

Beginners Guide to Float Fishing

This page describes the basic concepts, equipment and techniques used for float fishing. I have tried to make it as user friendly as possible. I hope you find this page useful.



"It was said that a float is one of the few things that is more pleasing in its disappearance than its appearance! Using a float is one of the most efficient and sensitive methods for fishing. With a float you get a real feel for what is going on under water. The slightest knock is recorded sending your heart racing."



What is float fishing?

Float fishing is where you use a floating indicator to help catch fish. This indicator is called a float. Floats have a bright tip that allows you to see it easily. The float is attached to your fishing line. It acts as a visual indicator between your rod and hook bait. When a fish picks up your hook and swims away, the float is pulled beneath the water. When you see the float disappear, you know that you have a fish. You can use floats to fish the whole depth of the water. i.e. from the surface right down to the bottom. This lets you put your hook bait right where the fish are. Professional Match fishermen are able to keep catching fish, even when the fish have moved up or down in the water.

Floats come in different shapes and sizes. Choosing the right float depends on the type of fishing you want to do. You can use floats on many different types of venues. i.e. from deep or shallow lakes, to fast or slow rivers.



What are floats?

The three main types of floats are:

The waggler:

- The insert waggler
- The bodied waggler
- The sliding waggler
- The stepped waggler
- The crystal waggler
- The self depth adjusting waggler

The stick float:

- The quill float
- The standard stick float

The pole float:

- Pear shaped - body up pole float
- Pear shaped - body down pole float
- Cane stem floats
- Wire stem floats
- Carbon fiber stem floats
- Continental varieties (top quality)
- Lake / still water pole floats
- River / fast water pole floats
- The dibber

These three types of floats are used for different techniques and venues.

The waggler

The waggler is a float that is attached to the line at the bottom of the float. Depending on the situation, a waggler can be locked in one spot, or left free to slide up and down the line. The waggler floats can be used for almost all forms of fishing. The different varieties can be used from fast to slow, to deep, to shallow venues. It is by far the most diverse float design.

The stick float

The stick float is designed for river fishing. They are attached length ways along the line, with the bottom facing the hook end. Two or three small silicone rubber bands are used to slide over both the line and float, and are placed at the top and bottom of the float. This holds the float in place, but allows you to easily adjust the float position along the line. Stick floats are fished down stream of where you are river fishing. The stick floats have a slim design, that allows it to lay down in the current. This lets you maintain control over the float and more importantly, your hook bait.

The pole float

The pole float is used for float fishing with a pole. A float is attached to a piece of fishing line, that is attached to the end of the pole. Pole floats are very small and do not require much weight. This is because they are physically pushed out by the sheer length of the pole. As a result, you are able to make your rigs ultra sensitive. Pole floats range from many shapes and sizes, allowing you to fish most venue types.



How does a float work?

A float is buoyant mass. i.e.; this means that it floats in water.

To use a float for fishing, it needs to be weighed down. This is done by squeezing small pieces of lead shot onto the fishing line between the float and the hook. When a fish picks up the hook bait, the float moves. It is this movement that indicates what is going on below.

The most common types of movement are mentioned below:

The rising float tip

The rising float tip happens when a fish has taken your hook bait and is either holding the line up, or that the fish is swimming towards you. When a fish does this, it usually means that the fish has lifted the bait but has not yet swallowed it. I have found that you shouldn't strike until the float has disappeared under the water.

The side to side wobble

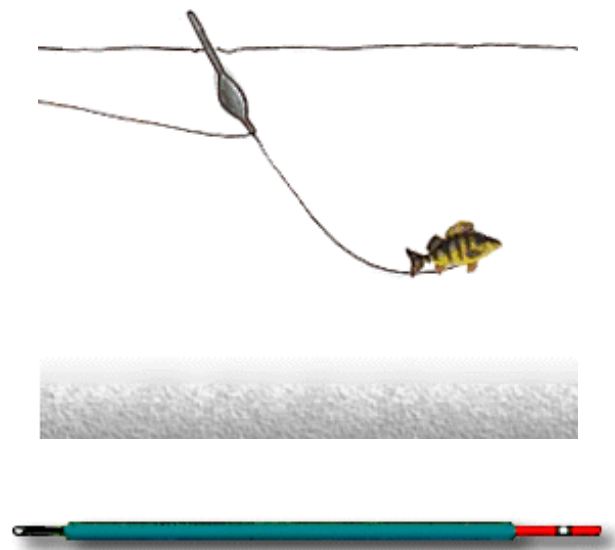
The side to side wobble is when a fish is moving with the bait in its mouth OR that fish are bumping into the line.

The slide away

The slide away is when a fish has picked up the hook bait and is moving off in one direction. The float will steadily slide beneath the surface. I have found that you should strike only when the float has disappeared.

The diving float

The diving float is where the float tip simply dives beneath the surface of the water. This can be caused by the fish swimming off, or by the fish picking up the bait and the setting shot. When the shot has been lifted off the bottom, its weight is added to the total shot weight. If this extra weight is more than the total buoyancy of the float, then it will sink. This technique is an excellent way to see if a fish is playing up your bait.



Correctly setting the float up

Floats require a certain amount of weight to set the float in the water. This is called the 'total shot capacity'. Various forms of lead split shot are used to weigh the float down. This shot is pinched onto your fishing line.

There are many different types of lead weights. 'Styles' are an alternative weight to lead shot. These are very small cylindrical lead weights, with a slot cut down its length. They are used mainly for pole fishing, because they allow you to spread the weight evenly down the line. This lets the bait slowly fall through the water. One problem with them is that they tend to tangle the line. I do not recommend using these for float fishing with a rod.

The following table describes each shot size, and their appropriate weight. These are sizes used in the UK, other countries can differ:

Split Shot Size Weight

LG	3g
LSG	2g
SSG	1.6g
AAA	0.8g
AB	0.6g
BB	0.4g
No1	0.3g
No3	0.25g
No4	0.2g
No5	0.15g
No6	0.1g
No8	0.06g
No9	0.05g
No10	0.04g
No11	0.03g
No12	0.02g
No13	0.01g

Tip:

The rule of thumb when attaching shot, is that you should place 2/3 of the total shot capacity immediately beneath the float. The rest of the shot can either be spread evenly down the line, or bulked together. It is important to remember that you should try to place the remaining shot nearer the hook than the float itself. If you don't, you might get tangled up when you try to cast.

Floats can be fished fixed in one place on your line, or as a sliding float. If the swim you are fishing is shallower than your rod then you should fish with a float that is fixed in one place. If the swim is deeper than your rod, use a sliding float.

Using these methods will help with your casting.



What else do you need?

There is a lot of available equipment for all forms of float fishing. This section covers the other major components needed.

The float rod

The float rod is probably one of the most important components for float fishing. It can be the difference between catching or losing those winning fish in a match. Float rods must have special characteristics. These are represented in the length and action of the rod. A typical float rod should be between eleven to fifteen feet long. This long length allows you to cast your float out further, control the float better in strong currents and wind, and strike fish quickly. The optimal length seems to be thirteen feet, though you should stick with the length that suits you.

Float rods should also have a medium test curve. The test curve is the weight and speed that a rod takes for the tip to bend 90 degrees from the rod butt.

The rod you buy should easily be able to cast out your float rig, have a nice soft tip so you don't pull the hook out of smaller fish's mouths, and most importantly, to have ample strength to fight and land any larger fish you catch.

The fishing reel

There are three main types of reels that you can use for float fishing. They are as follows:

The first is the standard 'open faced' spinning reel, with a front drag. This is the most commonly used style of reel for float fishing. an example of one is pictured below.



The second is the 'open faced' spinning reel with rear drag. This isn't really appropriate for float fishing as the rear drag adds extra weight to the reel.

The third is the 'closed face' spinning reel. This reel is similar to the top mounted reels used for lure or plug fishing, but is mounted underneath the rod like any standard reel. Try not to confuse the two. This reel has been described by the top British anglers as the best type for float fishing, as the line is covered inside the reel. This helps prevent wind snarling up your line.



The fishing line

The fishing line you use is down to two things. Personal preference and the size fish you intend to catch. There are heaps of lines to choose from. Fishing line is measured in breaking strain and diameter. The breaking strain is the point at which the line breaks from the weight or pressure placed on it. It is always good to check your line as some manufacturers make it stronger or weaker than advertised. Lines come in two forms. Normal and pre stretched. Normal line is thicker in diameter, but has a lot of stretch left in it. Pre stretched line is a lot thinner, but it has almost no give left in it. It is important to remember that when you tie knots in the line that the line strength at the knots, it is sometimes reduced up to 2/3's of the original strength. I have found that you should use normal line on your reel, and only use pre stretched line for your hook lengths.

Tip:

Always use a lower breaking strain line for your hook lengths than your main line, so if you get snagged or a fish breaks you off, it will only go at that weaker line. An added bonus is that the diameter is lower so the fish are going find it harder to see and feel it on their mouths.

Hooks

Hooks should always be barbless. If the hooks you are using are not barbless then please get some new hooks or crimp the barb down on your existing ones. I have found that as long as you keep the line tight whilst fighting a fish, then you will have no problems landing them. Barbed hooks can cause terrible damage to fish's mouths. They can also make removing the hook really difficult. And if worst comes to worst and your line snaps, the fish won't be able to spit the hook out later on and may die !



How to cast the float

Once you have finished setting up the float you have to cast it out. The following directions explain what you have to do. I have also provided an animation of these steps below :

1. Wind the line in until the float itself is a few inches away from the tip of the rod.
2. Grip the rod near the reel seat with the hand you write with. The reel handle should be facing towards the opposite hand.
3. Place the other at the butt of your rod handle.
4. Hook the line coming from the reel under your first finger and press it under the handle.
5. Take your other hand and open the bail arm.
6. Put that hand back to the butt of the rod.
7. Making sure the line is still held under your finger, gently swing the rod over the shoulder of the hand that is holding the line.
8. Give the float and the hanging line a slight chance to swing away from your back.
9. Gently swing the rod forward, over the same shoulder in one smooth motion.
10. Continue to swing the rod out in front of you and let the line go from under your finger, so the float rig can cast out.

NB: The float rig should now be flying out over the water. When the float nears the spot you wish to fish, you will need to slow it down so it enters the water without a splash.

11. Quickly tap the rim of the spool with your first finger on the hand holding on the rod rest. The float will slow down and enter the water correctly. This is called 'feathering' the float.

12. Close the bail arm after the float has landed in the water.

NB: The float rig will now sink down through the water and 'set to depth'. This basically means that you are ready to start catching fish !

All you need to do is wait for a fish.



How to strike a fish

The float has now been cast out and it is exactly in the spot you wanted it to go... in the water and not in the trees above you! The following section steps you through how to strike a fish... and believe me, any fish you catch is worth it!

When a fish has taken your hook bait, the float tip will behave in one of the ways previously mentioned. The most common way is to have your float tip dive beneath the water.

When the float moves and you are confident that is a fish, you will need to strike to set the hook. Striking a fish may sound easy, but it is often the thing that can make or break a day.

The season, the type of fish and the weather are just some of the factors that dictate how you should strike a fish. Summer fish are more aggressive and often require a fast response from you to catch them. Winter fish don't move around a lot and will only take food if it is put in front of their faces. You can sometimes have to wait ten seconds before striking them. Don't worry too much as this is something that you can only really pick up with time. Besides, it is a damn good reason to go out and practice!

The basic theory behind striking a fish is to lift the rod in the opposite direction to the fish. If you are fishing straight out, then lift up. If you are fishing to the left or right, then strike in the opposite direction. It is important to also remember that you should only ever need to lift the rod at a maximum of 90 degrees from the fish. If you have to wrench your arm right up and away to hook fish, then you have too much slack in the line.

I strongly recommend that you use a float rod. The extra length helps you to quickly pick up the line between you and the fish. The soft tip helps prevent you inadvertently pulling the hook out of the mouth.

When float fishing it is important to wind in any line slack you have between you and the float. If you have a large bow in the line, it means that you have to pick up that much more when you go to strike a fish.

If you are fishing fast water like a river, or fishing into a strong wind, then there are a few things to help you hook fish:

Tip:

- When river fishing, try to keep your rod tip high in the air and your line will stay out of the water. This helps you maintain control over your float.
- Soak your spools of line in dish washing detergent. This will help it to cut through any surface scum.
- Push the tip of your rod down deep under the water after casting and reel in the float till it is in the right spot. Slowly lift the rod tip back out of the water, and the line will stay down near the bottom.

It shouldn't be long until you instinctively learn when to strike. I have found that if all else fails and you aren't sure, then just go ahead and strike. It is better to have struck, than not to have struck at all!

If you do miss a fish then you will need to reel in the float to put some more bait on, because 'as night follows day', the damn fish will have almost certainly stolen the bait!

Tight lines!