

Fly Casting – Purpose to Your Practice

When I help people with their casting, the question often arises about why, when, how and what to practice. Practice is an important part of becoming a good caster and being a skilled caster is going to help you become a more effective fisherman. I know that there is a certain amount of serendipity to fishing and that your casting skills don't always mean you're going to catch more fish. We've all heard stories or experienced ourselves that nice fish that was caught when your line was dangling in the water while you were fussing with tackle.

Good casting skills increase your ability to fish in places where poor casting skills would prevent you from considering or in environmental situations that would make you decide to quit and go home. Fish tend to be in places that are inconvenient to fishermen, tucked close to a river bank under an overhanging branch, in a pocket of water behind a rock with a couple of different currents around it, or near a small hole in the lily pads. If you are able to control your line properly, direct the fly to a target and present it accurately, you increase your odds of hooking a fish.

Now that we know why we need to practice, we need to answer when we practice. I think that we should look at every casting moment as a practice opportunity. Thinking about practicing may seem to be difficult during the excitement of fishing, but when is it more interesting to practice, than when you're doing what you love? Each cast that you take is worthy of evaluation; what did I do right? What can I change to make that last cast better? Thinking about practicing while you're fishing can also make a slow fishing day a little bit more entertaining.

When fishing isn't your practice option, there's always outside on the lawn. Unless you've got a large yard or you're going to practice close accuracy casts, you should try to find a patch of grass that allows you room to stretch. One time when I was working with Bill Gammel, he was observing the quality of my 60' double haul. He said that he can always tell how big a person's backyard is by the quality of their cast. It's usually best to the maximum size of the lawn. Then it goes to hell pretty quickly. Ouch! But it was true. I had a great 60 foot double hauled cast, but I really struggled at 65 feet and beyond.

Find a nearby park and practice there. Besides giving yourself plenty of space to work, you're bound to attract an occasional observer and spark some interest in fly fishing. They're always interested in the quality of the fishing and what you're catching.

Finally, down to the "what" and "how" of practicing. It's important to have some purpose or focus to your casting practice. Casting practice without some focus can lead to a situation of not much learned and the creation of some bad casting habits. Decide what you want to work on, maybe tightening your loops, casting to targets at varying distances or improving your distance cast. For the things that you choose to practice, focus on the principles that you've learned or know, and work on improving with those principles in mind. Bring a friend along and have them make observations of your casts to guide you in the adjustments that you need to make.

For example, if you work on distance practice, move in small increments. Don't rip all of the line from the reel and start trying to cast the entire line. For men, testosterone can lead to some really horrible distance casts and a lot of frustration. Start with a small length of line which you know that you can cast good tight loops. Then strip another foot or two of line and cast that until your loops are nice and tight. Try to build muscle memory for each length of line. When you reach a length of line where your cast starts to fall apart, don't go to the next length of line, back up and analyze what's different between the successful cast and the cast that has given you trouble. This is where the friend comes in handy. When you start to tire out or your casting starts to fall apart, it's probably time to call it quits for the day.