A well-known casting instructor offers some tips on how to keep your line and leader from colliding in mid-cast

Tame Those Tailing Loops!

LEFTY KREH

DRAWINGS BY BARBARA LEWIS

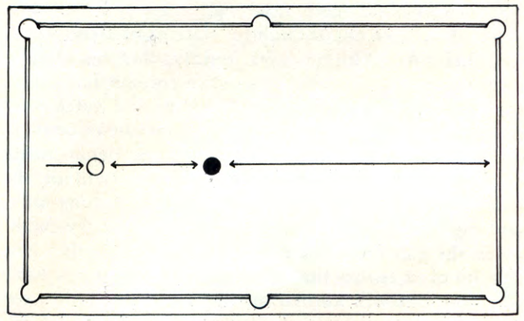
WIND KNOTS ARE SELDOM CAUSED BY THE WIND. More often, the fly-caster is doing the wind's job for it—by throwing a "tailing loop."

The tailing loop results in a poor presentation—at best—and, more commonly, in a fly hung up on the leader or on the line itself. What happened? The line-leader combination "ran into itself" at the end of the cast.

In conducting various casting clinics over the years, as well as acting as an informal casting coach for thousands of anglers—not all of them beginners—I've isolated at least *seven basic reasons* why a leader crashes into itself or into the line at the end of a cast. And almost all of these problems stem from an improperly applied power stroke. When the seemingly obvious, and really very simple, dynamics of this forward power thrust are understood, an angler can usually correct his own faults without personal instruction.

To understand the basic problem, let's change the scene for a moment and step up to the billiard table, wondering all the while what the heck *this* has to do with casting. No, I'm not recommending that you give up fly-fishing for the pool hall—just be a believer for a moment. We chalk up our cue—like we dress our floating line—than sight in the white cue ball on that elusive and solitary eight-ball that we're temporarily "behind." We make our shot—the cue ball strikes the target eight-ball head-on and drives it *straight ahead.* The eight-ball moves forward as the cue ball stops dead, strikes the cushion, returns, and, if we're right on, strikes the cue ball itself in a gentle "kiss," as the experts call it.

But—in fly-casting, this can be the "kiss of death". For that particular billiard shot, we *wanted* the eight-ball to move forward in a straight line, bounce off the cushion and return in the same straight line to strike the cue ball. But in making our forward cast of the line, leader and fly, this is the *last* thing we want but too often the *first* thing we do wrong.

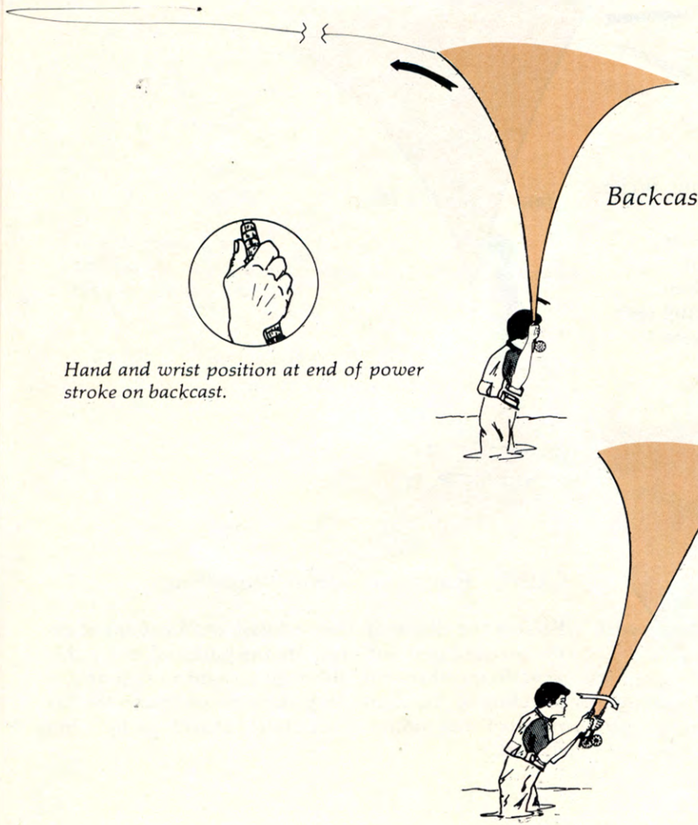


Let's look at our cast again. The line is straight out on the water in front of us. We make our line pickup directly up and over our head, then start our forward cast at the proper time, bringing it back overhead in the same "line of flight" as our backcast. Looks good on paper, but only luck—or a modification of your "picture-book" technique—can ward off disaster.

For what we're doing is directing our *forward stroke in the same plane as our backcast.* Seen from directly above, our line-pickup from the water becomes the initial strike of the cue ball. As we start our forward cast, as in the case of the head-on strike of the cue ball against the eight-ball, the rod-end of our fly line starts to move straight ahead. And, just as the eight-ball bounced off the cushion and began its reverse return, so does the business end of our line-leader-and-fly combination begin its "return" toward the target ahead.

And nine times out of ten, using our "straight-forward approach," the leader and the line *collide* in the classic and frustrating "hang-up" which all of us have experienced at one time or another.

Of course, the problem is obvious, the solution a bit less so, but we can do something about that rather easily. With one segment of the line traveling in one direction—and in the same plane as the other segment of line that was traveling in the opposite direction—the laws of geometry and common sense took over. The two sections of line met in mid-air, with the inevitable result. I don't know what *you* call it, but I've cleaned it up a bit. I call it the "tailing loop," and let's get rid of it!



Hand and wrist position at end of power stroke on backcast.

Hand and wrist position at end of gentle downturning after forward power stroke.

ONLY BY SEPARATING the planes that the forward and backward casts make as they slice through the air can you prevent the leader and line from running into themselves. This can be done by a *simple modification of your forward and backward power strokes.*

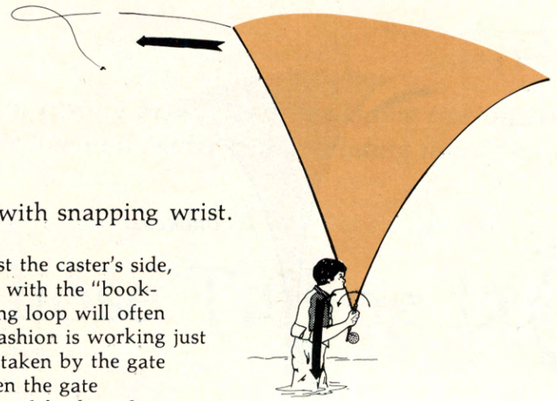
So—let's begin by taking a look at the way in which a correct power stroke is made. Then, with the visual help of an artist friend of mine, I'll try to illustrate each of the seven common causes of tailing loops and demonstrate how they can be corrected. (With typical artist's license, my illustrator has given the caster *two* right arms to demonstrate more clearly the hand and arm positions during the casts.)

If you study the drawings of the correct backward and forward strokes, you'll see that the thumb and wrist do not travel to the rear beyond the point shown in the drawing of the backcast. Note also that the elbow has been elevated a few inches as the rod travels backward.

On the forward cast, the angler drops his elbow slightly (it need be only two or three inches) and, as he comes forward, the shoulders will drop, too, helping to separate the paths taken by the line.

At the end of the forward power stroke, the wrist is straight and the thumb is pointing upward. At the absolute instant the power stroke is finished, the thumb and knuckles should be gently tilted slightly downward. This motion drops the rod and lower portion of the loop slightly, so that the upper portion of the loop coming forward misses it. If the thumb and knuckles are tilted downward too far, or with any force, the loop will open too wide (remember, you want the rod hand to turn slightly down without any power or thrust).

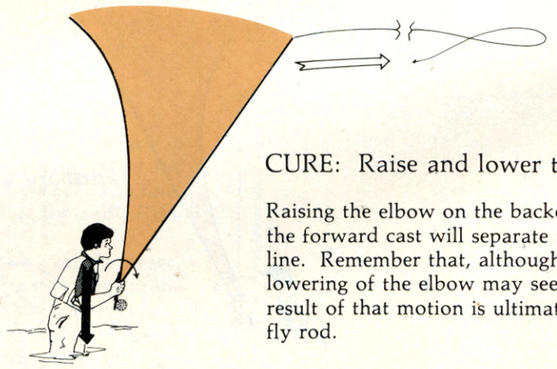
With a basic understanding of the correct procedure, let's look at seven common causes of tailing loops, and the ways in which these faults can be cured.



Fault 1

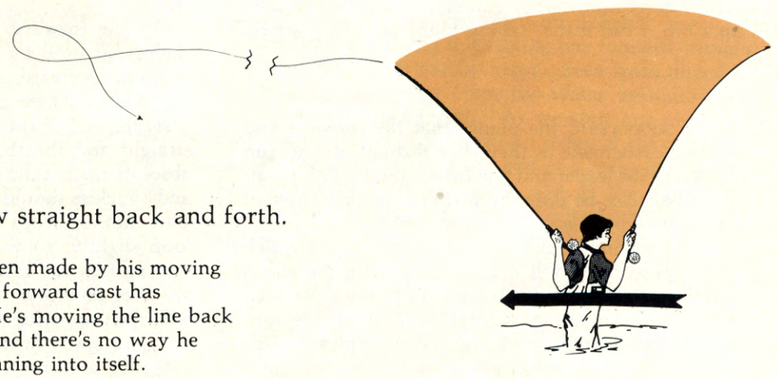
FAULT: Stationary elbow with snapping wrist.

If the elbow is kept locked against the caster's side, as so many old-timers advocated with the "book-under-the-arm" technique, a tailing loop will often occur. A person casting in that fashion is working just like a gate on a hinge—the path taken by the gate as it opens is the same taken when the gate closes. The line will travel back and forth in the same plane and strike itself.



CURE: Raise and lower the elbow.

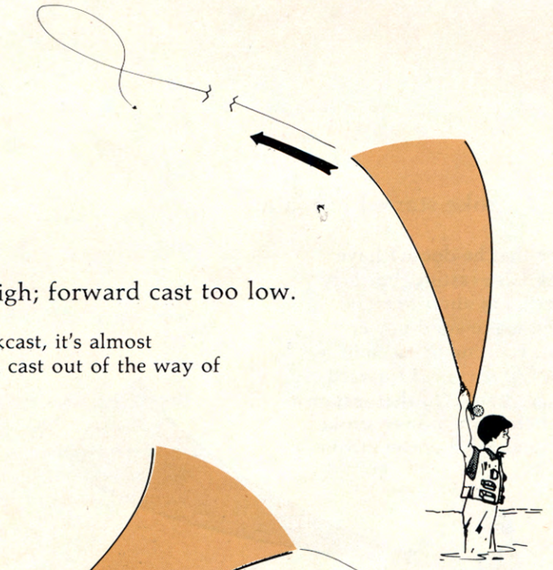
Raising the elbow on the backcast and lowering it on the forward cast will separate the paths taken by the line. Remember that, although a slight raising or lowering of the elbow may seem insignificant, the net result of that motion is ultimately magnified by a long fly rod.



Fault 2

FAULT: Carrying elbow straight back and forth.

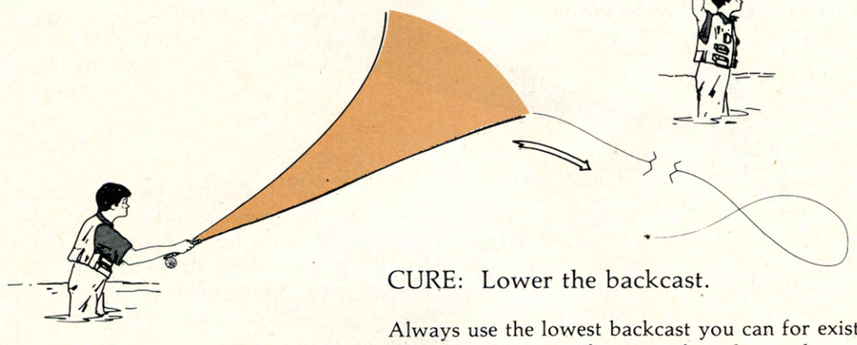
This angler's backcast has been made by his moving his elbow straight back. His forward cast has been made straight ahead. He's moving the line back and forth in a straight line, and there's no way he can prevent the line from running into itself.



Fault 3

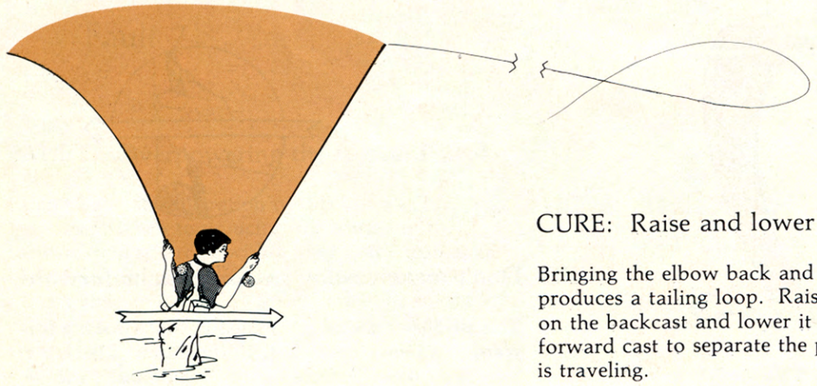
FAULT: Backcast too high; forward cast too low.

If you make a very high backcast, it's almost impossible to get the forward cast out of the way of the descending line.



CURE: Lower the backcast.

Always use the lowest backcast you can for existing fishing conditions. If you are forced to make a high backcast, concentrate on bringing the *lower* portion of the line under the *upper* section on the forward power stroke in order to separate the paths taken by dropping the line. This can often be accomplished by dropping the elbow more than normal as you bring the rod forward.



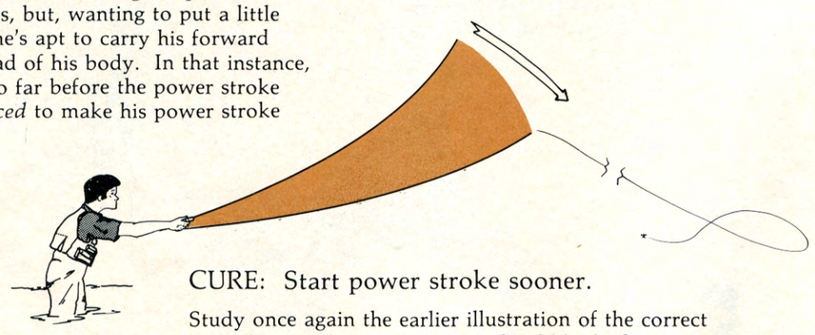
CURE: Raise and lower the elbow.

Bringing the elbow back and forth in a straight line produces a tailing loop. Raise the elbow slightly on the backcast and lower it slightly on the forward cast to separate the planes in which the line is traveling.

Fault 4

FAULT: Forward power stroke started too late.

Whenever an angler tells me that he doesn't have tailing-loop problems during false-casting, but may have one on his final delivery, I'm almost certain what his problem is. He will make good power strokes as he false casts, but, wanting to put a little extra in the delivery, he's apt to carry his forward hand-motion well ahead of his body. In that instance, the rod comes down so far before the power stroke is begun that he is *forced* to make his power stroke straight ahead.



CURE: Start power stroke sooner.

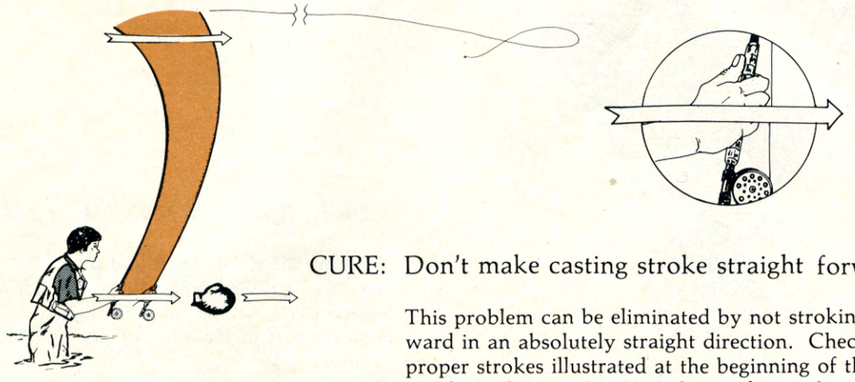
Study once again the earlier illustration of the correct procedure. When casting, you should be looking at the target, and making the forward power stroke as soon as your rod hand can be seen within your peripheral (side) vision.

Fault 5

FAULT: Punching the cast.

This is perhaps the most common fault of anglers who get a tailing loop. The fisherman who makes a power stroke directly forward radically increases his chances of a line-leader collision.

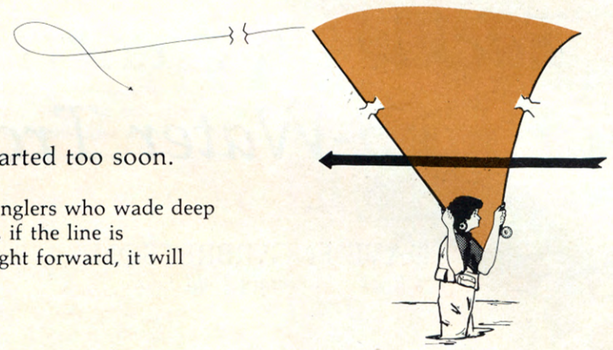
Remember that all backcasts, no matter how fast they travel, are like bullets fired from a gun—they begin falling immediately. Whey your backcast is falling and you come forward with a straight "boxing-glove" punch, you can expect line tangles.



CURE: Don't make casting stroke straight forward.

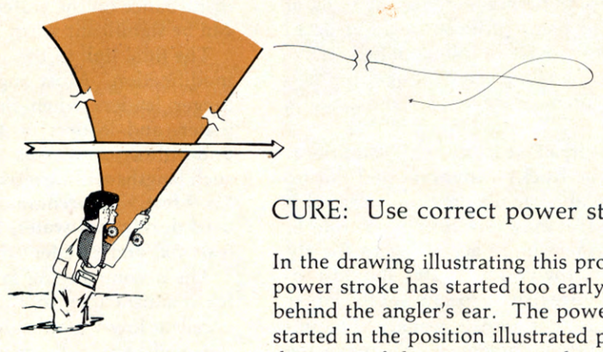
This problem can be eliminated by not stroking forward in an absolutely straight direction. Check the proper strokes illustrated at the beginning of the article, and remember to end your forward power stroke with a slight down-turning of the rod hand.

Fault 6



FAULT: Power stroke started too soon.

This is a common fault with anglers who wade deep and throw a long line. Again, if the line is carried straight back and straight forward, it will run into itself.



CURE: Use correct power stroke.

In the drawing illustrating this problem, note that the power stroke has started too early, considerably behind the angler's ear. The power stroke should be started in the position illustrated previously in the drawings of the correct procedure at the beginning of this article.

Fault 7

FAULT: Overpowering the forward stroke.

I don't have an illustration of this but a tailing-loop may result when too much force is used in the forward power stroke with a very quick stop at the end of the power application. What happens is exactly the same thing as a roll cast—the tip folds over violently at the end of the cast, forming a rolling loop that travels down the line and upsets the leader, producing a tangle.

CURE: Simply use less force.

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