



The Tailing Loop

The Federation of Fly Fishers Newsletter for Casting Instructors
Summer 1997

HOW-TO/WHY-TO

by Jason Borger

In order to provide the best possible casting instruction to our students, it is necessary to teach not only the "how-to" of fly casting, but also the "why-to." The "how-to" aspects are those tangible elements that can be shown in a direct cause and effect relationship: Move your arm like this, and the rod, and thus the line will do that. The "why-to" is the more abstract element: Why should you stop your arm positively at the end of the stroke? Why does stopping high on the forward stroke tend to produce a tight loop? Why does "kicking the rod" produce a tailing loop? A caster thoroughly versed in the underlying "why" will discover that he or she can learn to make any cast and diagnose any problems in short order.

I have found that students attain higher levels of proficiency significantly faster if they have a conception of the underlying reasons behind the arm movements they're making. And once they understand the "why", the "how" becomes only a matter of practice.

A typical casting lesson for a novice, for example, would include an introduction of the basic casting stroke by use of similes (so the student is able to quickly grasp the general idea behind the raw motions), followed by a brief, but pointed explanation as to the reasons those motions are necessary to cast a line. By integrating the "how and why" at the same time, the lesson plan can then be alternated between the two skills, allowing a student time to rest physically, while still keeping their mind focused on casting.

Such a combination works very well when integrated with a pantomime/visualization lesson. With no distractions from rod and line, the student can concentrate fully on proper arm movements and the subtext to which they are married.

It is important to the student's learning processes that they not be relegated to the position of a sponge as an instructor gushes forth a seemingly endless fountain of casting knowledge. The lesson needs to be interactive for the "why" to become a part of the student's knowledge base. Asking the student to repeat "how and why" information multiple times during a lesson will focus their mind on the task at hand, and re-solidify the information.

If the lesson is centered around more advanced students, take the "why" to another level and branch out, asking for "next step" leaps in practical application. The more that students must think on their own, and the less they are subjected to a purely "watch, and learn" lesson, the better for them (and for you).

Regardless of skill levels and whether the lesson is based in pantomime or full-line practice, it is important that the instructor demonstrate (with the real thing) the ways in which the "why" affects the "how" (and vice versa). For example, simply stating that (and explaining why) tipping the wrist only slightly out of plane will result in a tight loop is not enough. The instructor needs to demonstrate that idea, showing the path of the rod tip and why and how it influences the behavior of the line. Expanding that demonstration to include wide-open loops and the underlying causes will further enhance the student's ability to think critically about that aspect of casting. And again, it is important that the instructor not do all the thinking for the student. Students are quite capable of their own cognitive leaps if they are prodded in the right direction.

By assembling and instructing lessons based around a complete "how AND why" look at fly casting, you'll find your students will more quickly gain proficiency (and self-sufficiency), and that as an instructor you will better both your teaching and personal casting skills as well.

ONLY BACK CASTS ONLY FORWARD CASTS

by Gary Borger

A major problem in the teaching of fly casting is the speed at which the cast must be performed. It's as if a piano instructor expected the student to play at presto speed and with both hands during the very first lesson (shades of "Groundhog Day"). It's very hard for the beginner to remember the lengthy instructions given by the enthusiastic instructor, and then try to incorporate all that techno-talk into smooth muscle movement—Especially when the instructor immediately rips the rod out of the beginner's hand and shows the befuddled neophyte "how it's done."

One solution to this vexing problem is the pantomime method described in the last issue of the "Tailing Loop." Another equally effective tactic (and one that I use in combination with the pantomime) is "only back casts, only forward casts." It allows the students to focus on only half the cast at one time and learn it well. Once each half is under control, then the whole cast can be assembled quickly and seamlessly.

After practicing the basic casting stroke with the pantomime tactic until the arm movements seem relaxed, I have the students extend 15 to 20 feet of line and make a back cast, stopping the rod at the required position and leaving it there for me to check. The line falls to the ground behind them.

I then have the students turn 180 degrees (a right-handed caster turns to the right), drop the rod and make another back cast for me to check. I continue this "back cast and turn" tactic for several minutes, gently correcting the students by reminding them each time to stop the rod in the correct position. If someone is having particular difficulty in stopping at the correct place, I'll stand next to them and say "stop" when the rod reaches the correct point. I also tell them to watch their hand (not the rod, not the line, not someone else, etc.). I've discovered this to be more effective than grabbing the rod or otherwise blocking its movement with my hand.

Remember, muscles get tired quickly, so never allow students to cast for more than 15 to 20 minutes without a break (I prefer 10 minute sessions). After a few minutes, I ask the students to stop casting, and I demonstrate the forward cast. I start with the line lying on the ground behind me and explain the arm movements again, executing the cast slowly so that everyone can see all the details well.

Then, I have the students make only forward casts. After each cast, they turn 180 degrees (a right-handed caster turns to the left), raise the rod to the correct beginning position, think about what they should be doing, and then make a forward cast. Having the students softly describe to themselves what they are doing dramatically enforces the previous pantomime training.

I usually alternate several short sessions of "only back casts" and "only forward casts" before I ask the students to

try putting the two together. If anyone has difficulty with the entire casting stroke, I immediately take them back to the "only" sessions.

This "only back casts, only forward casts" teaching tactic is not the "only way" to help students get the stroke together, but it's one that works extremely well and relieves the tension that beginners often feel when trying to cast "up to speed." I recommend it most highly.

LAWN ROLLING

by Bob Pelzl

Living in the arid Southwest means that most of my teaching is done in a conveniently located park with no water. And of course, my students do their practicing on grass in a park or their own lawns. This works fine for aerial casts, but not so well for the water-dependent Roll Cast. Without surface tension while making the forward stroke, the line slides toward the caster instead of rolling outward on the surface. Because of this problem, I felt that my students were handicapped in trying to learn the Roll Cast.

In an effort to come up with a way for my students (and myself) to practice, I tied the tip of the leader to a brick at a distance slightly less than the length of cast I wanted to make. The brick kept the line from sliding toward me as I made the forward stroke, and the loop rolled out nicely. Of course, after the cast was completed, the line was doubled back on itself from the brick out to the end of the cast, and I was never really sure that the line and leader would have straightened properly had the cast been done on water. But the cast could be easily practiced and I could watch the shape and travel of the loop as my students practiced.

Then a way to check the completion of the cast occurred to me. In place of the brick, I pushed a smooth metal rod vertically into the ground, tied a fist-sized loop in the end of the leader, and dropped the loop over the metal rod [try a hardware store for an inexpensive length of rod or tubing—Ed.]. The leader pulling against the metal rod held the line as I made the cast, but as the line loop rolled past the metal rod, the leader slid up and off. The cast completed itself with the line and leader lying out straight.

I now use this tool when I want to check my students' Roll Casting efficiency. The only drawback is that the leader loop has to be replaced over the metal rod after each cast [in a multi-student setting, two facing rows of students can replace each other's loops—Ed.]. Most of the time, however, I have my students practice with the end of the leader fixed with a brick or tied firmly to the metal rod. For demonstrations in my classes, I mounted the metal rod on a base that I can use on any surface.

AIMING THE 'LOOP

by the Editor

As the official publication of the FFF's Casting Instructor Certification Program, the "Tailing Loop" is written by and for the members of the organization.

As Editor, my job is see that the pages get filled and that the content has a useful direction and purpose. To that end, I'm asking members of the Program to submit articles or queries that deal with processes involved in TEACHING (that's what we're about, after all). And specifically teaching casting—not to one another, but rather methods of instructing our STUDENTS. If the article has applicability to helping instructors hone their own personal casting skills, all the better, but let's not lose focus on who the ultimate beneficiary is to be.

As far as subject matter in the angling realm is concerned, I would like to avoid straight how-to fishing pieces. Describing how to apply a mend properly in a fishing situation is fine as long as it's successfully integrated into a larger whole—That whole being the methods and/or tips for TEACHING that mend to a student.

So think from an instructor's standpoint—Can the subject matter be used by another instructor to TEACH a student something in the CASTING realm? Is the subject matter practically applicable (can it be incorporated in some tangible way with a real-world student lesson)? If the subject matter covers teaching tools, are those tools inexpensive and easy to obtain for instructor and/or student? If the piece is geared more toward helping other instructors grasp an underappreciated casting topic, will it ultimately be truly useful to their teaching skills as far as the end student is concerned? These are all questions that prospective writers should ask themselves. If in doubt, query.

This is not to say that the TL isn't looking for philosophical or humorous pieces, or that it won't publish reviews of materials that are specifically useful to it's readers. I certainly don't want this thing to become some dry pamphlet of pontification, but I do want it to focus on teaching methods and tips with the student ultimately in mind.

As far as contributors go, anyone in the Program is welcome, but if only a few submit, then the majority of articles will soon have very familiar names on them each quarter, as I must go to those people whom I know and trust personally.

This is OUR publication, all 573 or so of us—Let's use it to its maximum pedagogical potential.

NEW MASTER CERTIFIED INSTRUCTORS

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

John Bianco, *California*

Joe Libeu, *California*

Michael Maloney, *California*

John Van DerHoof, *California*

This cartoon appeared in a major sporting magazine, but the Tailing Loop does not agree with the observers. See the back page for improvement after only one lesson with an FFF Certified Instructor...

COMING EVENTS

PRE-REGISTRATION IS REQUIRED!

August 16; San Francisco, CA; All day instructor workshop with Al Kyte/Mel Krieger; option to take Casting Instructor Cert. test; contact Al Kyte (510) 631-0419

October 4; Mountain Home, AR - Southern Council Conclave; Basic Certification with Tom Jindra/Bill Gammel; Master candidates should contact Tom for availability (504) 392-7511

October 25; 3rd Annual Flyfishers Expo; Gilford, NH; Basic Certification with Macauley Lord; contact Evelyn Taylor (406) 585-7592

The Tailing Loop

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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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THE ARM-CHAIR CASTER

by Len Holt

Stopping the rod properly is one of the more difficult actions for students to learn. While a student's "stops" can be easily corrected during a lesson, keeping his or her new-found skills sharp at home is more difficult. To help with this problem, I came up with the idea of having students use an easy-chair and a large (6-8 ounce) screwdriver [or try a rod handle, dowel rod, etc.—Ed.] to practice their "stops."

The student sits in the chair with the screwdriver gripped as if holding a rod, and their forearm resting on the chair arm in the fishing, or "ready," position. After making a pantomimed back cast (with a positive stop), the student hesitates (to practice timing), and then accelerates their elbow down until it contacts the chair arm (for obvious reasons, make certain the student first understands not to slam their elbow down). This tactile contact signals the student to stop their arm movement.

By combining this with the idea of a forward wrist-flip to form the loop, the student has both mental and physical reinforcement to stop the rod properly. In addition, it is an exercise that can be accomplished even while watching TV, thus making this portion of casting practice a relaxing endeavor. A few minutes a day for several weeks typically does the job.

Now he has a nice, tight loop, but we are still working on his line hand. [Still not bad considering he's casting what appears to be a 10/0 Hare's Ear!—Ed.]

Submitted by Jack Sherrill

A special thanks to Gene Trump for allowing the TL to use and abuse his work!

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THE ARM-CHAIR CASTER

by Len Holt

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