

The Loop

The Federation of Fly Fishers Journal for Certified Casting Instructors Fall 2001

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ON CASTING STYLES

by Roger Wood

At the 2001 Fred Hall Show in Long Beach, California, I watched a program put on by BOG member Al Kyte and Master Instructor Hutch Hutchinson. This was not your typical casting demonstration. They did not demonstrate any one casting style. Instead they demonstrated various grips, arm positions and movements, and stances.

They showed that casting is divided into two parts:

- the essentials, the principles of the cast.
- the poetry, the style of the cast.

As long as the caster correctly applies the essentials of the cast, any casting style can be used.

The importance of this is to remind us that there are as many casting styles as there are casters. As long as the student is correctly following the essentials of the cast, tampering with the student's style should be avoided. Any casting problems the student may have should be solved within the student's own casting style if at all possible.

It is a given that when a student is just getting started in casting, he must have a starting point. That will be the style in which his instructor casts. And bear in mind that under some conditions, one style of casting may very well be better for your student than another style. This should be pointed out to the student.

Many people tried to help me with my casting over the years. Everyone showed me a different way of casting. I became very confused and frustrated. It was not until I discovered for myself that casting is divided into two parts--the essential principles and the style--that I understood I could use any style I wished.

If, years ago, I had seen a program like the one Al and Hutch put on, it would have saved me many years of trial-and-error casting and greatly shortened my learning curve.

Roger Wood is a Certified Casting Instructor who lives in Patton, California.

Hutch Hutchinson responds:

With over 18 years of professional guiding and teaching in both the flyfishing and skiing industries, it has been my experience that "going with the flow" of someone's established style is a much better way to enhance and improve someone's casting/skiing abilities. It took many years and the help of Al Kyte to make me realize that trying to teach someone "my" style was harder than trying to enhance and improve the style an angler had already acquired. Admittedly, there are those rare occasions when suggesting a change in style may help. But, generally speaking, if you stick with a person's casting style and build from there, your time in classes and your guided trips will be more fun for both you and your students.

Al Kyte responds:

Whenever I am asked to do a casting program I start by asking, "What is important about a cast?" Then I proceed to work my way through various style options before eventually arriving at what I consider to be the essential physics of the overhead cast. I have found that there are many casters around who feel, as Roger does, that our teaching has been confusing. They are relieved to find that they don't have to move in a particular way to cast well.

The problem has been that some of us have left the impression that our style is the only way to cast. I have found that we continue to progress as teachers if we view differences in terms of "advantages and disadvantages" rather than as "right or wrong". This has been the basis of a series of casting articles I have been writing in California Flyfisher magazine.

Each of us teaches a style that we believe "works best for most people." Yet people learn very differently. If a student has difficulty with the method I teach, I will experiment with a different method. Their progress and excitement in learning is more important than any one method of teaching or casting style.

So it is important that we know as much about other

teachers' casting styles as possible. When someone is giving a casting demonstration, I learn the most from that time at the end when the instructor works with a few students. I need to know how that teacher corrects errors with the style he or she has presented. That is what I will have to do in working with that style.

At times, however, I will "tamper" with an existing style. Before doing this I usually ask how long that person has cast with that style and ask if he/she is willing to experiment for a few moments with another style. If the style I impose is not benefiting that student, I will probably cut the experiment short and go back to helping within the framework of the existing style.



TO FIND YOUR INNER BEGINNER, CAST WITH YOUR OTHER HAND

by Tom Jindra

Fly-casting is easy, isn't it?

Of course it is, when you've devoted years to mastering good loops, distance and accuracy. But the rookie who is picking up a rod for the first time might not find fly-casting quite as simple as do you. Clearly, there is a gap in perception between beginner and expert. And though this implies no particular problem for those who simply intend to use their skills for fishing, the responsibility shifts when you become an instructor. It's no longer enough to focus on your own needs and problems. You must also develop an appreciation for the obstacles that confront your student.

But can you really understand the student's frame of mind when your own experience as a beginner is ancient history? Are your memories from 10 or 20 years ago all that clear? Do you truly remember the angst of trying to throw a line 30 feet, let alone 30 yards?

Maybe you do, but maybe not. Perhaps it's time you turned back the clock by learning to cast with your other hand.

Everyone has a dominant hand. OK, there are a lucky few who are ambidextrous, but they are a distinct minority. And for most of us, learning to shift manual skills from one side to the other can pose a serious challenge. It is awkward, and it is uncomfortable. It is, however, a challenge that fly-casters can overcome. It is also a challenge that may give you, the instructor, renewed insight into the problems facing your students.

And what will you find?

You will discover that knowledge of proper casting technique is only part of the formula. That despite all your know-how and experience, you must also train your muscles to follow the brain's instructions. And until the muscles are trained, the physical act of casting will leave you discombobulated.

You will once again have to struggle with a creeping rod and tailing loops, and you'll probably find yourself wondering how you ever learned to control that floppy wrist. You will rediscover the disconcerting act of double-hauling. Even the single-haul and shooting line will prove at least a little troublesome.

The difference between you and the novice is that your brain already understands correct fly-casting. You no longer need to learn the concepts of loading the rod or forming tight loops. You only need to train your arm muscles to do what your brain already knows, which means practice and more practice. And you can use that practice to remind yourself of various teaching techniques you might have used, why they worked, and perhaps why some didn't work. You will also remember why several short practice sessions are better than one long session and why some line weights are better for teaching than others.

But most of all, this need for practice is a chance to realize and understand the frustrations that can overcome any novice, and it's the rare student who never feels frustration. The experience should lead you to a renewed appreciation for the fact that, while fly-casting isn't difficult, it isn't necessarily easy. And that, in turn, should help make you a more patient and better instructor.

So take a step back in time by picking up your rod with the wrong hand.

Tom Jindra, formerly President of the FFF, is a member of the Board of Governors. He lives in Louisiana.



HOW DOES LINE STRETCH AFFECT THE CAST?

Mel Krieger asks:

As we store energy during a casting stroke by loading (bending) the fly rod, would it follow that we also store and release energy in a stretchable fly line? Perhaps the line acts like a long rubber band or even the rubber in a slingshot and contributes to the cast—like the compression and release of a golf or tennis ball. What say you my friends? What say you fellow instructors, analysts and flyline people?

The editor invites you respond to castingcert@fedflyfishers.org



Getting Them Stream-Ready

by Phil Gay

As a teaching guide I often have beginners for just a day. Of course they want to fish, but I know I have to give them sufficient casting and line handling techniques to make them "stream-ready", or the day will be a bust. Over the past eight years I have taught over 400 of these one-day, on-stream schools, and I have learned that beginners are able to absorb much more than I initially expected. Therefore I introduce

them to a variety of casting and line-handling techniques to make them functional for a day of fishing.

Here is an overview, in order, of what I try to accomplish in about an hour and a half:

- A basic look at the tackle.
- Have the student rig the rod.
- Demonstrate a basic thumb-on-top grip.
- Explain the integrated movement of the upper arm, lower arm and the hand/wrist.
- Introduce the concept of rod loading.
- Explain and demonstrate four basic mechanics of casting:
 1. **Short cast, short stroke. Longer cast, longer stroke.**
 2. **All casts start slow and end fast, with a stop.**
 3. **Short cast, short pause. Longer cast, longer pause.**
 4. **The hand and rod must move forward and back in a single plane.**
- Have the students work on a basic pickup and lay down drill.
- The roll cast.
- Line handling.
- Shooting line.
- The reach cast.
- Mending.

Students learn the above best on the water. Initially, I face them downstream so the current will assist with slack control during the pickup/lay down drill and the roll cast. After the student has achieved reasonable consistency with the pickup/lay down, I introduce the use of the left hand in line control and shooting. I then introduce the roll cast and its use in the pickup. I then have the student stand crosscurrent with the flow from left to right (assuming the student is right-handed). At this point I introduce the basic reach cast, mending, and the use of the roll-cast pickup.

Phil Gay serves on the Board of Governors. A retired naval officer and pilot, he commanded the aircraft carrier USS John F. Kennedy during the Gulf War.

From The Editor

A friend who'd had an embittering experience with the FFF Instructor Certification Program in 1998, and had written publicly about it, recently wrote me to ask what changes have been made to the program since then. Rather than enumerate the many things we've done to improve the program, I prefer here to look at what we **haven't** changed. And that is the continuing focus on helping each other and those who aspire to certification to become better teachers—so we can help our students find more joy in casting a fly.

It was especially gratifying to receive Roger Wood's piece, coming in the form of a letter, a comment really. Roger

reminds those of us who are emphatic about a "correct" style that such thinking and teaching can delay a student's development as it did his. With others such as Bruce Richards and Tim Rajeff, Al Kyte has helped to change my thinking about teaching a style. "My" style is still the right one for me but not for all my students. On the whole, they are casting better for it, and proving the adage, "Different strokes for different folks."

Tom Jindra's article about casting with your other hand is a wonderful reminder of how each of us can become a novice again. To empathize with our students in this way is to make us better teachers. For years, Joan Wulff has championed casting with the other hand in her casting classes. When was the last time you cast or double-hauled with your other hand?

Phil Gay's article spurs some of us to question whether we underestimate our students. I try to be a minimalist—I've always thought that the less I teach, the more they'll remember. Am I holding them back needlessly? What a dreary world it would be if you and I were "right" about everything we taught—there'd be nothing more to learn.

And finally, there is Mel Krieger's question about fly line stretch. To my friend who felt wronged by the FFF, I say this: Since 1998 we've had many hundreds of aspiring teachers in this program, who, just like me, have been inspired by Mel's joyful curiosity, by Al's challenging of conventional stylistic wisdom, by Tom's finding his inner beginner, and by Phil's patient, thoughtful on-stream teaching. To my friend, I say that some things need to be improved, and some things need to be celebrated. So let's celebrate them. We only pass this way once.

THE LOOP STAFF

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YOU CAN HAVE A LINK from your FFF Website listing to your own E-mail address. Contact Evelyn (see above).

We welcome your submissions via E-mail or disk. Please attach a short instructor bio (1-3 sentences), including your location and Certification level. Please indicate whether or not you are willing to allow for your submission's possible re-publication on the Program's Website. Any illustrations should be in TIFF format. The Loop reserves the right to accept or decline any submission for any reason, and to edit any submission as it sees fit. All submissions should be sent to the National Office:

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The Loop is the quarterly publication of the FFF Board of Governors for Casting Instructor Certification.

COMING EVENTS

Pre-registration is REQUIRED!

Contact Evelyn Taylor at (406) 585-7592

Schedule subject to change

Denver, Colorado - Jan 4; The Fly Fishing Show; Master Certification prep workshop with Dusty Sprague; contact (800) 420-7582 or www.flyfishingshow.com

College Park, Maryland - Jan 12-13; The Fly Fishing Show; Certified Inst. & Masters; must preregister by Jan 4

Denver, Colorado - Jan 25-26; International Sportsmen's Expo; Certified Inst. & Masters; must preregister by Jan 16

Somerset, New Jersey - Jan 25-26; The Fly Fishing Show; Certified Instructor & Masters; must preregister by Jan 16

San Mateo, Calif - Jan 31-Feb 1; International Sportsmen's Expo; Certified Inst. & Masters; must preregister by Jan 23

Portland, Ore - Feb 7-8; O'Loughlin Trade Show; Certified Instructor & Masters; must preregister by Jan 31

Charlotte, N Carolina - Feb 15-16; The Fly Fishing Show; Certified Instructor & Masters; must preregister by Feb 7

Phoenix, Ariz - Mar 1; International Sportsmen's Expo;

Certified Instructor; must preregister by Feb 22

San Rafael, Calif - Mar 2-3; The Fly Fishing Show; Certified Instructor & Masters; must preregister by Feb 22

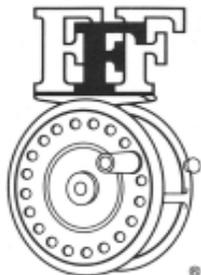
Salt Lake City, Utah - Mar 15-16; Intern'l Sportsmen's Expo; Certified Inst. & Masters; must preregister by Mar 7

Seattle, Washington - Mar 15-16; O'Loughlin Trade Show; Certified Instructor & Masters; must preregister by Mar 7

Freeport, Maine - LLBean 2-day workshop & certification with Macauley Lord; contact Craig Uecker to register at (800) 341-4341 x22666; **Dates for 2002:** April 6-7, April 13-14, August 24-25, August 31-Sept 1, Sept 7-8, Sept 21-22

SCHEDULE CHANGE

Instead of doing a certification at the Puyallup, Washington O'Loughlin Show in February, we are moving it to their Seattle show in March. BOGs and Masters who can help with the testing, please contact Evelyn at (406) 585-7592 or evelynt@montana.net.



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Fly Casting Instructor Certification Program
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