



## Where to look and how to approach

Many fish are constantly on the move, looking for food. You can either intercept them or wait for them to come to you. If you know you are in a good spot — for example, where you have seen other people catching fish or have caught them yourself — then it might be best to wait for them to return.

## Be patient. Be sneaky.

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If you are fishing unfamiliar waters, then it is often wiser to search for good fishing spots. Keep in mind, however, that even the best fishing holes do not produce nonstop action. Patience has always been a virtue among anglers.

### Be sneaky

Being quiet is almost as important as being patient. The bigger the fish, the more skittish they are. Commotion on a dock, along the shore or in a boat can scare fish away or cause them to stop feeding. Conversation is fine, but jumping or running or banging equipment will reduce your catch. Think sneaky.

You can usually get closer to fish under cloudy or windy conditions or in flowing water. When trout fishing in streams, wear muted colors and keep a low profile. Try not to let your shadow fall over areas you are fishing.

Stealth also applies to the way you present your bait or lure. Don't cast directly to the spot where you think the fish are. Instead, cast beyond them and reel until your bait or lure is among the fish.

## Learn to recognize a bite

Fish may hit a bait or lure ferociously, tentatively or somewhere in between, making it difficult to predict how you may see or feel a bite.

Bobbers could jiggle, plunge downward or skate across the water. If the fish swims upward after taking the bait, your stick bobber may lay flat or float higher in the water.

When bottom fishing, you may see your rod tip plunge downward or quiver, or your line may unexpectedly go slack.

If you are holding your fishing pole, you may feel a tap, a tug or a pull, or the line may go slack.

## Set the hook

When you suspect a bite, reel up any loose line and drive the hook home with a powerful upward sweep of the rod. Setting the hook with a slack line or a loop in the line usually won't make the hook penetrate and probably will cause the fish to drop the bait.

If your drag is set correctly, you can set the hook vigorously. Stretch in your line, the drag and the bend of the fishing rod will absorb much of the pressure of the strike to keep you from ripping the hook out.

Fight and land your fish safely — for it and for you

Keep the rod up high, so your arms and the bend of the fishing pole absorb some of the power of the fighting fish.

Allow the fish to run, taking line from the reel. Recover line by lifting the rod handle and then lowering the rod tip as you reel in, pumping the fish closer.

A fish's last-moment struggles can surprise you and make you lose the fish. When playing a large fish, loosen the drag slightly as the fish gets close.

## Net fish head first

Place your net in the water and pull the fish toward it. When the fish is over the bag, lift the net firmly and quickly.

If you have no net, play the fish until it is tired and cradle it in your hand. Black bass, crappie, carp, suckers and catfish can be grasped and lifted by their lower lip, which tends to paralyze them. Avoid the sharp teeth of other species. Be careful not to hook yourself when you grab the fish. You can lead fish up the bank with your fishing rod or by backing slowly away from the water, letting the exertions of the fish help you bring it ashore. Do this only if you are planning to keep the fish.

## Be careful handling fish

Most fish aren't dangerous, but careless handling can result in unpleasant cuts or punctures. Handle fish firmly but carefully, or use a landing net to stabilize fish while you unhook and measure them.

The catfishes, especially the minnow-size madtoms, possess a mild but painful venom that can be introduced when a person touches spines at the front of the pectoral or dorsal fins. Protect yourself by holding the fish from the underside, with your fingers firmly beneath the pectoral spines. The barbels of catfish are harmless.

You can safely hold bass, crappie, and small catfish by putting your thumb into their mouth and pinching their lower lip. Walleye, gar and large trout have sharp teeth that can inflict a painful wound when lipped. Grip these fish around the back of the head, above the gills.

White bass and stripers have sharp edges on their gill plates that can slice a finger inserted beneath their gills.

The fins of sunfishes, bass, and the walleye family become rigid when the fish is threatened. Slide your hand down over the fins of small fish and hold them firmly. Grasp larger fish over the back of the head, above the gills.

Don't let a struggling fish sink your own hooks into you. Keep hands and legs away from flopping fish and use hemostats or needle-nose pliers to safely remove the hooks from fish.

## Hang-ups happen. Learn to deal with them.

It's hard to imagine moving a hook and sinker through the water for any length of time without occasionally getting hung up on a rock, a stick, a log, a dock, a cable, weeds or some other object. Snags are part of fishing.

When you get snagged, try to free the hook by holding your rod tip high and jiggling it. Often it helps to move to one side or the other to change the angle.

If the hook won't free, you'll probably have to break your line. Don't just pull hard with your fishing pole, or it may snap instead of the line. Better to wrap the line several times around your wrist and hand, preferably around a shirtsleeve or glove, point the rod tip at the snag and steadily pull or back away until the line breaks or the hook pulls free. Should the latter happen, check your hook and replace it if it is bent or broken. If the line is frayed near the hook, cut it off and retie.