

THE EDUCATION OF A FLY CASTING INSTRUCTOR

by Dave Engerbretson

The first step in the process of becoming a good flycasting instructor is to become a top notch flycaster yourself. In some activities it's not always necessary for a good instructor to be an outstanding performer, but this is not the case with flycasting. There is simply too much demonstration necessary, and it's hard to expect the students to perform the skills if you can't do them yourself.

So it is required that the instructor become a student as well. To that end, read all of the books you can--there are a number of them by such folks as Lefty Kreh, Joan Wulff, Doug Swisher, Mel Krieger, and others. The videos by these same people are also tremendously helpful. In addition, it pays to take a one-on-one lesson from an instructor whom you know to have skills superior to your own.

You will, of course, find that different people have different approaches to casting, and often have quite different styles. That's just what an instructor needs--a lot of different thoughts on the skills. Then you can try them all, and can develop your own style and techniques. Take ideas from everyone, and put them together in a way that works for you.

As an instructor, you must know the mechanical laws and principles which govern casting, as well. These principles are the same for everyone, but how you apply them may differ -- hence, different casting styles. Watch other instructors teach at every opportunity. Note the language they use, the techniques they use, how they relate to the students, how they demonstrate, and anything else you can observe. You will find that some people are excellent instructors and some are not. Try to determine the difference between the two and emulate the successful ones, while avoiding the methods of the others.

In addition, being a good teacher means having a big bag of "tricks." These "tricks" are various phrases, sub-skills, and keys that you use to reach individual students. Some students learn best by doing the skill, or by seeing the skill, while others can mentally conceptualize the skill and need longer verbal explanations (but not too long!) Again, watching other people teach can help you pick up new tricks.

You should practice continually too. And not only how to do it right, but how to do it wrong. For example, can you throw tailing loops at will? You should be able to, and if you know what causes them you can. Why do loops collapse on the forward cast? Why do some loops "swing around" out of a plane on a forward or backcast? If you don't know what causes a certain problem, you won't be able to rectify the problem in others (this goes right back to understanding casting mechanics). When you practice, don't just make pretty casts, but THINK about everything you are doing. Why is this happening? What caused this? How can I correct it? Are there some basic rules I must follow?

Start observing other casters in general, too. What are their problem areas? How could you help them, if asked to do so? Mentally try to teach everyone you see casting. And, of course, as an instructor, someday you may well be asked to help someone who is already a very good caster.

Will you have the ability to do it? You can make sure that you're ready for any challenges by learning everything you can (it's a never-ending process), separating the wheat from the chaff, and then practicing.

Don't forget that to be a good instructor of fly casting, you must also be a good student.