

The Loop

<http://www.fedflyfishers.org/castingcert.html>

The Federation of Fly Fishers' Journal for Casting Instructors

s p r i n g 1 9 9 8

LEARNING

by Mel Krieger

BOTH OF US WERE INTIMIDATED. Ruth, a tiny sixtyish-year-old lady was taking my fly fishing course in Sun Valley, Idaho. And while her big concern was learning to flycast, I would be spending two days attempting to teach one of the foremost educators in America. We survived and actually became friends, but I didn't come out completely unscathed. During a lecture, one of the students, a compulsive note taker, persisted in asking—almost demanding—specific answers to his questions “But, Mel, what is the exact length of a dry fly tippet? How many casts do I make to a fish before changing my fly? Are green waders better than brown ones?” After several interruptions and reasonably patient replies, I lost it. “Pete,” I said, “You keep looking for black

and white in fishing, and there is no black and white. The beauty of our sport is that it's more of an art form than a science, we are not dealing in absolutes!” I was on a roll. Voice-rising, I proclaimed: “There are no absolutes.... There are no absolutes in fishing.... There are no absolutes in life!!!” Silence filled the room.... Embarrassed, I finally spotted her amid the quieted faces and blurted “Isn't that so, Ruth?” Loud and clear she replied “Absolutely!”

Of course, as Omar the poet concluded “Always coming out by the same door as in I went,” I too attempted to find absolutes in my newest passions, golf and Spey casting. I've read dozens of books and articles, submitted myself to interminable video watching and even taken private lessons—

looking for the secret, the Holy Grail. In golf, most of the information comes from champions who unquestionably play well. However, they can't even agree on such basics as grip, stance, ball position, etc., *ad nauseam*. Our flycasting world is identical. Who and what are we to believe? Obviously all of these instructions, however convoluted they appear, must work pretty well. I'm certain that the majority of instructors first learn to cast a fly, and then later attempt to analyze and communicate their acquired skills. I use a trick question in my instructor workshops: "How many of you had to learn flycasting by yourself?" Invariably, almost everyone raises their hand. Well, I'll tell you what, there IS a Holy Grail in learning to flycast—and that is to flycast!!! Just like the real secret in golf is to smack golf balls.

After fitting balls at a local driving range I commonly sit for a time watching others. The good golfers, despite their varied styles, hit the ball cleanly. The lesser players, regardless of their swing or style, miss-hit the ball most of the time. So far, in my golf search, I have found only one reference to this simple truth. Harvey Penick, a Hall of Fame golf teacher, explained to a complete beginner who requested lessons "Go home and practice the golf swing until you can consistently clip grass and then come to me."

A similar concept in flycasting would be the timing between back and forward casts; an elementary concept, but a difficult execution. A flycaster may have a variety of weaknesses in his or her casting stroke, but with the good timing that usually comes from experience, they can accomplish

acceptable casts. On the other hand, someone without that sense of timing would do poorly, regardless of their technique. These basic skills must come from the learner, not the instructor. The "just do it" slogan is a truism. The quintessence of learning is doing.

Instruction provides avenues for learners. Many instructors utilize a very narrow corridor, teaching an extremely concise style that is often comfortable for beginners. Wider corridors usually emphasize more substance than style, offering a somewhat broader base for growth especially to the intermediate or advanced learner. Most instruction in both golf and flycasting consists of analysis. Some instructors become quite good at analyzing the golf swing or the flycasting stroke, a skill that is primarily useful to the more advanced learner. There are a few gifted instructors who understand many styles and can analyze the student as well as the casting stroke or the golf swing, fitting one to the other without the loss of fluidity and athleticism. Fewer still are the instructors who additionally are good communicators, able to reduce complex concepts to simpler solutions, and to reach and connect with a wide variety of learners. Finally we come to the elite in instruction—the truly extraordinary teachers, those wondrous people who are able to inspire students to want to learn, to grow, to understand that the climb can be even more exciting than the summit, and who themselves continue to learn and to grow. In my book, the quintessence of teaching is inspiration.

the loop

CORRECTIVE STATEMENTS

by Will Gray

ACTUALLY TELLING STUDENTS what they're doing incorrectly is one of the most difficult tasks a fly casting instructor encounters. An instructor needs to present the information in clear, concise, and reassuring statements. If the statements are too rambling, the student won't remember what was said. If statements are too brief, they may come across as curt or cryptic, leaving the student to fill in the gaps.

Working through the processes to become a Basic, and then Master Instructor, led me to develop four "corrective statements" (and their respective abbreviations) that have improved my students' learning enormously.

The statements are:

- (H) - what's **H**appening to the line.
- (C) - what's **C**ausing this to happen.
- (P) - the **P**art of the body involved.
- (F) - how to **F**ix the problem with that part.

Here, then, are three casting problems, followed by the "corrective statements" I use in describing each one.

1. The student is casting nasty tailing loops by "bumping" (or "kicking," etc.) the rod during his casting stroke.

- (H) The end of the line is tailing below the middle.
- (C) This is caused by an uneven path of the rod tip, and thus the line.
- (P) You are "bumping" (or "kicking," etc.) the rod with erratic forearm motion during the cast.
- (F) Smoothly accelerate with your forearm.

2. The student fails to pause after her casting strokes, causing the loop-less line to "crack the whip."

- (H) Your line is "cracking the whip" with no loops.
- (C) This is because it isn't straightening out enough to make a loop.
- (P) Your arm is not stopping and not pausing after each stroke.
- (F) Stop your arm and pause after each casting stroke.

3. The student has developed the habit of looking over her shoulder at her back cast every time. In doing so, she is turning her torso, arcing her cast horizontally. This puts an accuracy- and distance-killing curve in her line.

- (H) Your line is curving horizontally on your forward and back cast.
- (C) This is because your rod is following a curved path around you as you cast.
- (P) As you look over your shoulder, your body is turning which is causing your arm to form an arc around you.

(F) Only look back periodically, and when you do, concentrate on keeping your body straight and on making your casts follow a straight path both vertically and horizontally.

VIDEOTAPE TEACHING

by Pete Caverhill

EVERY SPRING OUR FLY FISHING CLUB, The Osprey Fly Fishers of BC, holds a fly casting "tune-up" session for members and guests. This year we decided to use video cameras during this session to see if videotaping would be an effective way for participants to improve their fly casting. Our impressions were as such:

Capturing fly casting effectively on video is an extremely demanding task. Our results are miles poorer than professional videos, but we found them to be useful for our purposes.

Despite the less than perfect pictures, video allowed casters to see their casts in action (something that is not all that possible when casting and awkwardly attempting to look over a shoulder at loops). Participants really appreciated the exercise and found it useful.

It required significant work on the part of the organizer

Here's how we organized the event:

Four people put the event together (2 were certified casting instructors and 2 were experienced fly fishers with some casting instruction under their belt). It all took place at a city park (the park required us to obtain their inexpensive liability insurance). The organizers had a dry run prior to the event, with two video cameras running and the instructors casting so we could find the best combination of camera angles and backgrounds.

Once the session was underway, we videotaped each participant for a sufficient period of time to show their casting stroke on both shorter and longer casts. People brought their own rods and reels as well as a brightly- or lightly-colored floating fly line (for best camera visibility). With the 18 participants that showed up it was a bit chaotic, and we had to work at keeping the off-camera casters and walkers-by out of the camera's field of view. We ran each participant through each camera one time (about four minutes per caster per camera).

The casting tapes were analyzed by the instructors at a later date and consensus comments were recorded on a form. Doing this helped to ensure that we were consistent with our critique and able to provide people with some meaningful suggestions for working on improving



TEACHING A TEMPO

by J. Kevin Barry

The participants and instructors then convened at another date and sat around a TV, watching what everyone really looked like. The instructors critiqued each participant's casting according to the notes we had previously made, and encouraged the casters to analyze their own and other's techniques. The participants found the exercise enjoyable and personally useful (we provided an evaluation form for their comments on the exercise).

The instructors also found the exercise useful in that it gave them the opportunity to analyze and supply corrections for a variety of casting forms.

Next time, we'll try to choose a location that has a better background to show off the casting. We'll also use the audio capabilities of the cameras to explain who is on deck and what they're doing. Despite a few organizational headaches and a bit of casting chaos, the consensus was that videotape is definitely a useful teaching tool from many aspects.

IT WAS IN THE MID-1980's, while working part-time for a fly shop, that I first started teaching the basics of fly casting. In order to quickly and clearly convey the essence of the art to others, I began using a very simple, three-part method. It has served me well to this day.

The method consists of three commands, spoken aloud: "UP," "WAIT," and "FORWARD."

UP: Pronounced forcefully, thereby implying rapid acceleration of the rod tip UP to the "twelve o'clock" position (and thus casting the line UP into the air). This results in a high back cast which prevents future problems.

WAIT...for the line to straighten behind the student. At typical 25 to 35-foot line/leader ranges, it takes just about the same amount of time to *deliberately* say the word as it does for the line to actually unroll.

FORWARD: Accelerate the rod tip forward and stop just above eye level (coincidentally the "ten o'clock" position). To emphasize this element of the cast, I'll occasionally stand several feet in front of the student, telling them to cast the line over my shoulder or head.

During initial coaching, I'll stand beside the student and vocalize each command: UP...WAIT...FORWARD. I'll run through this sequence several times, then stop to correct any errors.

To continue the lesson after corrections, I'll start the "UP...WAIT...FORWARD" cadence again, asking the student to vocalize with me. After a short period of such "co-vocalization," I silence myself and let the student take over.

Overall, I keep the sessions short (typically ten minutes or less), and then take a break to allow the student's mind and muscles to relax. It's been a very effective system for me.

BASIC NOW ONLINE

BASIC CERTIFIED INSTRUCTORS are now listed on the Program's website (<http://www.fedflyfishers.org/castingcert.html>). If you've got internet access, check the site to be sure that all your contact information is listed correctly!



NEW MASTERS

Congratulations to these new Master Certified Instructors!

Brian Niska, British Columbia

Randi Swisher, Washington

Rick Williams, Idaho

COMING EVENTS

Pre-Registration is REQUIRED!



CONTACT EVELYN TAYLOR to pre-register (406) 585-7592.

Livingston, MT - May 30; Basic with Rod Walinchus.

Loveland, CO - June 16; Sylvan Dale Guest Ranch; all day instructors workshop with option to take the Basic afterwards with Mel Krieger; contact Bill Peisner for more info (970) 493-4005 or (800) 858-6808.

Sun Valley, ID - June 18; Basic with Mel Krieger; contact Terry Ring (208) 726-5282.

Livingston, MT - June 27; Basic with Rod Walinchus.

Redding, CA - July 18; Basic with Mel Krieger; contact Mike Michalak (800) 669-3474.

Idaho Falls, ID - August 5 & 7; International Fly Fishing Show & Conclave; Basic & Masters.

August 4 (3-5pm); How to Teach Flycasting: A panel moderated by Al Kyte. Your chance to bring questions to the experts on the teaching and learning of flycasting.

August 6 (9-5pm); Flycasting Instructor's Course with Denise & Mike Maxwell - for certified instructors as well



as those interested in becoming instructors.

August 7 (9-11am); Roundtable for Casting Instructors.

LOOK FOR THE REGISTRATION FORM in the Spring *Flyfisher* for the International Fly Fishing Show & Conclave.



LOOP STAFF

EDITOR & LAYOUT: Jason Borger, jbarger@pcpros.net;
phone/FAX (715) 843-7878

PROGRAM COORDINATOR: Evelyn Taylor,
74504.2605@compuserve.com

ASST. VP, CASTING: Jack Sherrill (970) 434-1221

WE WELCOME your letters, teaching tips, articles, and yes, even cartoons. All submissions should be sent to the National Office: FFF Casting Program, P.O. Box 1595, Bozeman, MT 59771. FAX (406) 585-7596.

THE LOOP is the quarterly publication of the FFF Board of Governors for Certified Casting Instructors.

THE LOOP LIBRARY

by Doug Swisher

FLY CASTING INSTRUCTORS need a good reference library. This section of the Loop features selected snippets of casting knowledge from books and articles by masters of the art.

This issue's Library column comes from Doug Swisher and Carl Richard's book, "Fly Fishing Strategy" (Crown, 1975). The piece describes a great tool for teaching others (and perhaps oneself) to have proper control of the arm's plane during casting.

"...ANOTHER AID THAT TEACHES the feel of proper thumb position is to cast with a large, flat sheet of material such as the side of a cardboard box or a piece of sheet plastic. Either cut out a grip at the bottom or attach a wooden dowel. Such a large, flat, lightweight sheet *has* to travel straight as it slices through the air, ensuring that your thumb will stay in the proper position. If turned even a few degrees sideways, it will immediately straighten itself because of the tremendous buildup of air resistance. This exercise not only corrects the thumb but teaches the feel of perfect loop alignment."

"Thank you," Doug, for allowing the *The Loop* to re-print your work—Ed.