

Casting tips – basic concept – timing, types of casts, loading, power applications etc..

Welcome back!

Over the past 2 issues we've learned about the critical components that make up our fly fishing 'outfit', and then we've gone through how to rig the equipment accordingly.

Hopefully by now you've managed to get out on the lawn or to a waterway and have a feel how the rod moves and reacts as you make a casting-like motion?

This important issue of the Journey explores the concept of a basic fly cast. Arguably the key element of fly fishing that discerns it from the other forms we employ is the cast using a fly line – we discussed in Issue 2 how a fly line and terminal tackle is very different to spin or bait. I've employed CAA's first Certified Casting Instructor - Nathan Walker to arm you with the right information to get you going. Nathan is the most qualified club member to teach us to 'fly cast' and remove our bad casting habits!

Fly fishing is very much a presentation form of fishing, and by that I mean; how you present or cast the fly to the fish is what fools it into thinking that your imitation is in fact real.

Whether it be making the fish think that an insect has gently landed on the water's surface (Dry Fly), a baitfish or crustacean in distress (Wet Fly), or a nymph (aquatic insect) is naturally drifting down a river (Nymphing).

So, let's start from scratch on how to cast or present a fly with the basic overhead cast.

1. Grip.

How to hold the rod.

Although how to hold a rod is mainly a style, I'd like to impose two of the more popular styles on you.



** Thumb on top: The thumb on top grip is by far the most popular method for holding a fly rod.*

It's a very accurate way to cast, but also has its limitations.

This grip is mostly used for casting short distances as it's very accurate for tracking the rod in a straight line path.

(Hmm, Nathan is demonstrating this as if he were a left hander)



** Key Grip or knuckle on Top: The key grip is the most versatile grip, as it's the most natural way to hold a fly rod and facilitates a wider range of movement for short, medium or distance casting.*

The most important thing with any grip is that the hand must remain relaxed during the stroke, and only squeeze the rod grip tightly on the pause or stop. We'll talk about the stop shortly.

2. Stance.

The stance will vary depending on how far you are casting:

For in-close or short casting

- *You should maintain a square stance.*
- *Both shoulders and toes facing forward. The same stance you might employ to throw a dart.*
- *You are far more accurate in this stance.*

For distance casting

- *You will gradually convert to an open stance with the right foot dropped back, if you're a right handed caster, and facing side on to your target.*
- *The same stance you might employ if you're throwing a cricket ball from the outfield.*
- *The stance will gradually change as you start from in-close to throwing distance.*
- *Liken the action to throwing a ball as it is very similar.*

3. Rod Arc, Loop Shape & Rod Loading/Timing.

So now we know how to hold the rod and how to stand, but how do we get the line out there?

Fly casting is unlike conventional casting by the fact that we can't just pick up the rod and throw 50 metres of line with one single cast.

Because fly line is a lot thicker than normal nylon/monofilament fishing line, it has a lot of friction, and can be only cast in small amounts at a time. We also don't have the mass or weight at the end of the line like a sinker or lure. A fly is generally unweighted. As previously mentioned, the line itself is our weight or mass for casting. The weight can be distributed in different ways depending on the application (Refer to Issue 2 on fly line tapers).

On either the forward cast, back cast or both, we must let a little bit of line slip between our fingers, a little bit at a time until we have achieved the distance we want to cast to.

The less the amount of line we have outside the rod tip in the air while "false casting" (the name for casting line in the air while letting line slip), the less line we can "shoot" or let slip. The more line we have outside the rod tip when "false casting", the more line we can "shoot" or let slip to achieve more distance.

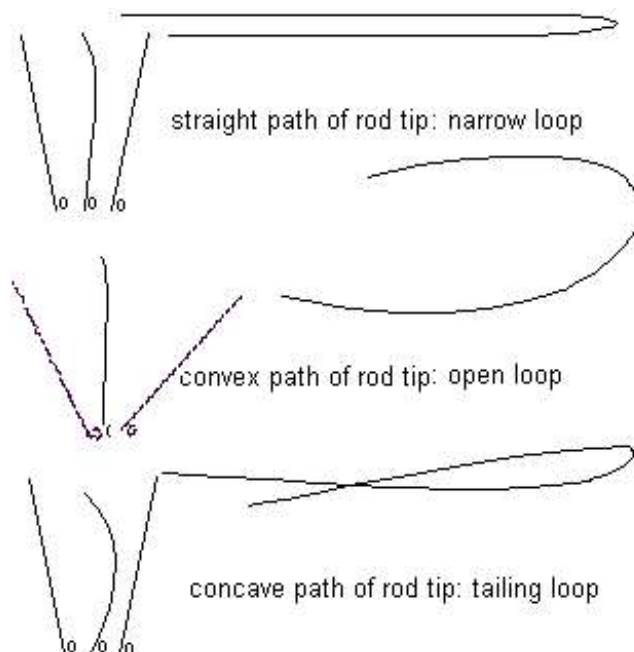
Now we move the rod forwards and backwards when false casting, the distance of the rod between the forward cast and back cast is called the "CASTING ARC".

Remember this name as it's very important. Think of your casting arc as an upside down triangle, or a slice of pizza, or a piece of pie...whatever helps you remember.

For a short cast we use a small triangle or narrow casting arc.

For a distance cast we use a large triangle or wide casting arc. Now the most important part...When the rod is moving through the casting arc (the forward and back casts) the rod tip must travel in a straight line path (SLP) as the shape of the line or "loop" as it travels through the air will be much more efficient.

When the line travels through the air, the loop must be narrow as it is far more aerodynamic than a wide one which has a lot of wind resistance and catches a lot of air. Think of it as the wing or aero foil on a plane. It cuts through the air a lot easier.



When the rod tip travels in a SLP (straight line path) during the casting stroke, the result is a narrow or tight loop. When the rod tip travels in a dome or convex path, the loop will be wide or open, and when the rod tip travels in a dipping or concave path, the result is a what we refer to as a "tailing loop". This causes the line to tangle and puts knots in our leader. This is more of a fault for an intermediate level caster so we won't go into the subject until later on except to say that sudden application of power forces the rod tip to dip or collapse and then rise again and creates the concave path.

When the line straightens after the stop or pause on the forward and the back casts, the weight of the line bends or "loads" the rod. It is this loading of the rod that is vitally important to making the line go out with minimal effort. The rod acts like a slingshot or catapult in the same way that when loaded then released, it propels the object. In this case the object is the fly line.

So it is important that the "timing" of the cast is correct. By this I mean, when the line straightens on the back cast and the rod is loaded or bent, it is time to move the rod through the arc into the forward cast. The same as pulling the elastic back on a sling shot. The rod loading contributes a lot to the cast. More than your own energy...At least for beginners anyway. We need to commence the cast the moment the line straightens on both the forward and back casts. No sooner and no later. While we are waiting for the line to straighten, the rod must remain stationary. The amount of time we pause depends on the amount of line being cast. The shorter the line, the shorter the pause. The longer the line, the longer the pause.

Now we want to move the rod through the stroke smoothly and efficiently.

The most efficient way to cast is start slow and finish to an abrupt halt or stop. This is "power application ". Think of trying to flick an apple off a pencil or flicking water off a paintbrush.

If you start too fast the apple will fall on the ground right in front of you or the water will end up spraying everywhere. If you start slow then finish fast, you can direct the energy forward in a much more efficient manner.

So this basically covers the info required to learn the basic overhead cast, which is the fundamental cast for fly fishing.

In later articles we will delve into some other different types casts including slack line presentation casts required for fishing rivers and streams.

Tight Loops!

*Nathan Walker
IFFF Certified Casting Instructor*