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## ***Beginners/Basic Fly Tying Course***

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### **Basic Tools**

Vise	Scissors	Hackle Pliers
Bobbins	Bodkin/Dubbing Pick	Hair Stacker
Dubbing Wax	Head Cement Dispenser	Whip Finish Tool
Wing Burning Tools	Tweezers	Half Hitch Tools
Tool Caddy	Fly Tying Table	Back Plate
Materials "Catch-All Bag"		

### **Basic Beginners Techniques**

Starting Your Thread	Laying a Thread Base
Adjusting Bobbin Tension	The Pinch Method
Half Hitch	Whip Finishing
Laying Out Tools and Materials	

### **The Hook**

Eye	Shank	Bend
Gape	Barb	Point

### **A Hook in Terms of X**

1X Wide      1X Fine      1X Stout      1X Short      1X Long  
Can be 2X, 3X, 4X, 6X and 8X and any combination of length and strength.



# **BASIC FLY TYING TOOLS**

As a general rule, quality tools will allow you to learn faster and tie better flies. As such, you should strive to obtain the best tools your budget will allow. This does not mean that tools must be a costly investment. Your local fly shop owner can be a source of quality tools and materials. As you gain experience, retail catalogs also can be an excellent source.

The tools needed to begin fly tying are a **visé, scissors, bobbin, bobbin threader, bodkin, hackle pliers, hair stacker and whip finisher.**

**THE VISE:** This is your single most important purchase. This tool holds the hook secure while the fly is being constructed. There are many vises with prices ranging from \$35 to several hundred dollars. Some vises are more versatile than others and you need to consider the type of mount (base). A C-clamp mount is usually less expensive and often gives you more control in height while a pedestal mount may cost more but is more flexible for different types of tables or counters where you may want to tie.

The way the hook is secured in the vise also is a consideration. There are rotary and rotary vises. A rotary vise is one that allows the jaws (and fly) to be turned 360 degrees while you are constructing the fly. This feature can be used to your advantage, but is not an absolute necessity. The Thompson "A" vice is an excellent choice for a beginner and is available with either a base or clamp mount for a reasonable price, however it is not a rotary vise. It's cousin, the Thompson 360, is a full rotary vise.

**SCISSORS:** After a vise, scissors are probably the next most important fly tying tool. Considerations when making your purchase include the quality of the blade, the size of the finger holes and the fineness of the point. Finger holes need to be large enough to facilitate easy manipulation of the scissors and the blade **MUST** be of high enough quality to maintain a good edge. Without a fine point, you cannot get close enough to the body of the fly to cut material. Besides the standard scissor, the spring-loaded clip style of scissor is available in fabric stores and fly shops. It can be an excellent choice for the fly tier with the advantage that replacement blades are available when the blades become dull. No matter which scissors you select, just be sure they are sharp and have fine points.

**BOBBIN:** Thread is used in the construction of the fly and a bobbin holds a spool of thread as it is applied to the fly. This rather inexpensive item consists of a stainless steel tube that is flared at the end, and heavy spring steel material with beads on the end to hold the spool of thread. Considerations include the length of the tube, it's diameter, and whether it includes a ceramic tip. Some feel that a longer tube is an advantage because it allows more leverage when wrapping the thread and more control in placement of the thread. Either a standard or long length bobbin will function perfectly well for the beginner. Bobbins with a larger diameter are used for floss, not thread. In time thread friction may wear grooves in the flared end of the tube; a ceramic tip will prevent this tendency. A ceramic tip, however is not an absolute necessity for the beginning fly tyer.

**BOBBIN THREADER:** This is a tool used to pull the tying thread through the bobbin tube. It consists of a fine wire loop secured together at one end to a handle or knob. This tool can be purchased, or one can be made with fine guitar string or wire. A dental floss threader, available at any drug store can be used as a substitute.

**BODKIN:** A bodkin has several uses. It is used to apply head cement to the finished fly and also to "pick" out dubbing on some patterns. It basically consists of a large needle and a handle about the size of a pencil. This is a relatively inexpensive tool that can also be made by inserting the head of a 2-inch pin into the end of a 3-inch piece of quarter inch dowel.

**HACKLE PLIERS:** The hackle pliers are an absolute necessity when wrapping hackle around the shank of the hook. Many different styles are on the market today; however, pliers with one rubber grip and one serrated brass grip are relatively inexpensive and recommended for the beginner.

**HAIR STACKER:** Getting the hair tips even is a basic necessity if the fly is to be properly proportioned and balanced. The hair stacker performs this function. Generally available for under \$10.00, this tool consists of two tubes, one that fits inside the other. The larger of the two tubes has a bottom attached to it; the smaller is open on both ends. The hair is inserted into the top end of the smaller tube with the tips pointing downward. The tool is then turned to the vertical position, inserted into the larger tube and tapped on a solid surface. This action "shakes" the hair fibers to the bottom of the stacker, thus evening the natural ends. The tubes are then moved to a horizontal position and separated. The evened hair fibers are then removed to construct a portion of a fly.

**WHIP FINISHER:** The whip finisher is the tool used to knot the thread at the completion of a fly so the thread can be cut without the fly coming untied. There are two primary types of whip finishers available on the market today, the Thompson or the Matarelli. Each accomplishes the same task in a different manner. Both are good products with the choice of selection up to the tier. It is strongly recommended that the beginner learn to use one of the above tools; however, a good substitute for the whip finisher is the hollow tube of a ball point pen. It will not only provide a whip finish, but can be used to tie a half hitch knot.

# BASIC FLY TYING MATERIALS

For fly tying, potential materials are restricted only by resourcefulness, locale, and imagination. Entire books have been written on this subject and as you may know, some fly tyers spend considerable energy and time collecting materials.

**THE HOOK:** The hook is common in all fishing flies. The sizing of that hook tends to vary from one hook manufacturer to another and also from one style of hook to another. The differences between manufacturers can be very confusing. The numbers used to identify the hook size can also be confusing. Basically hook sizes are distinguished as follows: a small number identifies a large hook and a large number identifies the small hook. In other words, a #6 hook is much, much larger than a #24 hook. This convention is the same as for electrical wire.

Because many of the proportions of a fly depend on one part of the hook or another, it's important to know nomenclature for the various parts of the hook. They are the eye, the shank, the bend, the point, the barb, and the gape.

The distance between the point and the shank of the hook is called the gape and the gape is the part of the hook that determines the size. Stated differently, a number eight (#8) dry-fly hook from most manufacturers has the same size hook gape as all of the other number eight hooks from that manufacturer. The shank of the hook is a different story. A hook with a "standard" length shank has a shank that is basically a little longer than twice the distance of the gape. NOTE: The actual length of a "standard" length shank is "twice the distance of the gape PLUS the width of the hook eye." You see, after learning the TRUE description of the shank length, it's much easier to say a standard length hook shank is "a little longer than twice the distance of the gape."

Now that you have been confused regarding the hook shank we'll go even further by describing the measurement system used to define "shank length." This system is called the "X Shank" length system. For example: a 1X short hook has a shank that is shorter than a standard length hook AND a 1X long hook has a shank that is longer than a standard length hook.

How much shorter or longer are we talking about? READ CLOSELY NOW! A 1X short hook has a shank that is equal to a standard length shank on a hook that is one size smaller. On the other hand, a 1X long hook has a shank that is equal to a standard length shank on a hook that is one size larger. In other words, a 1X long #8 hook has a #8 gape and a shank that is equal to a #6 hook. (Hooks only come in even numbered sizes, so one size smaller than 8 is size 6).

There are four styles of hook eye, ball, looped, tapered and tapered-looped. These eye styles can be straight out from the shank, turned up or turned down. There are also three basic types of bend; round, limerick, and sproat.

**THE THREAD:** Your choice of the correct tying thread is also important. The size and type of fly you are tying tends to determine which size of thread you will use. The most commonly used sizes are 3/0, 6/0 and 8/0. The strongest and largest thread of these three is 3/0. As with hook size and wire, the bigger the number, the smaller the thread diameter. Typically a fly tier uses size 3/0 when tying large flies or flies requiring the spinning of animal hair. Smaller flies, especially dry flies, require either 6/0 or 8/0 thread. The color of thread may vary between patterns, however black is the most commonly used. To avoid buying unneeded thread, we recommend that you start with a spool of black 6/0 thread. Add to your thread collection as you feel it is necessary.

# ***FLY TYING TECHNIQUES***

There are several basic techniques that a fly tier use on almost every fly. Skill with these commonly used techniques is an important aspect of successful fly tying.

**THE HALF HITCH:** The half hitch is one of two methods used to finish the fly. It is really nothing more than a over-hand loop that is placed over the eye of the hook and around the hook shank. When the excess thread is pulled out of the loop, it tightens around the hook shank and keeps the thread from unwrapping. Three or four of these applied to the hook is one way of tying off the fly. It is applied like this:

- With the thread attached to the hook, hold the bobbin in your left hand with about four inches of thread between the hook and your bobbin.
- Hold the forefinger and the middle finger of your right hand apart about an inch and, with the back of your hand facing you, lay them across the thread.
- Rotate the fingers toward you 180 degrees forming a loop with the thread wrapped around the fingers.
- The thread from the bobbin crosses over the thread from the hook forming an X between your fingers.
- Slip this loop over the eye of the hook and gradually remove the slack from the thread. As the thread is tightened remove your finger and allow the thread to secure around the hook shank.

**(Note:** If these instructions don't work for you, ask your local supplier for a "Half-hitch tool". It is very easy to use.)

**THE WHIP FINISH:** The whip finish is really just an extension of the half hitch and can be done with or without a whip-finishing tool as follows. First apply a half hitch but **DO NOT** pull the slack out of the thread. While keeping your fingers spread with the thread around them, rotate the piece of thread that is attached directly to the hook around the hook shank in a clock-wise direction. Two or three rotations are all that is required. Now pull the slack out of the thread removing your fingers as you go just like you did for the half hitch or use your scissors tip to steer the loop into place while you pull the slack out of the thread. The illustrations should help you understand this process.



# Basic Fly Tying Course

## Elk Hair Caddis

Hook	Standard Dry Fly Hook 8 - 20
Thread	Brown 6/0
Tail	None
Rib	Copper Wire
Body	Light Brown Dubbing Wrapped with Brown Hackle
Wing	Natural or Bleached Elk Hair
Throat	None
Head	Elk Hair
Weight	None



### NOTES

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