

Leaders, Tippetts and Traces

There can be much confusion on the matter of Leaders, Tippetts and Traces. Novice fly fishers can easily be baffled by much of the hype that surrounds this very important link between fly line and fly. They often wonder why anglers use tapered leaders instead of a level piece of nylon or fluorocarbon.

This writer has always thought that there are 2 main reasons for using tapered leaders.

The first and most important is that a tapered leader transfers the casting energy from the fly line to the fly and enables the fly to be presented to the target more easily than with a level piece of line. This is very easily demonstrated by substituting a level trace of about three metres length of tippet material instead of a tapered leader and casting a lightweight fly with it. The power of the cast will be lost in the first foot or so of the nylon trace and there will be little control of where the fly lands.

The second reason for tapered leaders is quite simply to avoid breakages further up the leader with the loss of a length of nylon or fluorocarbon monofilament. If it is necessary to sacrifice a fly to a snag or if broken by a fish, it is far better to recover most of the leader and lose only a short piece of tippet.

The word TRACE is more commonly used these days to describe the length of nylon or fluorocarbon between a hook and a swivel or where it joins the main line. It applies more to bait fishing and spinning than fly fishing. The favoured terms for fly fishing are leader and tippet.

Tapered leaders can be purchased ready to attach to the fly line by a loop and these come in various lengths and breaking strains. The most common length in most tackle stores would be 3 metres long (9 feet). These are knotless leaders and of course without knots there is less likelihood of further tangles caused by casting accidents and so on.

Knotless tapered leaders are sold as "5X", or "4X", or "3X", and what this means is that the tippet end of the leader is a certain diameter in cross section.

<i>X Number of tippet</i>	<i>Thickness in thousands of an inch</i>	<i>Approximate breaking strain in pounds</i>
0X	0.011	15.50
1X	0.010	13.50
2X	0.009	11.50
3X	0.008	8.50
4X	0.007	6.00
5X	0.006	4.75
6X	0.005	3.50
7X	0.004	2.50

I have drawn up a chart above that illustrates the relationship between "X" number and thickness of the monofilament given in thousands of an inch and also the

approximate breaking strain of the line. The “X” number predates the conversion to the metric system but is still used, particularly in the USA where a lot of the fishing tackle on the market is sourced.

Most fly fishermen tie their own tapered leaders by joining monofilament of different thicknesses. There are guidelines and formulas on the internet but many of these require as many as eight pieces of monofilament to achieve the taper that is desired.

An acceptable result can be achieved using half of this number but care must be taken not to jump from thick to thin too quickly, because vastly different thicknesses of tippet material cannot be joined satisfactorily.

The thick butt section of the leader is important to transfer the energy from the fly line and turn over the fly at the end of a cast. The **properties** of a leader can be altered by changing the relative lengths of the component parts. We will refer to these as Butt, Mid and Tip sections. A leader made up of 60% Butt, 20% Mid, 20% Tip will deliver a fly with authority, probably suited to nymphing. Whereas a leader consisting of 40% Butt, 40% Mid, 20% Tip will give a much softer presentation more suited to dry fly.

For much more information on this topic type —Fly fishing leaders —or similar in the box on your preferred internet search engine.

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