



Accelerated Fly Tying Instruction Methods for Instructors

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The method outlined in the following lesson plans is one of teaching one or more individual techniques with each new fly pattern or type and reinforcing those that have already been learned in the process. While this is an outstanding and proven method for teaching beginning fly dressers, it is time consuming because of the multiple layers of reinforcement and the relatively slow tying speeds most beginners possess. The methods that follow are based upon the principle of teaching several related techniques in rapid succession. The instructor can spend one or two hours on fundamental techniques, then shift to patterns that demonstrate and merge those techniques into execution of sample patterns. The rest comes with continuing practice or varying combinations of techniques as they are applied to those patterns.

Getting Started

Three basic elements of technique are essential to nearly all fly tying. The first fundamental is getting a hook properly anchored in the vise. The second one is attaching the tying thread to the shank. The technique taught here is the open X approach. The third fundamental technique is the squeeze-tightly-and-bind-tightly approach to materials placement. The first technique can be taught quickly and easily by demonstration and pressing the hook down slightly with a finger or thumb. Upon release, the hook should spring back to the horizontal position with a nicely pitched ring. The second element may be taught with an over-sized hook and a piece of yarn, chenille or bright backing line about 24 to 36 inches in length. Have the instructors practice several times before they attempt to attach the thread to the rear of the shank on a long-shanked hook.

Teaching Techniques in Bunches

Using that long-shanked hook (preferably a 6x long streamer hook or something even longer) in this case we need the shank length, not the hook shape or eye type, demonstrate and have the instructors tie a series of wings on the shank. Rear to front, have them tie a bucktail or calf tail down wing, a flank feather wet fly wing, a flank feather dry fly wing, a quill slip wet fly wing (demonstrate both a tent-style wing and a flat-style wing), a quill slip dry fly wing and a set of hackle point wings. Finish the demonstration by having the instructors use both a Thompson-style whip finisher and a Materelli-style whip finisher, determining which of them they prefer, but learning each of them adequately to teach with them.

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Using a second long-shanked hook, demonstrate and have the instructors apply a series of body materials including tinsel, dubbed fur, chenille and floss body materials with at least one rib application. As before, bind the last segment off and apply a whip finish.

On a third long-shanked hook, demonstrate and have the instructors apply a series of hackle types including bearded hackle, wound soft hackle, a hackle segment beard, wound dry fly hackle, wound and bound down wet fly hackle, a palmered hackle and, if space and desire permit, a parachute hackle on a hairwing post. Note that wet fly hackle is usually best kept sparse and soft, while dry fly hackle requires harder, stiffer hackles and usually a bit more material.

If desired, a fourth hook could be used to demonstrate and practice application of spun or stacked hair of fur to form bodies, heads or other parts of flies. It may be best to wait until those pattern types are being taught to use this approach.

Reading Fly Patterns

One of the challenges facing most beginning tyers, and one of the problems often overlooked by experienced tyers, is the challenge of reading a fly pattern. Knowing when and where to bind in the materials in proper sequence, where to leave the thread for each application, and when and how to apply the pattern elements is critical to successful tying. Use a pattern or two to consolidate the learning above and to reinforce the sequencing of binding in and applying materials like tails, ribs, body materials, wings and hackle. Finish up by demonstrating the application of head cement or lacquer to the heads and have the instructors either do the same with their practice patterns or simply trim off the material so the hooks can be re-used.