

Fly Fishing — Workbook

This workbook accompanies the Fly Fishing course and turns each module into hands-on practice you can complete beside a river or at your tying bench. Complete the exercises in order — each one builds the observational and motor vocabulary the next one requires. Bring this workbook to the water; many exercises only make sense when you are standing in a river with a rod in your hand.

Gear, Setup, and the Physics of a Fly Line

Solidify your tackle knowledge by evaluating real gear, rigging a complete system, and testing your knots before they cost you a fish.

Exercise: Outfit Matching Exercise

Visit a fly shop (or use an online retailer's filter tools) and build three complete outfits for three different scenarios. For each outfit record the rod weight, length and action, matching line taper and weight, leader length and butt diameter, and starting tippet X size. Be specific — use real product names and prices.

- Scenario A: Small brushy creek, wild brook trout, average cast under 6 metres. What outfit and why?

- Scenario B: Broad tailwater river, selective brown trout, average cast 9–12 metres. What outfit and why?

- Scenario C: You have a \$150 total budget for a beginner who wants to try the sport once before committing. What would you buy and from where?

Worksheet: Rigging Log

Rig a complete fly fishing system (backing !' fly line !' leader !' tippet !' fly) and record every component and connection. Repeat for two different setups — one for dry fly fishing, one for nymphing.
Setup name (dry fly / nymph)

Backing material and test weight

Fly line brand, taper, and weight

Leader length and butt diameter

Tippet X size and length added

Fly pattern and hook size

Knot used at each connection

Break-test result for each knot (pass / fail with firm tug)

Time to rig from scratch (minutes)

Checklist: Pre-River Tackle Check

- Verify fly line weight matches rod weight marking
- Loop-to-loop connection between fly line and leader is fully interlocked
- Leader is not kinked or coiled — stretch it between your hands if needed
- Tippet is attached with a double surgeon's knot, tested with firm tug
- Fly hook point is sharp — scratches fingernail without slipping
- Hook barb is crimped flat with forceps if barbless is required or preferred
- Improved clinch knot on fly is seated fully against hook eye — no gap
- Spare tippet spools (at least two X sizes) are in vest or pack
- Forceps or hemostat for hook removal are clipped and accessible

Casting Mechanics — False Cast and Roll Cast

Track your casting progress with structured practice drills and honest self-assessment against measurable benchmarks.

Exercise: Loop Diagnosis Drill

Film yourself casting on grass with 7 metres of fly line and no fly. Watch the video back in slow motion. Answer each prompt honestly — self-deception here costs you fish later. Repeat after one week of practice.

- Describe the shape of your back cast loop: tight, wide, or collapsing? At what point in the stroke does the loop shape change?

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- Does the rod tip track in a straight horizontal plane on both back and forward strokes, or does it dip in an arc? What fault does a dipping tip cause?

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- Time the pause between back cast stop and forward cast start. Is the back loop fully extended before you begin the forward stroke?

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- After one week of daily 10-minute practice drills, re-film and compare. What specifically changed?

Worksheet: Casting Practice Log

Record each practice session using the fields below. Aim for at least 5 sessions before your first river trip. Consistency of practice (short daily sessions) produces faster gains than infrequent long sessions.

Date

Location (grass / still water / river)

Line length used (metres)

Drill type (false cast / roll cast / reach cast / mend practice)

Duration (minutes)

Loop quality self-rating 1–5

Specific fault identified

Correction attempted

Notes for next session

Checklist: Casting Competency Milestones

-] Can throw a consistent tight loop with 7 metres of line on grass
-] Can stop the rod between 10–11 o'clock (back) and 1–2 o'clock (forward) without consciously thinking about it
-] Can execute a roll cast that fully extends to 7 metres from standing water or a lawn
-] Can perform an upstream mend without moving the fly more than 15 cm
-] Can execute a basic reach cast to the upstream side of a target
-] Can deliver a fly to a 30 cm diameter target at 9 metres three times out of five

Reading Rivers and Matching Hatches

Develop your river-reading and entomology skills through structured observation and pattern-selection practice on actual water.

Exercise: River Feature Mapping

Stand on a bank above a 50-metre section of river for 15 minutes before fishing it. Sketch a rough map of the section in the space below (or on a separate page) and label every feature you can identify. Then answer the prompts.

- Mark the three locations you predict are most likely to hold actively feeding fish. Explain your reasoning for each, referencing current speed, depth, and food delivery.
- Identify the primary foam line. Where does it originate and where does it lead? Where would you position yourself to fish it without drag?
- After fishing the section for one hour, how many of your predicted holding lies produced fish contact (either takes, refusals, or visible fish)? What did you miss and why?

Worksheet: Hatch Observation Log

Complete one entry per river visit during any period of observable insect activity. Over time this log becomes your personal hatch chart for your home water — far more valuable than a generic published one.

Date and time

River and location

Air temperature (°C)

Water temperature (°C)

Insect order (mayfly / caddis / stonefly / midge / unknown)

Estimated adult body size (mm) — compare to hook size

Colour (body / wing)

Rise form observed (sip / head-and-tail / splash / bulge)

Pattern selected and hook size

Presentation method (dry / emerger / nymph)

Result (fish taken / refused / no response)

Adjustments made

Checklist: Stream-Side Entomology Kit

- Carry a small aquarium net or piece of window screen to sample invertebrates from cobbles
- Collect one cobble sample per river visit — turn it over and count and photograph what you find
- Carry a pocket entomology guide specific to your region (e.g. Hatch Guide for the Upper Midwest, Pacific Northwest Hatch Charts)
- Match sample size to your fly box before selecting a pattern
- Note whether fish are feeding in the film, below it, or at the bottom based on rise form
- Record water temperature every visit — correlate temperature to hatch timing over multiple visits
- Compare your selected pattern to a natural insect from the sample before tying it on

Wading Safety and Catch-and-Release Ethics

Build a personal safety habit and an evidence-based fish handling protocol that you follow consistently on every outing.

Exercise: Wading Risk Assessment

Before each wade into unfamiliar water, complete a 2-minute bank-side assessment using the prompts below. This should become automatic muscle memory — experienced guides do a version of this unconsciously before every crossing.

- Identify the two deepest points and two fastest sections in your planned wading zone. Where will current reach hip height? Mark your limit before you step in.
- Identify your exit points: if you slip and are carried 20 metres downstream, where can you self-rescue to shore? Is there a log jam, sweeper, or hydraulic recirculation feature downstream that you must avoid?
- What is the bottom substrate? Rounded cobble is the most dangerous. How will you adjust your wading speed and step placement on slippery footing?

Worksheet: Catch-and-Release Handling Record

Record your handling data for each fish caught over your first season. Reviewing this log will reveal patterns in your handling that you cannot see in the moment. Honesty here is the only way this exercise has value.

Date and river

Species and estimated size (cm)

Hook type (barbed / barbless)

Hook location (lip / corner / deep — note if deep-hooked)

Time from hook-set to fish at hand (minutes)

Time fish was out of water (seconds — estimate; use a phone timer)

Handling method (net / hands / landed without lifting)

Water temperature at time of catch (°C)

Revival time (seconds fish held before swimming on its own)

Release condition (strong / sluggish / floated — circle one)

Checklist: River Safety and Ethics Pre-Trip Checklist

- Current fishing licence downloaded and accessible on phone or physical copy in vest
- Regulation PDF for the specific waterbody reviewed — season, size limits, gear restrictions confirmed
- Water temperature plan: know the nearest Environment Canada or USGS gauge; plan to stop if temperature exceeds 21 °C
- Wading staff packed or identified on-site
- Wading belt cinched tightly before entering water
- Forceps accessible for fast barbless hook removal
- Rubber-mesh landing net rinsed of any previous water source (biosecurity)
- Emergency contact knows your location and expected return time
- First aid kit with blister and wound supplies in pack
- Leave No Trace: plan to pack out all tippet trimmings, packaging, and waste

Your Action Plan

1. Purchase or borrow a 9-foot 5-weight outfit and rig it completely from backing to fly using the five core knots — test every connection before proceeding
2. Complete 10 sessions of 15-minute grass casting practice, filming yourself and reviewing loop shape each session against the diagnostic criteria in Module 2
3. Visit a local fly shop to ask for the current season hatch chart for your nearest river and buy 12 starter patterns from the recommended beginner box lists
4. Make one observation-only river visit with no rod — spend one hour reading water, sketching features, and mapping predicted holding lies; return with a rod the following day
5. Complete at least one cobble turn-over sample and identify the dominant insect order present before making your first cast on any new river
6. Fish your home water five times in the first month, completing the Hatch Observation Log entry after each session
7. Record handling data for every fish caught in your first season using the Catch-and-Release Handling Record worksheet
8. Join a local fly fishing club or regional Federation of Fly Fishers chapter — guided outings with experienced anglers compress months of solo learning into a single day
9. Book a half-day guided lesson with a certified casting instructor (FFF certification list at fedflyfishers.org) to get real-time feedback on your casting stroke

10. After your first season, review your hatch log and casting progress log — identify the single biggest gap in your game and build next season's practice plan around closing it

