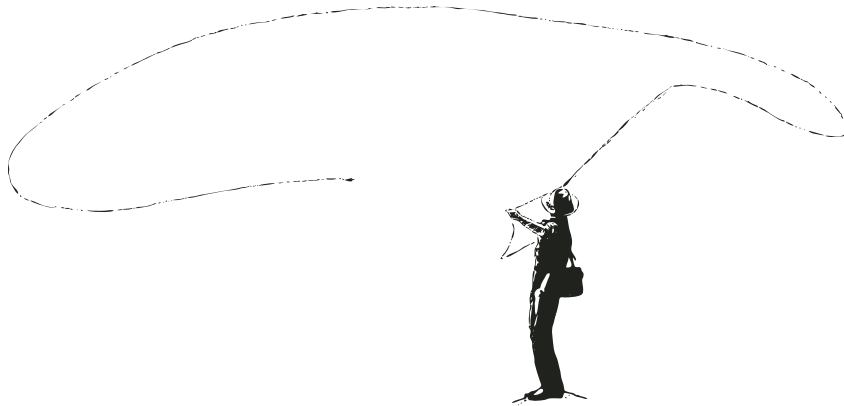


# MIND-SET & MODULES

CHAPTER ONE



**F**IRST THINGS FIRST: This book is designed as a skill system that can help you teach yourself or others. One thing leads to the next, and new skills tend to build upon previous skills or discussions. Because of that, I recommend reading the book straight through. Take your time, and remember: *If all else fails, follow the directions!*



## WHAT IS FLY CASTING?

To get an answer, I'll ask a different set of questions: Can the fly cast itself? How about the fly line? Maybe the rod? No? What's really responsible for getting a cast going?

~> It's the human aspect—*you*.

Or more specifically, your **arm and hand movements** (and perhaps some **body movements**, too). It's your arm and hand that direct the fly rod that directs the fly line that directs the fly.

### You + Rod + Line = Cast

In fly casting, it's the weight of the line that is cast (the fly may even hinder the cast). Because of that, a fly line allows you to accomplish things via both casting (and mending) that simply cannot be done with other types of fishing equipment. To me, the line is like a **kinetic sculpture** that can be reshaped as needed or wanted.

As the rod is moved through the typical casting process, it flexes against fly line's weight, its own weight, and air resistance. The act of creating that flexure is typically called **loading** the rod, and is usually viewed as energy storage (until the rod **unloads**). Load is good, but it's part of a larger whole.

~> While loading and unloading are ubiquitous terms, I'm going to use *flex* and *unflex* (Figure 1-1).

Like some other instructors, I feel that flex/unflex more thoroughly covers what's happening throughout the *overall* casting process across different types of casts.

~> As the rod is being flexed during the casting process, the rod tip (and thus the line) *is forced to travel through a greater proportional distance than your hand and through a different pathway, as well* (see Figures 1-1 and 1-2).

This means that the tip is moving *much* faster than your hand. That both speeds up and provides a sense of direction to the line. Near the end of the casting process, the rod unflexes and the rod tip moves even farther in a short period of time. This speeds up the line even more, increasing its **momentum**. The line then unrolls in some form of looped shape.

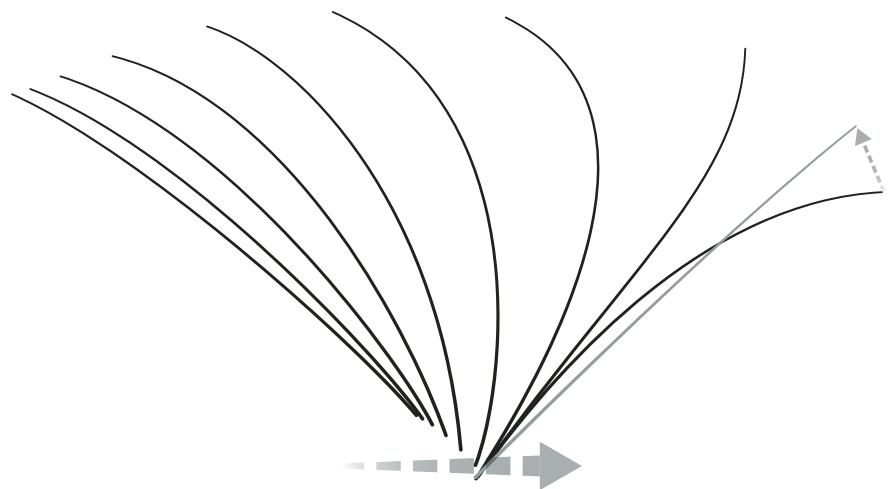


Figure 1-1. (left) A fly rod (black lines) flexing and unloading as it is being cast from left to right. The final two positions of the rod show it as it momentarily counterflexes downward and then rebounds toward straight (gray line with upward arrow).

Figure 1-2. This shows the tip path of the fly rod (heavier gray line) and my hand path (thinner black line) during one Overhead Forward Cast from the very start until the rod has counterflexed downward. The differences in pathways and distances travelled should be quite obvious!

### Human Time & Rod Time

Our direct physical actions take place in what I call **human time**. It is often, *but not always*, slow enough that humans can get a grasp on what is happening and when. The resulting actions of the rod take place in what I call **rod time**. It can happen at a pace that's *behind* what's going on in human time and it can also happen *much faster* than human time. Keep both human time and rod time in mind as you cast.



with techniques that require little in terms of casting skill. But ...

→ To be *consistently successful* in a variety of angling situations, you need to be able to cast.

Casting is *moving line in order to form a loop*. During a fly cast, there is typically a **backcast**, followed by a **forward cast**. The backcast typically travels behind the caster (to varying degrees), while the forward cast travels in front (there are some exceptions). The forward cast typically delivers the fly to the target.

While one can cast without a rod (known as **hand casting**), it's usually the rod that acts as the translator between caster and line. Once the loop starts to unroll, the cast in-and-of-itself has been directed (Figure 1-3, for example). With some water-based casts the backcast loop has direction, but it doesn't unroll fully, nor in the strongly visual way that it does with aerial casts.

## FLY CASTING MIND-SET

As Eric Taverner wrote in his 1929 book, *Trout Fishing From All Angles*, "The foundation of all good casting is in the mind." Use that idea to start (or continue) your fly-casting journey.

### Core Casting Terms

There are a few core terms that need to fit into your fly-casting mind-set. These are terms that you'll hear in general "casting talk," and are important for being able to read this book.

#### Casting

→ Casting is the *primary physical skill* of fly fishing.

As many instructors have said, "You never hear people complain about being *too good* at casting, do you?" One can catch a lot of fish—in *some scenarios*—

#### Loop

→ This is the signature visual aspect of fly casting.

The loop forms as the rod is unflexing and then the loop unrolls as it travels.

The "classic" aerial loop in fly casting starts out looking like a **U** or **J** tipped to the side before it straightens out (Figure 1-3).

There may also be other shapes to loops, especially if there is a water-based component to a cast. In water-based casts, the loop may look more like a **D** tipped to the side, with part of the loop touching the water.

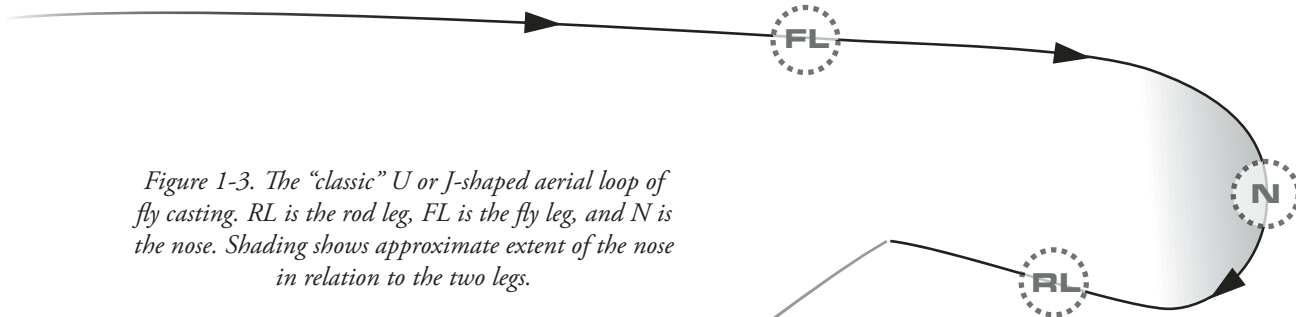


Figure 1-3. The “classic” U or J-shaped aerial loop of fly casting. RL is the rod leg, FL is the fly leg, and N is the nose. Shading shows approximate extent of the nose in relation to the two legs.



Such loops are cast at slower speeds—sometimes so slowly that the line is just dragged into the D shape. I’ll explore various types of loops throughout the book, but I want to talk about basic loop parts here.

There are two “legs” to a loop: the **rod leg** and the **fly leg** (Figure 1-3). The names describe what’s what.

↪ The rod leg of a loop is the line extending from the rod tip. The fly leg of a loop is the line extending from the fly.

Between the rod leg and the fly leg is the **loop nose**. The loop nose is the part of the loop that forms the unrolling section at the leading portion of the U, J, or D (or whatever) shape. In other words, the nose is where the line goes through a turn from the fly leg into the rod leg (Figure 1-3). In many loops the nose is quite obvious. In certain cases, such as with water-based loops that are dragged, the loop nose is where the line bends around from the rod leg to the fly leg.

### Casting Stroke

I see the casting stroke as *focusing on the caster*. So for me, this is *the movements of the caster that are responsible for casting*. I use the term “movements” to describe hand, arm and/or body movements, since they can all affect the cast.

### Rod Hand & Line Hand

The concepts of **rod hand** (and **rod arm**) and **line hand** (and **line arm**) are also important. Your dominant hand usually holds the rod, which makes it your rod hand. It also has some line-control duties. Your sub-dominant hand usually deals with the line, which makes it your line hand (Figure 1-4). Depending on how you reel, either hand can have input.

### Mending

↪ Mending is the *secondary* physical skill of fly fishing.

After the loop has started to unroll, you can begin to adjust the position of the unrolled line. This is **mending** (Figure 1-5). Mending can be done while the line is airborne (**aerial mending**, or **in-the-air mending**), or while it is on the water (**water-based mending**, or **on-the-water mending**). Mending is done to change the way the line and water interact, often to combat the pull of the water’s currents, an effect known as **drag**. Aerial mending is covered in Chapter Seven.

### Control & Relax

↪ Like many instructors, I see “control” as the key word in fly casting.

In 1951, Joan Wulff outcast everybody at the U.S. national Fisherman’s Distance Fly Contest. Joan is not an exceptionally strong person, so how did she do it?

Control—or more specifically, control of her skills. In John and Richard Alden Knight’s 1963 book, *The Complete Book of Fly Casting*, there is a sequence of six photos showing Joan casting a tournament rod and line. Facing a wind pushing 20 knots, she fired off a measured 128-foot cast. That came from skill control.

**Relaxing** is an important element of control, too. A comment that one often hears about well-honed athletes is that they “make it look so easy.” Relaxation is part of that easiness. Casters who have their foundation skills firmly planted often find themselves “allowing it to happen.” The late Charles Ritz felt that relaxation was a key (he actually wrote “secret”) to fly casting. He even included a section in *The Wise Fisherman’s Encyclopedia* (1951) entitled “The Art of Relaxation.”

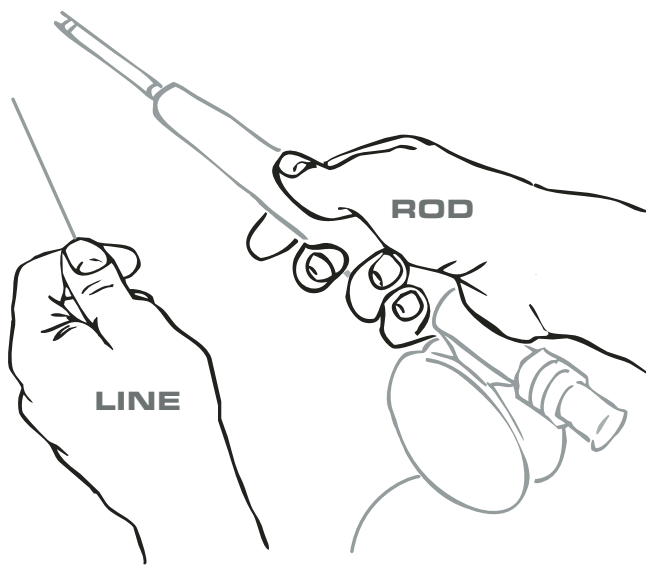


Figure 1-4. The hand holding the rod is my dominant hand, and is my usual rod hand. The other hand (holding the line) is my usual line hand.

If you relax, concentration can lead to sensation—a **tactile awareness** that connects hand, rod and line. If things are not progressing in your casting, stop, relax and get your mind-set straight:

→ It is your arm (plus hand) that directs the rod that directs the line that directs the fly. That is the “casting chain of command.”

## Over-Thinking

While our fly-casting journey begins with the mind, I have to tell you that it’s easy to over-think casting (and fishing). As I prepared this chapter, I had a good e-mail exchange with fellow casting thinker, Barny Wong. He compared the “mental constipation” experienced during learning Spey casting to that experienced during golf. The end result in both disciplines was pretty much the same: collapse of the desired skill.

I recommend that when casting, you focus on a single element at a time (if feasible), even if the skill at hand requires multiple actions. This way, your mind can slice off bite-size chunks to work on one at a time (kind of like **modules**—keep that in mind).

## Flow

Many casters have compared the movements of fly casting to the flow of water: sometimes bold, sometimes reserved, sometime fast, sometimes slow, but always **purposeful** and **smooth**. The flow is physical for sure, but it isn’t a structured process. It really comes from a combination of practice and physicality, mixed with relaxation and mental freedom, as well as a sense of

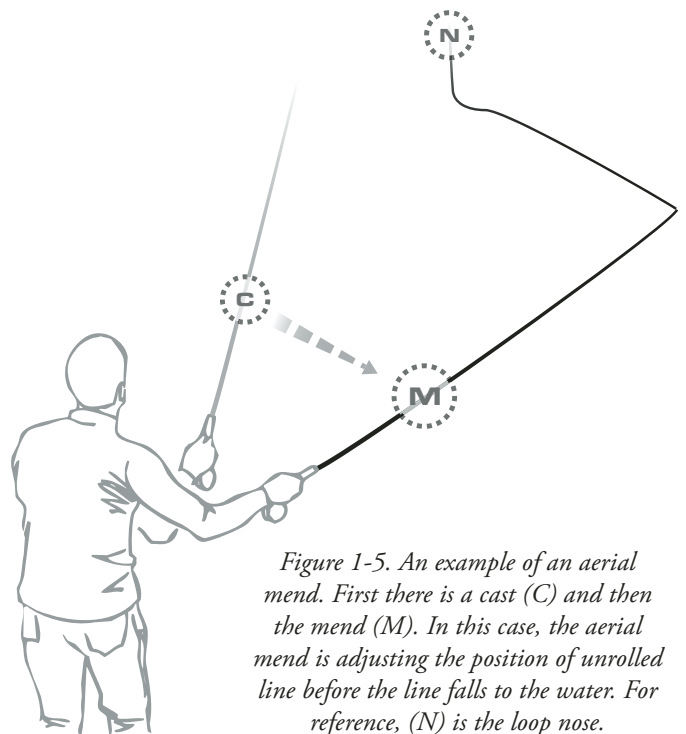


Figure 1-5. An example of an aerial mend. First there is a cast (C) and then the mend (M). In this case, the aerial mend is adjusting the position of unrolled line before the line falls to the water. For reference, (N) is the loop nose.

feel and response from rod and line. When the flow is really “on” in one’s casting, it’s like *watching and feeling* the cast happen while also directing and controlling it. Casts feel as they have no sharp edges and are always morphing from one state to the next. In other words, the physical movements are not robotic.

→ We can flow faster or slower in fly casting and do it in a variety of directions.

## Fun

Fly fishing is actually supposed to be *fun*. It has been my experience that the fun factor increases right along with one’s ability to control one’s skills. The *more* times one’s cast reaches the mark, the more fun, and the *fewer* times one’s cast goes into the trees, the more fun. There are few shortcuts, though, and it’s practice that is key to making fly-fishing fun a full-time reality.



## PRACTICE APPROACHES

→ “Practice makes perfect,” is how the old saying goes. Sure, but there is also an equally old qualifier: “If you practice *wrong*, all it will ever make you is *perfectly wrong*.”

To paraphrase the legendary cyclist Eddy Merckx, if you want to fly cast better, “fly cast lots.” I will make an addendum to that and say “fly cast lots, *but do it well*.” Practice, particularly in the formative stages of learning, should not be a frenetic “castcastcastcastcastcast.” It should be “cast.....cast.” Allow yourself to develop flow.

→ Putting it another way, *make your casting worth your time*.

## Self-Critique

### Mental

If you want to become a better caster you have to be willing to critique yourself as you practice.

*Honest* self-critique is a useful part of the process toward personally adjusting both mind-set and physical skills. Of course, one can also overdo it.

I’ve seen casters who were so critical of themselves that they could not advance in their abilities without waging a deprecating mental battle. I’ve even seen casters who were so distracted by internal fury that they just stagnated, no matter what the encouragement. Don’t take that path!

If you are willing to look *truthfully* at your skills (perhaps the hardest part?), but do so with the attitude of making *positive* change, then you’ll be on a better road. But—and I have to emphasize this—*wanting* to become a better caster and *actually devoting a mind-set to doing it*, are two different things.

→ For a critique to be truly effective, there must also be action, and that means *physically changing what you are doing*.

### Physical

This requires a second level of critique, one where you have to make your body obey. This idea is linked directly to the previous section, but it is also linked to breaking free of habitual action. For example, if you know that you need to adjust your arm movement on your backcast, *but you don’t force your body to make the change*, then change will be very hard, indeed. Taking critique from thought to action means that you have to *create* change, not just hope for it.

→ No matter whose books you read, no matter whose videos you watch, and no matter whose fly-casting schools you attend, the only person who will ultimately make you a better caster is ... *you*.

### Instructors, Too

Instructors should work to improve their casting through practice, of course, *but they also need to do the same for their teaching*.

→ There is an old saying that goes something like, “Teaching makes you learn twice.” I’d add, “But only if you want to.”

A good instructor, one who wants to grow in his or her teaching skills, must be willing to learn and



re-learn, time-and-again. That means paying attention *during* teaching and using self-critique in general to build more successful teaching approaches. That includes stepping out of one's knowledge base comfort zone and leaving outdated casting/teaching information behind. When it comes to that process, I like to follow four words: **admit, embrace, adjust, advance**. That means admit that something has changed, embrace the new knowledge, adjust your teaching to match, and then move forward.

For those who want to dig into the technical aspects of teaching proper, I suggest reading some of Dayle Mazzarella's work.

## Pantomiming

Try to avoid *unnecessary* practice while you fish; practice before you fish, if you can. "Before" does not mean the night before or the morning of, either. Yes, most new skills will require some "on-the-water" time before they gel in your casting mind. Just try to avoid turning your valuable fishing time into *mostly* practice time. Fortunately, casting practice—at least one form of it—is something that can be easily accomplished by using pantomiming.

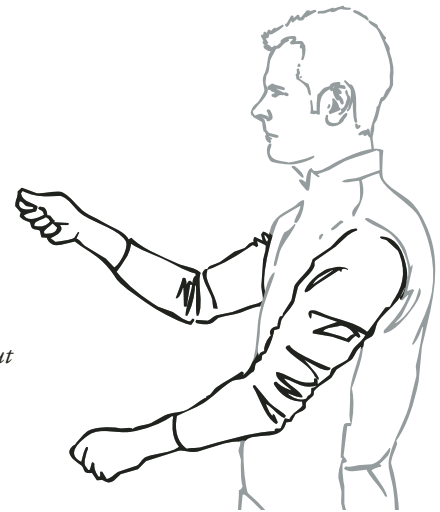
→ Pantomiming means casting without a rod and line. In other words, arm and hand movement—the core of casting.

The idea of pantomime learning is based on the work of late Mel Krieger, who widely introduced the concept in the U.S. in 1975. I was only five at the time, but Mel's work certainly locked into my father's fly-casting mind. As a result, I grew up in the pantomime school of fly-casting thought.

By initially practicing without a rod and line, your muscles are not constantly influenced by the rod and line, allowing you to practice without distraction (Figure 1-6).

This book makes extensive use of pantomiming, which should make it easier to try things out as you read along. But pantomiming is only part of what

*Figure 1-6. See the rod and line? No? This is pantomiming. Good way to work through things without the distraction of gear in your hands. Plenty more of this in the next chapter.*



you can use to enhance your time in the text. If you employ visualization, you can add another element to your practice.

## Visualization & Sound

As with other sports, visualization is a useful tool in fly casting. I quite often spend time "casting" in my head, seeing, and almost feeling, the casting motions that I am focusing on. For me, it is like the visual and tactile are linked by sensations of prior experiences.

Taking that to the next level involves the addition of pantomiming. With my eyes either open or closed, I let my mind visualize the motions—the movement of my arm, the flex of the rod, the unrolling of the line. I find that the visual-tactile interplay becomes stronger here than when using pure visualization alone.

I also employ visualization during actual casting. This involves closing my eyes, trying to further develop and understand subtle tactile cues that the line and rod are passing on to me. During these times, I may visualize my casting so that my mind has something to follow when my eyes are seeing only black. Of course, I don't spend an entire practice session in the dark; I typically alternate between eyes-closed casting and carefully watching my cast. That way I can better cross-reference the visual with the tactile in terms of timing.

Sound can also be a surprisingly useful contributor to the overall educational experience. The **sonic signature** of a cast can serve as a clue that all is going well (or not). Many casting instructors (myself

included) will talk about listening for a certain sound as a cast is being made. In fact, I like the newer generation of textured fly lines for teaching for that very reason. I find the *ziiing* of the line in the guides provides additional, useful feedback, particularly when assessing skills like hauling.

## Practice Time Frames

In my fly casting and fishing schools, I prefer to teach in 10 to 20 minute sessions maximum, either punctuated by five minutes of rest or alternated with 10 to 20 minutes maximum of a different skill (George X. Sand recommended a similar time frame in his 1969 book, *Salt-Water Fly Fishing*). This has a basis in studies conducted about the learning process.

From a non-scientific view, if you practice for hours straight with no rest, you will get tired. If you get tired, you will make mistakes. If you make mistakes over and over, you will *learn* mistakes.

## Warm-Ups, Stretching & Weights

If you're going to be doing some serious casting during a practice session, it is smart to do some warm-up before getting into it (especially with distance). Just a few minutes of getting your muscles moving with shorter and/or lower-power casts may help you prevent injury. It may seem laughable to talk about "pulling a casting muscle," but you'd be surprised how often I've heard it from people who just decided to grab a rod and pop off a few hero casts between beers in the backyard.

Between significant casting practice sessions (sometimes right after), I will stretch, especially my fingers, wrists, arms, chest, and shoulders. I really started doing this after I began working with Dr. Tim McCue at the Fly Casting Institute. In the past, I sometimes noted wrist, hand and other isolated pains during and after casting (particularly long-distance and curve casting). By stretching between casting sessions, many of those pains simply stopped or were reduced.

In *A Fly Fisher's Life*, the late Charles Ritz discusses weight training for fly casting. He talks about swinging wine bottles (empty or sand-filled) as a way to build "incredible" results. Sounds good to me!

Even modest weights can help with increasing strength and control. You can also get benefits from no weight at all, via isometric exercises. Charles Ritz wrote about this as well, inspired by a discussion he had with his friend, Ben Fontaine. Ritz suggested squeezing tennis balls, as well as pulling against a simulated rod and line anchored to a wall.

Other resources for fly-fishing-specific physical conditioning include Dr. Gary Eaton's articles (in the "The Loop"), Stephen Hisey and Dr. Keith Berend's book, *Fit to Fish*, Lefty Kreh's *Fly Casting with Lefty Kreh*, and Joan Wulff's *Fly-Casting Accuracy*.

## Playing Around

Playing around takes practice and de-structures it to the point where casting in-and-of itself is a game. For me, playing around involves a lot of fly-rod gymnastics: circular moves, elliptical moves, spirals, and rotations. I also do a fair amount of "alternative" casting—arm movements that are not "traditional" and allow me to see how "non-codified" casting looks and works (or perhaps doesn't).

While playing around isn't necessarily going to help you learn a *specific* technique, it can help you get a sense for what the rod and line are doing when moved in certain ways. That's useful in "real" casting.



## MODULES

If you went ahead and paged through this book before reading this section, you might have wondered about all of the little boxes mixed in with the text. Do not fear, for it is only the Modular Approach!

— At a basic level, the Modular Approach is a way to breakdown the sometimes overwhelming world of fly casting into manageable, bite-size chunks—chunks that you use and re-use as you see fit.

To get into the Modular Approach mind-set, you first need to view the various actions of fly casting and line handling as separate skills. Not just *entire* casts or



mends, but also the smaller skill chunks that make up the larger whole. Each smaller skill is a module, ready to be plugged in to other skill modules to make all sorts of things.

### A Modular Skill Language

→ The beauty is that you only need to learn a skill (module) once, and then you have it for everything else.

It's a bit like having a fly-casting language that you can piece together in various ways. With a library of such modular skills to choose from, assembling new casts or line-handling techniques can be surprisingly easy. All it requires is taking the needed skill modules (the "words" of the language) and fitting ("writing") them together like building blocks with each module combining with another to make a whole (the "sentences" of the casting language). Those same skill modules can then be rearranged to create something different (same "words," different "sentences"). Friend and renowned instructor Michael Maloney refers to such as-you-please skill assemblage as **designer casts**.

Of course, like any language, it's possible to "write" "sentences" that don't mean anything (casts that are a jumbled mess, or just look like flailing, and so forth). I think that common-sense and the overall structure of this book will help you find your way.

### Simple Modules (SM) & Compound Modules (CM)

A module consisting of only one skill is known as a **simple module** (SM). Simple Modules can also be plugged (written) together to create another whole skill which can then become a module itself. This module is called a **compound module** (CM) (Figure 1-7).

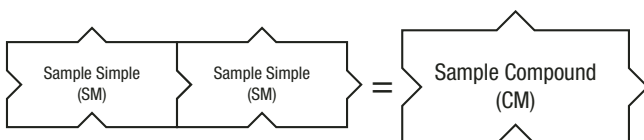


Figure 1-7. Simple modules can stand alone or be plugged together to create a single compound module. See them as smaller chunks and bigger chunks if you prefer.

### SubModules (SubM)

Each simple module or compound module can have a **submodule** (SubM) inside of it. Submodules describe a particular aspect of a simple module or compound module that requires more detail. For example, the execution of a certain skill may require tilting the cast at a certain angle, say 45 degrees out to the side. Another skill may (or may not) require a certain action to start it moving. In cases where such details are needed, a SubM containing the information would appear inside the larger appropriate simple module or compound module. A submodule can also be placed on the left or right side of the larger module in order to indicate if it happens earlier or later in the process (Figure 1-8).

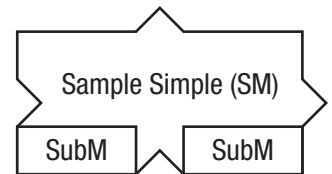


Figure 1-8. A submodule is an easy way visualize some minor modification of a skill. It can be placed right or left to add some general timing detail.

### Modular Writing

There are two ways to write modules together: **in-sequence** (end-to-end), and **simultaneously** (stacked). Those skills that follow one another in the time-line of casting are inserted in-sequence. For example, a cast followed by a mend (Figure 1-9a).

Those skills that occur at the same time can be thought of as being stacked one on top of the other. For example, aerial mending and shooting line (Figure 1-9b).

Follow along with me as I write two different casts using the Modular Approach. You don't even have to know the first thing about fly casting; this is just breaking two fly casts down into bits and pieces. For the sake of example, the two casts I'm using here are shown in their lowest level of build (that is, Simple Modules).

Begin with a standard Side-Arm Backcast stacked with a Single Haul, insert a Pause, then add an upward-aiming, Overhead Forward Cast stacked with a Single Haul, and follow it with a Forward Shoot stacked with Pointing. The result is a **Belgian Wind Cast**—a great

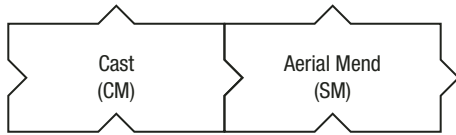


Figure 1-9a. Skills that occur one after the other are “written” in-sequence.

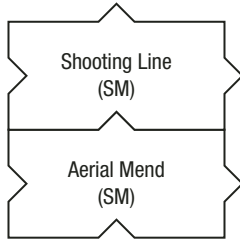


Figure 1-9b. Two skills that occur at the same time are “written” in stacked form.

way to get distance with a tailwind (Figure 1-10). If you don’t have any idea what all those skills are, it doesn’t matter (yet). Just look at the sequence, see how it’s built, and then go to the next paragraph.

Want a totally different result? Take a standard Side-Arm Backcast stacked with a Single Haul, insert a Pause, then add an upward-aiming, Overhead Forward Cast stacked with a Single Haul, and follow it with a Forward Shoot stacked with an aerial Reach Down Mend. The result is a **Puddle Cast**—a great way to make a delicate presentation over tough currents (Figure 1-11). The two examples are written *using the*

*same modules until the end*; it is the modules at the end that make the difference. Without thinking modularly, the two skills might seem unrelated.

→ By thinking modularly you can see that it’s not necessary to try and learn a *separate* Belgian Wind Cast and then a *separate* Puddle Cast—*just learn the underlying, individual skills*. The way you assemble (write) the modules is what makes them specific to a situation.

### Modules in the Text

In the many pages of text that follow I have provided modules for those skills directly related to casting and mending. I have not named the skills with a “module” suffix, instead I’ve just added an (SM), (CM), or (SubM) next to the skill’s name.

While the modular thing is sort of my fly-casting “baby,” if it doesn’t end up working for you, don’t feel compelled to use it.

→ This book is meant to be functional without *forcing* you to rely on the Modular Approach.

**I suggest giving a modular mind-set a fair shake, though. If all goes well, the system will eventually transform into a flow, and you will be able to “speak” a casting “language” all your own.**

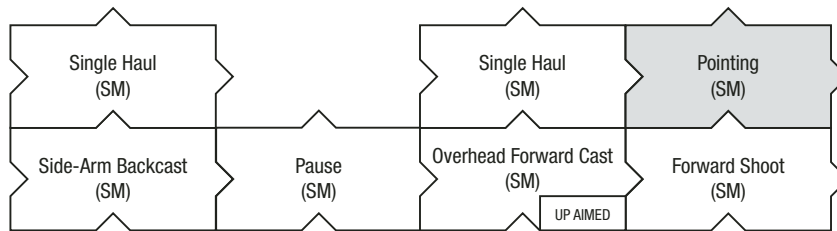


Figure 1-10. The skills that create a Belgian Wind Cast.

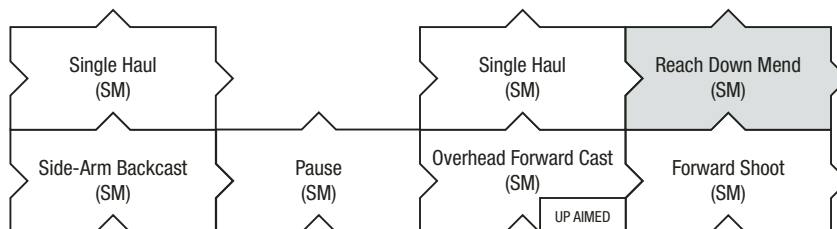


Figure 1-11. The skills that create a Puddle Cast.