no right answer—it's totally up to you, and many archers use both over the course of their lives.

As we mentioned above, people who are interested in target archery generally use recurve bows, which are designed to enhance form and accuracy, and people who are interested in bowhunting

generally use compound bows, which are designed to be short and transportable through hunting environments, and shoot arrows that are blistering fast and powerful.

But, that said—those are generalities. There are plenty of target archers who enter competitions where the contestants use compound bows, and plenty of hunters who train extensively and use recurve bows made for hunting.

And, there are a LOT of folks—the good people who write for this website included—who have fallen in love with both target archery and bowhunting, and who shoot both recurves and compounds.

## Our Bow Recommendations for New Archers

We've looked at a *lot* of bows over the years, and there are two that we consider the best options for new archers.

For recurves, we usually suggest the [Samick Sage Recurve Bow](#). It's easy to use, easy to set up, and it's easy to accessorize—you can add a arrow rest and a bow sight without too much effort. Plus, it's a "take-down" bow, meaning that if you want to increase or decrease the strength of the bow, you can remove the limbs and install new ones.

For compounds, we're big fans of the [Genesis Original Kit](#). It's a good option for new archers of all ages, and it's got an adjustable draw weight ranging from 10 to 20 pounds, and it's very easy to use. That's a good thing, because compound bows can get pretty complicated. It also comes with some gear—a quiver, an arm guard, five aluminum arrows, and a hex wrench that you can use to adjust the draw weight of the bow.

Note that the Genesis Original is not strong enough for hunting—usually you need a bow with a draw weight of 40 pounds or more when you're hunting, and the Genesis Original's max draw weight is 20 pounds—so if you're a new archer looking for a hunting bow, we usually recommend the [RAPTOR Compound Hunting Bow Kit](#). It's durable, comes with a lot of gear, and has an adjustable draw weight that goes past 40 pounds.

### Measurements: How to Get the Right-Sized Bow for You

There are two main measurements you'll need when selecting your first bow: draw length and draw weight. Let's discuss each.

**Draw Length.** The first measurement, draw length, refers to distance to which you can comfortably pull back the bow string. Draw length is important because in order to make accurate shots, you need to draw the bow string back *the same distance* for each shot, every time

you shoot. Taller people typically have a long draw length, and shorter people typically have a shorter draw length.

There are two ways to determine your draw length:

1) Go to an archery store and have a bow tech measure you with a tool called a “draw length indicator shaft.” The tool looks like a really long arrow, but it has measurements on it, and the bow tech will be able to determine your draw length using it.

2) Take your height, in inches, and divide by 2.5. If you are, say, six feet tall, that means you’re 72 inches tall (6 feet x 12 inches = 72 inches), and 72 divided by 2.5 = 28.8. So if you’re six feet tall, you’d select a bow with a draw length of 29 inches (draw length is measured in full inches, so you’d round up from 28.8 to 29). Taking your height in inches and dividing by 2.5 is remarkably accurate, and seems to work for most people.

**Draw Weight.** This is the second measurement you’ll need to consider when buying a bow. The draw weight is a measurement, in pounds, of how difficult it is to pull the draw string back. A bow with a draw weight of 10 pounds will be very easy to pull and shoot, and a bow with a draw weight of 50 pounds or more will be more difficult to pull and shoot.

As a general rule of thumb, children up to the age of 18 are good with bows that have a draw weight from 5 to 20 pounds; young adults between the ages of 18 and 21 do well with a draw weight between 15 and 30 pounds, and adults 22 and older usually use bows with draw weights of 25 pounds and higher. These numbers are generalizations, though, and you’ll learn more about your draw weight capability as you gain more experience.

Recurve bows usually have a “set” draw weight, whereas many compound bows have an adjustable draw weight, and you can adjust the draw weight to make them heavier or lighter, so you may want to take that into consideration if you’re purchasing your first bow. We go into depth about purchasing bows in our [“Best Recurve Bow”](#) post and our [“Best Compound Bow”](#) post.

Before we wrap up, there’s another factor you’ll want to consider when you’re buying a bow, and that’s what hand you’ll hold the bow in. For the most part, righties will use a right-handed bow (and a right-handed bow is one that you actually hold in your left hand, and use your right hand to draw the bow string), and lefties will use a left-handed bow (and a left-handed bow is one that you hold in your right hand, and use your left hand to draw the bow string).

## **Additional Gear for Bows / Bow Packages**

Archery is a gear-heavy sport, and while you now know a good bit about bows... there are some other things you may need before you jump into archery! Here are some additional tools you may

want to look into.

**Arm Guards.** We'll start with the most important bit of gear first: arm guards. This is a piece of protective gear you wear for whatever bow you're using (in other words, for bow recurves and compounds), and it shields your inner arm from getting hit with the bow string after you release an arrow. Getting hit with the bow string doesn't sound like a big deal, but it can be *incredibly* painful, and give you a huge, three-dimensional bruise. There are some very good arm guards on the market; we like the [SAS Arm Guard](#) because it's thick and provides a lot of coverage. It's got buckles, though, which some people don't like, so we also suggest the [OMP Mountain Man Arm Guard](#), which has straps and Velcro, and can be a little bit easier to adjust.

**Bow Releases.** Bow releases for recurves are pretty simple, but most people either use a glove (we like the [Archery Max Leather Glove](#), because it's super-comfy and stays in place) or a tab (and we like the [CyberDyer Leather Tab](#)). Bow releases for compounds get pretty complicated, but the option we usually recommend for beginners is the [TruFire Edge Foldback Release](#). It's got a trigger release which feels pretty natural, it's got a dual caliper designed to enhance accuracy, and you attach it to your wrist, which makes it easier for beginners.

**Bow Sights.** As we mentioned above, these help you aim. Recurve bows don't usually come with a bow sight, and we like the [Recurve Bow Sight](#), because it's easy to install, easy to use, and you can adjust it after every shot. Compound bows often do come with a bow sight, but if your chosen bow does not, we like the [Archery Essentials Bow Sight](#). Bow sights for compound bows can get *super* fancy, but this is an easy-to-use, easy-to-adjust model.

**Quivers.** There are a lot of different types of quivers available—hip quivers, back quivers, and quivers you can attach directly to your riser—but hip quivers are the most common for target shooting, and we like the [Easton Flipside Hip Quiver](#). It clips to your belt or pants, has a few compartment for tools or whatever, and it comfortably holds a dozen arrows. NOTE: If you're buying a compound, be sure to check if a quiver comes with the package. Quivers used for bowhunting often attach to the riser, and they're a common add-on when you buy a compound bow.

And, lastly, perhaps the most important piece of gear... arrows! We'll give this its own section, because...

## **A Bow Isn't a Bow Without an Arrow**

So we've talked about bows. What about arrows?

There are three main types of arrows: aluminum, carbon, and wood. Each has specific qualities and specific uses:



- **Aluminum Arrows.** These are great for beginners, and they can be used by people who shoot from a recurve bow, as well as by people who shoot from a compound bow. If you go to the range, you'll probably see a lot of aluminum arrows.
- **Carbon Arrows.** These are popular with hunters, and are very popular with people who use compounds bows (although you can also use them with a recurve).
- **Wood Arrows.** The original arrow! If you decide to get into traditional archery, you'll learn to love wooden arrows, and eventually you'll learn how to make your own. That's pretty cool. You can use wooden arrows with a recurve bow, but they're more delicate than aluminum and carbon, so you shouldn't use them with a compound bow, because as we mentioned above, compound bows push arrows with incredible force, and wooden arrows can't always withstand the pressure of a compound bow.

Here are some terms you'll probably hear when you're talking about arrows:

- **Arrowhead.** This is the pointy part at the front of an arrow. Arrowheads can be different weights (and that's important; we'll talk about that in another post) and different shapes, ranging from very blunt to super, super, super sharp.
- **Shaft.** This is the length of the arrow—the part between the arrowhead and the fletching.
- **Fletching.** These are the vanes on an arrow; sometimes they're made of feathers (this is good for target practice) and sometimes they're made of plastic (and this is good for hunting). Usually, there's one vane on the arrow that's a different color than the other two vanes, and that's called the index vane.
- **Nock.** This is the back bifurcated end of the arrow, that fits into the bow string.

If you're looking for recommendations, there are two arrows we like for beginners: [Easton Jazz Aluminum Arrows](#) (they're feather-fletched, pretty durable, and great for practice), and the [Carbon Express Maxima RED](#) (these are very sturdy, have plastic vanes, are manufactured to a high degree of straightness, and can handle shots from high-poundage bows).

Believe it or not, arrows are one of the more complicated aspects of archery, because every archery company that makes arrows has different weighting systems, measuring systems, and so on. But, if you're raring to go, we've written a lengthy post about [arrows and how to select them](#).

## Where You Can Get a Bow and Arrow

There are pro shops all over the United States and Canada, and most carry hundreds and hundreds of different archery products. Some pro shops have salespeople who know what they're talking about, although sadly, some pro shops have salespeople who have no idea what they're talking about, and are just trying to sell you stuff. It's wise to read up on archery before

you go to a pro shop, so you can tell the difference between a good salesperson and a salesperson who doesn't know his head from a hole in the ground.

You can also buy archery supplies online. There are a fair number of “big-name” online stores that carry archery products, but there are plenty super-specialized archery and bowhunting company and outfitters that you can buy from. The reviews on these sites can be very, very helpful, especially because there are literally thousands of companies that make archery products, and you may eventually want to buy a product from a company you've never heard of.

So, you've got the option of pro shops and online retailers. However, if you're not ready to buy a bow, you can simply go to the range—have we discussed ranges yet? No? We'll get to that in a minute—and you can rent your bows and arrows there. For beginners, that's a GREAT option, because it can be difficult to tell what size bow you need, the type of arrows, and so on. When you show up to the range, they'll give you exactly what you need, and you can jump in head first.

## The Shot Sequence: How to Shoot

No matter what kind of bow you're using, and no matter what your skill level you're shooting at, archery is a sport about *process*. To shoot a bow and arrow, you must follow a sequence of steps—and the more you practice those steps, the better you'll get.

The shot sequence is a big topic, and there's too much to talk about for us to shrink it into this post, so we've written about each of these steps in great detail, and you can hop over to our "[How to Shoot a Bow and Arrow](#)" post to get started. We'll provide you with all the “pre-shot” steps, like how to determine your dominant eye, where to place your feet, and how to hold the bow, and then take you step-by-step through the shot itself.

### Some Intro Rules You Should Know About

Archery is practiced by adults and kids all over the world, and when everyone follows proper safety precautions, it can be a very fun, very safe pastime.

With that in mind, there are some rules you'll want to keep at the front of your mind at all times. They include, but are not limited to...

**Always Follow the Rules of Your Range.** Your range has rules, and you need to learn them and follow them;

**Always Shoot with Proper Form.** Archery is a sport based on repetition—if you're shooting improperly, you can injure yourself over time;

**Wear Appropriate Clothing.** In other words, DON'T wear clothing that can interfere with your shot, and injure you or others. Loose clothing and loose jewelry are no-nos, as are open-toed shoes, and you'll need to keep long hair tied up;

**Wear Appropriate Protective Gear.** That usually means arm guards and bow releases, but if you're playing Archery Tag, it means helmet (and whatever else your range requires);

**Damaged Gear is Dangerous Gear.** Don't shoot arrows that are broken or damaged, and always check your bow to make sure it's in tip-top shape;

**Never Dry Fire Your Bow.** "Dry firing" is pulling back the bow string and releasing it without an arrow, and it's another big no-no. Doing so can damage the bow and send parts (sometimes sharp parts) flying everywhere, and that makes it dangerous for you, too; and

**Only Aim at the Target.** Always operate with the idea that you'll hit what you aim at, so only aim at the target, and never point the bow—drawn or not—at anything you wouldn't want to hit.

We've written extensively about each of these rules (and others), and you can check them out in [our "Commandments" category](#).

## Great... Now Where Do I Go to Learn Archery?

We'll start with one of our favorite locations:

### Archery Ranges: The Easiest Way to Get Started

The easiest way to get hands-on experience and professional guidance is to go to your nearest archery range. Many ranges require you to take an introductory safety class ([here's an example](#)), where you'll quickly learn the proper way to hold a bow, draw, aim, and so on. You'll be amazed at what a single session will do for you—you'll walk into the range a novice, and you'll walk out of the range... well, you'll still be a novice, but you'll probably have hit the target a few times and you may feel pretty great about yourself.

Plus—here's the true value of a range: they'll give you the equipment you need to shoot for a few hours. They'll allow you to rent a bow that fits your size specifications, give you arrows that match the bow, and place a target at the appropriate distance. That alone is worth the price of admission, because choosing equipment when you're a beginner can be quite difficult.

So where is your nearest range? Luckily, there's a fantastic site that has a state-by-state index of range locations. Archery 360 is a site run by the Archery Trade Association, and they have a

terrific database of archery ranges in every state. [Their page here](#) will tell you the closest archery stores and ranges near your house.

If you do get involved in archery, the range may become your favorite place. Not only will you have access to archery leagues and some amazing classes (the range near us has a axe-throwing class—how cool is that?), you will very likely meet like-minded people who can teach you a lot about target shooting and hunting. For many people, the range starts out as a place to learn, and quickly becomes a place to hang out with friends.

## On-Your-Own Learning

If you catch the bug and want to learn as much as you can about archery, there are some fantastic sites dedicated to archery that you can visit. The best one is: this one, obviously! We've tried to create a site that truly helps beginners go from 100% green to capable archers, so if you have any feedback on how we can make this site better, we'd love to hear it—jump over to our "Contact" page and send us a note.

There are other sites, of course, and some are pretty darn fantastic. Here are some of our favorites:

**Archery 360.** We mentioned these guys above. It's got some excellent how-to videos, interviews with pros and Olympians, and magazine-style articles about topics of interest (ie, "Five Epic Spots for Archers Who Love to Travel" and "10 Archery Costumes We Love").

**NUSensei's videos on YouTube, [located here](#).** NUSensei truly loves the sport of archery, and has dozens of in-depth, helpful videos about equipment, form, and style. Plus, he's got a great sense of humor, and that makes a huge difference, because there are some very, very dry archery teachers out there. Fun Fact: NUSensi has a goal of attending the 2020 Olympics, and has kept a strict training regimen to get him there. Go, NUSensei! We're rooting for you.

**The "Archery" subreddit at Reddit.com.** Yes, there are some archery snobs there, but very few—the overwhelming majority of folks [in the community](#) are super-nice and super-helpful. It's updated every day, and it's definitely worth a visit.

## Last Thing—What About Kids?

A \*lot\* of the visitors to this site are parents, and that is AWESOME. Archery is an incredible parent-and-child sport, and we're glad you're here.

Here are the #1 and #2 questions we get from parents who visit our site: Can my kids get involved in archery, and is it safe?

Question #1: Absolutely! There are many, many kids who learn archery at a young age, and there are actually leagues kids can join. JOAD (Junior Olympic Archery Development) is a program for kids 8 to 20, and has programs in [every state in the U.S.](#) We've written a post about getting kids involved in archery, and you can find that here.

Question #2: Archery can be safe AS LONG AS THERE IS A PARENT OR GUARDIAN AROUND, WHO KNOWS WHAT HE/SHE IS DOING, AND IS PAYING CLOSE ATTENTION.

We gave you the old "full caps" treatment there, because we want to be very clear: archery can be a safe sport for kids, but they NEED PROPER SUPERVISION (we just went full caps again; sorry).

Archery is a hobby, but a bow and arrow is not a toy—it is a weapon, and it can fatally harm the user or people around the user.

So, yes—archery can most definitely be a safe and rewarding sport for kids, but only when proper safety rules are followed.

## You're Off to a Good Start

So now you know about the two main types of bows, a little bit about arrows, the benefits of a range, and where you can learn more as you develop your skills. You should be excited—you're off to a great start!

If you have any questions about archery, hop on over to our "Contact Us" page, and we'll get back to you as soon as we can. In the meantime, welcome to the wonderful world of archery! We hope it provides you as much joy and satisfaction as it's provided us.

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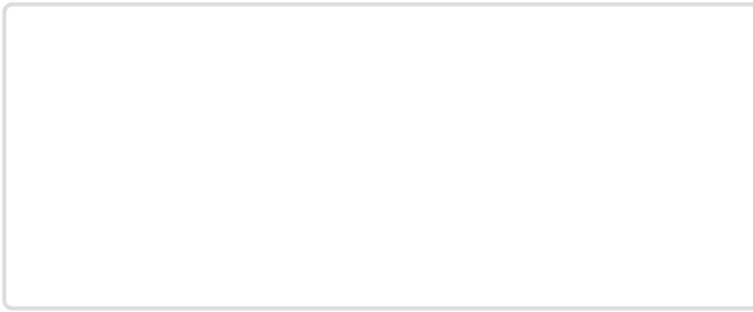
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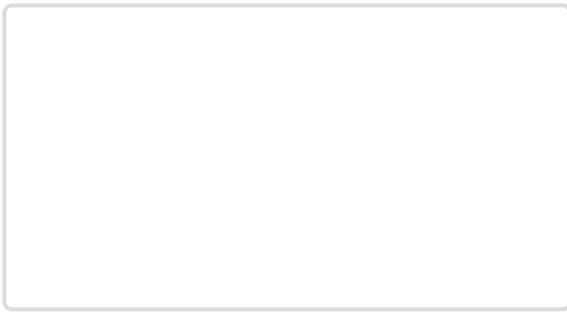
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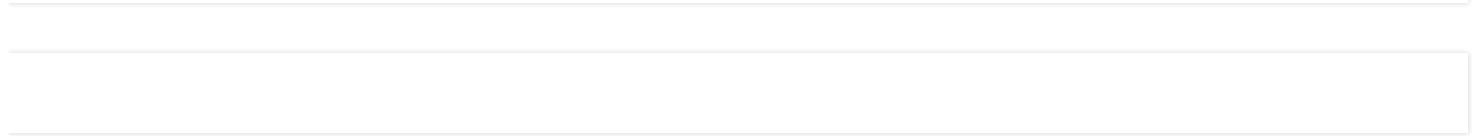
## If I Go to the Range, Will I Be the Only Woman There?



## Archery is About Building Relationships

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### AFFILIATE DISCLOSURE:

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