

Planning Your Fishing Trip

FOR STUDENTS

Getting Ready . . .

- Consult your state wildlife or natural resources department to determine dates and locations where you will be permitted to fish.
- Determine if fishing licenses will need to be acquired.
- Invite parents and other adult volunteers to come along and assist.
- Acquire life jackets (PFDs) as needed.
- Take swimming and water-safety lessons.
- Heed warnings for lightning and windstorms.
- Decide in advance if you will keep or release fish that you catch. If keeping fish, check regulations on what fish species and sizes you are allowed to keep.
- Practice your skills! See the sections on “Knot-tying,” “Building a Casting Rig,” and “Casting Practice” on the next page.

What to Bring . . .

- Dress for weather, and remember it is often windier and colder near water. Raincoats can double as windbreakers. Wear a sunhat and apply sunscreen to exposed skin.
- Protect your eyes—sunglasses and baseball caps or other hats with brims can protect the eyes from the sun and fish hooks when casting and reeling in.
- Bring a first-aid kit and insect repellent.
- Use barbless hooks or flatten the barb with pliers.
- Fishing gear (see “Basic Fishing Tackle” to the right).
- Don’t forget a fish stringer and a cooler with ice if you are planning to bring home fish to eat or dissect.

While Fishing . . .

- Always be careful near water. Beware of steep or slippery banks, strong currents, or piers without protective railings.
- As necessary, wear life jackets (PFDs).
- Handle fish carefully, with wet hands. Take care with sharp teeth, spines, and gill covers.
- When ice fishing, be sure you are on sound blue ice that is at least ten inches thick. Check with state agencies that announce when ice is thick enough for ice fishing.

Fishing Ethics . . .

- Obey fishing and boating laws.
- Support conservation efforts.
- If not keeping fish, practice catch and release.

- Practice safe angling and boating.
- Respect other anglers’ rights.
- Share fishing knowledge and skills.
- Protect fish by never releasing live bait into waters.
- Properly recycle and dispose of trash.

Basic Fishing Tackle



Tackle includes poles, reels, and many fishing accessories such as sinkers, hooks, lures, and bobbers. Spincasting tackle is easy for beginning anglers and is the most popular type of fishing equipment in use today. The spincasting reel mounts to the top of the pistol-type handle or grip on the rod. Most rods are 4.5 to 6 feet in length. Spincasting reels work using a push button to release the line to cast out into the water. It is best to set the drag so that line is released when a firm tug is given. There is a drag adjustment in front of the thumb button. These reels also have an anti-reverse lever that prevents turning the handle backward and forces the drag system to slow the line leaving the reel as a fish pulls. Spincasting tackle is best used for smaller fish in freshwater. It is ideal for bluegill, bream, small catfish, bass, and trout.

Fishing line is made of nylon called monofilament. It is used for most casting. Fishing line comes in a variety of sizes or strengths, called pound-test. The pound-test refers to the amount of force it takes to break the line. The larger the line size, the stronger it is. Six-pound test line is more flexible and casts easily. It is advisable to match your fishing line to your rod and reel capacity and to the species of fish you want to catch. Six-pound test line is best suited for most fishing.

Bait can include natural baits such as worms, insects, and minnows. Check the fishing regulations to make sure the bait you select is legal for the water you fish. Live minnows and other live fish are illegal to use in many states. If live bait is used, left over bait fish should never be released into the water.

Prepared baits can be made from bread and cheese. Commercially made baits are available in abundance. A few examples include salmon eggs for trout and floating paste-type bait available in many colors. Canned corn and hot dogs can also be used for bait.

Artificial lures can include jigs, spoons, plugs, and spinners. These are available in a wide variety of sizes, shapes, and colors.

Learn all you can about fish behavior and how to choose the best bait for different situations. Discovering which bait works best for the particular fish and the body of water will help ensure you make a catch!

Knot-tying

Before your trip, practice tying a fishing line on a barbless hook with a clinch knot. Links to online demonstration videos are available at www.projectwild.org/aquatic. When practicing knot-tying, try using a fairly large diameter string and paper clip. Be careful with hooks, and if showing others how to tie knots, be sure to demonstrate safe handling of hooks.

Build a Casting Rig

If a rod and reel is not available or desired, an alternative is to make a tin can casting rig. Make sure the tin has no sharp edges by covering it with tape. Tape one end of a 30-foot piece of fishing line to the can near the closed end. Carefully wrap the line around the can toward the open end, trying not to overlap it. Too many overlaps may spoil the cast. When all the line is wound, tie a casting weight to the end and secure the end with the rubber band.

For each person fishing, you will need: tin can, elastic or rubber band, 3 feet of rope; thick string (30-cm long); paper clips; scissors; 30 feet (or more) of fishing line of about 6-lb test strength; one small (size 6–8) barbless hook or pliers to bend down the barb; adhesive tape; a sinker (e.g., 4- to 6-oz split-shot, non-lead sinker).

If you do not wish to use baited hooks, you could use artificial lures such as spinners or artificial flies on a clear, floating bobber.

Casting Practice

Practice casting and reeling in. To designate a casting area, use chalk on pavement or align ropes on grass to represent a stream or lake shoreline, including the features that might harbor a fish and obstacles to avoid (rocks, logs, fast water, pools, vegetation, etc.). Casting targets could be as simple as cardboard boxes or hula-hoops on a gym floor. Upside-down aluminum pie plates make good targets because they reward good aim with a loud bang.

A Few Fishing Tips

There are many fishing techniques. “Still fishing” is the easiest—just cast line out and simply wait with the hook dangling from a bobber or resting on the bottom. If the hook is not too deep in the water, you can see light-colored bait. Watch for the bait disappearing from sight. This signals that the fish has taken the bait, and that it’s time to set the hook by jerking the line.

If fishing with a spinner, move it regularly by jiggling it or by casting it out and reeling it in. The advantage of casting is that it can place the bait or lure in locations that are otherwise difficult to reach, and it adds the attraction of

movement for the fish. Cast bait gently into the water, not too close to the fish. Try to keep the bait off the bottom and watch and feel for fish nibbling or biting the bait or lure. Retrieve the line slowly between casts.

When a fish takes the bait, set the hook (pull up with one swift motion to ensure the hook has firmly set in the fish), pull it toward the surface, and scoop it up in a net. If this is not possible, lift the fish out of the water and lower it into a bucket of water. Keep any fish you plan to eat on a stringer in the water, or clean them and place in a cooler.

Catch-and-Release

Unless you plan to eat the fish you catch, you will want to release them. Many anglers fish just to be outdoors and enjoy the experience. They release fish so they can be caught again. Careful handling of fish when catching and releasing demonstrates good angling ethics. Fish that are caught out of season or do not meet legal limits also need to be released. Carefully check the area’s sport fishing regulations.

The most critical aspect of releasing fish is to do so quickly. A fish may die of exhaustion if dangling on the line for too long. If possible, keep the fish in water so it can breathe. Hold it firmly but gently. Sliding the hook out will be easier if you use barbless hooks. Long-nosed pliers will be useful if the hook is deep in the fish’s mouth. If the hook is barbed and cannot be removed without tearing flesh, cut the line and leave it in.

If the fish is still struggling, release it gently into the water. Do not put it directly into a fast current because it may need time to regain strength. If the fish is unconscious, you may be able to revive it. Hold the fish upright in water heading upstream. Move it gently forward in a figure-eight pattern, so that freshwater flows through the gills. Release the fish as soon as it begins to struggle. Be careful—if there is too much motion then water will not pass over the gills properly. You will drown the fish!

