

1.A brief guide to equipment for the Novice Fly Fisher.

The keyword here is “brief”. Writing about fly fishing gear can be as long as the proverbial piece of string but we were asked at the AGM to provide something for beginners so here goes.

- **Rods:** These are categorised by the AFTM weight scale. There are some reasonable “combo” deals which supply a rod and a reel, often pre-loaded with a floating line but don’t go **too** cheap. If you are lucky enough to have a gear shop near you then the best bet is to ask the supplier to allow you to try out a rod but this is a rare option today. Alternatively, you could ask to try out some SFDG members gear at a fishing event or at the casting clinic.

I would suggest 2 rods to start with:

1. A **fast to medium** action 9ft 6in 7 weight for casting lures and heavier flies on stillwaters and reservoirs. These rods will have most of their action towards the tip of the rod and hence feel slightly “stiffer”. This allows you to cast further with weighted flies and strike with greater effect, if your fly is at some distance as the line can be lifted from the water more swiftly.
2. A **softer** actioned #6 of 9ft. This can still be used on smaller stillwaters and rivers where a little more subtlety is required perhaps with nymphs and dry flies. Some would say that this is the best rod to buy first as its slower casting action is more forgiving and it’s lightness means you can cast for longer without getting tired out. The softer action also allows you to fish with lighter tippet as the rod cushions the take and strike.

As you will no doubt have seen fly rods can be “eye-wateringly” expensive and so what you buy will depend on the depth of your wallet and your commitment to the sport. However, in my view the marginal gains from buying very expensive rods do not necessarily convert into making you a better caster or angler. **Money invested into casting lessons with a qualified coach may be far more productive.**

Having said that, buying too cheap can be money wasted. Trout and Salmon magazine do periodic “gear tests” which you might be able to find online to compare certain types of rod e.g. 6 weight 9 footers.

- **Reels** : First and foremost buy a **reel that matches the weight of your rod as that will create a “balanced” setup** when matched with the right line. Again the cost can go skyward (e.g. the likes of Hardy, Lamson and Loop are very expensive) but reels are an area where going too cheap can be wasteful. (I have recently had to send back 2 Greys Fin Cassette reels which had major faults so avoid those like the plague)

Around the £150 mark is I think about where the cost benefit break point lies. However, some members have bought very cheap Chinese reels which are close copies of European models which they probably manufacture anyway. (Talk to Andy Wood) It's worth doing your research here. I have recently purchased a reel on sale from a website which was £80-90 less than RRP.

If like me you want to be able to swap lines fairly quickly, then a **“cassette”** reel is advisable. However, if you feel this is not likely to be a major issue for you then a **spooled version** may be more reliable, though spare spools tend to be far more expensive.

- **Lines:** Although again, it is possible to get some fairly good lines at bargain prices (watch out for John Norris sales) I think this is an area where **quality can have a real effect on your angling**. Casting with a smooth, well-tapered fly line can be a bit of a revelation if you have bought cheap before. Make sure you match the weight of the line with your rod and reel and it's probably not worth buying anything but weight forward lines. In your first few years of fishing, I think you can make do with 3 or 4 lines. These are a **floater, a midge tip, a slow intermediate and a Di3 sinker**. Some would miss out the midge tip but this is my favourite sub-surface line for fishing small nymphs and buzzers. All this can be a sizeable layout all at once if you have 2 rods, so start with floaters and intermediates and gradually add to your armoury.
- In competitions you will quite often see other members with two rods set up so they can switch even more quickly between lines/flies e.g. I frequently set up a #7 intermediate and a #6 with a floater or midge tip.

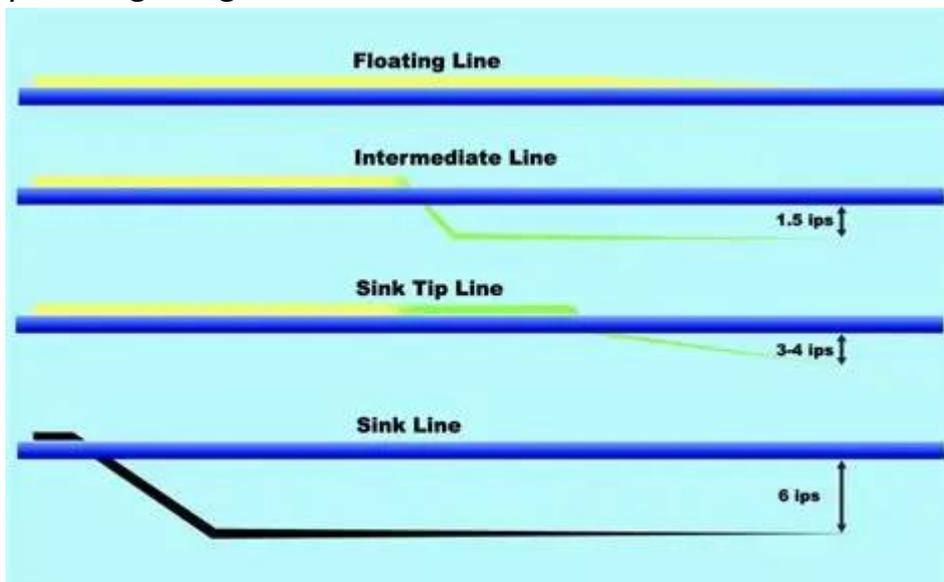
Whilst we no longer do auctions, I think Surrey FDG do one, so it may be worthwhile going to look at pre-loved tackle you can see and feel the quality of.

2. When to use different Lines:

The following is just **my take** on using different lines and I am no expert- this is just what I have gleaned through about 20 years of fly fishing and talking to those in the club with much more experience e.g. **John Plowman, Peter Winder and Martyn Grey**. The other sage amongst our ranks was **Ray Burt**, an ex- England International, who usually had his bag in competitions before the rest of us had left the car park! Sadly, we haven't seen Ray on the bank for a while due to health issues but I hope he can make it again soon, as his knowledge and sense of humour is a tonic.

If the fish are obviously high in the water as shown by signs of rises, topping and tailing or "distressed water", then a **floaters** is your best bet as it holds the flies higher in the water column.

If there is no sign of surface activity and or early in the morning, I will tend to use an **intermediate** to start with. This sinks at between 0.5 and 1.5 inches per second, so can be counted down to where you think the fish might be holding. The line also tends to hold more at a level on retrieve, whereas a floater, if moved medium to fast speed, will raise the fly up in the column as you retrieve it. This difference can be sometimes "what the fish want" on a particular day, so may be worth changing to if you are getting nowhere on a floater.



A half-way house is the **midge tip**. This is essentially a floating line with a 3-4 foot sinking tip. I use one with a 3ft intermediate tip but heavier tips are available. Also, if you did not want to invest straight away in a whole different line, Airflo do separate tips (polyleaders) you can add to a floating line at the braided loop connection. As the name suggests this

line is good for fishing a team of buzzers or small nymphs, as you have the visual cues from the floating section but the tip “anchors” the cast and I think leads to better hook ups.

The **Di3** is a full sinking line which sinks at 3 inches per second (I think you can work out what Di5 and Di7 lines do!). You might use this if you think fish are lying deep, perhaps in very bright sunny conditions or in cold, winter conditions. As Ray Burt said to me once at Duncton, “If it’s cold they want it low and slow”. Of course, he was right and 5 minutes later I had a fish on a Di3 and a booby! Conversely, heavier sinking lines can enable you to fish lures faster, without pulling them up towards the surface, as would happen with a floater. On a drifting boat these lines can be invaluable in allowing you to get a fly down to depth as you are, perhaps, moving forward quite quickly- trickier to do with a floater.

This may all seem a bit superfluous and if you are doing fine on one line, all good. However, one definition of madness is “**doing exactly the same thing over and over and expecting different results.**” I watch some anglers staying in the same place for literally hours, casting the same fly, on the same line and perhaps after initial success (or not), takes dry up but they persist. **Change things up-** to use an annoyingly modern phrase. If you watch our more successful anglers like **Martyn Grey**, if he fishes a spot for about 15/20 minutes maximum without action, he will usually move on. If moving position and depth don’t produce the goods, *then* change your fly.