

Cutting Our Losses

Scientific studies clearly show that wounding loss in bowhunting is around the same as it is with the rifle. (Krueger, Wendy Camp Ripley Study 1993) However, when one experiences the heartbreak of losing an animal or that sick feeling when one has made a less than perfect hit, you can't help but think of how he might have prevented the tragedy. We all are looking to cut our losses down to zero if possible. Allow me to suggest a few ways one might accomplish just such a goal.

Practice a lot with your hunting equipment. That means with your hunting clothes, gloves, and headware on. You might be surprised at what you find getting caught on the string. Also along those lines, practice with your broadheads on. They simply don't always fly the same as your fieldpoints and in many cases they fly radically different. Even if the manufacturer claims that they will fly the same as your field points you had better check them out. Once you have practiced with your broadheads you should re-sharpen them or replace the blades, depending upon the type of broadhead you have. Extremely sharp broadheads are a must. You have the responsibility to the game you hunt to check all of your equipment before that big shot ever happens.



Shoot with your hunting clothing on and practicing with broadheads before the season is a must.

Practice in an effort to determine your effective shooting range. Basically that means finding out your limits at which you feel you can ethically harvest game at an extremely high percentage of the time given a set of conditions. Choosing to limit yourself is the decision that will be the greatest factor in reducing wounding losses in your bowhunting. Bowhunting isn't about the long shot but rather it is about the woodsmanship and skills to get close enough for a high percentage shot for the hunting situation that you are in. I believe that there should be more praise given to the man that consistently harvests at short range rather than the guy that has to "launch" and rely on lady luck. There are simply too many outside factors that enter in to the shot as the distance is increased. Experienced bowhunters realize that an alerted animal at the sound of a shot can move a considerable distance before the arrow reaches its destination. Even if the animal is not alerted just one step while feeding combined with an arrow being off a mere 3 inches can turn complete joy into the sadness and remorse of a lost or wounded animal. Other factors that play into the scenario are wind, elevation, buck fever and unseen obstacles such as a tree limb or twig. All of which can lead to heart break hotel. Only discipline on your part can deter such catastrophic circumstances from ever developing. You might be surprised at how many times that staying calm and playing the waiting game will provide you with a shot inside your effective range.



Practice with targets in a hunting like situations

Yardage	Angle of Elevation/Decline		
	22.5	45	67.5
15	13.9	10.6	5.7
20	18.5	14.1	7.7
25	23.1	17.7	9.6
30	27.7	21.2	11.5
35	32.3	24.7	13.4
40	37.0	28.3	15.3
45	41.6	31.8	17.2
50	46.2	35.4	19.1
55	50.8	38.9	21.0
60	55.4	42.4	23.0
65	60.1	46.0	24.9

Yellow = Pin setting used to adjust for the angle of the shot. Notice how the aiming distance is shortened with increased angle.

Practice shooting shots that will be similar to your hunting conditions. Did you know that your bow will perform differently in the rain? What does wind do to your shooting? Have you shot from a treestand in your practice sessions? Do you know how your bow performs when shooting sharply downhill/uphill? Did you know that on a steep slope a bowhunter tends to cant their bow slightly into the hill and it throws off their shot? -hence the use of a level- By simply taking your target to your hunting area and shooting around or by taking a walk and stump shooting down some of your favorite canyons you can greatly improve your shooting and reduce wounding loss.

Practice waiting. This is one of the hardest things to do when you are excited and the blood is pumping and your senses are keenly aware of a shot opportunity coming. Making split second decisions is part of the hunting game, however those decisions will be easier and more clear if you have established a set of personal standards (ethics) that you will adhere to. Examples of these may be acceptable shot angles you will take, a still or relaxed animal, or even the size of animal you will hold out for. Waiting means that you won't shoot until your pre-determined conditions for an ethical shot are met. Waiting is often the difference between a mediocre shot and a shot that would be considered a slam dunk. That also means that some animals will come and go only to leave you with a memorable close encounter. Welcome to bowhunting. I have heard many speak of taking the first shot opportunity that is presented but I would refine that statement be to take the first *ethical* (as defined above) shot opportunity presented. This will reduce your wounding loss and add to the satisfaction of your bowhunting experience.

Practice blood trailing. Have you ever been on a blood trail before? As a bow-ed instructor I have had many opportunities to watch both youth and adults become confused and lost as they allowed their excitement to get in the way of good blood trailing techniques. There are lots of books and resources available on both tracking and blood trailing that are fascinating. This truly can be one of the funnest parts of the hunt. How long should you wait on a good hit? Bad hit? Marginal hit? What do you look for in the blood and on the arrow? What do you do when the trail runs dry? As a bowhunter you owe it to yourself, fellow bowhunters, and to the game animals to be responsible enough to know these answers.



This arrow is optimally placed but does not necessarily coincide with 3d scoring rings. Knowing your game anatomy will provide clues that will help you blood trail a hit animal.

Of course a bowhunter education course is a great place to get this information and hone your skills but there are many other sources. There are books of all kinds on all of these subjects. The internet is also a great place to start by doing various key word searches by subject matter. One of the best methods is seeking out the tutelage of an experienced bowhunter that has a proven track record and asking for help. All of these resources can greatly improve your learning curve. The bottom line is that ultimately you are responsible to learn the techniques and skills to cut your losses. Remember practice, practice, practice. May your arrow fly true to it's mark!

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