BEAT THE BOTTLE GAME
Building The Setup

I’ve gone to the trouble of building a railing and matching the dimensions of an actual bottle game. This is important because you don’t want to change your technique once you are out in the field. There will be plenty of distractions like wind, noise and people at the carnival, so you want to make the basic motion of standing a bottle up as natural as possible.

I’ll also go over the different variations of the game, so you won’t be surprised if you encounter a “weird” setup.
MEASUREMENTS

A - Dowel
1/2" in diameter

B - Eyelet Ring

C - String
58" in length

D - Ring
2.5 " in diameter

E - Bottle
9" in length

F - Railing

G - Platform

H - Stand

Hex Platform

(If you want to be anal about it.)

Make sure the wood is SMOOTH.
STICK

The stick is just a dowel you can get at any hardware store. It’s 3’ in length and ½” in diameter. You’ll notice there’s an eyelet at one end to which the string is attached. This is what they generally use at a typical carnival.

RING

The plastic ring is 2½” in diameter. It’s important that you match this ring as closely as possible. The diameter of the ring and the thickness of the material (usually plastic) affect your ability to lift the bottle. You don’t want it to “feel weird” once you are at a carnival and have given your money over to the carny.

Where can you get the exact ring?

At the ring toss game! If you ask nicely, maybe the carny will give you one! :-)

Beat The Bottle Game
If you won’t have the chance to visit a carnival any time soon, you can buy them on Amazon.

http://t.co/L12J7Vy

In a pinch, you can use something like a shower curtain ring, but it’s just not the same.

TYPE OF BOTTLE

This is important. You want what they call a “BAR BOTTLE”. They’re 9” in length. I’m using a Budweiser bottle in this demonstration. The important thing is to match the lip at the top, just below where the cap is secured. This is where the ring will grip the bottle and you don’t want to use the wrong kind of bottle as this will affect your lifting technique.
PLATFORM
Set up your platform about 5” from the edge of the railing. Here’s an actual photo of what you’ll be dealing with. The most common setup is with the bottle and platform is facing toward you, and they both have a subtle tilt in your direction.

ANGLE
You want to create this tilt with something like a standard door wedge. The degree of the tilt that’s applied to the platform will affect your technique. The most common angle I’ve seen is about ½”. This is approximately 2-3 degrees; it depends on who is setting up the game. I’ve seen some games that use maybe an inch of tilt and you’ll have to adjust for this.
Standing Up The Bottle

STARTING POSITION
You want to start with one foot forward. You need to extend the pole forward a good length and you’ll be able to do this more fluidly by rocking your body forwards rather than just bending over at the waist.

HOLDING POLE
The correct way to hold the pole is to place your hand around it about ¾ of the way down. When most people first encounter the game, they choke up on the pole and hold it at about the halfway point. They’re doomed from the start. There’s no way to win the game if you hold the pole like that. You need the extension to keep the bottle up.

Check to make sure the string and eyelet aren’t twisted around each other and that the string and ring hang straight.

PICKING UP THE BOTTLE
Lift the bottle just below the lip. It’s critical that the ring is perpendicular to the neck in this groove.
If the string gets twisted, give the bottle a little bounce so the ring sets itself correctly.
STARTING POSTION

Lift the ring up vertically for a few inches. The string should remain in a straight line during the movement. If it starts to angle away from or towards you, the bottle will sway from side to side. By going back to the vertical position, you can stabilize the bottle and stop the swaying.

By sighting with one eye closed, you should be able to line up the string parallel to the length of the bottle. Everything should be lined up and centered for your final move.

Lift the bottle up about 35 degrees, or as high as you can raise it without it becoming unstable. If the bottle starts to sway, lower it and reset. It can be sometimes tricky to get the correct starting position, especially if it’s windy or the platform isn’t completely horizontal. Sometimes a tiny piece of grit can screw you up.

Standing the bottle up should be done in one fluid motion, without pausing. You’ll find that making any sort of corrections while doing this will most likely result in failure. You want to use the momentum of the bottle going forward to help stabilize it. It should feel like an arcing motion with the stick, not a straight push. The ring should almost feel like it’s about to slide off the bottle, but not quite. This feels very unnatural and the carnies have been exploiting this, making the game nearly impossible to win.
You want to rock your entire body forward; don’t just push with your arm. It has to be smooth and consistent.

Extend the string beyond the bottle. You need to keep the ring on the bottle to stop it from falling over. Because of the tilt of the platform, the bottle won’t remain upright by itself. You’ve got to hold it there while the bottle settles into its final position. If the ring comes off, the bottle will fall over.

It’s going to take you a while to get the hang of it. Like I said, it’s a pretty unnatural motion to master and the carnies know this. This is why the prizes are so big at these tents. It’s very rare for someone to get lucky at this.
**Training Wheels**

Try this: when you first start out, ignore the stick and use just the string. It's much easier to do it this way, and it will illustrate what needs to be done to keep the bottle standing.

After you get the hang of that, use a pair of books to stabilize the bottle on the platform. This will really help keep the bottle aligned as you lift it.
Variations

You should also experiment with changing the angle of the platform by moving the door wedge back and forth. Some carnivals have the platforms at a much steeper angle. This requires you to alter your starting position a little bit and forces you to really keep the string taut after you lift the bottle in place. At this steeper angle, the bottle naturally wants to fall back towards you.

Doing It Backwards

Occasionally you’ll find a carnival that has a game in which the bottle faces away from you and you’ve got to lift it towards you. It’s the same technique as before; but this time you’ll be pulling the stick down at the end of the pulling movement, and the string should almost touch the railing. You can tell that carnivals are getting wise to us “ringers” and are trying to throw us off. It doesn’t take too long master this technique.
Crazy Setups

I haven’t seen it myself, but I’ve heard of one carnival that starts with the bottle facing uphill. You’ve got to spin the bottle around first, then lift.

I personally beat one game where the platform was set up in a perfectly horizontal position. The guy working it demonstrated how to do it by slowly lifting the bottle up very high. He tipped the bottle into place while quickly spinning the ring, then pulled the line taut, which stopped the bottle from falling forwards. It’s extremely hard to do, but this guy had the biggest prizes I’ve ever seen. I just managed to do it by lifting VERY slowly and keeping the string taunt vertically, holding the bottle in place.
Be Cool About It

If you find this whole procedure difficult at first, well, it should be. The first night I started practicing, I probably got the bottle to remain standing about a total of three times. It takes a while, but you'll get it. If I can do it, so can you. I'm certainly no circus acrobat.

You've now gone to your first real carnival game and have won. You could start jumping around and making a big scene and attracting attention to yourself, but don't forget, not too many people win at this carnival game so you don't want to be remembered as the person who easily “took” one of their prizes that they paid for. Even though there is a limit of only one prize per carnival that they impose on everyone, the same carnival might be back in your area later that year. You don't want them to refuse to let you play again some time in the future. I've been asked many times if I've ever worked at another carnival and if I'm just taking advantage of them. They just don't like to be outsmarted.

The hard part now is once you've won about a dozen of these prizes, it's hard to put on an act that you're really surprised and excited that you actually did it. I usually let my girlfriend pick out the prize and then I hide behind her. I'm stressing the part about being humble and going unnoticed, because at some point you may get greedy and want to come back for more. If you win the first time, they have to give you your prize. Since I usually win within three dollars (a lot of times
I can do it on the first try) they always make sure to tell me to beat it and don’t come back. You may notice sometime there are different people working the afternoon shift and evening shifts. At this one state fair, I had come earlier in the week and won a large prize at their bottle carnival game. Later that week I came back and played at the same carnival game in a crowd of people. I won and everybody was watching. They might’ve noticed who I was but it would have looked bad for their business if they refused to give me a prize. Everybody would have wondered what had happened. How come that guy didn’t get his prize? I’m sure everyone would not have played too long after that.

I once showed up at a state fair ten minutes after it opened. Hardly anyone was there so I shot right up to one of their bottle carnival games. I won on the first try and took their biggest prize. I must say the looks on their faces was not pleasant. I took one of their best animals for a buck. Nobody had even had a chance to see it! The guy who worked the booth was pissed. He started accusing me of being the guy who came back twice in one day at their last set up. This wasn’t true, I had never even seen him before. If I was running one of these carnival games, I would be miffed too. Since nobody else was around, he practically threw the prize at me and told me to beat it. This was a good lesson, don’t make the people who work these carnival games feel like they were robbed. If you win when a lot of other people are around, they get to make a big production out of you being a winner. The bells go off and they announce that you’ve won to everyone within megaphone range. It’s sometimes fun to wave your arms and yell along with them. This attracts more business for them and you feel pretty good. Of course afterwards they’ll tell you very quietly to never come back.
Plan Your Attack

Another point that you should know about how to win is that a lot of carnivals, especially the larger state fairs, have more than one bottle carnival game! With the state fairs, they usually get a couple of different carnivals to join together for the event. The most bottle carnival games I saw at one state fair was FIVE! Usually you find two or three.

Now what you must realize, is that everyone who works the midway knows about each other. They’ll always separate the carnival games so one doesn’t receive more business. They also know what prizes are given out at each carnival game. One bottle carnival game might give out large white panda bears, while the other might have those stupid cheap horses. If you win the white panda bear first, and then go strolling up to the second carnival game with it under your arm, THEY WILL NOT LET YOU PLAY! They will know that you got the panda bear at the other bottle carnival game because that’s the prize they give out. Don’t bother trying to tell them that you won it at the ring toss carnival game, they’re up on these things. They’ll tell you that you can only win one prize per fair, their animals or the other carnival games.

How do you get around this? Simple, make a plan of attack. Find out where all the bottle carnival games are located. Next, find a way of going around one carnival game without being seen. If you’ve watched Monty Python, you should know the importance of “not being seen”. (It's my book, I can make any dumb jokes I want!) I like to stake out the fair first. I'll have a good time, stuff my face, and then go on the rides. It's a pain to have to lug those stuffed creatures around all night. Once I know I’m about ready to leave, I win a prize at the booth that’s closest to the exit. I take that prize and bring it back to my car, making sure that I’m not seen carrying the prize by the other booth. That’s number
one. Next, I go back in and win the second one. Now I’m safe, I can stay a while little longer, show off, or I can take it back to my car and leave.

You can see that when I found the state fair with five bottle carnival games, I had to take long hikes to be able to win at all five carnival games. I did it and my car was stuffed. I had to keep walking past the person who worked the gate five times with a different animal each time. You should have seen the look on that persons face! I won all the stuffed animals in a span of thirty minutes. He must have thought they were giving the damn things out!