

Fly Casting Tips for the Serious, Experienced Caster

From Fly Casting Forum <http://home.att.net/~slowsnap/>

Fly Casting Forum is a webpage of various serious casters who have labored hard to provide the world with very good information on fly casting. On this page you find book reviews, VHS reviews, tips from experts, some physics, and lots of fly casting history.

1. Use a double taper line for your dry line fishing. Many shops and instructors like to have a new caster use the weight forward dry line because it gives the illusion of greater distance and power than a double taper line. This is truly an illusion. The weight forward line is a shooting head and has all the benefits and drawbacks of a shooting head. A given rod will throw a weight forward farther than a double taper, but not much. A double taper first of all feels like a fly line. It has a silky, comfortable feel and has the virtue of demanding a little better technique and understanding of the casting process. A double taper will mend beautifully. It can be reversed when one end wears out. With your double taper floater you can roll cast like nobody's business out to fifty or seventy feet, depending on the bushes. A double taper will execute a spey cast just fine with a single handed fly rod. This is valuable when you are back to back with trees and bushes. If you have ten or fifteen feet behind you a dynamic roll cast will get you way more than fifty feet into the river or lake. The place you need a weight forward dry line is tropical surface fishing for bones and tarpon etc. where you need lots of distance in a hurry.

2. Buy a stiff double taper dry line. This is not a commercial site but you can find high end lines that are stiffer than the others and these will make casting much more of a joy. The stiff line shoots through the guides more readily and it does not tangle like the very flexible ones.

3. Don't be too lazy to use line dressing on your dry line regularly. The line picks up algae and dirt and gets to be not so smooth. If you dress it you not only remove the scum but you lubricate the line and it shoots through the guides like a dream. It also floats higher which is particularly helpful when you are making that fifty foot roll cast.

4. Concentrate on your back cast. With a good strong straight back cast the fore cast or lay down is a snap. It is the back cast that counts.

5. Practice for short periods regularly. One way to induce this good habit is to keep a rod set up in your garage or closet and step outside for a few minutes whenever you feel like it and practice something. We cut little circles or squares from plastic milk jugs, punch a small hole with an awl, the sharp point on a compass or any such tool and then cut a slit from the edge to the hole with a jack knife. We pull the tippet through this by the practice fly or yarn fly and leave the rod either fully assembled or half and half with the leader straight. We walk out the door and Voila! we are fishing. (well almost)

6. When you practice, practice something. Always have an objective. You can practice on the sidewalk, across the street, in the parking strip or anywhere but have an objective. Becoming a journeyman fly caster is like learning a musical instrument, basketball, tennis or any other skill. Practice is focused on one or two points at a time.

7. Be prepared to backslide on what you know while you are adding to your fly casting skills. It is a normal learning pattern to make two steps forward and then one step back.

8. Take a blond, brunette, redhead, grey head, silver head or any head fishing with a fly rod. Fly casting is not a gender specific sport. We know couples where the wife casts in tournaments and fishes and the husband goes along to enjoy the camaraderie and the scenery. We know couples where the man is the caster and the woman does the bird watching.

9. Critique one another. If you have a friend who thinks casting is a worthwhile pursuit watch each other cast and dissect your strokes. The most telling signal of good or bad practice is the character of the back cast. It tells more about the state of your progress than anything else.

10. Watch your own back cast from time to time. We have seen casting works that recommend that the caster watch every back cast and we have seen others that recommend that the caster never look at the back cast. Neither of these positions is tenable. Turning your head or body to observe your back cast disturbs the geometry of your arm and shoulder joints etc. and is not ideal body mechanics but you must know what is going on behind you to evaluate your cast. Ultimately you will become so grooved that the friendly little tug of the line will announce that you're on the right track. We have film of a world champion caster who looks at his back cast in distance events. He does this to see if the line is straightened out and in an optimum position to accept the strength he will put into the final forecast.

11. Wait for the friendly little tug of your line on the back cast. In order to feel this tug you must have a short stroke on the back cast, about 1:00 or 1:30 is fine. The farther back you get the less you can feel the tug of the back cast. After 2:00 it is pretty subtle.

12. For long and powerful roll casts learn the dynamic roll cast. The basic roll cast is taught in the static mode - the rod drawn back to about the 1:00 o'clock position, letting the line fall and then making the casting stroke forward. The cast works because you have put enough line behind you to be able to impel it forward. For a dynamic roll cast you throw a small loop of the line behind you and commence the casting stroke while the line is still bellied out behind. You do the full casting stroke - load the rod with hand movement, add the power stroke with mainly wrist movement and snap the tip. This will drive the line out in a fifty or sixty foot roll cast. You can snap it high to get the line into the air for a soft dry fly landing or you can snap it farther forward and make the line roll out on the water for a wet fly presentation or to overcome the wind. It is important to start the forward casting stroke immediately after the loop of line bellies out behind. There are two reasons: First, the line is at its maximum distance behind, giving you more room for the loading part of your stroke. Second, the floating part of the line has come to the top of the surface and has no time to sink a little bit and slow down your cast. I first saw this at a fishing show and was astonished at the power. The amount of line you can throw behind is dependent on the amount of space behind. If there is fifteen feet clearance behind you can throw a fifteen foot belly of line behind - that's thirty feet of line you are moving forward. This dynamic roll cast blends all the way from the static roll cast with the line hanging straight down from the rod tip two feet behind your ear to a full blown power roll with not much more than the leader and a little bit of line remaining on the water. The amount you throw behind depends on how much room there is and how far you want to roll cast. The Spey cast is a variety of dynamic roll cast or the dynamic roll cast is a spey cast in a straight

line. This cast is very useful fishing and for hitting targets in accuracy games. Try to keep the back toss as close to your body as possible without fouling. It works fine on the off shoulder also. You can get just as much power on the off shoulder when the line is down stream on that side or the wind is blowing from your dominant side. Try it. You'll like it. Warning - It takes practice to get the feel and timing down.

13. If you want to improve your range and distance and are willing to practice try to practice with a medium stiff rod. The softer the rod the easier it is to tail your loop and overpower the rod. If you concentrate on loading the rod before cranking in the power stroke, the softer rod will discipline your stroke by giving a horrendous tailing loop if you load or haul too fast. Then when you are out there with your cannon rod, the slower motions forced by the soft rod will permit you to load the rod nicely and **then** apply the horsepower.

14. The softer rod will also give you a chance to acquire a feel for delaying the haul until the rod is loaded. We all have experienced the paradox of doing a languorous sleepy sort of cast and being surprised at the way the line flew out there. Then when we try to really do it and make it really go we get a short untidy cast. A haul started before the rod is bent - loaded- from the inertia of the line will distort a good loading motion by further bending the tip toward the ground, driving the line down and expending part of the haul in bending the rod rather than moving the line.

15. One effect of a good load is a heavy feel to the rod. If the rod feels heavy during the power stroke you will know that you have both straightened out the line before loading and loaded the rod at the right tempo. This is true on both false casts and back casts. If the rod feels light you know that you are not adding as many foot pounds of kinetic energy to the line as you are when the rod feels heavy. The faster the line is moving the more foot pounds of kinetic energy it has to carry it through the air resistance.

16. We advocate the thumb braced on the top of the grip, opposite the guides. We demonstrate this to students by asking them to resist our movement of the rod with their thumb braced directly on the top of the grip and then with their thumb off to the side with the V of the thumb and forefinger on the top of the grip. They always find that they can resist our force much better with the thumb braced. The thumb brace means that the rod moves when your hand moves rather than sagging back into the V of the thumb before moving. I build up my target and distance rod grips with tape and find that my thumb gradually destroys the tape because it is bracing the rod during power strokes.

17. Derek Brown of Tweedside, Scotland, has a casting and fishing tip <http://www.rodfish.demon.co.uk/octip.htm> Changing the drift to catch more fish,

18. Another Derek Brown <http://www.rodfish.demon.co.uk/juntip.htm> dissertation is on tailing loops and how to conquer them.

19. Derek Brown <http://www.rodfish.demon.co.uk/speycast.htm> specializes in spey casting and instruction from his vantage point as a casting instructor certified by the AGPAI in Great Britain. This is his short and sweet exposition of the single and double spey

20. Shooting line into the back cast is a necessary skill for distance with a fly line and rapid deployment of line as in the flats boat cast. It also enhances the speed and impressiveness of getting your line out. It is easy to do. Just start doing it and it will come. Lubricating the line makes it a lot easier and if you ever want to compete in distance you must oil the line with something. A lot of us use Armoral or some other vinyl conditioner and there are slippery preparations on the market.

21. Shooting the line into the flats boat cast. Anyone who watches videos of flats fishing has seen the flats boat cast where the caster stands on the bow with fly in hand (never ever hold the hook anywhere but on the bend, behind the point) with about thirty feet of line out, lying in the water or on the deck. When a fish is seen the caster roll casts forward and then, with one or at most two false casts lays the fly out at fifty, sixty or more feet. Shooting into the back cast is the key to this maneuver. You don't have to rent a guide and a flats boat to practice. Any lawn or dock will do. Simply do the dynamic roll cast described above - throwing the loop of line behind you and then rolling forward - high - with good tip snap- and then into a back cast, false cast and shoot. Some people let the roll cast pull the fly from their hand and others throw the fly out and start hauling on the first roll cast. Plenty of haul will get the line straightened out on your first back cast so you can power up the forecast. This cast is generally used in windy conditions so line speed is important. When you practice this at home please think about where your back cast is going with reference to your feet. You will have one or more people sitting and standing behind you on the boat. This cast also works off the bow or stern of a seventy foot flying bridge cruiser so long as your back cast goes away from the boat parts that rear up behind you.

21. Shooting into the back cast for distance. Getting the most out of a fly line when the fish are rising way out there will require a little shoot into the last back cast. Five feet or so is about right. You shoot into the last back cast in order to give your rod the optimum load on the final shoot to the target. If you were to measure the line you are false casting you would find that your rod gets soggy and loses its liveliness if there is too much line out but if you false cast with a short enough line to have a live rod and then shoot about five feet or so into the last back cast you will get a good cast with a heavy but not soggy rod on the fore cast. The big trap in all of this is overloading the rod. For example, false casting about 50 or 55 feet of nine weight with a final shoot into the back cast will yield ninety ' with a medium flex rod - a 9' marked 8/9 which vibrates at 164, whereas false casting 60 or 65 feet will yield a shorter cast and a mess at the end. Don't forget to keep the line oiled. It is so much more fun with a slick line.

22. When do you need to lube the line? - when you can hear it rustling through the guides on the back cast. Also, if the line doesn't want to easily follow the line after the haul on the back cast but tends to hang in a loose loop below the stripping guide rather than easily following the line back to a little tug it means that lube will help. If you have performed an efficient haul and back cast and the line still resists lubrication is generally the culprit. This can also be the result of a worn out or too old line that has a crazing or alligating of the plastic coating. Your ears will tell the tale most of the time. The back cast is the test because your back casting muscles are not as strong as your fore casting muscles. Sometimes the line coating will start to separate and make little bumps. Life is short so get a new line.

23. Would you like to put a fly in a pie pan at 50 feet? Most of the time? It is not as hard as it looks. The trick is to get a vertical cast. All of us fish off to the side most of the time because we

don't really trust the fly, particularly when the wind blows. But - if you work on fundamentals and practice - not long but often - you can develop a vertical cast that will lay out straight. Then you learn to measure and you can hit the pie tin. Tournament casting is into 30 inch rings and the journeyman tournament casters are hitting the 30 inch ring most of the time but a pie tin sounds better and in fact is about the size of some of the spots you pick out in the weeds along shore.

The first hurdle in casting overhead is the infamous tailing loop. We know that the way to avoid this is to use a short stroke, drift back a little farther after the snap, let the line straighten out and then load gently before going into the power part of the stroke from about 1:00 to 10:45. If you try to emphasize a very short stroke you will wind up with a little longer stroke but still short enough to create a tight loop. Where the fun comes is when you are throwing a non tailing loop directly overhead - some people throw over their shoulder and others throw over their nose. I do both right now and have a patented shot where the cork bass bug bounces off the back of my head and lands in the target. I've done this in private but not yet in public. It happens on the seventy footer. The trick is to have it hit the head dead center not the ear. If it hits the ear the air will turn blue and the water freeze over. This shot is the result of using a direct overhead cast. If it is truly vertical it will pass directly overhead on the way forward and a tailing loop will bonk you on the melon. I suspect the over the shoulder cast is sounder in the long run, so long as the loop is vertical and the line relatively straight going forward following the loop. With the over the shoulder there is more room to tail if your head is higher than your shoulders. I hear it go by my ear much of the time.

By the way, the big time casters, on the bass bug, on the longer targets, have a tailing loop on their back cast but seem to get it up for the fore cast. The bass bug is a half inch diameter piece of cork. We make them out of regular bottle corks of that dimension with an inch or so of kip or anything else for a tail. Poke a big hook through the center of the cork or drill a small hole in a drill press for the hook shank. Then tie the kip or fish hair or anything you want on the stub of the shank - on the small end of the cork. The eye is on the big end.

24. After you start getting a pretty vertical loop without a tail you can zero in on actually getting the fly into the pie pan. It helps to put water in the pan. The fly wont bounce out as readily. Start with some pans at a short enough distance that allows you a vertical loop without a tail. You can improve from there. A really short cast - 20 feet or so - is really more of a problem than a longer one unless you have a soft rod that will load well at that distance but betray you at 50 feet or more. There is a trick to getting it into the pan. False cast with nice loops until you think you are the right distance out. Then, start looking at the loop and, when the loop looks truly vertical, lay it down. Bring your rod down close to horizontal in a consistent fashion. After you do this a little bit you will come to trust the loop. If it is vertical the cast will lay down straight and the fly will not kick right or left at the end. This works when the wind is quiet. Casting accurately in the wind is another chapter. But, it can be done. Looking at the loop is not the entire answer to accuracy casting. There are situations and casting events that require a lay down with only one or two false casts and in these situations there is no substitute for looking at the spot on the water or target and learning to cast to it. Just like pitching horseshoes or shooting baskets.

25. When you are shooting for the pie pan speed can be the enemy of accuracy. The fly will want to flutter so slow down and see the cast straighten out. The trick is to foil the wind with as

much speed as the fly will allow. It is perpetually discouraging to lay one down straight and have it kick sideways at the end due to a crooked back cast or too much velocity or a combination of the two.

26. Another continuing battle is between enough snap to turn the leader over but not so much as to wrinkle the leader. If you try for the pie pan a few times you may experience "dumping the cast". The fly lands way short in a pile of leader - a "presentation cast" in the words of the fishing gurus. This is generally the consequence of failing to apply a gentle snap in the lay down stroke.

27. From time to time you will encounter a discussion of learning to cast by flipping water off a paint brush. You are exhorted to try to flip water twenty feet with a 4" paint brush. This is tip snap. Examine your hand and wrist motion in doing this maneuver and you will then realize what you are doing or must do with a fly rod to induce tip action. Twenty feet with a paint brush is the equivalent of the back cast weight exercises discussed above. Try flipping water backwards with the brush. Same difference. The paint brush won't build any muscles or coordination but it will show you what you must do with the rod to produce tip action.

28. Wind and accuracy are not compatible. But wind need not destroy accuracy. Line speed casting can minimize the effects of a cross wind if the line speed is produced without wrinkling the line too much. Casting up wind or to the up wind part of the target area with more speed, a smaller loop and maybe some gentle haul will yield some accuracy. Every account of salt water fly fishing discusses the wind and one good reason for messing with practice and these exercises is to add value to your tropical fishing excursion.

29. Stretch your line when you are shooting a lot of line. Most modern fly lines will straighten out with a single stretch so if you are going to shoot twenty or thirty feet stretch the part you are going to shoot before you shoot it. You can see that the watch spring coils of line at your feet will pick each other up and tangle. Then when the big one boils eighty feet away you will be ready.

30. Practice a heavy tip snap on the back cast. Everyone who spends much time with a fly rod comes to the realization that the back cast is everything. With a good back cast the forecast is a piece of cake. What we need for the good back cast is line speed on tap. The way to have line speed available is to practice an exaggerated very heavy tip snap on the back cast, preferably with a heavy rod (after warming up the arm and wrist a little bit). This may look like a dog's breakfast at the beginning with all kinds of kinks and waves in the back cast but with time it will become more controlled and your strength will also improve (what else do you do with this motion?) If you have a heavy rod you can build up strength and coordination with repeated series of "reps" as the weight trainers call them. False cast ten heavy back snaps and then let your arm rest or do something else and then ten more etc.. Soon you will be able to put up a high straight back cast or a low straight back cast or anything in between. Since you are trying for length on the back cast - enough length to load the rod to its optimum - you will also be smoothing up your fore cast as well. When you build up the back cast power you will be ready for some of the fancy change of direction casts that demand plenty of speed into a long back cast. Lots of tip action is not the complete answer to a good back cast. You must still load the rod, power it, haul, snap, drift and all those good things but the snap is the icing on the cake that gives extra power on demand. There is no law that says you cannot practice your haul timing on these back cast reps but for some of us practicing two things at

once will blow fuses in the brain box so use your own judgment. You may never be able to produce a great back cast with maximum tip action but you will have raised the bar and be able to produce good back casts at a higher level than before. You know the old saw - you learn to cast ninety feet so you can cast well at seventy feet. Same thing.

31. Exercise to increase your drift distance into the back cast. At times you will want to drift to the maximum into the backcast, after the snap, and you can use your weight training with the heavy rod as a chance to loosen up the old shoulder area. Don't overdo it but try to get your rod hand behind the ear more and see how it affects the loading part of your stroke. This won't happen overnight either but you'll be glad you did it. This is not a problem if you are casting three-quarter arm where you will naturally have a long drift and a long smooth load. But, if you are casting overhead to lay the fly or bug down in a narrow patch between the weeds or between two bushes on the shore more mobility to the back will ease things and extend your range.

32. If you really want to go for distance start thinking about a more vertical cast. Distance records are set with a vertical cast which produces a vertical lower air resistance loop. The back casts will not be as vertical as the fore cast and may go beside the caster at head level but the forecast will be vertical or nearly so.

33. We are including here a link to a new internet resource which will have a continuing supply of casting tips from the top. [STEVE AND TIM RAJEFF'S SCHOOL OF FLY FISHING WITH PAGES OF CASTING TIPS AND FILMS OF EXPERT CASTINGSTROKES](#)

34. If you really want to hit the pie tin at 50 feet it is time to think about feet. Standing in a river or a boat means that your feet are mainly to keep you upright so just put them where they are the safest for you. By the time you have learned to hit a few targets a lot of the time you will be casting where you look. But where accuracy and distance are concerned the feet become important. I don't recall ever seeing a target caster working from the open position - with the right foot back for a right handed caster. They all seem to stand in the closed position - right foot forward. Some have it more forward than others but hardly any stand square to the target - the right foot is ahead. This helps in a number of ways. You get a more compact and reliable stroke. You can use a little body motion if you like - rocking back and forth a little to extend the length of the stroke. You free up the path for a longer haul if that is what is needed - down to or past the left hip. This can be important shooting the seventy foot bass bug target. Not everyone needs a haul to the hip for that shot but it is nice to have that available.

I have hardly ever seen a distance caster who was not using the open stance - the right foot back for a right handed caster. This opens up the shoulder joint for the extreme motions involved in a distance shot. It allows the caster to peek at the back cast to see if it is straightened out. If it isn't straight there won't be much distance. It allows the caster to lengthen the back stroke clear out to the horizontal if that is what is desired. You can't do this from a square or closed stance without serious strain of the shoulder structures. The open stance allows the caster to rock back and then rock forward with the stroke to lengthen the overall stroke. Putting the legs into the cast makes a

difference. Some casters use every muscle from the big toe to the adams apple in trying for distance. And it works.

35. The great disadvantage of the open stance for distance is that it tends to foul up the nice straight vertical overhead cast that accuracy requires. The distance cast should be just as controlled as the accuracy cast with a vertical or near vertical tight loop in a single plane. The idea is to minimize air resistance. Looking at the back cast soon convinces one that a sloppy back cast never goes anywhere. It is easy to create wide lateral loops on the back cast from an open stance. One way to develop a good distance stroke is to shoot targets or leaves or bubbles on the water from an open stance. Over time this will make the distance stroke more controlled with a better loop. It will approach the precision of the closed stance stroke and travel farther.

36. Another principle for distance is to have the back cast 180 degrees from the fore cast. For instance, if you are throwing a shooting head a long way, a low back cast into a rising fore cast will help. With a fly line it may be better to have a higher back cast and a lower fore cast. Sometimes a high fore cast with a fly line just spends all its kinetic energy going twenty feet in the air. On the shooting head it seems strange to put out a low and slow back cast, passing by below your head on the back cast but it makes sense.

NEW STUFF

37. THE DOUBLE HAUL REVISITED In case you missed the discussion in the history pages of Marvin Hedge's revelation of the double haul at the 1934 St. Louis Nationals we have obtained a book on this subject by Marvin Hedge and will be discussing it soon. Everyone who enjoys the fly rod seems to have a special regard for the haul and the double haul. It is certainly the caster's friend in need and in deed. There are several ways to use it of course. A little haul when the line is getting unruly will add speed and straighten out the cast and tighten up the loop. When you are aerializing a long line a late haul, started after the rod has moved forward in the loading phase and about the time of the power phase will yield a tight loop with a snappy turnover of the fly. This is nice in the wind. For a wider loop, maybe when the fly is large and wind resistant and likely to tail and foul the line a nice long early haul will do wonders. It helps a lot to carefully feed the line into the back cast after the haul - the up part of the down-up maneuver. This will avoid the jerking around of the fly as the line straightens out and produce a nice vertical loop. The same thing goes for the late and sharper haul for the tighter loop. With a really soft feed of the hauled line back into the fore cast or back cast the fly will stay in the vertical loop pattern with the resultant lessened wind resistance. The only trouble with this is that it is not as much fun as feeling the line rattle out and jerk your rod as it straightens out. A very macho feeling but it wrinkles up the line.

By all accounts Marvin Hedge must have invented the double haul and maybe the single haul since I cannot imagine any caster not paying attention to anyone using the haul. The first mention we find is accounts of the 1934 Nationals. As soon as his book arrives we will know what he has to say about this subject and pass it on along with his insights on how to make it work. Marv baby was a fly line salesman and had a lot to say about line tapers in an era when fishermen built their own tapered lines