Floating and Sink Tip Lines Q & A

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Thank you for your interest in this blog! I hope it is helpful to many people interested in getting into fly fishing and wanting to improve their stillwater fly fishing skills. I was happy to recently receive an email from a reader with questions regarding floating vs. sink tip lines. I think this topic might be useful to many others, so I am posting the questions from that email here with my answers.

Q. How do you approach fishing when you see trout sipping bugs from the surface?



Trout sipping midges from the surface

When trout are feeding near the surface, they are focused on either the adult or pupa stage of the insect. When I observe a head and then a dorsal tail rise on the surface, fish are feeding on the pupa stage of the insects trapped in or suspended just below the surface film.

When fish are feeding on pupae close to the surface, my go-to line is Cortland's 7-foot Intermediate Camo Sink Tip line. This line maintains the fly in the top few feet. Trolling this line maintains the fly in the zone where the trout will be feeding on emerging pupae or midges dangling in the surface film. This is important because if the fly is not presented at the depth the trout are feeding, it won't be seen. The line you use determines the sink rate of the fly, and the intermediate sink tip line is perfect for this application.

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Q. When would you use a floating line?

In my experience, floating lines are best suited for dry flies and indicator fishing. This is because fishing a floating line with wet flies leaves a shadow and causes surface disturbance when retrieved across the surface.

Q. Is a floating line effective during windy conditions?

In windy conditions, it is preferable to cast perpendicular to the wind in order to present your fly's profile because more fish will see the fly. In windy conditions, a floating line will bow causing the fly to move unnaturally. Trout will refuse the fly since it does not effectively mimic the insect's natural movement. A 7-foot intermediate sink tip maintains the fly close to the surface and will not bow creating drag.



A flash of light reflected from the floating line can spook trout

Q. What color of floating line is best for stillwater?

I prefer dark olive floating lines as they tend to be less visible to trout.

Research conducted by John Goddard and Brian Clark finds that light reflection off light colored floating lines can spook fish.

Q. Can I troll a floating line?

While many anglers troll a floating line, John Goddard and Brian Clark's research found that the drag of the floating line creates a visual disturbance when viewed from below the surface of the water.

The amount of disturbance is proportional to the speed of the retrieve. Anything other than the very slowest retrieve will cause ripple in the surface film which can spook trout. In addition to disturbing the surface, a floating line also casts a shadow when fished during periods of high sun.

Q. If I need a line to keep the fly in the top two feet, what should I use?

I prefer a sink tip line which maintains the line and leader below the surface, reducing or eliminating the surface disturbance during the retrieve. The Cortland 7-foot Intermediate Camo Sink Tip line has a dark green colored floating line married with a transparent intermediate 7-foot intermediate sinking tip.

This line is also ideal for probing shallow shorelines or weedy areas where you want to avoid hanging up on the bottom. I also add 3-5 feet of fluorocarbon tippet tied to a 9-foot monofilament leader. The fluorocarbon tippet has the same density of water, so it visually disappears in the water and avoids spooking the trout.

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Brown Trout caught with an intermediate 7' sink tip line

I want to thank the reader for their questions and invite others to send their questions to: vickie@stilwateradventure.com

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