



The Tailing Loop

The Federation of Fly Fishers Newsletter for Casting Instructors ***Spring 1995***

TEACHING A CROWD: PARTNER UP

by Dave Engerbretson

Fly casting is best taught with a small teacher-student ratio, and a class of one to six students is ideal for a single instructor. However, things are rarely ideal, and I regularly find myself teaching twenty-five students in my university class. In one extreme case, I was faced with forty students and I had no help!

My normal procedure, whatever the class size, is to bring the group together to explain and demonstrate the next skill. In explaining the skill, I will stress two or three key points critical to its success. The students then return to their casting positions to practice the skill, while I move among them making appropriate comments and suggestions.

When the class is large, however, I find it very helpful to have each student choose a partner and practice in pairs. One student is the caster while the other becomes the coach. Even though the coach may not be an experienced caster, he or she can watch the partner to see if the key points of the cast are being accomplished, and offer suggestions if they are not.

While teaching the single haul, for example, I may holler out to the group, "Now, be sure that the haul is put into the backcast just as the short power stroke is applied with the casting hand." And all of the coaches concentrate on watching that key point and correcting the caster, if necessary. Then the partners switch and the caster becomes the coach.

When all have practiced that key point, I may say, "O.K., now concentrate on making the haul a short, crisp downward tug on the line, not just a long, slow pull." And, again, the partners coach each other, paying particular attention to the new key point of the skill.

Of course, all during this time I move around the group giving individual instruction.

I find that having students pair up is beneficial to both the caster and the coach. While the casters are practicing the actual skill and receiving individual help, the coaches are reinforcing the techniques in their minds and are getting valuable mental practice. The entire learning process is enhanced, and the potential handicap of a large class can be turned into a positive factor.

BRUSH UP ON YOUR CASTING STROKE

"A picture is worth a thousand words"

by Larry Iwata

Giving students a picture or model of proper casting techniques helps them to understand the principles we as instructors are trying to convey to them. A picture or image can help them learn faster, and also help them over mental obstacles. Something as simple as a common household paintbrush can be a great teaching tool.

Beginners often have a difficult time comprehending the basic casting motion. In particular they often struggle with the principle of bringing the rod to an abrupt stop, what is referred to as 'stopping' or loading the rod. In part, this is because the motion involved in fly casting is very different from that in other sports, which emphasize follow-through. Follow-through is stressed and emphasized in so many other sports: tennis, golf, basketball, and numerous others. While follow-through is important in all these sports, it is a motion almost the opposite - a firm and abrupt halting of the rod - that is the key to effective fly casting. This halting motion has a lot in common with the motion used when shaking liquid off of a paintbrush. Using a brush gives students a correct image to hold onto when casting.

When using this technique with students, I ask them to imagine that they have just completed a full day of house painting and are in the process of cleaning their paintbrushes of excess paint (using water as a cleaning agent). Next I pull out the paint brush that I always keep with me when teaching and demonstrate the actual process for them. I first wet the brush with water. Then I demonstrate the shaking motion used to shake the excess water out of the brush. The motion required to shake off all the excess water is the same one used when casting to load the rod and propel the fly line. Other everyday tasks employ this same type of motion: 1) rapping a kitchen spoon against a mixing bowl to get the excess food off the spoon, 2) getting the excess water off of your toothbrush, and 3) trying to shake water off your hands after you have washed them and then realized there are not towels in sight (and how many times has that happened!).

After showing students this demonstration, I always

encourage them to do this paintbrush exercise themselves. Experiencing the feel of this stroke will help them far more than merely explaining and demonstrating the idea to them.

This is a very useful technique to use as students are actually casting at a pool or lake. If I'm working with individuals that are really struggling with their casting, I'll ask them to put down their rods and work with the paintbrush for a few minutes. This helps them get out of a frustrating rut, and gives them a feel for the proper stroke. For some students this experience has been a revelation. It definitely works better than having students simply force themselves to try harder.

Using a paintbrush is most effective for teaching the forward casting stroke, since the two motions are quite similar. Sometimes this technique also works for backcasts if students can grasp the idea of holding the paintbrush and attempting to fling off the water up and backward, as is done in a normal fly-casting backcast.

So don't throw away those old brushes. When heading out to do some casting instruction, tuck a paintbrush in your pocket. Then you'll be ready to 'paint' an image of a good casting stroke that students can relate to, as well as a tool that they can use to feel the correct casting motions themselves.

AN INSTRUCTION SUGGESTION

by Mel Krieger

In order to fully understand and communicate a good flycasting stroke, instructors should learn to cast badly as well as proficiently. I also find that this kinesthetic approach, this "feel" of good and bad casting, is an excellent teaching tool.

After a student successfully corrects a casting fault, I commonly have them repeat the fault, casting wrong and then right again. This exercise is especially useful to intermediate and advanced students who through repetition may have "grooved" a fault into their stroke.

THANKS!!!!

Many thanks to everyone who submitted articles! Keep them coming!! If your article didn't appear in this issue - stay tuned it may be in a future one. Your contributions are greatly appreciated, and without them we wouldn't have a newsletter!!! Please send your articles, antidotes and cartoons to:

John Seidel
325 N. Pine
Townsend, MT 59644

CHARACTERISTICS OF AN EFFECTIVE INSTRUCTOR

by Chuck Echer

Being extremely good at something doesn't necessarily mean one can excel at teaching. As this is only a small portion of instruction, I thought it might be helpful to discuss some of the characteristics of a good teacher.

Most of you probably have your favorite fly casting instructor. You might stop and consider why this individual instructor stands out as your favorite. For example, your favorite might be Mel Krieger for his ability to retain undivided attention with his dynamic, enthusiastic, and simplistic approach to fly casting. Or it might be Lefty Kreh for his humor and continuous "one liners", coupled with his effortless ability to shoot off his entire fly line with only the rod tip section in his hand, executing his five principles of casting. Yet another might be Doug Swisher for his surgical ability to dissect the dynamics of casting into a visual concept of simplistic rules that everyone understands. All three of these individuals are casting machines, possessing a wealth of subject knowledge, all having different techniques, but commonly getting the fly to the target under any conditions with the ease of a master. Of course, the common denominator is a good set of teaching characteristics that makes them excellent instructors.

Let's now look at some characteristics that we may now possess (our little bag of teaching tricks) and some we may want to add to our instructional arsenal to increase our teaching skills.

An effective teacher: is inspiring, adaptable, patient, compassionate, non-judgmental, and has a sense of humor and respect for other people; creates a conducive environment for self-expression; establishes a level of comfort with students, getting everyone involved in the learning process;

has a thorough, current knowledge and passionate love and enthusiasm about the subject; can communicate the essence of the subject matter and maintain a high level of interest; can be attentive and draw out the students' greatest potential and nurture their individuality; has a unique curiosity and an ability to learn from the students, thus providing a two-way process that promotes learning; stimulates the students by discussing different points of view; instructional strategies include flexibility, speaking concisely and clearly, using visual aids and reinforcement; is prepared - organizing the subject material promotes time effectiveness and results in good communication with students; maintains a focused learning environment avoiding conversational side-tracks; is attuned to students' needs, strengths, and weaknesses; tailors subject vocabulary and information to all levels and understands the learning needs of youth, adults, and senior students; knows that positive praise promotes student confidence.

A good teacher should make positive use of different styles of casting, pointing out the similarities of each to aid the students' casting technique. Students have learned from different sources and thus have acquired different skills and techniques. Remember, the ultimate objective is to get the fly to the target in a precise but comfortable manner. If one looks at the rod tip position from the point of acceleration to the abrupt stop, most casting strokes are the same. This is true regardless of the instructors' casting method of teaching, the casting plane, clock position, rigid wrist, or the broken microsecond wrist.

Often I see individuals give unsolicited help to beginners, particularly those around casting ponds or clubs. This help is normally in the verbal form of "you're working too hard, you're breaking your wrist, you're dropping the back cast, here let me show you how to cast correctly my way." The beginner is usually confused, frustrated, and leaves without the benefit acquiring a casting foundation from which they can build.

Students should leave your instruction differently than the when they arrived, feeling more prepared, having a greater sense of self-esteem and confidence in casting and having a solid foundation of basic fly fishing knowledge. Make the learning experience fun. Be enthusiastic! When you have them sitting on the front of their seats, it's like having several trout feeding in front of you waiting for another presentation, i.e., another tantalizing piece of information. I instruct around two hundred students a year in northern California. To maintain my teaching credential in California, I completed a mandatory course entitled "Foundations of Adult Education" taken a few years ago, and the professor, Robert C. Williams, left me with this expression that I would like to share with you. "What of myself did I leave with my students today?"

FEDERATION OF FLY FISHERS CASTING CERTIFICATION BOARD OF GOVERNORS

Barry Beck
RR1, Box 310-2
Benton, PA 17814
(717) 925-2392

Al Kyte
57 Corliss Dr.
Moraga, CA 94556
(510) 631-0419

Gary Borger
5001 Packer Dr.
Wausau, WI 54401
(715) 842-4806

Steve Rajeff
1359 Downriver Dr.
Woodland, WA 98674
(206) 598-3502

Al Buhr
569 Palmer Dr. N
Keizer, OR 97303
(503) 393-6965

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4100 James Savage Rd
Midland, MI 48642
(517) 835-2048

Leon Chandler
3736 Kellogg Rd.
Cortland, NY 13045-5588
(607) 756-2851

Allan Rohrer
20452 Bayview Ave.
Santa Ana, CA 92707
(714) 756-9286

Dave Engerbretson
1272 Highland Dr.
Moscow, ID 83843
(208) 882-1687

Barbara Rohrer
20452 Bayview Ave.
Santa Ana, CA 92707
(714) 756-9286

Chico Fernandez
11450 SW 98th St.
Miami, FL 33176
(305) 596-4481

Doug Swisher
P.O. Box 725
Hamilton, MT 59840
(406) 363-2878

Jim Green
37896 Snake River Rd.
Asotin, WA 99402
(509) 243-1105

Lou Tabory
96 Pine Mtn. Road
Ridgefield, CT 06877
(203) 798-8052

Mel Krieger
790 27th Ave.
San Francisco, CA 94121
(415) 752-0192

VP, Education
Judy Lehmberg
420 Ridgeview
Dayton, TX 77535
(409) 258-8505

Asst. VP Casting
Tom Travis
Box 1320
Livingston, MT 59047
(406) 222-2273

FFF National Office
P.O. Box 1595
Bozeman, MT 59771
(800) 618-0808

THE HARKER'S ISLAND RELEASE

by Capt. Dave Cornell

I turned around just in time to see my favorite 10-weight outfit rocketing off the stern of the boat where I had momentarily set it down to remove my jacket. I had just learned a hard lesson about leaving a fly in the water trailing behind a drifting boat. There were so many false albacore in the area, I should have known better. And after a discouraging morning casting to breaking fish that didn't seem eager to eat a fly, this added insult to injury.

Some humor was gratefully injected into my sad tale of the lost rod and reel by a newfound friend back at the marina at Harker's Island, North Carolina. When I told him what had happened, he related another story about a friend of his who had fought a large tarpon to the boat in rough seas. As everyone was preparing for the landing of the fish, the angler's forearms were slammed down on the rail when a large wave passed under the boat. Rod, reel, and tarpon disappeared beneath the water. This was dubbed a "Harker's Island Release" and hearing about someone else's similar misfortune somehow made me feel a little better. Besides, now I was a member of a small if somewhat reluctant fraternity which practiced this costly form of conservation.

Many people believe that we who call ourselves professionals don't do stupid things or have embarrassing moments while fishing. Nothing could be further from the truth

- a point I frequently make to people I take fishing. In fact, one could argue that because of all the time we spend on the water, guides and professional anglers get pretty casual about things and are bound to get into trouble from time to time.

I remember seeing a program on tarpon fishing a few years ago that brought home this point. The show featured a well known guide and angler, both of whom shall remain nameless. The sequence of mishaps was very entertaining and it did my heart good to see one of the best anglers in the world having the same problems I did. He spooked fish with his line, stepped on the line during crucial presentations, and in my favorite part, broke off a nice fish when his leg became entangled in the flyline coming up off the deck during the tarpon's first run. This all occurred with appropriate comments from the guide, who was relentless in his good-natured badgering.

So when I catch myself sounding a little too much the expert, I remember things like that thousand-dollar outfit getting a Nantucket sleighride behind a false albacore in North Carolina, or that world renowned fly fisherman hopping up and down on one leg while a wildly leaping tarpon came tight against the wraps and broke off. A little humble pie should be on everyone's diet once in a while.

Federation of Fly Fishers
Casting Instructor Certification
P.O. Box 1595
Bozeman, MT 59771

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