

Bsd

This document was written with the presumption that the reader has a basic level of understanding fishing terms, as well as some minimal experience on the water. Hoping that you'll find the content useful, and that it helps you out every now and then.

Tight lines!

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### *Rules and regulations*

Before heading out to do any sport fishing, please be aware of local rules and regulations. They vary by state and province throughout North America, and even regionally or by waterbody in some areas. From open and closed seasons, to bag limits and slot sizes, to limits on the equipment being used. Lastly, be sure to purchase valid, local fishing licenses before fishing, for anyone legally required to do so. Last thing you need is a vacation or trip ruined by being on the wrong side of the law, and claiming ignorance is not a valid excuse.

### *Local research*

Before fishing a spot, especially if I've never been there, there are a few steps of research I like to do.

- 1) Find as much intel on the spot as possible. Search engine research can be helpful. So can locals, or fishing groups such as fishing forums or groups on social media.
- 2) Scan Google maps of the area, and if available, a Navionics bathymetric map can be even more helpful. Look for productive depths and structure related to your target species.
- 3) Once on site, the use of electronics is very helpful. Deeper makes a trollable / castable transducer that connects to Smartphones via Bluetooth, if you aren't already on a boat equipped with a sonar. On ice, flasher type sonars provide a real time view of your lure, and approaching fish as well.

### *Keeping a log*

Keeping a paper or digital fishing log will greatly improve your chances of connecting with fish year after year, especially when you fish many new waterbodies. It will also help eliminate spots or seasons that don't work on a given waterbody.

I keep a spreadsheet format, so I can always add columns or extra data as required. My entries start with the date and location of a given outing. I then list species caught, sizes, lures/colors used, as well as the methods (casting, trolling, etc). I then add Time of day / solunar info, depth, water temperature, and meteorological information such as outer temperature, cover, wind speed. I also have a general comment section for each entry, where I typically log other pertinent information, such as hours fished, quantity of holes drilled, ice thickness, and fish mood. Eventually, you should have a much better chance at finding patterns that work, all year round.

### *Targeting specific species*

Different species of fish react to different presentations. Knowing which species reside in the water body you plan to target, is the first step. Figuring out how to go about catching them, is the next. While some beginners may just cast a worm out and hope for the best, you are infinitely better off planning which species you attempt to target, followed by the right methods and lures or bait used to do so.

Often, you'll have an overlap. Predators like bass, walleye, pike and muskies, often share waterways, and can be caught using the some of the same tactics, such as casting or trolling a variety of lures.

Similarly, while fishing with carp bait, you'll inevitably end up catching catfish, suckers, tench, and possibly the occasional sturgeon.

### *Peak fishing times*

Peak times for fishing will vary by species and seasons. Early in the season when water temperatures are cold, most species peak bite is sometime close to the hottest part of the day. As spring turns to summer, different species have different peaks, becoming a bit more predictable:

- 1) Bottom feeders will generally feed in spurts throughout the day and night, as they don't use their sense of sight to feed. Catfish tend to bite more as dark rolls in, and all through the night. Carp bite tends to increase with changes in light levels, i.e., sun to cloud, calm to wind, incoming rain, or just after sunset.
- 2) Fishing for predators like walleyes and largemouth bass, is far more productive during early morning and late evening hours, where they generally turn on to feed. Wind, and especially rain is favorable to walleye, while calm and sunny conditions are favorable for largemouth bass.
- 3) Smallmouth bass and pike seem to prefer "user friendly" hours. Their peak bites usually start a couple hours after daylight, and start to dwindle a couple hours before sunset.
- 4) Solunar periods generally are the best time of day to catch top predatory species in a given waterway, no matter which species that might be. Majors are often best, followed by minors. See the solunar times chart by clicking: <https://www.fishingreminder.com/>

### *Mindset*

Often overlooked, your attitude towards fishing will ultimately dictate what may consist of a successful day. If your success is solely measured by the quantity or quality of fish caught, you may be in for some "tough" days every now and then.

My expectations going into any outing are to give it my best shot every time out. While exploring hundreds new waterways and dozens of species over the past few decades, I've inevitably run into non productive spots or tactics. Rather than look at those outings as failures, I look at them as necessary time spent eliminating places or methods that are not productive. Then, when I do find something that works out well, I'm happier about it, and if things go according to plan, I end up with a place I can go back to on a regular basis for (hopefully) years to come.

## Rods/reels

Owning fishing rod and reel combos can be as simple as buying one, or as complicated as owning dozens of rods specific to certain species, techniques/lures, or other scenarios.

Over the years, I have accumulated a decent number of rods, which I'll break down into various categories:

- 1) Rods for my kids. My kids all started fishing around the young age of 2 or 3 years old. Putting a quality rod and reel in the hands of kids that young, simply isn't worth it. I found some rods good enough for most of the species they fish for, that cost about \$7 each. Paired with reels that varied from \$5 to \$15 over the years. Though the reels tend to fail after a few seasons, I typically stock up on them, and don't need to worry about them being mistreated.
- 2) Multi purpose rod/reel combos: These are my go to rods when fishing for most mainstream freshwater predatory species like bass, pike, walleye, etc. As I'm not much of a gear freak, I prefer to get something sturdy, that won't break easily, and can take a beating under various circumstances. I use them for both casting and trolling.
- 3) Specialty rod/reel combos: From tiny ice fishing rods, to longer 12 foot carp rods, these are rods designed for very specific applications, and generally don't lend themselves to other types of fishing. Baitrunner reels are extremely useful for carp fishing, as well as with live bait applications, where legal.

For the most part, I prefer to mix and match rods and reels with what I choose, and when I do find something sturdy for a good price, I like to stock up on a few of the same model. Inevitably, companies discontinue certain models, and for the most part, newer models almost always end up being cheaper versions of the originals. Having multiple reels of the same model, I don't have to worry about finding spare parts in case of damage, nor do I have to worry much about constant price increases.

Storing all those rods, takes up quite a bit of space, and easy access to them is important if you plan on using them often. I made good use of "dead space" up on my office wall by installing shelving racks (without the shelves) to store my rods. I can keep them pre rigged and ready to go anytime.



### *Self spooling line*

While there are some spooling stations available on the market, I have never bothered with them. Initially, I just had someone hold a pen or pencil pushed through the center of the spool, and thumb it for pressure. Eventually, I figured out a couple hacks, to doing this on my own.

- 1) From reel: Before dipping into my stash of new fishing line, I'll typically opt to spool from broken reels or spare spools. With the reel you want line added to mounted to a rod, simply tie the 2 lines using a back to back (double) uni knot (more on that on a later page). Then, adjust the drag/tension setting on the receiving reel to be tighter than the one you are taking line from. Use your feet to hold the giving reel in place, and crank the receiving reel to take as much line as required from it.
- 2) From spool: If you plan to take the line from a new spool, mount your reel onto a rod. A basic fishing knot will do if you are filling up line from scratch, be sure to open bail before tying line if you are using a spinning reel. If you are using braided line, use a small piece of tape on your knot to avoid line slippage later on. This is not necessary with monofilament line as backing. I found the simplest way of keeping tension of the spare spool without the help of an additional person, is to run a pen or pencil through the center of the free spool of line. Then, wearing socks, you can use your toes to hold it in place and add tension as required while reeling down on it, to fill the reel to capacity.

### *Ice – fluorocarbon*

The use of fluorocarbon or monofilament leaders is a growing trend for various applications. From stealth, to abrasion resistance, to necessity when ice fishing. Braided line tends to soak up water, and when outside temperatures drop below freezing, braided line freezes quickly. Fluorocarbon and monofilament lines are the way to go. As I use my standard summer reels for ice fishing, I simply tie on as much of these lines as I need, leaving the braided line as backing. I rarely fish deeper than 50 feet, so using 60-80 feet of leader line per reel, is more than enough for an entire winter.

### *Shock leaders*

Shock leaders are a similar idea, except that heavy line is used, to avoid line cuts due to abrasion to rocky areas, especially blasted shale. Braided line will snap at the slightest run against the sharp edges, and even more so in waterways containing Zebra mussels, that have razor sharp shells. I use shock leaders on all my carp fishing reels, typically 50 feet of 80 lbs test monofilament, tied to 50 lbs braid mainline, using the FG knot, which is described in the following chapter.

Knots / Line / Leaders:

### *Palomar knot*

The basic knot I use to tie on lures, is the Palomar knot. This knot works extremely well with most thinner lines, especially braided lines. Simply double the line over, pass it through the eye of the hook or lure, and tie overhand knot. You should have a large open loop on one end of the eye, and the main line + tag end on other side. Pass the entire lure or hook through the loop, then pull on the main line to tighten the knot in place. Most people will cut the tag end of the line at this point.

View Youtube video demonstration by clicking: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TFk\\_Ktw2f1w](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TFk_Ktw2f1w)

There are couple hacks to this knot.

- 1) Before passing the lure through the loop, the loop size and tag end are adjustable by pulling on either side of the loop. If your loop isn't big enough for the lure to pass through easily, pull on the loop's side which connects to the main line. This will enlarge your loop as needed (especially for bigger lures) , by feeding it main line.
- 2) Pulling on the opposite side of the loop will feed line from the tag end. As you pull on it slowly, watch the tag end shrink in size. If you pull it through close enough to the eye, you'll never need to cut the tag end once the knot is completed.

### *Basic fishing knot*

This knot is another very simple knot, that can be used with most lines. There are a few variations available, but the standard version is achieved by threading the hook or lure's eye onto single strand of the mainline. Now, wrap the tag end around the mainline 5-6 times, or rotate you hook or lure 5-6 times, while holding the lines steady. Then, pass the tag end back through the loop formed closest to the eye. You can wet stiffer lines at this point. Pull down on the mainline to tighten knot into place, and cut the tag end.

View Youtube video demonstration by clicking: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=12suga1qwEs>

This knot is extremely useful when tying thicker and stiffer lines, such as heavy fluorocarbon, monofilament, or leader material. I use this knot to tie 40-50 lbs fluorocarbon leaders for pike fishing. Much simpler and a lot stronger than using crimps.

### *Double uni knot*

The double (or back to back) uni knot, is used to tie 2 lines of similar diameter together. As the line on your reel runs out over time, you'll want to add more to your reel in order to achieve optimal casting capability. Instead of getting rid of hundreds of feet of old line by replacing it completely, simply tie a double uni knot connecting the 2 lines, and add as much new line as required, using your old line as backing.

Note that the lines don't need to have exactly the same diameter, but they should be close. I even tie on my 6-8 lbs test fluorocarbon or monofilament lines for ice fishing directly to braided line, as my 20 lbs test braided line has roughly the same diameter.

To tie the knot, the first step is to overlap both lines. Next step is to bring the first end of the overlapping line, over the main line to form a loop, and then keep wrapping it over the 2 lines about 6-7 times. Tighten down once done. Now, repeat the same steps on opposite side. You should be left with 2 sliding knots, and a section of both mainlines in between them. Pulling on both mainlines outside the knots, they will slide together "back to back", until they tighten. Cut the tag ends as close to the knots as possible, to avoid them impeding / catching the rod guides when casting.

View Youtube video demonstration by clicking: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LBoU1R4GGv0>

### *FG knot*

The FG knot is used to tie heavy leaders to lighter line, most often, fluorocarbon or monofilament to braid. The FG knot is sort of tough to explain in writing, so please see the instructional video by clicking: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pjzUb5QRKuk>

### *Leaders*

Leaders are generally used to avoid line cuts when fishing for species that have teeth sharp enough to cut thinner or braided lines. In this part of the continent, the main target freshwater species necessitating the use of leaders are Esocids such as pike, pickerels, and muskies. While many store bought leaders are available, I prefer tying my own, using components that I prefer, instead of standard steel coated leaders crimped to snaps, which have failed me too often in the past.

For most of my freshwater fishing, I use 40 lbs fluorocarbon leader material. Starting with a 12-14 inch piece of line, I tie a barrel swivel to one end using a basic fishing knot, and a duo lock type snap, to the other end. The duo lock snap system is more reliable than the standard type snaps which tend to open under pressure, as opposed to the duo lock which tightens down onto itself under pressure.

The leader is then tied onto the mainline at the swivel end, and lures can be changed on the snap end without the need to cut and re-tie the line.

For lures with an open ended eye such as many spinnerbaits and buzzbaits, tie the lure directly to the leader instead of using a snap, as the snap would slide out of place outside the confines of the standard eye, greatly reducing the lure's efficiency. A basic fishing knot with leader material will do.



### *Quick strike rigs*

The quick strike mainly rig is used when fishing for Esocids such as pike or muskies, using live or dead baitfish. Esocids have the tendency to first grab a fish at the midsection, and then slowly turning it by chomping down, until they swallow it head first. Being that these species are prone to taking very large baits in proportion to their body's length, the quick strike rig ensures a proper hookup, without needing to wait for the fish to start swallowing the bait hooked through the lips or back in a traditional setup. They also have less chance of swallowing the hooks, making for easier releases, provided the hooks are set quickly enough.

Quick strike rigs can be tied using basic knots with fluorocarbon leader material, or metal wire using haywire twists. Generally, they are tied using two small (#6 to #4) treble hooks, a few inches apart, depending on the size of the baitfish being used. Check for legalities of using double treble hooks in your area before tying them.

Dead bait can be rigged by pushing first hook into its head or neck, and the trailer hook further back, near of behind the dorsal fin. I also like to have both hooks in opposite flanks of the bait fish. For live bait, tying a thin strip of line around the fish and leader, or perhaps a thin rubber band, will help keep it in place. Be sure to use only one of the treble hook's tines on each side, leaving the other hooks exposed.

Most often, quick strike rigs will be used under bobbers in open water, or flag lines while ice fishing. Be sure to set when the fish is running, as waiting too long increases chances of a gut hooked fish, which likely won't survive swallowing a quick strike rig.

Here is a quick strike rigged mackerel I've used to fish for pike on ice in the past:



### *Sliding sinker rigs*

These rigs are typically used when still fishing, either from the shore, or from an anchored boat. In freshwater, they are used mainly to fish for bottom feeders like carp, catfish, and sturgeon.

The mainline is passed through the center of many styles of sliding sinkers, or through the eye of some other styles of sinker. The idea remains the same, where the line can easily slide through the sinker without any resistance from the sinker's weight. The end of the line is then tied to whichever rig you plan to present, typically a shorter length of line with a hook on one end, and a swivel on the other, which connects to the mainline.

Hair rigs (described below), are the best for carp. A short 2-3 foot line with a circle hook tied on the end is great for catfish, and greatly reduces the chance of them swallowing your hook, to make for an easy release. Octopus hooks are usually used for sturgeon fishing, on a similar length of line.

Sinker style and weight will depend on the structure, and current you are fishing in. A few styles include, egg sinkers, no roll sinkers, pyramid sinkers and spider sinkers.

Another tip is to use baitrunner reels when fishing sliding rigs. The double drag system allows fish to run with the bait without feeling any resistance. Winding the reel will click the baitrunner off, leaving you to fight the fish with the standard drag system.

My typical hair rig / sliding sinker setup using a 3 ounce no roll sinker:

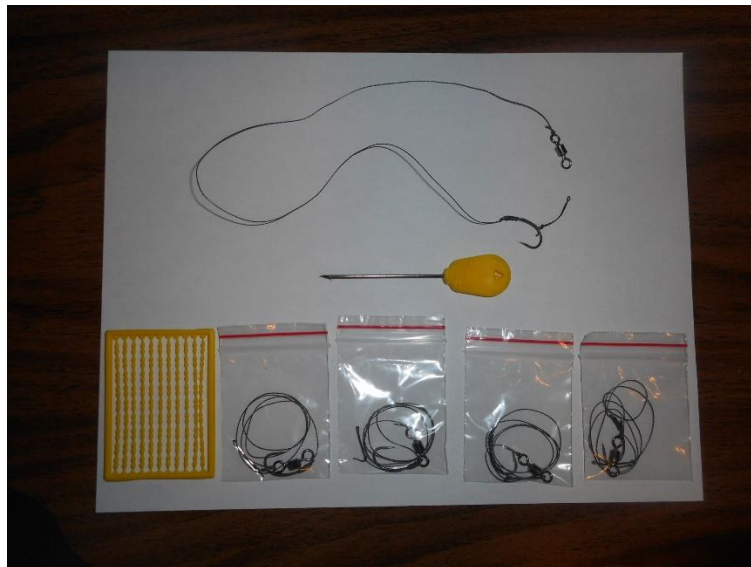


## *Hair rigs*

The hair rig was primarily designed for carp fishing. The idea is to have the hook exposed, while the bait is threaded onto a tag end of line with a loop knot, then secured in place with a bait stop. This allows for the use of bait items that aren't easily impaled on a hook, such as boilies, and harder or brittle particle baits. I've found most success using #4 carp hooks, generally curve shank style.

When a bottom feeding species like carp inhale the bait, the exposed hook will typically lodge itself in the bottom or side of jaw. This works equally well for catfish, suckers, tench, and to a lesser extent, buffalo, which tend to expel through their gills, instead of blowback.

To bait a hair rig, a few items are required: a baiting needle, either barb or crochet hook style, to thread your bait onto the hair. A bait stop to hold it in place. Anything from a twig, to piece of rubber or plastic will do, though commercial types are inexpensive. Bait drills are useful when dealing with dense or hard items.



Tying a hair rig is better demonstrated visually, for video instructions, click:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gWwdd4TdBfY>

A video I made demonstrating how to bait a hair rig, click:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eDYX5pT-X3w&t=6s>

Additionally, I sell hair rigs, as well as baiting needles, and bait stops on my web site, available by clicking: <https://freshwaterphil.com/hair-rigs.cfm>

### *Drop shot rigs*

Another very basic rig used with either live bait, or soft plastics, is the drop shot rig. The idea is to have the hook ride 12 to 18 inches above the bottom, by attaching a weight to the tag end of the mainline. I've always preferred to use split shot sinkers for my drop shot rigs, for a couple reasons.

First, I can add more sinkers as needed to get the bait down deeper or quicker.

Second, if the sinkers get snagged on bottom, I can usually pull the hook free, without losing it and having to re-tie.

Hook sizes used will typically depend on bait being used, and weight will depend on depth and current.

The one pictured below is what I use for small panfish when fishing with younger kids:



### *Lures*

There are simply too many categories and styles of lures for the scope of this guide. Over time, a couple noteworthy observations I've made:

- 1) The price of lures just keeps going up. No matter how expensive I may have found a given lure 10 years ago, chances are that a new one in the same model is between 50% to 100% more expensive today. I've bought small lots of lures that I use often, typically on sites like eBay, or perhaps marketplace today. Stocking up on well performing lures now, will provide substantial savings over time.
- 2) Many lures come with hooks that are less sharp than you'd think they should be. Even worse, some have inferior hooks that simply don't sharpen well at all. I often sharpen hooks on lures straight out of the box, using a diamond coated file type sharpener. I also have a stockpile of ultra sharp treble hooks in various sizes, to match ones that often need to be replaced.

## *Trolling*

Trolling lures is an extremely effective way to cover water, and in many instances, the only way to connect with certain species of game fish, given the right conditions. Most fishing boats come equipped with a sonar and GPS system, which generally have lake maps for most larger waterways in North America. Trolling a constant depth is a major key to success, and electronics such as a sonar/GPS are invaluable when it comes to large waterbodies or deeper water. As well, they allow for entry of waypoints, which many anglers will use to mark either productive areas, or spots where they manage to hook a fish.

In instances where you have access to a boat that doesn't have its own sonar mounted, there are a few portable models available, as well as the Deeper model I previously mentioned. In absence of any electronics, shallower water can be trolled visually.

In clear water, this is simple enough. Polarized glasses will help you see further down into the water by cutting surface glare, and standing while running the motor will give a better view of what is coming up ahead. Troll outer edges of weedlines, sunken logs, or reefs.

In muddy or tannic water, visibility is often reduced to depths too shallow to troll visually. This is where emerging weed growth becomes your guide. Various types of waterlilies and pondweed, root at certain depths (ie. 6-8 feet). Trolling the outer line of a continuous weedbed will ensure you remain in the vicinity of the target depth. Most diving lures come with depth ratings, so when your lure starts bumping bottom, you'll have a rough idea of the depth at that spot as well.

## *Wading / shore fishing*

While shore fishing can be a simple method of hitting your local waterway in absence of a boat, wading will often take it to the next level. In general, many smaller rivers and streams offer wading opportunities. Depending on the water temperature, the clothing required can vary.

In cold water, you'll need warm waders. I prefer neoprene chest waders, under which I often wear thermal underwear and thermal socks. With this sort of gear, I can fish near freezing water for hours at a time, while keeping warm. Once the water warms up enough, I opt to wade either in a bathing suit, or an old pair of jeans, wearing water shoes. This helps keep me cool throughout the day, as well as avoid direct skin contact with toxic plants, or insect bites on shore.

When wading, especially in cold water with strong current, be sure to stay shallow enough to safely move along the river bed, Take your time with each step, making sure of your footing before shifting your weight. Avoid wading in water deeper than waist height, especially in stronger current. Loose rocks or extremely soft spots in mud are common, and can potentially lead to falls, injuries, or broken equipment. Wading staffs can be helpful, there are commercial versions available, though a strong branch can be used as a pole if need be.

## *Casting*

Without getting into all the intricacies of casting, it's safe to say that most casting done from a boat, will usually be towards shallower water. Predatory species prefer various types of cover, which they use to ambush their prey. Accurately casting to within inches of submerged logs, rocks piles, or emerging weeds, is often the best bet. Accurate casting takes some practice, but I've found over time, that the most effective technique is to cast a bit harder, and simply thumb the spool when you are ready for the lure to land, as opposed to naturally trying to achieve a perfect cast each time.

## *Hands free fishing*

Certain styles of fishing require rods to remain in position for extended periods of time. Trolling and still fishing come to mind.

For trolling, rod holders are an essential tool. It simply isn't feasible to troll large lures at high speeds while holding rods for extended periods of time. Often, even standard rods are just as well left in holders while trolling.

Various models exist, but for my money, the most practical and cost effective ones I have found are "Salty's" made by Down East. Stainless steel, sturdy, and rustproof, there are various models to match gunwales, or the simple "clamp on" type that I use. They come with adjustable quick release mechanisms, so you can choose to have a rod riding high, horizontal, or even buried under the surface while trolling, which is often an effective way of reducing weeds catching your line. I use them on various types of rowboats, small motorboats, canoes, and Jon boats.

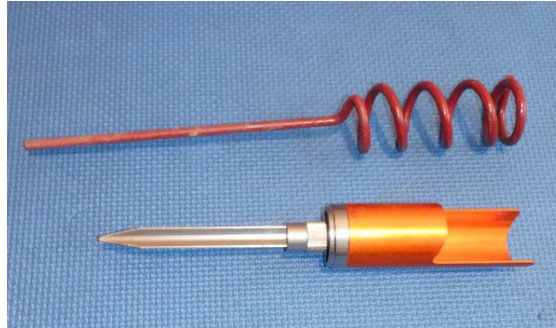


The bonus is that I also use them to mount my rods to dock or pier cleats when still fishing.



For still fishing, while the aforementioned rod holder can be mounted to certain structures, at other times, I have a few more styles to choose from:

- 1) Ground spikes are simple, cheap, and effective when fishing from a grassy or earthen shorelines.



- 2) Bank sticks are effective in the same conditions, and as they pair with bite alarms, one can run multiple lines at different distances and hear alarms go from afar when lines get taken.



- 3) Rod pods are the ultimate version of rod holders used for shore fishing. They hold multiple rods, can be set up on just about any surface, and have various adjustable levels to keep rod tips from up high, all the way down to under the surface if need be. They pair with bite alarms as well, and are typically used when still fishing for bottom feeders with baitrunner reels.



## *Bait*

Use of baitfish, live or dead, is no longer permitted in my area, outside of dead bait for ice fishing. As such, my use of natural bait is limited mainly to earthworms that I catch after rainstorms when required, or mealworms that I use to tip my ice fishing lures with. After a couple disasters of having worms escape in my fridge, I got a small inexpensive fridge dedicated to keeping bait in. Aside from worms, it also contains various concoctions of baits that I tinker with for carp.

While we are on the topic of carp bait, for the most part, commercially sold carp baits are harder to find, and extremely overpriced. As such, I've been making my own version of carp bait for many years, from boilies, to popups, to particle baits such as prepared corn, tiger nuts, chickpeas, etc. Aside from saving a substantial amount of money, the satisfaction of catching carp on home made bait, adds to the thrill.

Prebaiting can become quite expensive using conventional store bought bait. Instead, I opt to use cheaper items, from particles such as deer corn or chick peas, to range cubes (horse feed).

Prebaiting a spot for carp, is an extremely effective way of increasing your chances of catching them. Carp are bottom feeders, that often congregate in schools. Once they find a regular source of food, they tend to stay in the area, or keep returning to it, as long as the food is available. Being that they are omnivorous, they will consume just about anything, that other animals, fish, or humans do.

Once you identify a general area that has carp in it, narrow it down to a spot with little to no current, preferably close to deeper water (20+ feet). Easy access is a bonus. Prebait the spot with a mix of items and flavours, at least once a day, for 2-3 days before fishing the spot. Use one or more of the prebaited items as your hookbait, as the carp should be onto them by then.

Before leaving, prebait the area again, to ensure that it keeps producing. In this manner, a spot can be "maintained" all season long.

As always, check your local regulations before prebaiting a spot, as certain regions forbid "chumming".



## *Night fishing*

Night fishing is often a good time to target big bottom feeders like carp, catfish and sturgeon. Still fishing is the primary tactic used, as these species use primarily their sense of smell and taste to find stationary food on the bottom, as opposed to predatory freshwater species that rely more on their sense of sight to ambush and chase prey. As most people fish during daylight, you'll likely find yourself alone when night fishing, which typically makes for more relaxing conditions in the peace and quiet of dark cover.

Here are a few tips to make night fishing simpler and more enjoyable.

- 1) Wear insect repellent and cover up. Unless you are out on a blistering hot midsummer night, you should be able to wear long pants and long sleeves, which will provide additional protection against biting insects like mosquitoes, which tend to go on the feed after dark.
- 2) Bring along a headlamp. Tying rigs and rigging bait in the dark can be tricky without proper lighting. Headlamps allow you to work hands free, and are easily switched on/off as required. They remain out of the way, yet handily accessible at all times. Also, be sure to turn lights off when taking pictures, and if need be, set your camera to night mode.
- 3) Pre-tie your lines and rigs. Having everything pre-tied and rigged to fish will save you time and effort as opposed to getting setup from scratch in the dark. I have spare rigs pretied, and everything properly organized to maximize my time when I start night fishing.
- 4) Be aware of municipal regulations. Some areas prohibit overnight parking. Others, prohibit overnight access to public land such as municipal parks. For example, Montreal and all surrounding municipalities have strict rules to park closures at 11 pm. Avoid getting fined by knowing the rules before heading out.
- 5) Stay safe. This one is a no brainer. Avoid dangerous neighborhoods where you may find yourself as a target for theft, especially when fishing alone with expensive gear. Same goes for areas where you may run into dangerous wildlife, such as bears, etc. Consider carrying bear spray or possibly weapons **where legal**, to keep nuisances away.



### *Float tubes / kayaks*

Smaller and more remote waterways often offer excellent fishing opportunities, due to tough access, which keeps people from accessing and launching boats into them. Using smaller types of personal watercraft such as float tubes or kayaks, will allow you to access often untapped resources, though accessing those areas may require some extra effort trekking out to the spots carrying your gear and personal watercraft.

Personally, I prefer float tubes over kayaks, for comfort, weight, size, and cost. Best of all, is the hands free propulsion using fins, which allow me to efficiently work my way along shoreline while casting lures of choice for the areas I'm fishing. Compared to the size, stability, weight, and cost of a pedal drive kayak, float tubes are a breeze. The drawback to them is that they are just about useless in moderate or strong current, and very tough to fish from on windier days. As such, plan your outings to coincide with less windy days, and stay in lakes or slow moving river areas.

Various float tube models exist, with the lightest and simplest models, being inflatables. If possible, order replacements bladders whenever you find them. Bladders seams will eventually fail over time, often after a long winter without use, and it's always nice to have the replacements on hand, as opposed to having to scramble to find them.

For the most part, I prefer to stay as light as possible, carrying only a few good lures, a spare telescopic rod in addition to my standard rod, and some water / food to keep me going all day. With a barebones setup like mine, I'm able to haul the tube for a good distance. This suits me fine, as I'm normally casting to shoreline structure visible to the naked eye, usually on smaller lakes, canals or ponds.

On the flip side of things, bigger fixed pontoon type float tubes made of foam, are able to handle the bulk and weight of accessories like sonar, trolling motors and batteries. They end up being more like fishing platforms. A bit too much overkill for my liking.

Same goes for kayaks. Models exist ranging from a few hundred dollars barebone platform with paddle, to fancy fishing kayaks rigged with pedal drives, motors, and all the latest electronics, that can easily cost in the \$5000 to \$10000 range. More like a bass boat to me by then. I really don't see the point, but to each, their own.

Either way, there are a few adjustments to be made when fishing from a float tube or Kayak:

- 1) Casting. Sitting low, on, or even in the water, casting angles change. Accuracy takes a bit more practice, and you won't see any following fish until the last moment.
- 2) Use a lighter drag setting to make up for the inevitable pressure a fish will put on your gear when diving directly under you, as your maneuvering space is greatly diminished.
- 3) Consider using a lip grip or cut proof landing gloves when fishing for toothy fish, as most float tubes don't have much space for a landing net.
- 4) Take extra care of where you position your rod when unhooking fish, changing lures, etc, to avoid losing gear.
- 5) Keep a spare pump on the tube with you in case of slow leaks in the air bladder.
- 6) In colder weather, you can use waders to stay warm and dry, just be sure to stay close to shore in case of emergencies.

Ice fishing:

### *Dealing with cold*

When it comes to ice fishing, the major drawback for most people is the cold. Outside from the obvious use of heated shelters, there are other ways to stay warm out on open ice, for hours on end.

I don't use shelters or heaters when ice fishing. Instead, I dress in layers, and keep drilling holes and moving around to keep warm. This also allows me to explore more water, as I hole hop looking for schools of fish. I've fished 6-8 hour days in -25C temp, and managed to keep warm using these tactics. In warmer weather, I'll keep removing layers, and at times, have been down to my undershirt on open ice. See video at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9Z47UMsvq2U>

For panfish or smaller predatory species, a 6 inch hand auger will do, as long as the ice isn't too thick. For larger fish, or on thicker ice, an 8 inch auger is in order. Modern electric augers are more expensive, but their light weight and reliability in cold weather makes them far superior to the older gas powered models, which are rarely used any more. My Ion G2 cuts through thick ice with ease, and in no time.

Cold doesn't affect me as much as it does some other people, especially when it comes to my hands. I rarely use gloves when ice fishing, unless it's extremely cold or very windy. While I do carry a pair of waterproof gloves just in case, I prefer to bait lines, and unhook fish barehanded, and when the bite is on, removing gloves and putting them back onto wet hands nonstop, is basically useless. Early in the ice season, I start conditioning my hands, to make them more resistant to the cold. I simply dip them into my ice holes, then let them dry in the open air. Given enough time and ice fishing, the skin on my fingertips will get rougher and more weather resistant as the winter goes along. See video clip at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SizhD7Bw2sQ>

### *Ice safety*

Before venturing out on ice, knowledge of basic ice safety is a must. For starters, no fish is worth risking your life for. If the ice is unsafe, find somewhere else to go, or wait until the ice is safe enough to walk on. Weighing roughly 155 lbs, my bare minimum is 3 inches of solid (black) ice. Any less, make me too nervous to fish on, though I have walked on ice 2.5 inches thick a couple times. Small ponds and shallow lakes freeze quicker than deeper water. Current and warm springs under the surface, make ice very unpredictable. As such, knowing your water is crucial to staying safe, early in the ice season.

Next, is the use of safety equipment. A spud bar is your most important piece of equipment on thin ice, simply hit the ice in front of you at every step before proceeding. Once you are confident to have 4+ inches all around, the spud bar becomes less important. A floating survival suit is another important item early in the season. Some people add ice picks that clip on to clothing. See a short video demonstration by clicking: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tbujYY6kvCo>

Trekking out on foot is the safest way to go, as opposed to snowmobiles, atv or trucks. Besides being way more cost effective, it's also a way to keep warm by constantly moving around. I use ice sleds, and pack only the gear I plan to use, to keep it as light as possible. Please watch the following video demonstrating how to get out of the water if you go through the ice:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PKeP4LHR0z8>

### *Ice fishing gear*

My basic gear for a day typically includes:

- 1) An ice auger to drill holes, usually manual auger for thinner ice, and electric auger once it gets thicker as winter progresses, or when I'm after bigger fish species.  
Drilling with manual auger video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-KrVyhFAizk>  
Drilling with electric auger video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TOiNVFOfnZ8>
- 2) An ice scoop to remove slush from ice holes.
- 3) A small tacklebox with a few lures, typically small lipless sinking crankbaits, and other assorted ice lures like jigging lures and mini spoons.
- 4) A small toolbox with spare cutters for augers and matching wrench size, longnose pliers, a bolt cutter, jaw spreaders, a knife, some spare lures, lip gripper tool, and band aids.
- 5) A flasher (ice sonar) to assist me with jigging deeper water.
- 6) At least 2 ice rods, and if I plan on using flag lines, I'll bring as many as I'm legally allowed to use, The disc style Big game tip ups fit perfectly into 5 gallon buckets.
- 7) A folding chair, toilet paper, and first aid kit come in handy.
- 8) Ziplock or plastic bags if I intend on harvesting fish.
- 9) Food and water. I prefer 4 litre bottle, which I keep shaking often, to avoid ice buildup around the neck in below freezing temperature.

Speaking of freezing, I keep my phone, digital camera, and live bait, inside my coat pockets to avoid freezing.



As for staying warm, some people use popup shelters with heaters, other have ice shanties they tow out onto the ice. I prefer to avoid both, as I don't like being stationary for that long. I have gone out on ice in cars and trucks, once I was sure the ice was safe. Turning on the heater as needed will keep you warm if you are fishing stationary style lines like tip ups.



### *Ice fishing bait*

Keeping bait alive in colder weather can be tricky. If left outside, worms or mealworms will freeze, so I keep them in my coat pockets to avoid that. Live baitfish can be kept in an insulated cooler, use a dipnet to fish them out as required. An aerator will help keep them alive longer, or simply change the water every once in a while, as required. For dead bait, make sure to thaw them properly before fishing.

When baiting multiple tip up lines at the start of an outing, I like to use disposable gloves. Being that I use mainly frozen mackerels (live bait is not legal to use in my region), I prefer to keep the extremely strong scent they have off my hands.

Tipping lures with bait is an effective method of increasing your odds of getting a fish to bite. Small minnows, minnow heads, bit of earthworms, mealworms or waxworms, are popular choices.

### *Using tip ups*

The use of stationary lines is one of the main ways to catch fish under ice. Line allowances in winter will vary by region, but are typically higher than summer, throughout the “ice belt”.

I prefer polartherm big game tip ups, which are basically 11-12 inch diameter plastic discs, with a tip up / flag mechanism that is tripped when a fish runs with the line. Fish are then handlined, using pressure by pinching down or easing up on the line as required.

In general, these lines will remain stationary for most of your outing, the goal being to give enough time for fish to move in and find your bait. On colder days, be sure to periodically break newly formed ice in your ice holes to avoid freeze over. When a fish bites, it trips the flag, which is visible from a distance. Remove the disc, set to hook by hand, and handline the fish using fingers as “drag system” for resistance as needed.



### *Jigging on ice*

Ice rods are used primarily to jig lures through ice, often with the help of a “flasher” type sonar. Lures are dropped down the ice holes, and jigged at various depths and cadences, until a pattern is developed. The real time sonar gives you a direct reading, and idea of what is going on below the surface. Lures can be tipped with a variety of worm species or bit of small minnow, typically heads.

While many people jig a given spot from a heated shelter for hours on end, I prefer to “run and gun”. Basically, if I don’t get any hits in a particular hole within 5 minutes or so, I’ll move 20-50 feet away, drill another hole, and start again. This serves both to look for active fish (or schools of them), as well as to keep me warm moving around all day, without the need of a shelter.

Ideally, once I find a productive depth range on a lake, I tend to stick with it all around for the rest of the day, unless I intend to change the target species. As well, if I find schools of fish, I’ll drill a second hole next to my jigging hole to use strictly for the flasher and its transducer. This avoids having to remove the transducer with every fish landed to avoid them tangling in the wire on the way up the hole.

I shot some footage demonstrating the use of a flasher, but unfortunately, due to the nature of the screens they use, the fish aren’t visible on the video. Still should give a rough idea of what to expect. View it by clicking: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G\\_h-pABkGcg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G_h-pABkGcg)

### *Selective harvest*

Some people fish for the table, others, for pure spot. Most are somewhere in between. At times, I fish for better eating species in clean waterways. When I do, I prefer to keep mid size fish for the table. The small ones simply aren't worth bothering with, and generally speaking, the biggest ones won't taste as good. Bigger fish are more valuable alive as spawners, being that most species will have larger egg carrying females, than smaller males.

I typically use a couple fillet knives, a larger one for the tougher bones, and a smaller finesse knife to deal with more intricate y bones, or rib cages. As well as saran wrap if I'm freezing the fillets for later use.

When fishing with the intent of harvesting some for the table, I prefer to keep most of my catches during winter. No worries of a fish spoiling out on the ice, as opposed to a hot summer day. When I do keep fish in warm weather, I usually have a fridge or freezer nearby. In absence of these, a livewell, or cooler with ice will do.

Fillet or gut your catch as soon as possible once you get back to shore. Personally, I hate bones in fish, so I've learned how to make boneless fillets with the species I like to consume. Once fillets are removed, check for worms or parasite infestation, in which case, you'll need to remove them or discard the fillet. Avoid eating raw freshwater species unless you freeze them for a good week or so first, as some can contain harmful parasite larvae, invisible to the naked eye. If you plan on cooking the fish right away, if possible, I suggest leaving the fillets in a fridge for 6-8 hours first. This will avoid them curling up when being seared or pan fried, as rigor mortis needs a while to kick in. They will be more tender once rested.

If you intend to freeze the fillets for later use, make sure you rinse them well before freezing, and wrap them tightly in a few layers of saran wrap. Alternatively, you can use a vacuum sealing machine.

Many jurisdictions have rules regarding transportation of wild caught fish and fillets. In general, they require some skin to remain attached to the fillet for identification purposes. I leave the skin on to help prevent freezer burn. As well, freeze fish or fillets individually, so that legal bag limit can be easily counted. Fish may need to remain whole or gutted when slot sizes are in effect for a given species.



### *Catch and release*

When I don't intend to harvest fish, releasing them in good condition becomes the priority. Here are a few tips to increase their odds of survival:

- 1) Use a landing net to keep the fish in the water, upright and with its head submerged. For bigger fish such as muskies, sturgeon or carp, a larger net or cradle may be in order. Opt for rubberized mesh or soft mesh to avoid further damage to the fish.
- 2) Use a measuring tape or bump board to quickly measure fish. If you intend to weigh a larger fish, do so while it's in the net, and then subtract the net's weight after releasing it. This will avoid hanging the fish on a scale, which can cause damage to the vertebrae, or organ slippage, especially with large fish.
- 3) Make sure the fish is in good condition before removing it from the net or cradle for quick pictures. Avoid holding fish by the gills, and for big fish, keep them horizontal for the pictures. In hot weather, certain species become very vulnerable, namely muskies and big pike. Put them back in your cradle or landing net between pictures, measurements, weigh ins, etc, to let them revive.
- 4) Use a landing mat under big fish when unhooking them out of the water. This will reduce damage from hard surfaces such as rock, gravel, or concrete, and make for cleaner / nicer pictures. When fishing from shore, consider leaving them in a keepnet if you intend to have multiple fish in your pics.
- 5) When ice fishing, try to minimize the time a fish stays out of the water on very cold and windy days. The goal is to avoid their slime freezing, especially over their eyes. Have your release tools and camera handy, and keep the fish submerged as long as possible while handling.
- 6) When taking pictures to post for the general public, such as social media, that extra exposure can add a lot of fishing pressure to your spot, to the point where you may find the spot "burned out". Consider avoiding noticeable landmarks in your backgrounds, or possibly blurring them out using photoshop.

This big channel catfish is pictured in a fish friendly mesh net, laying on a release mat.





### *Hiring fishing guides*

Good fishing guides are an invaluable resource when it comes to successful fishing outings. Opt for a well experienced guide with a good track record, whenever possible. I try to get a realistic idea of what to expect from them before going out, so I can make informed decisions on how to proceed. That being said, you'll inevitably run into guides that either exaggerate, or worse, may be complete liars, just there to take your money. Luckily, these have been a rare minority in my experience, and most of the guides I've hired were extremely professional, and masters at their game.

Though I'm comfortable fishing on my own in most freshwater situations, when I'm away travelling to new regions, I've often hired guides to put me on to new species that required the use of a boat, specialized equipment, and equally importantly, the guide's knowledge of pursuing our target species. The success rate and knowledge I acquired, has usually been well worth the cost.

Locally, hiring a guide can be a great way to learn waterways in your area, as well as where the productive fishing spots are, and various ways of targeting the species you may be after. They can also give you valuable lessons on how to maximize the use of your own boat, electronics, and gear. Often, a good guide can teach you more in a day than you may have learned in many days on your own.

Always make sure to let your guide know what your expectations are before going out, to make sure everyone is on the same page. At the day's end, if you feel your guide did their best to put you onto good fishing, be sure to tip them accordingly, especially when you end up having better success than expected.



## *Clothing*

Fishing in four seasons requires clothing suitable for weather varying from extreme heat to deep freeze. For extreme cold, dress in layers. Fleece undergarments, followed by standard layers, then sweaters, and finally snowsuits, parkas, etc. Boots should be 100% waterproof for ice fishing, and preferably high enough to reach just below the knee. Insulation rating of -60C to -100C is what I recommend, as well as thermal socks. This will keep you warm all day out on ice, even without shelter, provided you keep moving around enough to stay warm. I test my waterproof boots in a bathtub filled with cold water as soon as I get them, to ensure there are no defects.

For rain, various styles of rainsuits are available. While they are lightweight, when it comes to heavy rain in cold weather, I prefer to wear my neoprene chest waders. Nothing will keep you dryer, warmer and windproof in nasty weather. Keep in mind, that going overboard in waders is dangerous, as there is no way to empty or drain them without removing. They offer protection from insect bites as well.

During the hottest days of summer, I often prefer to wear pants, and even long sleeve shirts. To stay cool, I go in the water with them on, and when I get out, I'll stay much cooler until they dry, at which point I'll go in the water again. They also provide added protection from biting insects and poison ivy when trekking through wooded areas or bushes.

Spraying clothing with insect repellent is an effective way of avoiding ticks and mosquito bites. These would otherwise cling to, or sting through clothing. Avoid using DEET on certain synthetic/polyester materials, such as the ones "performance" clothing is made of. Alternative repellents are effective, I use PiActive on those items.

Another often overlooked item at times, are sunglasses. Polarized glasses cut surface glare, and help you see structure and even fish better in shallow water, aside from protecting your eyes from the sun, glare, and UV rays. Furthermore, I wear them even on cloudy days, as an added security measure against potentially getting hooked in the eye. When a rod is loaded and a fish spits the hook just as you are about to land it, the hook will often come flying back at you at high speed. I've had some close calls, and luckily, the few times that I've been hooked past the barbs, has been in my hands, and I was equipped to deal with the situation on site.



### *Emergency Hook removal*

Carrying a small first aid kit, as well as bolt cutters, or pliers strong enough to cut hooks, are added security measures one can take in case of emergency. Inevitably, getting hooked is part of fishing. While most of these accidental hookups typically don't result in the hook being embedded past the barb, every once in a while, they do.

Should be hook embed itself in a more vital area, seek immediate professional help.

Assuming the hook is embedded in a relatively benign part of the body such as a hand or arm, there are a couple ways to safely remove the hooks without doing major damage:

- 1) If possible, push the hook through and out of the skin, cut the barbed tip with a cutter or pliers, then pull the hook back out the way it came in.
- 2) If the hook is embedded in a manner where pushing it through is not an option, this simple trick using fishing string and counter pressure is invaluable, and will save you a trip to the emergency room. I used it successfully a couple times, once on my son, and once on myself, in which case I used my teeth as an extra hand, being that the hook was embedded in my left hand.

In either case, disinfect the area with Polysporin or rubbing alcohol once hook is removed. Here is a (slightly graphic) video clip demonstrating both hook removal methods:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LeW3JP8oQzk>

### *Other Emergencies*

Without getting into all the possibilities of things that can go wrong, it suffices to say that carrying supplies in case they happen is the way to go, especially when going to remote areas with no phone or internet access. From first aid kits and medicines for personal emergencies, spare equipment in case of failure or breakage, spare tire, jack, pump, tire repair kits (which I've had to use a number of times), duct tape with its 1000 uses, and a few tools. Though I haven't done any remote trips alone, I'd probably opt for an emergency satellite communication device if I were going solo.

I hope you found my fishing tips document useful. My plan is to occasionally add more content to it over time. In the meanwhile, I invite you to enjoy more of my fishing related content, accessible online:

**My website:** [Freshwaterphil.com](http://Freshwaterphil.com)

Created around 2007, this site is where my online fishing content was launched.

**My blog:** [Montreal-fishing.com](http://Montreal-fishing.com)

My blog chronicles my ongoing fishing outings, trips and adventures. It is updated on a regular basis, with new posts, pictures, and occasional video clips.

**Montreal fishing spots:** [Click to purchase](#)

This pdf document contains my tips and tricks to shore fishing 10 spots around Montreal. For the nominal fee of \$15, you will receive the guide, and I'm happy to answer any questions regarding the guide and its specific spots as need be.

**My book:** [The Frum Fishaholic](#)

My first attempt at publishing a book, a goal that I'm proud to have finally achieved. Available in digital and print formats.

