

LEVEL ONE



Merit Class

TARGETS: Place targets (A, B, C, D and E) approximately 20, 25, 30, 35 and 40 feet from the casting box as per diagram.

Round One

Set up your fly rod, and attach a leader (about 7½ feet) and a practice fly.

1. Lengthen your cast by stripping a few feet of line from your reel until you hit Target A. Make as many casts on the ground or water as required to reach Target A. This a “measuring” cast and isn’t scored. From here on the presentation casts count and are scored. Are you ready? Now lift up for your back cast and WITHOUT making any false casts, make a presentation cast to Target A (20 ft.), which counts as a scored cast. If you hit it, great! Congratulations!

2. If you miss it, just continue with the rest of the targets. Strip about five feet of line from your reel, make your back cast, pause for an instant and then make your presentation cast to Target B without any false casts in between.

3. Continue to the other targets: Strip about five feet of line, lift, back cast and make your presentation casts to Targets C, D and E.

Nice going!

Don’t worry if you miss the targets. What’s important right now is that you develop a rhythmic casting stroke: back cast, pause and forward cast. *Back cast, pause, forward cast.* This

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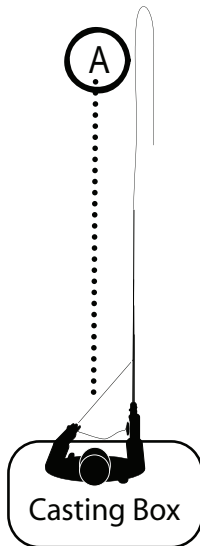
40 ft. (E)

35 ft. (D)

30 ft. (C)

25 ft. (B)

20 ft. (A)



QUICK START

1. Make a measurement cast (dotted line) to Target A.
2. Lift up and make your first presentation cast to Target A, which counts.
3. Strip about five feet of line from your reel and make your second presentation cast to Target B and then C, D and E without false casts.
4. In Round Two you will make two false casts between targets.

is essential. It's the building block or foundation for future casting success. Keep practicing the Round One until you consistently hit three out of the five targets and come within a few feet of the missed targets. Don't worry if it takes some time to acquire accuracy, especially on the distant targets. You can do it. I know you can!

YOU WILL LEARN: (1) That it is really a simple, rhythmic cast (be sure to accelerate before coming to a pause on both the back and forward casts); (2) That the line follows the arc of a rod tip; (3) That a fairly straight back and forward cast will deliver the fly in a reasonably straight path to the target; (4) That the longer the cast, the longer you must wait for the back cast to straighten out behind you before beginning your forward cast; (5) That it's important to shoot the line smoothly on the forward cast as you advance from target to target.

IMPORTANT: Please, please do not proceed to Round Two until you master Round One and you are very confident that you can hit the majority of targets most of the time. I know I'm being repetitive, but that's because it's important to develop your stroke and accuracy. Don't get discouraged.

Round Two

Okay! Okay! You've developed confidence in your stroke and accuracy to the point you could almost do it with your eyes shut, and you know that you are ready to advance to the next level.

1. Again lengthen your measuring cast until you hit Target A (this cast isn't scored). Lift up and make two false casts and make your presentation (scoring) cast to Target A (20 ft.).
2. Strip about five feet of line off your reel. Lift the fly, make two false casts before delivering your presentation cast to Target B (25 ft.).
3. Repeat the same thing (strip, lift, two false casts, and presentation cast) to Targets C, D and E. See, it's easy.

Practice this until you are able to hit at least three targets most of the time and any misses are within a couple of feet from the target. Avoid hitting the ground or water during false casting (this is known as a “tick”).

YOU WILL LEARN: (1) To develop and improve your false casting; (2) To deliver a more accurate cast; (3) To lengthen your casts by shooting line on the forward casts; (4) To avoid “ticking” the water/ground in front of you during false casting, which could scare off some fish or hamper your casting; (5) To develop a smooth rhythmic casting stroke so that it becomes second nature.

TARGET CASTING ORDER: A, B, C, D, E (both rounds).

YOU’LL IMPROVE FASTER IF YOU: Learn to throw a narrow loop on your back and forward casts. Narrow-loop casting is the most important component of accurate and distance casting. This is best accomplished (1) by accelerating your rod stroke before you come to an abrupt stop on the back cast or the forward cast; (2) by making sure that your rod travels in one plane; (3) by understanding that the line will follow the arc of the rod tip. You can read casting books, view tapes, listen to advice from experts, and in the end, it’s something that you learn by trial and error. Keep experimenting with your stroke, and soon enough, you will see narrow loops unrolling. Suggestion: Check out the “Improve your casting with video!” chapter (page 130).

If you are hitting the water/ground in front of you during false casting, aim your false casts higher or begin the start of your back cast slightly faster. If the fly lands fairly close (within a few feet) to missed targets, you’re on the right track. Just practice, practice and practice.

TRY TO AVOID: While there is a definite pause on the back cast, this pause should not be too long because the line will drop behind you and touch the ground or water. Yes, these two rounds may be a little tedious, but they are the foundation for all the other casting disciplines and events, and the lessons

learned are absolutely necessary for successful fishing. *Tip:* After you gain some dexterity, you may find it helpful if you turn your head around (toward your casting arm) to observe the fly line on the back cast. Turn just your head and not your body, because that would change the path of the rod.

AND REMEMBER: The fly-casting motion is accomplished at three different fulcrums: the wrist, elbow and shoulder joints. Many beginners, especially those who have done a lot of spinning and plug casting, use their wrists too much if not almost entirely. For most fly casting, the elbow joint is mainly used.

ASIDE: I asked Chris Korich, one of the all-time best casters, what was the single most important element in successful casting. *“Easy. It’s the casting loop,”* he responded immediately. *“Everything in fly casting is dependent on the loop. I don’t care whether it is accuracy or distance fly casting . . . the loop is the most important element. Regardless of skill, the fly caster must always pay attention to the loop. It cannot be over-emphasized.”*

SCORING: Give yourself ten points for every target you hit in each of the two rounds. Try to avoid “ticks,” which is when your fly ticks the ground or water in front of you during false casting in Round Two. Starting in Level Three there will be two demerits for each tick.

SAMPLE SCORING: Let’s say in Round One, you hit the first two targets (A & B), missed the third (C), made the fourth (D) and missed the fifth (E). You have a score of 30 for Round One. On Round Two, you hit targets A, C and D. You’ve hit a total of six targets out of ten for a score of 60.

QUALIFICATION FOR MERIT LEVEL 1: 60 points. If you do this on a fairly consistent basis, you’re ready for the next level. If not, please, please, I beg you, keep practicing Level One. Some of the world’s best casters started out very poorly.