



The Tailing Loop

*The Federation of Fly Fishers Newsletter for Casting Instructors
Spring 1997*

CHANGING A CASTER'S MUSCLE MEMORY

by Gary A. Berger

A reflex is a fixed response to a stimulus. There are both inborn and trained reflexes. Inborn reflexes are those which are innate, such as your leg kicking outward when a doctor strikes the area below your kneecap. Trained reflexes (muscle memory is one of them) are not inherent, but rather are learned by repetitive exposure to a stimulus.

The most famous example of a trained reflex is Pavlov's dog. He gave the dog meat and rang a bell. After several hundred such sessions, Pavlov rang the bell without giving the dog meat, but saliva still flowed from the dog's mouth. The dog's body was trained to associate the sound of the bell with food and was getting ready to begin the eating and digesting process.

Fly casting is a trained reflex; the stimulus is the rod and line. If you have a hard time accepting this, just try to correct someone with bad casting habits (or try correcting your own bad casting habits). You can stand beside the students and tell them what to do and they still can't do it. They will cast the same way they always have. Put the stimulus (the rod and line) in their hand and the reflex (casting like they always have) WILL occur.

Changing the response to the stimulus is extremely difficult unless the stimulus can be removed during the changing phase. For example, with Pavlov's dog, the change could be made by playing a particular piece of music and not ringing the bell as the meat was given. The transformation would not occur immediately, either. It would require weeks of feedings before the change was made. Not only that, but if the bell were rung every other time the dog was fed, the dog would never lose his response to it.

Exactly the same thing applies to casting. To correct casting-stroke errors, perform the stroke without the rod. Without the rod, the caster can go slowly in order to develop the proper movement and not have to worry about what the line is doing. And just like Pavlov's dog, there can be no trials with the old stimulus (the rod) until the new pathway is perfected.

I recommend that casters trying to correct a problem make the proper movements **WITHOUT THE ROD** 50 times each day for a week. Then and only then should the cast be tried with the rod. If the cast can't be done correctly and easily at this point, stop and do another week of practice without the rod.

This rod-less casting practice is also the best way to teach beginners how to cast. If the average beginner is exposed to two practice sessions of about 15 minutes each (without the rod), they will usually acquire the correct casting motion. Two more sessions of about the same length with the rod and reel but no line extended will set the movement well. Two more short sessions with only 15 feet of line gets the students used to the feel of the rod and moving line. Then they are ready for 25 feet of line. If the student falters at any time, immediately have him/her go back to practicing without the rod.

These short practice sessions should be separated with other activities. I like to discuss a piece of equipment or use a brief knot tying session between casting periods. If the students are kept casting for more than 15 minutes, their arms get tired and they change their casting strokes in order to compensate. Remember, it's better to get the student to cast well 100 times than to cast poorly 1000 times. Practice does make perfect, but if you practice wrong, all it will make you is perfectly wrong!

PETE'S TOOL BOX

by Pete Caverhill

Good fly casting instruction should offer a variety of "tweaks" to the student's senses. Finding simple and understandable verbal, visual, and tactile techniques to achieve this is the instructor's challenge. To that end, I've filled a Rubbermaid "suitcase" to hernia-inducing levels with paraphernalia to help explain different elements of fly casting. The following is a list of some of those items.

SCALE MODEL CASTING LOOPS (a "Pete Caverhill basement original")

I make my casting loop models from inexpensive, vinyl-coated, wire coat hangers (preferably in bright colors). A few moments of snipping and bending will produce nifty scale representations of narrow, wide, and tailing loops (or any grotesque configuration you may desire to portray). I mount these models into short pieces of one-inch diameter dowel rods, and then glue them onto a flat piece of wood or plastic so they'll stand on a tabletop. They provide an easily-handled, three-dimensional representation of casting loops that otherwise might be difficult for a student to see during a demo, or to interpret from a flat drawing or verbal explanation.

FLY ROD HANDLES

The "tool box" contains five or six of these, which I have scrounged from shops that repair fly rods (they have the reel seat, cork handle, and a short portion of the rod butt section). These handles are useful for explaining rod grip, but are particularly good for "pantomime" casting exercises. The students use the handles to pantomime the essential elements of the cast, which may have been lost while using a full rod and line set-up. "Casting" with the handles gives students something tangible to use, and can help make students feel less self-conscious than would pantomiming with a pen or nothing at all.

SCREWDRIVER

This is a good drink to serve mid-session. No, no—just kidding! Actually, I use a screwdriver as an analogy to explain how to comfortably and effectively grip the rod handle. In addition, it's just a good tool to have in case of any equipment problems.

ROLL OF MASKING TAPE

This may be a bit controversial, but I feel that it works for the purpose intended. I use the masking tape to aid beginning casters who have problems with "over wristing." When wrist problems persist, I will temporarily bind the student's wrist to the reel seat, reinforcing the idea that a

controlled wrist is required (just remember to be careful of potential arm-hair loss.) I also try to make the situation as humorous as possible, so as to make sure no one equates getting a "taping" with being made to stand in a corner. I've found that most beginning casters will break the tape after a bit of casting, which further emphasizes to them the need to concentrate on wrist control.

Well, there's a quick peek inside "Pete's Tool Box." Such tools not only make casting instruction more fun, but offer new and effective ways to explain the same old basics. Try one or all during your next teaching session—they can help your students get the fly casting "picture" in short order.

ONE MORE CAST

a poem by Rav Bianco

A Cast. Oh, so fine, but never perfect.
Is it like trying to reach the Perfection of the Creator, and
never being able to do so?
Is it the best one can do? Is it more?
Is it a standard, and if so, how would I measure?
Cast... Cast... Cast.
I'll try again and again, just one more time.
Am I, a man, trying to become a machine?
Is it a contest between you, the rod, and me?
Am I not superior to you, the rod, an inanimate object?
Do I not carefully assemble you and dress you with fine
accessories?
Do you mock me?
Shall I let you sleep?
I cannot; I must cast you just one more time...
Again and again.

THE TAILING LOOP HAS A NEW EDITOR

by Macauley Lord

I am very happy to report that Jason Borger is the new editor of this publication. Because of family commitments, I needed to find someone to take the reins and I think Jason will do an outstanding job with it. For those of you who are not familiar with him, permit me to fill in some blanks:

Jason began professional production fly tying at age ten, the year he won his first FFF International Conclave fly tying contest. He began teaching in his father's fly fishing schools at age eleven and at thirteen wrote his first nationally published fly tying article. During his teens, he won various casting competitions, including the Federation of Fly Fishers' Colliander Cup, awarded to the best overall caster at the International Conclave. He is a professional videographer with eleven titles to his credit. In 1990 he illustrated the book "Designing Trout Flies," which went on to win the "Book of the Year" award from United Fly Tyers. In 1995 he illustrated and contributed to Gary

Borger's "Presentation," which includes a superlative chapter on casting.

Jason created and performed the famous "Shadow Cast" in the film "A River Runs Through It," as well as doubling for three different actors in the casting and fishing scenes. He has already made a major contribution to the Casting Instructor Certification Program and I know he will continue that contribution in these pages.

Thanks, Jason, and welcome aboard!

WHAT'S OUR POINT? (AKA "MY SOAPBOX")

by Jason Borger

In order to become members of the Federation's Casting Instructor Certification Program we are required to pass exams, both oral and written, demonstrating our ability to precisely move fly line, and then to express those abstract motions in concrete terms. Only those who have shown an appropriate level of aptitude in both arenas earn the credentials of Certified Instructor.

While the official title is ours to use as we see fit, we all need to understand that the whole point of the Instructor Certification Program is to create a group of active educators whose credentials are clearly defined in terms of a governing organization. This allows anyone who is not intimately familiar with fly fishing to easily locate someone from whom they can feel assured in receiving competent casting instruction.

We as an organization need to be self-policing, in terms of both our personal competence and the competence of the Program as a whole. We need to hold ourselves to the highest of technical and teaching standards and to make certain that the title of "Certified Instructor" doesn't become merely a decoration behind our names. Granted, that title has both a sense of prestige and a value from a business standpoint, but it should not become an end unto itself.

Our final goal should be to provide, unquestioningly, the finest pool of casting instructors in the world. The individual elements of tough standards (both personal and organizational) and rigorous testing will help aim us in the right direction, but ultimately that goal is attainable only if we, as an organization, reach for it as a collective whole.

NEW MASTER CERTIFIED INSTRUCTORS

Congratulations to the following Master Certified Instructors who have passed the test in 1997!!

Kirk Eberhard, *Idaho* (1996)
Kevin O'Keefe, *Oregon*
Jamie Lyle, *California*
George Spector, *New York*
Tony Vitale, *Washington*

CASTING CALL!

by the Editor

In order for this publication to be of use to the members of the Instructor Program, it needs to have one thing above all else—Content! The sharing of teaching ideas and tips will help to make the Program stronger for everyone involved.

You needn't give away any of your personal trade secrets nor any of your ideas for paying articles. Don't worry too much about spelling, punctuation, or even sentence and idea structure—That's what an editor (and his giant box of red pens) is for! Either new or previously published material will work just fine. Base the article length and basic subject matter on what you see in these pages. If you aren't sure about the topic, fire me off a query (e-mail is always best, as I travel quite a bit).

Think about this: If every member of the Certification Program was to write only one article, we could fill the current iteration of the Tailing Loop with content for something on the order of 25 years!

COMING EVENTS

PRE-REGISTRATION IS REQUIRED!

May 16-17; Kerrville, TX; Texas Fly Fishing Show; Basic Certification with Bill Gammel (281) 421-7128

August 6 & 8; Grand Rapids, MI; International Fly Fishing Show/Conclave; Basic & Master Certification; contact Evelyn Taylor (406) 585-7592

October 25; 3rd Annual Flyfishers Expo; Gilford, NH; Basic Certification with Macauley Lord (207) 729-3737

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We welcome your articles, letters, teaching tips and cartoons. All materials should be submitted to the National Office: FFF Casting Program, P.O. Box 1595, Bozeman, MT 59771. (406) 585-7596 Fax

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USING YOUR HEAD

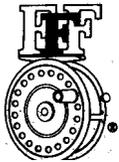
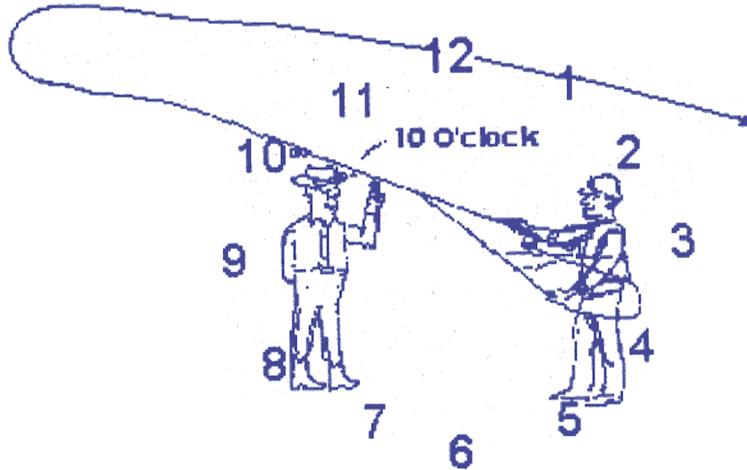
by Kenneth Callaway

Stopping the rod properly is vital to good loop control. If the rod tip is stopped too low, an inefficient, open loop results. In addition, if there is a lack of a proper speed-up-and-stop, the line will never be fully energized, further exacerbating loop control problems.

Through frustration at my own inability to convey these most important elements of casting to one of my students, I discovered something I want to share with you. This particular student was continually unable to stop his rod properly on the forward cast, so I got in front of him (as the

cartoon shows) and asked him to cast straight over my head, trying not to hit me. That did it! After a few casts over my head, he got the point and we went on from there. Give this technique a try with problem students. It certainly worked for me—I bet it'll work for you.

[Editor's note: This type of tactic can get your point across in a hurry. Instructors may also try offering students an outstretched hand into which to cast, or have the students cast into their own hands during a pantomimed practice session.]



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