

Fishing 101

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There have been thousands of articles written about fishing and with the proliferation of the sport fishing industry, there is no shortage of advice and equipment.

Unfortunately, a lot of it is written for the person with a \$50,000. Bass boat or a Cart Blanc Visa card.

This article is written for the novice “fisher – person” or for someone who doesn’t fish that often. You are probably on vacation (or soon to be) and would just like to catch some fish easily and inexpensively.

From the years of doing charters, I find some common mistakes and misconceptions made by “fisher – people”.

Firstly, you don’t require a suitcase full of tackle. Fish have been eating other fish, bugs and worms hundreds of thousands of years prior to us coming along, so why mess with a presentation that worked and works so well?

A box or worms or pail of minnows will constantly put more fish on your line than all the lures in China and the presentation doesn’t have to be perfect unlike some lures that may require a certain depth, speed, line thickness ect, to work properly.

Quite often I will be fishing with friends or family using fancy rods and a bevy of lures and yours truly will be just bouncing a minnow or worm off the back of the boat and catch just as many, if not more fish.

Most tournaments do not allow live bait because they’re partly sponsored by lure and artificial bait companies. There are also environmental reasons but if you’re not in a tournament, grab your local minnows and go fishing!

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Also, lunar cycles, wind direction, barometric pressure, season, time of day and on and on, do play roles in fishing, but if you only have a week at a cottage and you have set aside Wednesday morning from 8 AM to 1 PM to take your family fishing, all those factors are secondary.

A modest spin-cast rod combo from Canadian Tire or Wal-Mart should catch just as many fish as a \$200+, if handled correctly.

The easiest presentation is a new hook (approx 2/0) tied “directly” to the line (approx 6 lb) with a proper fishing knot (not a granny knot). Try breaking the line with your fingers. If it beaks easily, it will for the fish; time to change it. You don’t need leaders, snaps or swivels. They only impede the natural (which you want to reproduce) presentation of your bait.

Insert a bb (or similar) split shot sinker approximately 12” above the hook to keep your minnow / bait down and for added casting weight.

Remember; if you are bait fishing, there is no need to try and cast your line for a mile. Most fish can be caught beside the boat or beside the dock.

For novice “fisher – people” it’s best to use a bobber or float on the line adjusted for the depth you want the bait presented (rule of thumb; 1 foot off the bottom).

You can put a small split shoot sinker just behind the float (if it keeps moving) to keep the bait at the correct depth.

A lot of “Rule of Thumb” analogies are used in this article. Just remember it’s not a “rule” but more of a “guide”

For example; hook for hook (Rule of Thumb), worms seem catch “more” fish than minnows, but minnows seem to catch “bigger” fish than worms.

When you use a float, a fish will usually pull it under. You can actually see the strike!

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This curtail part of fishing is where most of the mistakes are made. If you set the hook too fast, you will pull it out of the fish's mouth and most likely, lose your bait, if you set the hook too late, the fish will have already "spit" the hook and left town or it will swallow it so deep – it is virtually impossible to get out.

Don't get too hung up on this aspect. Successful fishing is more of an art and it takes years to perfect.

Rule of thumb; when you see the float go "completely" under – let the fish have it; count one steamboat, for worm fishing and one steamboat, two steamboats for minnow fishing and set the hook with a quick hard wrist motion.

This is where the "art" comes in play. If the fish are aggressive, you may have to speed up the count. If they are being picky, lazy, biting short (can't make their minds up if they bit or not) you may have to slow the count down.

Try not to set the hook until you see the float go completely under, otherwise you will most likely just keep losing your bait.

If the float is just dancing on top of the water (rule of thumb), it's usually a small fish trying to get its mouth around the bait or (most important) a big fish being lazy or picky!

If you can use both worms and minnows on different rods at the same time - great. Some days they prefer minnows and some days they prefer worms. Some days they want nothing, but that is extremely rare.

You don't have to limit yourself to worms and minnows. Virtually any bugs, beetles, insects will work.

Frogs are dynamite for bass but you're limited to the amount you can be in possession of and you will need at least a three steamboat count to set the hook!

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Corn, bacon, dead grocery store smelts and sardines also work in a pinch.

You can always "jig" your dead minnows (or anything - plastic worms scented artificial), which works quite well.

The reel drag is of monumental importance, check each time prior to fishing.

If it is too tight, you will snap the line when a big fish bites. If it is too loose, you won't get a proper hook set.

Many people tighten up the drag if they get snagged, but forget to reset it when they restart fishing again.

Also, if the reel drag is too loose the fish will take your hook down into the weeds and work its way off or snag you.

Always take up the line slack and keep the rod tip up as well. If you have too much loose line, you won't be able to set the hook properly and again, you may end up snagged in the weeds.

Finally, scented bait, lures, rubber worms all work great, but you have to be constantly "working" your line and with a boat load of children or being just introduced to fishing, it isn't the easiest task to master.

Good Luck. Rick – MuskyGuide@bell.net

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