



Fly Fishers International

The MCI Exam Study Guide – 2023 ~~Version~~  
Edition 1

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## MCI Study Guide – ~~Version 1~~2023 Edition

### Introduction

The Fly Fishers International Master Casting Instructor (“MCI”) certification is by far the most widely recognised Single-Hand instructing certification in the world, and it brings its holders instant credibility everywhere. Earning it will help you teach, cast and fish better, and to develop a deeper understanding of fly casting. MCIs teach other instructors, mentor, examine and serve as ambassadors for and take leadership roles in the FFI’s casting program. The process is not easy, but it is very rewarding, and you meet many wonderful people. MCIs never stop learning and seek to build on the skills required to qualify.

The MCI certification process was designed to have a large element of self-discovery. As prospective Masters, we are expected to figure things out for ourselves. That said, most successful MCI candidates receive considerable in-person mentoring and training. A few candidates tell us that accessing in-person mentoring is not easy, and many say that more structured and better preparation materials would be helpful. With that in mind, our approach is simply to share what our mentors told and showed us, and what we in turn convey to our own mentees.

This document is an update of the August 2022 Version 1 of the MCI Study Guide, and covers both the October 1, 2022 ~~2020~~-MCI Exam (the “Exam or the “MCI Exam”)-and the updated version going into effect on October 1, 2022. It has been reviewed by several of our colleagues<sup>1</sup> and approved by the FFI’s Casting Board of Governors. If there are any discrepancies between this document and the ~~2020 or 2022~~-MCI Exams, the applicable MCI-Exam (the “Exam” or the “MCI Exam”)-will of course take precedence, and in any event your examiners will have the final say on Exam Day.

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<sup>1</sup> We thank all our CBOG colleagues and initial reviewers Carol Northcut, Bruce Richards, Jonathan Walter, David Bracks, and Lyall Crawford as well as Exam Committee members Molly Semenik and Rick Williams. We thank FFI instructors including John Biggers, Vince Brandon, Terry Cummings, David Drez, Willy George, Gene Geppert, Przemysław Kawecki, Juro Mukai, Malik Mazbouri, Walter Simbirski, and Bob Young for their helpful comments and suggestions on the previous published version of the Study Guide.

Our goals are to give candidates:

- A clear idea of what is involved in preparing for the MCI Exam;
- Every opportunity to make meaningful progress if they are unable to access in-person mentoring; and
- A resource to supplement mentoring, which we strongly advise them to seek.

This Study Guide suggests first mastering four Training Casts, which form the basis of a detailed task-by-task run through of the Performance Section of the Exam. These Training Casts are:

- [Pickup, False Cast and Deliver on Grass<sup>2</sup> at 50 ft](#);
- [Oval Cast on Grass at 40/45 ft](#);
- [Switch Cast on Water at 50 ft](#); and
- [No Change of Direction Waterborne Anchor Cast at 50 ft](#).

We go through all of them in detail.

We know some of our readers have not had much exposure to Spey casts, so we start with the basics and build from there<sup>3</sup>. We also cover a game plan for the Teaching Section in some detail and share some thoughts on the Interview and Discussion Section. We begin with a review of casting mechanics and suggestions on preparation, practice and equipment, and end with Exam Day strategy and tactics.

~~We are making~~ videos illustrating the Training Casts and ~~some several~~ of the Exam Tasks, ~~which are will be~~ available [here on the FFI Vimeo site](#), and we plan to add more over time.

*The authors have mentored several successful candidates since 2018, but other mentors may choose to approach preparation differently with great success. Similarly, we make specific recommendations on how to perform Tasks and teach, but there are many ways to get the job done. If you and your mentor prefer other ways of making the line do what it needs to and/or conveying skills and knowledge to students, by all means go for it.*

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<sup>2</sup> We refer to Sub-Section 1A of the Exam as Grass, and to Sub-Section 1B as Water.

<sup>3</sup> Rick Williams MCI, THMCI and Russ Carpenter, CI [have produced an excellent](#) ~~a~~-tiered Single-Hand Spey Ladder. ~~It will appear in for~~ the FFI Learning Center ~~in due course, but it is available now on the MCI page. Please keep an eye out for it.~~ We think it will be a very helpful bridge ~~to help candidates progress~~ from the anchored casts on the CI Exam to those on the MCI Exam, [and encourage MCI candidates to work with it.](#)

*This guide is meant to be useful, but it is not intended to be a complete package. All MCI candidates should be familiar with various teaching methods, casting styles and techniques, as well as **areas of potential controversy** in casting instruction and mechanics. These topics may arise at any point during the exam, especially during Section 3, Interview and Discussion.*

We hope candidates and mentors find this document helpful and welcome your questions and feedback.

## Mentoring

**Perhaps the most important piece of advice for an MCI candidate is to work with one or more mentors if possible.** All our data suggest well mentored Exam candidates are much more likely to succeed. Some candidates work with MCIs as mentors for the entire exam. Others get additional input on the water tasks from THMCIs. All our examiners and most of our mentors are listed on the FFI website. Do not hesitate to reach out. We believe our Mentoring Committee has a system in place to at a minimum source virtual mentoring for candidates. Please contact the [FFI Casting Coordinator](#) if you are having trouble finding a mentor. Many candidates work with mentors in a combination of online and in-person sessions. Other teams are starting to work entirely virtually. Some mentors charge for their services, others don't. Have an open conversation at the outset.

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Secondly, starting several months before testing, participate in at least one full pre-test exam, and ideally more. Pre-tests provide the opportunity for candidates to get detailed feedback and additional experience in exam situations. It is usually helpful to be tested by someone other than your main mentor(s) **in order to** get a broader perspective on your progress.

We are not saying only examiners can effectively mentor - far from it - but we do suggest that these pre-tests be administered by active MCI examiners (L2 Single Hand examiners and L3 examiners). This is so you can get an accurate read of your skill levels relative to a fully current view of the performance standards you will be assessed on. Please make sure you completely understand the different qualification levels of FFI examiners.<sup>4</sup> Some candidates find it helpful to work with a well-qualified casting

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<sup>4</sup> FFI Single-Hand and Two-Hand Examiners and what they can assess: L1 SH-CI Exam. L2 SH-MCI and CI. L1 TH-THCI. L2 TH-THCI and THMCI. L3 examiners are those who are both L2 SH and L2 TH

partner or “buddy” who is also preparing for the MCI Exam, but this is not a substitute for proper mentoring.

**This Study Guide is not intended to replace regular personal mentoring.** As we say above, we aim to help candidates without access to mentoring progress as much as possible, and to supplement the mentoring candidates do receive.

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## The MCI Journey

You are ready to start serious MCI preparation when you can easily complete all CI performance tasks with flawless loops and have gained substantial additional teaching experience.

You are ready to schedule your MCI Exam when a Single-Hand L2 or an L3 examiner administers a full pre-test and says you should pass comfortably. To use a golfing analogy, it’s not how good your good shots are, it’s how good your bad shots are. You need to make sure your worst shots are good enough.

## The Five Essentials of Fly Casting

Understanding the Five Essentials is critical to success in FFI Exams. Bill Gammel’s view of the Essentials of Fly Casting<sup>5</sup> has evolved substantially since he wrote them as a young man with his father around 30 years ago. After many years of teaching, Bill has refined his views of how the Essentials fit together and generalised beyond just line length determining arc and pause.

Bill now summarises The Essentials of Fly Casting as follows:<sup>6</sup>

*“There is one overriding result that must occur for a tight, straight loop to result from the cast. The rod tip must travel as close as possible to a **straight line** during the casting stroke... In order for a rod tip to travel in a straight line ..., there are five things that must occur. “*

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examiners. They are our most qualified examiners and there are only around 15 of them worldwide. They are well worth seeking out, for reasons including their expertise in anchored casts.

<sup>5</sup> *The Essentials of Fly Casting for the Federation of Fly Fishers*, Bill and Jay Gammel, 1993.

<sup>6</sup> All quotes from Bill Gammel [“Making Adjustments on the Fly” The Loop, Summer 2010.](#)



### 1. Straight Line Path

*“The first essential states that the rod tip must travel in a **straight line** throughout the casting stroke. The first time you heard this [in 1993 in the Essentials of Fly Casting] it was presented as the desired result, however, it is also an essential [direct caster] action. The rod tip must travel in a straight line in the horizontal plane and the vertical plane. The rod tip must travel from RSP<sup>7</sup> to RSP with no right or left deviation. This is known as tracking. The tip must track straight. Also, the rod tip must travel from RSP to RSP with no (very little) deviation up or down. This is accomplished by properly executing the four remaining essentials”.<sup>8</sup>*

### 2. Casting Arc

*“The next essential ... states that the **casting arc** or angle, through which the rod butt travels from RSP to RSP, must vary with the amount of bend placed on the rod. As the bend gets deeper, the casting arc must get wider. This is most often done by lengthening the overall length of the casting stroke. This is the foundation for adjusting your cast”.<sup>9</sup>*

### 3. Pause

*“The **pause** between each cast must vary with the amount of time it takes the line to straighten. Very simply the line must straighten before the next stroke begins...”.<sup>10</sup>*

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<sup>7</sup> Rod Straight Position.

<sup>8</sup> This paragraph puts it all together. Make sure you study it carefully.

<sup>9</sup> Generalizing beyond just line length affecting arc. It now for example covers changing line speed with the same amount of line as in the CI Slow to Fast and the MCI and CI Vertical to Horizontal Tasks.

<sup>10</sup> Generalizing beyond just line length affecting pause, and now covering the CI and MCI Exam Tasks in the previous footnote.

#### 4. Power/Force<sup>11</sup>

*“In order for the rod tip to move in a straight line, you must apply the **power** in a smooth acceleration from RSP to RSP... Too much or too little bend and the rod tip will not travel a straight line.”<sup>12</sup>*

#### 5. **Slack**

*“There can be no **slack** in the casting system during the application of power..., [when] the rod tip must be pulling against a taut line. If this doesn't occur, then the rod tip will not travel along a straight line path. When you pull against slack, the rod tip will rise, because there is not enough load (bend) being placed on the rod... “*

Bill also uses the 180-degree ~~rule-principle~~ in his teaching now, saying -“The 180 degree rule<sup>13</sup> ~~the 180-Degree Rule~~ is really good teaching terminology and I use it often. I would use it in the description of the Straight Line Path Essential if I were rewriting it.”<sup>14</sup>

What Bill means is that to produce efficient loops the rod tip must not just go in a straight line, but also in the *right* straight line in relation to the fly line's position when the casting stroke starts. The correct SLP is in exactly the opposite direction to the fly line. In other words, we need to line our fly line up with our target before we cast it.<sup>15</sup> If

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<sup>11</sup> The Gammels used the expression Power. Current FFI thinking favors using the arguably more technically correct word Force instead. We use Force in this Study Guide when we can, but Force and Power should be interpreted as meaning the same thing in this document.

<sup>12</sup> Stopping properly is important too. In the 1993 Essentials, the Gammels included the stop in their discussion of the Power Essential on p. 12, saying “there should be a crisp stop at the end of the casting stroke”. In 2016 Bill answered a question about whether stop should be the sixth Essential by saying: “There is no doubt that the caster needs to stop or slow down -you can accelerate all day and never form a loop. We started with a longer list of Essentials and whittled it down to six. Stop was actually the sixth Essential but my Dad and I decided it was just power applied in the opposite direction to the cast in order to form a loop and it therefore should be part of Power.”

“Casting Masters Then and Now-Bill and J.W. (Jay) Gammel”, The Loop, Summer 2016.

<sup>13</sup> We use “principle” instead of “rule” to be a bit less prescriptive. We aren't disagreeing with Bill, who was asked and answered a question about a rule.

<sup>14</sup> “Casting Masters Then and Now-Bill and J.W. (Jay) Gammel”, The Loop, Summer 2016.

<sup>15</sup> The Exam defines the ~~180 degree rule~~180 degree principle as “Loops...will be nearly opposite each other”.

The description of the ~~180 degree rule~~180 degree principle in the 2016 Loop article was “the rod tip path during the casting stroke should be an extension in the opposite direction of the fly line's position when the casting stroke begins.”, and that's what we mean when we mention the ~~180 degree rule~~180 degree principle in this Study Guide. The key point is that the line's mass should be aligned with the direction in which we cast it, and we wanted to make clear exactly how this guidance applies to things like pickups (which don't have a previous cast's loop to oppose) and long casts affected by gravity. See Joan Wulff's New Fly Casting

we don't, even when we apply the appropriate mix of the 5 Essentials to produce a straight tip path, we ~~won't~~may not produce a straight fly leg. We cover this in [Diagrams B and C](#) and the [Fly Leg Cause and Effect Table](#).

Finally:

*"Manipulation or changing one or more of the 5 Essentials affects the others and most importantly will affect the size and shape of the loop. This may be in error, or may be done intentionally, such as changing tip path to obtain a wider loop. I tell my candidates this so that they start looking at the 5E's as tools rather than rules. I think MCI's should understand this."*<sup>16</sup>

We cover this in [Beyond SLP and Constant-Smooth Acceleration](#).

## Basic Casting Mechanics

The Five Essentials, including ~~the 180 degree rule~~the 180 degree principle, with the addition of a good understanding of "Rotation", "Translation" and "Force" plus the basic concept of "Work" (Force on an object times the Distance over which it is applied<sup>17</sup>) are quite sufficient to pass an MCI assessment. It is not necessary to introduce concepts any more complicated than these.

We apply terms to these things, Casting Arc (a measure of Rotation), and Casting Stroke Length (a measure of Translation). Often we refer to Force as Power.<sup>18</sup> These are the terms we use for discussion amongst instructors and consequently these are the terms you should be using in your Exam.<sup>19</sup> You should be familiar with the FFI casting definitions, which can be found [here](#) on the website.<sup>20</sup>

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*[Techniques, p.82: "Long Cast Trajectory - the Seesaw Effect. Backcast path is above horizontal...Line unrolls below horizontal...Forward cast is above horizontal."](#)*

<sup>16</sup> Jonathan Walter, MCI and CBOG Chair.

<sup>17</sup> For an object moving in a straight line.

<sup>18</sup> The term Force is probably more technically correct.

<sup>19</sup> When you are speaking to your examiners as instructors, not "students" who won't understand a word of it.

<sup>20</sup> The authors of this Study Guide do not necessarily fully endorse all of them (such as the trailing loop definition, as we say in Diagram B), but candidates should study them thoroughly.

The rod works best as a lever; it is how we produce a “mechanical advantage”.<sup>21</sup> Rotation of the rod is the principal means of accelerating the line. Of course, translation will also accelerate the line, but it gives us no “mechanical advantage”. When you apply, and continue to apply, a force sufficient to overcome the inertia of your rod and line, the rod and line will accelerate. The rate at which you accelerate the line depends on the magnitude of the force you are applying via the rod tip.

The principle of “work” tells us that, for any given desired tip speed you can use a high force applied over a short distance or a lower force over a longer distance. A caster has the option to control the force more easily by increasing the distance over which it is applied. Plus, it’s only a rule of thumb but, generally, we can control our smooth application of force better the longer we have, timewise, to apply it.

A caster could use Casting Arc *or* Translation in isolation to increase the length or change the shape of an intended tip path but, almost without exception, we use a mixture of both. How we manage this mixture matters. Changing only one of arc, stroke length or force will require a change to be made in the other two if you are looking to achieve a particular objective: a loop shape or line speed, perhaps.

Increasing Arc during the casting stroke will give a convex fly leg for the wide loop Task. Increasing Stroke Length, which is an underestimated weapon in a caster’s armoury, means that we don’t have to significantly increase arc to increase tip speeds and run the risk of convex tip paths and open loops as a consequence. It’s a vital tool in force and tip path control.<sup>22</sup>

A Casting Stroke could therefore be explained as a motion with the objective of forming a loop which is created by Force applied through a mixture of Casting Arc and Stroke Length. Because you know the effects of changing each element within a casting stroke you can recognise and teach many different casting techniques which may have very differently constructed casting strokes, but which will produce exactly the same outcomes. This is particularly important to understand at MCI level because both the

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<sup>21</sup> By “mechanical advantage” in flycasting we mean when the increase in tip speed is greater than the increase in hand speed. The term is in quotation marks because a lever’s mechanical advantage traditionally refers to amplification of force not speed (e.g., a crowbar). A fly rod is literally the other end of the stick.

<sup>22</sup> Insufficient stroke length is a problem we very often see with candidates. Adding body movement really helps. Joan Wulff, MCI recognised this many years ago:

*“In 1943, at age 16, Joan won her first national casting accuracy championship, one of the two categories in competitive casting. Along the way, she questioned why her casting instructor wanted her to use only her wrist ... Joan went on to win one international and 16 national titles by 1960—using her ... whole body, in fact. In a 2018 interview, she said, “I loved that casting was whole body, you had to use every part of your body, from your fingertips to your toes.””*

*Casting from the Shoulders of a Giant, Cindy Salo, Big Sky Journal, Fly Fishing 2022 Issue.*

CI and MCI assessments are tests of an instructor's abilities to understand and control the inputs required to achieve very different task objectives. This means two things: first that a one cast fits all approach to the assessment will be very likely to fail, second that so long as you meet the task objectives it doesn't much matter what technique you use to do it.

That said, some techniques do tend to work better than others, and we make a few suggestions along the way. We tend to favor styles and techniques producing longer stroke length.

Insufficient stroke length is a problem we very often see with candidates. Adding body movement really helps. Joan Wulff, MCI recognised this many years ago:

*"In 1943, at age 16, Joan won her first national casting accuracy championship, one of the two categories in competitive casting. Along the way, she questioned why her casting instructor wanted her to use only her wrist ... Joan went on to win one international and 16 national titles by 1960 — using her ... whole body, in fact. In a 2018 interview, she said, "I loved that casting was whole-body, you had to use every part of your body, from your fingertips to your toes.""*

*Casting from the Shoulders of a Giant, Cindy Salo, Big Sky Journal, Fly Fishing 2022 Issue.*

## Fly Leg Cause and Effect

Recent FFI thinking has focused on the shape of the fly leg as critical to good fly casting. Bruce Richards, MCI points out that the fly leg is the fastest moving part of the loop, and that the air drag acting to slow it down is disproportionately greater than for any other part of the loop. Bruce argues that pointing a straight fly leg directly at the target maximizes efficiency.<sup>23 24</sup> Have a laser focus on what your fly line is doing and develop a clear understanding of what causes your fly leg to be anything than straight and

<sup>23</sup> In his Loop articles *Do Big Loops Matter?* (Spring 2021) and *How Loops Work* (Fall 2022), Bruce Richards, *The Loop*, Spring 2021. Bruce points out that the average speed of the front edge of the loop is the average of the speeds of the rod and fly legs. The rod leg's speed is zero when no line is shot. Assuming uniform line diameter, a fly leg travelling twice as fast as the front edge of the loop will experience four times as much drag per unit of side profile (the deviation of the fly leg from straight, or how wide the fly leg looks from the front), so Bruce argues that the shape of the fly leg is really important. Therefore, as we explain later, distance casters care a lot about tracking. For example, if they pick up with 60 ft of line and leader outside the tip (most of our friends do more), a 1-degree tracking error is equivalent to making around 1 ft of the fly leg try to go sideways through the air at loop formation. At up to 4x more drag affecting it than the front edge of the loop, you can see why loop width isn't the only game in town.

<sup>24</sup> See this NASA piece on the factors influencing aerodynamic drag. — <https://www.grc.nasa.gov/www/k-12/airplane/drageq.html>

pointed at the target. For a standard overhead cast there should be no tip path deviation in any direction during the Casting Stroke.

- In the rod or vertical plane<sup>25</sup>, watch for and correct up and down tip path deviations. Understand causes of tails, crosses and domed fly legs, including ~~180 degree rule~~[180 degree principle](#) violations. See the Diagrams and Table below.
- In the plane perpendicular to rod/horizontal plane<sup>26</sup>, look out for rod tip deviations to the left and right. Understand causes of swinging fly legs in both directions, including ~~180 degree rule~~[180 degree principle](#) violations. Faults include wrist and forearm twist in both directions, and shoulder swinging. See the Diagrams and Table below.
- *Make sure you understand how ~~180 degree rule~~[180 degree principle](#) violations can mimic the results of curved rod tip paths if an absolutely straight line tip path goes in a direction other than opposite where the fly line is pointing when you start the cast.*

Figuring out whether a fly leg is misbehaving because of a curved tip path or a 180 degree violation (or both) will help you save lots of trial and error time [for both your overhead and anchored casting](#).<sup>27</sup> See Diagrams B and C and the Fly Leg Cause and Effect Table below<sup>28</sup>. Use Bruce Richards' Six Step Method<sup>29</sup> to diagnose your own loops and fix yourself. Video ~~yourself~~ and treat yourself like a student. Learning to correct your own problems will also help you correct student problems. If you are able effectively to do this, you will save yourself many lonely frustrating hours trying to figure out what's wrong, and you will progress much more quickly.

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<sup>25</sup> We introduce the terms rod plane/plane perpendicular to rod plane to cater for situations when the rod may not be vertical. Some think of a vertical "T" or cross shape rotating down sideways with the casting plane.

<sup>26</sup> See above.

<sup>27</sup> You may not need to fully understand all the details of 180 degree violations to pass an MCI assessment, but it will help!

<sup>28</sup> We appreciate that these Diagrams, the Table and its footnotes may not be light reading, but we encourage you to take the time to go through them thoroughly.

<sup>29</sup> Diagnose line/rod/body; fix body/rod/line. [A Six Step Method, Bruce Richards, The Loop, Spring 1999.](#)

Diagram A – Loop Shapes in Vertical Plane from SLP Deviations - Side View – Assuming Vertical Casting Plane

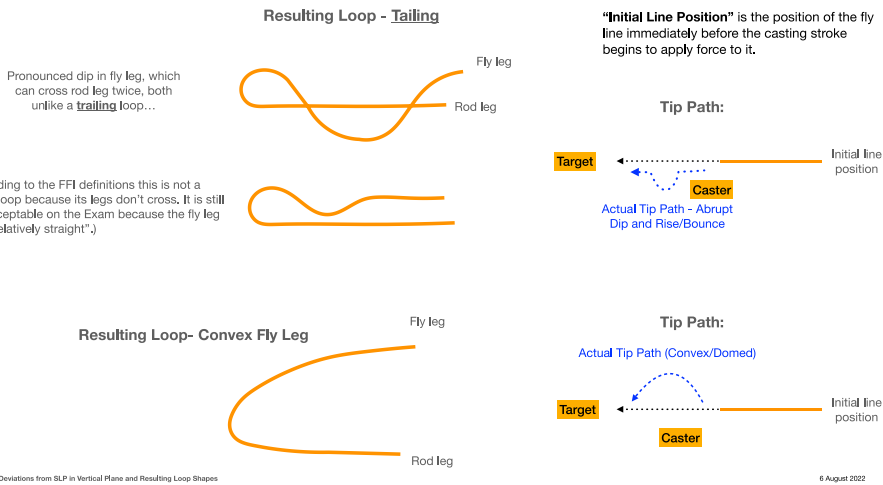
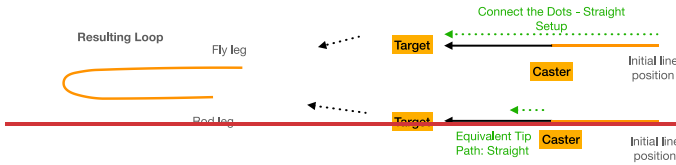


Diagram B – ~~180 Degree Rule~~ 180 Degree Principle – Side View – Assuming Vertical Casting Plane

180 Degree Rule Followed - Tip Path Straight and in Alignment with Starting Line Position:

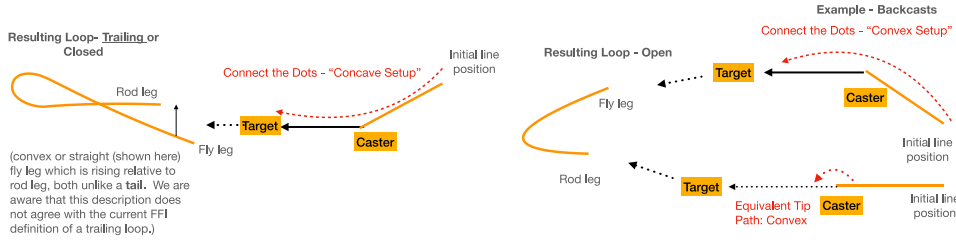


"Initial Line Position" is the position of the fly line immediately before the casting stroke begins to apply force to it.

"Connect the Dots" is the line or curve connecting the target, the rod tip and the fly at the beginning of the cast.

"Equivalent Tip Path" is a simplified description of the rod tip path, if applicable, which would produce a similar loop shape if the line position at the start of the cast had followed the 180 Degree Rule.

180 Degree Rule Not Followed - Tip Path Straight, No Change in Force, but out of Alignment with Starting Line Position:

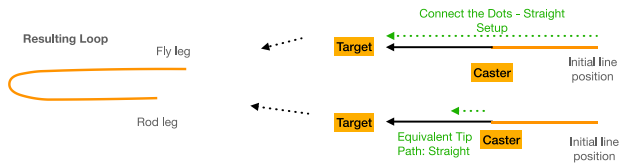


(convex or straight (shown here) fly leg which is rising relative to rod leg, both unlike a tail. We are aware that this description does not agree with the current FFI definition of a trailing loop.)

180 Degree Rule - Initial Line Position, Equivalent Tip Path and Resulting Loop Shape in the Vertical Plane (Side View)

1 August 2022

180 Degree Principle Followed - Tip Path Straight and in Alignment with Starting Line Position:

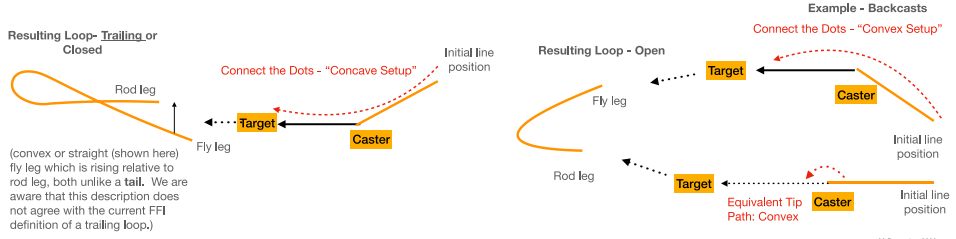


"Initial Line Position" is the position of the fly line immediately before the casting stroke begins to apply force to it.

"Connect the Dots" is the line or curve connecting the target, the rod tip and the fly at the beginning of the cast.

"Equivalent Tip Path" is a simplified description of the rod tip path, if applicable, which would produce a similar loop shape if the line position at the start of the cast had followed the 180 Degree Principle.

180 Degree Principle Not Followed - Tip Path Straight, Cast Unchanged except out of Alignment with Starting Line Position:



(convex or straight (shown here) fly leg which is rising relative to rod leg, both unlike a tail. We are aware that this description does not agree with the current FFI definition of a trailing loop.)

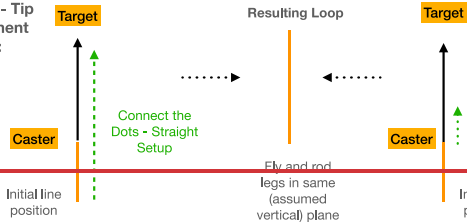
180 Degree Principle - Initial Line Position, Equivalent Tip Path and Resulting Loop Shape in the Vertical Plane (Side View)

28 December 2022

Diagram C - 180 Degree Rule 180 Degree Principle - View from Above - Assuming Vertical Casting Plane



**180 Degree Rule Followed - Tip Path Straight and in Alignment with Starting Line Position:**

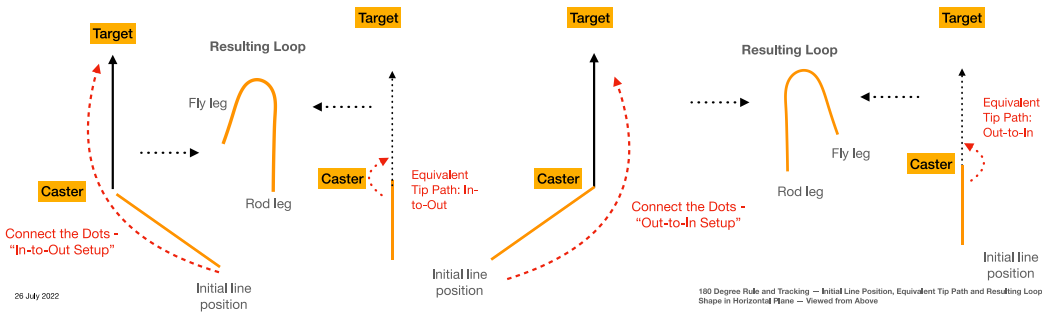


“Initial Line Position” is the position of the fly line immediately before the casting stroke begins to apply force to it.

“Connect the Dots” is the line or curve connecting the target, the rod tip and the fly at the beginning of the cast.

“Equivalent Tip Path” is a simplified description of the rod tip path, if applicable, which would produce a similar loop shape if the line position at the start of the cast had followed the 180 Degree Rule.

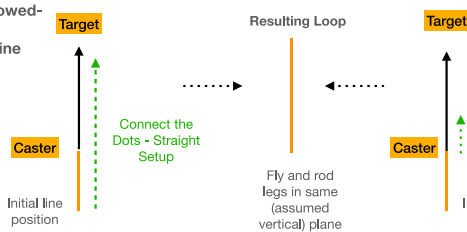
**180 Degree Rule Not Followed - Tip Path Straight, No Change in Force, but out of Alignment with Starting Line Position:**



28 July 2022

180 Degree Rule and Tracking – Initial Line Position, Equivalent Tip Path and Resulting Loop Shape in Horizontal Plane – Viewed from Above

**180 Degree Principle Followed - Tip Path Straight and in Alignment with Starting Line Position:**

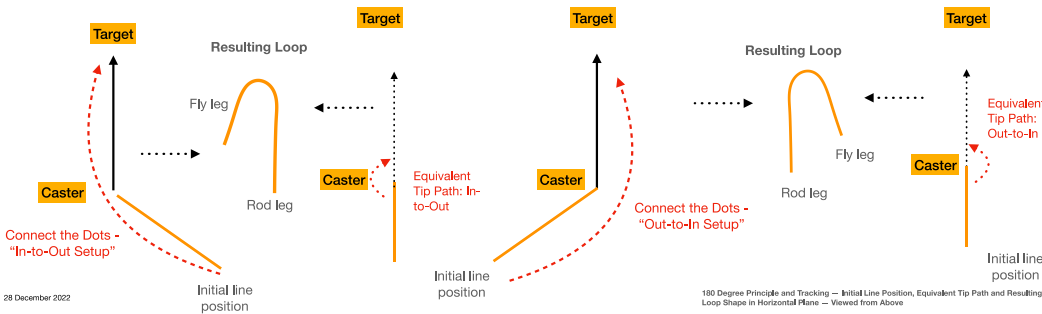


“Initial Line Position” is the position of the fly line immediately before the casting stroke begins to apply force to it.

“Connect the Dots” is the line or curve connecting the target, the rod tip and the fly at the beginning of the cast.

“Equivalent Tip Path” is a simplified description of the rod tip path, if applicable, which would produce a similar loop shape if the line position at the start of the cast had followed the 180 Degree Rule.

**180 Degree Principle Not Followed - Tip Path Straight, Cast Unchanged except out of Alignment with Starting Line Position:**



28 December 2022

180 Degree Principle and Tracking – Initial Line Position, Equivalent Tip Path and Resulting Loop Shape in Horizontal Plane – Viewed from Above

Fly Leg Cause and Effect Table - See Previous Diagrams - Right Handed Caster

Fly Leg Shape	Tip Path Cause	180 Degree Rule Cause (If Tip Path Straight) <sup>30</sup>
Straight Fly Leg, Both Loop Legs in Rod Plane <sup>31</sup>	Straight	Cast direction was opposite <i>starting line direction</i> <sup>32</sup> in all planes
Domed Fly Leg <sup>33</sup>	Domed/convex <sup>34</sup>	Cast direction lower than starting line direction <sup>35</sup>
Tailing <sup>36</sup>	Abrupt concavity <sup>37</sup> /dip and bounceback <sup>38</sup>	None
Trailing / Closed <sup>39</sup>	Not applicable <sup>40</sup>	Cast direction higher than starting line direction <sup>41</sup>

<sup>30</sup> For a fuller explanation of *why* 180 degree violations produce the fly leg effects we describe, see the description of the bead chain experiment in [Follow Me, Please](#), by Aitor Coterón, CI, in The Loop, March 2018. The original bead chain video embedded in his article is currently [unavailable but](#) see a redo [here](#). Aitor describes how after the line starts below SLP, its momentum swings it through and to the other side of SLP, causing it to ~~cast~~ fly upward ~~in~~ to form a wide loop with a convex fly leg. John Clark MCI, THCI refers to this as the “flapping flag effect”. Our Diagrams B and C show the entire fly line out of alignment, but the result is similar if a cast starts with only part of the fly line bent out of line with SLP, as it is before the backcast trails in [this other video](#). Below we cite the first bead chain video to illustrate 3 of the 4 possible 180 degree violations.

<sup>31</sup> May occasionally be a fault. Bruce Richards argues that we actually sometimes want a convex fly leg to slow down heavy [or complicated](#) payloads in [Do Big Loops Matter?](#), The Loop, Spring 2021.

<sup>32</sup> Starting line direction is along an imaginary straight line extending from the fly through the rod tip.

<sup>33</sup> Usually but not always a fault. We may do this on purpose to cast heavy things.

<sup>34</sup> Assuming an upright rod plane, we refer to a curved tip path which goes up then down as convex.

<sup>35</sup> Line mass starts below SLP. [Evidence: Aitor’s bead chain video](#).

<sup>36</sup> Tailing loops are usually but not always faults. Italian ~~FFI~~ style casters and Mac Brown, MCI have been using them for many years to [throw a horizontal curve cast called a “Svirgolato”, which several FFI instructors learned from Malik Mazbouri, CI, some](#) like Paul Arden use tails to sink nymphs, while others skip flies under overhanging vegetation or on the surface with casts like the “Skipping Caddis” used by Brian Henderson MCI, THMCI.

<sup>37</sup> Assuming an upright rod plane, we refer to a curved tip path which goes down then up as concave.

<sup>38</sup> Aitor Coterón: <https://onemorelastcast.net/2015/02/22/mysterious-creature-rides-again-2/#more-367> A tail is an entirely different kind of crossing loop than a trail because a tail has a U-shaped wave which propagates (fast) down the fly leg to the leader, getting larger along the way [and usually crossing the rod leg twice](#), whereas in a trail the loop legs just happen to cross [\(once\)](#) and there is no U-wave in the fly leg. Here again is a demonstration of some of the [differences between tailing and trailing or closed loops](#).

<sup>39</sup> Trails [in the authors’ opinion](#) are often not faults. For example, they feature in all Roll, Switch and Spey forward deliveries. We have never heard of an FFI examiner calling a candidate out for throwing a **trailing** loop.

<sup>40</sup> This is a topic beyond the scope of the MCI Exam.

<sup>41</sup> Line mass starts above SLP. [Video Evidence](#). To replicate Diagram B, imagine tilting the forward cast in the video to horizontal, and elevating the backcast to preserve the angle between them.

Fly Leg Cause and Effect Table, Cont'd

Fly Leg Shape	Tip Path Cause	180 Degree Rule Cause (If Tip Path Straight)
Fly leg <u>initially</u> swinging sideways away from caster <sup>42</sup>	Out-to-in. Can be from backcast <i>pronation</i> <sup>43</sup> , forward cast <i>supination</i> <sup>44</sup> or an out-to-in hand path, which can be caused by swinging with or from the casting shoulder.	Cast direction inside starting line direction. (Cast to starting line direction less than 180 degrees on caster's side of the line.) <sup>45</sup>
Fly leg <u>initially</u> swinging sideways into caster	In-to-out. Can be from backcast supination, forward cast pronation or an in-to-out hand path.	Cast direction outside starting line direction. (Cast to starting line direction more than 180 degrees on caster's side of the line.) <sup>46</sup>

<sup>42</sup> Laterally swinging fly legs are not always faults. As you will see, we recommend swinging loops in both directions to perform [some of the Curve Casts/Curved Presentations](#) in the Exam.

<sup>43</sup> With the casting hand at ear level with the palm facing the caster, pronation is rotating the palm forward, and supination is rotating the palm backwards. Another way of thinking about it is that for a right-handed caster with their hand in front of or behind them, supination is a clockwise hand and wrist twist, while pronation is a twist in the [counter-clockwise](#) direction. A very common error is to start the backcast in a neutral wrist and forearm position, pronate on the backcast and return to neutral by supinating on the forward cast, causing outswinging loops front and back.

<sup>44</sup> See previous footnote.

<sup>45</sup> Line mass for RH caster starts to the left of SLP. Video Evidence: [Evidence: A Mirror image of Aitor's bead chain video one more time](#), now considered as a view from above of a right-handed caster. Imagine we could just see the end of the tip of a vertical rod sliding between the tiles, and that the chain started on the other side of SLP.

<sup>46</sup> Line mass for RH caster starts to the right of SLP. Video Evidence: [the same clip](#), again considered as a view from above of a right-handed caster and imagining a vertical rod, but this time with the chain starting on the side of SLP shown in the video.

## Going Beyond SLP and ~~Smooth-Constant~~ Acceleration

SLP is critical for many MCI tasks, like many of the overhead casts and the forward deliveries in the Water Sub-Section, but the MCI Exam sometimes requires you to go “outside the envelope”.

Develop a clear understanding of how to deliberately make fly legs that are not straight for curve ~~casts~~ [presentations](#) (as well as fault demonstrations). In some tasks, such as the Spey setups and D Loop formation, the rod tip not only moves in 3 dimensions, but it does so under very uneven force application to make the fly line do what we want it to. Paul Arden, Mark Surtees, MCI and others address this by referring to “Intended Tip Path” or just “Tip Path” (which of course *is* often straight) rather than to SLP. Mac Brown, MCI goes one step further and covers speeding up and slowing down by using “Rates of Movement Along an Intended Tip Path”. None of these gentlemen are saying the Five Essentials aren’t valid and useful, they are just pointing out you can adjust the five control inputs (tracking, arc, force, pause/timing and slack) to make the rod tip do whatever you want it to.

You will need to do a bit of left/right brain parallel processing to think SLP and constant smooth acceleration on many of the Grass tasks, while focusing on three-dimensional casting with uneven force application to make D loops on Water, and then back onto SLP again for the forward delivery. The [Basic Overhead Cast](#) and [Oval Cast](#) Training Casts will be a big help.

Similarly, ~~the 180-degree rule~~ [the 180 degree principle](#) is only a “rule” if the caster’s intent is to produce a straight fly leg. Sometimes we may want to deliberately curve the fly leg by misaligning our forward and back casts. One example is producing a convex fly leg by breaking ~~the 180-degree rule~~ [the 180 degree principle](#) with an oval cast to take a heavy payload safely overhead on the forward cast.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> [Follow Me, Please](#), by Aitor Coterón, CI, in The Loop, March 2018; see text on pp.13,15. The line position at the start of a forward cast with an almost vertical rod plane after a low sidearm backcast looks like the one in the lower right-hand corner of [Diagram B](#) (considered as a forward cast). The advantage of producing a wide loop this way rather than through just [a convex tip path in the vertical plane](#) is of course that the continuous tension oval cast keeps heavy things under much better control and well away from the caster on the back cast.

## Equipment

Your examiners' first task is to check your outfit. Make sure you can crisply describe it (including line and leader taper and specifications) and explain why you chose it.<sup>48</sup>

Get mentoring input and settle on and practice with your equipment well before your exam date.

Know the **line** rules:

- Part 1A (Grass) and Sunk Line (Oval) Cast: the lines must conform to the actual AFFTA 7-weight line grain weight maximum of 193 grains. Examiners aren't the line police, but if your line does not conform you are at risk.
- Part 1B (Water) except Sunk Line Cast: ~~For Exams conducted before October 1, 2022, theif a~~ second floating line is used it only needs to be designated by its manufacturer as a 7 weight or less Single Hand line, regardless of what it actually weighs. Starting on October 1, 2022, this line must weigh 260 grains or less at 30 ft.<sup>49 50</sup>

AFFTA rated Single-Hand lines are generally around 2-to-3-line weights too light for properly balanced Spey casting with similarly designated rods. The rules allow a heavier line for the Water Sub-Section, and as long as the head is at least 33/34 ft long<sup>51</sup>, we advise candidates to take advantage and use one. For the MCI water tasks the Rio Single-Hand Spey lines and the Ballistic appx. 41 ft head Spey lines are popular choices.<sup>52</sup> The Zimsen MXP12 is a long headed<sup>53</sup> AFFTA conforming line which also works well on water. For grass lines, most candidates use lines with heads of close to 60 feet and longer. Many candidates choose the Scientific Anglers MED or the Ballistic Pro Performance lines for the grass tasks. The Ballistic Pro Performance line is very popular with candidates from other organisations who are not allowed to switch lines for their

<sup>48</sup> A very common leadoff and break-the-ice question for all FFI Exams. Not knowing, for example, exactly how long the head of your fly line is (which is often asked) will not get you off to a good start. It could also prompt some questioning in the Interview and Discussion Section of the Exam.

<sup>49</sup> We believe the Ballistic 350 gr trout Spey line (weighed at its 41 ft full length) and the 7 wt Rio Elite Single Hand Spey lines weigh 240 gr and 241 gr respectively at 30 ft, so candidates may continue to use them if they wish.

<sup>50</sup> Please note that this grain limit applies only to the water floating line. The sinking line must still conform to AFFTA standards and weigh 193 grains or less at 30 ft.

<sup>51</sup> With an approximately 8 ft leader. If the line is much shorter either you will have too much overhang on the 50 ft static roll cast (a certain cast killer) or require a longer leader.

<sup>52</sup> Several of the authors find both the 300 grain Ballistic Spey line (which weighs 215 grains at 30 ft) and the 7 wt Rio Elite SH Spey line work well with our 7-weight rods.

<sup>53</sup> 66 ft (20 m) head including a 26 ft (8 m) rear taper.

almost identical to MCI Exam water tasks, and well-prepared candidates can perform all the MCI Exam Tasks smoothly with this line ~~with no drama~~.<sup>54</sup> The Type II sinking line requirement is not particularly demanding. Candidates usually find sink tip lines (Exam minimum tip length 7 ft) a bit easier to raise and cast than full sinking lines. A line with a 10 ft type II or Type III sink tip should be readily manageable. Some candidates use the Cortland Sink Type 3 line, which has a 10 ft sink tip.

**Leaders** are also important. Showing up with an 11 ft ~~3x-5x~~ leader, which we have seen on an FFI exam, is a bad idea. A 10 ft 12 lb nylon bonefish leader cut down to 8 ft or so is a better choice.<sup>55</sup> Some examiners like Jonathan Walter, MCI advise using approximately slightly over 7.5 ft 0x leaders with a spare spool of 0x tippet. We suggest attaching the leader to your floating line with a nice nail knot. We think it looks more professional than a loop-to-loop connection, which is more air resistant and likely to hinge, and won't turn over as cleanly and positively. It will also be less likely to snag on the grass when you pick up. Your examiners will see your knots, and bad ones may come up in Section 3 of the Exam.<sup>56</sup>

The “fly” must be yarn. Use enough to be able to see it, but not so much that it adds too much drag. Carry different colors for different backgrounds, including black for casting on snow (if applicable) and other light backgrounds.

**Rods.** Don't stress too much. Lines and leaders are more important. Most candidates choose 9 ft, 6-~~weight~~, or 7-weight medium fast to fast rods, but you should ~~choose~~ pick the rod action which works best for you. If you can handle a 7-weight outfit, it is likely to perform better in windy conditions and give you a modest advantage on the Distance Casts. We have seen candidates test with 4 and 5-weight outfits and with rods less than 9 feet long, none of which are advisable.

**Reels** also require a little bit of thought. A big heavy-duty reel with lots of backing just adds unnecessary weight and will magnify any wrist twisting errors. Many candidates use light, simple fairly large arbor reels designed for slightly smaller line sizes, sometimes with no drag mechanism.<sup>57</sup> Ideally the reel should not roll line *in* when it is

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<sup>54</sup> Some mentors insist their candidates use AFFTA conforming lines like the Ballistic Pro Performance on the Water Section to hone their technique.

<sup>55</sup> Some of our colleagues like MCIs Mac Brown and Jim Schneider recommend harder leader material like Maxima to help deliver with authority on accuracy tasks. You only need a 5 ft or longer leader for the sunk line task.

~~You'll need a bit more than 7.5 ft of leader and tippet for tying and retying fluff.~~

<sup>57</sup> They should of course still balance reasonably well with the rod you are using.

tightened down.<sup>58</sup> This prevents candidates from getting called out for accidentally performing tasks with too little line.<sup>59</sup> As we describe when we discuss the accuracy tasks, knowing exactly how much line is in the loop off the reel is quite useful for the far target.

## Preparation and Practice

### 1. Prepare a practice plan<sup>60</sup>

In a well-constructed practice plan, we would expect most effort to be directed at embedding the core skills in the early stages of training to create a rock-solid base for development. If there is no mentor close by to help you make your plan, don't be afraid to ask online to get someone to talk you through it. These core skills need to be continuously reinforced throughout the rest of the program. This is a test of personal discipline that most of us struggle with, so by all means have an occasional go at the more complicated rod control tasks, but the overwhelming evidence from assessors all over the world is that successful candidates always have complete control over the basics. If a candidate can master the core skills first, then the advanced casts become much easier to achieve.

### 2. Practice short and often

30 minutes of deliberate focused practice four times a week is better than one extended 2-hour session. Successful candidates tend to cast on most days in the months leading up to their assessment.

### 3. Start from where you are

The MCI assessment requires that a candidate be able to perform and teach any of the tasks on the CI assessment. This is an excellent basis for beginning to work towards the MCI because any candidate who passed the CI should be reasonably confident they can perform core skills assessed at that level.

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<sup>58</sup> We do not mean tightening drag (which prevents line from going *out*), rather we mean preventing line accidentally coming *in* as well. Some candidates secure the reel handle to the rod butt with a rubber band to prevent this from happening.

<sup>59</sup> Several of us used the Danielsson DryFly or 2W Reels for our Single-Hand certifications. We are unaware of any other reels with this lockdown feature but welcome any suggestions from our readers.

<sup>60</sup> See *Practice Perfect: 42 Rules for Getting Better at Getting Better*, Doug Lemov and others.

For each CI Task (and MCI Task when you get to them), prepare:

- Steps of cast
- Uses
- Alternatives
- How to teach it
- Faults and fixes

If you work through this, it will firm up in your own head what you need to do or change in order to step up to the MCI level. This may mean muttering to yourself on cold wet sports fields and could attract some attention from passing dog walkers, but in the end, you will find it very helpful. Watching video of yourself teaching can be very beneficial.

The first tasks in the assessment are a chance for a candidate to shine and a good place to begin training, because they are a relatively short step up from similar performance tests in the CI. Candidates and examiners alike relax a bit when the first 3-4 tasks go well! The significant difference is the additional 10 ft of line carry, which is roughly equivalent to an additional two line weights. You need to really nail this down.

Use your tape and cones when practicing on grass. Cleaning your fly line before each session is a good idea.

For all task practice, lock in incremental improvements before you make the next step. You are very unlikely to improve every time you practice, and you may from time to time actually go backwards. If you “lose your loop” go back to where you last saw it, have a brief think about what you would tell a student to do to recover in the same circumstances and start again from there. Consistency of control is compelling evidence of competency for assessors, and good practice techniques will help you iron it in with repetitive performance.

#### 4. Objectivise everything

All the task performance objectives are clearly outlined on the Exam and should form the basic questions you ask yourself as you practice.

- “Is my pickup loop tight”
- “Is my loop the right size”
- “Is my fly leg straight”
- “Is the loop in plane, i.e., not swinging”
- “Is my forward cast in line with my back cast”
- “Does my line layout look just like the Diagrams appended to the MCI Exam”



You're only going to be able to verify answers to these questions when practicing on your own if you learn to look and see **in real time**. You can use lines on sports fields, goalposts, crossbars, and near and distant targets to help you check whether you're closing in on your objectives. If you make videos of yourself with a coaching application (or regular way) you can also share them with a remote mentor.

Bryan Martin MCI, THMCI told one of us in a mentoring session:

*"Amateurs practice until they get it right. Professionals practice until they can't get it wrong."*

#### 5. Look at your loops

Much of your practice will be solo and for it to be effective you will have to be able to check you are meeting your practice objectives. We will offer some drill suggestions in the Task sections below but whatever you do with your practice, make sure that it is heavily objectivised with outcomes you can measure on your own. **This means learning to look both front and back and being honest with yourself about your performance.** Video can really help with this.

#### 6. Relax and make it easy for yourself

There's no point in making things any more challenging than they already are. In the assessment you will want to make slow, controlled, observable loops unless the task requires otherwise. Longer smoother casting strokes are the order of the day. If you are tense and stuck in a rigid body position while anchored to the earth's core using short robotic motions, this is going to prove problematic.

Remember that the assessors don't much care how you stand to make these casts, so make it easy for yourself. Your body is perfectly capable of delivering controlled motion in all sorts of shapes and configurations. Pick the techniques that suit you for each task and don't be afraid to change during the task if performance expectations require it.

More open stances (left foot forward when casting right handed) buy you extra room for manoeuvre when casting onside and give you the best option to view your loops both ways. Closed or squarer stances may be more suitable for accuracy or target focused presentations, but you lose sight of back casts and stroke length is curtailed. Make the wind your friend. Instead of fighting tail winds or head winds, position

yourself so that the wind affects your cast equally front and back. Please see [Wind Direction on Grass](#) in the Strategy and Tactics Section.

#### 7. Always warm up.

We strongly suggest you develop a simple warm up routine. Put together something easy that you spend the first five or ten minutes of each practice session on. You can use this routine prior to your Exam to relax and smooth out the wrinkles in your casting stroke. Whatever you choose to do, make sure that it is well within your current capacity to perform. This will help you settle and focus. Pushing the envelope at the outset is likely to be counterproductive.

## Overhead Casting Fundamentals

### The Clock and Angle System

Descriptions of fly casting often mention clock positions. We use 3 imaginary clock faces to describe rod positions.

1. The **Direction Clock** is flat on the ground or water with 12 o'clock in the direction the caster is facing. 1 o'clock is 30 degrees to the right and so forth.
2. The face of the **Rod Elevation Clock** is along the caster to target line. 12 o'clock is above the caster's head, representing a vertical rod, 9 o'clock denotes a rod parallel to the ground or water pointed at the target, and 3 o'clock means horizontal behind. 45 degrees is the 10:30 or 1:30 clock position.
3. The face of the **Rod Plane Clock** is perpendicular to the caster/target line with 12 o'clock vertical and 3 o'clock (90 degrees) horizontal to the caster's right.

### Overhead Pickup and Cast 50 ft – MCI Training Cast 1/4

Just as in the CI test, the first tasks in the MCI test examine a candidate's basic skills, which represent simple management of the casting stroke. Core skills include control of loop shapes, loop speeds and a caster's capacity to tilt or lean the rod plane to manage trajectories. In the MCI test, Task 1 is also the first of our Training Casts. Virtually all the other grass tasks are built by adding variations to this Training Cast. **This Cast must be ironed in. Without it, success in an assessment is impossible.**

~~Bridging~~ the 10 ft difference in line carry between the CI and MCI Exams will be successfully ~~achieved~~ ~~bridged~~ if candidates follow Bill Gammel's excellent advice in ["Making adjustments on the fly"](#)<sup>61</sup>. Practice with incremental increases of one foot at a time, making sure that the task objectives are being met at each stage, rather than ~~trying to making-make~~ the full leap at once.

[A word on casting style, picking up on our earlier comments about the advantages of increasing stroke length. Al Kyte, MCI says:](#)

*["Hopefully we have at least learned not to look at style choices as "right or wrong" but as having "advantages and disadvantages.""](#)*<sup>62</sup>

[One of the styles we think has disadvantages in an MCI Exam is the \*\*immobile\*\* elbow in front style \("dart throwing", or what Mac Brown, MCI calls "bicep/tricep casting"\). If you can smoothly and efficiently control 50 ft of line like this without hauling, power to you, but we have seen many candidates struggle.](#)<sup>63</sup>

More advanced tasks add motions before or after, or even during, performance of a core training skill to produce wiggles, mends, curves and slack line presentations. The temptation for many candidates is to leap straight to the advanced tasks because this is what we believe will take us longest to master and therefore what we should practice most. It may be counterintuitive, but this is not the case.

## Pickups and Back Casts

Candidates tend to have frontal tunnel vision on rod control and accuracy Tasks, while the examiners are actually looking at both back and forward casts for size, shape and symmetry. Back casts, in particular pickups, require special attention, especially when you are distracted by accuracy and presentation cast tasks. Failing to master the basic cast will result in certain fails in all those tasks even without considering the actual rod control tasks.

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<sup>61</sup> ["Making Adjustments on the Fly, Bill Gammel, The Loop, Summer 2010.](#) He uses it to progress from 20 to 40 ft, but we start at 40 ft. If your 40 ft cast needs work, start shorter.

<sup>62</sup> [The Loop, Spring 2010.](#)

<sup>63</sup> Please note that "dart throwing" is not the same as the elbow up, elbow down "Western Tournament" style we later suggest you try for the accuracy tasks. [This elbow movement generates additional stroke length.](#)

Moreover, the rod control tasks require a good backcast and proper timing to perform properly, because line position and tension before the delivery stroke are essential. A mend, for example, is a travelling wave. Waves travel much better through taut fly lines than ones with lots of slack in them, and a good backcast [with a high, crisp stop](#) will set you up to throw an efficient forward cast which will straighten the rod leg out for you.

Common faults include wide pickup backcasts from a failure to adhere to the ~~180 degree rule~~ [180 degree principle](#), overpowering, a hurried tempo, and poor tracking.

Here is [a video of the cast](#).

### The Forward Delivery

After you master the pickup and false cast, then add on the forward delivery. Many candidates suffer from “Last Cast Syndrome” on several Exam Tasks, especially accuracy and distance. After false casting well, they overpower and over-rotate the delivery cast in a misguided effort to deliver the fly down to its target or cast it really far, ripping open the loop and puddling the line and leader in a heap. Make the last cast just like the false casts. Same force, [and](#) high crisp stop, and for accuracy just let the proper up in back/down in front trajectory direct the loop to its target. You can make the stop quick and drift down fast if it’s windy. When you eventually come to distance casts, don’t do anything different on the delivery cast, just let it go.

Once you master the 50 ft Overhead Training Cast, you are ready to work on preparing for the rest of the Grass Performance Sub-Section (1A) of the MCI Exam.

### Oval Cast on Grass - MCI Training Cast 2/4

In parallel with working on the 50 ft Overhead Training Cast, we suggest nailing down the Oval Cast <sup>64</sup> on Grass. This is the Second MCI Training Cast. This would be a good time to start to get familiar with the [anchored cast definitions](#) in this Study Guide.

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<sup>64</sup> Also known as a Gebetsroither Cast after its Austrian inventor, a guide on the river Traun, who converted a cast he used to dry clients’ silk lines into a fishing cast now used worldwide. The story has it that much later, American casters visiting Europe saw a Belgian competitor win with this cast and started calling it a Belgian Cast. The Austrians are still unhappy about this!

Start by getting the feel of continuous tension connection between the sidearm backcast flowing into the overhead forward cast. This connection is the equivalent of the circling-up move of the Switch Cast which you will do on water. Start with say 35-40 ft of line and, as described above, gradually work your way up to 45 ft<sup>65</sup>, making nice, smooth stop-free rounded backcasts blending into regular overhead forward casts, with a neat slightly upward trajectory delivery.

You really want to focus on the back loop shape being automatically smooth- the level backcast/sweep should seamlessly blend into the circling up. Try to feel like you are pulling the line all the way around. Note/warning: grooving any form of wrist “flick” into this critical phase of back loop formation will make future anchor and D Loop formation unpredictable and less effective, and it is a hard fault to fix.

Experiment with casting plane changes, but to represent a Switch Cast make the backcast say on a 92:30 plane on the rod plane clock (rod just above horizontal) and the forward delivery more vertical at around 14 o'clock on the rod plane clock. Make sure the backcast tip path is horizontal or slightly rising, before blending into the circle-up. When you are comfortable with your oval cast sequencing, experiment with reducing the force in the level/flat backcast (sweep) phase so that the leader and the end of the fly line just tick the grass beside you; you will now be simulating a Switch Cast. Please see [Diagram N](#) for the tip path required for both Oval and Switch Casts.

Here is [a video of the cast](#).

Also experiment with adding an upward rod tip curve at the end of a sidearm cast: it's a sure way to make the line tick (See [Diagram E](#)), and circling-up has the same effect. Once you perfect the Oval Cast on Grass, you are ready to [prepare](#) for the Water Section of the Exam.

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<sup>65</sup> We think it's easier to get a feeling for [controlling the line with](#) continuous tension at distances shorter than 50 ft.

## Grass Performance Tasks (Sub-Section 1A)

*Repeating what we said at the outset, we make specific recommendations on how to perform Tasks but there are many ways to get the job done. If you and your mentor prefer other ways of making the line do what it needs to, by all means go for it.*

Note: Read the Exam carefully several times before practicing Tasks.

### Task 1. 6 False Casts with Narrow Loops (50 ft)

A pickup and lay down with 6 false casts between the first back cast and the final delivery cast, all made with a straight tip path while observing the ~~-180 degree rule~~ 180 degree principle, to produce the straight fly legs required for narrow loops ~~with parallel legs~~.

This cast is uncomplicated but tremendously important. As we said, it is **the** key to mastering the Grass Tasks in the Exam and covers key basic skills that will repeat throughout the assessment. It is solely about loop control. Is the loop consistent from the first pickup to the final delivery cast? Is the fly leg straight and is tracking accurate? It is the first opportunity for an assessor to see you cast, so make it good. [Here's a video of the cast.](#)

Pickups. We recommend an upward pickup Casting Stroke to form a narrow loop. Willy George MCI, THMCI calls the pickup an "Upcast". The upward pickup backcast falls very quickly, and little or no adjustment is required to make the following forward cast horizontal.

~~A pickup is formed by a Lift to clear line from the water (or ground)The following observations are intended only for candidates trying to tighten their pickup loops. If your pickup loops conform to expectations, the following 180 degree principle discussion may not apply to you.<sup>66</sup> and an upward Backward Casting Stroke to form a narrow loop.~~ Casting the pickup flat is a ~~-180 degree rule~~ 180 degree principle violation which often creates wide loops. It is one of the most common errors we see in

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<sup>66</sup> While the Exam does require adherence to the 180 degree principle, in practice the authors consider following the 180 degree principle in the vertical plane an input for conforming loops, not a standalone objective. We have not seen examiners call candidates out for vertical plane violations if their loops conform to expectations. We do however think there is a risk of examiners calling candidates out for horizontal 180 degree violations on both overhead and anchored casts even if the loop more or less behaves properly.

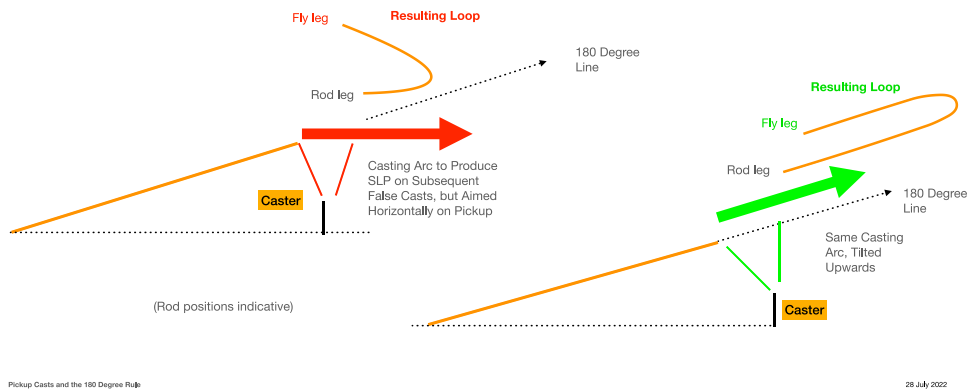
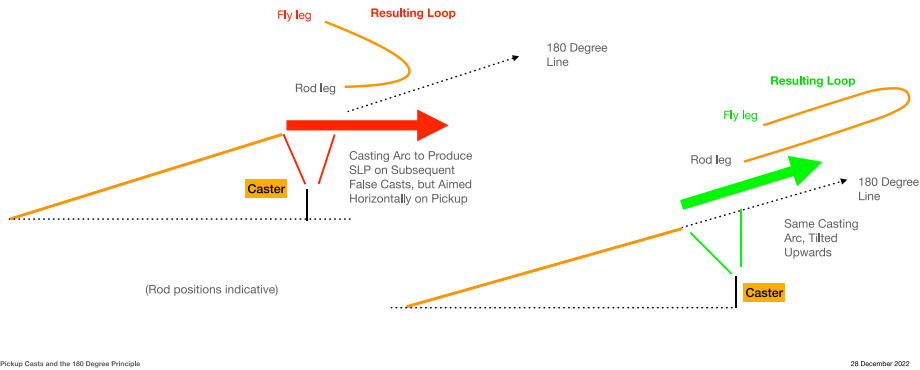
certification exams. See Diagram D below. <sup>67</sup> ~~We are not saying that all 180 degree violations produce wide pickup loops or that all pickup wides are caused by such violations, just that many candidates throw wide pickups primarily because they don't observe the 180 degree principle. If your overhead loops are good but your pickups are wide, be especially sure to check your 180 degree alignment carefully. and~~ See [a video demonstration here](#). <sup>68</sup> ~~The upward pickup backcast falls very quickly, and little or no adjustment is required to make the following forward cast horizontal.~~

Diagram D – Pickup Casts and the ~~180 Degree Rule~~ 180 Degree Principle – Side View

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<sup>67</sup> Please also note that this Diagram assumes the only thing that changes is the direction in which force is applied. We are not saying that casters can't make other adjustments to produce good pickup backcasts, just that we think making the same cast aimed upwards is the easiest way to get the job done. MCI's Mac Brown and Mark Surtees point out that the more horizontal the rod is on the rod plane clock during the backcast the less severe this issue is (and the less you need to aim up), and also that a very low sidearm backcast can complicate Tasks.

<sup>68</sup> The video used line for only 40 ft reel to fly to highlight the point, so your backcast pickup with 50 ft may not need to be angled up so much. We tried to draw Diagram D approximately to scale, assuming a vertical rod plane. If your pickup isn't vertical your trajectory will be flatter, as we say in the previous footnote.



A false cast is a FC/BC cycle, formed by a Forward Casting Stroke and a Backward Casting Stroke one after the other.

The Delivery cast is a FC with the rod tip repositioned down to the water surface as the line unrolls.



It is common in assessments to see this cast performed in closed or square stances. This increases the risk of wide loops on both your first BC pickup and all subsequent BCs. The casting plane must be somewhat upright so the assessors can see the loops, but the rod doesn't have to point straight up. A slight shift off vertical gives you an opportunity to open your stance and use a longer casting stroke on your pickup, and to look both front and back without significantly affecting your tracking.

Finally, make all your grass pickups flow smoothly into the backcast with no pauses in between, just as you need to do on the water<sup>69</sup>. We have seen examiners question candidates for coming to a dead stop after their lift on Grass tasks.

### Pickup Drill:

Open Stance, unhailed pickup and lay downs at Exam length, no false casts, no shoot. Use an upward lift which morphs in to a loooooong casting stroke with a smooth steady pull, aim up. Pick distant targets to check that your BC and FC are in line. Occasionally drop the line on the BC to check BC tracking. Objective is a tight BC loop, tight FC loop. Stand so you can see in both ways front and back.

What to Watch: Too high a lift. Over rotation through the pickup. -180 degree Rule 180 degree principle and Tracking. Last Cast Syndrome overpowering and ripping open loop on laydown. Too much force. Casting too fast.

### Task 2. Wide to Narrow Loops (50 ft)

*Pickup into false casting:*

- *First wide loops using much more rotation than required for SLP, and little translation, then;*
- *Medium loops, with slightly too much rotation for SLP, and more translation; and finally*
- *Narrow loops, reducing the rotation further to produce SLP, with even more translation.*

This Task adds a bit of spice and contrast to the basic Overhead Training Cast by asking you to vary the height of your loops. Remember that the tip path affects the shape and size of the fly leg and the size of the loop, and that the height of the loop is also determined by how far beneath the tip path the rod tip finishes at the end of the casting stroke. For most purposes this is at maximum counterflex, but you are

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<sup>69</sup> As we explain later when we talk about with the Switch Cast, a pause will partially reverse the effect of the lift by dumping line back on the water.

allowed to artificially lower the rod tip after the stop to emphasise the contrast between fly leg and rod leg.

Your first pickup must be wide. Bearing in mind that there's less than 35 ft of *fly line* to move around, an 8 ft loop doesn't leave much line left over for fly leg and rod leg formation. You are permitted a convex fly leg, which means that adding rotation to your long smooth pickup casting stroke will produce a pretty wide loop. You may find that using a convex hand path to cast "up and over" works better than just using your wrist. On the wide false cast cycle, you should use a high hand position so that you can slightly lower the tip at the end of each stroke, which will keep the loop open while avoiding ticking.

Dropping the hand and straightening the fly leg for the medium loops should be sufficient to produce a contrast with the very wide loops. Casting medium loops which are clearly and consistently different from both your wide and your narrow loops may be the most challenging part of this Task. Carefully watching your rod stop positions (i.e., your casting arc) and adding a softer stop than for the narrow loops may help. Your narrow loops should be the off the shelf performance from Task 1.

You may find it helpful in the task to think of force as fixed, with the proportion of translation relative to rotation increasing as the loops get narrower.

#### **Transition Practice Drills:**

1. Do the task backwards at first to calibrate your motions to loop size. Start narrow (which you know how to do) and go to medium. Don't go to wide until medium is accomplished.
2. Raise the bar - vary the loop size mid cycle. BC cast wide FC narrow, BC medium FC wide (see 2015 CI Exam Task 2). This is harder than MCI Task 2 requires but it's excellent practice for transitioning.

*What to Watch:* Making sure there is sufficient contrast in loop sizes. Making big wide loops and tight narrow ones helps create breathing room for distinct medium loops. Repositioning the rod between transitions. Too much force on narrow loops. Ticking on wide ones.

### Task 3. Varying Rod Plane (40 ft)

Pickup into off-~~shoulder~~side false casting at 1 o'clock rod plane (30 degrees off vertical); then transitioning to

- 2-10 o'clock (60 degrees off vertical); and finally to
- 3-9 o'clock (horizontal), increasing line speed in this rod plane to avoid ticking.

You get a break here because the line length is down to 40 ft, but you may have to learn to dance (move your feet while false casting). This is a task wrapped around tilting the rod plane from just off vertical to horizontal. Some casters will begin the task by making the almost vertical casts with their feet and body facing the target. The horizontal casts need to speed up to avoid ticking, so lengthening stroke is a very good idea. If you try to make the horizontal casts facing the target, your ~~stroke length~~ will ~~need to instead be~~ shorten your stroke length ~~ned by to avoid~~ your rod hand colliding with your ~~offside~~ upper arm and shoulder. It is much easier to perform the horizontal casts in an almost facing sideways stance so, as you come down the rod plane clock face, learn to move your feet and point them more sideways to facilitate a nice long stroke. This a good discipline to learn anyway but it is invaluable for this Task.

Other casters, however, make the almost vertical casts already facing sideways. This doesn't look particularly natural or pretty, but it does help them see their backcasts and avoids the need to change stance as much. In either case, once you're down at that horizontal level you will add a little bit of everything to generate extra speed but as we said above the number one thing that will assist you in maintaining loop control here is a longer casting stroke. As you come down and do your dance floor shuffle, increase casting stroke length as you gain a bit of speed. This will help you avoid accidentally opening your loop (excess arc) or throwing a tail (a disturbance in the force applied). Remember to manage your pause, which is shorter the faster you go.

The examiners are looking for you to make adjustments to avoid ticking as you go horizontal. You may at some point be asked which of the 5 Essentials you tweaked. 5 Essentials changes are to force to speed up, arc to accommodate more rod bend, and a shorter pause due to higher line speed. Other changes, which may be very important too, may include those to stance and stroke length. Arc, not stroke length,

is one of the 5 Essentials according to the Gammels, but in our (and Bill's) view stroke length is extremely important, and we use it a lot in our own teaching.<sup>70</sup>

To produce a contrast in speed<sup>71</sup> take advantage of the shorter line and cast slowly overhead. This should now seem really easy! When you get to horizontal, remember that there is no requirement for the rod to be *low*, it just has to be *parallel to the ground*. So if you keep it at say chin level, you can cast much more slowly and under control with less risk of mistakes than if you for example bend over or kneel and throw your loops a foot off the ground at the warp speed required to prevent them from ticking when the line is that low.<sup>72</sup>

This Task does require a bit of wrist strength to maintain good tracking while casting faster horizontally. Some gentle wrist and forearm exercises won't hurt. Holding the rod high on the grip, even partially by the blank and/or propping the butt against your casting forearm can help you control the rod.

*What to Watch:* Tracking: scooped/underslung loops at horizontal from "Orchestra Conducting" instead of moving the rod flat. See Diagram E below. Watching the reel helps. Swinging loops in transitions. Open loops as speed increases. Tails if arc insufficiently adjusted.

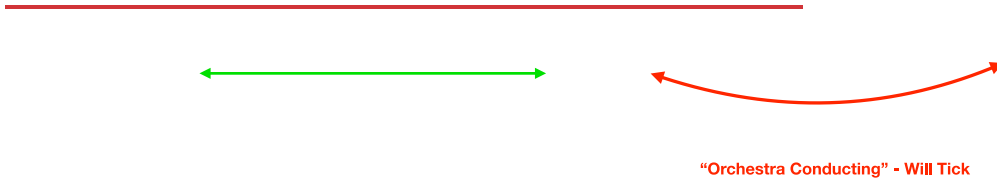
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<sup>70</sup> See *The Essentials of Fly Casting for the Federation of Fly Fishers*, Bill and Jay Gammel, 1993. On page 9 the Gammels explain that while stroke length is a helpful proxy which many teachers use with students, Arc is the item they include in the 5 Essentials.

<sup>71</sup> Not formally required by the task but a little extra touch to impress your examiners.

<sup>72</sup> We have seen candidates cast as though they were really going underneath overhanging vegetation. Save it for your fishing!

Diagram E – Horizontal Tracking – Caster View



Vertical to Horizontal Task – Tracking When Horizontal – Caster View  
20 March 2022



Vertical to Horizontal Task – Tracking When Horizontal – Caster View  
21 August 2022

#### Task 4. Slack Line Waves (50 ft)

Rod tip manipulation after loop formation in a downward “zigzag” pattern to the left and right of a vertical downward drift path of the rod, creating linked symmetrical sideways waves in the rod leg of the loop.

- Horizontal component of rod tip deviation determines width of wave;
- Make one more Number of rod tip movement thans (minus one) determines the number of wave points/peaks required.

This and the next Task are based on the Overhead Training Cast with an approximately three-count drift after the stop.

As with all the presentation tasks, put in a full false cast cycle after the pickup before you attempt your mends. For assessment purposes it is good advice not to go into complex post stop motions immediately after the pickup. Get comfortably into that Training Cast stroke before you commit, but don't do more than a couple of false casts.

There is a tendency to aim the FC delivery up in this and the next Task. In fact, these Tasks work best with a just below horizontal trajectory on the delivery FC, and it helps to have a high hand through the false cast cycle immediately prior to execution. This buys you time to do your artwork. Build in a very short pause after a high crisp FC stop to allow the loop to get on its way before you start mending.

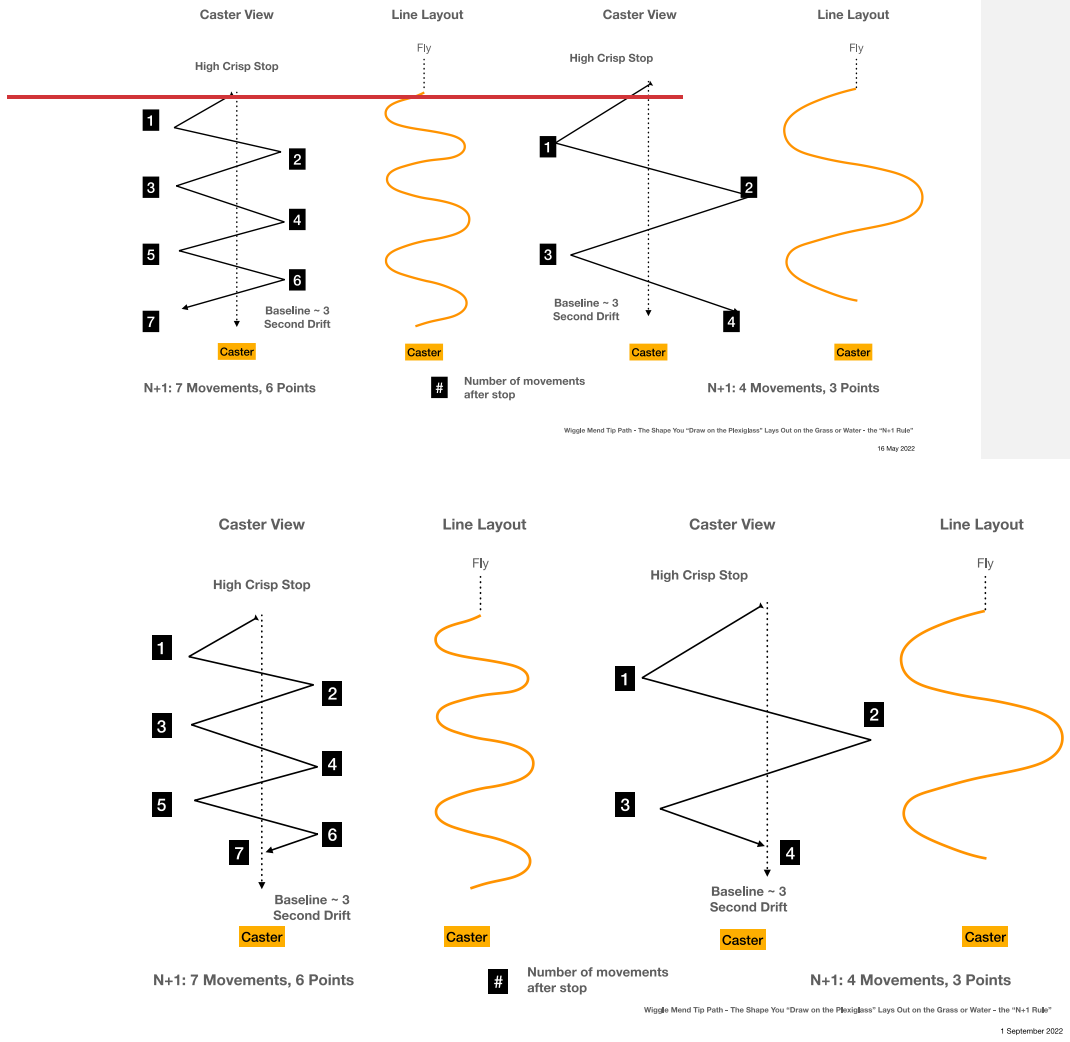
To make these shapes draw them with the rod tip as if you were drawing them on an imaginary plexiglass wall in front of you. There is a powerful urge to lay them out on the ground as the line falls but drawing them on the wall is the answer here. You can think about the wall falling to the ground towards the target after you're done painting on it to show the shape of the line on the ground. See Diagram F. How far you move the rod tip side to side determines how wide the waves are, how often you move the rod tip determines how many peaks you will get. There's no need for anything too vigorous; make yourself some time, start after the stop and draw the mends on the wall.

As the Diagram below shows, you need to make one more rod movement after the stop than the number of points you want your waves to have. John Clark, MCI, THCI calls this the N+1 rule (where N is the number of wave points). To make the 7 movements needed for 6 wave points you can't wait around. But you need to pause just ever so slightly after the stop to let the loop get away before you start mending. If the leader end of the line on the small wiggles task crumples, lengthening this pause very slightly may help smooth it out. It is a good idea to try to follow the falling line with your rod parallel to the ground at the same height. MCI Bob Young points out that leaning

forward and extending the casting arm as you do so can help smooth out your waves and stop the fly and leader from kicking sideways.

We go into a little bit more detail on wiggle mends in our [Teach the Teacher Task Example](#).

## Diagram F – Wiggle Mend Tip Path – Caster View



**Drill:** Build up to 7 wave points.



Start with 4 movements to make 3 wave points (the first part of the Task), and make sure you are casting straight along the tape throughout the exercise. Then gradually add wave points until you get to 6.

Then see if you can make 7 wave points (requiring 8 rod motions). This will make doing the required 6 wave points much easier.

*What to Watch:* Inconsistent wave sizes, casting left or right of the tape, mending with too much force, leader not straight, not enough points, no firm stop, incorrect trajectory.

## Task 5. Mends Around Targets (50 ft)

*Rod tip manipulation after loop formation away from and back into a vertical downward drift path, creating a single transverse wave in the rod leg of the loop. A subset of the Wiggle Mends in Task 4.*

This is one of the scary tasks on the assessment and yet once you get the hang of it, you'll wonder what you were worrying about. It involves the Overhead Training Cast so remember those neat BC pickups. Individual mends are just single half wiggles at heart. You've just drawn several of these things in Task 4. above. Now you're going to do it again in singles. Like Task 4, this task benefits from a slightly below horizontal trajectory. In Task 4 you drew continuously on that imaginary wall as the line came to ground, in Task 5, you're going to have to pick your moment.

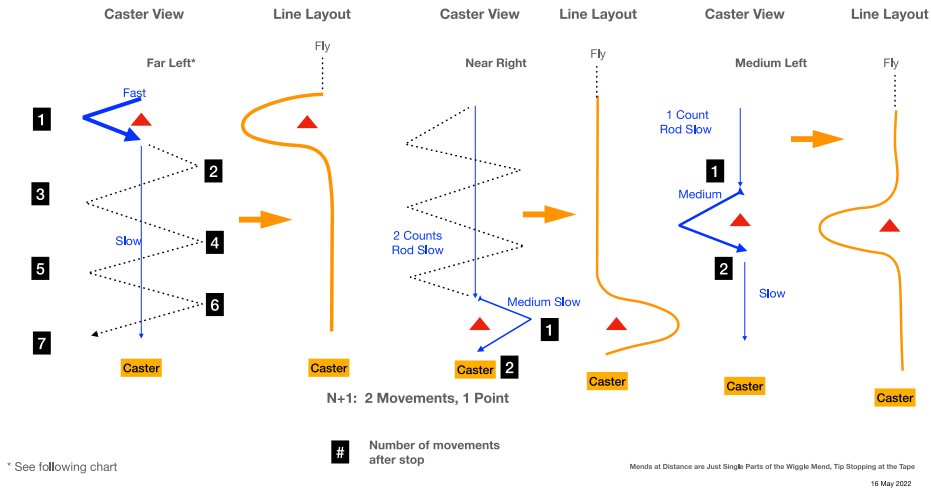
Since mends are waves in the rod leg, the sooner you make one the further it will travel. Therefore, mends at the farthest target are made very shortly after the stop and mends at the nearest target are made late as the line unrolls. You need to make a crisp stop. For the two near mends, there is an obvious pause. But even on the far mend, for which you need to get the rod moving almost immediately, there is still a micro pause. This tensions the rod leg and lets the mend travel more quickly down it, and you more than make up for the very, very small time you pause for. [If you're having trouble getting the 35 ft mend far enough down the tape, you might try a flatter out/in motion, keeping the rod fairly high when it returns to the mend centerline.](#)

An MCI should be able to mend around targets at any reasonable distance, not just at the 15, 25 and 35 feet specified by the Task. One way to do this is to move the rod tip so it appears to go around the targets [during the mends.](#) The Drill below is good practice for this.

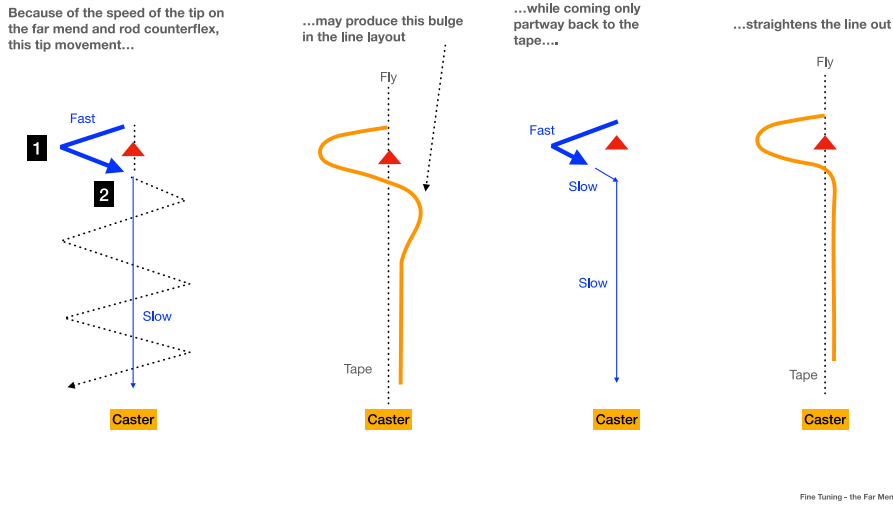
If this isn't working for you, you can try a mechanical fix. Some mentors teach a StopMend for the far Cone, Stop AND Mend for the middle target and Stop AND AND mend for the near one, with the rod drifting down during the ANDs. Whatever method you choose, practice going left and right of each cone in every practice session so you are ready for whatever the examiners may ask you to do. Don't hesitate to change casting direction if mending into a crosswind is problematic.

Diagram G below shows the rod tip movements required, and Diagram H adds a tweak to straighten out the line on the far mend.

## Diagram G – Mends Around Targets



## Diagram H – Mends Around Targets – Fine Tuning the Far Mend



**Drill:** lay out the full 50 ft of line straight on the ground. Put your cap on the ground at your feet and walk back so that you can touch your cap with your rod tip. Go back another 4 ft.

Now, make a tidy BC pickup, a false cast cycle to check everything is straight and on your delivery cast you are going to wait until the line has almost landed on the ground and draw an out to in movement [“>”] with the rod tip. The mend should land to the right of your cap.

Repeat but this time take a step to the left and draw a curve to the left with the rod tip [“<”]. The mend should land to the left of your cap.

When you are successful at this take a step back and go again, > right, < left.

Success? Take a step back and repeat.

*What to Watch:* Remove slack between attempts. Back cast loops as you change trajectory or pickup between targets. Failure to make a high crisp stop. Pause duration.

#### Task 6. Two Curves to the Left (45 ft) Rod Vertical and Horizontal

*(With apologies to left handers, we describe this and the following Task for right-handed casters.)*

*Recommendation:*<sup>73</sup>

**Vertical plane:** an off-shoulder ~~underpowered~~ “underpowered”<sup>74</sup> cast with a deliberate out to in tracking deviation through severe wrist pronation, creating an un-aerodynamic loop whose fly leg swings sideways to the left, delivered with a downward trajectory to help put the line down before the loop unrolls.

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<sup>73</sup> We present task descriptions as “Recommendations” for this and a few other Tasks when we suggest certain techniques or casts over other workable alternatives.

<sup>74</sup> When we say “underpowered” we just mean the fly leg fails to turn over and remains on the far side of the rod leg from the caster. We are not necessarily referring to how much force is applied by the caster.

**Horizontal plane:** an ~~overpowered~~“overpowered”<sup>75</sup> onside cast with a crisp stop forcing leader, fly, and end of fly line to turn over with sufficient momentum that they curve back to the left across the line, encouraged by a slightly upward trajectory:

-“Pull-back” increases the speed of turnover; and

-An optional vertical up and down mend will straightens the “question mark” line layout caused by counterflex of the rod.

We obsess about straight lines and BC/FC alignment, but now we’re going to break some of those rules to deliver curve cast layouts.

For want of a better way to describe this we’ll call the first technique, for a vertical rod position, a Collapsed Cast. This is a loop that doesn’t fully unroll. If your tracking was perfect, a vertical loop that didn’t unroll would land with the fly or fluff somewhere back down and on or near the fly line. If however you had messed up your tracking and had a bout of severe **pronation** as you completed your FC casting stroke, starting supinated and then twisting your hand as far as it will go, the line would land in a U or L shape. It is advisable to make this cast off shoulder to avoid hitting yourself. See [Diagram I](#). This is the shape you want to throw over and around your 30 ft cone. Top tip here is to aim your Collapsed Cast downwards so that the ground retards any further possibility of the loop continuing to unroll. Finally, raising the rod tip just before the line lands helps set it down sweetly. To curve to the **left** using this method you should stand to the **right** of the tape and aim your loop a couple of feet to the **right** of the cone.

We recommend an **onside** version of this Collapsed Cast technique for the curve to the **right**, (see next Task) and this onside cast is a bit easier than the **offside** cast to the **left** presented here. *You should learn the onside version to the right first, then work on this offside version to the left.*

What to watch: Line speed too high. FC trajectory not downward enough. Tracking error too subtle.

The second technique, to curve left from a horizontal rod position, is commonly called an Overpowered Curve Cast. It’s not really ~~overpowered~~“overpowered”; this is only a simple Tuck Cast performed sidearm and close to horizontal. A Tuck Cast is delivered

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<sup>75</sup> When we say “overpowered” we just mean the fly leg turns over and kicks to the near side of the rod leg from the caster. We are not necessarily referring to how much force is applied by the caster, and specifically say no extra power and just a firm stop is required for the “overpowered” curves.

with fairly high line speed and a very firm stop. This causes the leader to kick over and, if performed as a side cast, this kick will deliver a sharp curve in the end of the line and leader.

In direct contrast to the Collapsed Cast above, this cast is best made with a very slightly upward trajectory on the delivery cast to let the leader and fly kick around without ticking on the grass or water. You can wet the fluff before making this cast to reduce any drag effects as it comes round.

It is common for the rod counterflex to cause a portion of the line to lay out in a question mark shape called a “Counterflex Question Mark”. While it is not required by the Exam, if you want to impress your assessors you can straighten the line with a gentle hump mend after the stop, moving the tip up and down. Finally, you may wish to adjust your casting direction so your curves aren’t fighting a strong crosswind.

See [Diagram I and this video](#).

*What to watch:* Rush of blood to the head resulting in a force spike on delivery and a tail. Failure to stop hard. Downward trajectory causing the line and leader to crash down and sideways into the ground before unrolling. Crosswind.

## Task 7. Two Curves to the [Right](#) (45 ft) Rod Vertical and Horizontal

*Recommendation:* <sup>76</sup>

**Vertical plane:** A dominant shoulder ~~underpowered~~ “underpowered” <sup>77</sup> cast with a deliberate out to in tracking deviation through severe wrist supination creating an un-aerodynamic loop whose fly leg swings sideways to the right, delivered with a downward trajectory to help put the line down before the loop unrolls.

**Horizontal plane:** either

- (i) An ~~overpowered~~ “overpowered” <sup>78</sup> offside cast as in Task 6; or

<sup>76</sup> We present task descriptions as “Recommendations” for this and a few other Tasks when we suggest certain techniques or casts over other workable alternatives.

<sup>77</sup> When we say “underpowered” we just mean the fly leg fails to turn over and remains on the far side of the rod leg from the caster. We are not necessarily referring to how much force is applied by the caster.

<sup>78</sup> When we say “overpowered” we just mean the fly leg turns over and kicks to the near side of the rod leg from the caster. We are not necessarily referring to how much force is applied by the caster, and specifically say no extra power and just a firm stop is required for the “overpowered” curves.

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- (ii) An **“underpowered” onside** cast controlled by slow and wide body rotation to create a highly convex un-aerodynamic loop in the horizontal plane, with sharply upward tip movement and pronounced wrist supination at the end of the cast to cause a tracking error to help put the line down before the loop unrolls.

The simplest way to curve the other way is to do the same two casts as in the previous Task and just make onside / offside switches for both.

As we said just above, this on shoulder Collapsed Cast is easier than the offside Collapsed Cast, and you should master it first. In a mirror image to the previous Task, to curve to the **right**, stand to the **left** of the tape and aim the loop a couple of feet to the **left** of the cone.

You can then make a horizontal **off shoulder** delivery on the ~~overpowered~~“overpowered” curve to curve it to the right. The latter is just the final casting position of Task 4 (Varying Rod Plane) with a firm stop. A Barnegat Bay Cast is in principle an attractive alternative to help generate line speed, but it and Galway Casts are sadly not allowed on this Task. We find this cast more difficult than the **onside** ~~overpowered~~“overpowered” curve in the previous Task, so you should master the version in the previous Task first. An alternative<sup>79</sup> for the ~~overpowered~~“overpowered” off shoulder curve is a hugely convex on-side horizontal loop thrown with shoulder and body rotation<sup>80</sup>, swinging the rod forward past the tape, and driving the line down with an upward rod tip movement accompanied by severe supination at the end of the cast.<sup>81</sup> [See video here.](#)

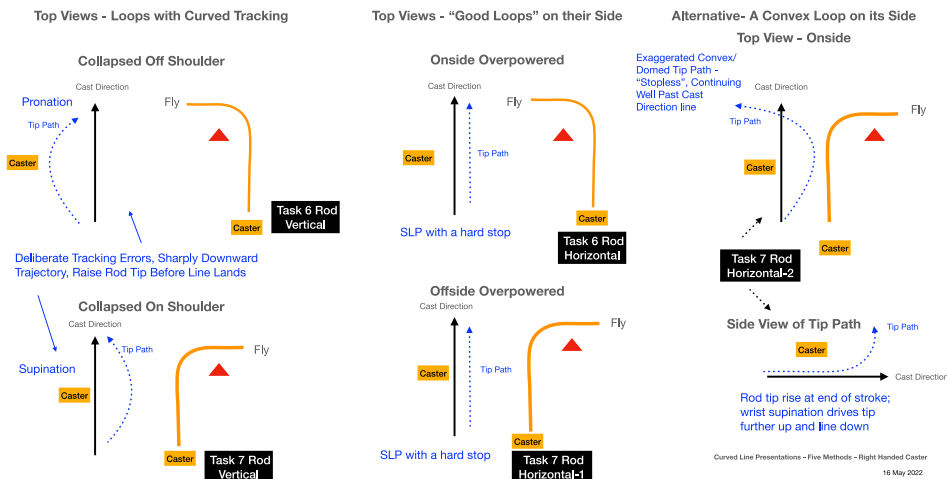
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<sup>79</sup> Courtesy of FFI Australia: Shaun Ash, MCI and Brian Henderson MCI, THMCI showed some of us this cast.

<sup>80</sup> Some instructors refer to this as an Aimed Curve.

<sup>81</sup> Some instructors refer to this last movement as a Torque Twist.

## Diagram I – Curve Casts <sup>82</sup>



Finally, we will mention a cast **not** to do on Exam Day. We see many candidates attempting to curve right (and left) by throwing a good aerodynamic loop with a straight fly leg in the horizontal plane and trying to take underpower it by just enough force off to find the very narrow middle ground of the desired curve cast between the extremes of the cast unrolling fully (which modern equipment is very much designed to make happen) and collapsing completely. Please don't try this on your Exam. It is really difficult, and Exam Day pressure-adrenaline will make it even harder.<sup>83</sup>

<sup>82</sup> The diagrams appended to the Exam show the minimum required 45-degree angle change. The techniques we describe will enable you to do the 90-degree curves in our Diagram I, and we suggest you aim to produce these right-angle curves to stay well clear of the minimum requirements.

<sup>83</sup> Bernd Wiesbauer, MCI, THMCI has some fun pulling this cast off by running after the loop, so it loses tension and doesn't unroll, but that is sadly not allowed on the Exam! Throwing these kinds of underpowered horizontal "good" loops, however, can be an excellent rod control exercise, but we suggest you save it for practice and warmups!



## Task 8. Accuracy. Targets at 40 ft, 30 ft, 50 ft

*Recommendation:*<sup>84</sup>

*“Accuracy focused” setup: closed stance (right foot forward when casting right-handed), upright rod plane, arm and rod in front of body:*

- *“Elbow up elbow down” casting style*<sup>85</sup>;
- *Pickup into false casting with “up back / down forward” trajectory;*
- *The closer the target, the steeper the trajectory; and*
- *Hovering fly over the target by very slightly overpowering the cast and “stalling” the pause.*

This is one of the scary ones. If these targets were fish, you would be over them in a shot, but the task gives you a lot to think about that distracts you from your mission. It pays to think carefully about this not so obvious stuff before you become obsessed with the rings or cones.

You want to hit the cones on the nail, but your assessor only wants to see you get close to them. They are less concerned about you actually hitting targets than watching what you are doing to change your casting strokes and your line management between targets. It is very common to see BC loops open or tails appear because candidates have focused solely on hitting the cones. Casters who can concentrate on delivering neat BC/FC loops with the right trajectories will also find hitting the targets much easier.

Line management has tripped up many candidates in the past, but it is very simple. You are free to use your line hand to retrieve or slip line as required while false casting.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> We present task descriptions as “Recommendations” for this and a few other Tasks when we suggest certain techniques or casts over other workable alternatives.

<sup>85</sup> Also known as Western Tournament Style. If you don’t move your elbow up and down, you’ll be “dart throwing”, which we don’t recommend.

<sup>86</sup> Line retrieval looks similar to like a single haul on the backcast with the rod hand guiding and then then pinching the line. Your examiners are in our opinion extremely unlikely to call you out for hauling when you do this.

Once you are at the target distance the line should be secured by the rod hand, trigger finger or whatever you normally use to secure it, before you lay the fly down at the target.

An MCI should ideally be able to judge distances by false casting and hovering the fly. But here are a couple of things that can help.

When you're not doing drills like the one we suggest below, practice this task exactly as set up and sequenced in the Exam. When the fly is initially stripped in from 60 ft, watch the loop of line off the reel as the fly passes the 50 ft target and memorize its size and shape. As you false cast out from 30 ft to 50 ft for the final target, when you have a similar looking loop appearing in the corner of your eye, you are at about the right distance. When you extend from 30 ft to the first target at 40 ft, try to develop a routine of a fixed number of shoots to extend the line by 10 ft. Finally, you should not have any trouble getting the 30 ft distance right. As you shorten from 40 ft to 30 ft for the second target, you should know exactly how many strips it takes, perhaps with a slight tweak if your fly was long or short of the 40 ft cone.

#### **Drill:**

Fix your line so that the fluff is right on a cone at 40 ft. Practice multiple pickup and laydowns with two false casts, aiming your fly leg at the cone. Repeat at 50 ft and 30 ft. No need to worry about line management at this stage; this is about tight loop control and trajectories. If you control the loop, tracking and trajectory you are guaranteed to hit the cone because you are only putting the fluff back where it started from. Try to be aware of the changes you make to your casting stroke as you change from target to target.

When you are satisfied that you can hit these targets consistently with a fixed length of line then you can begin to transfer from one to the other either by pulling line in or by slipping while false casting. It helps to travel up and down the targets in sequence before you start to practice mixing it up as required by the task.

*What to Watch:* Back cast loops between targets and transitions. Trajectory and ~~180 degree rule~~ **180 degree principle**. Last Cast Syndrome overpowering and ripping open the FC loop on delivery.

## Task 9. Offside Accuracy

Recommendation<sup>87 88</sup>:

As in Task 8. but off~~side~~~~the other shoulder~~:

- Casting at approximately 11 o'clock on the rod plane clock (30 degrees off vertical, offside);
- Stance with casting arm foot in front to assist stroke length;
- Standing slightly to the right of the tape, triangulating to aid aim; and
- Aiming slightly left of target to compensate for the turnover of fly to the right.

Most candidates stand in a closed stance (right foot forward when casting right handed) to avoid restricting stroke length.

If you judge distance by hovering the fly, the typically almost vertical onside rod plane means the loop and fly unroll directly above the target. We typically cast with a flatter rod plane off shoulder, and if you do this, remember that your hover point should be above and to the offside of the target in the rod plane, instead of directly above it.

If there is any appreciable wind, make sure to change your casting direction from the previous Onside Accuracy Task. Unless you are casting with a straight head or tailwind (both of which are highly inadvisable), you need to change direction to replicate your onside wind angle.<sup>89</sup> We cover how to do this [here](#). The practice routine above works perfectly well for offside too.

## Task 10. Double Haul 45 ft - 65 ft

*Controlled pulling on the fly line with the line hand during both the back and forward casts to accelerate the fly leg of the loop towards its target.*

- *This pulling action (hauling) separates the hands, so in preparation for the next hauled cast, there is a controlled return of the line hand to the rod hand during the pause while feeding back the pulled length of line, or shooting line, into the rod leg of the loop; and*

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<sup>87</sup> Again, for right-handers.

<sup>88</sup> We present task descriptions as "Recommendations" for this and a few other Tasks when we suggest certain techniques or casts over other workable alternatives.

<sup>89</sup> Watching CI and MCI candidates doing onside accuracy and then obliviously attempting offside accuracy right down the same tape direction in windy conditions is very frustrating. Some MCI examiners might prompt. Others might think an MCI should know wind management and safety backwards and forwards, let the candidate learn the hard way and pick it up after the Exam.

- *Haul length and stroke length/arc width increase appropriately with increases in line length.*

Aim for long smooth hauls mirroring similar casting strokes instead of short, sharp tugs not in harmony with what the rod arm and hand are doing. The Task looks for variation in the casting stroke and haul length as you transition from 45 ft to 65 ft. Timing is a critical change here, so set up so that you can look both front and back to judge pauses. Remember that a possible cause of tails is a haul that starts and ends too soon, so make sure your hauls finish late. Please see Drill 1 below for haul timing. As you approach 65 ft your hauling arm should probably start to straighten at the end of the haul to emphasize the changes you are making to your examiners.

One of the issues we often see is with haul direction and length. Remember that a haul adds line speed by approximately the rate at which the line hand and the stripping guide move away from each other. A practical way to think about this is that your hands should move in opposite directions to haul most efficiently. Many good casters have good backcast hauls but short to non-existent forward cast hauls (“T-Rexing”) because they do not move their hauling elbow down to enable them to haul backwards in opposition to the rod hand as it moves forward. Even worse, some otherwise very good casters use their line hand to “Escort” the rod hand as it moves forward, as if doing so somehow lends support through strength in numbers to help to move the line to the target. This is a line speed killer even worse than keeping the line hand still. See Drill 2 below.

John Reynolds, the highly respected UK distance caster and current GAIA Chair, reminds us that we have 3 joints at our disposal – shoulder, elbow and wrist<sup>90</sup> - and that efficient hauling should use all of them. Drill 2 addresses this as well.

Finally, although ~~its is~~ not as important on this Task as on the Distance Casts, pay some attention to line management and see Task 13 Quick Cast from a Skiff for how to [reverse or clear the line](#) off the reel to lower the risk of tangles.

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<sup>90</sup> Some might argue our fingers are a fourth.

### Drill 1: Haul Timing: “No Force until Midnight”<sup>91</sup>

Sidearm setup. Two cones representing tip path. Third cone in middle. With line on ground, *very, very slowly* move the rod from its starting position and wait until the rod passes the halfway cone before smoothly hauling and returning the line hand. Set line down. Repeat in other direction.

### Drill 2: Haul Direction

Pantomime without rod, *first with hauling arm only*. Start very slowly. BC haul: Start with hauling elbow at hip, hauling hand at shoulder. Move elbow up. Pretend to throw a dart at a target in front of you at chin height<sup>92</sup>, straightening arm and using wrist. Hand back to shoulder.

FC haul: Elbow down to hip. Pretend to bounce a ball off the ground backwards and down, straightening arm with elbow moving backwards and adding a wrist flick.<sup>93</sup> Your hand should travel backwards well past your hip pocket in this drill.<sup>94</sup> Hand back to shoulder, elbow to hip.

Repeat. Elbow up, BC haul, elbow down, FC haul. Gradually blend the movements together and increase tempo to casting rhythm. Still using hauling arm and hand only. Add rod hand. Go slow at first, then as before gradually blend movements and increase tempo.

### Drill 2A: Varying Haul Length

As Bruce Richards says, Think-think of your hauling and rod hands and forearms moving the same distance, effectively being mirror images.

For a short cast, do three line hand haul cycles stopping at your belt. Then three stopping at your front pocket for a medium length carry, and finally three with your hauling elbow extended for a longer carry. Then repeat the cycle with rod hand movement added and adjusted accordingly.

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<sup>91</sup> We are indebted to reviewer and MCI candidate Carol Northcut, CI for suggesting we borrow the late Chuck Easterling MCI’s famous phrase for teaching roll cast power application. We are aware that under our [clock system](#) the expression should technically be no power before noon!

<sup>92</sup> We don’t object to line hand “dart throwing”.

<sup>93</sup> Should be done smoothly to lower the risk of tailing.

<sup>94</sup> But not on short casts. See next drill.

Cast and haul with the rod and line. Do Drill 2 with a fixed length of line. Go back to the slow pantomime as soon as any trouble develops. Then when this is grooved, practice varying line and haul lengths.

*What to Watch:* Making sure to haul on every casting stroke (especially the short ones), Tails, Tracking, Timing and Haul Asymmetry, especially Short Forward Cast Hauls (T-Rexing and Escorting).

#### Task 11. Distance Cast 85 ft

*As in Task 10 Double Hauling:*

- *Extending further to approximately 70 ft; then*
- *Letting go of the line on the forward delivery cast with a slightly more upward trajectory, shooting to 85 ft.*

It helps to think of this task as simply letting the line go at the conclusion of the Double Hauling Task. If you can apply an efficient double haul false casting at 65 ft, just let go on the last FC and there's a fair chance you'll hit 85 ft. If you can't, it's only a minor modification to the Double Hauling Task to carry the up to 70 ft or so you'll need. There is a powerful tendency to treat the Distance Cast as an entirely new task, overpower it throughout and hammer that last FC even harder. If you can learn to cast smoothly under control and drift and shoot line on the last BC (if necessary), your Double Hauling Task casting stroke will be long enough to generate sufficient line speed to comfortably cover 85 ft.

Try to be as consistent as possible by settling on and sticking to a distance to shoot from. You should develop a routine to get to your shoot distance as reliably and quickly as possible and then let it go. This Task requires two false casts, which is comfortably more than enough to extend to shoot distance. Nothing good will come from false casting more times than this, because it robs you of consistency, risks putting more line out than you can effectively carry and increases the likelihood of a cast somewhere in the cycle which doesn't meet requirements.

See Task 13 Quick Cast from a Skiff and make sure to [clear the line](#) off the reel to lower the risk of a tangle. Having an examiner walk the fly out to a few feet past the 85 ft mark is the best way to do this. Make sure you have enough line to get to 85 ft after compensating for any slack in the system when the delivery cast lays out, but don't have them go too far out, as that will make it more difficult to turn the leader over.

Stepping on the line is one of our favourite tricks, so make sure you step forward and to the side to make the line pile and then back to cast. Some lay the line pile out on a towel to have the line come off a smoother surface than grass, but unless you are dealing with some gnarly conditions, we consider this overkill demonstrating a lack of self-confidence.

**Drill:** PULDs to 75 ft

Pickup at 60 ft with a haul and shoot the forward cast to 75 ft. Focus on making a tight BC loop. You'll be surprised how easy this becomes and it will make your 50 ft pickups feel like silk, which is going to help you through the entire assessment.

**Drill:** Walk it Back

To make sure the leader turns over well and the fly reaches 85 ft without having to waste time trotting back and forth down the tape, Brian Henderson MCI, THMCI teaches walking backwards with the rod extended until the fly starts to move. If you need to move more than by the couple of feet you extended the line past 85 ft, there's a problem with your layout and the fly is landing short.

*What to Watch:* Too many false casts, carrying too much or too little line, overpowering and Tails (especially Last Cast Syndrome on delivery and backcasts into wind), Tracking<sup>95</sup>, Haul timing, length and symmetry.

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<sup>95</sup> The longer the cast, the more tracking matters. Competitive distance casters obsess over it. When we ask our friend and world championship finalist Dr. James Evans to look over our distance casting, he first lies on his back along the tape to check our tracking. In his own casting he is laser focused on the leader turning over straight without kicking left or right.

## Task 12. Off Side or Back Cast Distance Cast to 75 ft

*Recommendation:*<sup>96</sup> Repeat the Double Haul Task at 65 ft with a forward cast pickup and deliver a back cast to the target.

This task offers a useful lifeline in the form of a Barnegat Bay (back cast) delivery<sup>97</sup>. We think this is much easier than a standard offside delivery, which constrains stroke length, and makes both hauling and watching backcasts difficult.<sup>98</sup> We do not recommend a Galway cast, which only solves the backcast issue of the three just mentioned, while introducing more moving parts and the risk of tracking errors resulting from the required pronation/supination cycle.

Another advantage of the back cast delivery is that you have already effectively just done it in the Double Haul Task: a half-decent 65 ft hauled and shot back cast will hit the reel hard at 75 ft. You don't have to learn and practice an entirely new cast. Trajectory is an issue here. There is a tendency to open the BC loop and aim down on delivery. Just aim it up a bit double hauled at 65 ft and let go on the BC.

Another common problem we see is candidates anxiously turning to watch the delivery backcast by swinging their shoulders around, creating an ugly out-to-in tracking error which causes the delivery loop to collapse in an air resistant sideways puddle. Just watch the backcast delivery loop roll over the rod tip out of the corner of your eye, wait before you have a peek, when you do turn just your head, and drift the rod towards the target.

Note: Same line management pointers as in the preceding task. There is an additional risk of shooting line/reel tangles for some casters on backcast deliveries. Turning the rod handle (and reel) by 90 degrees before gripping it or letting the line shoot through an "OK" sign with the line hand instead of letting it go completely can help.

*What to Watch:* As in Distance Cast, plus tracking on delivery and choice of technique.

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<sup>96</sup> We present task descriptions as "Recommendations" for this and a few other Tasks when we suggest certain techniques or casts over other workable alternatives.

<sup>97</sup> Barnegat Bay, New Jersey and its barrier islands face East into the Atlantic Ocean, and the prevailing usually strong winds are from the South. Right-handed saltwater anglers there are credited with developing and naming the cast.

<sup>98</sup> An offside delivery does make it easier to deliver accurately and to hit moving fish, but that is a real-life fishing concern not immediately pertinent to this Task. You would be well advised, however, to have a clear view of the fishing advantages and disadvantages of the various ways of doing this Task, as it is a prime target for an examiner question, perhaps in Section 3.



### Task 13. Quick Cast from a Skiff to 65 ft

*Starting fly in hand with two rod lengths or less of line outside the tip, shoot after at most two false casts to a target at 65 ft between 9 o'clock and 11 o'clock on the direction clock.*

We'll go into a bit more detail on this Task since not every candidate will have had the chance to do this kind of fishing. Our goal with this longer Task writeup is to help you make your examiners think you've fished the saltwater flats for years, even if you never have. The underlying theme is that your shots at fish will be sudden and of extremely short duration, so speed, efficiency and careful prior preparation are of the essence.<sup>99</sup> Despite our relatively long writeup, you can and should do the Task very quickly. [It is a good idea to study the three new Saltwater Skills Development Ladder documents<sup>100</sup> on the MCI page \(which will soon also be in the FFI Learning Center\), and you may find working through the ladder helpful preparation for this Task.](#)

Take complete charge of this Task from the outset. Please see [Diagram J](#) below. Lay out the bow and stern of your imaginary skiff with one and two cones respectively and make clear where it is pointing and where the casting platform, cockpit and poling platform are. Many saltwater flats skiffs are around 16 to 20 ft long, so make your boat's dimensions look realistic. Don't just automatically aim the boat down the tape, as that can create some ugly casts: a 9 o'clock cast with the boat pointing down the tape in a side wind will give you a 65 ft cast directly into a headwind. If you pick a skiff direction that makes the 9 to 11 window remotely dangerous from either the wind blowing into your casting shoulder and/or "Casting Through the Boat" (see the Diagram) you will be in trouble with your examiners before the Task even begins. A right hander should not have the second problem with a 9-11 window, but a left hander will be casting right through the boat and needs to make sure to agree a 1-3 o'clock target range with the examiners, as stipulated in the Exam. Take careful note of the wind and make it blow from 6 to 12 o'clock to give your imaginary skiff a tailwind. This will make your quick casts range from a side wind into the non-casting shoulder at 9 o'clock to behind and across at 11 o'clock. This area range is a right-handed caster's ideal target zone. Since a skiff is moving forward, you shouldn't see too many fish for the first time towards 8 o'clock and anything to the right of 11:30 or so requires some sort of sidearm, offshoulder, back cast or a non-dominant hand delivery [to avoid casting through the boat.](#)

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<sup>99</sup> "Slow is smooth and smooth is fast", a saying attributed to US Navy SEALs, is very applicable to these fishing casts.

<sup>100</sup> [Introduction/Orientation, Angler's Guide: Tips for Saltwater Angling, and Quick Reference Guide.](#)

Have some fun! You might invite your assessor to be the guide on the poling platform behind you. Tell him or her that you will first organise your line and then since you haven't fished together, you want to make sure you both agree on the clock system, so you will be ready for him or her to help find you some fish.

### *Line Management*

The assessors will look carefully to see if you understand line management prior to making this cast. You have a couple of options for places to store your coiled line off the reel:<sup>101</sup>

The first place you might put it is at your feet up on the imaginary casting platform, which typically has very low sides. This increases the risk of the line being blown overboard and you can also step on it, ruining casts or breaking off fish.

A safer option may be to put your line off the reel down in the cockpit of the boat, especially if you have a boat partner to help tend it for you.<sup>102</sup> Weather permitting, many experienced anglers fish in bare feet or socks (for sun protection) so they can feel line under their feet. Wading boots are also much noisier and likely to spook fish.

### *Clearing or Reversing the Line*

If you just pull line straight out from the reel onto the grass/cockpit/deck and cast it, the line leaving the pile first during your cast is going to be beneath all the other coils rather than on top, and your first cast is much more likely to tangle. You have two further options to deal with this, and you should clearly show your assessors you are doing one of them too, because they will be looking for your solution.

The first is a "Clearing Cast". Pull the full 65 ft of line off the reel and cast it out. Now retrieve the line and lay it out on the ground in your chosen "boat location" so that it doesn't lie in too many overlapping coils. The coils will now be the right way up.

- Fishing Advantage: warm up.
- Fishing Disadvantages: risk of tangle on Clearing Cast (for which the line is backwards), noisy/spook fish, time consuming, wrong species or smaller fish can (and do!) grab the fly.

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<sup>101</sup> Examiners may or may not probe your line pile location. This is just in case they do, either during the task or in Section 3, and to help a bit with your fishing.

<sup>102</sup> A third is a stripping basket on the casting platform but you aren't allowed to use one here.

The second option is “Reversing the Line”. After pulling the 65 ft of line off the reel as before, reverse or turn the line coil right way up by pinching the line with your rod hand around a foot from the reel and stripping the entire line back through your rod hand using your line hand from *between* the rod hand and the reel. This puts the line which will shoot through the rings first on top of the now-reversed pile of line coils.<sup>103</sup>

- Fishing Advantages: quick, quiet, efficient.
- Fishing Disadvantage: no warm-up.

On Exam Day, a Clearing Cast may be easier because it enables you and the assessors to measure the line more easily to 65 ft, but it is not our preferred fishing alternative for experienced anglers who don’t need the warm-up.

#### *Setup and Ready Position*

There are many ways to set up and few of them are really “wrong”. You are allowed two rod lengths of line outside the rod tip. This may be a bit more than you would normally use when fishing from a skiff<sup>104</sup> but take advantage and use it. Hold the “fly” in your line hand downwind, pretending to hold the hook between finger(s) and thumb, sharp end pointed away from you.<sup>105</sup>

#### *Agreeing Direction*

Point to 9 and then 11 and ask if your “guide” agrees with your direction finding<sup>106</sup>. What you are really doing is letting them know that when you hit the target in a moment you knew what you were doing, and it wasn’t an accident.<sup>107</sup>

#### *Casting*

Since a false cast is defined in the Exam as a forward cast followed by a back cast, you should start this cast with a backcast to take the fly/leader out of your hand, because it

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<sup>103</sup> It sounds a bit more complicated than it is. It should be clear as soon as you try it.

<sup>104</sup> That much line out increases the risk of it going under a moving boat and snagging there or elsewhere, which is not good if a fish suddenly appears.

<sup>105</sup> This is a safety-first approach to minimize the risk of hooking yourself; the Exam specifically asks for fly in hand. More experienced fly fishers might choose to hold their leader a couple of inches from the fly to avoid putting scents on it.

<sup>106</sup> Questions to resolve with guides include whether directions are measured from the caster, the back of the casting platform, etc.

<sup>107</sup> Quickly casting a few times to agree distances is highly advisable in real life too, but that’s inapplicable here.

is a “free cast” which does not count toward your allotment of two false casts to reach 65 ft. On instruction from the assessor/guide, begin your normal false casting cycle and shoot to the target. Hauling is not mandatory, but you should haul throughout the cycle after the initial back cast (on which hauling is almost impossible because your line hand is busy holding the fly). Even if you hit the target, not hauling will almost certainly prompt a question, perhaps about what you would teach advanced students going saltwater fishing in windy places. As with the previous Tasks, you should be very sure how much line you need to extend to shoot to the required delivery distance and work to develop consistency. Remember to keep looking at your target.

#### *Line Management on Delivery*

When you deliver, you ~~might~~should finish with a bang by shooting through your line hand instead of letting the line go. As the line fully extends, remove all slack by bringing your line hand up to the reel, then bend over and lower the tip to the “water” and begin your first strip pointing the rod along the line. If you let the line go completely and point the rod high at the target like in a distance cast, you will have to scramble to find the line, lower the rod and then strip the slack out, wasting valuable time and maybe missing strikes. The other advantage of holding the line on the flats is that you can control distance and prevent overshoots. You might get away with letting the line go like in a hero distance cast in your Exam, but a flats guide will tell you off good and proper! And your examiners might ask about it at some point.

#### *Possible Follow-on Question*

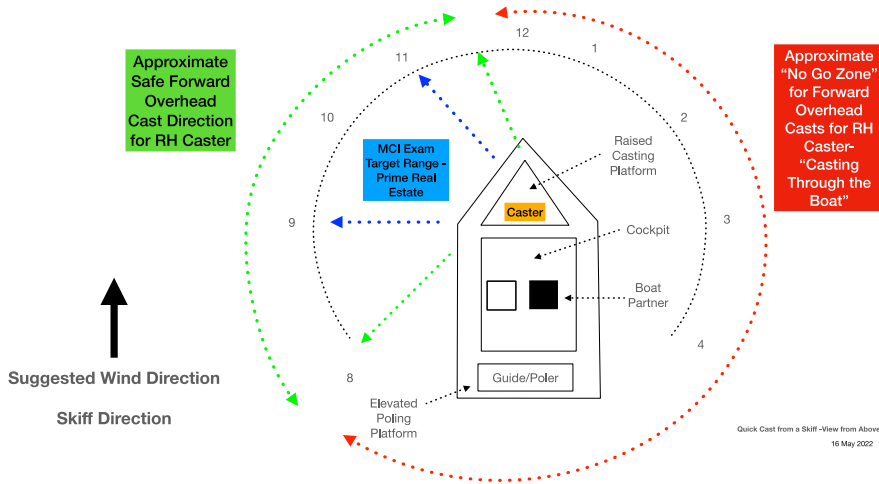
Your examiners should not ask you to cast to another target outside the 9 to 11 o’clock range. But they may ask a question either during the Task or later in the I&D Section about how you can safely deliver a cast to another direction. Remember the two safety rules: wind not into casting shoulder and no casting through the boat. So, if they were to ask how to deliver to ~~4~~say 2 o’clock in the diagram below, you might say your safe alternatives include Barnegat Bay (for maximum line speed) and off shoulder (most accurate).<sup>108</sup>

*What to Watch:* Setup, line management, safety violations, taking eyes off target.

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<sup>108</sup> This list is not complete.

Diagram J – Quick Cast from a Skiff  
View from above



## Water Task (Sub-Section 1B) Preparation

*The Grass and Water Sub-Sections of this Study Guide are presented sequentially but most candidates work on them at the same time. We do recommend mastering the 40/45 ft Oval Training Cast [on grass](#) before starting Water Task preparation. You should also be able to comfortably roll cast to at least the 40 ft the CI Exam requires before starting on the MCI Water Tasks.*

Welcome to the graceful and captivating world of Spey casting! These casting techniques were developed almost two centuries ago to address the challenges of the great Salmon rivers of Scotland: to safely, quickly and efficiently change direction to re-cast a relatively long fly line back across the current, when faced with difficult wading conditions, relatively limited backcast space, and lots of wind.

Although Spey casts were first used with long Two-Hand rods, they are equally applicable to Single-Hand rods of any length and are an extremely satisfying and useful skillset to embrace. No time-wasting false casting, just one backcast with the line folded beneath the rod tip, then deliver.

Once you begin to discover the Spey world, you will quickly realise that there are many Single-Hand uses for these casts. You can swing streamers. You can fish where other anglers can't on a trout stream with very little backcast room. While sight fishing on a saltwater flat you can make a safe and quick 90-degree change of direction with a Snake Roll, quickly cast to a fish well short of the amount of line out of the tip with a Snap Cast or deliver to wary fish without spooking them with false casts. The possibilities are endless.

Leaving the delivery casts aside, which like your regular back and forth overhead casts are one dimensional<sup>109</sup>, your D Loop (i.e., backcast) and anchor placements result from three-dimensional rod tip movements in combination with subtle speeding ups and slowing downs, all while maintaining line tension.

This may sound rather daunting, but remember as Dr. Way Yin, MCI, THMCI says, if you perform a slightly underpowered oval cast backcast, and if the tip of the fly line and leader were to stick in the water beside you (thereby preventing the back loop from unfurling) you would have in fact made a [switch cast with a](#) perfectly serviceable D

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<sup>109</sup> Assuming a straight tip path.

Loop which you could then easily launch with a forward cast. We will show you how to do this.

Candidates should practice roll, switch and Spey casting extensively on water, both still and moving.

*On water, the Switch Cast is the equivalent Training Cast to the 50 ft overhead cast on grass.<sup>110</sup> Every Spey cast ends with the movements of a Switch Cast.<sup>111</sup>*

As we discuss below, you should not attempt any change of direction Spey casts before mastering **two water Training Casts**:

- The **Switch Cast**; and
- The **No Change of Direction Waterborne Anchor Drill**.

Once you get these two Training Casts down cold, all the Spey Casts in the MCI Exam become relatively simple. They are just combinations of the two Training Casts with modest modifications. After the second Water Training Cast, we will briefly summarize how all this comes together before discussing the Exam's Water Tasks in detail.

Please see the [Anchored Cast Definitions and Terminology](#) in the Appendix.

As you start work on the water casts, take careful note of the language in the Exam suggesting candidates stand in very shallow water. Deeper water makes everything much more difficult. You will need to practice in varying depths to make sure you aren't thrown off on Exam Day, but keep in mind that shallow water is much, much easier to cast in.

### Steps in a Roll, Switch or Spey Cast

1. **Setup.** Line on dangle with no slack.<sup>112</sup> Body correctly positioned and aimed at target. Rod tip low to water.
2. **Lift.** Peel most or ~~all of~~ the fly line off the water so it can be more easily repositioned or cast.

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<sup>110</sup> [In Spey Casting the Anchor is Everything, Mark Huber MCI, THMCI, The Loop Winter 2013/14, p.3.](#)

<sup>111</sup> Sometimes with the line in the air, other times with part of it on the water.

<sup>112</sup> For Switch and Spey Casts only, as one of the uses of a Roll Cast is to eliminate slack.

3. **Anchor Placement Sweep.** An intermediate anchor repositioning step only done in two-stage (Waterborne Anchor) Spey casts.
4. **D Loop Sweep.** Creates the D Loop<sup>113</sup> on the “outside train track” (see [Diagram K](#) below) and aligns the anchor with the target.
5. **Circle Up.** Moves the rod tip up, slightly forward and onto the “inner train track” to lift more line off the water, making the anchor “sit up on its toes” (see [Diagram K](#) below), and avoiding a tangle on delivery.
6. **Deliver.** A forward cast to the target followed by drifting the rod tip to the water to minimize slack.

## Water Training Casts:

Before attempting any change of direction, it is important to be very comfortable with and consistent at producing anchors and D Loops. The anchor, which makes or breaks water casts<sup>114</sup>, should ideally be:

- In the right place (downwind and in front of you with the anchor point (line/leader connection) somewhere around 0.5 to 1.5 rod lengths away – see [Diagrams K](#) and [L](#) below;
- Taut and sitting up nicely “on its toes” (see [Diagram K](#) below); while
- Observing the 3 rules of roll, switch and Spey casting:
  - o The **anchor** pointing at the target;
  - o The **D Loop** lined up directly behind the anchor; and
  - o The forward cast aligned along the D Loop and anchor to the target (**180 degree rule/principle**<sup>115</sup>) to permit efficient delivery. See [Diagrams K](#) and [L](#) below.

<sup>113</sup> As in the MCI Exam we use the generic term D Loop to describe back loops of any shape. V Loops are described [here](#). You will not be judged on whether you make V or D loops, but in our opinion it’s a bit easier for those beginning their Spey journeys to achieve consistently good anchors and line control with D Loops, and our rod tip movements are suggested with that in mind.

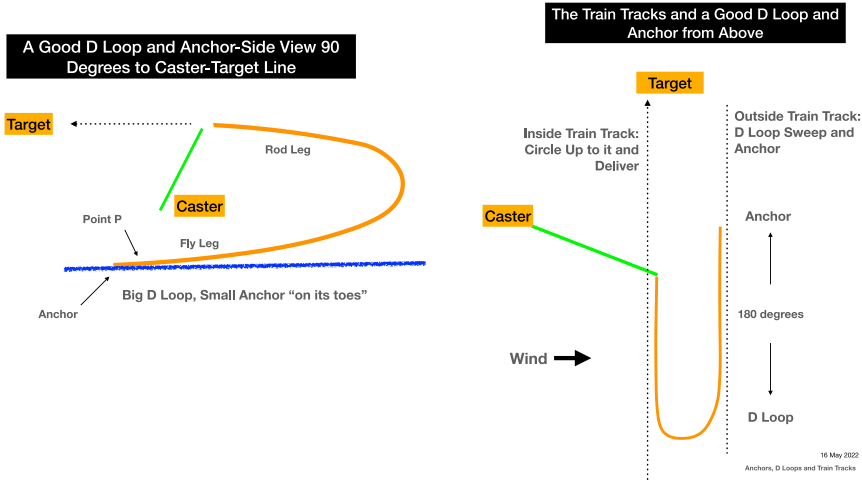
<sup>114</sup> [In Spey Casting the Anchor is Everything](#), Mark Huber MCL, THMCL, *The Loop Winter 2013/14*, p.3.

<sup>115</sup> The ~~180 degree rule~~ **180 degree principle** for anchored casts has the same name as the version for overhead casts but is somewhat different, as [we believe](#) it refers only to horizontal alignment. Anchored casts are misaligned vertically: most of the fly leg of a properly executed anchored cast starts far below



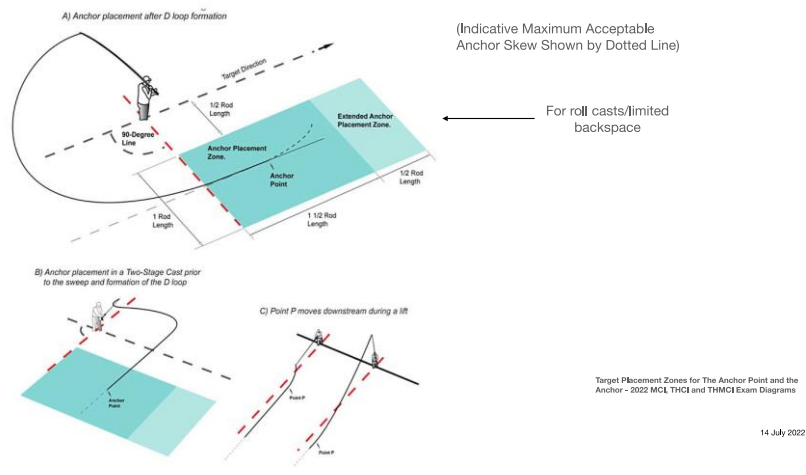
You will notice that the delivery line is parallel to and inside/upwind of the setup line. These two lines are commonly known as the “train tracks”. The narrower the gauge of the tracks, the more efficient the delivery, but the risk of a line collision is also higher.

Diagram K – Anchors, D Loops, Train Tracks and ~~the 180 Degree Rule~~ the 180 Degree Principle



the rod leg and must produces a trailing (closed) loop with a climbing fly leg. Finally, while the anchor and most-much of the D Loop do align horizontally, the forward cast is made along a slightly different but parallel line on the inside “train track” to avoid collisions and tangles.

Diagram L – ~~New~~ MCI Exam Anchor Placement Diagrams <sup>116</sup>



~~Diagram L will be included in the MCI Exam from October 1, 2022. The anchor placement guideline now in the MCI Exam of the anchor being in front of the caster by at most 1.5 rod lengths will be replaced with a general performance standard saying candidates should normally place most of the anchor in the Anchor Placement Zone shown in Diagram L and Diagram P. In practical terms, if you are making Spey casts whose results conform to MCI Exam requirements you are almost certainly doing this already.~~

Switch Cast – MCI Training Cast 3/4:

**A touch and go anchor dynamic roll cast without a change of direction:**

This is ~~similar to~~like the static roll cast from the CI Exam, in that it has an anchor and a D Loop setup prior to delivery.

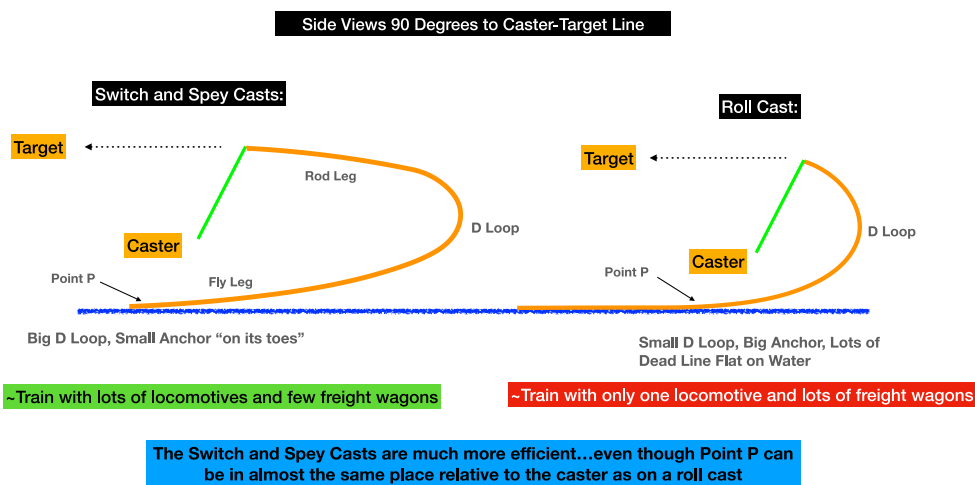
However, the Switch Cast will form a much larger D Loop (and consequently) a much smaller anchor with very little fly line on the water, which in combination makes for a

<sup>116</sup> By Bintoro, THMCI, whom we thank very much. Different rods, same principles.

far more efficient (and longer, if required) delivery. The caveat is that this anchor / D Loop combination is only momentarily correctly formed, so the delivery timing is critical (unlike for the static Roll Cast). See Diagram M below.

As we said earlier, the Switch Cast is a key Training Cast for all Spey casts.

Diagram M – Relative Efficiency of Switch and Roll Casts



Relative Setup Efficiency – Switch and Spey Casts vs. Roll Cast – D Loop Components

22 May 2022

## How to do a Switch Cast:

**Safety first: D Loop and Anchor Downwind of casting shoulder.**

### 1. Setup:

Facing the dangle/line stationary downstream, with no slack, take up an open stance to facilitate stroke length and looking at your D Loop. Angle rod out horizontally approx. 20 degrees on the direction clock, rod tip low to water, allow the line to wash straight downstream from the rod tip.

## 2. Lift:

Smoothly lift the rod tip straight up (not on an incline) to a bit above head height; this will:

- Lift line clear of the water;
- Move [point P](#) towards the fly, thereby reducing the overall line stick; and
- Increase tension – if you pause after the lift the line will drop back into the water and point P will come back towards you.

Note: You'll have to experiment a bit with the height of your lift. The higher you lift, the more line you'll remove from the water and the more cleanly it will release. Very low lifts release with much more line stick and rod unbending, often making them less predictable and it more difficult to control the line and make the anchor land sweetly. On the other hand, if your lift is too high, you'll run out of room to circle up into your D Loop and increase the risk of dipping in the D Loop sweep, which is a serious fault (see below).

Then, seamlessly, **without stopping**....

## 3. Sweep:

The sweep has two phases:

First, smoothly accelerate the rod tip on a flat path to approx. level with your casting shoulder and the 90-degree line. This is the movement that moves the line behind you (important: behind the 90-degree line in relation to your target, not around and behind your back). You will have to experiment with how much energy you put into the sweep, but too much and you will hit the bushes behind, too little and the line will not release from the water. You want just enough so that all the fly line and the leader become airborne and then touch down again momentarily.

Second, after the flat powered portion of the sweep, back off the force and curve the rod up and backwards along the outside train track in a "climbing curve"<sup>117</sup>. This curve starts approximately when the rod tip passes the casting shoulder (the 90-degree line) and:

- Makes the curved shape of the bottom leg of the D Loop;
- Positively puts the anchor down;

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<sup>117</sup> Robert Gillespie.

- Creates a small anchor that lands “on its toes” by curving it upwards instead of a large one landing flat on the water, a fault called Level Line Drop.<sup>118</sup>
- Helps make a large, efficient D Loop, by moving the rod further back away from the target than its forward cast starting position.

Note: the closer you keep your casting arm’s elbow to your body during the D Loop sweep, the closer laterally the anchor and D Loop will be to you. If safety is not compromised, this makes the forward cast more efficient.

#### 4. Circle-up:

The rod tip continues to rise as it moves from the outside to the inside train track and is repositioned slightly forward to the forward casting position.

Rick Williams, MCI, THMCI describes the backwards then in, forward and up path of the circle-up as like going around a volleyball with the rod tip.

This phase “connects the rear-moving sweep to the forward cast”<sup>119</sup> and;

- Maintains tension in the D Loop;
- Increases the size and height of the D Loop;
- Holds up the apex of the D Loop;
- Puts the anchor more “on its toes”;
- Creates the inside train track; and
- Brings your hand up and around into the key position (the “answer - the-phone” hand position<sup>120</sup>) for delivery.

The Sweep and Circle-up are the 3D phase of D Loop formation and require subtle changes in and blending of tip speed and curved and linear translation prior to delivery. This sounds a bit complicated, but it does describe what is happening behind you, just as in the oval cast. You will have to learn to feel your way through this. Please really focus on the touchdown and shape of the anchor (straight and up on its toes): a good anchor and a good D Loop go hand in hand. If possible, have someone video you both from the side and directly behind in line with the target.

<sup>118</sup> [Diagram Z](#) shows Level Line Drop resulting from a Trunking fault (over-rotation backwards). Other causes of LLD include a D Loop sweep which is too flat and a too long a pause after the D Loop sweep.

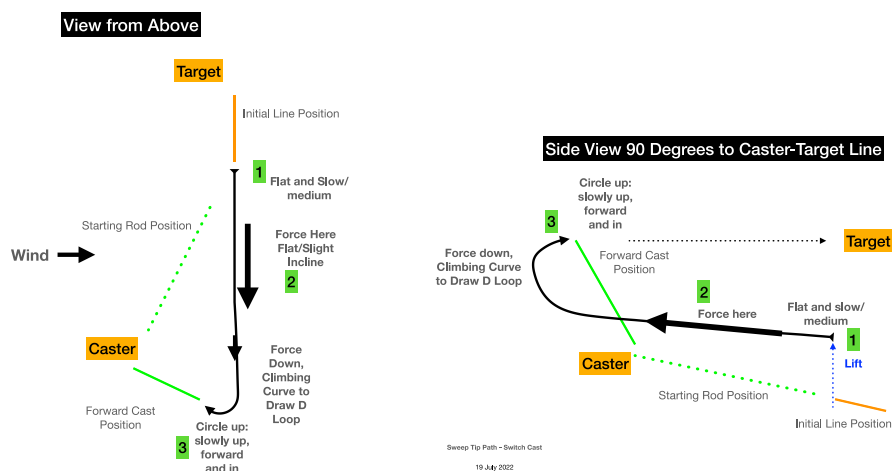
<sup>119</sup> Rick Williams and Molly Semenik, MCI THMCI. <https://uwotf.com/blog/basic-spey-casting-terms/>

<sup>120</sup> Christopher Rownes, MCI.

You will know when it's right because the subsequent delivery will feel relatively effortless and sound quiet (with no loud slurps or whip cracks).

Note: You will find that there is a momentary, and quite natural, slight pause at the end of the circling-up, especially with longer lines, allowing the D Loop to finally fill out / mature as your hand comes around into the key position and the anchor correctly forms, straightens, or touches down. This touching down of the anchor in position is called the **Anchor Set**. Diagram N below show the rod tip movements required to arrive at the forward delivery position.

Diagram N – Sweep Tip Path – Oval and Switch Cast



Rod position and line layout check: At the completion of the circling-up the rod should be angled back no more than 45 degrees from vertical on the elevation clock and angled out approx. 20 degrees on the rod plane clock; do occasionally check this by stopping at this point; at the same time allow the line to fall to the water. *There should be a nice loop the same width as your train tracks directly lined up with the target which looks just like the line layout in the right-hand side of [Diagram K](#).*

## 5. Deliver

The delivery timing is critical, and the best visual aid is to watch your anchor like a hawk; as soon as it touches down you need to deliver. Many casters find they need to give themselves the “go” command just before the anchor touches down to time it perfectly, in effect switching from “touch and go” to “go and touch”. If you wait too long, your nicely tensioned D Loop will start to collapse into the water, losing tension and adding line stick. If you go too soon, the anchor will not have touched down and the line will snap away behind you. As with your oval cast training, “aim high and let it fly”.

Here is [a video of the cast](#).

### Training tips:

- The **lift, sweep, circle-up, deliver** sequence is fundamental training for all Spey casts. The sweep and circle-up phases energise the line and create the D Loop.
- Always start with no slack. Begin with say 40 ft and gradually work up to 50 ft, then 53-56 ft if you are practicing with a weight forward line; when you can consistently make sweet, conforming casts at 53-56 ft, the shoot to 65 ft will be relatively straightforward. If you are practicing with a single-hand Spey line, you should be able to shoot to 65 ft from around 50 ft.
- You can keep the line to be shot off the water to minimize resistance by draping the midpoint of a loop over the small finger of your line hand. The line from the stripping guide can be held in the thumb and forefinger of the line hand (even if you're not actively hauling) or pinched to the cork by the rod hand.
- Hauling on either the powered phases of the D Loop sweep or the forward delivery can be of limited benefit for some casters due to the short working line in the D Loop, and the “handcuffing” effect of the line hand chasing the rod hand can shorten the back and up portion of the D Loop stroke. You should experiment with what works for you, but hauling may not be worth the added complications when learning to “groove” this Training cast.
- If you do haul, make sure the backcast hauls are relatively short. Sometimes casters do a half haul into the D Loop, and to maintain tension don't return line, and then do the rest of the haul on the forward cast.
- ~~Do-Try~~ *not to dip on the sweep.*
- Make watching your anchors a habit.

- Practice varying the position of your anchors:
  - To put point P far in front of you sweep short and curve the tip early/in front of you and keep it fairly low.
  - To put point P back near you, you sweep long and circle up high from further back.
  - This further back anchor and Point P position will come in handy for the change of direction Spey casts we will discuss later.
- If it goes wrong, try to work out why and fix it before casting again. Don't be too proud to shorten up. Repeated casts without thought in between about what to correct often just reinforces bad technique. Taking stock also provides a moment's rest.
- Take regular rest breaks in any event. Practicing this can be hard on your arm and shoulder. Above all, enjoy the process!
- Once you have mastered the Switch Cast, you have one more Water Training Cast to learn before we can begin to attack the MCI Water Section Tasks.

#### No Change of Direction Waterborne Anchor Cast - MCI Training Cast 4/4 <sup>121</sup>

***This cast is the key building block for all waterborne anchor Spey casts.***

This drill finishes with the same sweep, circle-up, and deliver as in the Switch Cast, but is preceded by a line repositioning Circle Cast to lay the line out on the water much closer and across and in front of you. The line is then collected off the water by the start of the D Loop sweep, which we sometimes refer to as the Line Collection phase of the D Loop Sweep, which then blends into the movements of a Switch Cast: sweep, circle-up, and deliver. <sup>122</sup> Unlike in an actual Switch Cast, the anchor and part of the fly line remain in the water during all and most of the D Loop sweep, respectively. <sup>123</sup> Even though you will not be changing direction, the anchor after the Circle Cast will be pointing at approximately 90 degrees to the target line. You will need to learn to apply just the right amount of energy during the sweep and circle-up process to turn the

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<sup>121</sup> We are indebted to the renowned teacher and caster Robert Gillespie, who has for many years taught this as a key training cast.

<sup>122</sup> Because there is no change of direction it is a drill rather than a fishing or Spey cast.

<sup>123</sup> The anchor and the whole fly line are on the water at the start of the D Loop sweep and-while only the anchor is on the water at delivery.



anchor to point at the target for an efficient delivery. Make sure you are comfortable with the Switch Cast sequencing before attempting this cast.

**How to:**

**Safety first: D Loop and Anchor Downwind of casting shoulder.**

**1. Setup**

Line straight out in front of you, rod tip down. Experiment with stances for optimising the D Loop sweep.

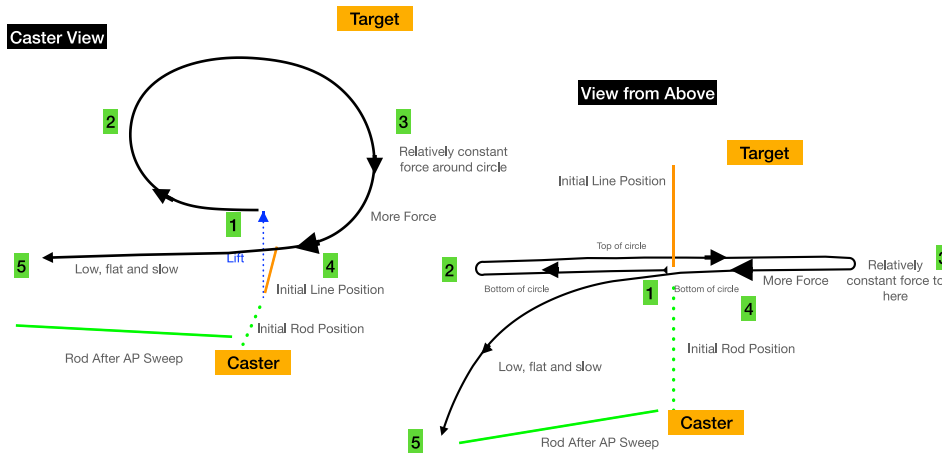
**2. The Line Repositioning Circle Cast**

Imagine there is a blackboard in front of you square (perpendicular) to your target line. Keeping your rod tip on the blackboard, make a smooth vertical lift raising the tip to around shoulder height, and without stopping draw a giant clockwise circle (counter-clockwise when casting left-handed or for right handers casting off-shoulder), passing underneath the point where you started the circle. Once your rod tip passes this point, the rod leaves the plane of the blackboard and smoothly swings in on a flat path to point roughly perpendicular to your target line (or just past perpendicular, depending on line length). Smoothly slow down as the rod tip finishes near to the water. Diagram O below shows these rod tip movements.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> Many of us find that turning from the waist using core muscles allows us to make a longer and more consistent anchor placement sweep.

## Diagram O – Anchor Placement Tip Path, No Change of Direction Exercise



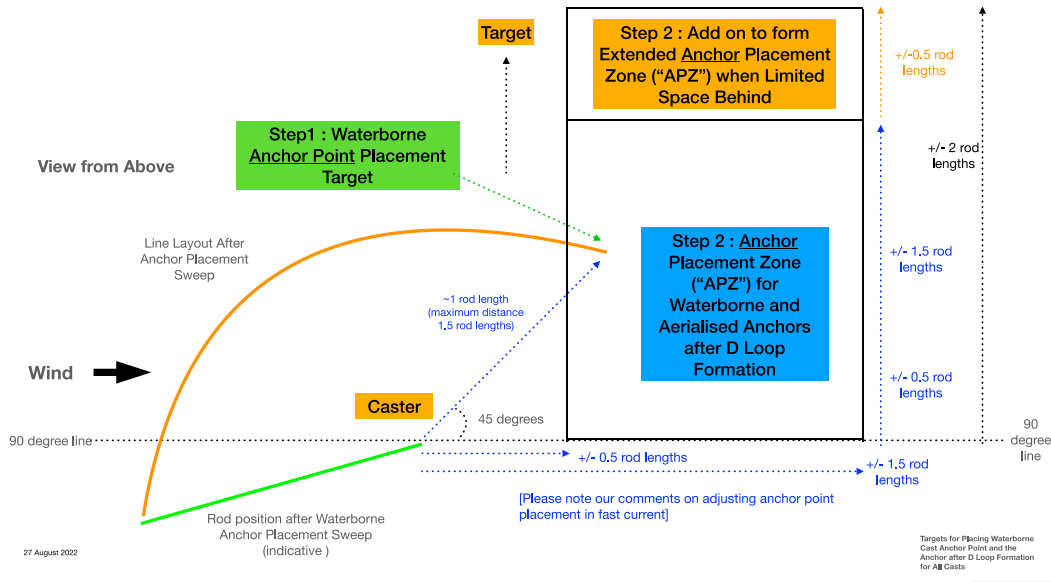
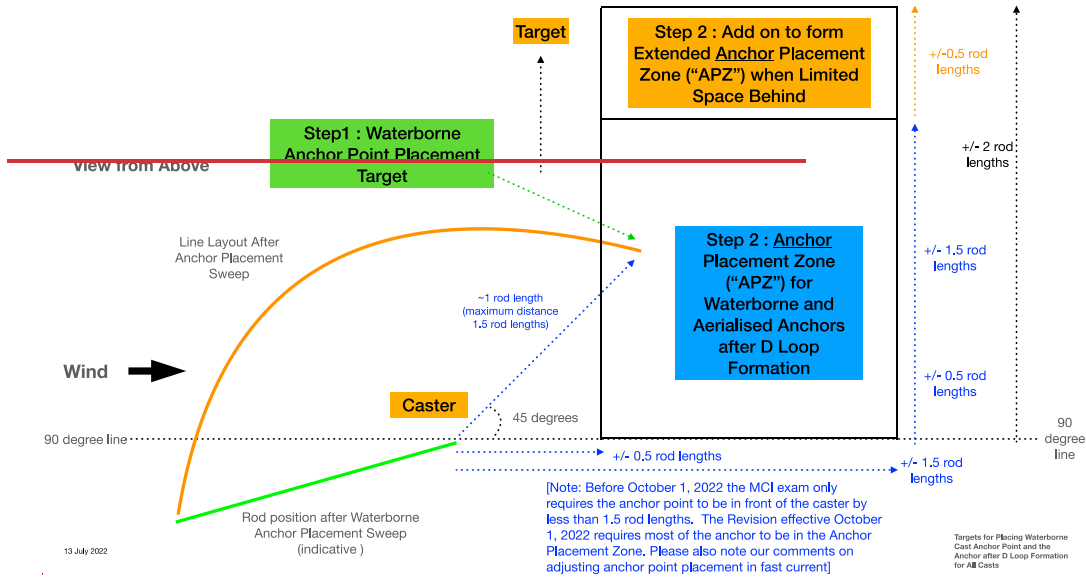
Anchor Placement Sweep Tip Path - Circle C, No Direction Change Exercise

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The resulting line repositioning/layout should look like the static position in Diagram P below, in which the rod tip is not moving. Practise this line layout until you can do it as smoothly and gently as possible: do not overdo the force increase when you cut back underneath the circle. The fly should gently touch down and not be in danger of being snapped off and the line should land flat on the water in a curve with no slack. On a Circle Cast like this, be careful not to apply too much force downwards in the circle as that will crash the line onto the water.<sup>125</sup>

<sup>125</sup> As we discuss later a Snap T/C Cast may have a downward and in snap from a higher rod position.

Diagram P – Anchor and Anchor Point Placement – View from Above



### 3. D Loop Sweep:

From a low rod tip position lift to at most waist height and without delay smoothly retrace the line layout with the rod tip, peeling the line from the water and folding it over itself, creating a wake which is referred to as a white mouse (quiet and small!). **Do not dip, and move the rod tip out and around, not in a straight line toward the anchor point (as the song says, “take the long way home”).**<sup>126 127</sup>

When the rod tip reaches around 1 o’clock on the direction clock, smoothly accelerate on a slightly rising straight path until around 3 o’clock. Then back off the force and drift into your climbing curve and circle-up to form the D Loop, as we suggest do in your Switch Cast: the D Loop will “swing” around to align with the target. See Diagrams Q and R below.

*Again, please do not dip at any point during this sweep - it will dump line on the water and ruin the cast.*

Watch the anchor and nail knot like a hawk as it turns to align with the target. See Diagram Q below.

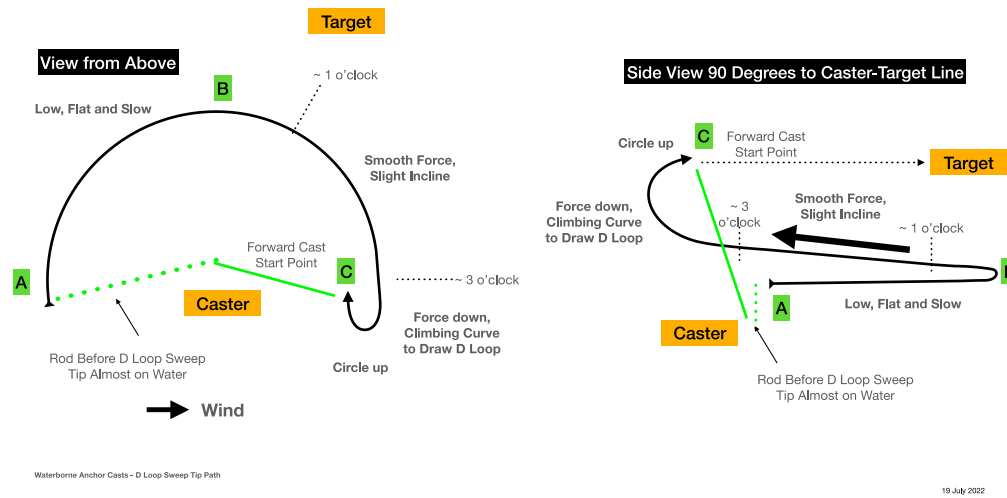
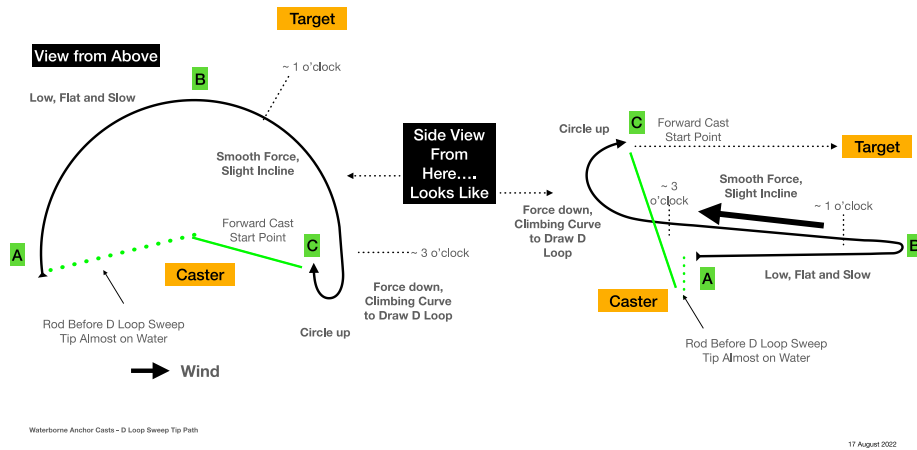
Note: the closer you keep your casting elbow to your body during the D Loop sweep, the closer laterally the anchor and D Loop will be to you. If safety is not compromised, this makes the forward cast more efficient.

Diagram Q – D Loop Sweep Tip Path – All Waterborne Anchor Casts

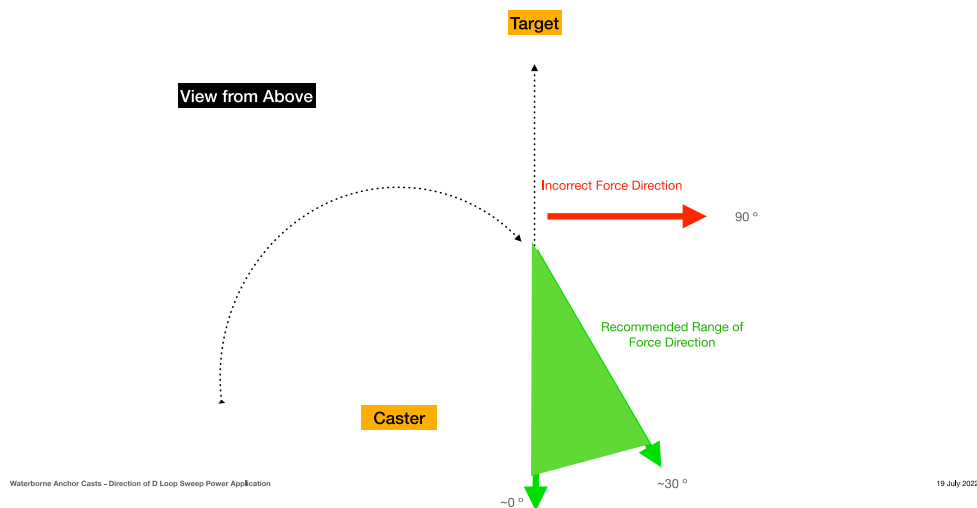
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<sup>126</sup> Supertramp, *Breakfast in America*, 1979.

<sup>127</sup> If the anchor placement sweep was made using large core muscles, they can also help make the return D Loop sweep more efficient and consistent.



## Diagram R - D Loop Sweep Force Application Direction Range, Waterborne Anchor Casts



### 4. Deliver:

Aim high, let it fly

**Rod position and line layout check:** As with the Switch Cast, occasionally check this by stopping at the end of the sweep and allowing the line to fall to the water. *There should be a nice loop the same width as your train tracks directly lined up with the target. Just as with the Switch Cast, this should also look like the line layout in the right-hand side of [Diagram K](#).*

Over-rotation is a common error which causes the apex of the D Loop of Waterborne Anchor Casts to swing behind the caster and point outside the target line (see hooking fault in [Diagram Z](#)). The authors of this section of the Study Guide teach throwing the powered portion of the D Loop sweep at the “back corner of the room” (an angle of say

20 to 30 degrees on the direction clock to the outer train track)<sup>128</sup> and not directly opposite the target. On the other hand, some superb teachers and casters like our colleagues Mark Huber and Brian Henderson, both MCI, THMCI, teach applying D Loop force directly back along the target line. You will need to work at it to figure out what works for you, and the answer will also depend on line layout and the speed of the first part of the D Loop sweep. The best way to nail this down when you practice is to stop after your circle up and make sure the apex of your D Loop is pointing along the railroad tracks at the target. If it hooks<sup>129</sup>, apply the force at a bigger angle to the outside railroad track. [Diagram R](#) shows a range of D Loop force application directions we consider reasonable. Please experiment with what works for you, adjusting for wind, current and other conditions.

Here is a [video of the No COD exercise](#) with the D Loop sweep force applied at a modest angle to the outside railroad track.

Please get comfortable and consistent with these drills before adding a change of direction, gradually increasing your line lengths until 50 ft feels comfortable. A single-hand Spey line should easily shoot from 50 ft to 60 ft, and a regular AFFTA conforming weight forward line can sometimes do so as well. If you are using a lighter AFFTA conforming line, you may find it more comfortable to work your way up to 52-53 ft to take a bit of pressure off the shoots to 60 ft.

Please see the [Appendix](#) for a [description of some Anchored Casts and their uses](#) and some common [Anchor](#) and [D Loop faults](#).

We will now use the two Water Training Casts to get started on the MCI Water Performance Section.

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<sup>128</sup> In [The Double Spey, The Loop Spring 2015](#), Chris Aldred, MCI, THMCI suggests aiming the D Loop around 45 degrees off the target line when using much heavier Two-Hand Spey lines being moved considerably faster by long Two-Hand rods. The accompanying video is <https://youtu.be/WNft91UtkpA>. In his *Skagit Master-Featuring Ed Ward* DVD, Ed teaches the “45 Thrust”, also recommending sweeping a Two-Hand Spey rod out at 45 degree angle from the target line to “avoid the D Loop hooking behind you”. We suggest you try at most 20 to 30 degrees off the target line with MCI Exam equipment.

<sup>129</sup> Assuming the hooking does not result from over-rotating your body. Make sure you are not doing this before adjusting your sweep direction.

## The Drills - Putting it All Together on Water

### The Switch Cast and No Change of Direction Waterborne Anchor Drill Make Learning the Spey Casts Simple

- You will make a **Switch Cast** move to form your D Loop and cast it on all the Spey casts, and you already know how.
- A **Single Spey Cast** is nothing more than a **Switch Cast** interrupted by a body turn to produce a change of direction.
- Waterborne anchor Spey casts produce the exact same line layout before the D Loop sweep as the **No COD drill**.
- Once the **No COD drill** is mastered, all you need to learn is a relatively minor tweak to the line layout move to successfully do **Double Spey** and **Snap/Circle Casts**.
- Finally, a **Snake Roll Cast** is in effect a “wrong-way”<sup>130</sup> spiral **Circle Cast** anchor placement sweep which is kept aerialised and then blended into a **Switch Cast**, all of which you know how to do.

Let’s take it step by step!

## Water Performance Tasks (Sub-Section 1B)

*Repeating what we said at the outset, we make specific recommendations on how to perform Tasks but there are many ways to get the job done. If you and your mentor prefer other ways of making the line do what it needs to, by all means go for it.*

### Tips:

- *Read the Exam carefully several times before practicing Tasks.*
- *Note: All diagrams are indicative only, reflecting among other things the authors’ preferences and assumptions about line length and sweep path.*
- For all these Tasks adopt a **Target Focused Setup (“TFS”)** i.e., take up a stance that optimises your ability to conform to the 3 fundamentals of Spey Casting: align a straightened anchor with a tensioned D Loop, both of which are 180 degrees from

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<sup>130</sup> Right handers begin the Snake Roll with a counter-clockwise Circle Cast.



the intended target. A TFS almost always includes having your hips and at least one foot pointing at the target. *Please note that the distances to targets in our anchored cast diagrams are not drawn to scale; if they were, the casters would appear to be much more squared up to the targets.*

- Become familiar with the concept that when your target angle changes from a certain position, the 90-degree line, **Anchor Placement Zone (“APZ”)** and the train tracks rotate with you. An old railway turntable can be a useful picture.
- Have someone occasionally video you (safely) from the side and from directly behind you in line with the target.
- ***Look at, and really focus on your anchors***; this is invaluable for placement, touchdown, turning them into alignment, and delivery timing.
- Make sure you are ready with
  - Simple steps of the cast
  - Uses
  - Alternatives
  - How to teach it
  - Faults and fixes

#### Task 14. Static Line Roll Cast

Dominant Side to 50ft.

- *A sustained anchor forward cast.*
- TFS, train tracks close, inner one ½ rod length away
- Slowly and deliberately, so the fly does not leave the water, lift, sweep, and circle-up to key position
- D Loop hanging under rod tip, behind shoulder
- Pause for point P to stop
- Deliver forward high and across water not down
- ***Uses include:*** *final delivery for switch and Spey casts, clear slack, limited room behind, severe tailwind, raise heavy fly/sink tip, stealthy pickups, free fly from behind hard obstacles.*

### Tips:

- Start at 40 ft CI distance and work up 1 ft at a time to 50 ft.
- Be patient. Because its constraints require very large anchors and very small D Loops, the Roll Cast is one of the more difficult Water Tasks. Do not be alarmed if it takes a while to reliably get to 50 ft. Don't hesitate to work on the other Water Tasks in parallel.
- Roll casts are more sensitive to water type than the other Water Casts on the Exam. If you have a choice, try to do them in relatively smooth water. Rough water surface will grab the anchor and retard the rollout of your cast.
- Generously mucilin, gink or grease your leader and a few feet of fly line before the Roll Cast Tasks in particular to help rollout. Sometimes lengthening the Water Sub-Section leader by a foot or two can help with the Roll Casts. Using a smaller piece of waterproofed fluff on water is advisable.
- Slowly pull the line into position. **Do not** aerialise the line or "cast" it behind you in any way, but don't rush the cast: wait for the anchor point to stop moving toward you.
- To help deliver *high and across* the water not down, think roll cast pickup.
- As the line gets longer rock back and forth for stroke length.
- Think \\\ \/, <sup>131</sup> long translation late rotation to *dead, high* stop.
- A very common combined error is too much force, too early along with too wide a forward casting arc.
- As a drill, experiment with slight pullback (a very subtle bounce backwards at the forward stop). This will make the roll out zippy but may compromise the subsequent line layout by introducing some slack in it. It can help you learn to make a dead stop by gradually decreasing the amount of pullback.
- Use the wind to help your delivery during the Exam but beware the collapsing effect of a straight tailwind on your D Loop: quartering downwind may be more advisable.
- Please take regular breaks as roll casting can be hard on your hand and forearm.
- See videos [here](#) and [here](#).

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<sup>131</sup> Peter Hayes, MCI. "Backslash, backslash, backslash, forward slash". There will of course be both translation and rotation near the end of the casting stroke.

### Task 15. Off-Side Static Line Roll Cast.

- As per Task 14 with “closed” stance to facilitate longer stroke length

#### Tips:

- As for Task 14.
- We find this Task easier with a high onside or overhead rod hand tilting the rod offside, which provides much more stroke length than moving the rod hand to the offside, where your shoulder will block it.
- Regularly check you are not hooking at the end of your setup.
- Beware a slicing delivery - watch reel alignment carefully to keep good tracking.
- Some find that offside roll casting is easier because it encourages less and delayed rod rotation.

### Task 16. Switch Cast

Dominant Side, to 65 ft, Hauling and shooting line permitted.

- A **touch and go** anchor continuous tension dynamic roll cast
- Strip in to 50/56 ft of line, loop spare line to reduce water drag on shoot
- TFS, clear slack, rod tip down, then;
- Lift, Sweep, Circle-up, (set), then;
- Deliver as soon as line/leader touches down, shooting line to 65 ft
- **Uses include:** foundation of all Spey casts, training and teaching, addresses Static Roll Cast inefficiencies, quick long casts without a significant change of direction, adding distance to Spey Casts.

#### Tips:

- Practice with and without hauling. Use what gives you the most consistent result.
- Experiment with just how much line you wish to pick up. 50/56 ft is a suggested reasonable balance between effective D Loop (the cast engine) and effectively managing and casting the amount of line outside the rod tip. The bigger the D Loop, the smaller the anchor, and the easier the delivery, but if you try to cast too much line it won't be pretty.

- As we said earlier, shooting AFFTA conforming lines from 53/56 ft to the 65 ft required for the Switch Cast Task should be readily doable with good technique, and a Single-Hand Spey line should shoot from 50 to 65 ft on a Switch Cast without too much trouble. If you are using an AFFTA conforming line, to get to the 65 ft for the Switch Cast, focus on making a very large D Loop with the rod as high and as far behind you as possible and circle up as high as you can. Here are videos [with](#) and [without hauling](#).

### Task 17. Single Spey Cast

Dominant Side, minimum change of direction 45 degrees to 60 ft. Hauling and shooting permitted.

- *A **touch and go** anchor change of direction cast to 45 degrees, in the form of a Switch Cast<sup>132</sup> interrupted by a body turn toward the target between the lift and sweep.*
- Strip in line to 50/53ft, loop spare line to reduce water drag
- TFS.
- Rotate body/arm/rod to dangle, clear slack, rod tip down.
- Lift, Turn body and arm/rod together back to target, *keeping arm quiet and not moving it relative to your body*, then:
- Sweep opposite target, Circle-up, (set).
- Deliver (with a haul if you prefer) and shoot to 60 ft.
- **Uses include:** *moving water, upstream wind, moving or different fish in any water, floating line, smaller flies. Fast and stealthy compared to a Snap/Circle cast.*

#### Tips:

- The lift and turn should be smooth, one speed, no rush.
- After the lift, freeze the arm to the body then turn. You'll end up in the Switch Cast position, body facing target, then:
- Think positive high energy Switch Cast with a big D Loop and a late high circle up, putting the anchor back close to you.
- Again, look at where you want your anchor to touch down.
- Start with a shorter line, e.g., 45 ft.
- Make incremental angle changes e.g., by 15 degrees or so, and work up to 45 degrees.
- Then add line length to 50/53 ft.

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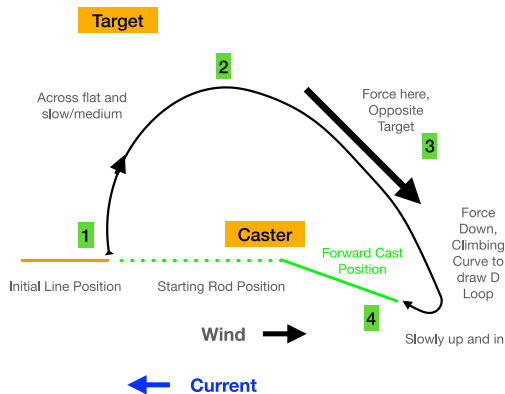
<sup>132</sup> Which incorporates a Lift.

- Then add shoot to 60 ft, in stages if you need to.
- Experiment with and without hauling and go for your most consistent delivery.
- *Note:* the sweep will need to be a bit longer and a little more energised than with a regular Switch Cast to compensate for breaking the 180-degree rule while getting the line around the corner, with the anchor and D Loop lined up at the target. A short backcast haul may help.

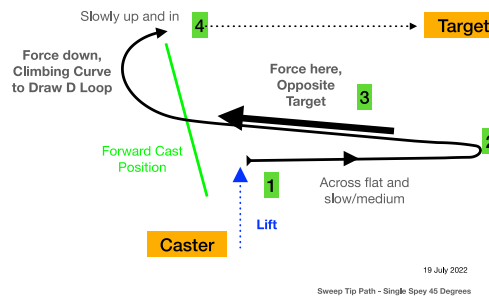
**Note:** Getting out of poor anchor placement jail. For all your Spey Casts, be ready to explain what you could do to recover from an anchor which is too far upstream (here change angle and cast more upstream, Perry Poke<sup>133</sup>, snake roll, redo, etc.) and too far downstream (here, change delivery angle, snap, roll cast to dangle and redo). Angle changes and redos will feature in all your Spey jailbreaks, but we will let you figure most of the others out for yourselves. But be ready, since this is a common question from the Two-Hand examiners who may be assessing you. [See a video of a Single Spey here.](#)

Diagram S – Sweep Tip Path, Single Spey 45 Degrees

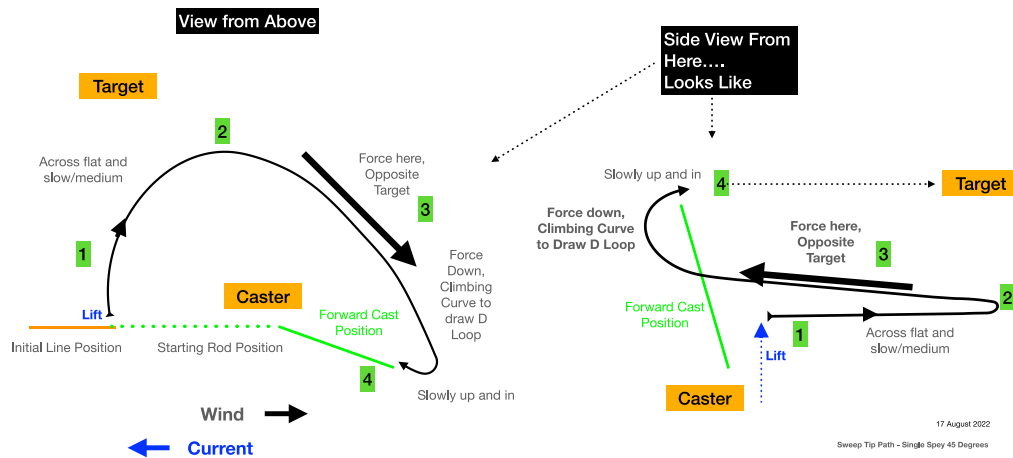
**View from Above**



**Side View 90 Degrees to Caster-Target Line**



<sup>133</sup> Raising and lowering the rod towards the target to reposition the line on the water, then collecting and casting it with a Switch Cast movement.



## Task 18. Double Spey or Snap Cast, Dominant Side

To 60 ft, to 90 degrees; hauling and shooting permitted.

### Double Spey Cast:

-A sustained anchor change of direction cast (to 90 degrees) with a lift and two rod Sweeps:

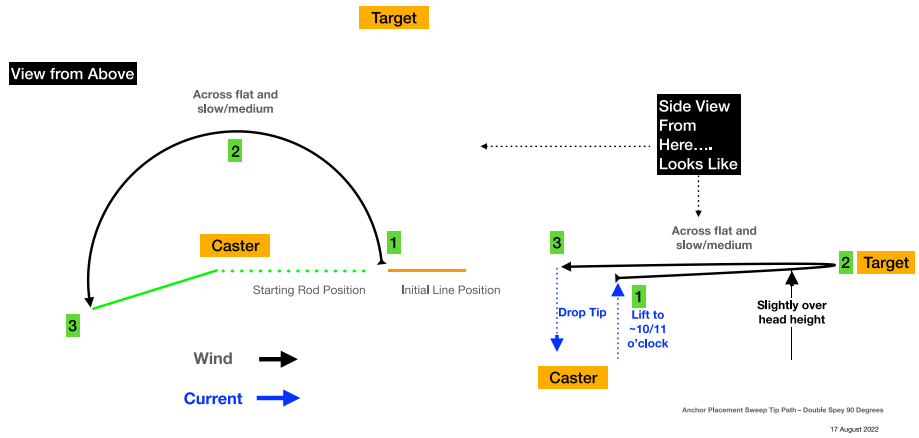
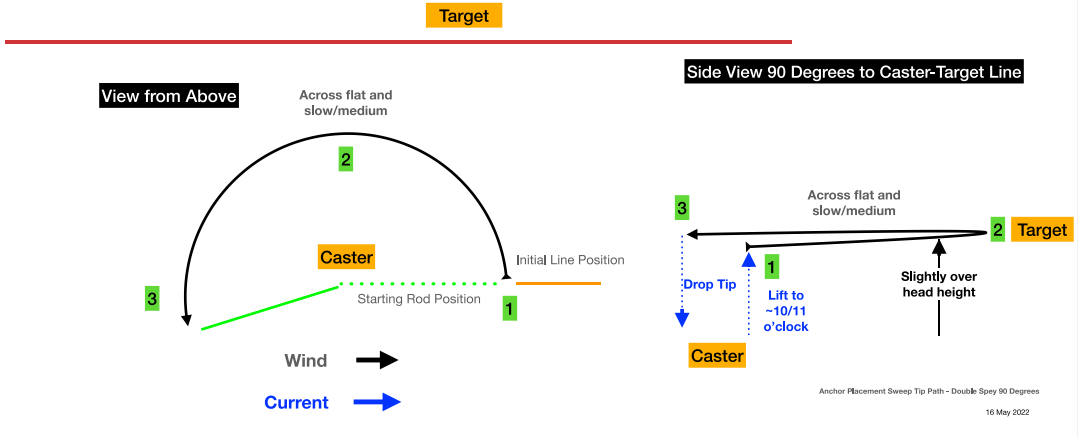
- Line and Anchor positioning Sweep, then;
- D Loop Sweep to collect line and then form the back loop, prior to circle up and delivery.
- TFS, rod to dangle, 50/53 ft of line, loop spare line.
- Lift, then sweep over, out, and around. Drop rod tip almost to the water, laying the line across and in front of the caster, anchor square to target, then;
- Continue just as with No COD Exercise. Reverse direction with a smooth and level then gradually rising D Loop Sweep, blending into a Circle-up, (anchor and D Loop now aligned with target);
- Deliver (with haul if you prefer) and shoot.

- **Uses include:** moving water, downstream wind, moving fish or targeting different fish, floating and sinking lines, Skagit setups, larger/heavier flies.

#### Tips:

- From the dangle make a smooth initial lift to approx. 10 to 11 o'clock up, then make a flat sweep smoothly away from, across and around the caster and back into the bank, rod tip dropping low to the water to finish.
- Build consistency in the first sweep line layout, forming a smooth curve with a correctly placed anchor square to target; this is not a cast, just a controlled placement or "draping" of the line into position; see Diagram T below.
- Practice your ability to place the anchor further up and downstream.
- Please note that if the current is fast you will need to place your anchor point more upstream. A good way to think about it is that you are arranging to have your anchor point at 45 degrees on the direction clock around a rod length away when your D Loop sweep passes back over it.
- For the second/ D Loop sweep, just apply your training from the Waterborne Anchor Cast Drill and complete the Cast.
- *Do not dip on the D Loop sweep;* we suggest around a waist high horizontal sweep until after the rod tip is facing the target at 12 on the direction clock.
- Note: Most casters make the on-shoulder anchor placement sweep palm down. If you start the D Loop sweep palm down you will need to rotate to palm up sometime before the forward delivery, risking an up and down tip movement during the sweep. You may find starting your D Loop sweep after rotating to palm up helps to economize movement and build consistency.
- You will need to learn to moderate and balance the amount of energy in the D Loop sweep with the height of the sweep and the flow of the water.
- *Watch your anchor, as it turns to align, then deliver.*
- Getting out of anchor placement jail. Remember that for Double Speys you have one additional direct escape route for an anchor too far upstream: just wait for the current to bring the line and anchor down to a safe forward cast position.
- Also please see the (hypothetical) [Double Spey Teaching Task](#) writeup and [here is a video showing the cast](#)~~this video~~.

Diagram T – Anchor Placement Sweep Tip Path, Double Spey 90 Degrees



-As we say, there are many ways of doing and teaching casts. Here is Brian Henderson MCI THMCI showing how he teaches the Double Spey.



## Snap Cast:

-A sustained anchor change of direction cast (to 90 degrees) with two rod Sweeps:

- Line and Anchor positioning Snap Cast<sup>134</sup>, then:
- D Loop Sweep to collect line and then form the back loop, prior to circle up and delivery.
- TFS, 50/53 ft line to dangle, loop spare line.
- **For Circle C** <sup>135</sup>

On a plane square to target (think of an imaginary blackboard), smoothly lift into and then scribe a large clockwise circle (for right handers), creating a large softly unfurling loop to lay the line out across and in front of the caster. This will place the anchor square to target. As in No COD Exercise. Reverse direction with a smooth level then gradually rising D Loop Sweep, blending into a Circle-up. The Anchor and D Loop are now aligned with the target. Deliver (with haul if you prefer) and shoot.

- **For Snap C and T**

Straight inclined lift, up an escalator on a plane square to target, then accelerating back around a medium pulley (Snap C) or a very small to non-existent pulley (Snap T)<sup>136 137</sup>, accelerating down and *underneath* the lift path to the water, creating an unfurling loop which lays out the line across and in front of the caster. The direction in which the end of the line was pointing has changed by 180 degrees. Then use No COD Exercise delivery as above. [Here's a Video of a Snap C.](#)

**-Uses include:** moving water, upstream wind, moving fish or targeting different fish in any water, quickly delivering inside line length, floating and for Circle C and a lesser extent Snaps, sinking lines, Skagit setups, and larger flies.

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<sup>134</sup> We define Snap Casts as starting with a Lift, as Circle Casts do.

<sup>135</sup> A Circle C is not technically one of the options on the MCI Exam, but it is a very close relative, and you already know how to set an anchor with a circular [anchor placement](#) sweep. Learn this first and then tweak the anchor placement sweep to develop the Snap T/C.

<sup>136</sup> [Casters doing a Snap T often snap the tip down and in towards the bank somewhat to lower the rod/line collision risk.](#)

<sup>137</sup> [Using the elevator/pulley analogy, a circle C is done by going around a very large pulley \("over the moon, under the moon" - Chris Hague MCI THMCI\) with little to no escalator.](#)

### Tips:

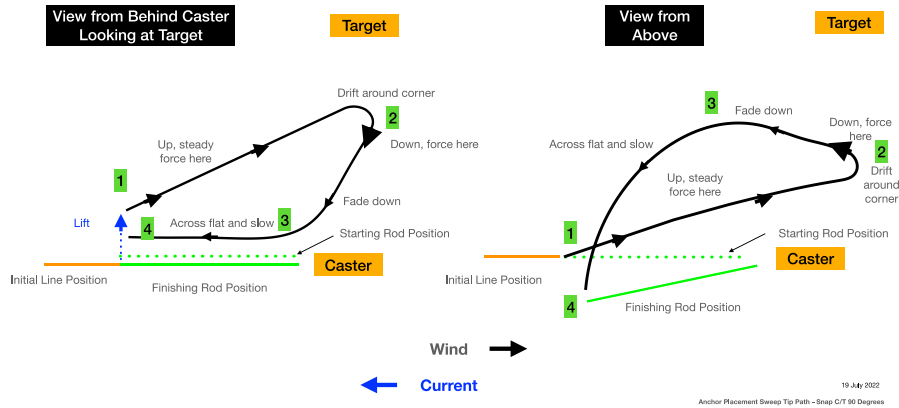
- Refer to your No-Change of Direction Circle Cast Drill.
- Focus initially on the Circle C. It is the default Snap/Circle type cast safely to teach learners and you've already effectively learned it with No COD.
- Then move to the Snap cast, whether T (more elegant with less effort but a little harder, with less lifting power and more collision risk) or C (easier and closer to Circle C), to get a smooth and predictable line layout with a correctly placed nail knot and anchor square to target in the first sweep.
- Practise also your ability to position the anchor further upstream and downstream by varying the rod tip position at the end of the snap.<sup>138</sup>
- As with the Double Spey, land your anchor point more upstream in fast current.
- *Do not overpower the anchor placement snap.* As with the No COD exercise, we want the line to land sweetly on the water with no slack, not break the sound barrier with an awful crack and land in a heap.
- *Do not dip* on the D Loop sweep. The best way to do this is to make sure to start the return sweep with the rod tip **low**.<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> This will come in handy for the Fault Demonstration Section.

<sup>139</sup> Note: Unlike in the Double Spey, most casters finish the anchor placement sweep in the Snaps in the ready-to-deliver palm up position when casting on-shoulder, in which case the palm flip we mentioned for the Double Spey is inapplicable.

## Diagram U – Anchor Placement Sweep Tip Path, Snap C/T 90 Degrees



### Task 19. Snake Roll Cast

Dominant Side, 60 ft, to 90 degrees.

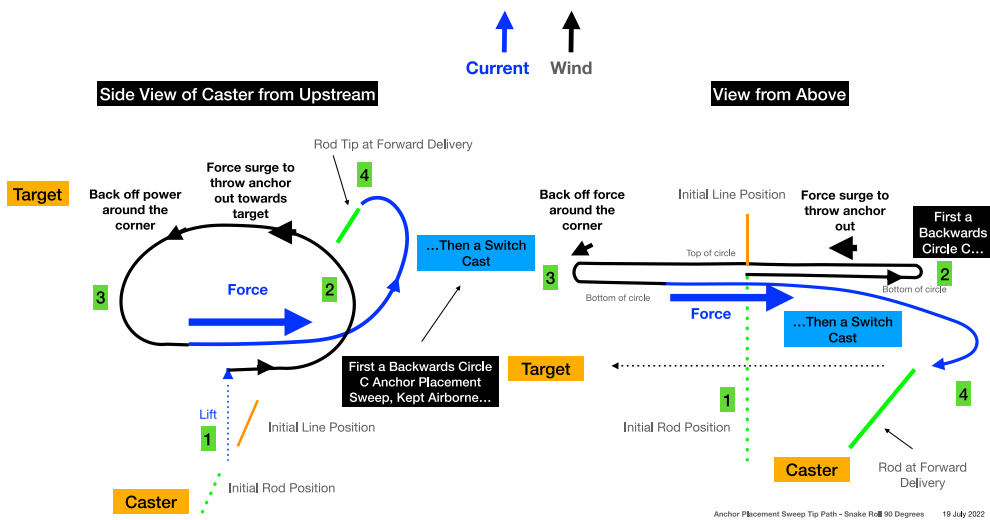
- *A touch and go anchor change of direction cast with a spiral line pickup incorporating a lift blending into the D Loop Sweep prior to delivery.*
- TFS to 90 degrees, rod to dangle, no slack, 50/53 ft of line, loop spare line, *keeping the rod tip on an imaginary upright plane pointed at the target*
- Lift smoothly, and then move into a gentle slide away from target (into the bank, if there is one), continuing into an oval shaped outward spiral sweeping back towards the target, then around and away again (from the target), finally accelerating into a D Loop sweep, and then coming inwards off the plane, Circle-up, (set):
- Deliver (with haul if you prefer) and shoot to 60 ft

**-Uses include:** downstream wind in moving water, moving or different fish in any water, floating line, smaller flies. Quick and stealthy compared to a Double Spey (and a good way to impress spectators!). [Here's a video.](#)

**Tips:**

- Diagram V below illustrates tip path and speed guidelines
- As we said earlier, this cast is effectively a backwards No COD spiral anchor placement sweep kept airborne and blended into a Switch Cast.
- Do not rush the spiral pickup. You have much more time than you might think!
- Some learners get confused about which way to circle. “Bank, river, bank deliver” might help.<sup>140</sup>
- Go long and smooth both to the bank and then out into the river before accelerating into a level/slightly rising D Loop sweep
- Make your D loop sweep long and positive to straighten the leader out, just like on the Single Spey.
- A well-executed Snake Roll looks elegant and slow: it should not be a blur!
- As with all **touch and go** anchor casts, *look at where you want to land the anchor*, and deliver as soon as it touches down.

Diagram V – Sweep Tip Path, Snake Roll 90 Degrees



<sup>140</sup> Some of us first learned this from Roger Miles, MCI.

## Task 20. Off-Side Spey.

Double Spey or Snap (depending on Task 18), to 55 ft at 90 degrees; descriptions as in Task 18.

### Tips:

- You already know how to do these casts on shoulder; these tasks are just mirror images.
- Retrace your steps on the Switch Cast and the no COD Waterborne Anchor Training Casts by getting them working off shoulder to 50 ft. Since you already have these skills in your arsenal on-shoulder (and have just learned something very close to the first move of the off-shoulder No COD to start your Snake Roll), this shouldn't take long. Make sure they are solid before going any further.
- Then learn and practice the initial line layouts, finally adding on the D Loop sweep and delivery.
- As with the offside Roll Cast, rod hand high overhead or just onside is the way to go to get a nice long delivery stroke.
- Keep the line collecting / D Loop sweep smooth, again *no dipping*.<sup>141</sup>
- Listen to the "white mouse" as the line comes around and aim for no pauses or sudden changes in volume.
- Occasionally "freeze" after the circle-up and let the line fall to the water to check the alignment of the D Loop to the target. Make doubly sure to experiment with aiming your D Loop sweep at a target diagonally behind by up to approx. 30 degrees; see [Diagram T](#) and [Diagram U](#) and apply to the offside.
- Again, *watch your anchor*; as soon as it turns to point to the target, deliver.
- Become consistent with around 50 ft, then add a shoot, working up to 55 ft.

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<sup>141</sup> Note: Many casters finish the anchor placement sweep in the ready-to-deliver palm *down* position when casting both possible alternative casts *off-shoulder*, in which case the palm flip we mentioned for the on-shoulder Double Spey is inapplicable.

### Task 21. Sunk Line and Oval Cast

Raising sunken line at 45 ft, Oval Cast to shoot line to 65 ft over at least 2 false casts, with 30-degree change of direction.

- *From dangle at 45 ft with spare line looped*
- *Roll Cast to clear slack and raise sink tip, then without delay*
- *Pickup into Oval false casting sequence, cycling relatively horizontal backcasts circling-up into relatively overhead forward casts*
- *Gradually extending line and changing direction*
- *Shooting remaining line on delivery to 65 ft*

#### **Tips:**

- The “lifting” roll cast should have a quite large softly rolling out loop with the rod tip finishing low to the water, and the line fully extended. This is similar to the Wide Loop Roll Cast Task in the CI Exam<sup>142</sup> and will lay the line out nicely instead of bouncing slack into it with a fast loop with a straight fly leg. Then:
- Lift immediately into the oval casting sequence.
- Practise accurately changing direction.
- Do not let the line tick behind you; make your backcasts crisp and aim them up a bit.

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<sup>142</sup> Please note the performance standards say: “Forward and back loops of any width are permitted in this task”.

## Teaching (Section 2)

There is no substitute for real experience and practice. Teach as much as you can. Find a friend, or fellow club member to instruct. Teach the tasks on the Exam. This will greatly increase your confidence. Your examiners will pick up on teaching inexperience almost immediately. Make sure you get experience teaching groups and develop an approach to lesson plans. Watch or teach with MCIs and THMCIs as much as you can.

Many instructors find studying how to teach very helpful. For those who do, here is some reading you might find useful.<sup>143</sup>

- *Practice Perfect: 42 Rules for Getting Better at Getting Better*, Doug Lemov and others
- *How We Learn to Move: A Revolution in the Way We Coach & Practice Sports Skills*, Rob Gray
- *The Language of Coaching: The Art & Science of Teaching Movement*, Nicklaas C. Winkelman
- *Skill Acquisition in Sport Research, Theory and Practice*, Edited by Nicola J. Hodges, A. Mark Williams
- *The Talent Code: Greatness isn't Born it's Grown*, Daniel Coyle.
- Topics for further study:
  - o Constraints Theory
  - o Deliberate Practice
  - o Attentional Focus
  - o Motivation Theory/Interviewing Techniques

We now turn to some practical suggestions for the Teaching Section of the MCI Exam.

### Teaching Section Strategy

***Repeating what we said at the outset, we make some suggestions on how to teach, but there are many ways to get the job done. If you and your mentor prefer other ways of conveying skills and knowledge to students, by all means go for it.***

First, take a deep breath and relax a bit. If you have made it to the Teaching Section, you must have cast very well. No FFI examiners like failing candidates, especially those who cast well, which they must do if they give a single overall borderline score on a

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<sup>143</sup> As we say when we introduce the [MCI Study Materials](#), we don't necessarily endorse or agree with everything we suggest you might read, and as an MCI you need to make up your own mind.

Teaching Task. Sometimes examiners choose to prompt. Be very alert to questions and other forms of prompts in the Teaching Section (and elsewhere, of course). By all means respectfully defend how you teach, but being remotely argumentative is a particularly poor strategy.

**Style.** It is generally true that the FFI is style neutral in assessing the Performance Section of its Exams: if you perform the substance of the cast properly pretty much any style goes, regardless of how unsuitable the examiners may think your style or technique is. It is not safe, however, to assume that FFI assessors are style neutral in the Teaching Sections of Exams. Just because you can do something with a style that makes a task more difficult does not mean examiners will accept students being taught that way. You do not need to change the way you cast, but you should make it clear that you might not always teach students the same style.

For example, let's assume you use an index finger on top grip for a (hypothetical) teaching task, Quick Cast from a Skiff. You perform the cast beautifully and an examiner asks if you would teach students using a 12-weight outfit for tarpon to use that grip. If you say that you use the grip with a 7 wt because it's what you feel comfortable with, but of course there is potential injury risk and loss of thumb force that might come into play with a heavier outfit, and that you would probably teach students say a thumb on top or V grip, that's fine. Even better is if you proactively say you will cast with this grip but teach another and explain why. What is not fine is saying "that's just how I cast, and I teach my all students to do the same" or being surprised by the question.

**Casting in Teaching Tasks.** All your casts must conform to MCI Exam standards, including any demonstration casts in teaching tasks. Making all your casts good to MCI standard is a high bar to clear. The more you cast in the Teaching Section, the more risk you run of some bad ones slipping in. Basic common-sense survival strategy, and our experience that students tend to learn more with the rod in their hands than in the instructor's, together suggest you really shouldn't cast too much. Mark Surtees, MCI, usually does not cast at all when teaching beginners, partly because he doesn't want to intimidate them.



## Types of Teaching Tasks

There are broadly speaking four types of teaching tasks in the Exam:

- **Scripted and Rehearsed Presentation (“SRP”)** - A fully written out and repeatedly practiced presentation taking up to 3 minutes (absent interruptions), which is designed to just teach a student to do something as efficiently as possible. It has no side trips into different teaching methods, faults and fixes, and so forth;
- **“Teach the Teacher”**: an even longer set piece presentation taking up to 5 minutes which, over and above an SRP, is also likely to cover different ways of teaching a task and faults and fixes;
- **Fault Demonstrations** where the candidate performs faults and describes and demonstrates corrections; and
- **Fault Correction/Give the Examiner the Rod**: having an examiner cast and simply correcting him or her, instead of going through a full SRP.

Your approach to two of the six teaching tasks is fixed by the Exam:

- Task 2 is **Fault Demonstration and Correction**; and
- Task 6 is **Teach the Teacher**.

Your approaches on the other three tasks you will be asked to do are up to you. Make a game plan for each task, *keeping in mind the stated student level*. Decide well in advance for each whether to do:

- An SRP; or
- Give the Examiner the Rod.

In our opinion an experienced instructor should strongly consider giving the examiner the rod where feasible. Rather than risk forgetting something or saying something your examiners object to in several minutes of talking, if you get it right you can just fix the fault(s) your examiner demonstrates and move on. Usually, examiners do only one obvious fault at a time (as we are trained to), which makes them much easier to fix than real students with several overlapping and interacting faults. The risk of course is that if you fail to pick up the fault, you can quickly land in trouble.

An advanced student being defined by the Exam as at successful CI candidate level provides opportunities to Give the Examiner the Rod. The more advanced a student is, the more likely in real life we would be to ask to see a cast first rather than launch into a full SRP set-piece speech from the ground up.

Be realistic about what the line length and angle changes you choose in teaching tasks. Use what you would teach a student with and dial them both back from MCI Exam requirements when appropriate.

**Stepping stones.** Build in reasonable assumptions about what your “student” already knows how to do, to avoid starting every task from scratch. Take careful note of the Exam saying that you should assume students have the skills needed to learn tasks and interpret it to your advantage. This together with the definition of an advanced student being at CI level can mean your “advanced student” is *more skilled* than a CI is required to be. You for example might tell your examiners at the beginning of a Teaching Task what your “student” knows how to do, or you might employ a little creative fiction to nail required skills down, for example by referring to non-existent conversations or lessons. Be aware, though that your examiners will decide what stepping stones you can use. We think most of us would not object to a Single Spey being taught to a student who already knows how to do a Switch Cast. But some might object to a Snap Cast being taught to a student who has already mastered the No Change of Direction Exercise. Getting away with that assumption makes teaching ~~the a Snap Task~~ really easy, so it may be worth a try anyway!

Note: ~~Kinaesthetic Hands-on~~ kinaesthetic methods of Spey casting with students require some adjustments. It’s hard to move the fly rod through its whole range of motion standing behind and to the side of the student, so casting with them can be challenging.<sup>144</sup> Some instructors find it easier to cross in front of the student, hold the fly rod up the blank, and then walk/jog it around and through the motions of the cast, like some golf teachers do.

## Teaching Task Examples

There are many ways to teach any task and there is no single “right method”. The following are just examples of what we have found effective. They contain many of our

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<sup>144</sup> We generally try to cast with students (with prior permission of course), by holding the fly rod without touching them.

individual style preferences and there are many other ways to get the job done. What is and isn't acceptable is up to your assessors.

#### Scripted Rehearsed Presentation - Example - A Double Spey to an Advanced Student<sup>145</sup>

There is no formal requirement to use an examiner as a student, but in practice that's what we see happen most of the time. If you attempt a student-free explain and demonstrate, we think you run a risk of the examiners ~~masking~~ you to teach a live "student" instead, and in any event, examiners will ~~often-sometimes~~ pre-empt the issue by starting the Teaching Section by introducing your "student" to you and telling you to get on with teaching them the Tasks.<sup>146</sup>

You should repeatedly practice word for word, action by action. Candidates regularly practice their delivery to students, other instructors, family and friends, trees, bushes and flowers.

Warmly greet your "student" and if they aren't wearing eye protection, very gently ask them to <sup>147</sup>.

*"At our last lesson we got a nice Switch Cast going, and we agreed that today we would start layering in changes of directions to give you some useful fishing casts.*

- *Suppose we are in the river looking downstream<sup>148</sup> and our bank is to our right, so our fishing position is right bank.*
- *We are casting straight across the river and letting the current swing our fly to present it.*
- *Let's say we've no room behind us for overhead back casts, and the wind is blowing hard downstream (in the same direction as the current), so we are going to need to do some kind of Roll or Switch Cast on our safe downwind side, with the Anchor here aimed at target [point] and the D Loop directly behind and in line with it here [point], as we discussed the other day.*
- *We'll do this in two steps, first moving the line closer to us so the line/leader connection is here [point], then collecting the line and making the motions of a*

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<sup>145</sup> We chose a Spey teaching task not on the MCI Exam.

<sup>146</sup> Our reading of the Exam is that candidates have the right to choose whether to use an examiner as a student, but we suggest candidates try to accommodate reasonable requests.

<sup>147</sup> There is no harm in making sure your examiners know safety matters to you. Of course, if it was a real student your safety discussion would be much more extensive, with a lot of time spent on topics including the dangers of moving water.

<sup>148</sup> If the wind is strongly upstream, consider changing direction and describing an imaginary current/bank setup.

Switch Cast to deliver it to the target. The cast is called a Double Spey and here's how it looks [Demo]

- Now let's get you going. Grip the rod and face the target, left foot slightly forward, both as before, and let's break it in two. Starting with rod almost touching the water, imagine there is a flagpole going straight up from your rod tip, and right next to it a semi-circular brick wall curving around in front of you at just above head height.
- **Step 1:** Lift the rod tip straight up the flagpole to above head height, and without stopping move it smoothly and fairly slowly along the top of the wall and set it straight down right when your rod starts pointing directly upstream.<sup>149</sup> We want to get the end of the fly line there [point] and the line laid out on the water in a semi-circle.
- Have student do it until they get it right. When they do<sup>150</sup> : Now let's do that one more time.
- **Step 2:** But this time, when we get that good layout on the water, we are going to collect then cast it. Starting with the rod tip low and upstream, we slowly and smoothly retrace the path of the line on the water NEVER DIPPING, and then just after the rod points at the target we accelerate into our slightly upwards Switch Cast sweep, and glide up into our climbing curve, circle up and delivery, just like we did the other day.
- Now let's have you put it all together. Let's put the end of the fly line there again [point] and then come back around and make your Switch Cast movement and deliver to our target.
- Great cast! [If you have time you can quickly recap the steps of the cast. If you are short of time in this example, you can drop the separate anchor placement sweep step and teach combined anchor placement and D loop sweeps.] Any questions? Enjoy your trip and send pictures!

Note: It is not a good idea in these SRPs to say here are four ways you can grip the rod and here are three ways to stand. Save alternatives for Teach the Teacher and just make a recommendation. If the examiners want your thinking behind it, they'll ask.

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<sup>149</sup> The rod finishing position depends on line length and we chose a D Loop sweep finishing with the rod pointed upstream to reflect the likelihood that we would start teaching students using less than the 50 ft reel to fly in the No COD exercise.

<sup>150</sup> If you give your "student" clear instructions, they tend to be cooperative and get it right first time.

## Teach the Teacher – Explaining to an Instructor How You Teach a Wiggle Mend<sup>151</sup>

This will be a Task from the CI Exam in place at the time. You are being examined for a qualification which is the gateway to mentoring for and giving the CI Exam, so you need to demonstrate you are completely on top of that Exam. Bring a copy just in case you need to refer to it. Your examiners will not like it at all if you seem unfamiliar with the CI Exam and its Tasks or start asking uninformed questions about it.

This MCI Teaching Task is different from an SRP. Rather than directly *teaching* the task, you are *describing to another (almost) instructor how you teach it*. This Task is different from an SRP in that you are likely to include why you ask students to do certain things, common faults, and perhaps a discussion of alternative teaching methods if time permits. It too needs to be thoroughly scripted and practiced. Unlike other types of Teaching Tasks, because your about-to-be instructor student probably knows how to do the cast, you may be able to pull it off as an explain and demonstrate without asking a “student” to do anything. But even if you choose that route, it may be a good idea to grab a victim from the examiner team and make sure to confirm their understanding along the way.

- *“I like to start students off with the skeleton of the cast: A very high arm position enabling a high crisp stop with a slightly below horizontal forward trajectory, at a low line speed. The high stop and the low line speed buy “hang time” to make the mends on the way down, the crisp stop tensions the rod leg so we can send the mend waves down it, and the slightly below horizontal forward trajectory lays the leader and the end of the line out nicely instead of landing them in a puddle. I make sure students’ backcast loops are both good and fully unrolled before they come forward, and of course if their basic cast isn’t right, we fix it before we do this task.*
- *I then add in a very slight but distinct pause after the stop before a 2/3 count drift straight down. Then, after this clear pause, I build in a “bad” or “delayed” reach mend: I ask them to slowly move the rod 90 degrees to the side in a reach mend motion. Because they pause slightly before moving, the leader and perhaps some of the fly line remains straight (completely blowing up a drag free drift), unlike a “good” reach mend where the rod moves sideways immediately after the stop and the leader and whole line points at the rod tip in a gentle curve. Getting this mini pause in is key to good wiggles-the loop must be on its way to the target and providing tension in the rod leg before we start with the fiddly stuff. Does that make sense?*

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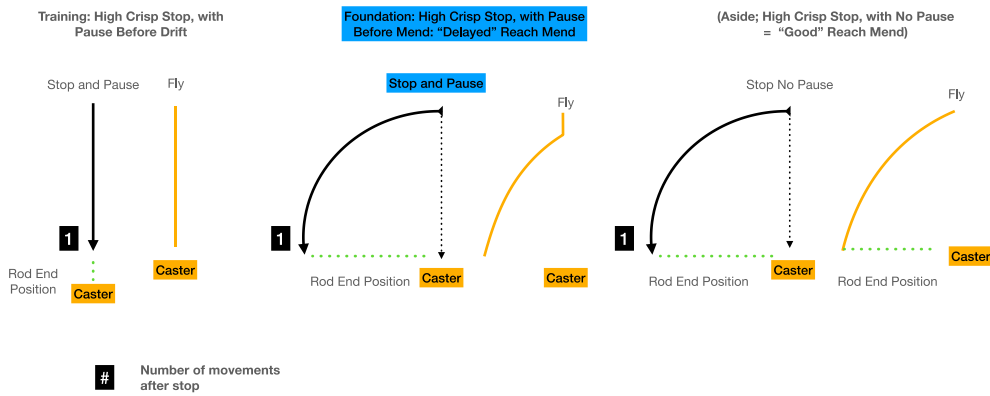
<sup>151</sup> A Task from the 2022 CI Exam.

- *After they get this delayed reach mend down, I ask them to go halfway down and out diagonally and then bring the rod diagonally back to the tape at the ground. These two movements make one giant half-wiggle covering most of the line. I then tell students they are drawing the shape the line takes on the ground on a piece of plexiglass in front of them. We then have a bit of fun mending in the other direction, making the mend wider and narrower, sharper, and flatter and so forth. Just so they understand better the relationship between what their rod tip does on the way down and the resulting line layout. Any questions? Note: You will not have time on the MCI Exam Task to demonstrate this.*
- *When we get back to business, I have them do first a 3 zigzag mend for 2 points and finally 4 zigzag movements down to make the 3 pointed wiggles that the CI Exam Task requires. With the nice high stop and low line speed we built in, they have all the time in the world to make these 4 movements before the line lands. Note: You may not have enough time on the MCI Exam to demonstrate this either.*

#### *Faults*

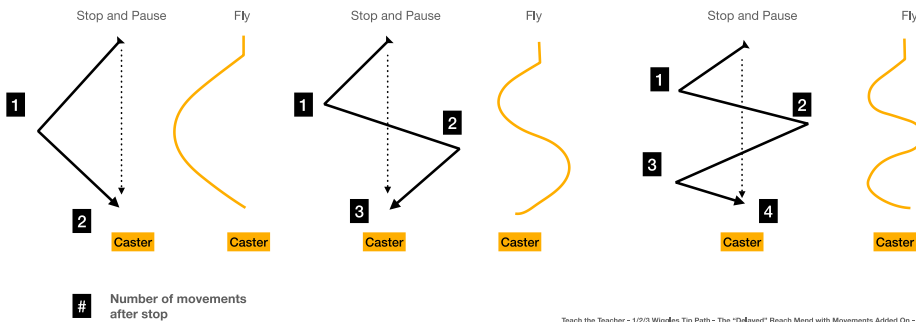
- *[Demo if you have time, just describe if you don't]*
- *Probably the most common fault is failing to stop high and then swinging the rod low. They lose all line tension and have no room or time to make their mends, which become hurried and ugly.*
- *Being anxious to get the mends in and coming forward too soon or ignoring backcast form altogether-no chance of a good mend without good loops front and back.*
- *Flat or upward forward trajectory puddling the line.*
- *High line speed: low speed buys more time to mend.*
- *Fast frantic wrist wiggles with the rod tip bouncing all over the place and producing inconsistent wiggle shapes. With proper technique there is plenty of time to make big nice smooth consistent waves with the arm and forearm.*
- *Wiggling back and forth flat from the same high rod position instead of zigzagging down. This creates slack and results in poor mend control."*
- *[Ask for any final questions and confirm overall understanding]*

## Diagram W – Teach the Teacher-Wiggle Mends-Caster View



Teach the Teacher - Wiggle Mends - The "Delayed" Reach Mend is the Foundation - Caster View  
16 May 2022

## Diagram X – Teach the Teacher-Increasing the Number of Wiggle Mends



Teach the Teacher - 1/2/3 Wiggles Tip Path - The "Delayed" Reach Mend with Movements Added On - Caster View  
16 May 2022

## Fault Demonstration and Correction

If you are confident in your fault recognition and casting skills (as you should be) this part of the Teaching Section should be quite manageable. Unlike on the CI Exam, you don't need to figure out what the examiner is doing wrong, and except for the Spey faults, the MCI faults are fairly similar to the CI Exam faults. You will see from the Exam and its scoring boxes exactly what is expected of you. It lays out a short simple recipe you would be well advised to follow:

- Proper Demonstration of Fault
- Cause Properly Defined
- Correction Properly Defined (and Demonstrated)
- Explanation Clear and Concise

### Proper Demonstration of Fault

Treat each possible fault as a casting Task in the Exam and practice them until you can do them perfectly first time, every time. Nobody is asking you to be subtle. Make faults blindingly obvious so that a student can easily see them. Demonstrate only one fault at a time.

### Cause Properly Defined

Clearly explain what went wrong with the line, and what the rod tip did and why. Keep it simple and make sure you don't stray into trouble on casting mechanics. This will come back to bite you either immediately or in the Interview and Discussion Section. For example, see [creep](#) below.

### Correction Properly Defined

Describe a quick and simple caster, rod tip, line fix and cleanly and briefly demonstrate it. Then stop talking. The more different this "corrected cast" looks from your fault demo the better, which is another reason to make the faults obvious. A question to be ready for is "what else could you do to fix it?". Make sure you are ready with Plans B, C and D to fix the fault,



and make sure your game plans between all of them cover seeing, hearing and doing learning methods.<sup>152</sup>

#### Explanation Clear and Concise

Self-explanatory. This whole task should not take more than a minute or two unless you are asked follow-up questions.

#### Example – Poor Stop <sup>153</sup>

##### Proper Demonstration of Fault

*A PULD with no errors except a long, slow forward stop to the ground, ripping the loop open and causing the line and leader to land in a heap.*

Note: this is not the same thing as a too wide forward casting arc, which continues accelerating past the correct stop point at full speed.

##### Cause Properly Defined

*Pinch the line outside rod tip under rod hand. “As you saw my backcast arc (the angle I moved the butt through) was pretty much OK. Force on at 10:30 and a stop around 12:00.” Show them with the rod. “But coming forward, instead of stopping crisply at the same 10:30 position where I applied force going back and then drifting down, I faded straight forward to where the rod tip is almost on the ground, ripping the loop open and piling the cast.”*

##### Correction Properly Defined (and Demonstrated)

*“If I just stop at the 10:30 position and then drift down, the cast works.”*

Likely question: “How would you help a student make that correction?”

- *Watch the rod tip*
- *Student pantomimes with line pinched*
- *Gentle karate chop, hammer analogies*
- *Encourage student to move from shoulder, keeping bend at elbow*
- *After asking permission and touching the rod not the student, cast with them also holding the rod, starting with student as passenger and finishing with them driving over the course of several casts<sup>154</sup>*

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<sup>152</sup> What we mean is that Plans A, B, C and D together have at least one of each of the three teaching methods, not that they each do.

<sup>153</sup> Not on the MCI Exam.

<sup>154</sup> Dayle Mazarella, MCI progressively goes from the instructor doing 100% to student doing 100% over several casts together. Applicability of kinaesthetic methods are of course also dependent on public

## Demonstrating Water Faults<sup>155</sup>

*Single Spey cast with a bloody L or blown anchor.*

One way to demonstrate a bloody L is to start by applying a full force D Loop sweep directly upstream while your body is turning, instead of waiting until your body turn is complete before sweeping almost opposite your target. If this is all you do, you will have demonstrated an anchor which is too far upstream. To make the bloody L, make a pronounced dip when the rod passes your body then pull the rod back away from the target. The water will arrest the part of the line that hits it, and the momentum of the end of the line will carry it upstream to make the "L". Then attempt the cast and make sure the anchor fails to release properly. Explain this is why we don't want this fault.

A blown anchor is a delivery fault caused by too little anchor stick in relation to the forward casting force applied to it.<sup>156</sup> The anchor releases prematurely and slides up and backwards with a crackle or pop, ruining the cast and sometimes going in the bushes. Some of the causes of blown anchors include:

- Too steep a D loop sweep, making the anchor lie too vertically on the water;
- Premature forward cast not allowing the full anchor to touch down;
- Applying too much force on the forward delivery; and
- Placing the anchor too far back.

You'll have to experiment a bit to blow your anchors, but we favor the first two causes in combination. You ~~should probably~~ can try to land just the fly on the water before starting your forward cast.

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health and other issues. We suggest avoiding even this no-touch approach if you have any reason to think a student might be uncomfortable with it.

<sup>155</sup> The Water Tasks come first in the Teaching Section of the Exam so everyone can stay in their waders at the water location.

<sup>156</sup> We think of an anchor which fails to land properly as "skipped". Some of our colleagues also refer to these anchors as "blown". Ask your examiners if you have any questions.

*Snap C or Snap T cast (candidate choice), where anchor placement is too far upstream or downstream*

To put the anchor too far upstream, after turning the corner on the anchor placement sweep you can leave your arm and the rod pointing considerably more upstream of the required correct anchor placement rod position. See [Diagram U](#). We think the easiest way to demonstrate a bloody L is with an anchor too far upstream, making the D Loop sweep softly enough so it doesn't straighten the anchor. The other way to make a bloody L is to put the anchor more or less in the right place and sweep very slowly. The closer your anchor is to the correct position, the more risk there is of the sweep straightening out the anchor. To go too far downstream you might just aim the snap on your downstream side, effectively making the first bank/river/bank move of an off-shoulder snake roll, before sweeping back around to attempt to dangerously "cast across the anchor" from the upstream side and making a big tangle. Explain why both are faults.

#### Demonstrating Grass Faults – Reordered and Grouped

*Wide loop with convex fly leg due to a wide casting arc.*

You've already done it! See Performance Task 2.

*Fly leg curved horizontally due to poor tracking.*

One way to do it is to pronate (turn palm forward) on backcast, supinate (rotate palm back to face caster's head) on forward cast<sup>157</sup>.

You've already done the FC supination on the Collapsed Curve if you took [our advice on Task 7](#), so all you need to do is add the BC pronation, cycle the casts together and keep the line airborne with a flat trajectory.

*Tailing loop due to abrupt force application.*

The key to doing this well is remembering speed and force don't cause tails: you can cast as fast as you like and not make a tail if you are smooth and widen your arc - remember the CI Slow to Fast Task. Rather, the key is a sudden spike in force, and the best way to spike is to cast slowly, so that the force surge is a big contrast. This also helps your students to see the tail. A sudden thumb push is a really good way to create the force surge needed to bounce the rod tip up and down. Finally, if you feel like fine tuning, a slight out to in tracking error on a forward tail cast through supination will help prevent tangles by separating the rod and fly legs horizontally, allowing the tail to mature and be more easily seen.

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<sup>157</sup> Assuming a thumb on top grip or something close to it and a right-handed caster.

*Tailing loop created by an improper haul on the backcast.*

This Task is virtually identical to the one above, except the force surge [bouncing the rod tip](#) comes from the line hand not the rod hand and is required to be on the back cast. A short, quick, abrupt, and much too early tug will do the trick every time.

*Tailing loop preceded by creep.*

This is comfortably the trickiest Demonstration Task and needs close attention to definitions, casting mechanics and execution. Firstly, creep in and of itself is not a fault according to the FFI definitions. It is rod rotation in the direction of the next cast during the pause, whether good, [bad](#), or indifferent. Creep is rotational drag by another name. There are lots of times when (according to the FFI definitions) good casters creep on purpose.<sup>158</sup>

- Correcting for excess drift on the previous cast.
- Competition distance casters repositioning the rod and taking up slack after moving the rod to horizontal under force on the backcast.
- Casting with a strong tailwind.
- [Some casters' Circle Up moves in anchored casts.](#)

Secondly, creep alone does not cause tailing loops. Expert casters can deliberately creep horribly and throw good loops all day long. Please note that the name of creep related tail tasks has been changed to "tailing loop *preceded by creep*" in all four FFI Instructor Exams to make this lack of direct causation clearer. What creep (from an appropriate starting position) does do is rob the caster of arc, and as a result one of several bad things are more likely to happen. A tailing loop is one of them and is [often](#) caused when they apply a compensatory burst of force over a now too short arc (and probably too short a casting stroke too). To demo creep then tail, you simply need to follow the creep with your rod hand tail demo above - just throw in the same force spike. To demo the creep part, you need to bounce forward from the backcast stop position to almost the forward stop and slow down before throwing the tail. If you wait for the backcast to unroll you are likely to be too late moving forward. It is quite difficult to demonstrate creep without throwing in some translational drag too. You should not worry too much about this: we have never heard of an examiner calling out a candidate for accompanying a creep demonstration with some translational drag.

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<sup>158</sup> Do not assume your examiners necessarily agree with this definition of creep. Some of them may consider the term creep to mean only a casting error.

Finally, several candidates confuse creep with poor timing, specifically an early start. They are entirely different, as an early start is made under full force [before the loop unrolls](#) and causes a crack-the-whip effect<sup>159</sup> and a line collapse. It is in effect a very overpowered Snap Cast.

#### Give Examiner the Rod Method – Example – Roll Cast<sup>160</sup>

While you should of course have an SRP for all Teaching Tasks in your back pocket<sup>161</sup>, you would be in our view on very safe ground assuming an advanced student knows how to roll cast and are about as safe making that assumption about an intermediate student, who you are told is double hauling.

Greet the student, set the scene, and ask them to warm up and perform the cast when they are ready.

- If you don't see anything obvious, change position so you can see tracking clearly and ask them to please do the cast again. For example, [hooking](#) on a roll cast setup is a common fault, and it's hard to see side on; a shoulder swing on delivery isn't easy to see from the far side either. Try not to ask for too many repeats, though. It makes you look lost.
- Once they detect the fault(s)<sup>162</sup> many understandably anxious candidates then immediately blurt out the name of the fault in shorthand technical instructor-speak. We suggest you not do this. Remember your "student" is not an instructor.
- Instead, we prefer you act like you are teaching a real student: Pause. Pretend to think for a few seconds. The faster you speak, the more you convey to the student that he or she did something obviously very bad.<sup>163</sup> Say something nice about the student's casting.<sup>164</sup> Very gently ask if they mind if you make a small suggestion to improve it. Ask if they saw what the line did (if not, tell them) and explain why it was suboptimal. Then tell or show them what caused it and how to fix it, all in language a student will understand. Give them a quick simple drill

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<sup>159</sup> [Phil Ratcliffe MCI, THMCI calls this "lion taming"](#).

<sup>160</sup> Another example not on the MCI Exam.

<sup>161</sup> In case your examiners reject your plan to Give them the Rod and ask you for an SRP instead.

<sup>162</sup> As we said earlier, examiners are trained to demo one fault at a time. If you see more than one, start with the correction that makes the biggest difference and be prepared to justify your prioritization.

<sup>163</sup> We are aware that some teaching methods advocate an immediate stop at the first mistake. We think it's more important for our students to leave feeling good about themselves.

<sup>164</sup> See previous footnote. Sometimes this is very difficult! With an MCI casting, however, you are very likely to see a functional stance and grip and several solid elements of the cast.

if appropriate. Do not take the rod from the student unless you need to. Ask them to cast again incorporating the correction.

You should be able to do all this in a minute or two.

## Interview and Discussion Section (Section 3)

If you are in the I&D Section, congratulations! You are a good caster *and* teacher. You're on the home stretch and should be confident in your performance to this point. ***Risk management is now the name of the game. Play it safe and stay out of trouble.*** Most of the oral examinations we have seen spend a considerable amount of time on things the examiners picked up during the exam and wish to revisit or explore. A list of representative I&D questions can be found [here](#), but remember many are likely to be generated from your Exam.

Make sure you have a good understanding of and can explain casting mechanics. Here are some suggested [study and reading materials](#). Ensure you can respectfully defend your views. Be aware of the conflicting opinions and perspectives on fly casting. A very solid understanding of casting mechanics is one of the keys to staying out of trouble.

Know potentially controversial topics when you see them and exercise appropriate caution. Our views, which we consider well supported by empirical evidence, are in the footnotes, but do not assume all your examiners necessarily agree with us. Form your own views and make sure you can support them.

- "Rod loading": is the rod primarily a lever or a spring? <sup>165</sup>
- Does the anchor "load the rod" or prevent the leader and the end of the fly line from slipping up and backwards? <sup>166</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> A lever. See [Europe's Power Couple, The Loop, October 2019-February 2020](#). Interview with Lasse Karlsson MCI, THCI, L3 examiner and Silja Longhurst, CI, THMCI. Also see [The Rod & The Cast by Grunde Løvoll and Jason Berger MCI](#), where they say "the caster moving the rod is the primary generator of line speed, with the "spring component" being secondary", and conclude on the order of 80% or more of tip speed is due to the effect of the rod as a lever.

<sup>166</sup> The latter. Here is [an article by Aitor Coterón](#) which includes two of his best-known videos, where he filmed a roll cast on a smooth tiled floor. Also see Lasse Karlsson's comments in the Loop interview above. A couple of us saw Lasse win does the anchor load the rod argument in a beer hall during the EWF show in Germany by running out to his vehicle, returning with a practice rod, making a D Loop and as Aitor suggests in his subsequent article, asking a doubter whether he could feel anything when he held the anchor while Lasse walked the rod tip forward. It was quite a performance. Give it a try!

- Does a double haul work by bending the rod or accelerating the line toward the target? <sup>167</sup>
- Do you lower the rod to fight a powerful fish in order to “bend it in the [thicker] butt section” or to reduce the leverage/torque the fish applies to *you* by shortening the effective rod length? <sup>168</sup>
- Does the line *always* “follow the rod tip”? <sup>169</sup>

Examiners are not meant to ask a lot of questions during the Performance Section in particular, and often save them for the I&D Section. Therefore, not digging yourself holes with extraneous-unnecessary strong opinions earlier in the Exam is important.<sup>170</sup> Using words like “always” and “never” is rarely a good idea as it is a very good way to provoke examiners into presenting you with counterexamples. Neither is saying the uses of, or reasons for things “*are XYZ*”, implying that your list is complete, in both cases almost begging an examiner to say, “what about this?”. It’s safer to avoid definitive statements and to say uses or causes “*include XYZ*”, and then thanking your examiner for adding to the list if they do so.

Expect follow up questions to test your depth of knowledge. Saying you don't know is vastly preferable to guessing, but make sure to outline how you would go about finding the right answer. Thoroughly study flycasting and how to teach it, but as Lasse Karlsson, MCI, THMCI, Bruce Richards, MCI and others say, question everything you read or see. Be ready to answer questions on individual and group teaching scenarios.

Read widely on fly fishing for unfamiliar species, but don’t be afraid to say you aren’t an expert. There is nothing wrong with telling an examiner if a student asked you, you would phone around, do some research, and get back to them. If you do, however say that you are an expert at fishing for something or do it a lot, then detailed questions are fair game.

<sup>167</sup> The latter. See Lasse Karlsson’s comments in the Loop interview above [and this video by Mark Surtees](#).

<sup>168</sup> The latter. See Lasse Karlsson’s comments in the Loop interview above, *The Technology of Fly Rods*, Don Phillips, pp. 47-49 on effective rod length and *Fish On!*, Floyd Franke, pp. 43-44.

<sup>169</sup> No. See Aitor Coterón, [Follow Me Please, The Loop, March 2018, p.10](#), and please watch [this video again](#). Questions your examiners might ask if you claim the line “always” follows the tip include how a loop could form without an accordion-like line/tip collision and how snap casts work.

<sup>170</sup> “I make sure to ask my mentees to explain things they’ve said that I know they can’t. They quickly get the point and are a bit gun shy afterwards...” Bruce Richards to one of the authors, 2022.

## MCI Exam Day Strategy and Tactics

### Before Exam Day

You should be well aware of the teaching and writings of FFI notables over the years. We pride ourselves on giving candidates the same Exam experience around the world, regardless of the personal views of examiners, who have all been thoroughly trained through our EDP Program. That being said, we still think it is a good idea to research your examination team. Look into backgrounds, qualifications, writing and videos. It is a good idea to have an idea of their outlooks before you start offering views or they begin asking you questions.<sup>171</sup> You can also make a good impression by for example referring to some of their work when you are introduced.

Scout out the location. Directions. Parking. Restrooms. Food and drink. Grass area: sun, background, shelter from wind. Get in the water and get used to wading conditions, depth and current or lack thereof. Remember to stay as shallow as you can. Spey casting on still and moving water is very different. Don't get caught out if you weren't practicing on the kind of water you are being examined on. Make a plan for every cast in every possible wind direction in the water but be flexible in case the location changes at the last minute. Check the wind speed *and direction* forecast for Exam Day.

Don't hesitate to start your line across the current or even directly upstream<sup>172</sup> if the wind is a problem. You can also cast onto the bank if you don't have access to the bank a cast requires.

Make sure you check and clean your equipment thoroughly beforehand. You should do your best to position yourself to withstand breakages. Jim Schneider MCI points out that it is a good idea to have backup line(s), rod, and of course tippet and fluff handy.<sup>173</sup> Jim and others like Leslie Holmes MCI, THMCI also suggest keeping your leaders stretched if you can get them to the Exam site without rolling them up again.

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<sup>171</sup> Examiners should not hold well and respectfully defended views they may not agree with against you, but situational awareness is still highly advisable!

<sup>172</sup> But don't wait around if you do position the line upstream, as slack will quickly become a problem.

<sup>173</sup> We appreciate the cost implications of the first part of this suggestion. If it's problematical, it is a good time to ask friends for loaners. The chances of your examiners having some kit with them are good, but it might not be what you've been practicing with.



## Exam Day

Make sure you get there early to set up and warm up. Assume your examiners are watching you as soon you arrive and behave accordingly. Examiners relate well to friendly, courteous, professional, humble, and non-argumentative candidates. Show them you will be a good colleague.

Give the examiners space before the Exam. They often need to meet to get their act together, especially at events when several Exams are being given. Just say a friendly, professional, and confident hello, make sure you know where to be when, and create some distance.

Sort your equipment out the night before. Clean the fly line, add and stretch new leader and tie on new fluff. Our personal advice is to string up out of the examiners' sight. We think nervous fumbling, missing rings etc. is not a good look. Make sure you don't miss any.

## Setting the Casting Course

Candidates sometimes are shown an already set course and are reluctant to change it. Don't be. **Do not settle for anything other than exactly what you want**, including types of cones and their placement (subject to Exam stipulations). If you want to use your own gear, say so. If you set up your own course, walk through it with the examiners. If they set it up for you, have them walk you through it. Pay careful attention to background and wind. Make very sure you can see your front and back loops. We have all seen candidates do things like make accuracy casts into a low sun and set the tape to create unhelpful winds. Don't make it harder than it needs to be.

## Wind Direction on Grass

Getting this right is critical. The range of sensible directions is pretty much in one quadrant: directly into the non-casting shoulder (90 degrees to tape) to almost directly behind the caster (say 5 or so degrees to the tape), with some candidates choosing a quartering wind of around 45 degrees. You must choose a direction you are comfortable with but think it through beforehand. Remember you can (and should) cast in different directions for different tasks.

Advantages of a straight sidewind of 90 degrees (generally our preferred alternative):

- The wind affects both forward and back casts equally;
- Less risk of feeling you must hit your backcast into the wind, lowering the risk of tails and box loops<sup>174</sup>;
- Easy to replicate wind condition off-shoulder: just turn 180 degrees. We have seen several candidates with a behind and quartering wind unable to figure out in which direction to make offside casts to replicate that wind direction and make poor choices as a result;<sup>175</sup> and
- If you think you need any kind of a tailwind to throw 85 feet, your technique needs work.

#### Disadvantages of a 90-degree sidewind

- Accuracy casts blown more sideways; and
- Makes some curved presentations harder, but you can always turn: there is no rule saying all casts must be in the same direction.

### During the Exam

Trust your training and preparation and try as much as possible to relax. Your examiners know most candidates will start off a bit nervous and will do their best to help you over any initial butterflies. They will first run you through how your assessment will work, as they do with all FFI Exams.

Exhibit a positive, can do, confident, and keen to learn attitude, and perform tasks as directed by your assessors without arguing. Do not however be afraid to politely and respectfully defend (i) a point of view; or (ii) your interpretation of a task instruction which is clearly stated on the Exam paper.

Don't hesitate to call for a break, including during a task if you need a moment to collect your thoughts.<sup>176</sup>

Unless you need to say something, don't. Avoid volunteering things and offering gratuitous opinions. They can come back to bite you hard, especially in the Interview

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<sup>174</sup> Ugly down and back up line angle changes in the rod leg caused by counterflex after an overpowered cast.

<sup>175</sup> The general offside adjustment rule is to turn toward and then through the wind direction by twice your onside wind to tape angle. For a 90-degree wind into non-casting shoulder onside, turn 180 degrees for offside casts; for a 45-degree wind turn 90 degrees; with a 15-degree wind turn 30 degrees, etc.

<sup>176</sup> Most examiners, however, are likely to take a dim view of a candidate calling a break after a cast which does not meet expectations to repeatedly practice it before resuming. A mid-task break should probably not involve any casting.

and Discussion Section. Use as few words as possible when answering questions. Answers should be concise and accurate. If your examiners want more, they will ask. It's a good idea to make sure you are clear with your examiners whether you are answering or speaking as you would to a student or to another instructor.

## Do-Overs

In our experience most do-overs result from examiners seeing something that does not meet Task requirements.

Think very hard about what the problem might be before casting again, and carefully mentally review the Task scoring boxes, which contain many of the most common problems candidates encounter. If, however, you are sure you made a good cast just relax and do it again.

Listen closely and be very attentive to direct and indirect hints from the examiners. They can't tell you how to fix things, but they can sometimes give prompts or ask helpful questions.<sup>177</sup> For example, any of "how might you fix a student's wide backcast", "what is good tracking-~~is~~" or a reminder of a task expectation, followed by a repeat request should be sending you a very loud and clear message about what the examiners want to see done differently.

## Mistakes

We all from time to time make truly horrible casts which fail entirely. If this happens, you can deploy your sense of humor and proactively turn it into a teaching moment.

Let's suppose you do an over-caffeinated anchor placement sweep on a double Spey and put the anchor point far upstream of you. You could quickly explain:

- The fault you inadvertently demonstrated;
- Why the result is in this case both ineffective and dangerous;
- What escape routes you might advise a proficient student to use to salvage the cast (wait for current to bring line down, cast at a target further upstream, Circle C and recast, or just reload, etc.); and
- What you need to do to correct the original mistake.
- Then do the cast again properly.

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<sup>177</sup> We are trained to do this less in master level exams than in entry level exams, so don't count on being told what's wrong.

As John Clark MCI, THCI says: “you can teach your way out of a bad cast, but you can’t cast your way out of bad teaching”.

A word of warning: do not employ this proactive “my mistake” strategy or even think about casting again without being asked to unless you are absolutely 101% positive you made an unacceptable cast. Often examiners aren’t immediately sure whether they will accept a cast or not and need a bit of time to think and/or confer. A candidate embarking on an unprompted do-over removes all doubt and can annoy examiners [trying to run their assessment process](#). The disaster scenario you are trying to avoid is that you in effect sabotage and discard an imperfect but passing cast, and then follow it with some that are much worse. This is shooting yourself in both feet.

### After the Exam

Some of the FFI’s most able and experienced instructors have spent a lot of time watching very carefully and taking extensive notes on your performance. This is a gold mine of information that you should take advantage of, win, lose or draw.

If you passed, you should make every effort to get feedback while the team is still there, and their memories are fresh. Follow up emails are nice but having them show you is even better. Some examiners are a bit reluctant to point out things passing candidates can improve on for fear of raining on their parade. So just ask. A simple thanks and I’d love to know what I can do better will usually produce great detailed feedback and make you even better. It also makes a very good impression.

If you did not pass, first please make every effort to behave professionally and rein in your disappointment. Angry outbursts will not help your reputation with folks who will hopefully before too long be your MCI colleagues.

It is in our view even more important for disappointed candidates to try to get quality feedback either on the spot or after a short decompression period while your examiners are still around. While the temptation to give the examiners a piece of your mind, slam the car trunk and roar off in a cloud of dust may be strong, you’ll never have a better opportunity to get quality feedback to help you get over the line next time. It may not always be easy, but please take advantage of it!

**Tight lines and Good Luck!**

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John Clark, MCI, THCI  
Brian Henderson, MCI, THMCI  
Dominic Hewitt, CI  
Mark Surtees, MCI

Comments or questions should be directed to the Exam Committee Chair (currently [sekhar.bahadur@gmail.com](mailto:sekhar.bahadur@gmail.com)), copying [casting@flyfishersinternational.org](mailto:casting@flyfishersinternational.org) please.

~~August 11~~ March 9, 2023

## Appendices

### Anchored Cast Definitions and Terminology

- **Touch and Go Anchor:** An anchor which is aligned to the target while the line is entirely airborne, and which then briefly touches the water before the delivery cast. Also referred to as an **Aerialised** or **Splash and Go Anchor**. The **D Loop** in a **Touch and Go Anchor Cast** is also formed when the line is entirely in the air.
- **Anchor:** The leader or fly line and leader (**Point P** to the fly) in contact with the water.
- **Anchor Point:** The tip of the fly line (line-leader connection).
- **Anchor Placement Sweep.** The first step in a two-stage **Waterborne Anchor Cast** used to reposition the anchor. This movement may be a “flop” (which does not create a loop) or a “snap”, which does.
- **Dangle.** Static position of the fly line directly downstream at the end of a cast and swing in moving water.
- **D Loop:** A round-shaped back loop of line between the rod tip and the anchor. Also used in the MCI Exam and elsewhere as a general description of a back loop without regard to its shape or size. Candidates are **not** required to produce any particular back loop shape on the MCI Exam.
- **D Loop Sweep.** Forms the D Loop, either in the second sweep stage of a **Waterborne Anchor Cast** or in the single sweep stage of a **Touch and Go Anchor Cast**.
- **V Loop:** A wedge-shaped back loop of line between the rod tip and the anchor. Candidates are **not** required to produce any particular back loop shape on the MCI Exam.
- **Point P:** The location where the fly line or leader leaves the water surface. Point P moves during the casting sequence, as well as during the initial lift.
- **Downstream Wind:** air moving in the same direction as the water.
- **Upstream Wind:** air moving in the opposite direction as the water.
- **Left Bank / River Left** <sup>178</sup> : The left bank of the river when facing downstream.
- **Right Bank / River Right:** The right bank of the river when facing downstream.

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<sup>178</sup> The banks are sometimes referred to in the UK as “true” left or right bank.

- **Waterborne Anchor:** An anchor aligned on the water to the target. Also referred to as a **Sustained Anchor**. In a **Waterborne Anchor Cast** the D Loop is also formed when part of the line is on the water.
- **90-Degree Line:** An imaginary line centered on the caster and perpendicular (90 degrees) to the target direction.
- **180 Degree Principle<sup>179</sup>:** The anchor, D Loop and the forward cast are all in 180 degree alignment to the target.

### Types of Anchored Casts

- **Roll Cast:**  
A cast made by the rod dragging the line back to form a shallow D Loop with the forward cast having an aerial loop. *NOTE:* Effective to remove slack, to raise a sunken line to the surface prior to starting a cast, and to present a fly without a back cast or in confined spaces.
- **Switch Cast:**  
A **touch and go** anchor cast with no change of direction; formed by lifting and sweeping the line back above the surface and repositioning into an energized D Loop, followed by an aerial forward loop. *NOTE:* Also known as a Jump Roll or Live Line Roll Cast. This is an essential cast for learning lift movements, anchor points and energized D Loop formations.
- **Single Spey Cast:**  
A **touch and go** anchor change-of-direction cast that positions the anchor and D Loop to the upstream side of the caster in a continuous motion, and is safe to use with an upstream wind.
- **Double Spey Cast:**  
A waterborne anchor change-of-direction cast performed in two stages that positions the anchor and D Loop to the downstream side of the caster. Is safe to use with a downstream wind, including when using a sinking line.
- **Snake Roll Cast:**  
A **touch and go** anchor change-of-direction cast, utilizing a circular rod motion to reposition the anchor, and which forms the D Loop to the downstream side of the caster. Is safe to use with a downstream wind.
- **Snap T / Circle C Cast:**  
A waterborne anchor change-of-direction cast performed in stages which

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<sup>179</sup> Sometimes referred to as The Three Rules of Roll, Switch and Spey Casting.

positions the anchor and D Loop on the upstream side of the caster. Is safe with an upstream wind, including when using a sinking-tip.

### Spey Casts Table

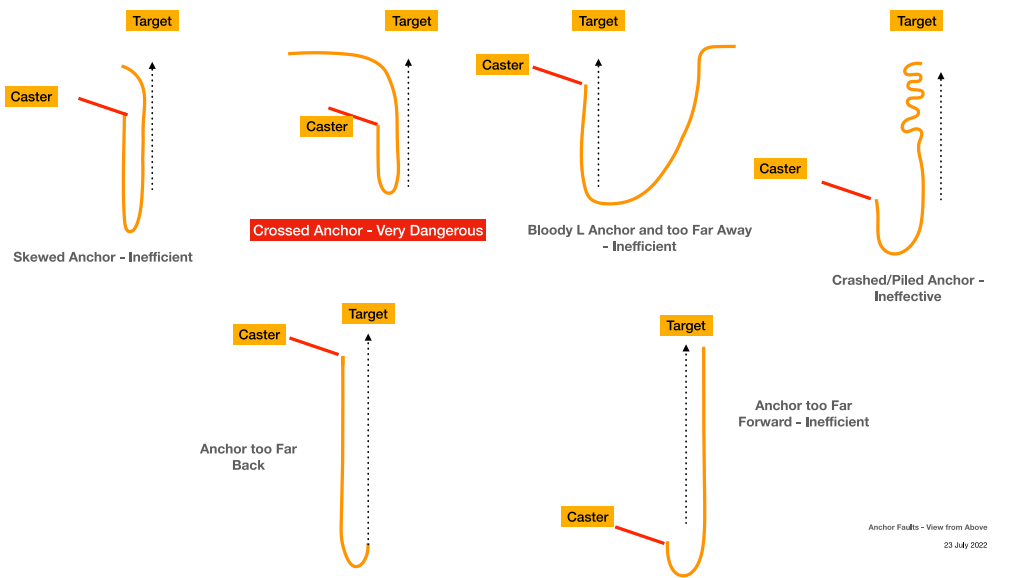
Cast	Anchor Type	Wind	Advantages and Disadvantages
Single Spey	Touch and Go	Upstream or neutral	Fast and quiet. Harder to make large direction changes, cast heavy things.
Snap/Circle Spey	Waterborne	Upstream or neutral	Relatively easy to learn. Good for casting heavy things (esp. Circle Spey). Slower and noisier.
Snake Roll	Touch and Go	Downstream or neutral	Fast and quiet. Not ideal for casting heavy things.
Double Spey	Waterborne	Downstream or neutral	Relatively easy to learn. Good for casting heavy things. Slower and noisier.

### Anchored Cast Faults

- **Misplaced anchors.**
  - o Too far forward, back, upstream, or downstream.
- **Too much fly line in anchor.** **Line stick** often refers to poor timing, **Level Line Drop** to a rod tip path which does not curve sufficiently upwards in the D Loop sweep, or **dips** and deposits fly line on the water. This can result in a **piled** or **crashed anchor** with cast killing slack.
- **Misaligned anchors**
  - o **Bloody L.** A right-angle kink in the anchor pointing perpendicular to the cast direction. Inefficient and likely a cast killer.
  - o **Skewed anchor.** An anchor which points away from the target. Inefficient and possibly dangerous if pointed toward the caster.
  - o **Crossed anchor.** An anchor which crosses in front of the caster on the opposite side from the D loop. Most dangerous anchor fault with a high risk of the fly hooking the caster.



Diagram Y – Anchor Faults – View from Above



- **D Loop Faults**

- **Hooking.** Lateral over-rotation in the D Loop sweep resulting in the D Loop behind the caster and pointed across the target line.
- **Trunking.** Backward over-rotation in the final stages of the D Loop sweep resulting in line being deposited on the water behind the caster.

Diagram Z – Anchors and D Loops - The Good on the Left, Bad and Ugly on Right

