

Tips for Teaching Basic Casts

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GENERAL REMINDERS

1. The 5-30-75% rule

It's been said that students retain 5% of what they hear, 30% of what they see, and 75% of what they do. Is that true? Probably not, but maybe it's close. If it's even close, it's important. Make the lessons as "hands-on" as you can, and refrain from taking the rod from them. Remember: No two students learn the same way.

2. The importance of leaving them alone and being positive

PPL – **Praise, Prompt, and Leave!** This is even more important, as it affects their desire and motivation as well as their ability. It's easy to do some unintentional damage here and end up discouraging rather than encouraging. Avoid the words "don't" and "but" in your lessons. Use instead "Good -- Next time what I'd like you to try is . . ." Tell students what you want them to do, not what you don't want them to do.

3. Style vs. Substance – what is important (e.g. mechanics) vs. what is not (stance, grip, casting plane, etc.).

4. The importance of having fun!!

Both you, and the students, should be enjoying this! If either party is not, you might ask yourself if there is something that you could be doing differently.

THE PULD CAST (Pick Up and Lay Down)

First: Tell them why this is important. What benefits does it offer? How is it used in fishing?

(It's quick; it's relatively easy; you can use it to straighten the line; to change direction; it's a "foundational" cast (it forms the basis of a lot of things they will learn later). All fly fishers use it, and use it often, to get the fly to the fish in a hurry.

Components: (1) Starting position (remove slack, rod tip down); (2) slow pick up until (...when?); (3) smooth acceleration to (4) abrupt stop; (5) pause; (6) drop elbow (slow pull) and smoothly accelerate forward; (7) abrupt stop; (8) follow it down.

Analogies: Flicking an apple off a stick, answering the phone ("clear to the ear"), flicking water off a paintbrush, a fly swatter, hammering a nail into a wall (not into a table!); water in the gorilla's face; food fight (good for kids).

Tips, Techniques, and Drills: Actually flick water off a real paintbrush; use a "proxy" for the rod to stop and look at the casting hand in mid-cast; tuck the rod handle into the shirt sleeve; use a rubber or Velcro band; cast with hand in front of face; turn the rod upside down with reel against forearm; cast with finger on top rather than thumb; have instructor physically stop the rod in front and in back using his/her hand; have student cast in a horizontal plane so she/he can see the line better; pantomime with a handle.

THE FALSE CAST

First: Tell them why this is important. What benefits does it offer? How is it used in fishing?

(It's faster than retrieving the line and recasting each time; change of direction; changing your mind; drying off your fly; measuring / gauging the distance to your target; extending and retrieving line).

Components: All of the above, except that in step (8), instead of following the line down to the water/grass, you return to step (3), smoothly accelerating back again to the full back stop.

Analogies, Techniques, Drills: Exactly as for the PULD above

THE ROLL CAST

First: Tell them why this is important. What benefits does it offer? How is it used in fishing?

(Easiest way to get rid of slack before a cast; avoids obstacles in their backcast; can be used to unhook a snagged fly; good if you have a tail wind; can be used to lift and a sinking line or heavy streamer prior to the cast). It's a very helpful cast that we all use in actual fishing situations.

Components: (1) Starting position (remove slack, rod tip down, line in front of you); (2) slow drag line off to the side and back and up; (3) raise rod so that handle is ~ ear level; (4) rod remains canted to the side more so than in a PULD; (5) line is dropping behind you to form a D-Loop, with anchor in front; (6) drop elbow and accelerate to an abrupt stop (where?); (7) allow line to roll out and follow it down to the water.

Analogies: Narrow gauge railroad tracks – the line is coming in on the outer track and going back out on the inner track.

Tips, Techniques, and Drills: On grass, use a “roll cast tool” of some sort (grooved stick, clip board, etc. – see mine for one example). Try stopping at different heights on the forward stop to get more narrow vs more open loops on the forward cast. (Why is that important?).

Helpful for you (but not necessarily for the students) to know are the “five essential casting mechanics:”

1. **Slack** has to be minimized at all times. Slack is the enemy of a good cast.
2. **Force** (= Power) must be applied at the right time and in the right amount in the casting stroke (easier said than done . . .), and always smoothly!! Always start slow, moving faster and faster until the abrupt stop.
3. The **Casting Arc** (sometimes called the rod angle) has to change with the amount of line that is out.
4. The **Pause** has to change in duration according to how much line is being cast.
5. The **Path of the Rod Tip** determines the shape of the loop; a Straight Line Path of the rod tip results in a narrow loop of the fly line.

Helpful in analyzing someone else's cast (or your own) is “Bruce Richards' 6 Step Method,” as follows:

1. What is the line doing? (example: It is traveling in a very wide loop)
2. What is the rod doing to cause that? (example: the rod is traveling through a wide casting arc)
3. What is the caster's body doing to cause this? (example: the caster is not stopping his arm soon enough)
4. What can the caster do to correct this? (example: The caster needs to stop his arm earlier)
5. What does the rod do now? (example: Now the rod is traveling through a more narrow arc)
6. What is the line doing as a result of that? (example: Now the line is rolling out in a more narrow loop)

So you go 1-2-3 What is the line, then the rod, then the body doing? And then you correct it by going in reverse, 3-2-1 (or rather, 4-5-6): Correct the body motion (4), which corrects the rod motion (5), which corrects the line movement (6).

Let me know if I can help you in any way! Remember, keep it fun for the students! If you are relaxed and enjoying it, they will be too. Thanks for coming out today. JM

Based on feedback I got from the Santa Clarita class in October of 2021 more great tips added to my “Tips for Teaching Basic Casts” added below:

- Remember to remove your sunglasses when teaching to make yourself more approachable and less intimidating to the students.
- Video (which we all have on our smart phones) can be a fantastic tool to show students what they are actually doing (as opposed to what they think they might be doing).
- “Accelerating to a stop” can be easily misunderstood; most of us think of accelerating as simply “flooring it,” going as fast as we can right from the start. Perhaps a better term is “progressive speed,” emphasizing that you start slowly and speed up gradually so that your greatest speed is right before the stopping point.
- Having the students cast in a horizontal plane, so that they can see all aspects of the cast (what happens when the rod stops, how the size of the loop changes, how the line follows the rod tip, etc.), can be very helpful.
- Trajectory was not mentioned by me today and is a helpful concept. The trajectory can be upward, downward, or completely level, while still maintaining a “straight line path” of the rod tip.
- “Self discovery” – allowing the students to learn and correct and get it right on their own – is going to have a longer-lasting impact than having us correct them; be sure to give them plenty of time for this (harking back to the PPL mentioned on page one).

Some articles that I thought were good about casting: (each one also filed separately in my casting files on my laptop).

1. Todd Tanner, in Hatch Magazine (April, 2019):

Fly Casting for Beginners: 5 things you need to know to improve your casting

https://www.hatchmag.com/articles/fly-casting-beginners/7714801?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=weekly

2. John Juracek, in Hatch Magazine (December, 2016):

Do You Have a Casting Style, or Just Flawed Technique?

<https://www.hatchmag.com/articles/do-you-have-casting-style-or-just-flawed-technique/7714238>