



FLY CASTING:  
FLY CASTING SKILLS CHALLENGE PROGRAM

CONSERVATION / EDUCATION / COMMUNITY

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The **FFI Learning Center** is a primary source of educational and instructional materials, to meet the needs and interests of the fly fishing community in the areas of Fly Fishing Skills, Fly Casting, Fly Tying, and Conservation. The Learning Center is a combination of in-person workshop instructions, as well as a source for downloadable instructional materials found on the FFI Website.

The goal of the Learning Center's **Fly Casting Resource Area** is to inspire and assist fly fishers to become more knowledgeable, accomplished fly casters. Fly casting is an essential skill in fly fishing. Increased casting knowledge and proficiency improves enjoyment and success. The Casting Board of Governors oversees the Fly Casting Resource Area of the Learning Center.

## THE FLY CASTING SKILLS CHALLENGE PROGRAM

The Fly Casting Skills Challenge Program is designed for the experienced beginner caster, as well as intermediate and advanced fly fishers. It is meant to be a fun, voluntary way to study, practice and challenge oneself in a progressive fashion at one's own pace. It allows participants to measure progress with an option of receiving documentation and recognition for doing so. Each casting challenge at the Bronze, Silver, and Gold game levels is directly applicable to increasingly difficult fishing scenarios and includes these general areas:

- Pick-up and Lay-down cast
- False casting
- Roll casting
- Reach mends, slack line, and curve casts
- Accuracy, from Dominant and Non-Dominant shoulders
- Distance and shooting line
- Hauling
- Casting while seated or kneeling
- Presenting the backcast

The Challenge Program is supported by online educational resources, as well as in-person casting workshops such as occur at the annual FFI Fair or through clubs and council gatherings world-wide. These resources can be used by individuals, groups, and Clubs and can help teachers plan clinics and classes. The guidance and tutelage of FFI certified fly casting instructors or Gold Casting Skills Level recipients will be especially helpful. Some participants may eventually choose to participate in the Casting Instructor Certification Program.



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## DOCUMENTATION AND RECOGNITION

Successful completion for all three skill levels requires verification by an evaluator. The Bronze level challenge requires that the evaluator must be an observer (such as a Club member), a Silver or Gold level award recipient, or a CICP Certified Instructor. Silver and Gold level challenges require an evaluator who is a Gold level award recipient or a CICP Certified Instructor.

To receive recognition at any level, the participant, who has successfully qualified, completes the form located at the bottom of the score sheet. Score sheets also require a signature from the evaluator. Participants need to be FFI members in order to apply for recognition. A fee must accompany the form in order to receive the recognition package. The recognition package includes: a recognition of completion certificate, and a pin corresponding to the level in which the participant as qualified.

## PERFORMANCE AND TACKLE GUIDELINES

The following points are important when participating in the Challenge levels, so that the skill set is as consistent as possible within challenge levels across multiple participants:

1. Caster should use the same rod, line, leader, and yarn fly for all tasks within a game level. The line should have a head length of at least 35 ft. Suggested leader dimensions are 7.5-8.0 ft., 0X-2X.
2. Casting may be on water, grass, or both.
3. In most settings, casting should be along a measured course at specified targets. The caster has the option to change the direction of the course to optimize environmental factors (wind, sun, etc.)
4. Distances referenced are from caster's foot to fly, unless otherwise stated.
5. In tasks that specify a target, the fly should land within 2 ft. of the center of the target and those skills that use the tape for fly placement should land within 4 ft. either side of the tape measure. For simplicity in assessing proximity to the target, a tape measure can be used or a 4 ft. section of rope can be used to check the distance from the tape and folded in half to measure the distance from a target. Soccer cones make excellent targets.
6. Accuracy and target achievement: Marking the fly line for distance is discouraged; it should be estimated while false casting between targets. Each time the fly lands or touches ground or water counts as a delivery and there are a limited number of deliveries allowed ("Ticking", or accidental momentary landing the fly, counts as a delivery). A fly that hits the edge of the target zone is a hit. A fly that lands within the target but bounces out is a hit. A fly that lands outside the target zone and then bounces in is not a hit.
7. The caster achieves the designated casting skill within three attempts unless stated otherwise. The sequence can be repeated after the participant has practiced the task or has been coached to improve performance of the task.
8. The caster should strive for a distinct back and front loop in approximately the same plane with all casts, unless otherwise required, such as with a Belgian cast or some change of direction casts.
9. Leader should land relatively straight with all presentations except where otherwise indicated.



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10. Caster must successfully perform ALL tasks within a specific Casting Skill Challenge level to consider him or herself as having achieved that skill level.
11. A 10% allowance should be given for adverse conditions such as strong wind (this equals approximately 26 inches from the target center or 52 inches from the tape measure)
12. Coaching and instruction should take place while learning the necessary skills, but is discouraged when confirming achievement of the Skills Challenge.

## BRONZE FLY CASTING SKILL LEVEL

The Bronze Level is focused on developing or reinforcing solid beginning fly casting skills. A fly fisher with this level of proficiency can successfully fish many common fishing situations.

**The Bronze Level challenges are as follows:**

- B1. Pick-Up and Lay-Down cast (PULD):** This cast is fundamental to all fly casting. Starting with the fly at 40 ft., the caster can perform a PULD cast in a near vertical plane with leader straightening to within 2 ft. of the 40 ft. target center. No hauling or false casting allowed.
- B2. Vertical to Horizontal Casting:** Starting with the fly at 40 ft., the caster picks up in a near vertical plane (1 o'clock), makes a series of 2-4 false casts moving down to a near horizontal plane (3 o'clock), and delivers the fly with leader straightening at 40 feet within 4 ft. of either side of the tape. Nearly horizontal means that the fly would travel and land under an obstacle approximately 4 ft. above the surface. No hauling allowed.
- B3. Roll Cast, Dominant Side:** The roll cast is a very useful cast for removing slack in the line or when there is limited backcast space. Starting with the fly at 40 ft., the caster will perform a 40 ft. roll cast on the dominant shoulder (right shoulder for a right-handed person) with the leader straightening to within 2 ft. of the 40 ft. target center. A roll cast tool (artificial anchor) may be used if performed on grass at participant's discretion. The D loop (the back loop) should be established by slowly dragging the line into position such that the fly and leader do not leave the water surface or grass.
- B4. Roll Cast, Non-Dominant Side:** This cast is often used in situations where there are obstacles or the wind is blowing in from the dominant side. Starting with the fly at 40 ft., the caster will perform 40 ft. roll cast on the non-dominant shoulder (left shoulder for a right-handed person with rod held in right hand) with the leader straightening to within 2 ft. of the 40 ft. target center. A roll cast tool (artificial anchor) may be used if performed on grass at participant's discretion. The D loop (the back loop) should be established by slowly dragging the line into position on the non-dominant side of the body such that the fly and leader do not leave the water surface or grass.
- B5. Shooting Line:** This technique is fundamental to extending line when casting. Starting with the fly at 40 ft., the caster will strip 5-10 feet of fly line off the reel. A pick-up and lay-down cast will be performed with shooting line to 45 ft. or more on delivery with the fly landing within 4 ft. of either side of the tape. No false casting; hauling is allowed.
- B6. Accuracy:** Caster will extend the fly to 45 ft. and then strip line in so that approximately 4 ft. of fly line (4 ft. of fly line plus the leader) is beyond the rod tip. Casts are made off the dominant shoulder (right shoulder for a right-handed caster) to the 20, 30, and then 40-foot targets in sequence with a potential of 3 tries at each target. The fly must land within 2 ft. of the target center. In the event of a miss, the caster picks up where the fly landed and tries again at the



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same target for up to two more attempts (3 in total). Once the first target is achieved or 3 attempts exhausted, the caster will pick up and false cast while lengthening line to the next targets. Two (2) of three (3) targets must be achieved, with one being at 40 ft. False casting, shooting line, and hauling are allowed.

- B7. Distance:** Starting with the fly at 40 ft., the caster will achieve a distance of 50 ft. or beyond with the fly landing beyond the line tip and within 4 ft. of either side of the measuring tape within 3 attempts. Second and third attempts, if needed, can be started from any point. Hauling and unlimited false casts are allowed. Second and third attempts, if needed, can be started from any point.

## SILVER FLY CASTING SKILL LEVEL

The Silver Level is focused on developing intermediate level fly casting skills. A fly fisher with these casting skills can successfully fish common situations and often achieve more challenging presentations.

**The Silver Level challenges are as follows:**

- S1. Vertical to Horizontal False Casts, Non-Dominant Side:** Casting off the non-dominant side is useful when wind or obstruction require the loop to be on the non-dominant side. Starting with the fly at 40 ft., the caster picks up in a near vertical plane (11 o'clock) and makes a series of 2-4 false casts to a near horizontal plane (9 o'clock) on the non-dominant side (left side for a right-handed caster) and delivers the fly with leader straightening at 40 feet within 4 ft. of either side of the tape. Nearly horizontal means that the fly would travel and land under an obstacle approximately 4 ft. above the surface. No hauling allowed.
- S2. Reach Mend to Right:** When casting across moving water, the water in front of the caster is often faster than the current further out near the fish. To maximize drag free drift, it is helpful to mend the line up current in the area of the faster water with a reach mend. Starting with the fly at 40 ft., the caster will perform a reach mend to the right without slipping line with the fly landing within 4 ft. either side of the tape. The final rod position should be at 45 to 90 degrees to the direction of the cast. The leader and line may be curved, but the line position should be adequate to account for a faster current nearer the caster than the target. No dragging of line/leader after landing.
- S3. Reach Mend to the Left:** If the current is going in the opposite direction, the caster must often mend to the left. Starting with the fly at 40 ft., the caster will perform a reach mend to the left without slipping line with the fly landing within 4 ft. either side of the tape. The final rod position should be at 45 to 90 degrees to the direction of the cast. The leader and line may be curved, but the line position should be adequate to account for a faster current nearer the caster than the target. No dragging of line/leader after landing.
- S4. Slack Line Presentation:** Often when fishing across multiple current seams or directly downstream, a drag free drift is facilitated by having slack in the presentation. Starting with the fly at 40 ft., the caster will make a slack line presentation of their choosing. The fly must land beyond the line tip and within 4 ft. of either side of the tape. The amount of slack should take up about 3 or more feet of fly line/leader so that the fly lands at approximately 37 ft. or less from the caster.



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- S5. Belgian style or Oval Cast:** This cast can be used for sinking lines, multi-fly and nymph rigs, or heavy flies, when it is best not to have tight loops or a stop in the back cast. Starting with the fly at 40 ft., the caster will perform a Belgian cast with the fly landing approximately 40 feet and within 4 ft. of either side of the tape.
- S6. Accuracy, Non-Dominant Side:** Caster will extend the fly to 45 ft. and then strip line in so that 4 ft. of fly line (4 ft. of fly line plus the leader) is beyond rod tip. Casts are made off the non-dominant shoulder (left shoulder for a right-handed caster) to the 20, 30, and then 40 foot target in sequence with a potential of 3 tries at each target. In the event of a miss, the caster picks up where the fly landed and tries again at the same target for up to two more attempts (3 in total). Once the first target is achieved or 3 attempts exhausted, the caster will pick up and false cast while lengthening line to the next targets. Two (2) of three (3) targets must be achieved, with one being at 40 ft. False casting, shooting line, and hauling are allowed.
- S7. Distance and Shooting Line:** Starting with the fly at 45 ft., caster will achieve a distance of 60 ft. or beyond with the fly landing beyond the line tip and within 4 ft. of either side of the measuring tape within 3 attempts. Hauling and unlimited false casts are allowed. Second and third attempts, if needed, can be started from any point.

## GOLD FLY CASTING SKILL LEVEL

The Gold Level is focused on developing advanced fly casting skills. A fly fisher with these skills can successfully fish in a wide variety of fishing situations. The Gold Level performance must be witnessed and confirmed by either a current Gold Skill Level holder or a Certified Casting Instructor. *Note: At this level, loops should be approximately 4ft. in size front and back with no or infrequent tailing loops in order to accomplish the tasks.*

**The Gold Level challenges are as follows:**

- G1. Loop Control:** Starting with the fly at 45 ft., the caster will perform 4 or more false casts off the non-dominant shoulder (left shoulder for a right-handed person) ending with fly hitting a 4 ft. target. Hauling is allowed.
- G2. Curve Casts:** Casting around an obstacle is an advanced casting skill. Starting with the fly at 40 ft., the caster will perform a curve cast to the side of their choice with the line/leader curving around an obstacle at approximately 25 ft. The fly should land at least 45 degrees from the line layout between the caster and the obstacle. The technique used and the direction of curve is at the caster's discretion.
- G3. Roll Cast Pick-Up:** This cast can be used to remove significant slack after the drift. Starting with the fly at 40 ft., the caster will perform a roll cast pick-up with extension of line to 55ft. within 3 additional false casts. The fly must land within 4 feet of either side of the tape. Hauling is allowed.
- G4. Change of Direction Casts:** These casts are often used to redirect the fly back upstream to repeat the drift. Starting with the fly at 40 ft., the caster will perform two different change of direction casts of their choosing with fly line and leader landing relatively straight. Directional change should be at least 45 degrees. Hauling and false casting are allowed.
- G5. Accuracy:** Caster will extend the fly to 55 ft. and then strip line in so that 4 ft. of fly line (4 ft. of



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fly line plus the leader) is beyond the rod tip. Casts are made to the 20, 30, 40, and 50 ft. foot targets in sequence with a potential of 3 tries at each target. In the event of a miss, the caster picks up where the fly landed and tries again at the same target for up to two more attempts (3 in total). Once the first target is achieved or 3 attempts exhausted, the caster will pick up and false cast while lengthening line to the next targets. Three (3) of four (4) targets must be achieved, with one each at 40 and 50 ft. False casting, hauling and shooting line are allowed.

**G6. Casting While Seated or Kneeling:** This cast may be used when fishing from a boat, float tube, or kneeling behind cover. While sitting in a chair or kneeling with one knee on the ground, the caster will pick up 30 ft. of line and shoot to 40 ft. with the fly landing within 4 ft. of either side of the tape. False casting, shooting line, and hauling are allowed.

**G7. Backcast Presentation to a Minimum of 55 ft.:** Wind and obstructions may require presentation on the backcast. The caster will start with 40 ft. of line out and present the back cast to a minimum of 55 ft. with the fly landing within 4 ft. of either side of the tape. False casting, shooting line, and hauling are allowed.

**G8. Distance and Shooting Line:** Starting with the fly at 45 ft., the caster will achieve a distance of 70 ft. or beyond with the fly landing beyond the line tip and within 4 ft. of either side of the measuring tape within 3 attempts. False casting, shooting line, and hauling are allowed. Second and third attempts, if needed, can be started from any point.

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# OUR MISSION

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FLY FISHERS INTERNATIONAL has been an organized voice for fly fishers since 1964. We represent all aspects of fly fishing—from the art of fly tying and casting instruction, to the protection of and access to fisheries around the world.

A 501c3 non-profit organization, FFI is driven by three fundamental pillars: CONSERVATION, EDUCATION, AND COMMUNITY. Together, these pillars provide the foundation for our vision of the future of fly fishing—a future in which anglers have access to prime waters and fish can thrive in healthy, protected habitats; in which learning never stops and artistry is not forgotten; and that recognizes the true value of camaraderie. If we want this legacy to be experienced by future generations, we have to work to make that happen.

JOIN FLY FISHERS INTERNATIONAL TODAY to help ensure that fly fishing can continue to instill the kind of passion it does today in so many of us.

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