

The Loop

The Federation of Fly Fishers Journal for Certified Casting Instructors Fall 2000

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THE QUESTIONING TEACHER

by Al Kyte

As conscientious teachers, we like to know how our instruction comes across to students who learn in different ways. One of our best tools for understanding that learning is our ability to ask questions. The information we obtain from questioning students then helps us to teach more directly to their needs.

One day I was watching a serving lesson in tennis. I noticed a student who was hitting almost every serve into the court with excellent technique. As her instructor approached, she miss-hit one serve, and was subjected to several minutes of unneeded instruction. That day I learned to ask, "How have you been doing?" whenever I have not seen the next student in line cast. And as I begin to watch, "Is that typical of how you have been casting?" Our instruction should build on the learning that has been going on, and questions can help provide more complete information.

I have also learned to ask questions following a "break-through" moment, when a student suddenly achieves the change I have been striving for. Typically we attribute that success to the last thing we said or did. However, if we really want to know what triggered the change, we ask, "What were

you thinking as you made that cast?" I am often surprised at the response. I may even hear, "I blocked out what you were saying and concentrated on keeping my wrist firm." Sometimes understanding learning is humbling for the teacher.

In a classroom setting, as when discussing topics such as "the physics of a fly cast", I often use the "Guided Discovery" method of teaching. This method allows the teacher to ask questions but not answer them. We ask increasingly specific questions until the right answer is "discovered", then move on to the next general question. This challenging process not only reveals the learning going on, but also prevents the most common error of knowledgeable teachers -- talking too much.

These are just a few of the many ways in which questioning can improve our teaching. As you examine your own approach with students, you may see a way to substitute "asking" for "telling" and, in so doing, build a better bridge between teaching and learning.

Al Kyte has served on the Board of Governors since its inception and has conducted and published original research on the dynamics and stylistics of flycasting. He is retired from the faculty of the Physical Education department at the University of California, Berkeley

YOUR FAVORITE TEACHING TIPS

Most of the following tips were gleaned from the 2000 Casting Instructor Certification Renewal Questionnaire and were patiently transcribed to disk by Evelyn Taylor in the National Office in Bozeman. There were far too many good tips to run in this issue. You've heard some of these before, as they were developed and taught to us by The Great Ones. Two consistent ones that you cited for beginners involve the use of pantomime and having students cast horizontally across their bodies to permit easier viewing of rod dynamics and loop shapes. The Loop thanks all of you for your submissions and for sharing your ideas with the rest of us. That's how we get better.--Ed.

Before beginning casters even string up the rod, I have them pantomime the casting stroke with the unrigged rod. This helps them better feel the rod and what it takes to make the rod bend and un-bend (load & unload). *Philip Chavez, Idaho*

After I teach the basic cast and the students have practiced it awhile, I pair them up and have them analyze their partners' casts. I ask them to comment on what their partner is doing right and where improvements could be made. This often helps the student who is doing the analyzing to recognize his own casting errors and forces him to articulate a corrective action. *Mike Kaul, Wyoming*

I use hula hoops as targets when teaching accuracy and encourage students to cast accurately with either hand. *Clarence Lovell, Massachusetts*

With students who are too wristy or just so patterned in an error that I'm not getting through to them, I ask them to change hands. They then have to think about how to make it work. *Michael Duly, Oregon*

For beginners and others who have trouble forming good loops, I think it is important that they see their own loops. I have them hold the rod straight out in front of them, parallel to the ground, and ask them to move the rod to the left and to the right, keeping about 20' of the line in the air. It is then easy for the students to clearly see how the line reacts to different rod, arm, wrist and hand movements. With the student then having a clear understanding of what the loops should look like and what cause the different results, we then move to the standard overhead cast. They can then identify what kind of loops they are casting...on their own. And, if there's an error, most can tell me what caused it. In most cases, those who cannot identify the cause fail to observe their back cast. *Snuggs Brown, Arkansas*

We've got to put more fun into casting instruction. For accuracy practice, I'll have people cast a weighted fly at a loaded mousetrap. When I travel, I carry a big hoop that has four shock-corded ferrules for portability. I'll hold it up and have my student cast tight loops through it. These kinds of things make learning to cast fun! *Lefty Kreh, Maryland*

When students move the rod too far down at the end of forward stroke, I stand in front of them and tell them that if their rod hits me in the head they are finishing too low. *Bob Stehwien - Master Instructor, New Mexico*



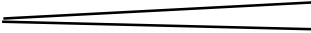
SOUNDS HELP GET THE FEEL

by Don Lawhead

The most difficult part of the basic casting stroke to teach is the acceleration to a crisp stop. Making sounds which depict the basic casting stroke can help beginners get that casting feel. Mel Krieger uses the sound "WHUMP" to identify the feel of the power stroke, that crisp stopping of the rod which forms such a beautiful, narrow casting loop. The word "WHUMP" sounds like how the rod feels as the rod, bending down to the grip, springs forward at the end of the casting stroke.

I like to expand the "WHUMP" sound to help students get the feel of the acceleration to a crisp stop which is so important to the basic casting stroke. I explain that the "WH" ("WHUH") sounds like the slow beginning of the casting stroke. The consonant "P" is a sharp, short, accented sound which depicts the crisp stop which is so important at the end of the basic casting stroke. If you add the musical concept of crescendo (Italian for getting louder), you have a **sound** which you can easily make which suggests how the basic casting stroke feels.

Wh--uh-----mp!

pianissimo  fortissimo
(very, very soft) *crescendo* (very loud, crisp end)

Try this:

- Discuss the soft consonance "Wh"
- Discuss the hard consonance "P"
- Practice having the students say, "Wh--uh-----mp"
- Add the casting motion to sound the student makes by holding only the lower section of the rod as you say, "Wh--uh-----mp"
- Practice extremes:
 - Very slow beginning: "Whuuuh"
 - **Very sharp, crisp stop**, "Puh!!"
- Lay out 30 feet of line behind you.
- Walk forward with the rod in the beginning position of the casting stroke until the line is straight behind the rod tip.

As you cast, say, "Wh--uh-----mp"
- Repeat, first concentrating on how slow you begin the stroke.
- Then concentrate on how crisp you make the stop.

At seminars, I have had even experienced casters tell me that this "sound" technique helped them improve their fundamental casting stroke.

Try it. It seems to help!

Don Lawhead is a Master Casting Instructor from Austin, Minnesota.



THE EDITOR NEEDS EDITING? YEP.

Two thoughtful, top-tier casting instructors, Joe Libeu and Randi Swisher, are keeping this editor on his toes. Joe is a member of the Board of Governors and has taught at the Long Beach (CA) Casting Club for 11 years. Randi is a Master instructor and has directed the Sage Fly Fishing Schools for 8 years. Both wrote me with incisive comments about an article I penned for the last Loop.

Joe objected to my description and analysis of an error I see fairly often. I wrote, "Your beginner appears to be doing almost everything right he is moving the rod through a short arc with clear stops, he is not wristing but he is casting wide loops. How is he doing it?" I answered, "In the latter part of the stroke, he is either slowing the rod down or moving it at a constant speed, instead of accelerating to a stop."

Joe thinks this is poorly worded, that the simplest description of this problem should focus on the application of too much power too soon in the cast, rather than on what happens in the latter part of the stroke. He also points out the

ambiguity in my term “moving it at a constant speed”. [In order for the scenario I described to be valid, after the initial acceleration that begins the stroke, the rod must decelerate, then move at a constant speed for a fraction of a second and then decelerate again to a stop.] Another point he makes is that the term “arc” can confuse people. Webster’s defines arc as “a continuous portion of a curved path” and as an “angular measure.” I used the term with the latter definition in mind. But if I tell a student to cast over a short arc, he may think of the former definition. He would then consciously try to move the rod over a curved path instead of over a short angle between backcast and forward cast stops, which is my goal. From now on, I’m sticking with “short stroke”, as there’s less chance for confusion.

Joe and some Master instructors at the Long Beach Casting Club unsuccessfully attempted to duplicate the short arc/wide loop phenomenon using my description. After taking my rod and video camera into my special casting facility (the back yard), I put my specific words to the test. The outcome wasn’t pretty. First, in my article I didn’t define “short arc”. A short arc for a beginner is perhaps a medium-length arc for a Master. Outside, when I used my typical short arc, I tailed the cast. When I used what my beginner students would consider a short stroke, I threw a loop that, while not grossly wide, would qualify as a wide loop on the instructor performance test. How did I do this? By starting with too much power too soon (the short line let me avoid tailing), which is not inconsistent with my description of the rod as slowing down or moving at a constant speed later in the stroke. Why didn’t I say it the simple way in the first place, as Joe suggested? As I too often do to my students, I needlessly complicated something that was simple. Why couldn’t Joe and his Master friends duplicate my wide loops? I think it’s because my description was so obtuse that they didn’t understand what I wanted them to do. Now I know better.

Randi Swisher was troubled by my following Q & A: “When practicing a 40-foot cast with a modern 6-weight graphite rod, a floating line, a tapered leader to match, and a yarn fly, should you feel the line tug as it turns over at the end of your backcast? No, unless you are using a level line or you are casting without a leader.” He wrote to say: “I think the big question is, what does the word ‘tug’ mean. I think ‘tug’ can be a very individual feeling, depending on the level of caster. To an advanced caster, a tiny little pull or loading of the rod as the fly line straightens would probably constitute a ‘tug’. But a beginner probably would not feel this little pull of the flyline.”

Randi’s comment taught me that I erroneously referred to the tug of the line when I meant to say the tug of the fly [at the instant the line and leader fully straighten]. Speaking as just one caster, I don’t feel a tug from a little yarn fly when I am using the rig I described and am casting with a slow line speed, as in the type of small-dry-fly trout fishing I sometimes do. On the other hand, when using a heavier fly or casting with a relatively high line speed, I do feel a tug or bounce at the instant the line and leader fully straighten. Also, and perhaps more to Randi’s point, the instant the loop has formed

and is on its way, there is a very slight bend [load] in the rod from the momentum of the unrolling loop. While I view this load as inconsequential and barely detectable, it is nonetheless a load. Is it a “tug”? The lesson for me is that, whatever I call it, I need to be very careful about how I word descriptions of casting to my audience, whatever their level.

Teaching is frequently about editing oneself. In a way, Al Kyte’s article in this issue describes a tennis instructor’s failure to edit himself, thereby subjecting his pupil to a needless digression. As a casting instructor, I too often talk first and think later. Try as I do to edit myself, I still need Joe Libeu, Randi Swisher and other keen-minded instructors to edit me, to see and hear in my own teaching what I do not see and hear, to keep me from making what may be mistakes, and to help me give the most to my students. To me, that’s what this instructor certification program is all about—becoming, through my own study and through the kind critique of my peers, the best teacher I can be to my students. And then it’s about returning the favor. So thanks, Joe and Randi, for speaking up.



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YOU CAN HAVE A LINK from your FFF Website listing to your own E-mail address. Contact Evelyn (see above).

We welcome your submissions via E-mail, fax, or disk. Please attach a short instructor bio (1-3 sentences), including your location and Certification level. Please indicate whether or not you are willing to allow for your submission's possible republication on the Program's Website. Any illustrations should be in TIFF format. The Loop reserves the right to accept or decline any submission for any reason, and to edit any submission as it sees fit. All submissions should be sent to the National Office:

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COMING EVENTS

Pre-registration is REQUIRED!

Contact Evelyn Taylor at (406) 585-7592

Portland, Oregon - January 5 & 6; International Sportsmen's Expo; Cert. Instructor & Masters; must preregister by Dec 29

College Park, Maryland - January 13 & 14; The Fly Fishing Show; Cert. Instructor & Masters; must preregister by Jan 4

Somerset, New Jersey - January 26 & 27; The Fly Fishing Show; Cert. Instructor & Masters; must preregister by Jan 17

San Mateo, Calif - February 1 & 2; International Sportsmen's Expo; Cert. Instructor & Masters; must preregister by Jan 24

Seattle, Wash - February 8 & 9; International Sportsmen's Expo; Cert. Instructor & Masters; must preregister by Feb 1

Charlotte, North Carolina - February 16 & 17; The Fly Fishing Show; Cert. Inst. & Masters; must preregister by Feb 8

Denver, Colo - February 23 & 24; International Sportsmen's Expo; Cert. Instructor & Masters; must preregister by Feb 15

Long Beach, Calif - March 10; SWC Show/Fred Hall Show; Cert. Instructor & Masters; must preregister by Feb 23

Salt Lake City, Utah - March 16 & 17; Internat'l Sportsmen's Expo; Cert. Inst. & Masters; must preregister by Mar 8

Phoenix, Arizona - March 23 & 24; International Sportsmen's Expo; Cert. Inst. & Masters; must preregister by March 15

Gulf Shores, Alabama - May 17; Southeast Council Conclave; Cert. Instructor; must preregister by May 10

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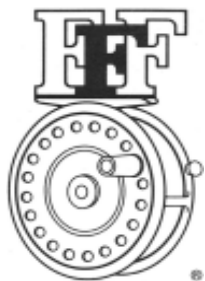
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