

## A Lexicon of Fly Fishing Terminology

Every sport seems to have it's own secret code, and whether you are new to fly fishing or a veteran of many years, the terms we use in this sport are both ever changing and at times a bit confusing. We speak our own language. Before you run out and buy your own copy of "Fly Fishing for Dummies", I have gone through mine and maybe can help with an understanding of a few of the more common secret code words used in this sport. Here are just a few of these...

### The Code of the Cast

**Loading the Rod** - The weight of the aerialized fly line and the motion of both the back and forward cast cause the rod to load or bend. The bend or load enables the rod to store the energy necessary to make the cast when the rod is abruptly stopped.

**Backcast** - The first part of the cast in which the fly fisher aerializes the fly line by casting it to the rear. Not only does the backcast set up the forward cast, I would rate it at 75% of the total cast. Simply stated, of the two motions, back and forward, the backcast is the most important.

**Forward Cast** - The forward cast is the second part of the cast. The forward cast directs the fly toward the objective setting in motion the variables that comprise the presentation.

**Casting Plane** - The angle(s) above or below horizontal the rod tip actually follows during the casting sequence. If you ever want to understand wind casting, this is extremely important to success or failure.

**Casting Arc** - The distance the rod is passed through from the beginning of the backcast to the end of the forward cast. The longer the cast, the longer the arc should be, since it helps you to make the cast.

**Hauls** - Hauling is a technique that increases the line speed of the backcast, forward cast, or both. Increasing the line speed enables the cast to travel over a greater distance. When the caster hauls (or pulls the line away from the rod) on either the back or forward cast, the technique is known as a single haul. When the haul is applied to both the back and forward cast, it's called the doublehaul. While mentioned in the text, especially in context of casting shooting head systems, hauling is an advanced technique that should not be explored until the mechanics of the basic cast have been mastered.

**Line Hand** - The hand used to handle and manipulate the fly line during the casting sequence and the retrieve. The line hand works in conjunction with, and in proximity to, the rod hand.

**Loop** - A general term used to describe the "U" shape of the fly line as it unrolls during both the back and forward casts. Soft action rod produce more open loops and gentle presentations while fast rods produce tighter loops and greater distance. It's your choice and both have a purpose.

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**Power** - A term generally describing the wrist and arm movement used during the casting sequence to energize the rod.

**Presentation** - The placement of the fly on the water as seen by the fish.

**Reach Mend Cast** - A technique used on streams and rivers to provide a longer "drag-free" float to the fly. It's done by making the cast as normal, then laying the rod over in an upstream motion once the rod tip stops on the forward cast. The fly will continue on target but the line near the tip will "reach" or fall upstream.

**Rod Hand** - The hand into which the fly fisher entrusts the rod during either the casting sequence or the retrieve. Some fly fishers prefer using one hand to hold the rod during the cast, exchanging it to the other hand when making the retrieve or playing a fish. While it may require conditioning, the preferred method is to use the same hand for rod handling during both functions.

**Roll Cast** - A casting technique that is extremely valuable in areas where a presentation cannot be made using the backcast. The roll cast uses the surface tension (drag) resulting from the line's contact with the water as the means to load the fly rod. The roll cast is useful when either a routine backcast cannot be made or to return a sinking line momentarily to the surface thereby enabling the standard backcast.

**Shooting the Line** - A term used to describe the act of releasing the fly line during the cast enabling the line to be carried out away from the line hand by the power or momentum of the rod.

**Specialty Casts** - The term refers to an array of advanced casting techniques that enable the caster to meet the requirements of specific and unique situations. The listing includes such techniques as the curve cast, underhand cast, steeple cast, soft cast, tug cast, etc. The details of the specialty casts are deliberately omitted from this text. The fly fisher should first achieve mastery of the basic cast before attempting any advanced techniques.

**Tailing Loop** - The result of an error in the casting technique. Tailing loops usually result when the rod tip following a concave path, such as it will do if the caster "jerks" the rod forward at the end of the backcast. Jerking the rod forward from the backcast applies power improperly and at the wrong time. The rod tip, in turn, dips sharply into a convex path. Since the line goes where the rod tip goes, the line is sure to follow the same concave path forming the tailing loop. The evidence of a tailing loop is a simple unwanted overhand knot somewhere in the forward part of the tippet. Sometimes called a "wind knot," the knot is anything but the result of the wind. When you begin to notice these little teeny-tiny knots, look for an error in the mechanics of your cast.

**Wind Knot** - The telltale result of a tailing loop.

**Presentation** - The cast as viewed from the perspective of the fish. The fly fisher's goal, of course, is to present the fly in an irresistible way through the mechanism of a perfect cast.

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## Code of the Fly and Fish

**Catch and Release** - This is an ethic growing in popularity among those who love sport fishing and especially those who have come to realize fish are not an inexhaustible resource. As an ethic, the term does not imply a fish cannot or should not become a tasty meal; it suggests, instead, taking no more fish than the meal requires, returning the greatest number back to the fishery unharmed.

**Fishery** - Used to describe a body of water that sustains a healthy fish population. Hopefully it will stay that way as long as you and I exert a little effort to police our waters.

**Fly** - The generic term applied to almost anything tied to the end of the tippet and designed to be cast by a fly rod in an attempt to catch a fish.

**Fly Groups** - For those not into entomology or the study of insects, the simplest way to understand the nature of the fly fisher's "flies" is to think in terms of two broad food groups, the aquatics and the terrestrials.

- **Aquatics** – As the name implies, are things living within the water column and include the flies historically associated with fly fishing such as mayflies, caddis flies, stone flies, damselflies, dragon flies, midges, etc. To keep it simple, shrimp, sow bugs and scuds are included in this group. Although the form of the tied fly usually takes a different appearance, don't forget minnows, sculpins, leeches and other swimming tidbits qualify as aquatics under this definition.
- **Terrestrials** - These are the land based insects that fly, fall or finally find themselves caught in the water's surface film. This group includes grasshoppers, crickets, red ants, black ants, leafhoppers, caterpillars, beetles, bees, wasps, etc. Of course, an occasional mouse or snake also ends up in the water as fish bait. While not insects, they do originate at shore side so we will leave them here with only this comment. You, too, could be a terrestrial if you fall into the path of a hungry Great White.

**Fly Types:** The efforts of an expert fly tier usually produce a fly he or she believes to be the perfect pattern or imitation of whatever-it-is the fly is supposed to imitate. The end product, the fly, is usually called one of three things: a dry fly, a wet fly or a streamer fly.

- **The Dry Fly** - The dry fly is an artificial "lure" that floats on the surface of the water. The term "dry fly" has a long association with aquatic insects such as the mayfly, probably the most imitated of all insects. In the life cycle of the mayfly, the adult stage "the dun" occurs shortly after emergence. After hatching from the nymph, the dun sits on top of the water until its wings dry, enabling it to fly. It's during the time when the dun's wings are drying that fish, especially trout, are apt to feed on the floating fly. This is also the time, fly fishers throw their imitations trying to deceive the fish into striking. Dry flies also are tied in a myriad of patterns to resemble any one of a number of terrestrials such as grasshoppers or beetles. It is also true that the entire group of the large deer-hair bass bugs and poppers can be generally classified as dry flies as they too float on the water.

- **The Wet Fly** - Wet flies are designed to work within the water column, hence the word "wet". Wet flies cover a broad range of depths from patterns designed to sit no deeper than in the surface film to the weighted designs quickly sinking into the depths. Thus, you can expect to find wet flies tied to imitate small nymphs or emergers, another stage in the life cycle of the aquatics, as well as the larger shrimps, sow bugs and scuds. Then, too, don't forget terrestrials also get wet when they happen into the water and become trapped. When considering wet flies, therefore, expect to see a wide array of "wet" insects, any and all lending themselves to any of a number of interpretive wet fly patterns.
- **The Streamer Fly or Streamer** - Since small fish represent a large food source of interest to all predator fish, the streamer fly or streamer is the fly best suited to the tier's skills producing a suitable imitation. While streamers are fished wet, a quick glance will tell you their appearance does not begin to resemble a small wet bug like a nymph. Streamers look like minnows or some other swimming creature and somehow always have really "neat" names. This assortment, which I suggest you carry, will give you an idea: the Muddler Minnow, the Blacknose Dace, the Woolly Bugger, the Marabou Leech, the Zonker and Whitlock's Sculpin. These too are broadly the types of flies that would be used in most saltwater fly applications.

**Fly Tier** - A fly tier is a person whose brain is somewhat impaired and geared to thinking small and working with things like a little hook, a little thread, a little material and a little glue. Some follow incredibly intricate "patterns" in assembling their flies. I don't. Some fly tiers purport to be able to see what they are doing. I can't. Some fly tiers produce beautiful pieces of art far too beautiful to waste on a fish. Mine are ugly, but do catch fish and are well suited to being lost sooner, if not later. Whilst I have had a bit of fun here, this is truly an art form that, should you take up as part of this sport, will be with you throughout your lifetime.

**The Hatch** - The hatch is the fly fisher's miniver. It is the time when the vassals of the fly fishers' fief gather and therefore a time of great celebration, joy and happiness. Truly, it is the time of the great happening. It's that moment when, the "little bugs" in the water stop swimming, emerge, become adults and when their wings dry, fly away. Provided the fly fisher is quick enough, can figure out the specific bug hatching and has a dry fly of that size and colour, he or she might be able to catch a fish during that magnificent moment. The rise is the hallowed ground of many a fish tale.

**Matching the Hatch** - Matching the hatch is a game played by fly fishers in which they attempt to find a fly in their collection that matches the bug they just found. After playing the game, it's fairly easy to tell who won and who lost. The fly fisher with a fish on is the winner. The fly fisher sitting on the bank looking dejected, especially one who is reading *On Walden's Pond*, is the loser.

**Put and Take** - A fishery management policy involving the artificial stocking of catchable fish and encouraging the keeping of the fish when caught.

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## Code of the Rod, Line, Leader and Reel

**AFTMA** - The American Fishing Tackle Manufacturing Association were the folks who standardized the weights of fly lines back in about the early 1950's and is the only thing in fly fishing under a standard. Many of us are in agreement that the standard needs to and will eventually be changed. Many rod manufacturers and line companies have left this standard some time ago and it now becomes up to you, the fly fisher, to understand your gear more thoroughly than ever before.

**Drag** - Usually used referring to the mechanism tightening or releasing pressure applied against the reel spool as line is pulled off by the fish or fly fisher. Drag is also used to refer to points of drag on the fly rod, such as the guides, inhibiting the line's free flow during casting.

**Leader** - The transparent line, usually of nylon monofilament, furred or braided nylon monofilament that connects the fly line to the fly.

**Palming** - A term referring to the use of the palm of the hand against the spool edge of a rimless fly reel as a means of applying drag against the release of line in fighting a fish.

**Rod Blank** - A fly rod before being fitted out with guides, grip, reel seat and other accoutrements.

**Reel Spool** -. That part of the fly reel onto which the line is wound.

**Reel Seat** - The part of the fly rod behind the handle or grip where the fly reel is attached.

**Rod Guides** - The closed wire loops attached to the rod by wrappings that hold the fly line in proximity to the rod along its length.

**Stripper Guide** - The first guide encountered to the front of the reel seat on a fly rod. Since its function is to decrease line friction and tame line violence thereby enhancing the cast, the larger the stripper guide, the better in most cases. Some very progressive companies are now looking at this guide as a key to the overall performance of the fly rod, particularly in the heavier weight classes.

**Tippet** - The smallest end of the leader and usually the last two to three feet. In the case of the furred or braided leader, this is simply a small section of mono or fluoro line added before the fly.

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## Code of the Catch

**Breakoff** - A term referring to either the accidental or deliberate breaking of the leader tippet and correspondingly the connection to a hooked fish thus freeing it. Breakoff is most usually the result of an error on the part of the fly fisher and of course, the influence of the Ancient Ones.

**Cruising Fish** - A term used to refer to a fish moving about in free waters in order to find food. In saltwater, it sometimes refers to sharks looking for you near the beach.

**Pressure** - A term used to describe the force applied by a fly fisher against a hooked fish during the fight to bring it to the net.

**Pumping the Fish** - A way of using the butt of the fly rod in a lifting motion to gain back a bit of line lost on the run to a hooked fish. Immediately after the lift, the rod is lowered and the slack line quickly recovered and wound back on the reel.

**Put Down** - The result of a fly fisher's error in presence or presentation. Once alarmed, fish will scurry away and hide. This is also referred to as spooking the fish. "Putting fish down" is a great way to assure yourself that you will not catch any fish. You may also find that this term covers an innumerable number of things your fly fishing friends may say to you at the end of the day if they have caught a lot of fish and you have taken none.

**Rising Fish** - A term referring to a fish visibly feeding at the surface or in the water's surface film and is characterised by the classic leap into the air or the more subtle sipping of the surface fare. It can also refer to a shark fin that rises within close range of where you are standing.

**Swimming the Fly** - The way a sinking wet fly or streamer is moved through the water as it is being fished. There are two things that govern the way a fly swims which are the knot that ties the fly to the tippet and the motion imparted by the fly fisher with the line hand during the retrieve.

**Stripping** - The act of pulling (stripping) line off the reel during the cast or pulling (stripping) the line in during the retrieve. Stripping line can be either fast or slow and involve either large or small amounts of line. It is also a common way to retrieve line when catching fish or a style of striking.

**Strike or Striking the Fish** - After the fish has taken or hit the fly, this is the action taken by the fly fisher to assure the set of the hook.

**Tailing Fish** - A term used to describe a fish feeding along the bottom in water sufficiently shallow so that its tail is sometimes visible.

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