

SMART Angler's Notebook

Setting the Hook

by Laurel Garlicki

After practicing your casting skills, you'll be able to get your lure or bait right where you want it to be—right where the fish are! The next important skill is setting the hook. No matter what is tied to the end of your line, a proper hook set is very important to landing your fish.

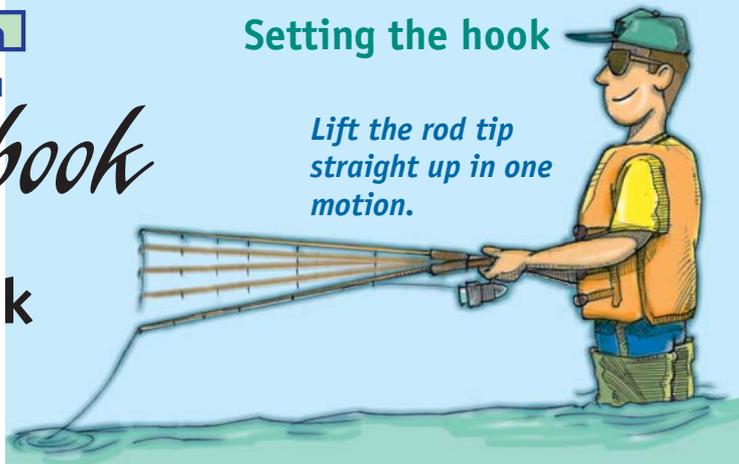
When retrieving your lure or bait, keep your rod tip low—almost parallel to the ground is just about right. You can adjust it higher or lower depending on the lure action, current, underwater vegetation or your comfort. Keep the slack out of the line. If you're fishing with a bobber, reel in as much line as possible without pulling in your bobber. The rod tip should point to the spot where your line enters the water, but you can also adjust this placement based on the factors listed above.



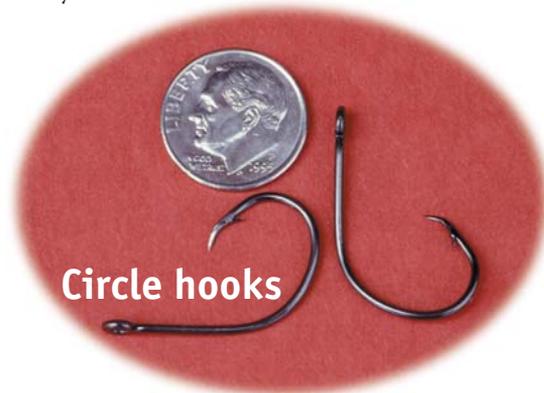
When you feel something tug at your line, or when you notice your bobber dipping under the water, lift the rod tip straight up in one quick motion. If you're catching smaller fish, you don't have to lift very hard. With very sharp hooks, just a steady, quick lift will set the hook. It is possible to pull your bait out of the

Setting the hook

Lift the rod tip straight up in one motion.



fish's mouth. But using a steady lift along with sharp hooks lets you set the hook on most fish that tug on your line. Another reason why you need a firm hook set is that a proper hook set will prevent the fish from swallowing the hook. This will cause less damage to the fish, so it will have a better chance of surviving when you release it.



Circle hooks are a newer hook style that has been proven to turn after a fish takes it into its mouth. It almost guarantees a hook set in the fish's mouth and no swallowed hooks. When using circle hooks, it's not necessary to set the hook—it will do so on its own. These hooks are especially helpful when introducing new anglers to the sport.

Putting up a fight

While reeling the fish in, keep your rod tip up. When the fish is fighting and your drag is buzzing, don't reel. Wait until the buzzing stops to start reeling again. Just hold steady when the fish fights and swims away from you. When it takes a break, reel in quickly. Then hold steady if the fish takes off again. Keep steady tension on the line during the whole pro-

cess. If your line goes slack, there's a chance the fish will "throw the hook" and you'll lose your catch. So keep that rod tip up!

Fight the fish as quickly as possible without breaking the line or damaging your equipment. The fish has a much greater chance of survival if it does not become exhausted during the fight. This part of the fishing experience can be the most thrilling for you, but remember to keep the fish in mind, too.

Landing the lunker

Once you've reeled in your trophy, keep the fish in the water as much as possible. Use a landing net to scoop the fish while it's in the water, and *then* lift it out. Landing nets are especially helpful when fishing from a boat or when using light tackle for big fish. Landing nets can protect the fish. They can also help you better release the catch, prepare a fish to be kept, and steady a fish so that you can remove the hook.



Using a
landing net

*Keep the fish
in the water
as much as
possible.*

illustration by Ted Walke

What a drag

Be sure to adjust the drag on your reel for your fishing situation. If the drag is set too tightly, a hooked fish can break the line when it runs, jumps or fights. If the drag is set too loosely, the fish can fight all day and you'll never be able to reel it in. The drag should be set so that you can reel the fish in quickly without exhausting it. On most reels, the drag can be adjusted by using a dial found on the top, side or back of the reel. ☐

TRICKS OF THE TRADE

Wearing polarized sunglasses helps you see what's going on in the water. The glare on the water's surface often prevents your seeing the action below. With polarized sunglasses you'll see more of where the fish are and how they are reacting to your lure. You can have more effective hook sets when you can see what's going on.



Hats off to fishing—or should we say "hats on." A hat with a brim can help reduce the sun's glare and provide some sun protection at the same time. Check out the Commission's Outdoor Shop at www.fish.state.pa.us for great fishing hats.