

The Key to Good Fly Casting, Practice!

by Bruce Richards

A lot has been written about how to cast effectively. I've taught over 3000 people to cast. The one single most important factor in successfully learning to cast, or improving your casting is practice. A lot of my students spend good money and time to take lessons, but if they don't practice what they have learned it will be lost. Developing good practice habits is often the key to becoming a good caster.

It doesn't take a lot of time to practice, but practicing fairly often is important. To make a bad analogy, practicing casting is a lot like training a puppy. The best way to train a puppy is in frequent short sessions, not all day once a month, the same goes for casting. Every day is best, but 3-4 times a week is certainly adequate.

I have found the best practice sessions are usually 15-20 minutes long, for me in the evening after work. I like to leave a rod rigged and ready in the garage that I can quickly grab and head to the back yard. Having water isn't necessary for a good practice session, except for roll casting. If you want to practice roll casting on the grass all you need to do is secure the end of the leader to something, to simulate the resistance of water. I like to use a clipboard, just clip the end of the leader in the spring clip and you are ready to cast.

Of course it is important to practice the right things. If you are having trouble correcting problems or improving your casting you need to reference a good book or video, or better yet, a good instructor. Books and videos can be very helpful but don't provide the feedback an instructor can. If you don't know a qualified instructor in your area contact the Federation of Fly Fishers as there is a complete list of FFF certified instructors in their site.

I think it is very important to practice to a target. Too many casters practice by just throwing loops at the same distance without paying much attention to their delivery. Being able to hit a target is often pretty important when fishing. A technique I have used very successfully when practicing follows. This drill works very well when practicing for demanding casting tasks like fishing for bonefish or tarpon.

Determine a good place to stand in the middle of a good sized open area. Scatter 6-8 targets (I use paper plates) around at various distances appropriate to the kind of fishing you do, and in different directions. Stand in the center of the targets and make a cast to the one in front of you. Strip the line in short, turn your body one way or the other and make your next cast at the target you see first. Try to make each cast with no more than 3-4 false casts. Repeat this process until you've made several casts at each target.

This drill will teach you to quickly work out line, judge distance and make good deliveries. If you find that you are unable to consistently come close to the targets, that usually indicates a problem with your loops, time to consult your book, video, or instructor!