

## HOW TO MAKE A FLY ROD WORK FOR YOU!!

By William T. Mangan (FFI) Certified Fly Casting Instructor

Part 1:

My passion for Fly Fishing has been a marvelous journey. For me it started in the early 80's when I saw a gentleman Fly Fishing for Blue Gills, on a Canal in Harrison Twp Mi. While watching him cast the fly, I knew I had to try it. Little did I know that day would be the start of a lifelong passion.

I well remember the first cast I made, making that fly line move felt magical and it still does to this day. It was in the front yard of a fellow who gave me a casting lesson for \$25.00, I was hooked instantly. After that day I was self taught until nearing my retirement from the real world. I then became involved with International Federation of Fly Fishers (IFFF), which has since changed to the Fly Fishers International (FFI).

I taught family and friends what I could about Fly Casting, but I wanted to be better at it. So with help from many (FFI) Instructors, who I cannot thank enough, I was able to hone my Fly Casting skills and become a (FFI) Certified Fly Casting Instructor, which helped me turn my passion into a business.

Knowing what I know now, I would have greatly shortened my learning curve, had I sought help earlier from a knowledgeable instructor. There are many excellent Fly Casting Instructors out there and I recommend you seek them out. Personally, I found that the (FFI) was an excellent fit for me.

I believe the best place to practice fly casting is on the grass, not the water. Although I have a pond in my backyard, when I teach fly casting at my house I teach on the grass. When first learning to cast or hone your rod hand skills, it is best not to use both your hands. Keep the line held/pinched, between the forefingers and your rod handle during the casting strokes. For clarification the rod hand is the hand used to hold the rod and the line hand is the hand used to hold the line.

Once the 5 Essentials are learned, I introduce the line hand, which is needed for more advanced Casts & Mends.

Fly casting is all about controlling the loop, and there are four basic loops:

- **NARROW LOOP:** Candy cane or v- shaped loop, which are approximately 4 foot or less wide, due to a straight line path (SLP) of the rod tip. **See Fig 1.**
- **WIDE LOOP:** 4 foot or wider open loop, due to a convex path to the rod tip. **See Fig 2.**
- **TRAILING LOOP:** Straight or upward curving of top (fly) leg that, due to gravity, falls below the bottom (rod) leg. **See Fig 3.**
- **TAILING LOOP:** Top (fly) leg and bottom (rod) leg of the fly line crosses over each other, due to a concave path of rod tip. **See Fig 4.**
- **FLY LEG:** Usually, **but not always**, the top leg of a casting loop. **Always** the leg to which the fly is attached **See Fig 1.**
- **ROD LEG:** Usually, **but not always**, the bottom leg of the casting loop. **Always** the leg that extends directly from the rod. **See Fig 1.**

Most Casters have thrown a Tailing Loop, which is never a good. The line tangles and forms what is called a wind knot. Tailing loops cause wind knots, not the wind. Don't confuse Tailing Loop with Trailing Loop, a Trailing Loop is a perfectly good loop.

During the cast the line always follows the path the fly rod tip travels. If the rod tip travels in a straight path you will have a narrow tighter loop. If the rod tip travels in a convex or dome shape you will get a wider open loop. If the rod tip travels in a concave path you will end up with a tailing loop.

"In my opinion any cast is good, as long as you are controlling the outcome of the loop formation with the fly rod correctly, and not by accident". With the accomplish the 5 Essentials, not only will you have the ability to make the rod tip to travel in a Straight Line Path, casting good aerodynamic and narrow loops, you will be able to control any loop shape you desire.

Now there will be times when you may not want to throw a tight loop. For example when you are casting a weighted fly, in which case you would want a more open loop. Casting a narrow loop, with a weighted fly, you risk hitting the fly rod with the fly, which can damage or even break your fly rod.



Fig. 1. Narrow loop, due to near SLP of the rod tip, which is a good aerodynamic loop. Top (Fly) Leg and Bottom (Rod) Legs are close to parallel.



Fig. 2. Wide loop, due to a convex (domed) shape rod tip travel.



**Fig. 3. Trailing loop, top leg of fly line, due to gravity, falls below the bottom leg. Perfectly good loop!!**



**Fig. 4. Tailing loop, due to concave path of the rod tip, top and Bottom legs of fly line cross over each other. Tailing loops cause "Wind Knots".**

Everyone is physically built different, and when we cast we cannot all move exactly the same, we all have our individual style. The one thing that is always the same is the mechanics/physics of how a fly rod works. These 5 Essentials are the basis of how a fly rod reacts when casting.

### **5 ESSENTIALS of FLY CASTING**

There are very few original ideas in casting. (FFI) Master Fly Casting Instructor Bill Gammel and his father Jay compiled popular fly casting concepts, establishing the 5 Essentials. and many experts consider them to be the model for teaching basic fly casting.

I use the acronym **S.C.A.P.S.** to remind me of the 5 Essentials:

- **S** (Slack)
- **C** (Casting Arc)
- **A** (Acceleration))
- **P** (Pause)
- **S** (SLP) Straight Line Path of the Rod Tip

## #1 ESSENTIAL (SLACK)

Slack is the number one enemy of Fly Casting. Slack must be kept to a minimum or better yet eliminated all together throughout the entire casting stroke, both on the forward and back cast, during the application of power.

When the line is under tension the rod is (loaded). A loaded rod simply means that it is bent. Here is a good example of how a loaded rod works. Hold the rod firmly, by the handle with two hands, at approximately a 45 degree angle to the ground. Now have a friend walk away from you, while holding onto the end of the fly line, until the rod is bent (loaded) and the line is taut. Now without you doing anything but holding steady on the bent rod have your friend let go of the end of the line.

The bent rod will unload, straighten, pulling the fly line behind it. When the rod tip stops the fly line will continue over the rod tip forming a loop. This simple exercise demonstrates how the rod does all the work. The caster simply has to learn how to control the movement of the rod and its stop. This is a little more complicated than it sounds but once you learn the 5 Essentials it won't be!

How is eliminating slack accomplished? First, every cast starts with an initial pickup of the line, and before you can make the pickup YOU must make the fly move. When slack is eliminated out of the fly line, the second you move the rod tip you are moving the fly and the rod will start to load. There should be NO slack in the line from the fly to the rod hand. Remember to keep the line between the forefingers of your rod hand and the handle.

When starting the pickup, especially critical with longer line, keep the rod tip low, within a few inches from the grass/water. The lower you keep the rod tip, the better the chance of eliminating slack before the rod reaches the start of the casting arc needed.

There are many ways to eliminate slack before the initial pickup. If you are casting on the grass, keep the rod tip low, walk backwards until the line is taut, no slack. If standing in a stream, let the current pull the line downstream until it is taut. You can pull the line towards you, thru the rod guides, until you have eliminated the slack. Or make slow steady back and forth movements (big wiggles) with the fly rod, keeping the rod tip low, until you are making the fly move, the rod is now loaded and you can initiate the pickup.

When I'm fly fishing I like to either make a roll cast or snake roll to eliminate slack. The roll cast is the first cast I teach, after the 5 Essentials are learned, You can fish all day just using the roll cast or use it to get the line airborne, eliminating slack, to make the next cast.

Slack must also be eliminated throughout the entire acceleration/power stage of the cast, if it is introduced, the rod will prematurely unloads. Depending on when and where slack occurs, problems will occur, which will be covered with the other Essentials.

Most of us get into fly fishing for the fun and relaxation the sport offers. I have fished with and guided fly fishers who's casting ability was limited, yet they had a great time. Everyone has their own level of what makes the experience enjoyable and that's the most important part. That being said, if you want to become a better fly caster you should practice fly casting at home, and not wait until your fishing trip.

See you with the next Essential!!!

Enjoy and tight lines,

Bill

About the Author: Bill is the owner/operator of Mangans Cast a Fly, a (FFI) Certified Fly Casting Instructor and Michigan DNR Certified Fly Fishing Guide. Please check out his website:  
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