

Mid Island Castaways: Fly Casting Skills Development Program

Level I: Foundation skills

1. Assemble Gear

All fly fishers must be able to properly assemble gear. The minimum required is: assemble the rod safely, attach the reel, line the rod, get about 1 rod length of fly line past the rod tip, and straighten the leader.

2. Feeling the Line: Pancakes, Eggs, Eights and Straights

With the fly at 20-25 ft., the angler will move the near-vertical rod in a clockwise circle (rt. handed caster) forming circles (pancakes) After about 6-8 revolutions, move the rod in a clockwise oval (eggs) for another 6-8 revolutions. Then “draw” figure eights with your rod tip and line. Finally, make narrow back to front movements of the rod tip until the line is moving nearly straight forward and back. Pay special attention to others’ safety!

3. Horizontal Loop Formation Drill

Starting with the fly at 25 ft. the angler moves the rod in a horizontal plane (rod is parallel to the ground at coffee table to waist height, with smooth acceleration through the right size arc (12 ft.) to an abrupt stop causing loop formation. For 25 ft., the right size arc may be marked with 2 cones about 12 ft. Apart. The angler accelerates the rod tip from one to the other stopping abruptly at the cones. Line and leader are allowed to fall to the ground and should be relatively straight. The goal is to create a narrow loop with 4 ft. or less distance between fly and rod leg. The horizontal plane allows easy observation of the forward and back cast loops, which should be nearly identical. It can be helpful to do this along a straight line such as stretched rope or measuring tape. This is also a great drill to do with longer lengths of line.

4. Horizontal False Casting Drill

Starting with the fly at 25 ft. the angler makes the same horizontal casting motion but does not allow the line/leader to fall. The angler must pause just long enough to allow the line to straighten, but not fall to the ground, before the next cast. Narrow loop formation (4 ft. or less fly to rod leg) is still the goal. When practiced with longer lengths of line, more power and a bit longer pause are needed.

5. Climb the Wall

Starting with the fly at 25 ft. the angler will start with horizontal false casting with narrow loops, then raise the rod tip in 10-20 degree increments up toward a near-vertical casting position. Narrow loops are maintained throughout. Once a plane close to vertical is reached, the caster will work back down to horizontal in like fashion.

For tasks 3, 4 and 5, anglers may increase line length from 25 to 30 ft in 2 ft. increments, but should master one length of line at a time.

6. Accuracy to 30 ft. Targets

Two targets are 30 ft. from the angler and 20 ft apart. Starting with the fly at one target, the angler uses a series of near-vertical false casts to change direction to the other target. The fly should land within 2 ft. of the centre of targets. Once the fly is delivered to the second target it is cast to the starting target in like fashion. Try repeating the cycle 3 times and see if 6 targets can be achieved in a row. Try challenging yourself to get as close to the targets as possible!

7. 35 ft. Lob or Water Tension Cast

Starting with the fly stretched to 30 ft. behind the angler, a lob or water tension cast is made with a crisp forward stop so the line/leader land relatively straight 180 degrees from where it started. Adding weight (split shot) to the leader just above the fly may be helpful on grass.

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Level II: Basic Skills

1. 35 ft. Pick Up and Lay Down (PULD) Cast, Dominant Side

Starting with the fly at 35 ft. the angler will do a PULD cast in a nearly vertical plane (no false casting or hauling) returning the fly to within 2 ft. of the centre of the 35 ft. Target.

2. 35 ft. PULD Cast, Non-Dominant Side

Starting with the fly at 35 ft. the angler will do a PULD cast with the rod tip and line traveling over the non-dominant shoulder, (no false casting or hauling) returning the fly to within 2 ft. of the centre of the 35 ft. target.

3. 35 ft. Horizontal PULD Cast, Dominant Side

Starting with the fly at 35 ft. the angler will perform a PULD in a nearly horizontal plane (no higher than 2 o'clock) with the fly landing within 4 ft. of either side of the centre line. The leader must not pile but may be curved. No false casting or hauling.

4. Shooting Line to 40 ft.

Starting with the fly at 40 ft. the angler will strip the fly back to 35 ft. The angler will cast and shoot the line to 40 ft. No more than 3 false casts are allowed. Slipping or shooting line is only allowed on the delivery cast. The fly must land within 2 ft. of a 40 ft. target.

5. Accuracy to 25 and 35 ft. Targets

Starting with the fly at 40 ft. the angler strips the fly to approximately 20 ft. The angler must achieve targets at 25 ft. and 35 ft. on the tape. Lengthen the line during false casting between targets. The fly must land within 2 feet of the centre of each target. If a target is missed the angler picks up where the fly landed and tries again. Only 3 tries are allowed for each target. The angler must achieve both targets. No hauling.

6. Minimum 35 ft. Static Roll Cast, Dominant Side

Starting with the fly at 35 ft. or more, the angler will perform a static roll cast with line/leader landing relatively straight and within 2 ft. of either side of the centre line. The D loop (back loop) should be formed by slowly dragging the line into position then holding still in the key position before initiating the forward cast. A roll cast tool is suggested if performed on grass or indoors. No hauling.

7. Distance to 50+ ft.

Starting with the fly at about 55 ft. the angler will strip the fly back to 35 ft. A cast is made to 50 ft. or more with the fly landing within 4 ft. of either side of the centre line and leader relatively straight. False casting, hauling, and shooting line are allowed.

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Level III: Intermediate Skills

1. Dominant Side 45 ft. PULD and Shoot

Starting with the fly at 45 ft. the angler will strip the fly back to 40 ft. and perform a dominant side PULD with a shoot on delivery to within 2 ft. of the centre of a 45 ft. target. No false casting or hauling.

2. Non-Dominant Side 45 ft. PULD and Shoot

Starting with the fly at 45 ft. the angler will strip the fly back to 40 ft. and perform a non-dominant side PULD with a shoot on delivery to within 2 ft. of the centre of a 45 ft. target. No false casting or hauling.

3. Belgian Cast and Shoot

Starting with the fly at 45 ft. the angler will strip the fly back to 40 ft. and perform a Belgian cast and shoot line with the fly landing within 2 ft. of the centre of a 45 ft. target. No hauling or false casting.

4. Minimum 35 ft. Static Roll Cast, Non-Dominant Side

Starting with the fly at 35 ft. or more the angler will perform a non-dominant side roll cast with line and leader landing relatively straight and within 2 ft. of either side of the centre line. A roll cast tool is suggested if performed on grass or indoors. No hauling.

5. Dynamic Roll Cast, Dominant side

Starting with the fly at 40 ft. or more, the angler will perform a dynamic roll cast with line/leader landing relatively straight and within 2 ft. of either side of the centre line. A 4 ft. grass leader is suggested if performed on grass. No hauling. A switch cast (touch and go) is allowed, but requires more finesse than a dynamic roll cast.

6. Change-of-Direction Dynamic Roll Cast

Starting with the fly at 40 ft. and perpendicular to the centre line, the angler will perform a change of direction dynamic roll cast delivering the fly at an angle 30 degrees or more to the opposite side of the centre line such that the line and leader land relatively straight. A 4 foot grass leader is suggested if performed on grass. No hauling.

7. Accuracy to 20, 30, and 40 ft. Targets, Dominant Side

Starting with the fly at 45 ft. the angler strips line in to get the fly to 20 ft. The angler must now achieve offset targets at 20 ft., 10 ft. to the left of the centre line, at 30 ft., 10 ft. to the right of the centre line, and a target at 40 ft. on the centre line. Lengthen the line by false casting between targets. The fly must land within 2 feet of the centre of the targets. If a target is missed the angler picks up where the fly landed and tries again, but only 3 tries are allowed for each target. Angler must achieve all three targets. No hauling.

8. Right Reach Mend

Starting with the fly at 40 ft. the angler will perform a reach mend to the right without slipping line, with the fly landing within 4 ft. of either side of the centre line and without dragging the line/leader after landing. The final rod position should be at 45-90 degrees to the direction of the cast. After delivery the line and leader should be nearly straight.

9. Left Reach Mend

Starting with the fly at 40 ft. the angler will perform a reach mend to the left without slipping line with the fly landing within 4 ft. of either side of the centre line and without dragging the line/leader after landing. The final rod position should be at 45-90 degrees to the direction of the cast. After delivery the line and leader should be nearly straight.

10. Distance to 60+ ft.

Starting with the fly at about 65 ft. the angler will strip the fly to 40 ft. A cast is made to 60 ft. or more with the fly landing within 4 ft. of either side of the centre line and leader relatively straight. False casting, hauling, and shooting are all allowed.

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Level IV: Advanced Skills

1. Loop Control Demonstration

Starting with the fly at 40 ft. the angler will demonstrate 4 false casts with 4 ft. loops or narrower on the back and forward casts. No tailing loops.

2. Seated or Kneeling Cast & Shoot

Starting with the fly at 40 ft. the angler will strip back to 35 ft. and pick up and shoot to 40 ft. with the fly landing within 2 ft. of a 40 ft. target. False casting and hauling are allowed.

3. Curve Cast

Starting with the fly at 40 ft. the angler will perform a curve cast to the side of their choice with the line and leader curving around an obstacle at approximately 25 ft. The fly should land about 45 degrees from the line layout between the caster and the obstacle. A pull-back mend to assist the curve is acceptable.

4. Slack Line Presentation

Starting with the fly at 40 ft. the angler will perform a slack line presentation of their choosing. The fly must land beyond the line tip and within 4 ft. of either side of the centre line. The slack should take up 3 or more feet such that the fly is no more than 37 ft. away from the angler.

5. Static Roll Cast Pick Up and Shoot

Starting with the fly at 50 ft., the angler will strip line back to 35 ft. and make a roll cast pick up with extension of line to a minimum of 45 ft. within 3 false casts. The fly must land within 4 ft. of either side of the centre line. Hauling is allowed. A roll cast tool is suggested if casting on grass.

6. Double Spey Cast, Dominant Side

Starting with the fly at 40 ft. and 90 degrees to the centre line on the dominant side, the angler will perform a double spey cast delivering the fly within 4 ft. of the centre line. A 4 foot grass leader is suggested if performed on grass. No hauling.

7. Circle-C or Snap-T Cast

Starting with the fly at 40 ft. and 90 degrees to the centre line on the non-dominant side, the angler will perform a Circle-C or Snap-T cast delivering the fly to within 4 ft. of the centre line. A 4 foot grass leader is suggested if performed on grass. No hauling.

8. Back Cast Delivery

Starting with the fly at 50 ft. the angler will strip to 40 ft., then make a back cast delivery to a minimum of 45 ft. with the fly landing within 4 ft. of either side of the centre line. False casting and hauling are allowed. The Galway cast is not allowed.

9. Non-Dominant Side Accuracy to 20, 30, and 40 ft. Targets

Starting with the fly at 45 ft. the angler strips the fly to 20 ft. While casting off the non-dominant side the angler will achieve targets at 20 ft., 10 ft. to the left of the centre line, at 30 ft., 10 ft. to the right of the centre line, and at 40 ft. on the centre line. The line will be lengthened during false casting between targets. The fly must land within 2 feet of the centre of each target. If a target is missed the angler picks up where the fly landed and tries again, but has only 3 tries for each target. Angler must achieve all three targets. No hauling.

10. Distance to 70+ ft.

Starting with the fly at about 75 ft. the angler will strip the fly to 40 ft. A cast is made to 70 ft. or more with the fly landing within 4 ft. of either side of the centre line and with the line and leader relatively straight. False casting, hauling, and shooting line are allowed.