

# 7 Tricks to Instantly Boost Strike Detection for Wet-Fly & Nymph

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Catch the Fish you  
Don't Realise are  
**ALREADY**  
Eating your Fly

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## You Don't Know What You're Missing!

**Y**ou've probably heard the phrase above plenty of times in your life. When it comes to fishing with the sunk fly - whether it is a wet fly, nymph or streamer - it has a very powerful meaning. Put simply, **the number of times that fish grab hold of your sunk fly when you can't see it is MANY, MANY times more than the number of fish that you catch.** It happens all the time without us knowing it.



*In other words, you quite literally don't know what you are missing. Now, I can't turn ALL of those missed opportunities into fish in your net. What I can do is significantly multiply your conversion rate of "chances" to "fish-landed". Would you like to know the moment that your fish of a lifetime grabs your unseen fly? It might have happened already...*

### *Simple and Effective*

None of the tactics in this guide are complicated. Do not be fooled into thinking that this means they are beneath you. Each one on its own will massively improve your chances. When you start layering them together in combinations - then those benefits compound and you will see a huge jump in your success.

Some of the tactics are sneakier than others - but, again, please don't fall into the trap of thinking that makes them "better". Every single tactic is vital. With that in mind, let's begin...

# 1: Create Proper “Contact” when Fishing a Dead Drift Presentation

This is the absolute foundation for everything that follows. It is the thing that top competition river fly anglers spend their entire careers getting better and better at. When you can't see your **fly** (and you can't see the **fish**), you need your rig to perfectly transmit what is happening beneath the surface. That signal needs to travel up through your tippet and at least as far as where that tippet joins your casting line.

*Let's go one step back though.*

First of all, you need to STOP only ever FEELING for strikes. If you are lucky enough to have normal vision you need to take advantage of your sight. Yes, there are special times when you either can't - or don't need to - use your eyes. Those times are the exception and not the rule.

Don't worry, later in this guide I'll also give you probably the most powerful tactic I know when you can't use visual strike detection (but no skipping ahead to **trick #7** just yet OK?!)

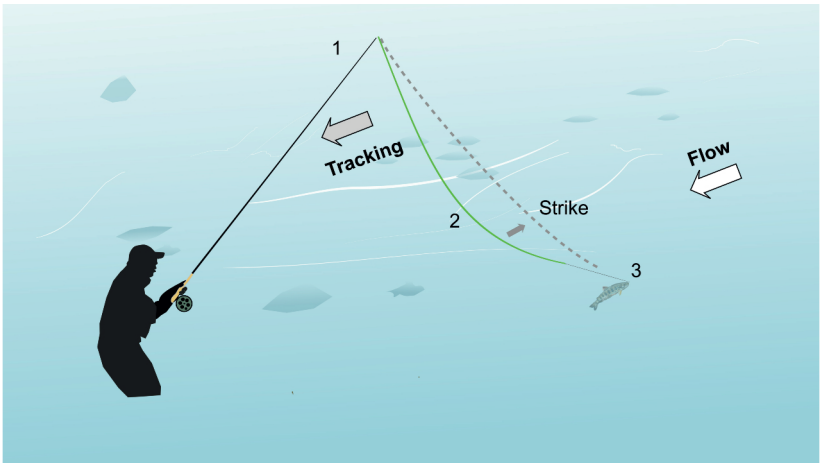
## *Keeping your System in Sequence*

Whatever fly delivery “system” (that's your rod/line/reel/rig setup) and whatever visual strike indication you are using, you **MUST** keep everything in sequence when fishing “dead drift”

*Sensitivity to strikes comes from maintaining that sequence all the time that your rig is drifting back downstream towards you.*

Simply put, you need to make sure that the fly on the end of your tippet is always upstream of your tippet; that your tippet is always upstream of the joint of tippet & casting line and that your rod tip is always **DOWNSTREAM** of everything.

Then, it is up to you to track that drifting system downstream at the pace of the current - all the while maintaining a light tension (known as “contact”) from rod tip to fly.



*Notice the numbered positions of Rod Tip (1), Line (2) and Fly (3). If any part of that system is out of sequence then there is a big delay in the transmission of information that the fly has stopped drifting. Fish quickly spit out artificial flies, so you will never know your fly was grabbed.*

It doesn't matter what visual indicator you are using. Whether you are using a hi-viz casting line, sighter mono, yarn, hopper/dropper rig or anything else - if the fly is downstream of part of your tippet, there is no "contact" to the indicator.

By the time the line pulls tight between the fly and the indicator, the fish already spat your fly - and you will never know it happened.

Although this all seems far too basic to be important - I cannot stress strongly enough what a game-changer it is.

Not only will your ability to detect strikes improve, you will also be making your flies drift in a more attractive manner. That's an amazing win:win. Not only are you setting the hook on more strikes - you are actually getting even more strikes than you did before. You are layering advantages on top of each other.

Now let's look at one of those slightly sneaky tactics...

## 2. Make the Fish Move to Your Advantage



*Size 10 hook and a hen pheasant hackle over an inch and a half in diameter. A much bigger mouthful than a Perdigon nymph!*

This is a tactic for warmer weather - i.e. when fish and insects are much more active. In the colder parts of the year, fish are often much less willing to move far to intercept prey.

Another key condition for this tactic to work is that the water must be at least reasonably transparent. That is not to say that it has to be absolutely crystal clear. It is totally possible to use this tactic in the whiskey-tinted water of many upland rivers around the world.

It does not work well when the water is muddy though.

The idea behind this tactic is to use a larger fly (preferably with some mobility in the dressing - like a big soft-hackled wet fly). Whether this is fished on a dropper or just as a single fly isn't too important.

Instead, the main thing is to fish that large/mobile fly fairly close to the surface. Because it is big and has enticing movement, there is a good chance that fish will move further up through the water to grab it.

This does two things - one, it can force a fish to show itself to you as it takes your fly (making it "play your game" and bring it out of hiding). Secondly, even if you don't see the fish eat your fly directly, you will have moved it a considerable distance up from its feeding station. That means you will get a WAY more positive indication on your line as it dives back down towards the river bed to get back on station. Two bites at the cherry!

### 3. Reduce, Replace or Remove Big Strike Indicators

I know this sounds totally backwards, but using big, buoyant indicators like “mop”, “bobber” or “pimp” style indicators are actually pretty likely to put a glass-ceiling on your strike detection sensitivity. Yes, they are a great first step for when your tracking isn’t great. The fast surface currents combined with the bulky indicator automatically keep your indication mechanism (the bobber/mop) DOWNSTREAM of your fly at all times. It maintains the sequence...

In other words, they create contact between fly and indicator - even if you have little to no clue how to track a drift.

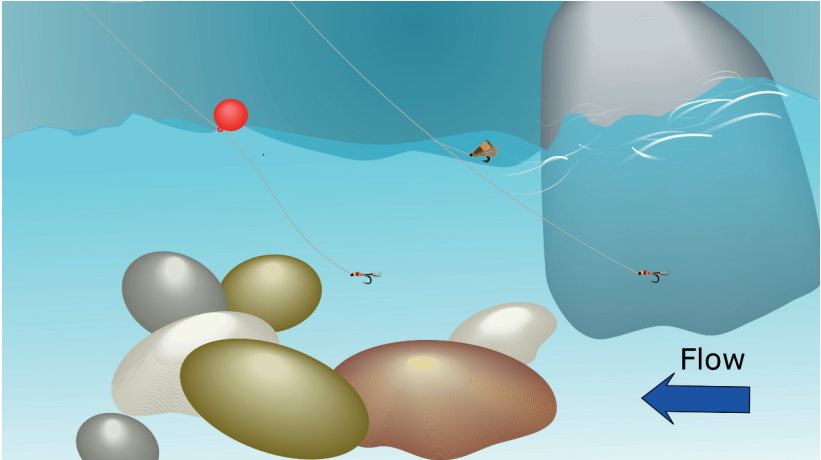
Advantages like that come with several costs though. Water almost always flows fastest on the surface - and having a big, super-buoyant indicator dragged along in that “jet-stream” pulls your flies along at an unnaturally fast pace. As well as limiting the depth that those flies can achieve, it can also make fish avoid your flies (and take easier to catch, naturally-drifting prey instead).

Probably more important than that, though, is their great buoyancy and overall un-streamlined resistance makes fish spit flies out. As soon as the tippet comes tight to the indicator - the fish feels that tension and ejects your fly if it can. Often enough, the fish is unlucky and the point of the hook snags the mouth and then the angler’s hook-set pulls the point home.

That being said, a big proportion of the time the fish will grab your fly, feel the tippet pull tight and reject it without creating a “hittable” strike. If you even see the indicator dip, by the time you pull for a hook-set, the fish is long gone.

What’s the way to get past this?

Well, as a good first step it can be possible to switch out the super-buoyant indicator for either a small tuft of yarn or a bushy dry fly on a dropper.



*Replacing the highly buoyant and resistant “bobber” type indicator (left) with a less-resistant - but still obvious - bushy caddis dry fly (right). This will go some way to reducing rejections due to fish feeling tension when eating your fly*



*Braid indicator (centre) and French leader plus nymphs - ready to go.*



Those options will dial back a little bit on the amount of resistance felt by a fish when it eats your fly - and there's more chance you can set up on them with a solid hook-hold.

Going beyond yarn or dry fly - that resistance can be reduced much, much more by using sighter mono or braid indicators with French leaders. This allows you to completely remove anything bulkier than your casting line.



*Winter grayling can create extremely subtle strikes - and eject a fly with great speed. You'll need every advantage in order to catch consistently*

But to get the best out of those options we need to add in a few more tricks.

## 4. Hold Everything Off the Water

Now, there is already a demo of this tactic in the very first diagram (for Trick #1) in this guide. Without pointing out some key details it isn't fair to expect you to get the very best out of that approach though.

In the ideal situation - which of course isn't always possible 100% of the time - you will not only hold your casting line (or casting leader) off the water; you'll also hold your INDICATOR off the water too.

By doing this, you ensure several things:

- The only thing in contact with the fast surface current is the thinnest part of your whole system (your tippet)
- You create much greater contact between your rod tip and fly (for better strike sensitivity)
- You remove the surface tension resistance to your hook-set motion (creating a much higher proportion of successful hook-ups)
- You greatly reduce the chance of spooking fish caused by casting line splashing down on the water (as long as you cast correctly)

Again, what you are doing here is really starting to layer the compounding benefits one on top of the other. It is that layering effect that will create massive increases in success.

How about we add another layer now?

## 5. Lighten up that Casting Line

One of the most important benefits of using a French leader is its incredible lightness compared to regular fly line. Now, a proper French leader needs to cast like a fly line - with or without a fly attached. In fact, a true French leader is a brilliant tool for casting and fishing a dry fly.



*Delicate presentation and sensitive strike indication = success*

Why is that so important?

These are the exact characteristics that allow trick #4 to work. Each bullet-pointed effect is made easier and more effective.

Even when you need to lay at least some of the line on the water when you need more range, that line will be thinner and create much less resistance to a fish as it grabs hold. It will also land on the water infinitely more delicately than even the lightest of fly lines.

As a word to the wise, replacing a great French leader with a comparable length of #3 or #3.5 (on the Japanese line diameter scale) level tenkara fluorocarbon lines is probably now my preferred option for these tactics. These cast really well on a good quality Euro nymphing rod and make a great substitute for competition style leaders for rod & reel nymph anglers.

## 6. Use Hooks that are “Crazy Sharp”

Fly hooks vary a lot in their overall quality. It should be possible, though, for you to lay your hands on really exceptionally sharp hooks. Many of those created for (and by) competition anglers (often hand-made) have special long points that are very sharp.



They will also typically have well-designed hook-gape and hook-eye alignment - as well as the specific shape and angle of the point. Taken together, this creates a much more effective angle of pull between the tippet connection and the custom-designed point. A far more reliable hook-hold is the result. Notably, for river fishing at least, these are usually all barbless hooks.

*What has this got to do with improved strike detection?*

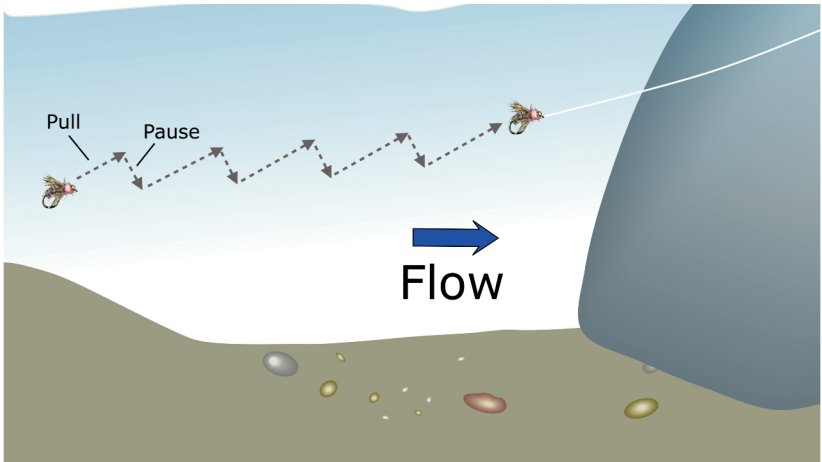
Remember those little moments of tension in the tippet and a fish's desire to eject flies that turn out to be counterfeit? Well, an incredibly sharp hook is likely to give you a real edge when it comes to the chances of snagging hold as a fish samples your fly. In turn, the bolting effect of a fish can actually create a much more positive indication of a take as it fails to eject the fly. This is a simple and instant advantage that you can create.

## 7. When you Can't See - Manipulate

In the final tip in this guide, what to do when visual strike detection is difficult or impossible. I hope, by now, that I've stressed what a huge advantage it is to develop sensitive visual strike indication skills.

What happens when you can't see your line or your indicator?

One really great option is to use one of the many "fly manipulation" techniques that bring your fly to life to induce a strike. When you choose an active manipulation with the rod-tip you'll create a series of short pulls and pauses.

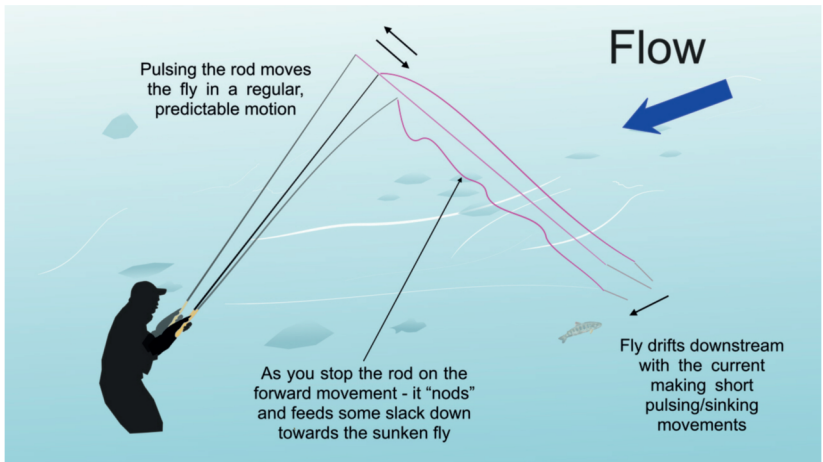


On many days, this actually increases the number of strikes that you get (which is one layer of advantage). Also, whether a fish grabs your fly as it is moving - or during the short pause - the next time you pull on the line, you'll feel the tension of the fish.

As soon as you feel anything like that resistance, use a quick hook-set motion to check if you have a hook up.

This tactic feels like testing whether you have a fish each time you pulse the fly. For both attractiveness to the fish and for high

strike detection sensitivity - make those pulses regular on a kind of “one-two” count.



Fly manipulation is a deep subject with lots of detail. It offers massive advantages to all of your dry fly, wet fly, nymphing and streamer fishing (whether that is with a rod & reel or fixed line fly fishing/tenkara rigs).

You can learn a lot more about it on our free course that introduces our premium “Fly Manipulation” content on this link:

<https://doublebadgers.kartra.com/page/manipulation-free-course>

Enjoy!

Paul Gaskell