**A Guide to Teaching and Learning LARPchery**

Teaching archery with this guide to a person with no knowledge of using a bow takes about an hour. This involves talking them through the major points, as well as teaching them how to use a bow, and giving them some time to practice.

I recommend that the student should spend at least 10 hours, but preferably 15-20 hours practising using a bow before they are assessed by a competent archer.

An assessment of their knowledge and skills should take place prior to the student using a bow in a larp combat situation. They should be able to successfully and safely shoot a bow as well as identify what aspects may cause a hazard or increase the risk of a hazard.

**Stage One: Instruction**

1. **Bows as weapons.**

Teaching the student that bows, regardless of poundage, are weapons. As we’ve seen, they’re capable of physical harm. If people think it’s a toy, they will treat it like a toy.

This must be taught at the beginning of all courses and would include:

1. **Where to point the bow when you’re not shooting but have an arrow nocked**If you have an arrow nocked and aren’t actively aiming at a target, point that arrow towards the ground. If you slip, or the string breaks or something goes wrong, that arrow will fly harmlessly into the ground.
2. **Parts of the bow that can be dangerous (limbs, string).**Everyone knows that arrows are dangerous. But new archers fail to respect the other parts of the bow. Limbs are made to be strong, to absorb and disperse energy. Hitting someone with the limbs of your bow will hurt them. Bowstrings are taut when the bow is strung. If a bowstring snaps and strikes someone, it will cut you. Look after your bowstring and check it for fraying.

**Safe arrows.**

Talking the student through what makes an arrow safe to use. They will be firing arrows at people with force and at speed. Once that arrow leaves the string, it’s too late to change anything.

This section includes:

1. **What a safe head looks like**When you examine your arrows for safety, look for any exposed metal on the head. The head of the arrow should be completely covered with foam or rubber.
2. **What are larp arrows made of?**Larp arrows should have the head end in a circle instead of a point so there is no chance of the arrow piercing another player. Covering the head should be either foam or rubber, or some combination thereof. The shaft should not be metal or wood. The vanes can be feathers or plastic. The nock should be plastic.
3. **How do arrows behave in combat**Larp arrows are heavier than normal arrows so they don’t fly the same way. They have a much-diminished flight and tend to be top-heavy. Despite this, when at the top of an arc, instead of falling head first, larp arrows tend to fall down relatively horizontal. This often means that larpers can be in danger from the nock-end of arrows as well as the safe rubber tip.

Larp arrows also have a tendency to bounce upon first impact. The training archer should shoot a few arrows to see how they fly and how they fall.

1. **How to check your arrows in the field.**Either prior to shooting or after retrieving from the battlefield. Arrows should be checked to ensure they are safe to use again. Check the vanes are still attached and aren’t torn, the nock isn’t broken and is still attached, the shaft is intact, and the rubber head is still attached and not split.
2. **Safe technique.**

This is the actual teaching of how to use a bow. Some people may have already shot a bow before, but it is important to go through and make sure that the teacher is showing safe technique and correcting any bad habits.

This will include how to shoot a bow, including aspects of aim (how to and where to), anchors, draw, release, equipment. Can the student prove that they can do this safely?

1. **Safe conditions.**

This is a must in larpchery. Many of our hazards are born out of people taking risky shots. It teaches a person how to judge whether a shot is a safe one, and what factors affect a safe shot.

This will include visibility (how much light is there, can you see your target, if necessary, can they see you?), range (how close are you?), terrain (hills, mud, sand etc) and angle (shooting uphill, downhill, flat and risks involved).

Larp bows should not be used in the dark. Once you loose an arrow, you cannot control where it goes. It is much harder to judge distance or choose targets in the dark. If you can’t see your target, you can’t aim at them. Do not shoot at a target you can’t see.

Larp arrows, in a New Zealand context, are rarely shot further than 20 metres away and no closer than 8 metres.

Are you still or moving when you are aiming? How does this affect your shot? What terrain are you moving over? If you are anticipating your enemy’s movement, what terrain are they moving through and how will that affect their speed?

Shoot on the flat wherever possible. Shooting downwards should be avoided as you will naturally be targeting the enemy’s heads. Arrows must not be aimed at a person’s head.

1. **How far does an arrow fly?**

Most people assume that in order to shoot an arrow, you need to draw the bow string as far back as possible. This means that people are often shooting arrows at full force, unnecessarily. This portion is meant to teach people about how a LARP arrow flies (very differently to a target arrow).

This teaches people about where to aim, how hard an arrow can hit, how far it can fly and how far you need to draw.

Turning the bow horizontal and drawing back into the stomach can easily deliver an arrow up to 10 metres. Pulling the bowstring back as far as you can is unnecessary and often dangerous. The furthest a bow should be drawn back is to the corner of the mouth.

Training archers should be shot with arrows at different distances so they can appreciate the impact of an arrow and how easily it is for the shot to go awry.

1. **How much is too much?**

A huge problem is that when people buy bows, they don’t understand how heavy the poundage is. Some IDV bows have been recommended to New Zealanders at a 28lb draw weight. But this weight is assumed for foreign larps, where a lot of the combat involves shooting an arrow across a field, for example.

New Zealand larp combat usually takes place across much shorter distances, meaning that these weights are too heavy for our style of combat. A 28lb target bow can comfortably shoot an arrow 70m. Larpers don’t need this kind of strength.

This would focus on recommended draw weights, how draw weight is measured, stacking, what materials larp bows should be made from (and how heavier materials can change the draw weight), and the differences between shorter vs longer bows.

The maximum weight for NZ larp bows should be 22lbs. No higher poundage is required to shoot the distances we use, and any higher could cause injury. Draw weight is measured by drawing back to full draw (at 28 inches) with a bow scale.

Larp bows should not be metal as this can cause injury if your weapon hits another player. Wood should also be avoided for this reason. Wood and metal also have less flexibility in a bow’s limbs, which means that they tend to have a higher poundage. It is best to check a bow’s poundage before purchase if possible.

Stacking is the name for adding extra poundage to your draw by pulling past your full draw length. For each inch you draw, you add an extra pound to your bow. This is a fast way to cause injury because a safe bow quickly becomes unsafe.

Longer bows tend to have more flexibility in the limbs and therefore lighter poundage (for bows that are one piece, anyway). Shorter bows make more tension in the limbs and therefore have a higher poundage. This is not always true, but may help people buy bows.

1. **Maintenance.**

Not taking care of your bow and arrows will result in the equipment breaking. If the equipment breaks in combat, this could be hazardous to the archer or those larping around them.

This would be about maintenance of a bow including string wax, string condition, serving condition, looking after limbs, dry-firing.

String wax costs $5 and lasts forever. It is rubbed along the string and serves to reduce the friction between strands. It will make your bowstring last much longer and remain in better condition. It should be applied once every two months or before every game, whichever is more frequent.

Bows should be unstrung when not in use. Strung bows lose tension in the limbs of the bow, greatly weakening its strength over time. The serving is the slightly thicker material wound at the ends of the string (where it attaches to the limbs) and in the middle (where the arrow sits). This material is stronger and reduces the friction against the key parts of the weapon. Check the serving and the string for any fraying. Frayed strings should not be used.

Limbs are fragile and should be cared for. Do not rest these on the ground, and do not lean on your bow. This will damage the limbs and/or wear them down to the point where the string will not stay in place.