

10 Simple Angling Tips for



Becoming a Complete River Angler

In the continental United States there are well over a million river miles. Most are accessible to anglers within a short drive from where they live; yet an estimated 70% dismiss the angling opportunities this resource offers. Here are 10 simple tips aimed at increasing success for those interested in fishing flowing water.

1. Keep a Fishing Log

This has been my least expensive and perhaps most useful angling tool over the last 10 years. Due to river stages and temperatures fluctuating more than on most other bodies of water, an angler must be ready for change. By logging the date, time of day, water temperature, air temperature, river stages, lure presentations and results, an angler can head to the river with confidence in nearly any situation. Take five minutes after each trip and over time you'll have a priceless reference log with keys to success in different conditions for the rivers you fish.

2. Know the Main Forage / Food Source.

“Match the Hatch” is the phrase that fits best. On rivers, this is a huge factor. Selecting patterns that resemble baitfish or crayfish will often make the difference. Being aware of the primary food source and knowing which are active during the seasons is a good start. There seems to be a magic time when either will work, knowing the water temperature also helps. Insects and crustaceans are far more active when the water reaches into the mid 60's, although this is just a general rule, it is a good place to start. For those river systems that hold specie migration, spring and fall on many; produce eel, herring, shad and frog migrations. Key into those patterns and hold on!

3. Make the Proper River Presentation.

Most fish in the river face into the current with their eyes fixed up river and excluding some migrations, the bait they feed on is coming down stream. For this reason, fish in a river are opportunistic and far more likely to bite, rather than inspect prey. In current, if they do not react quickly, the prey is swept down stream and a meal is missed. Even though fish conditioned to strong current are quick to bite, the proper bait presentation is required to be successful. The most common presentation is to cast the bait perpendicular to the current, reel up the slack line, and swim, twitch or bounce the bait as it swings down river. When it falls directly below you, reel it in the rest of the way and repeat.

4. Work the Whole Structure.

Any angler knows the value of structure for holding fish. In a river system, the structure has many uses and one is to block the current flow. Many will hurry to cast behind a rock or log because it holds fish. Unfortunately, many leave the area in front and to the side of that same structure alone. When fish are in a feeding mode, often the largest fish are in front or along side the structure. It stands to reason, they position themselves to have the first shot at bait as it moves down stream. Next time out, make a cast to the front of the structure first. Many of my largest catches come along the side or just in front of the structure.

5. Keep Enough of Tackle on Hand.

Space is often an issue for river anglers, this is particularly true for those who wade, paddle and float rivers. Since gamefish can turn a blind eye to bait presentations from day to day, keep three different style baits on hand. A set of small vest-sized tackle compartments with a few different baits, sizes and weights is all that is required. Being able to scale up or down a jig weight or the size of a presentation can make all the difference. Do not get stuck on the same patterns if they are not producing.

6. Know the River Conditions Before Heading Out.

Be safe and prepared before arriving at the river. Success is often a result of good planning. After a long winter or several weeks away from the water, many of us can hardly wait to get out on the river, heading out in dense fog, flood conditions or inclement weather is never wise. A phone call or web search on any of the USGS or Waterways pages for real time river conditions will provide current information.

<http://pa.waterdata.usgs.gov/nwis/current?type=flow>

<http://www.erh.noaa.gov/er/marfc/Stages/>

7. Know the Flow.

Each specie will search out water that best fits them. While smallmouth bass prefer more current than walleye, they are often found in the same pool, just in different locations. When the river levels rise and fall, the active gamefish will move to conditions that suit them best. I discovered this fishing a large riffle pool one weekend. The first day nearly all the bass were caught in the first 20 yards of each riffle. That night, water was released from the dam up river and the next morning the fish were gone. Drifting through the first pool, I made a desperate cast 50 or 60 yards below the start of the riffle and immediately hooked up. This pattern worked all day, the bass moved into a flow that best fit them. In high water, gamefish often move to the shoreline or along structure for the same reason.

8. Pre-Rig an Extra Rod or Two.

This tip is for those anglers who take to the river in some kind of craft and have room for an extra rod or two. Always be prepared, tie your two best lure bets before the outing. When you miss a fish on one lure type, just reel it in and immediately toss the different bait to the same spot, more often than not a strike will result. River fish are far more opportunistic than those in lakes, while stung just moments ago by one bait type, a bass or walleye will anxiously grab different looking bait if presented within a few second of the miss.

9. Do Not Ignore the Shallows.

A lesson learned from an old friend years ago; ignore the shallows and miss some great opportunities. I had logged nearly twenty years of river fishing and was foolish enough to think I had this river stuff down. It was early August and the temperature was in the high 90's, not a soul on the river that morning as my friend moved his boat into a large shallow area and began to drift in 12 inches of water. "What are we doing here?" I asked, as he tossed out a jerkbait and twitched it back to the boat. On his next cast, a monster bass swirled and smashed the bait. Not a question of doubt from that moment on, we landed bass after bass in flat, gin clear shallow water. The presentation could not have been easier.

10. Right to the Point, Maintain a Sharp Hook Edge.

Having a honing stone or hook sharpening device on hand is a good practice. If you fish crankbaits, tubes or jigs in a river, they are in contact with the rocky bottom on every cast. You toss the bait out into the current and bounce it back, then repeat over, and over again. It does not take long for the hook to lose the edge. A sharp hook increases your landing odds.

The Golden Rule: Respect Others While on the River.

Proper etiquette is critical for becoming a Complete River Angler. Providing ample room by giving way to smaller crafts and those wading and swimming is just good practice. Respect landowners and those who

also chose to spend their day out on the water. We all need to respect and protect this valuable resource and the wildlife that inhabits it.

Written by Chris Gorsuch 12/27/2003