

By Beth Jappay



For decades I always hated doing the roll cast, and would avoid it whenever possible. In my defense, a four hour casting class when I first started fly fishing (35 years ago) was the only instruction I initially received. Long before the internet and YouTube, I pretty much taught myself how to cast. I did a fairly good job with the overhead cast and within a couple of years I even won some local casting competitions. The same could not be said for my roll cast, which frequently failed to turn over (even with multiple attempts) and would often tangle my flies. Unaware how much better it could be performed, I tried to minimize using it.

Fast forward to six years ago, when Dwight Klemin announced FFI's new casting challenge at one of our monthly meetings. Intrigued, that evening I went online and reviewed the various requirements. The following Saturday I drove to the gravel bar at the Wallace Marine Park, introduced myself to Dwight, and told him I wanted to skip the easier casting challenges and try for the Gold level award. Looking back I have to give kudos to Dwight, who didn't even crack a smile at my hubris and informed me that I needed to collect the bronze and silver awards first. I left that first meeting having learned that though my self-taught forward loops and double-haul were pretty decent, my roll cast truly sucked and was my main barrier to better casting. It took a month of weekly lessons from Dwight for me to earn a bronze level award, and even longer for the silver. Even after achieving that higher skill level I still disliked and avoided doing a roll cast while fishing. Burdened by 30+ years of ingrained incorrect muscle memory I was dismayed by how difficult it was for me to make the changes I needed for a truly good roll cast.

I suspect that how I learn is partially to blame for my slow progress—I need to understand the why in order to enact change. During my journey to become a certified casting instructor I needed to understand principles such as the “5 essentials of casting” and the “straight-line tip

path", but I found myself able to apply that much more easily to the overhead cast than to the roll cast. I was stuck in a rut...until I utilized technology.

I started working on my Casting Instructor Certification 4 years ago. Two years ago I took an online F.F.I. course in a coaching system called OnForm; I ended up purchasing an iPad and tripod, and utilized the program to compare my casting side-by-side with others in my casting group. I guess I am a visual learner, because I could finally see what I was doing wrong. However 30+ years of incorrect muscle memory is hard to change, and it took a while to rewrite my brain. When I look back I am annoyed at myself. The casting stroke Dwight was trying to get me to change to is the same motion I was perfecting and teaching others for an overhand cast.

I am still fine-tuning how I perform a roll cast; I am not yet able to make the 50' roll cast required for the Master's designation. However for the past 2 years my cast has evolved from borderline, to consistent and reliable, and as my cast has improved I am finding more uses for it. These days if I am recasting a full sink line I can roll cast 30' to bring it up to an overhead cast instead of stripping back to 10' of line. The same applies to fishing multiple flies under an indicator. By using a roll cast to bring the flies to the surface they are much less likely to tangle, and I also don't have to strip the line back as far. Taking it to the next level, I am now frequently using a Snake Roll to change direction while I am stillwater indicator fishing (what can I say, staring at an indicator can get boring).

Teaching the roll cast

When I have a brand new student, I start with teaching the roll cast first. Why? Because it is a great way to narrowly focus on just a forward casting stroke without worrying about other things, like the back cast, timing, etc.

When to use a roll cast

When fishing I use a roll cast to:

- 1) Get rid of slack prior to performing a back cast
- 2) Bring up a sunken line prior to recasting it
- 3) Bring flies closer to the surface to cast, especially when indicator fishing
- 4) Cast when unable to back cast (e.g. bushes, etc)
- 5) Cast when there is a stiff tail wind
- 6) Attempt to release a snagged hook
- 7) Change the direction of the cast (single hand spey)

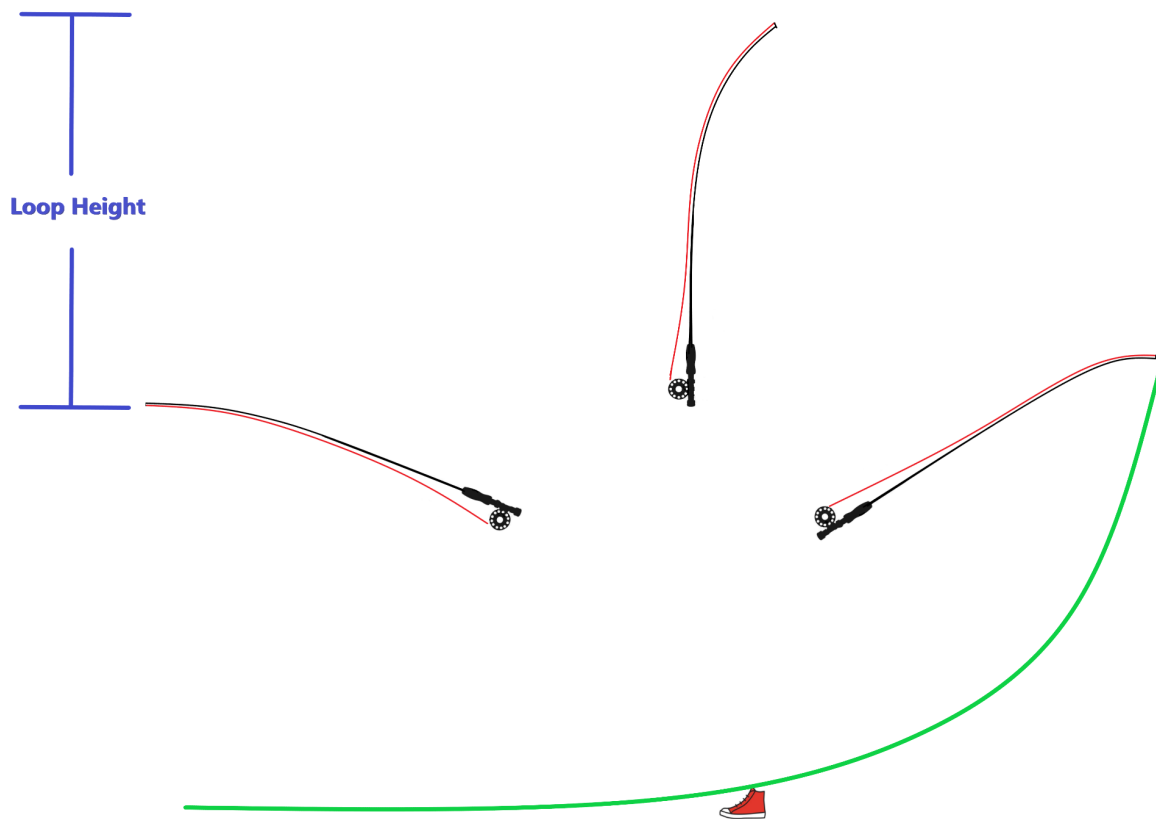
How do you know if you are performing a roll cast correctly? If you can aerialize (get all of the line off of the water simultaneously) 35" of line without a big slurping sound, you are probably doing a pretty good job. If not, perhaps your cast has too wide of a casting arc (the most common roll cast error).

The casting arc

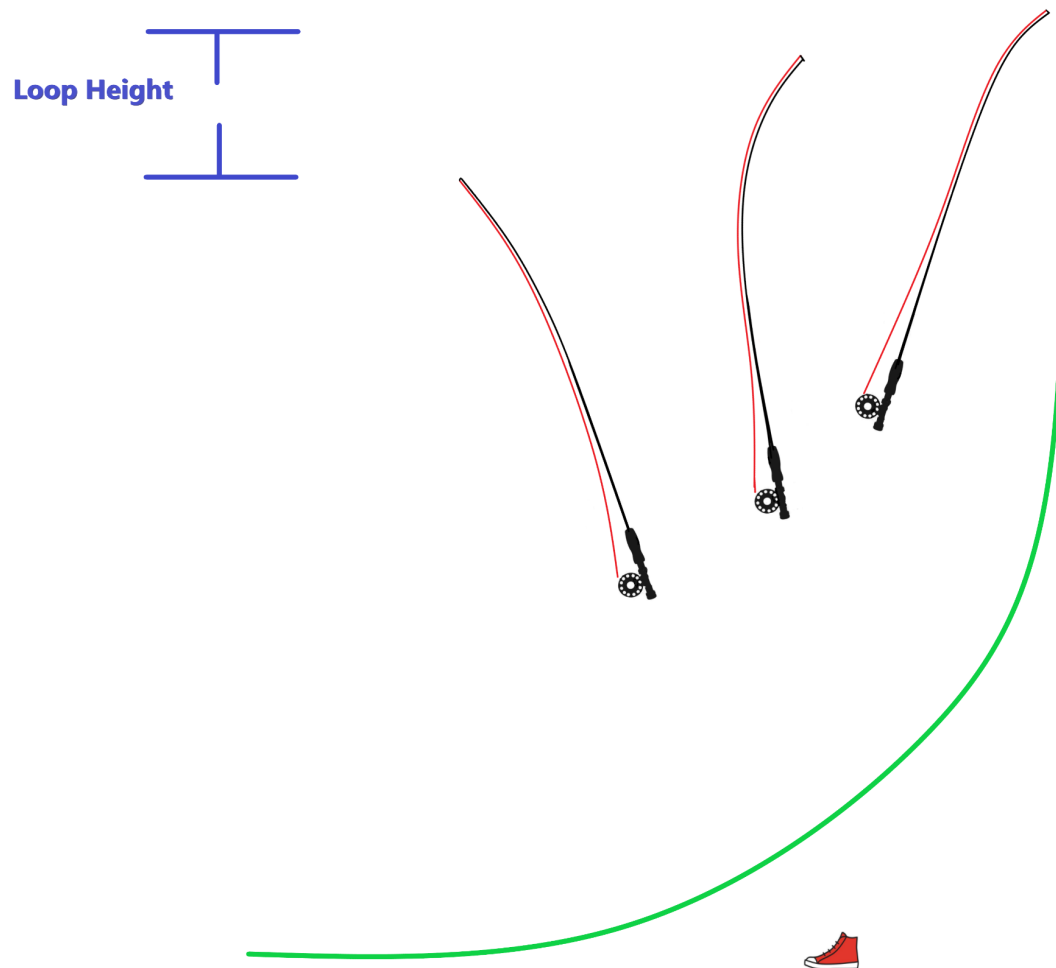
Most beginners believe that they can cast farther if they straighten their elbow during the cast, end the cast closer to the water, and just put more effort into it (In fact, this is exactly how I used to roll cast). Actually, the exact opposite is true. Why is this?

Casting a fly line is all about sending out the fly line in a narrow loop that minimizes the resistance of air/wind and maximizes the transfer of energy. The height of the loop is determined by the difference between the location of rod tip at the top of the casting stroke, and the location of the rod tip when the rod's forward motion is stopped:

Wide Loop Roll Cast



Narrow Loop Roll Cast



There are other things that will cause a roll cast to fail of course, the above is just the most common in my experience.

Need help with your roll cast? Don't be discouraged by the story of my slow learning curve. My latest student put in the work between her lessons; after only 4 lessons over a month's period of time she now has a pretty decent roll cast.