

Learning to Pitch

By Rod Yoder

Pitching is a skill that can be tough to figure out, but once you get the hang of it, it is the simplest most natural feeling cast you can make! I would see guys on TV or at boat shows doing this with such ease, but my attempts were fruitless. I kept trying and all of a sudden, almost by accident, I found the feel and it started to click. Allow me to try to talk you thru it:

First of all, this is a "standing on the casting deck" technique. Not down behind a high gunwale. The trajectory of the lure starts from your knee and travels parallel to the water. Ideally about 6" above the surface. (The lure will hit the inside of the boat if you try this standing in the bottom of a rowboat.)

To get a feel for the interaction between rod movement and spool release, (to help educate your thumb) try this exercise: Point the rod straight in front of you, parallel with the ground. Have a 3/8 oz. jig tied on and hanging a couple inches from the end of the rod tip. Push the spool release but hold the spool with your thumb. Now try to slowly lift the rod tip from 9 o'clock to 11 o'clock while keeping the lure suspended stationary in mid-air. You will find you need to adjust your thumb pressure to allow the spool to spin at the correct rate depending on how fast you raise your rod tip. With me so far?

You are not casting here... just an exercise. Practice this at different speeds until you get a good feel of it - maybe try it with your eyes closed.

I maybe should have mentioned... the spool tension and magnetic cast control should both be fairly loose. Looser than you would have set for normal casting.

The normal situation for pitching like I said, is from a casting deck. To duplicate this I stand on the edge of my front porch. This is about 12 - 14 inches above ground. Find something sturdy to stand on. It gives you a little more vertical room for lure travel. The lure will be swung, pendulum-like, with the rod tip always higher than the lure. The beauty of this cast is that the rod tip is in a position to counter-act the force of gravity! In an overhand cast the lure travels up above the rod tip and when trajectory speed slows, it falls... kerplow! With a pitch, as horizontal speed slows, the rod tip raises causing the lure to defy gravity! This is why a lure can ultimately be "placed" next to a stump 30' away with barely a ripple!

Ok, let's give this a try.

Give yourself a target about 10' away - not for accuracy but to limit your distance. It's important to start short.

Face forward holding the rod in front at 9 o'clock. Your jig, or better yet a hookless casting plug, is in your left hand. You have enough line out for the lure to reach from the rod tip down to the reel.

First lets do this without releasing the spool... Lift the rod tip slowly also letting go of the lure. As the rod tip goes up, the lure will swing forward, then lower the rod to allow the lure to travel forward and land at your target.

Think gentle... and slow. We aren't putting any load in the rod. Just gently placing the lure out there.

Once you are able to place the lure, gently, at the max length of arm + rod + line, move your target a couple feet beyond that distance. Not too much though. Take it slow.

This time, release the spool. As the rod comes up allow the weight of the lure to pull out line as it starts to swing forward. Remember the feel you gained in the first exercise. Your first attempt may find the lure falling 2' in front of you! Take it sloooow. Don't force it. Work your way to your target distance. With practice you will gain a feel for the rod lift speed needed to carry the lure forward.

I don't know if this will help, but I imagine pulling the starter cord on my lawn mower. If I'd bend over and jerk it hard, I'd break my back. Instead, I start pulling and try to speed up the force as I pull. It's the same with that free-spool. If you load the rod and make the lure jerk forward... start pickin'! Instead, with practice, you'll find the sweet spot of tip speed, lure travel, and thumb pressure.

A thought about your thumb... I like to place my thumb towards the side of the spool. Instead of lifting and pressing down to change pressure, I use a side-to-side rolling motion to adjust the amount of friction between my thumb and the spool.

I will also mention... Pitching is also an excellent technique for bank fisherman. If you find yourself surrounded by pesky trees and bushes a pitch cast is just the ticket. No need for side or overhead casting room!

Practice is essential. place a couple pie plates at various distances around you front yard. Make it a game to try to hit the targets but also to place the jig on each target - softly. It's like shooting hoops in the driveway. But at least with basketball - you don't have to put up with the cat calls from passers by wanting to know if anything's biting!!!

It's that target practice mentality that keeps me going when the bass aren't cooperating. It's gratifying to have your partner say, "Oooo, nice cast... oughta be one there!"

Another fun thing to do is play with your cat while practicing your pitching! I use one of those foam practice golf balls with a screw eye for a practice plug. No hooks of course! This has helped my mental imagery when fishing. I believe that a cat and a bass act alot alike. Initially my cat will run himself silly chasing that pitched golf ball as it zooms down the hallway. But after awhile he settles down and hides in a doorway to try to sneak up on the elusive ball. Sooner or later it will take a change in presentation to keep the cat's interest. This is when "dead sticking" is deadly! Let that ball sit still for up to a minute. You can just tell it is driving the cat crazy! Finally, he has to attack - just can't take it anymore! Watching that cat's various reactions is what I keep in mind. I "see" the bass in my mind with each cast. I picture it laying in wait... maybe having tired of the fishing pressure... maybe just curious enough that a "dead-sticked" bait is just too much to let pass without a pounce!



Now in the winter months this bit of practice/cat-play does have it's rewards... When you just have to get that "feel" of a good strike, pitch the practice ball/plug down the hallway and close your eyes. Then reel very slowly... maybe add a pause or two... Sooner or later, the cat will attack and when he does, it feels awesome! You may find it is all you can do to not swing hard and try to cross his eyes! Maybe I'm giving away my own personal sickness, but often I just want to feel that feeling again and again!

If you are new to pitching, I hope this helps. Good luck, and take it slow... distance and accuracy will come.

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