

# Hook, Line, & Thinker

Field Guide



**Field Knowledge—  
Know Before You Go**

**Field Knowledge—  
Making the Catch**



Select a fish that lives in Wisconsin that you would like to learn more about. Use this worksheet to profile the fish as you work through the different sections of this booklet. If each of your classmates selects a different fish, your classroom will know how to catch just about anything!

## Profile of a Swimmer

Common Name(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Scientific Name: \_\_\_\_\_

SENSE	FEATURE AND DESCRIPTION	IMPORTANCE TO FISH (HIGH, MEDIUM, LOW)
<b>Sight</b>		
<b>Smell</b>		
<b>Hearing</b>		
<b>Taste</b>		
<b>Touch</b>		

Identifying Characteristics: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Natural Food: \_\_\_\_\_

Habitat Description: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Niche (role): \_\_\_\_\_

Spawning habits and habitat: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Environmental stressors: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Tackle and Bait: \_\_\_\_\_ Bag Limit: \_\_\_\_\_

Is there a health advisory for this fish? if so, where? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Any restoration or stocking efforts for this fish? \_\_\_\_\_

Good to eat or simple recipes? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Other interesting facts about this species (list 5): \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Sources: \_\_\_\_\_

# Welcome, Anglers!

You are holding a guidebook that will provide you with **Field Knowledge** to take you through the various steps of fishing. This booklet is organized into two main sections: **Section A, Field Knowledge—Know Before You Go** and **Section B, Field Knowledge—Making the Catch**.

In Section A, Know Before You Go, you will learn about:

- fishing equipment
- techniques
- regulations
- safety considerations

You will build on what you learn in this section when you go outside for an actual fishing trip. Section B, Making the Catch guides you through:

- reading the water
- catching a fish
- deciding whether or not to keep your fish
- cleaning your catch
- cooking your catch

This booklet can be paired with the *Hook, Line, & Thinker: Science Guide* that focuses on the biology, ecology, and management of fish in Wisconsin. Even when done together, however, these booklets are not detailed enough to make you an expert angler. Fishing is a life-long adventure and the more you fish, the more you'll learn.

Be sure to thank your teacher and community members for offering you this chance to get outside and test the waters. We wish you the best in making an exciting catch and hope you will enjoy angling for many years to come!

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## The Scene

You and your friends are out fishing on Devil's Lake. You've each caught and kept your limit of one northern pike for the day, but the weather is perfect and you're all enjoying yourselves so much that you decide to keep fishing for a few more hours. If you catch any more fish, you'll release them. You sit back to watch the hikers on the ridge, when suddenly your bobber sinks and your line goes taut. You pick up your rod and struggle to reel in what turns out to be the largest northern pike you've ever seen! It's much bigger than the fish you caught several hours ago and would feed many more mouths. What would you do? Would you keep it or release it? Why? If you release it, how will you go about making it a safe release for the fish?

### SECTION A

## Field Knowledge—Know Before You Go

Knowing when to keep a fish and when to release it is an important part of being a responsible angler. In this booklet you will learn about the gear, techniques, and skills necessary for fishing, but most importantly you will learn some guidelines on how to be an ethical and responsible angler. It will be up to you to put these ethics into action!

Fishing is an excellent way to connect with the water world around you while relaxing with friends and family. But first you need to select your tackle, practice your casting, and make sure you have a handle on water safety and fishing regulations.

# 1

## Tackling Tackle

Newcomers to fishing are often overwhelmed when they step into a bait shop and face a wide variety of gear and gadgets. Anglers have a language all their own when it comes to tackle (gear), but fishing club members, bait shopkeepers, and probably some of your classmates are happy to translate. Where could you go for tackle advice in your community? Here are the basics to help you start a conversation and make the best selection for your fishing goals.

### Hook, Line, and Sinkers

All you really need to fish is a soda can, a piece of fishing line, a hook and some bait. If you wrap the line around the can about 50 times and thrust the can forward while letting the line release, you have a very inexpensive form of fishing tackle. Most people, however, find that a rod and reel help them better meet their fishing goals.



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Most rods (poles) are made of graphite, fiberglass, composites, or bamboo.

### Rods and Reels

Rods and reels are two separate pieces of equipment, but they are almost always sold and used together. Most **rods** (poles) are made of graphite, fiberglass, composites, or bamboo. In general, the more high-tech the rod material, the more expensive the rod will be. Most rods have **guides** (loops) along their length to thread fishing line through. Rods can be as short as four feet or as long as 16 feet, but most are about six feet in length. In general, the longer the rod, the further you can cast. However, a shorter rod allows for greater accuracy.

**Reels** are used to **cast** (send out) and retrieve fishing line. The reel attaches to the base of the rod. Many people, however, start fishing on the no-reel cane pole, the simplicity of which allows new anglers to focus on fish, rather than on gadgets.

The type of rod and reel you choose depends on the type of casting you will be doing.

**Spinning gear** is designed for long, backlash-free casts and is effective with relatively light weights.

**Baitcasting gear** (also called “levelwind”) is designed for precision casting and can be used with heavier weights and heavier line. Beware of the backlash though; baitcasting gear can leave your line in tangles.

**Spincasting gear** is similar to spinning gear, but has a button on the reel that makes it one of the simplest reels to use.



Baitcasting reel



Spinning reel

Reels are used to cast (send out) and retrieve fishing line. The reel attaches to the base of the rod.

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Baitcasting gear



Spinning gear



Spincasting gear



Fly-fishing gear



**Fly-fishing gear** is very different from the others listed above. The reel is designed to store line, not to cast and retrieve, and the rod is long and limber. The angler does the casting, rather than the gear; it takes some skill and a lot of practice to become a successful fly angler.

should break when a fish pulls back with 10 pounds of force or more. Lines are actually under-rated to allow for knots, the weakest point on your line. For optimal castability, look for limp, 8-pound test line.

## Lines

Fishing line winds around the reel up through the guides on the rod and is tied off with a hook on the end. Line comes in a variety of sizes and strengths. There are four basic types: monofilament (meaning "one line"), braided, high-performance polyethylene, and fly line. The type you choose depends on your rod and reel, the fish you plan to catch and the bait you will be using. The higher the "pound test" on the line, the stronger it is. A 10-pound test line

## Hooks

There are many fish hook styles and sizes, and you will want to try to match the hook size to the size of your intended catch's mouth. Hook sizes work the opposite of what one might logically expect. The larger the number, the smaller the hook. So a no. 24, used for fly-fishing, is tiny and much smaller than a no. 2. It might seem, then, that there would be no hook larger than a no. 1. There are, but sizes larger than a no. 1 add a "/0." So the next size up is a 1/0, then 2/0, 3/0 (pronounced "three-oh" or "three-ought") and so on. At this end of the scale, the larger the number the larger the hook, so a 12/0 is larger than a 2/0.



Line comes in a variety of sizes and strengths.

There are four basic types of fishing line: (top left) braided, (top right) monofilament, (bottom left) fly line, and (bottom right) high-performance polyethylene.



The larger the number, the smaller the hook. So a no. 24, used for fly-fishing, is tiny and much smaller than a no. 2.



## Buy Local!

Take a guess: how many large tackle manufacturers are based in Wisconsin?

If you guessed over 30, you're correct. With a little pre-shopping research, you could boost Wisconsin's manufacturing industry by assuring that your rod, reel, spoons, spinners, plugs, tackle box, artificial baits, and lure components were all produced in the state. In the 2006–2007 fishing season, anglers spent \$2.75 billion dollars on their hobby here in Wisconsin. What better way to help the economy than to go fishing?

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### Bobbers

Also known as “floats,” bobbers have two jobs: to hold your bait at the right level in the water and to help you detect bites. Bobbers are Styrofoam® or hollow plastic and are attached to the line. When a bobber dips down, you might have a fish (or maybe a stump!)



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### Sinkers

Sinkers are weights to help get your bait and hook under the water. There are many different sinker shapes and weights. Choose one that meets your needs—but avoid ones with lead. Lead poisons wildlife. Many anglers have turned to non-lead alternatives. Tin and bismuth sinkers are lighter, so you need more of them to sink your bait.



Sinkers are weights to help get your bait and hook under the water.

### Snaps and Swivels

Snaps are used to connect a hook or lure to the line, and swivels are used to prevent the line from twisting. The number one mistake beginning anglers make is to add too many snaps and swivels. Try starting without snaps and swivels and only add what you need.



Snaps are used to connect a hook or lure to the line, and swivels are used to prevent the line from twisting.

### Luring Them In

The method you choose to entice a fish to bite depends entirely on what species of fish you want to catch. Your attention-grabbing item could be live bait or an artificial lure. Both serve the same purpose of luring in the fish either by offering something to eat or something to attack.

### Bait

Worms, grasshoppers, live minnows, and dough balls are common baits you can slip onto your fishing hook. Not all baits are legal at all times so check the regulations before you drop your line in the water.

Obtaining bait is easy, but what to do with it after a day of fishing requires some thought.

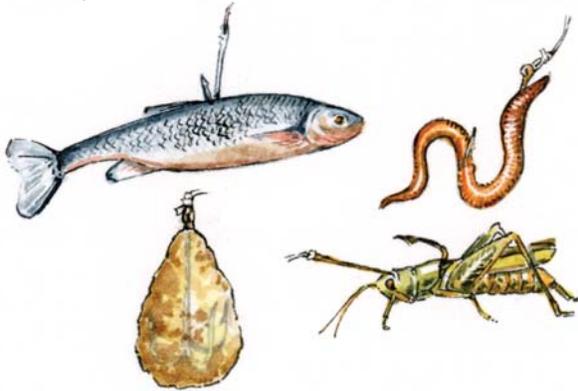
Transferring bait from one waterbody to another is prohibited due to concerns about spreading invasive species and viral hemorrhagic septicemia (VHS).



Lead poisons wildlife. Many anglers have turned to non-lead sinkers.

In order to prevent the spread of VHS, it is illegal to harvest wild minnows, both commercially and for personal use, from all known and suspected VHS waters. It is also illegal to possess or use minnow harvesting gear on any of the VHS waters. A current listing of these waters is posted on the DNR's Website.

Worms are another matter. All common bait worms are non-native and often become invasive. They can change the species composition of the forest by devouring the leaves that would normally decompose slowly and provide important soil nutrients for tree seedlings, wildflowers and ferns. So, just like you wouldn't dump your leftover minnows in the water, don't dump your worms in the woods; put them in the trash.



Live minnows, worms, dough balls, and grasshoppers are all forms of bait that you slip onto a hook when fishing.

## Lures

Lures are designed to resemble natural fish food, grab a fish's curiosity, or just make a fish mad enough to bite. Lures come in a variety of shapes, sizes, and colors. They're fun to look at and to make.

A **plug** is a casting lure, usually made of wood or plastic. It is designed to imitate a small fish or other aquatic animal moving on the water or below the surface. The actions of the angler make plugs dip, dive, rattle and thrash like live prey. The faster you retrieve a wooden plug, the deeper it will "swim."



Plug

A **spoon** is a curved, tapered slab of metal designed to wobble or flutter upon retrieval. As it is retrieved, the spoon will catch light and flash, attracting a fish's curiosity. Spoons may be fished at virtually any depth.



This well-proven spoon for northern pike is most effective when fished slowly, just off the bottom.

A **spinner** is a wire shaft with a treble hook at the bottom and a blade that spins (revolves) when pulled through the water. A variation of this is the spinnerbait, a weighted lure with one or two spinning blades set over the hook. It spins around a shaft that looks like a safety pin. Spinners also attract fish by catching and reflecting sunlight.



Spinners attract fish by catching and reflecting sunlight.

The most common freshwater **jig** is called a leadhead, which is a piece of lead molded onto a hook. It is baited with a plastic tail, pork rind, or marabou (described below).

Anglers allow the jig to sink, then quickly jerk it up, then allow it to sink again. This action is called jiggging. Jigs may also be trolled or reeled in at a steady or irregular rate at any depth or speed. Consider choosing a non-lead jig to protect birds and other wildlife.



The most common freshwater jig is called a leadhead, which is a piece of lead molded onto a hook.



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## How Many Hooks are Legal?

The regulations state that you can fish with only three hooks, baits, or lures. What does that mean for lures with treble hooks? A treble hook has three points and some lures have three treble hooks or nine points, but still are counted as one bait or lure. So, you can fish with three lures that have treble hooks. You'll learn more about regulations later.

**Plastic tails, pork rind,** and **marabou** are generally fished behind a jig or a weight. Plastic tails come in a tremendous array of shapes, colors, sizes, and even flavors! They imitate worms, eels, frogs, or salamanders. Many have curly-cue ends that wiggle upon retrieval.

Very thin, colored, cured strips of pork skin are appropriately called pork rind. Pork rind has amazingly lifelike action in the water and, although more expensive than plastic, is tougher and can't be pulled off a hook.

Marabou is a type of feather that takes on lifelike movements in the water.



Plastic tails



Pork rind attached to a spoon



The marabou lure imitates the mayfly nymph, a favorite food of trout.

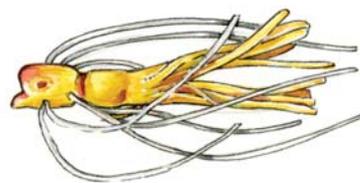
Fish will bite on **flies** that imitate what they would encounter in nature, so anglers need to "match the hatch" or choose flies to match the insects that are currently on the water.

**Wet flies** are used below the surface while **dry flies** float on the surface.



The dry fly (left) is a Traun-wing caddis; it mimics the veining of a caddis fly's wing. The wet fly (right) imitates the woolly bear caterpillar.

**Poppers** are bug-like flies that, because of their shape, pop when pulled along the surface.



Popper

A few other fishing essentials are listed below. What else would you add to this list?

Line clipper

Pliers

Life jacket or personal flotation device (pfd)

First aid kit

Sunglasses

Sunscreen

Drinking water

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## Don't Catch Birds!

A major cause of wildlife entrapment is fishing line that has been cut loose and left as litter by anglers.

Good fishing ethics include proper disposal of old line when you re-spool your reel with new line. Patronize local bait shops that will recycle old line.

## Know Your Fish

Your choice of equipment, bait, and technique when fishing all depend on the fish you are hoping to catch. Here is an easy chart that you can use to help you make the right choices.

FISH SPECIES	PREFERRED HABITAT	EQUIPMENT CHOICE	BAIT	PRINCIPLE FOOD	TECHNIQUE
<b>Bluegill Pumpkinseed</b>	shallow, fertile, warm waters often around weeds	light tackle: poppers, flies, bait	worms	insects	jiggle bait, depth is key
<b>Crappie</b>	open water, or near logs/weed beds; in cooler water in summer	bait casting rod with light line	minnows or small jigs or spinners	insects, fish	early morning is best
<b>Largemouth Bass</b>	warm water with cover such as lily pads and weed beds	medium bait casting or spinning rod	weedless artificial worms, minnows	fish, crayfish	casting into cover is best
<b>Smallmouth Bass</b>	rocky substrate, deep and cool water in summer	medium spin casting or bait casting, fly rod on occasion	hellgrammite , crayfish, dragonfly larvae	fish, crayfish, insects	quiet casting near old logs or rocks, deep holes
<b>Perch</b>	cool open water	light casting or spinning	minnows, worms	insects, fish	find a school, jig bait in the school
<b>Walleye, Sauger</b>	shallow at night, deep during day	medium casting	leeches, night crawlers, minnows, small plugs	insects, fish	trolling or casting in known habitats
<b>Salmon</b>	open water of Great Lakes	heavy trolling with downriggers, heavy casting in fall	plugs and spoons when using down-riggers on open water; spawn bags of fish eggs and streamer flies on tributaries	insects, fish	trolling in open water around epilimnion
<b>Brook Trout</b>	head of streams, small pools	fly rod or light casting in streams	flies, worms, minnows, small spinners	insects, fish	quietly using flies in pools
<b>Brown Trout</b>	deep pools or rocky ledges of streams	fly rod or light casting	flies, worms, minnows, small spinners	small minnows, crayfish, fish eggs, insects	May to June using dry flies
<b>Rainbow Trout</b>	cold, clear stream	fly rod or light bait casting	flies, worms, minnows, small spinners	minnows, insects	fly-fishing at night is best
<b>Catfish, Bullheads</b>	shallows at night	medium casting	stinkbait	fish, mollusks, insects	use their sense of smell against them
<b>Northern Pike</b>	weed beds	heavy casting or spinning	rapalas, bait fish	fish	casting in weed beds
<b>Muskellunge</b>	weed beds and old logs	heavy casting or spinning	live suckers or large plugs, spoons, and bucktails	fish	10,000 casts