

Go Catch Fish!

The “*how, when and where*” need to be tied together to produce a successful game plan, so let us look at each in some detail.

How

The “how” very much depends on your personal preferences, but always be ready to adapt and adjust to the conditions and to the fish. Whatever method(s) you choose, consider all of the following:

Start with equipment

The last thing I want to happen is to lose a fish because of equipment breakdown or poor maintenance practices. Don't wait until the season's end to fix up your gear. Practice good gear maintenance now. After every day on the water--and particularly in the salt--thoroughly rinse down with clean, fresh water anything that may have come in contact with salt water--rods, reels, lures, or flies. Look over your line and leader for abrasion and change it out if necessary; check your terminal tackle, sharpen hooks if necessary and re-tie knots.

1. Fly Fishing

- Matching the hatch, choosing fly patterns that resemble the prey or strike impulse patterns when the fish have "lock jaw"
- Color, shape, and size of the fly matter
- Water column: Where are the fish feeding? Surface? Just below or down deep?
- Line type: sinking, intermediate or floating. Get your offering to the fish.
- Match the rod to the fish and to the line

2. Light Tackle

- Spinning gear
- Conventional gear
- Match your tackle to the angling needs
- Color, shape, size, type of the lure matter
- Lure types, hard baits, soft plastics, spinners, strike impulse baits, swimmers, top waters, jigs, etc
- Line type, size and strength, mono, braids etc.
- Tried and true terminal tackle and knots
- Matching the hatch (or impulse strike triggering lures)
- Attractants that provide that “edge” when fish need a bit of coaxing
- Water column, get your bait to the fish

3. Bait

- Live bait choices that match the local menu and are specific to feeding patterns
- Chunking and chumming techniques that produce feeding incentives, chum lines, small suspended chunks
- Attractants such as adding flash, color and contrast to the bait, such as squid skirts and colored yarn, especially red

4. Trolling

- Line type: wire, mono, lead-core, braid
- Lure types: top water baits, swimmers, shallow and deep diving, jigs, etc.
- Water column position: the strike zone, type of bottom structure
- Live bait: type, storage, freshness, techniques
- Tube n' Worm

Match “How” with:

When

The “when” can be the most important consideration for success. Some fish will feed better at different times of the day and may depend on current weather conditions or other factors listed below. Sometimes choosing the

“best” conditions comes down to your experience and other "local" knowledge that you can readily get from other anglers or your resident tackle shops.

1. Time of day

- Sunrise, the magic time, is usually an all around good time to find fish eating and the low light conditions help stimulate impulse strikes
- Daytime feeding patterns are generally slower and very dependant on other factors, especially the presence of forage food
- Evening and the approaching dark can be the best time of day for finding actively feeding fish
- Nighttime brings darkness and a sense of well being to the larger fish, best time for big fish

2. Weather

- Sun and especially bright sun can keep fish spooky and off the bite unless there is bait working, so go deep, fish structure
- Clouds and dim sunlight usually will stimulate daytime feeding especially where bait and structure are present
- Wind speed and direction can be an ally or enemy. Know the water you're fishing, follow slick lines, check the lee shore
- High or low pressure systems can create or eliminate feeding patterns and bait movement in an area or water column

3. Water clarity conditions need to be addressed; whether the water is clear or stained, adjust as necessary

4. Tides can be critical to feeding times and bait movement in or out of specific areas and offshore

5. Moon phase: some are better than others and change with the season, bait movements can be affected, big tides and minus tides

6. Weather fronts: big impacts can be expected, warm fronts turn on the bite, while cold fronts turn it off

7. Water temperature and change with water depth, look for the thermocline

8. Seasons of the year dictate migration patterns of both predators and bait and also can determine area residency patterns of both

Match “How” and “When” with:

Where

With the how and when in place, the where is *where* the action is. Always remember that most, if not all, game fish are ***ambush predators*** and will be found where they can best accomplish the element of surprise and expend the least amount of energy. Whether you are fishing from a boat, walking a bank, shoreline, or tidal flat, stay aware of your surroundings and pay careful attention to potential “structure” and “ambush zones.”

1. Structure & Ambush Zones

- Current and current seams are areas of different water flow and present excellent ambush opportunities
- Sea foam on a rocky shore or beach front and slick lines provide structure for baitfish; look for feeding fish in or around those types of structure
- Water depth may determine where baitfish reside and as such become an ambush zone
- Tide flow and direction generally determine bait movement in a river, channel, tidal flat, or in the open ocean. Gamefish will seek ambush zones in these areas
- Rocks and weed beds provide the ultimate structure for baitfish
- Floating debris provides structure and hiding places for baitfish and become floating ambush zones
- Troughs and humps are feeding areas, so where there is food, there are eaters
- Points and depressions usually are associated with changes in water flow and depth thereby establishing ambush sites and gathering areas for bait
- Cut banks offer protection from current and provide overhead structure so expect these areas to hold bait
- Flats (mussel beds & sand bars) provide many habitant areas for feeding and spawning, gamefish party places!
- Creek mouths and estuaries are prime time places, rich in nutrients, abundant areas of structure, natural ambush environments
- Bait balls provide security in numbers for bait and easy feeding zones for gamefish

- Working birds are the torchlight to the promised land; find the birds working, and you have found the feeding fish

Every season I use this guide to help me prepare. It helps me build my game plans into a workable and changeable action plan that keeps me focused and prepared for opportunities. And remember; Think - Plan - Act - Adjust.

Get in the habit of keeping a simple day log and write down key events like tide patterns, weather, water temperature, how the bite was, and where you found bait. Then use it to prepare for future trips. Over time the *how*, *when and where* will become intuitive. Have Fun!

Captain Skip Montello,
North Coast Angler