

Learning How to Shoot

Years ago we used to think that some kids were just "born-shooters"... either you had the knack or you didn't. Nowadays, I believe everyone can become a good shooter with correct instruction on the fundamentals of shooting, combined with drills and practice. This article discusses the fundamentals of good shooting form. The principles discussed below should be used as guidelines, not absolutes, and may be helpful in correcting or teaching a player who is struggling with his/her shooting, or is just learning to shoot. Coaches should resist the urge to change a player's shot if it works for that player. We can all think of great shooters who didn't have perfect form. So, "if it ain't broke, don't fix it!"

Stance

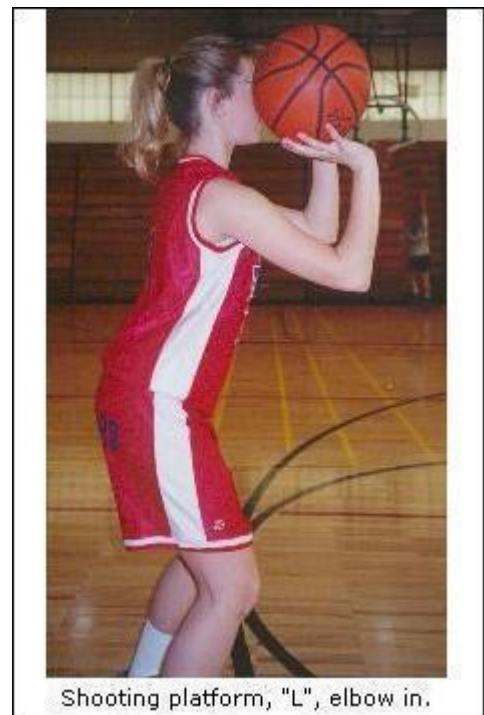
Have your feet about shoulder width apart. Your knees should be bent a little as your thigh muscles will provide power for your shot. If you shoot right-handed, your right foot should be slightly forward, and your weight should be on the balls of your feet (not the heels). Your shoulders and body should be square to the hoop, although some great shooters are more comfortable with the side that the ball is on turned a little toward the hoop (find out which is most comfortable for you). Probably the important thing here is that when you jump to shoot, jump straight up (or slightly forward), but not sideways or backwards. Stay balanced.

Holding the ball

Use both hands to hold the ball, but only your shooting hand will actually propel the ball forward. Don't shoot two-handed. Your shooting hand is the "platform" and should be underneath the ball with your wrist cocked back. Your elbow should be bent at about 90%, like a backwards "L", and underneath the ball (not out to the side). Your other hand (the "guide hand") helps support or balance the ball, but does not enter into the actual shooting of the ball. Your non-shooting hand should actually come off the ball just before you release the ball, so that you are shooting with one hand, just your shooting hand. Use your fingertips, not palms, to hold and release the ball.

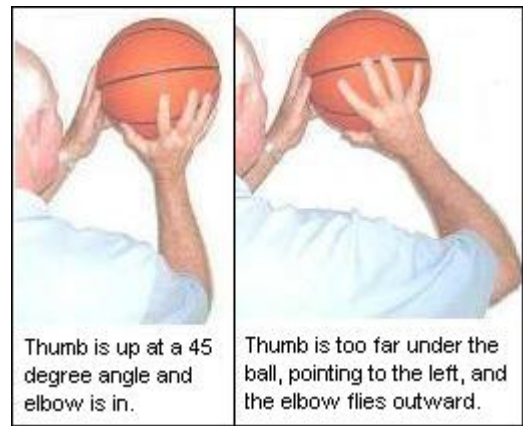
Here is a method to learn what the correct "platform" is. Extend your shooting arm straight forward with your palm facing up and let the ball sit comfortably your hand (fingers comfortably apart). Now in one motion, bend the elbow while rotating the forearm, wrist and hand outward and upward, and under the ball so that the ball is now resting on your hand above your right shoulder with the wrist cocked back. The shoulder is the "hinge", the elbow points toward the hoop and an "L" is formed by the forearm and the arm (looking from the shooting arm side). Your elbow should be in and pointing at the basket.

The position of the shooting hand's thumb is important. The shooting thumb should be pointing upward at about a 45 degree angle left (right-handed shooter). This will cause the elbow to naturally fall under the ball. I have seen some



Shooting platform, "L", elbow in.

young players with the thumb too far under the ball and pointing straight leftward, which causes the elbow to fly outward (see the two photos). So if your shooter's release looks a little goofy, has side-spin, or the elbow is flying, look at the position of the thumb... a very simple concept that's easy to fix.



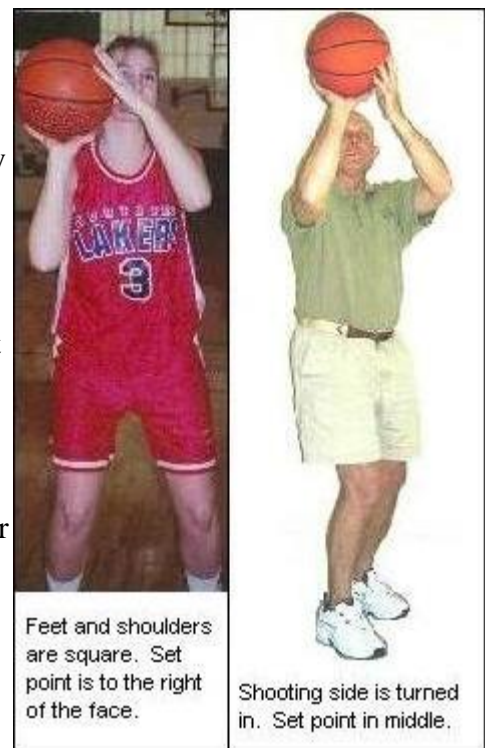
Set Point

The set point is where you position the ball just prior to releasing the shot. If you are right-handed and shoot with your shoulders and feet square to the hoop, have the ball to the right of your face, a little toward the right shoulder. Don't line the ball up in the center of your face, as this may result in your shooting elbow flying away from your body, and could actually cause your wrist to turn sideways (supinate) when you release the ball, imparting a side-spin.

On the other hand, if you are more comfortable shooting with your body turned in toward the shooting side, then the set point can be more in front of your face. You will have to find which method works best for you.

Also, it is best that the ball is as high as your forehead, or even higher (if you are strong enough or close to the basket), in order to keep your shot from being blocked. But do not cock the ball back over the top of (or behind) your head. This results in a "slinging" motion and a flatter shot.

Finally, younger players who have less strength will have a lower set point, perhaps even below the shoulder, in order to get more power. As the youngster matures, the set point should move higher.



Upward Force

Most of the power in your shot should come from the upward force of your jump (in the jump shot), or the upward force from your thighs moving upward (in the free throw). You should not try to power up longer shots with your arm, wrist or hand muscles. Let the big muscles in the legs do the work. Release your shot on the upward force of the jump, not on the way down.

Aiming the ball

Pick out a spot to aim at... either the back of the rim, or just over the front of the rim, or the backboard (if you are shooting a bank shot).

Concentrate on this spot, and don't look at the ball, or the flight of the ball.

Releasing (shooting) the ball

Use the shoulder as a "hinge". Your shooting arm extends forward toward the hoop (keep the elbow in), the elbow extends (straightens), and then you release the ball with a snap of the wrist, with the ball rolling off your fingertips. This will impart backspin ("rotation") that all good shooters have. Backspin makes the ball land softly on the rim, and often creates a favorable "shooter's" bounce, resulting in a score even though the shot was not perfect. Shoot the ball high with an arc. Don't shoot a flat, line drive, type of shot. An arched shot has a better chance of going in, since the hoop is actually bigger and wider for a ball coming in from above, than from a line drive. Don't "push" the ball with the heel of your palm; let it come off your finger-tips. Make sure that you extend (straighten) your elbow... don't "short-arm" the shot.

The release should be repeatable. Don't sling the ball up for more power on long shots... use the power from the up-force of your jump, or lower your set point for more power. Don't pull the ball back behind your head before releasing it, as this results in a flat, line-drive type shot. On shorter shots, release the ball more at the top of the jump with a higher set point (arms extended up over your head).



"Goose-neck" follow thru, reaching into the cookie jar.

Follow Through

This is important in getting the proper rotation (back spin) on the ball. Your fingers should be pointing toward the hoop, and your wrist bent forward, in a "goose neck" fashion. Another analogy is if you were "reaching into the cookie jar" high on the shelf. Hold this release after your shot until the ball hits the rim. You will notice that with a proper follow-through, the palm of your hand will be facing downward toward the floor. If it is turned sideways with the back of the hand facing outward (as if you were going to shake hands with someone), then you are incorrectly twisting your wrist during the release. Keep your eye on the target... don't watch the flight of the ball.

Form Shooting.

"Form shooting" is an excellent drill for developing correct shooting form. Start with shots directly in front of the basket, just a few feet away, to develop correct technique. Shooting further away does not allow the shooter to focus on this repeatable form. Do this drill for just 5 minutes every day. Even experienced good shooters who are going through a "shooting slump" find this drill helpful in restoring their shooting mechanics and confidence.

Move farther away as you get better, but do not sacrifice correct technique. Practice shooting from locations where you will likely shoot from in a game.