



# **SALTWATER FISHING FIELD GUIDE**

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Youth Anglers Learning Saltwater Fishing in Massachusetts  
WIDE RULED • 40 pages





Welcome, Anglers!

Here in Massachusetts, saltwater fishing is rooted in tradition. Around 30% of our residents are anglers, and people from all over the world visit these rich coastal waters to fish for striped bass, tautog, flounder, and countless other recreational fish species!

Fishing is a great way to connect with and enjoy the great outdoors while relaxing with friends and family. But first, you need to pick your tackle, practice casting, and make sure you understand water safety and fishing rules and regulations.

This guide will not only give you tips on how to get started in saltwater fishing, but will help you learn to keep Massachusetts coastal waters healthy and full for generations of anglers to come!

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## So get out there, and get saltwater fishing!



This guide includes companion videos on our YouTube channel. When you see this video icon, open the Mass Marine Fisheries YouTube and scroll to the video title.

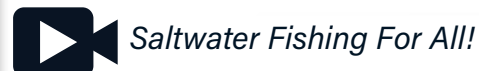


[www.youtube.com/massmarinefisheries](http://www.youtube.com/massmarinefisheries)

<http://mass.gov/service-details/take-me-saltwater-fishing>

# I am a saltwater angler!

It doesn't matter your age, gender, background, or ability—everyone can learn and enjoy the sport of saltwater fishing!



## How to use this guide

Learning to fish takes patience and practice! Every time you head to the water you will be perfecting packing your gear, rigging your tackle, and reeling in all kinds of saltwater fish. This guide will give you tips and tricks for learning these skills. At the end of this guide is a fishing logbook you can use to record and revisit your most epic fishing days!



# Tackling Tackle

With 1,500 miles of coastline, Massachusetts offers countless opportunity to explore saltwater fishing, yet many people never learn how to fish! Learning how to fish can feel a little overwhelming when you have so many tackle, bait, and gear choices to pick from. But the good news is saltwater fishing doesn't have to be difficult or expensive!

Picking up the sport of saltwater fishing has never been easier. There are plenty of public piers and beaches, free fishing gear loans, and fishing clinics for all levels. Plus, part of the adventure of learning to saltwater fish is learning what setup works best for **YOU**!

## What is "tackle"?

Tackle is all of the equipment used by anglers when fishing. This includes fishing rods, hooks, reels, lures, weights, bait, nets, and fishing line. Gear that is attached to the end of the fishing line, like hooks and sinkers, is called terminal tackle.



What do **YOU** need for a saltwater fishing adventure? As you read through this guide, fill in the "angler checklist" on the next page with all of the things you'll want to bring along for a fun and safe fishing trip!

## Angler Checklist:

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### Some questions to ask before a saltwater fishing trip:

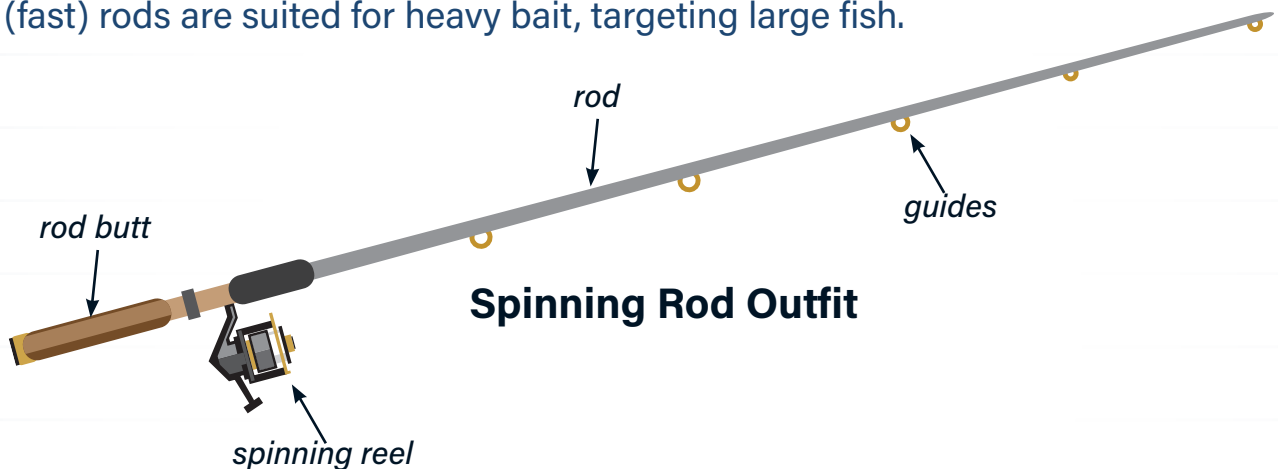
1. What kind of fish am I hoping to catch?
2. Am I going to use natural bait or lures?
3. What kind of weather should I prepare for?
4. Am I going to catch and release my fish, or take home a “keeper” to eat?
5. If I’m 16+ years old, do I have a copy my fishing permit with me?

# Fishing Rods

Rods and reels are two separate pieces of gear, but they are almost always bought as a pair. Rods come in many different lengths, materials, and strengths to meet all kinds of skills and interests.

Reels are used to cast out and retrieve the fishing line. The line threads through the guides, which help control the line along the rod. The rod butt offers a comfortable place to hold the rod during casting and reeling.

Rod power is the amount of pressure an angler has to use to cause the rod to bend. Some brands will also call this "rod action". Light action (slow) rods bend easily, and are a good choice for casting light tackle for smaller fish species. Medium action rods are versatile and often used with bottom bait. Heavy action (fast) rods are suited for heavy bait, targeting large fish.



The most common type of rod and reel combo is a spinning outfit. Spinning reels are one of the best for beginners to learn on because they can easily cast and reel in the line with fewer tangles. Spinning outfits are good for casting long distance with lighter bait. This guide focuses on learning how to use a spinning combo.

## Holding a spinning outfit:

The spinning reel rests below the rod. The guides that hold the line point down to the ground.



## Baitcasting Rod



Baitcasting outfits are sturdy and can be used to cast long distances with larger bait. Baitcasting can take time to learn, but allows anglers to cast with more accuracy. Baitcasters are more likely to have the line tangle up into a “birds nest” or “backlash” when casting, so be sure to keep good control of the spool with your thumb!

### Proper Handling:

On a baitcasting outfit, the reel rests on top of the rod with the guides pointing up towards the sky.



## Fly Rod



On a fly fishing outfit, the line is used to send the fly into the water. Unlike other fishing line, fly fishing line is made with a thick PVC coating that adds weight to help drive the fly forward. Before casting, the line is pulled out to the length needed and bundled on the ground or a basket next to the angler. Once a fish is hooked, the line is reeled back in.

### Proper Handling:

Fly rods that are cast with one hand are called single handed rods. Rods that cast with either one or both hands are called switch or spey rods.



# Lures and Bait

Choosing a setup for attracting a fish to bite depends on the type of fish you want to catch. You can choose natural bait or an artificial lure — both offer something interesting for the fish to attack!

## Common Saltwater Lures

Lures are made to look and move like the food (baitfish) commonly eaten by fish. There are a lot of lure choices, so enjoy your time learning what works best for your skill level and fishing interest!

*Bucktail Jig*



Bucktail lures can be used for all kinds of fish. Heavy bucktails are good for deeper water with a current. Smaller, lighter bucktails mimic tiny baitfish and work well in calm, sheltered waters.

*Softbait*



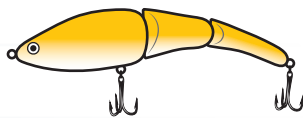
Softbait lures come in all different colors, sizes shapes, and even scents! Bright colors work best on sunny days while darker colors work better with overcast or dark skies.

*Spoon*



Shiney, metal spoon lures wobble and flash like a swimming fish.

*Swimming Minnow*



Swimming lures mimic the pattern of swimming fish as you reel through the water.

*Pencil Popper*



"Poppers" splash across the surface of the water, making sounds that attract large predator fish. They tend to work best at dawn and dusk when fish are more likely to feed on the surface.

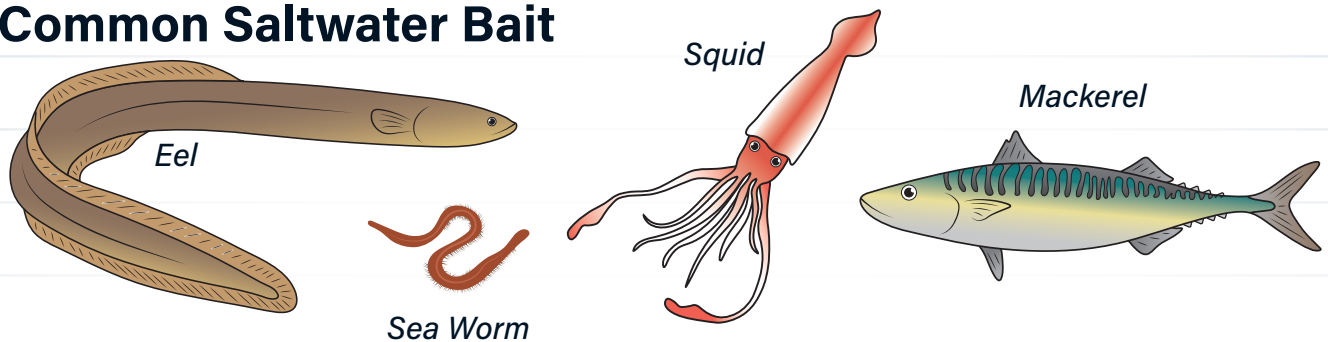
*Jig*



Jigs are lures made to bounce along the bottom as you reel in the line.

The way a lure moves through the water is known as "action". The shape and parts of the lure can cause it to splash, swim, and even vibrate as you reel it through the water.

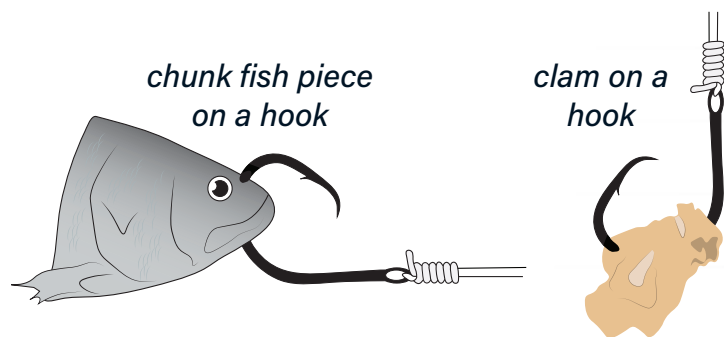
## Common Saltwater Bait



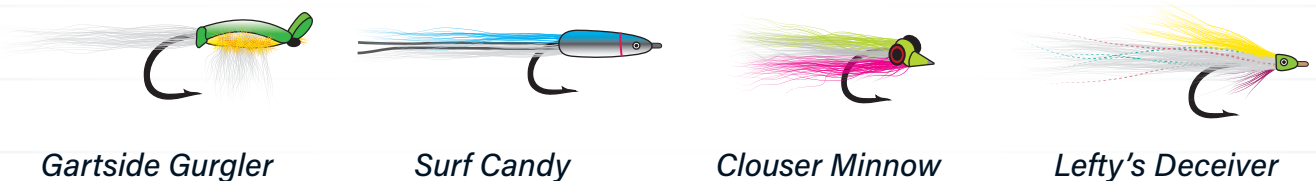
There are a lot of reasons to use bait when fishing. Bait allows the angler to target specific kinds of fish by choosing one of their favorite food items, is low cost, and attracts fish with its smell! Many fish hunt using smell.

Keep in mind:

- Bait often needs to be kept cold or in a live well to stay fresh
- Plan ahead to make sure you have the right bait for the type of fish you want to catch
- Bait attracts fish of all sizes, so be ready to release any fish too small that you might hook
- Always check state regulations before you fish to ensure your bait choices are legal
- If you are using chunk bait, it can be helpful to pre-cut the bait (clam, chunks of fish, squid) for quick and easy access.



## Common saltwater flies



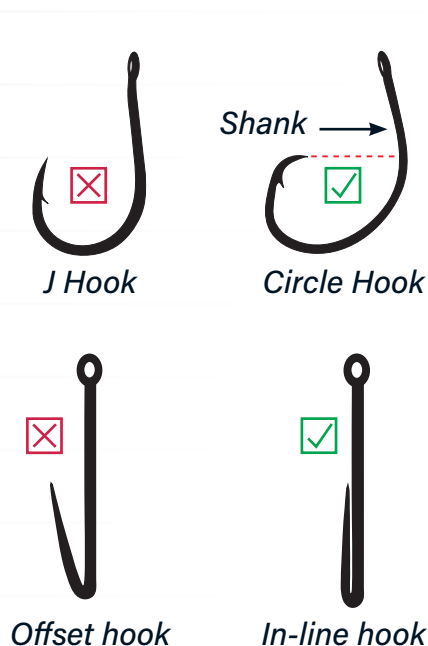
Flies are lures made for fly fishing. Like other lures, flies come in countless sizes and patterns. When you are choosing a fly, talk with a tackle shop or skilled angler who can recommend a few options to help get you started.

# Hooks, Line, and Sinkers

Learning how to setup your rod with fishing line and tackle is a valuable angler skill.

## Hooks

In-line circle hooks, along with barb-less hooks, reduce the chance of killing a fish. Recreational anglers in Massachusetts catch and release millions of fish each year, and sometimes fish die from their hook wounds. In-line circle hooks can help lower the number of these kinds of deaths by up to 50%!



In-line circle hooks are designed so that the point is turned straight back towards the shank. This unique shape causes the hook to catch on the lip or mouth instead of the gut or gills. In-line circle hooks are used with bait.

Offset hooks are more likely to gut-hook your fish. Gut-hooking is when the hook is swallowed and gets stuck in the belly or throat of the fish. True circle hooks are “in-line”, which means they will lay perfectly flat on a table.

Using circle hooks:

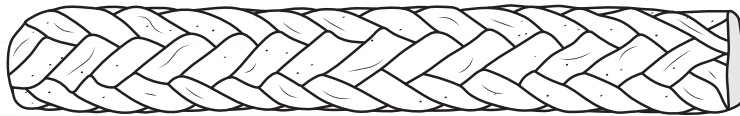
- BE CAREFUL - go slow to prevent accidental cuts!
- When using live bait, turn the hook through soft flesh, avoiding bony portions. For cut bait, rotate the piece completely onto the hook so it doesn't fall off.
- Keep the hook point clear—a hook hidden by bait is less likely to catch the corner of the mouth.
- When the fish takes the bait, be patient and do not set the hook. Reel the line tight and the hook will set itself!



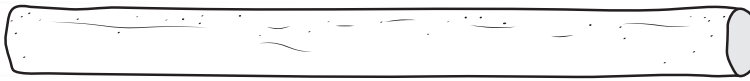
It is important to choose the appropriate hook size for the type of fish you are targeting. If a hook is too big, a smaller fish won't be able to get it in its mouth. If a hook is too small, a larger fish might swallow it entirely. Hook sizes run from 1/0 (called a one aught) to 19/0. The larger the number, the larger the hook.

## Fishing line

Fishing line winds around the reel and up through the guides on the rod. Line comes in a variety of strengths, colors, and sizes. The most common types of line are monofilament and braid. The type of line you choose depends on your rod setup, the fish you plan to catch, and the bait you're using.



**Braided line**



**Mono line**

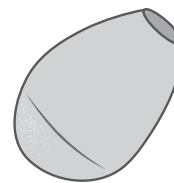
The higher the “pound test” on the line, the stronger it is. So a 20-pound test line should break when a fish pulls back with 20 pounds of force or more. Lines are generally under-rated, taking into account the knots that weaken your line. Lighter line will cast farther and sink faster, while heavier line is stronger and stiffer.

## Sinkers and swivels

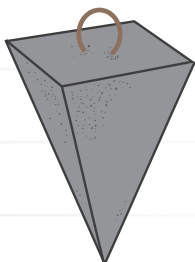
Sinkers are added weights that pull your bait and hooks down to different depths of the water. They make it possible to target fish swimming in the middle or bottom of the water column.



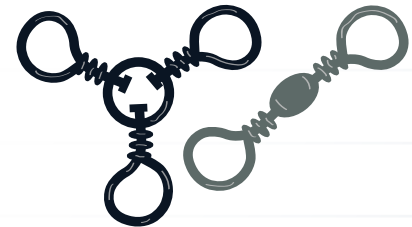
**Bank sinkers** are bell shaped to prevent it from getting caught in rocks.



**Egg sinkers** have a hole through the middle for line to be threaded through.



**Pyramid sinkers** are good for surf and sandy bottoms. Their flat sides prevent them from rolling, and the point helps bury the sinker in the bottom.



**Swivels** keep your line from twisting when reeling in a fish.



## Accessories and Gear

One of the more exciting things about saltwater fishing is that each time you go you'll have a different experience. With proper planning and the right tools you won't be caught unprepared. Here are some items every angler should have on hand to ensure a fun (and safe) day!



### Prepare for fun in the sun...and wind, rain, and cold!

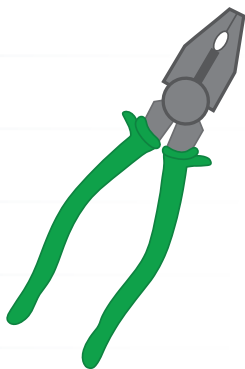
- ☐ A hat and sunglasses to protect your eyes
- ☐ Sunblock
- ☐ Closed toe shoes, secure sandals, or boots to protect your feet
- ☐ A change of clothing, as well as layers (long sleeves, rain jacket, pants) to keep you comfortable all day long.
- ☐ Grippy palm gloves for casting on chilly days
- ☐ Several bottles of water or your favorite drink
- ☐ Snacks that do not need to stay cool, like granola bars, fruit, crackers, or peanut butter sandwiches
- ☐ A first aid kit, stocked with bandages, cleaning pads, gloves, and gauze

## Saltwater Fishing Gear

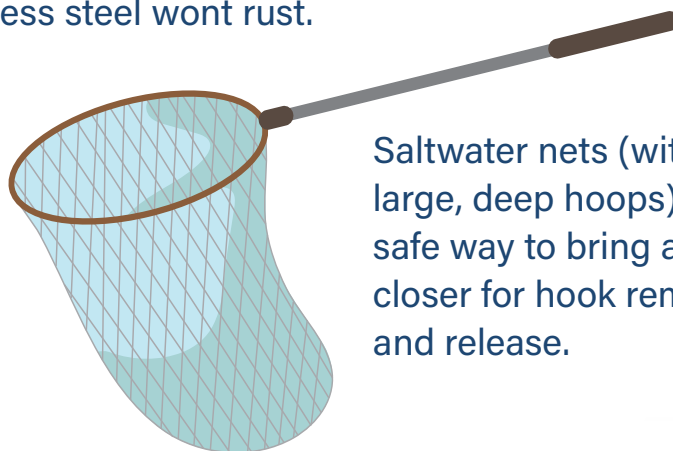
In addition to paying attention to your clothing and basic needs, there are many saltwater fishing specific items that will come in handy during your trip.



A cooler and ice will keep any fish you intend on keeping to eat fresh. Bring a separate cooler for food and drink.



Pliers can be used to tighten knots, remove hooks, pinch down hook barbs, and more. Pliers made of aluminum and stainless steel won't rust.

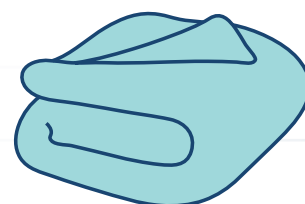


Saltwater nets (with large, deep hoops) are a safe way to bring a fish closer for hook removal and release.



A strong, sharp knife to cut bait and fillet any fish you keep for food. Always have adult supervision when using a knife.

Pack a few clean towels for drying hands. Use a wet towel to safely hold a fish when removing hooks, helping to keep its skin and gills safe.



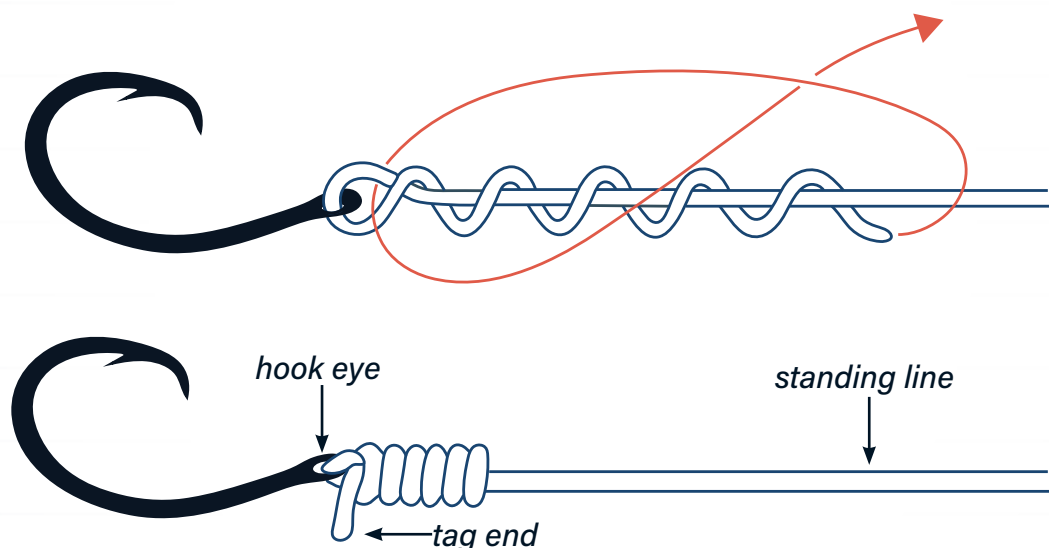
# Angler Skills

To get the most out of your fishing day, there are certain skills that all anglers need to know. Learning how to tie knots, set up your tackle, and cast your line are easy to pick up and will improve each time you're out fishing!

Before you catch a fish, your hook or lure needs to be attached to your line with a knot. Every angler has a favorite knot and setup that they have perfected for their fishing style. You can start by practicing knot tying with rope and a shower curtain ring. Once you feel comfortable with practice materials, move onto using fishing line and gear.

## Common saltwater knots

**Improved Clinch Knot:** one of the most universal fishing knots, and a good way to secure a hook, lure, or swivel to the line.

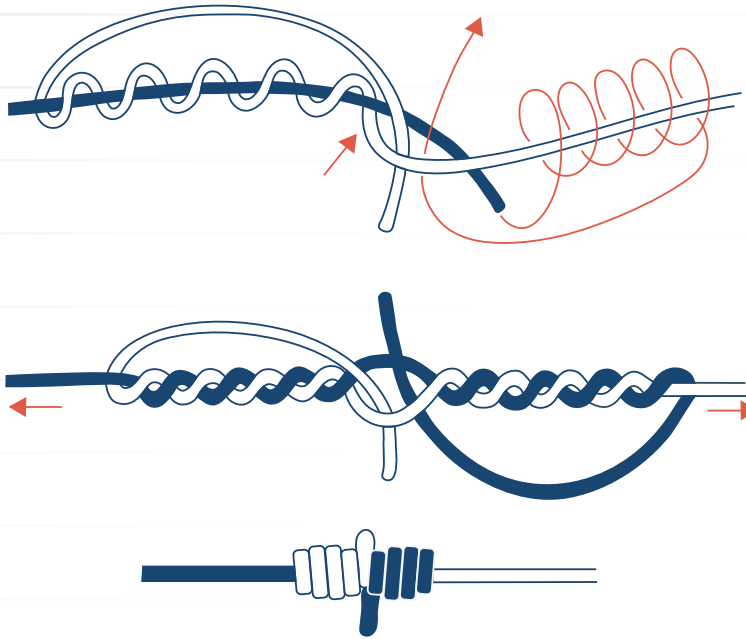


1. Thread the end of the line through the eye of the hook, swivel, or lure. Double back and make five or more turns around the standing line.
2. Bring the end of the line through the first loop formed behind the eye, then through the big loop.
3. Wet the knot and gently pull on the tag end to start drawing the coils together. Pull on the standing line to form knot with coils.
4. Slide the coil tight against the eye and cut the tag end.



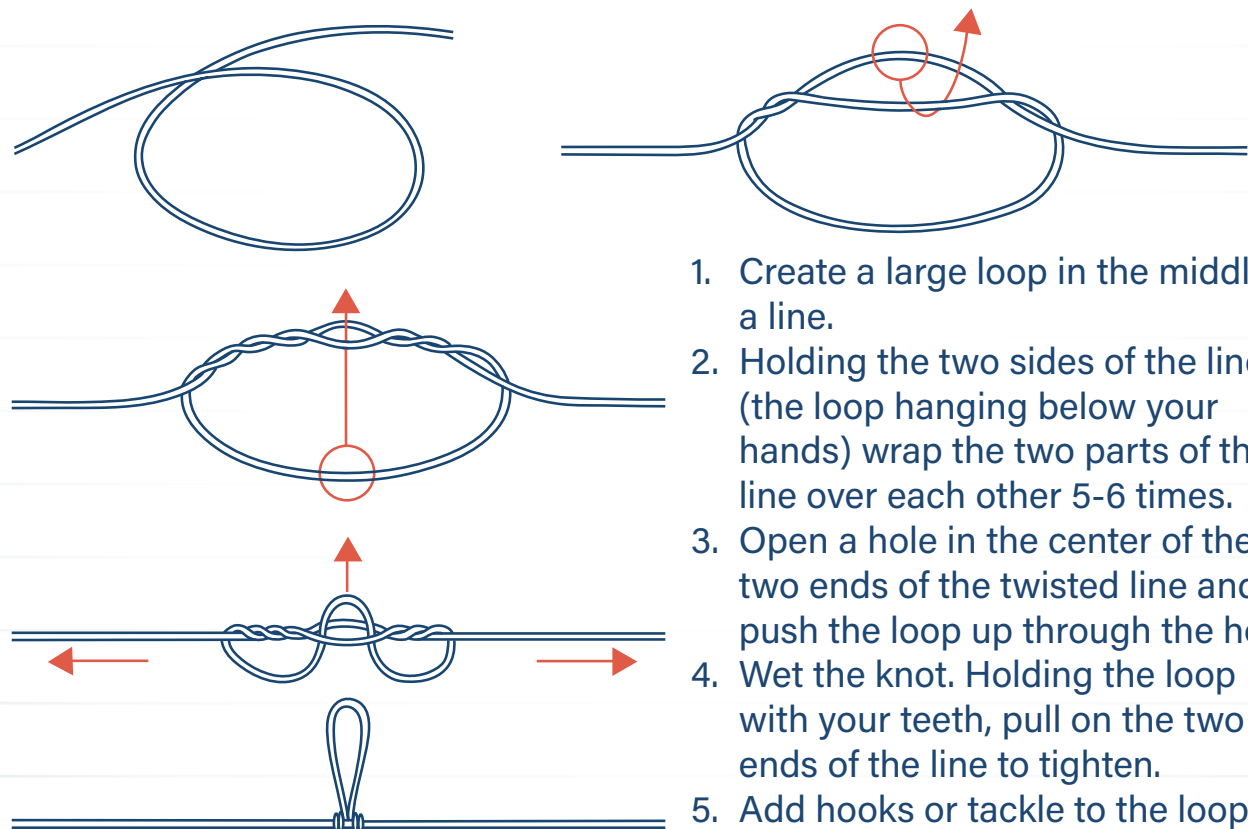
*Tying saltwater fishing knots*

**Blood knot:** use this knot to join sections of leader or line together. It works best with line of equal or similar diameter.



1. Overlap the ends of line you want to join together. Twist one around the other, making five turns (white line in diagram)
2. Bring tag end back between the two lines. Repeat with the other end (blue line in diagram), wrapping in opposite direction the same number of turns.
3. Slowly pull the lines or leaders in opposite directions. The turns of line will wrap and gather.
4. Pull tight and clip the tag ends.

**Dropper loop:** one of the strongest and most reliable knots, it is so simple that it can be tied in the dark! It is recommended for use with braided lines.

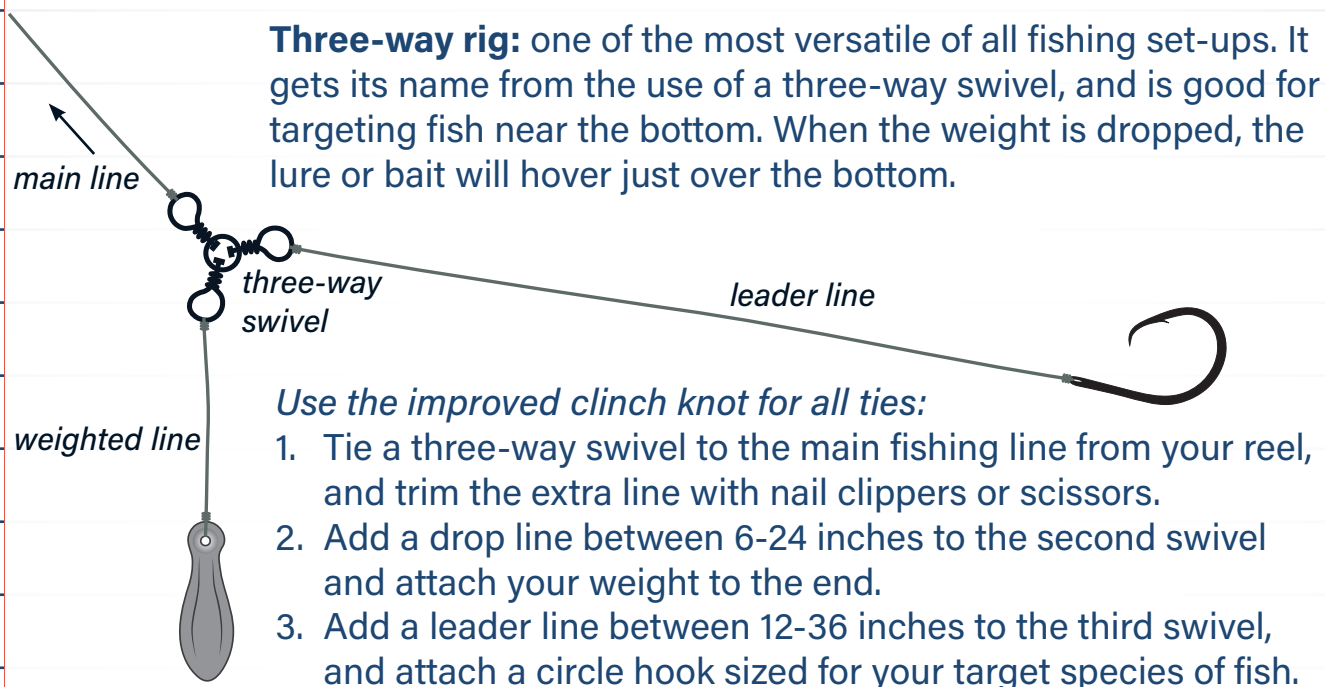


1. Create a large loop in the middle of a line.
2. Holding the two sides of the line (the loop hanging below your hands) wrap the two parts of the line over each other 5-6 times.
3. Open a hole in the center of the two ends of the twisted line and push the loop up through the hole.
4. Wet the knot. Holding the loop with your teeth, pull on the two ends of the line to tighten.
5. Add hooks or tackle to the loop.

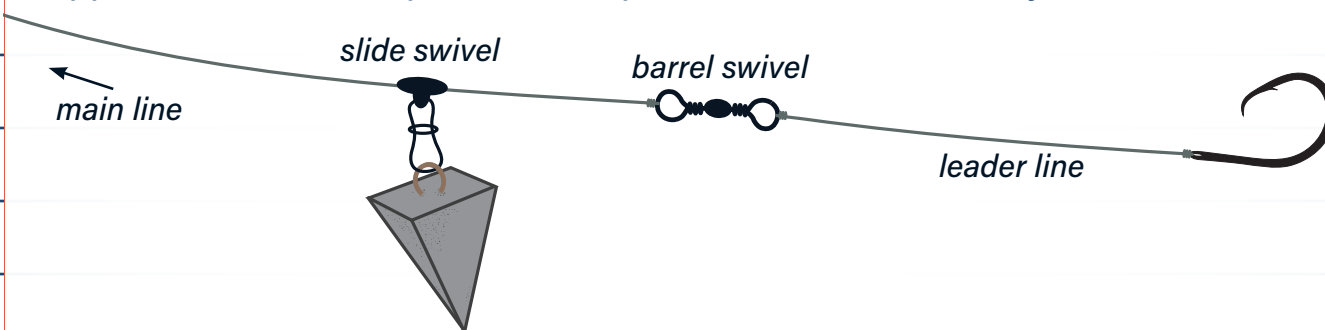


## Rigging Your Tackle

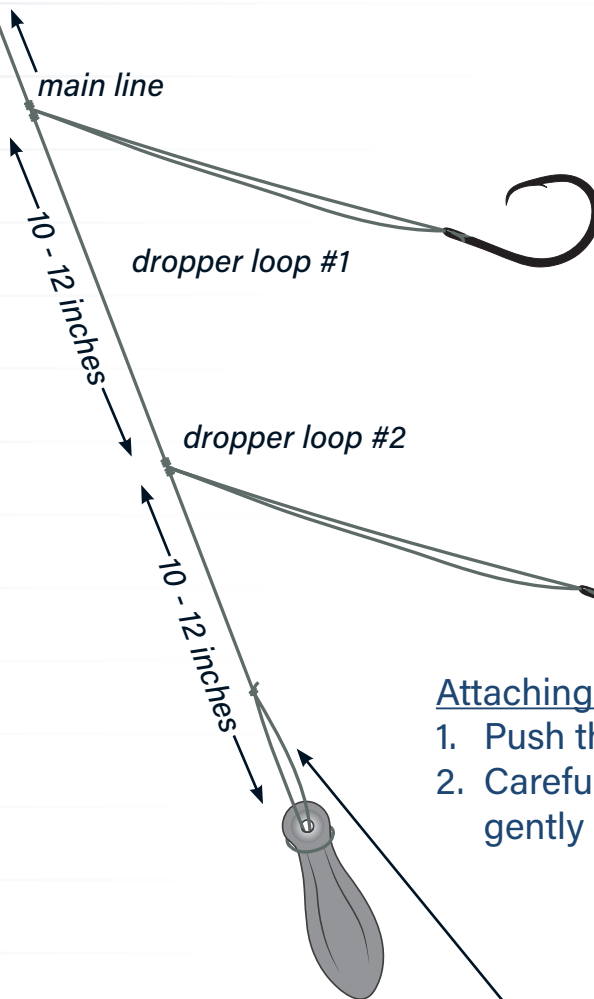
The combination of tackle used at the end of your fishing line is called terminal tackle. The setup you use will match up with the type of fish you intend to catch and the environment you will be fishing.



**Fish finder rig:** a good setup for fishing from shore, the fish finder can hold large pieces of bait and allows the fish to securely eat off the rig before setting the hook. The weight on the slide swivel holds the line down but allows the bait to be dropped back. This setup attracts striped bass, fluke, and many others.



**High-low (two-hook) bottom rig:** While you can buy high-low rigs pre-made at tackle shops, you can easily make your own using dropper loops or swivels on your main line. This setup allows the angler to put two hooks out while reducing the chances of tangling between the lines.



*Learning to tie a dropper loop takes time and practice. Once you're comfortable with making the loop you can move onto making high-low rigs.*

1. Start by pulling two and a half feet of main line off the end of the reel.
2. Make dropper loop #1, leaving about 24 inches of line below it.
3. Add dropper loop #2, leaving 10-12 inches between it and dropper loop #1.
4. Add a surgeon loop to the terminal end.

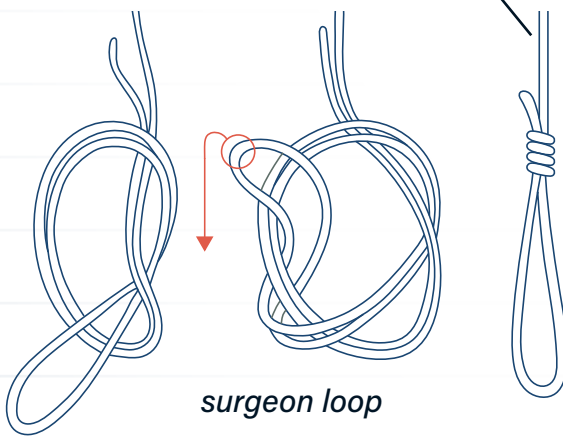
#### Attaching an in-line circle hook:

1. Push the dropper loop through the eye of the hook.
2. Carefully pull the loop around the hook and pull gently until it tightens around the eye.



#### Attaching the sinker with surgeon loop:

1. Leave 10-12 inches of line below dropper loop #2.
2. Double over the line and tie a loose overhand knot. Loop one additional turn through the middle.
3. Pull the loop down to tighten. Attach a weight the same way as hooks (above).



Rigging your tackle

# Casting

Learning how to cast a spinning rod is a technique that takes practice. Whether in your backyard, local park, or sandy beach, practicing with rubber weights is a fun way to make casting second nature.

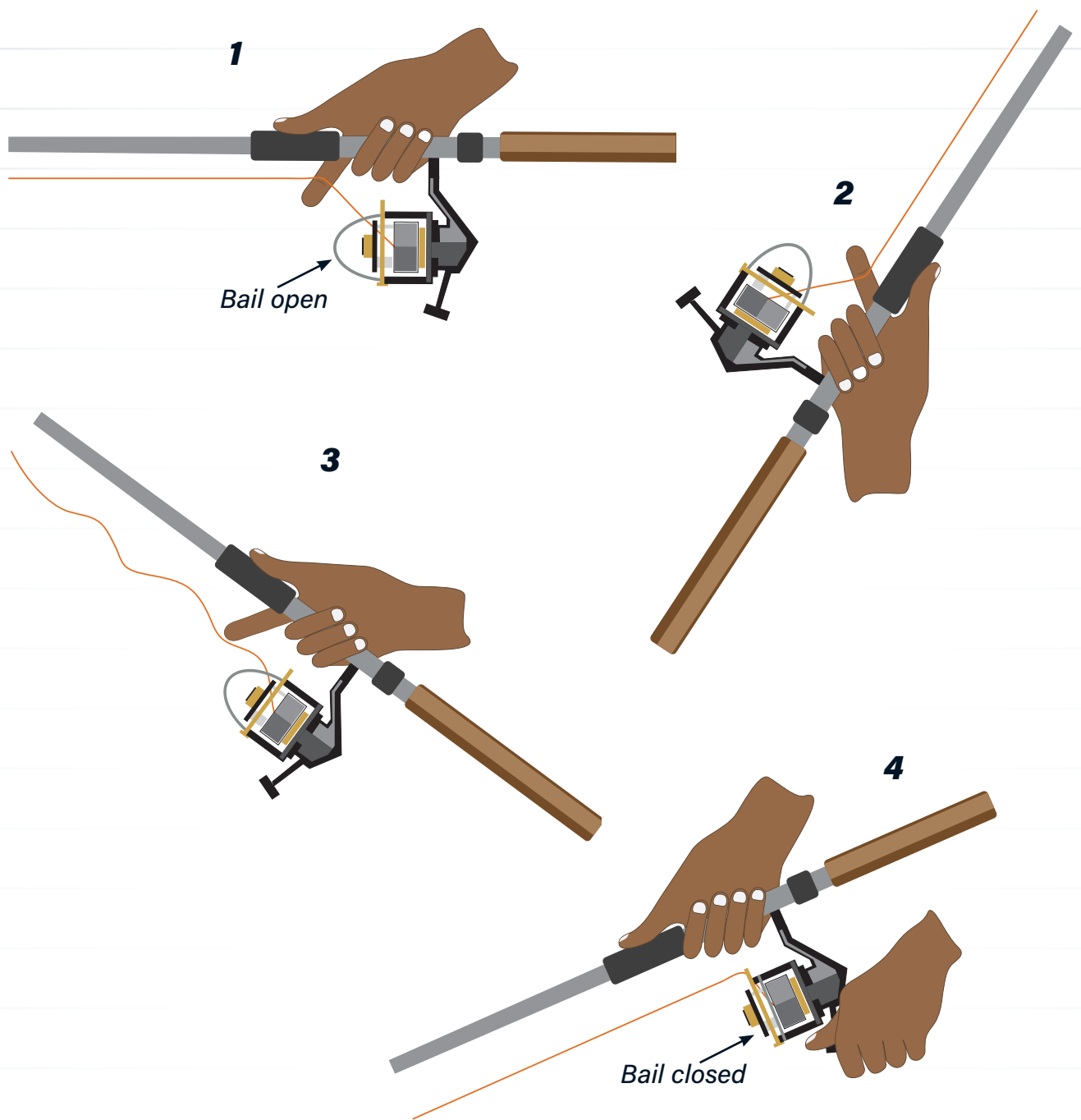
## Casting a spinning rod



1. Hold the rod at waist level, with the spinning reel resting below the rod. Let the line out enough to let the bait or lure hang 10–18 inches off the end of the rod.
2. Find a spot on the water that you want the bait to hit. As you cast, aim the tip of your rod to this spot. You can also set up hula hoops on a beach or lawn for a fun game of target practice with a rubber plug (weight)!
3. Holding the line with your pointer finger securely against the rod, open the bail.
4. Look behind you to make sure there are no people or obstacles in your way.
5. Bring the rod up and back over your dominant shoulder. Swing the rod forward with control and release the line in your pointer finger as you pass over your shoulder. The weight of the lure will pull the line forward.
6. Close the bail with your hand once you are ready to begin reeling.



*Casting a Spinning Rod*



1. Hook the line with your pointer finger and open the bail.
2. Bring the rod up and over your dominant shoulder, continue to hold the line with your index finger.
3. As you swing the rod forward, release the line with your finger just as the rod reaches eye level (or when the rod tip is pointed at your target). Allow the line to pull off of the reel until the lure hits your target.
4. Close the bail with your other hand and you are now ready to reel (retrieve) the line.

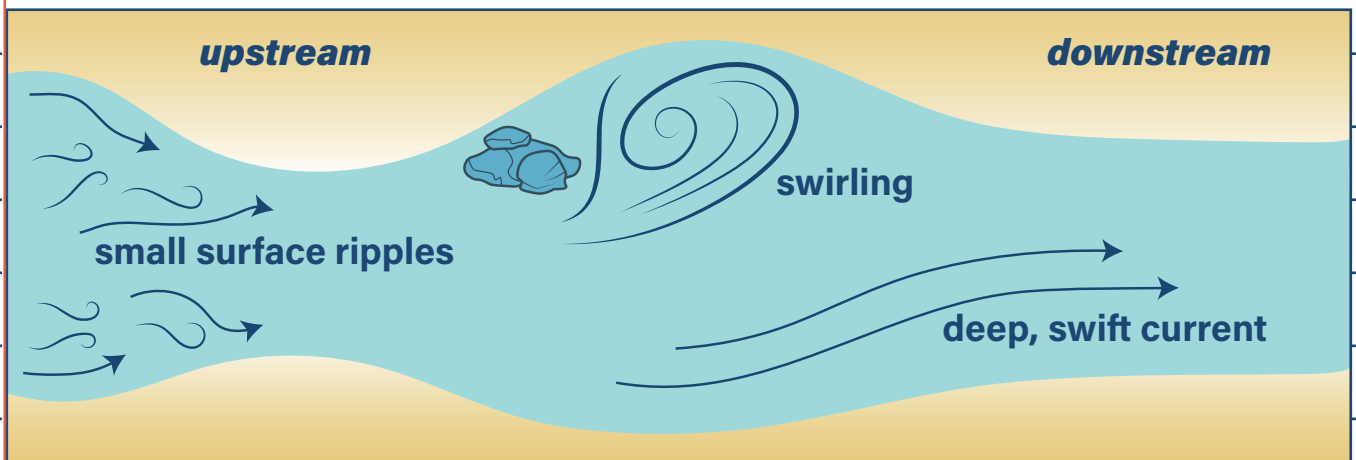


## Reading the Water

Like humans, fish have favorite places where they regularly spend their time. Finding locations to rest, eat, and reproduce are all a part of a fish's life biology. Learning about the habits and needs of different kinds of fish, and being observant of water conditions, are both helpful tools in deciding where to target potential bites.

Equally as important as reading the water, is reading a tide chart. Tides cause movement to the water, which effects fish behavior and location. Low tides are good times to see underwater structures, while high tide can be a perfect time to target gamefish hunting the deeper, busier waters. Check in with local tackle shops for tips and tricks into the best times for fishing in each unique tidal area.

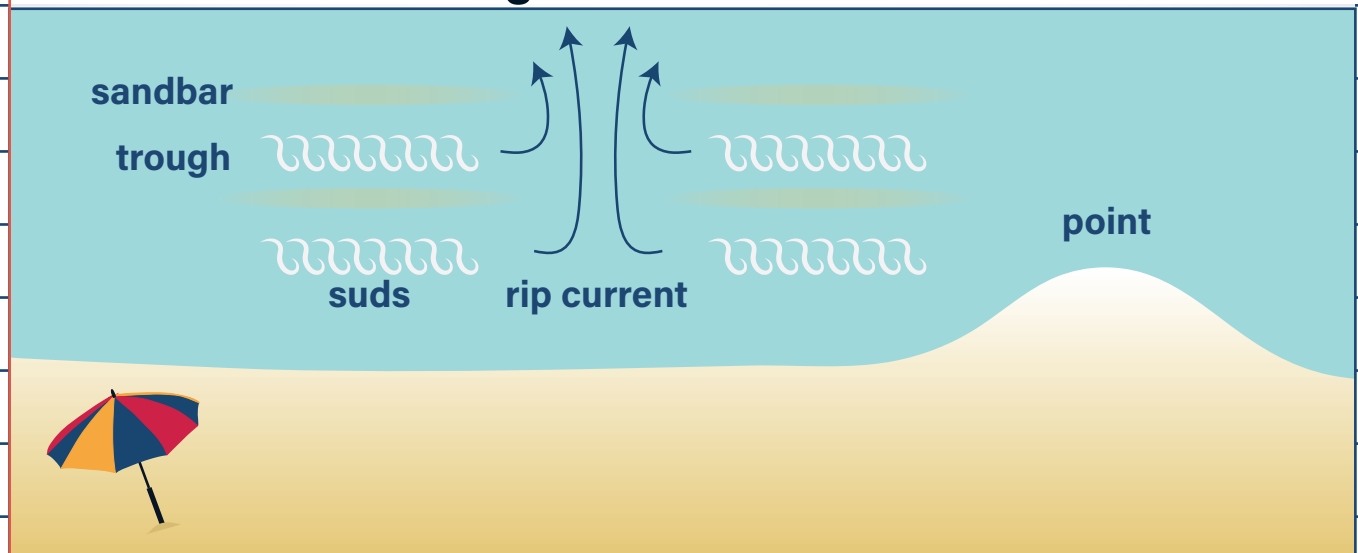
## Canal and shore fishing



When fishing along a canal or inlet, looking for differences in water movement can help you identify areas where fish are resting, moving, or actively hunting.

- **Small surface ripples** form along the edges or at bends, where faster water meets slower currents. Fish can be found resting upstream along these calm pockets.
- Water with calm surfaces can be an indicator of deeper, **swift currents**. These areas are the “highways” of the waterway, and larger fish will often swim this section during migrations or while hunting.
- **Swirling** water is formed as faster currents flow into inlets and behind large boulders and rock structures. There whirlpools offer shelter from the faster moving currents.
- Anglers who are downstream should be allowed to cast first to reduce the chances of tangled lines.

## Beach and surf fishing



Watching the waves to see where they break is a good way to locate structures in the surf. If there is a large sandbar, the surf will break directly above it, causing "suds" in the deeper trough just past the bar. If multiple sandbars are in place, smaller waves will reform and break again as they get closer to the shore.

- A **sandbar** is formed during low tide, when the sand builds up a new shoreline farther from the beach. You will rarely target fish on a sandbar. Instead, you will use the sandbar as a reference point to locate the troughs that form between the sandbar and shore.
- A **trough** is a deeper channel that forms below a sandbar. Troughs are a good location to target fish because they corral and move bait-fish. The larger predator fish cruise through troughs and ambush prey near entryways and exits.
- A **point** is a shallow area of the beach that juts out. Points can cause the formation of deeper pools on either side, where baitfish pile up after being forced through troughs and currents.
- Rip **currents** are formed between sandbars. The bigger the swell (waves), the stronger the current. As waves break, the water is forced back to deeper areas and quickly rushes back towards the open ocean in-between sandbars.

Fortunately for anglers, these outward flowing currents sweep baitfish up through the cut in the sandbar. Target the pools of water just on either side of the outgoing current. Bluefish, striped bass, and false albacore are just a few of the larger fish that use these pockets to hunt.



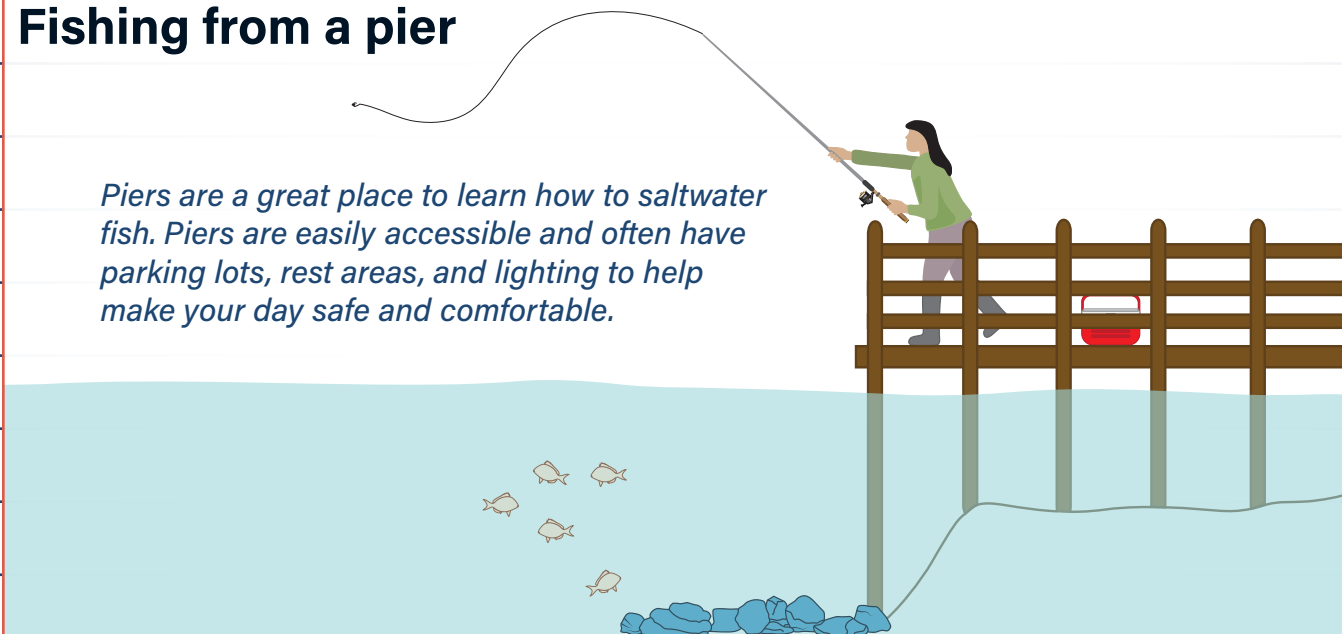
*Fishing from the shoreline*

# Fishing Techniques

Depending on the species of fish you're targeting, you might be fishing the surface of the water, using currents to move bait, or searching for a bite at the very bottom. Saltwater fishing can be enjoyed from the shore, pier, or boat...and many people fish all year long!

## Fishing from a pier

*Piers are a great place to learn how to saltwater fish. Piers are easily accessible and often have parking lots, rest areas, and lighting to help make your day safe and comfortable.*



Before your fishing trip, you'll want to look at the local tide chart to figure out the timing for the incoming and outgoing tides for your pier location.

- Generally, the best time to fish from a pier or shoreline is during a moving tide, either incoming or outgoing.
- Incoming tides are when the water is "rising", or flowing towards the shore. Outgoing tides are when the water is "falling", or moving back out to sea.

Whenever possible, check the seasonal fishing reports to learn what kinds of fish are in the area. This will help you plan your tackle choice for the fish most likely to be found around the pier.

Remember, safety first! There are usually several anglers casting and reeling in fish close together on a pier. Make sure to always look around you before dropping your line, and do not cast overhead or swing your rod near anyone else.



For a list of saltwater fishing piers in Massachusetts visit:

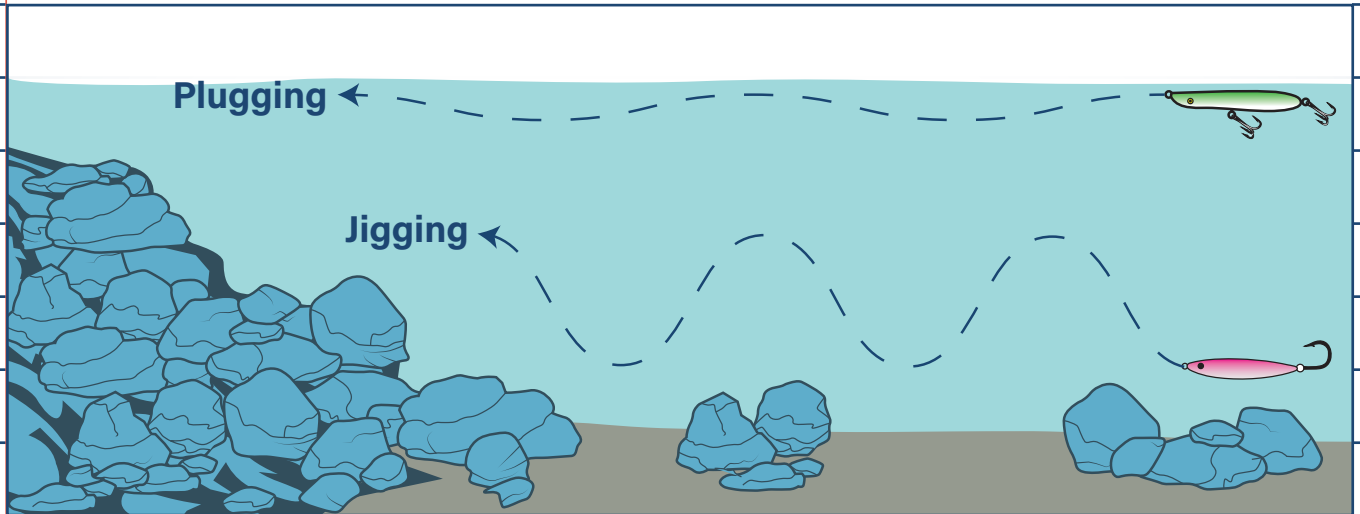
[www.mass.gov/saltwater-fishing-public-access](http://www.mass.gov/saltwater-fishing-public-access)



*Fishing from a pier*

## Fishing from the shoreline

Remember, the best fishing is almost always on a rising or falling tide. "Slack tides" (when there is little or no tidal current) are not productive fishing times. When fishing along a coastal waterway (such as the Cape Cod Canal) you'll want to learn to move your tackle through the water to attract a bite.



### Topwater Plugging

Topwater plugs are used on the surface of the water. They are a favorite choice for anglers who enjoy watching the fish strike the lure, sometimes ending with a big jump from the fish! Strategy for using a topwater plug is to alter the speed you reel and lightly bouncing your rod as you reel the lure across the water. This is sometimes called "walking the dog" because it looks like you are walking the lure across the top of the water.

### Shore Jigging

Fishing towards the bottom of the water column requires a heavier or weighted lure. Once the lure hits the bottom, crank the line back a few rotations and pull the rod up as you reel every few seconds. This will bounce the lure close to the bottom, keeping it clear of rocks and snags. Jigging is a fun way to develop your own fishing "style", testing different speeds and movements to see what best attracts the fish to your lure.



Lightening, heavy rain, and wind are dangerous conditions for fishing. Immediately end fishing and find shelter if you encounter bad weather.



# Making the Catch

It's time–You've picked a fishing spot, set up your gear, and now you're ready to reel in a fish! Learning how to responsibly "play" a fish and remove it from your tackle is the next step in your saltwater fishing education.

## **You have a bite, Now what?!**

### **Set the hook:**

1. Stay calm, and make sure you have good control of your rod.
2. If you are using in-line circle hooks, no need to set the hook–you are ready to start reeling in the line. Keep the line tight (taut) at all times as you reel.
3. If you are using a lure, fly, or other setup, set the hook in the mouth by giving a quick jerk when you feel the bite from the fish. If you feel a pull on the line down or away from you, chances are the fish has already set the hook.
4. Holding the rod tip up at a 45° angle, start reeling in the line.

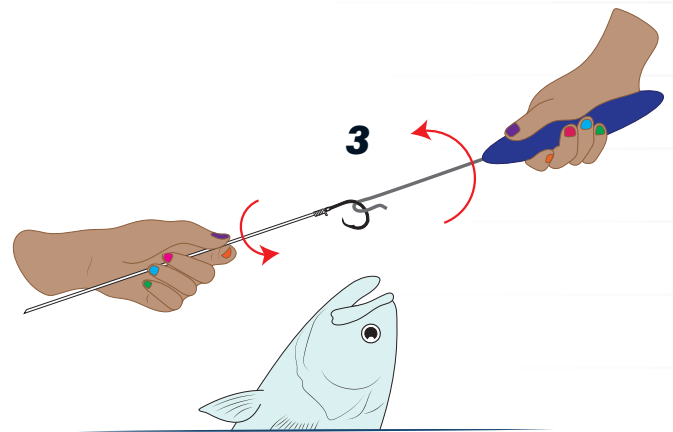
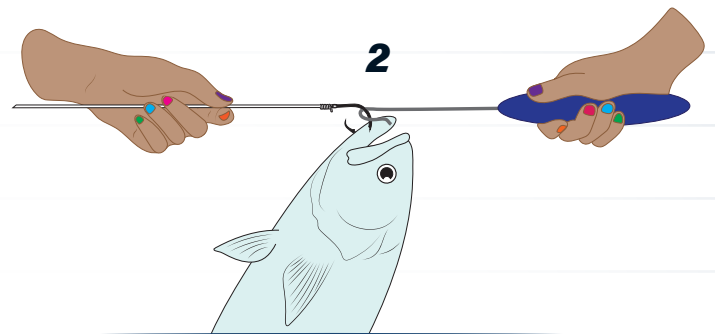
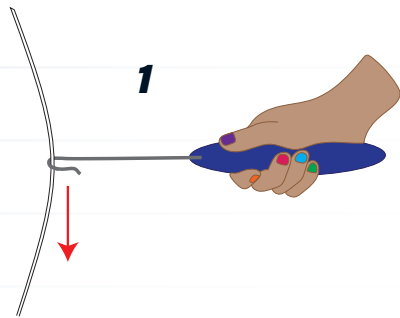
### **If you have a smaller fish on the line:**

5. Be sure to keep the line clear of rocks, pier decking and siding, and boat sides as you reel. These can all break the line, causing you to lose the fish.
6. If fishing from a pier, reel the fish in and up until there is 18-24" of line off the end of the rod tip. Lift the rod tip up towards the sky to gently swing the fish towards you.
7. Hold the fish carefully as you begin to remove the hook.

### **If you have a larger fish on the line:**

8. For larger fish, or those that have a quick and heavy fight, you will need to work harder to bring it in quickly and safely.
9. Without reeling, pull up on the rod until its angled up a bit from your hip. As you drop the tip of the rod back down towards the water, turn the reel quickly to pull in as much line as possible. Repeat, pulling the fish up each time you lift the tip of the rod up, and reeling as you lower back down.
10. If you are using a net, try to guide the fish in head first to reduce the chances of it swimming away.
11. If the fish is too large to safely lift or bring into the boat, keep control of your gear by holding onto the line with a gloved hand. Use a dehooker for a quick and safe release of fish that are heavy or ones that are risky to touch.

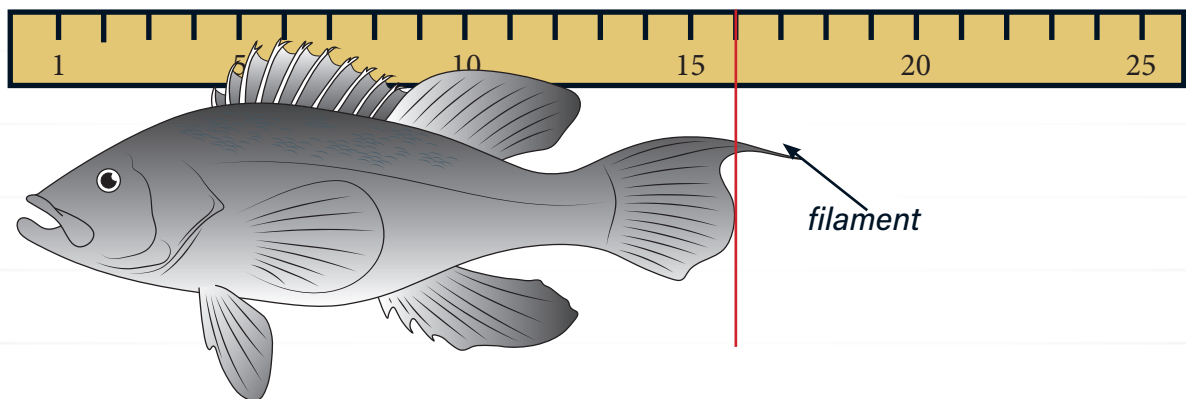
## Using a dehooker



1. Put the dehooker on the leader line and slide it down until it catches on the shank of the hook.
2. Pull the dehooking device and the leader apart with strong, even pressure. Raise your right hand (dehooking device) to the 2 o'clock position, and lower your left hand (leader) to the 8 o'clock position
3. With a slight twist and shake the hook will disengage and your fish is released safely. Keep the fish as close to (or in) the water as possible.

## Measuring your catch

- Fish sizes are measured as total length, from the tip of a closed mouth to the farthest part of its tail. Always have easy access to the current size and bag limit regulations set by the state.
- Place a tape measure flat along the ground, or use a measuring board, to quickly log the length. Anything less than the minimum size must be released back into the water alive.



Measuring exception: Black sea bass are measured from the tip of the jaw to the tip of the tail, *NOT* including the tail filament. The fish above measures 16 inches.

## Responsible Angling

Most of the time we only think about the fish we bring home from our fishing trips. But, improper catching, handling, and releasing of fish can cause injuries or death. A little knowledge can go a long way in protecting our natural resources. Below are some ways to be a responsible angler and increase a fish's chance of survival.



*Gently releasing a striped bass*

If your fish does not start to swim away on its own during release, try reviving it by gently moving it through the water in a figure eight pattern. Always keep the fish moving mouth first to allow water to pass over the gills. **NEVER MOVE A FISH BACKWARDS.**

### Properly handle fish

- 1. Reduce fighting time:** to reduce stress on the fish, use appropriate tackle for the target species and land the fish as quickly as possible.
- 2. Use a dehooker:** have a dehooker or pliers close by when you bring in the fish to help with a clean and quick hook removal.
- 3. Hold fish over the water:** it's easy to accidentally drop a slippery fish. When holding, keep the fish close to the water to protect it from hitting the ground or boat deck if dropped.
- 4. Protect the skin:** fish are covered in a layer of mucus to protect them. If you have to remove a fish from the water, wet your hands or use a wet rag to protect their covering. Keeping a fish in water as long as possible greatly increases their chance of survival. Never drag a fish along rocks or sand.
- 5. Hold a fish carefully:** never hold a fish by the eyes or gills. Hold it under the belly and keep a light grip on the caudal peduncle (where the body meets the tail) for more support.



*Responsible angling: reeling, handling, and releasing your saltwater catch*

## Responsible Angler Checklist

As a responsible angler, I will:

- ☐ **Know the regulations:** Pay attention to the minimum size for keeping a fish, and how many you can keep in a day.
- ☐ **Eat or release:** There is no reason to keep any fish you're not going to eat. Pictures and fiberglass trophies look better and last longer than stuffed fish.
- ☐ **Know when to stop:** If a fish has no limit, it doesn't mean you should keep as many as you can. Only freeze what you might need for a few weeks.
- ☐ **Get my saltwater fishing permit:** If you are 16 years or older you need to have a permit to fish. Funds support angler access and education programs!
- ☐ **Keep our waters healthy:** Don't throw anything in the water or the shore. Make sure unused bait, tackle, and line are thrown in a covered trash can.

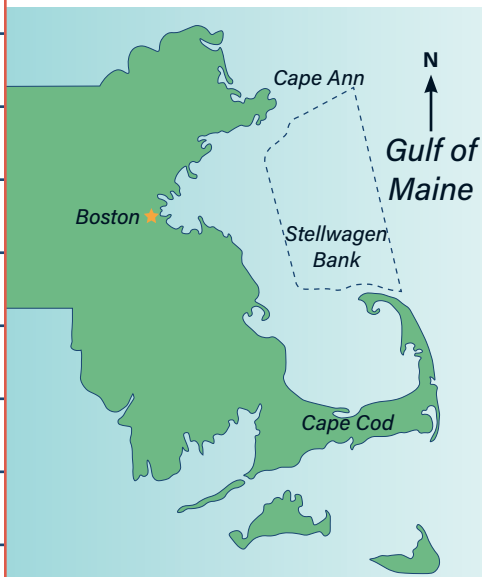
Add to the list any other ways you can be a responsible angler:

☐☐☐☐☐

# Fish ID

Massachusetts coastal waters provide ideal habitats for hundreds of species of fish. While some fish are found year round, others migrate thousands of miles to visit our coastal waters. All anglers should be familiar with the different types of fish and the regulations for them.

On the following pages you will learn about nine popular sportfish. Different fish mean different strategies, locations, and tackle. The last section of this book is a fishing journal, a place where you can note your catches. Looking back on your notes, you'll be able to learn from your own unique experiences!



Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary is a perfect stopping point for all kinds of animals. In the middle of the bank is an underwater plateau measuring 19 miles by 6 miles at its widest part. The steep sides of the plateau force the deep ocean currents to push minerals, plankton, and fish up the sides. This creates an underwater buffet for all kinds of marine animals!

Along the nearly 200 miles of coastline, migrating fish and shallow water species are easily targeted by anglers from shore, pier, and boat!

## What are fishing regulations?

Fishing regulations are in place to conserve, protect, and improve fish populations. Regulations on the number of fish that can be caught help keep anglers from taking too many fish at one time. Size limits allow many fish to reach spawning (egg laying) size before they can be kept. Fishing seasons protect fish during spawning, and limit the catch on popular waters.

Fisheries biologists study ocean habitats. They collect data on fish numbers and the health of fish populations. If we learn of a problem with a group of fish, regulations are used to help keep the fish population healthy.

If you fish, it's important that you know the rules and regulations. It is unacceptable to ignore fishing regulations - they are meant to protect fish and make sure there is shared angling for everyone!



## Black Sea Bass

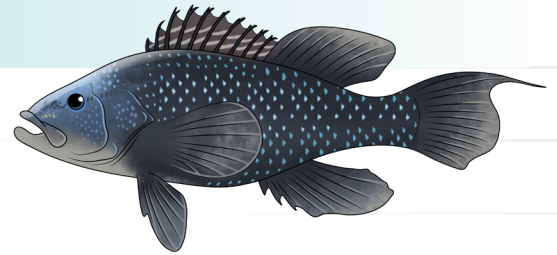
**Season:** May–September

**Baits:** Cut squid, clams, green crabs

**Tackle and tips:** Bottom fishing from a boat.

Fishing for black sea bass from a shore or pier is tricky because they prefer deeper waters. Young black sea bass may be found close to shore in early spring, May and June.

**Fish Facts:** Black sea bass all hatch as females, and some will eventually change to male when needed for breeding! Males can have bright blue or purple scales and a hump on their head.



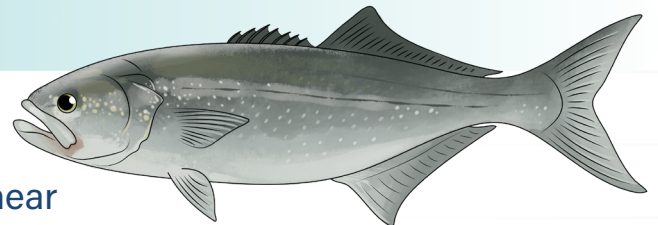
## Bluefish

**Season:** June–mid October

**Baits:** All small bait fish

**Tackle and tips:** Anglers catch bluefish near inlets, shoals, and rips where large schools (groups) of bluefish feed. Bluefish can bite through weak line, so use line of at least 40-pound mono or braid with a wire leader. Jigs, spoons, spinners, flies, and single hook top water plugs with a lure all work for attracting bluefish.

**Fish Facts:** Bluefish live throughout the world's oceans and migrate like birds. They are swift hunters with sharp teeth, so be careful when releasing them, and do not put your fingers in their mouth!



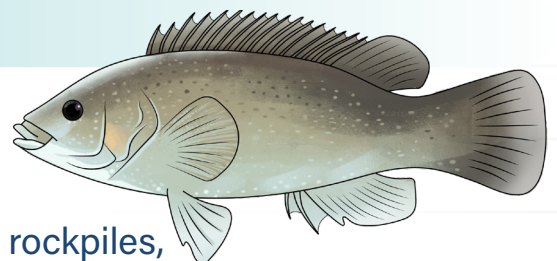
## Cunner

**Season:** April–October

**Baits:** Cut clam and worms

**Tackle and tips:** A great starter fish, cunner (also known as bergals) are easy to find around rockpiles, bridges, piers, and eelgrass beds. Use a smaller circle hook (size 2/0 to 4/0) and fish the bottom to attract a bite.

**Fish Facts:** Cunner are closely related to tautog, and both fish are members of the wrasse family. Their small mouth is lined with several rows of uneven cone shaped teeth that help them eat small lobsters, mussels, and urchins.



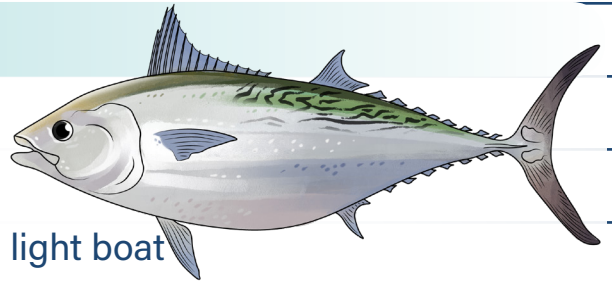
## False Albacore

**Season:** Late July-October

**Baits:** : Strip baits, squid, small jigs, spoons, plugs, flies

**Tackle and tips:** Spinning gear, bait casting, light boat rods, trolling, fly fishing.

**Fish Facts:** False albacore are very similar to bonito - fast, fun and sometimes a bit tricky to catch! Unlike bonito, they don't make a good keeper fish for eating. However, if you want to feel some serious fish power you won't be disappointed when you hook a false albacore and the line screams off the reel as they swim away from you!



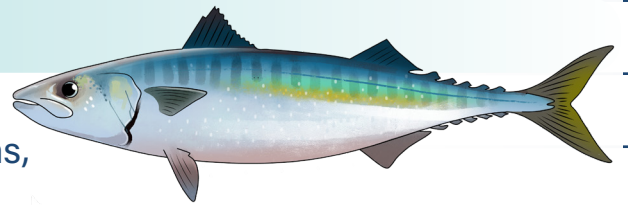
## Atlantic Mackerel

**Season:** May-September

**Baits:** Small bait fish, crab, clams, seaworms, squid strips, jigs, spoons, flies, sabiki rigs

**Tackle and tips:** Trolling, jigging, casting from shore or boat, using light tackle.

**Fish Facts:** Atlantic mackerel are fast swimmers and voracious feeders, which offers the angler many options for catching them. Using a chum bag with cat food or ground baitfish is great way to attract mackerel to your boat, and it'll keep them there so you can fill your livewell or cooler!



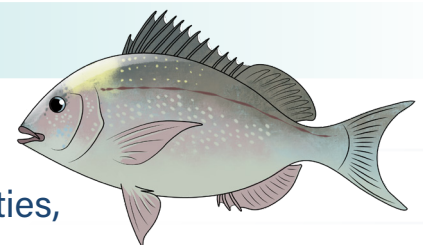
## Scup

**Season:** May-October

**Baits:** Clams, strips of squid, seaworms

**Tackle and tips:** Light- to medium-weight tackle, jetties, drift-fishing, piers, bridges.

**Fish Facts:** Scup can live upwards of 20 years and can grow to an average weight of 3-4 pounds. The waters of New England are important to scup, who spawn (lay eggs) in the sandy or weedy patches of the shallows throughout the summer. Scup migrate south from Massachusetts in the fall to the warmer waters found south of New England!



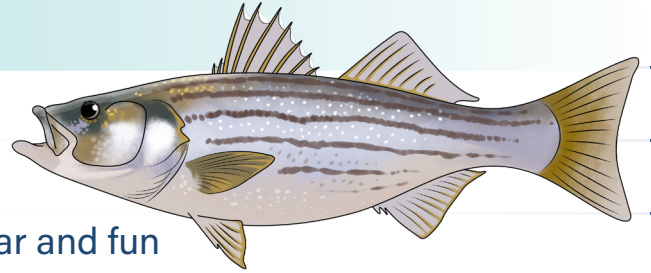
## Striped Bass

**Season:** Mid April–October

**Baits:** Seaworms, menhaden, eels, squid, herring, jigs, plugs, spinners, spoons

**Tackle and tips:** Striped bass are a popular and fun fish to catch for all fishing levels. Targeting "schoolies"—the young, first time migrating group of stripers—at the beginning of spring is a good place to start. Cast with natural bait along the shore and off piers, jigging as you reel in your line to entice them to bite. Be ready to quickly release any undersized fish!

**Fish Facts:** Striped bass spend their adult lives in the ocean, but spawn and hatch in freshwater streams and rivers!



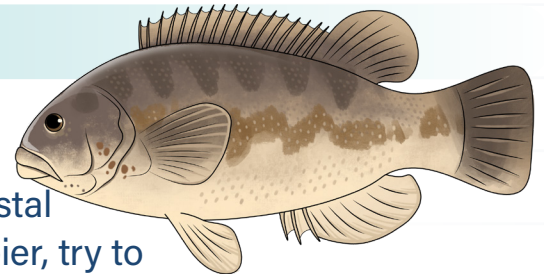
## Tautog

**Season:** April–November

**Baits:** Crabs, clams, and shellfish

**Tackle and tips:** Togs are easily found along coastal reefs and rocky areas by boat. If fishing from a pier, try to look at the underwater structure during low tide so you know where the fish might be hiding. Try using a fish finder rig setup, using an egg or bank on the line and a size 4/0+ in-line circle hook baited with crab.

**Fish Facts:** Tautog have a thick layer of slime covering their body to protect them when they hide in rocky habitats. Be careful handling and releasing tautog; it's dorsal (back) fin has sharp spines!



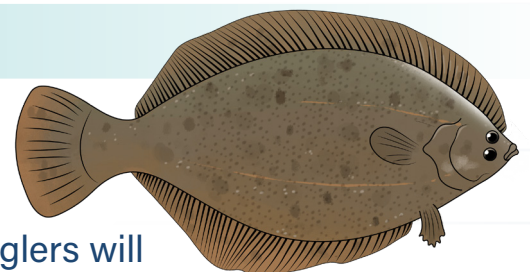
## Winter Flounder

**Season:** May–February

**Baits:** Sandworms, bloodworms, clams, strips of squid

**Tackle and tips:** If fishing from a boat, many anglers will use a "chum pot", which is a small wire cage filled with clams or fish used to attract flounder to your boat. Use a small hook baited with a sandworm, and when you feel a nibble use a quick and smooth upward pull to set the hook.

**Fish Facts:** Young flounder hatch with one eye on each side of its head. As it grows, one eye moves to the other side, so both end up on the same side of its head! Winter flounder eyes are always on the right side of the body.



# Finishing The Day

You can experience a lot of different emotions after a long day of saltwater fishing. If its been a good day, with some exciting catches, you might be feeling happy, talkative, and full of energy! If the day was slow, or maybe you had a hard time figuring out the right gear to use, you might be feeling tired, and a little let down.

No matter the day, you spent some good quality time with friends and family, and you learned something new to try on your next trip. The final step of your fishing day is making sure your gear is cleaned and stored. Journaling your day will help you grow your skills as an angler, and keep you fishing for years to come!

## Cleaning and storing your gear

### Before you head home:

1. Remove any leftover bait from the hooks and rinse with freshwater (if you have it).
2. If you are leaving hooks and lures on the line, hook them onto a guide on the rod and gently reel the line until it is just tight enough to hold in place. Make sure there is no bend in your rod.
3. You can use a strip of velcro around the line, or a mesh rod cover, to make it safer for travel.
4. You can also cut the line to remove the hooks and lures. Attach the end of the line with a loose tie to the rod. Rinse in freshwater before storing.

### Cleaning and storing fishing gear:

It is important to clean saltwater off of all of your gear at the end of the day.

5. Using a soft rag, wipe down the rod with freshwater and let dry.
6. It is important that you rinse all of your lures, hooks, swivels, and weights in freshwater. Lay them out on a towel for a few hours until they are completely dry before putting them away in your tackle box.



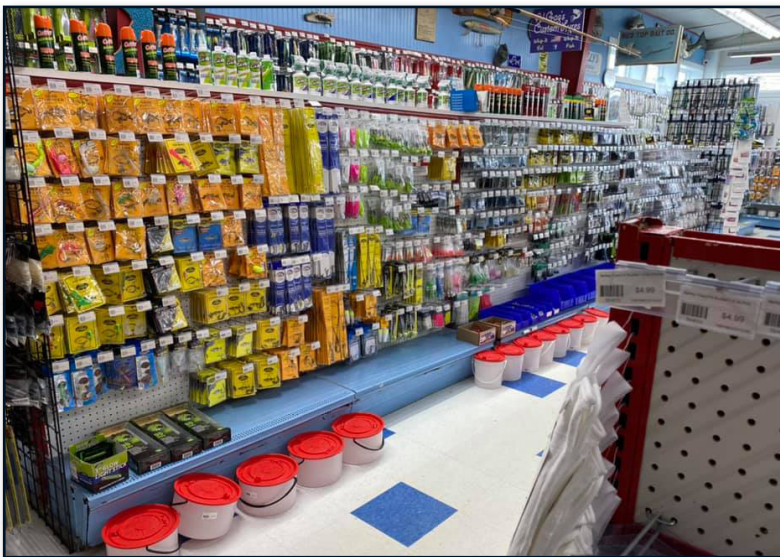
BE CAREFUL when cleaning your gear. Hooks can cut or stick you. Always have adult supervision when cleaning your gear.

7. Store your gear inside as much as possible. A garage, basement, or storage shed is a great place to keep your gear safe.



## Visiting a tackle shop

Visiting a tackle shop or outdoor store is a great way to start exploring the sport of saltwater fishing. Local shops can recommend places for beginner fishing and set you up with gear. It might feel intimidating at first, but know that shop staff are happy to talk with you about the sport they love! You can find a list of local shops in the Massachusetts Saltwater Fishing Guide. Charter and Head Boat fishing trips are another good way to test out different kinds of saltwater gear, and you can learn a lot from the captain and crew.



Tackle shops don't have to be intimidating. The more time you spend exploring, the more comfortable you'll be with finding and choosing your gear!

### Here are some questions you can ask in a tackle shop:

1. Do you know of any local fishing spots that are good for beginners?
2. Are there any tools or tackle you think anglers should always have with them on a fishing trip?
3. I am interested in catching \_\_\_\_\_ on my next fishing trip.  
(saltwater fish)

What kind of tackle do you suggest for beginners targeting this saltwater fish?

4. Are there any local fishing shows coming up I can visit?
5. How are bait and lures different? How do you choose when to use them?

**TIP:** If you're learning how to fish alongside a friend or family member, ask about entry level fishing rods you can share. This will save money (splitting the cost) and allows you to learn with less commitment. You can also ask if shops offer gear trials or loan programs.



# My Fishing Logbook

Date:

Start Time:

☐ am  
☐ pm

End Time:

☐ am  
☐ pm

Location:

Weather:



Temperature:

☐ °C  
☐ °F

Tackle and Setup:

Total number of Fish Caught:

Species:

Length:

in.

Weight:

lbs.

oz.

Species:

Length:

in.

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lbs.

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Species:

Length:

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lbs.

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Notes on the Day:

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Start Time:

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End Time:

☐ am  
☐ pm

Location:

Weather:



Temperature:

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Tackle and Setup:

Total number of Fish Caught:

Species:

Length:

in.

Weight:

lbs.

oz.

Species:

Length:

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Species:

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Notes on the Day:











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Location:

Weather:      Temperature: ☐ °C ☐ °F

Tackle and Setup:

Total number of Fish Caught:

Species: Length: in. Weight: lbs. oz.

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Notes on the Day:

Date: Start Time: ☐ am ☐ pm End Time: ☐ am ☐ pm

Location:

Weather:      Temperature: ☐ °C ☐ °F

Tackle and Setup:

Total number of Fish Caught:






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Species: Length: in. Weight: lbs. oz.

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Total number of Fish Caught:				
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Location: \_\_\_\_\_

Weather:      Temperature: ☐ °C ☐ °F

Tackle and Setup: \_\_\_\_\_

Total number of Fish Caught: \_\_\_\_\_

Species: \_\_\_\_\_ Length: \_\_\_\_\_ in. Weight: \_\_\_\_\_ lbs. \_\_\_\_\_ oz.

Species: \_\_\_\_\_ Length: \_\_\_\_\_ in. Weight: \_\_\_\_\_ lbs. \_\_\_\_\_ oz.

Species: \_\_\_\_\_ Length: \_\_\_\_\_ in. Weight: \_\_\_\_\_ lbs. \_\_\_\_\_ oz.

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Location: \_\_\_\_\_

Weather:      Temperature: ☐ °C ☐ °F

Tackle and Setup: \_\_\_\_\_

Total number of Fish Caught: \_\_\_\_\_

Species: \_\_\_\_\_ Length: \_\_\_\_\_ in. Weight: \_\_\_\_\_ lbs. \_\_\_\_\_ oz.

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Species: \_\_\_\_\_ Length: \_\_\_\_\_ in. Weight: \_\_\_\_\_ lbs. \_\_\_\_\_ oz.

Notes on the Day: \_\_\_\_\_

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# Glossary

**Angler:** a person who fishes with a rod and line

**Bait:** live or dead animal material used to attract fish to a hook

**Baitfish:** a fish used as bait to catch a larger fish, like herring and silversides

**Braid:** a strong, thick braided fishing line with no stretch

**Dehooker:** a device for removing a hook from a fish

**Fillet knife:** a thin, flexible blade knife used for cutting pieces of fish to cook

**Fishing line:** thin, strong, usually clear, cord used to attach tackle to a fishing reel

**Fly:** an artificial lure designed to look like a baitfish; commonly used when fly fishing

**Hook:** a bent piece of metal at the end of a fishing line (usually baited) used for attracting fish

**Improved clinch knot:** a knot used for attaching a hook or lure to the end of a fishing line

**Jigging:** fishing with a jig lure, or the act of moving your lure or bait up and down in a jerking motion to attract fish

**Lure:** an artificial bait used for attracting and catching fish

**Mono:** a thin, stretchy, often clear, fishing line that is easy to tie, but can loop and hold onto its round, spool shape.

**Outfit:** the equipment and rod and reel setup used by anglers when fishing

**Pier:** a structure (often made of wood and metal) used for walking out over water for fishing and sightseeing

**Pliers:** a pincer tool that is used for holding small objects or for bending and cutting wire and hooks

**Plug:** a lure designed to imitate a small fish or aquatic animal

**Reel:** a piece of tackle used to hold fishing line and to assist in casting and retrieving line

**Rip current:** powerful, narrow channels of fast-moving water

**Rod:** a fishing pole, used to extend the distance an angler can cast a line

**Rod action:** how much of the rod bends when you put pressure on the tip, from fast (bends more at top) to slow (bends equally along the length)

**Rod power:** the weight that the rod can lift, from light to extra heavy

**Sandbar:** a ridge of sand built up underwater by currents

**Sinkers:** a weight used to hold terminal tackle below the surface of the water

**Suds:** foamy or frothy water

**Spoon:** a lure that wobbles and flutters as it is pulled through the water

**Tackle:** fishing gear

**Terminal Tackle:** the combination of tackle used at the end of a fishing line

**Tide:** the rise and fall of sea level

**Trough:** a channel of water between wave breaks

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