

# Dry Fly Rigging and Tactics

by  
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## Leader and Tippet Rules

- In general, we want to fish dry flies on a 10-to-12-foot leader.
- With a 9-foot 4X tapered leader you can add 1.5 to 2.5 feet of either 5X or 6X tippet. Never more than 2.5 feet! Never add 7X without adding 5X or 6X first. You can skip one X but never more than that.
- Alternatively, you can add 1.5 feet of 5X and then 1.5 to 2.5 of 6X or 7X. This will get your leader out to 12 to 13 feet which is sometimes necessary in low clear water. Remember never more than 2.5 feet of any tippet diameter.
- When fishing long leaders, it will be necessary to bring your leader/line connection inside the rod tip in order to land the fish. So it is very important to have your leader/line connection be very smooth. No big clunky knots with tags sticking out.
- Rule of three! Divide your hook size by 3 and that will give you a starting point for the appropriate tippet diameter. E.g., size 12 hook, divided by 3 equals 4! Therefore, 4X tippet is a good starting point. You may need to adjust for fly type and water clarity. Big, air resistant flies may need a heavier tippet. Extremely clear water may dictate dropping down to a lighter tippet.
- Fluorocarbon is wonderful because it is less visible and likes to sink. However a full fluor leader will cause your dry flies to sink and then make that annoying pop on your pick up. A couple feet of fluoro tippet might be OK but not a full fluoro leader.

### **Nice to Know**

- **Rule of Eleven!** If you care about tippet diameter this rule will get you the answer. Take your tippet size, e.g., 5X, and add whatever number is required to get to 11. In this case 6, so your tippet diameter is .006
- **9 foot 4X leaders are close to universal!** They can be shortened for streamer fishing or lengthened as discussed above.

### **Casting Issues**

- **If, when casting, your fly seems to run into an invisible wall and falls off to the right (for a right-handed caster), your tippet is either too long or too light for the fly you are casting.**
- **If, when casting, your fly kicks to the left (for a right-handed caster), then your tippet is either too short or too heavy for the fly you are casting.**
- **If, when casting, your tippet gets all spun up due to a spinning fly, try minimizing false casts first, but most likely you will need to go to a heavier tippet. Also, try using a fly without wings as they are the main culprit.**
- **In all cases remember the rule of three and the maximum of 2.5 feet of any one tippet diameter.**

### **Mending and Drag**

- **Mending is very important in dry fly fishing, so keep your fly line and the first few feet of the leader dressed so they are floating.**
- **Getting a drag free drift is very important most of the time (not so much in caddis fishing). Remember, there are two anchor points; the rod tip and the fly. Your objective is to keep a controlled amount of slack between these two points. Slack is evil – except when it allows a drag-free drift. Controlled slack is the secret. Mend, mend, mend and manage your line.**

## **Accuracy**

- **Accuracy in dry fly fishing is very important. A fish sees things on the surface in a circle the diameter of which is 1.5 times the depth of the water it is in. This is because of the 10-degree light refraction between air and water. Therefore, if a fish is holding in a foot of water you need to have your fly appear in an 18-inch circle, only 9 inches on either side of the fish.**
- **Where you see a fish rise is not likely where this fish is holding. A fish drifts up and down current to take a fly. The fish is likely holding 1 to 2 feet up current from where you saw the rise. Therefore, place your cast 3 to 4 feet or more up current from where you saw the rise.**
- **If casting to a known fish location be careful not to line the fish. It is best to have only the fly appear in his window of visibility. None of the line. So always cast at a slight angle to the fish to avoid excessive leader, and for sure the line, from coming into its field of view. When in doubt start short, not long, and then adjust.**
- **In low clear water conditions, when fishing flies like hoppers and beetles, you may have to land your fly behind or off to the side of the fish. They will react to the “sound” of the fly landing. Landing in front of them often spooks the fish.**

### **Hopper-Dropper Adjustments**

- Hopper-dropper rigs are a great way to fish when river flows allow, but require some modification to the general rules to make them cast-able. You should shorten the distance from the leader/line connection to the “hopper” to 7.5 to 8 feet and maybe even make that tippet heavier. There is a reasonable limit to how long and heavy the dropper can be. Maximum practical length seems to be about 4 feet, and the float-ability of your dry fly will determine maximum weight.

### **Important Fishing Rules**

- Always fish as close as the fish will let you fish. You will get better drifts and better hookups!
- If you don't put your fly in a tree once in a while you are not trying hard enough!
- Ideally you want your line, leader and fly all in the same speed water. If that is not possible then fish from slow into fast water. Try not to cross the center of the current.
- Foam is home! Foam lines show you where the floating bugs are being channeled. The fish are often underneath the foam lines!
- Don't false cast more than necessary! There are no fish in the air!
- If your cast did not go exactly where you wanted it to, let it drift out. Don't snatch it up. Many good casts go unrewarded and many bad casts catch fish! Let the fish be the judge!