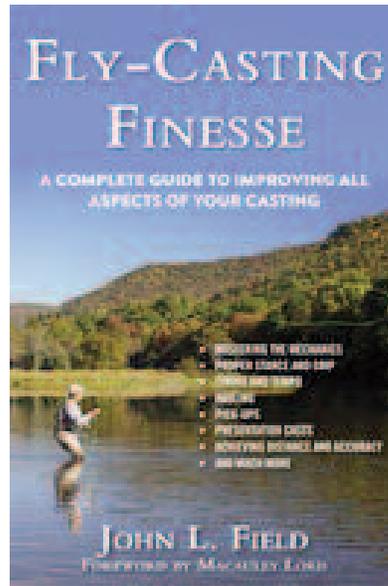


# Fly-Casting Finesse: A Complete Guide to Improving All Aspects of Your Casting

By John L. Field. Published by Skyhorse Publishing, 2015; \$29.99 hardbound.



Books about fly casting are inherently paradoxical: you can benefit most from them by putting them down and actually doing what they can only discuss. In some ways, that’s true of books in general, as Henry David Thoreau’s book *Walden* repeatedly insists about itself. But as Thoreau also says, books can also get you from reading to doing: “There are probably words addressed to our condition exactly, which, if we could really hear and understand, would be more salutary than the morning or the spring to our lives, and possibly put a new aspect on the face of things for us.”

That’s the case with John Field’s *Fly-Casting Finesse*. There is so much there that what you will take from it and what you can put into practice on the water is what you are prepared to hear and understand, and that will likely be different for every angler. What makes the book

worthwhile is that there is plenty there for every angler, whatever skill level or conceptual grasp of fly casting he or she possesses.

TGF member John Field is president of the American Casting Association, and he really knows casting. One of the strengths of the book is that he has drawn together the insights of a variety of casting experts from across the spectrum of those concerned with the cast, from tournament casters such as Steve Rajeff to teachers whose emphasis is bringing people into the sport of fly fishing, such as Joan Wulff. But he is not a casting wonk—or not just a casting wonk. He is a dedicated fly fisher who has fished for a variety of species in salt and fresh water all over the world, and the focus here is pragmatic: improving your casting to improve your angling success and enjoyment, which of course can include enjoyment of casting itself, when the fish aren’t cooperating. Indeed, most of us learn to cast for purely pragmatic reasons: you can’t fish if you can’t make a rudimentary cast, and we just want to go fishing. But when situations arise in which our limited skills make fishing difficult, it’s too late to do anything to improve. As Field notes in the preface, “Half of the sport of fly fishing is the challenge of properly using the tackle.” This is a book for people who just want to go fishing, but need to improve how they do it.

There is a sort of dialectical play between casting and understanding casting. You learn to cast by casting—ideally with an instructor who can help you develop the physical skills needed for improvement, and Field is well aware that no book can substitute for personal instruction and correction. But for most of us, developing physical skills isn’t enough. To improve, we need to understand, as well—understand what it is we’re doing wrong, doing right, how, and why. However, what you can raise to the level of understanding about a physical activity like casting depends a lot on what you already have done physically. The learning curve is powered by a feedback loop between mind and body.

Duffer that I am, I haven’t progressed very far along that learning curve, despite my years on the water, and what I found most illuminating in *Fly-Casting Finesse* was Field’s early chapters, “Mastering Fly Casting,” which includes sugges-

tions on how to diagnose and cure flaws, along with the admonition that you get to be a better caster the same way you get to Carnegie Hall: practice; “The Loop and the Rod,” which explains with uncommon clarity the basic dynamics of the cast, illustrated by some of the book’s revelatory strobe-light photographs of loading and unloading fly rods; and “Casting Mechanics and Adaptation,” which covers stance, grips, strokes, and the various ways in which your cast—well, OK, my cast—goes kablooey.

That’s about casting, pure and simple, but most of the rest of the book deals with casting as fishing: “Presentation Casts,” “Presentation Scenarios,” and “Maximizing Casting Distance” on the water, with the real-world conditions of wind and weather that every angler faces. There is so much specific information here, from ways to sling a beetle imitation under an overhanging branch on a small tributary to how to present a fly to a teased-up billfish and how to prepare for a shot at a cruising tarpon, that what you take away will depend even more than in the discussion of casting basics on what kind of fishing you do and what kind of fly fisher you are.

The book concludes with chapters titled “Tackle” and “The Fly Casting Universe.” The former is not the sort of Cliff Notes discussion of tackle for newbies that some books offer, but an exploration of the current state of things by someone with knowledge of the business side of fly fishing who knows that the challenge of properly using the tackle involves understanding and evaluating it. The latter surveys the resources available to those who want to improve their casting beyond what insights a book can supply: schools, clubs, and organizations where an angler can find help and support from like-minded people.

If you fish, you cast. If you fish, you can expect that somewhere in *Fly-Casting Finesse*, there are words addressed to your condition exactly. You can’t ask for more from a book.

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