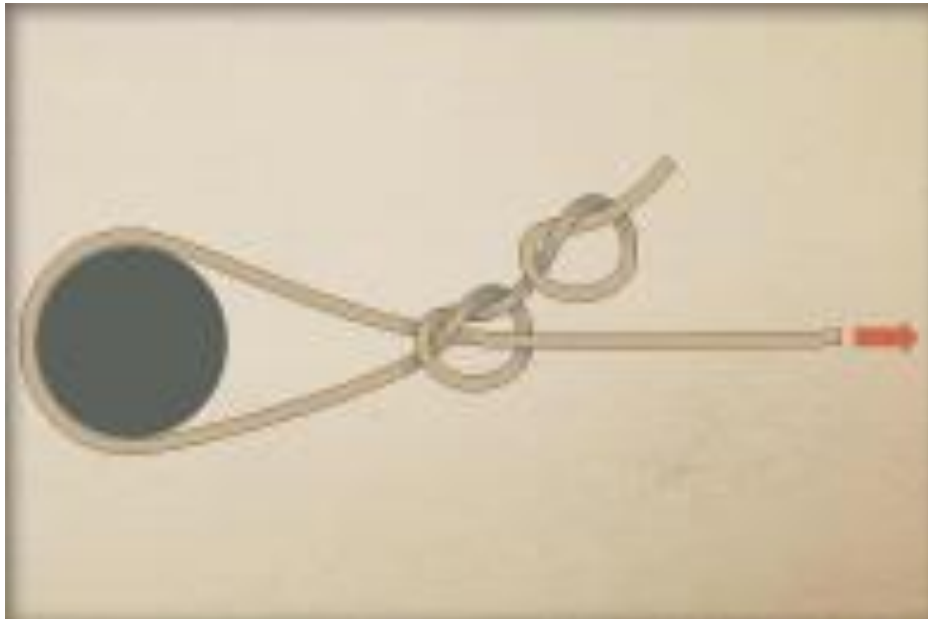


Saltwater Fishing Knot Information

Here are some tips for tying knots of any kind:

- Practice. Take a length of fishing [line](#), a [hook](#) with the point cut off or buried into a cork, and practice. Practice until you can tie each knot correctly.
- Always wet your knots with saliva as you pull them tight. This prevents damage to the line and allows the knot to pull tight.
- Trim knots closely with a nail clipper. A good knot, pulled tight, will not come loose. Close trimming prevents the knot from catching snags or weeds. Do not burn the tag end—heat damages the line and knot.
- When you're learning knots, the "tag end" (sometimes called the "working end") is the end of the line used to tie the knot. The "standing end" is that part of the line coming from your fishing [reel](#).
- Line is cheap. Always leave a foot or more of the tag end for tying knots so that you can tie them properly.
- Pull up all ends when tightening the knot. With some knots this will be only the standing end and tag end; with other knots it might be three or four ends.
- Once you find a rig that's working (a combination of weights, hooks, swivels or floats used for a particular type of fishing) don't lose it.
- Replace the line and retie your rigs at least every year.
-

Your First Knot: The Arbor Knot



Arbor Knot

The Arbor Knot is used to tie new line to the reel. It's the first knot you need to learn. It doesn't have to be that strong. And it's easy to learn. That makes it a pretty good knot to start off with.

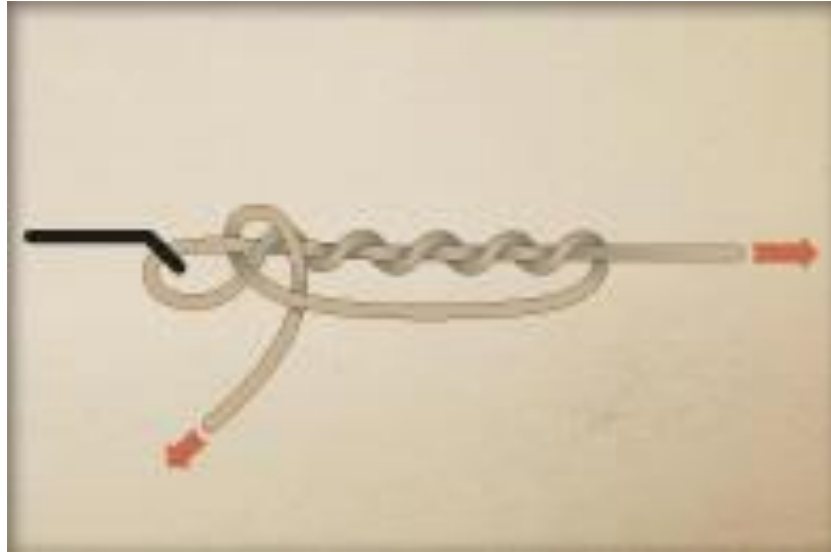
Run the line around the spool hub (arbor), then take the tag end around the standing part of the line and tie an ordinary, everyday, overhand knot. Tie a second overhand knot in the tag end as close as possible to the first one. Pull on the standing part of the line and jam the two knots together against the spool of your reel.

Knots for Hooks, Lures and Rigs

These knots are tested and proven to offer at least 90 percent of the original line strength when tying tackle (lures, swivels, sinkers, bobbers, etc.) to a line.

You don't have to learn all of them. But sometimes learning a complicated knot can be challenging and rewarding. On the other hand, learn the ones you're comfortable with to enjoy your hobby.

Improved Clinch Knot



Improved Clinch Knot

The improved clinch knot is a knot that is used for securing a fishing line to the fishing [lure](#), but can also affix fishing line to a swivel, clip, or artificial fly.

It offers up to 95 percent of the original line strength. The key is to make five turns of the tag end around the standing end before running the tag end back through the formed loop. As always, start with plenty of line. This knot is fairly quick and easy to tie and really popular. Use for lines up to 20-pound test.

Palomar Knot

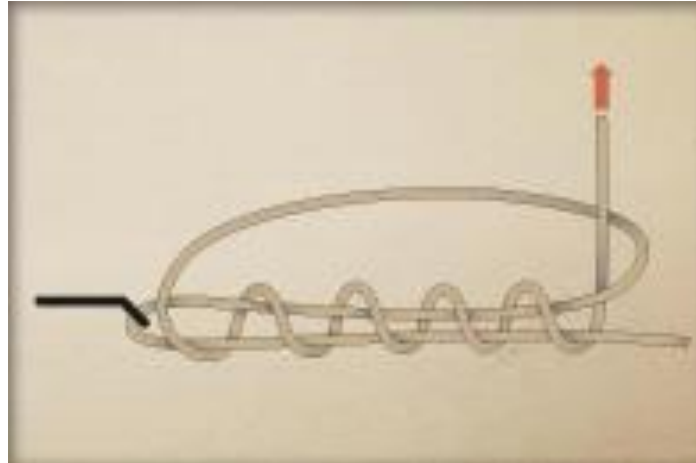


Palomar Knot

This knot is good for all kinds of light fishing lines (especially braid which will not pull out of this knot) and retains much of the original line strength.

Over 95 percent in strength, the Palomar knot is good for lines up to and over 20-pound test. Because it's double-run through the lure or [hook](#) eye, knotted, and then looped over the hook or lure, it may tangle easier. But it's still a favorite knot of many anglers.

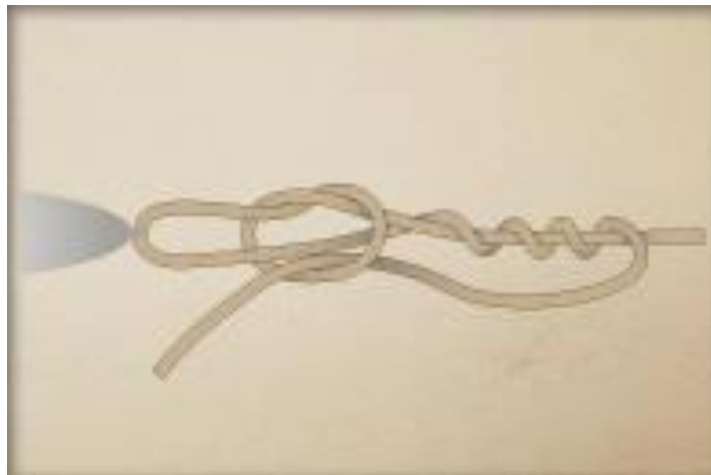
Uni-Knot



Uni-Knot

One of the most reliable knots for tying an eyed hook to a leader, the Uni Knot is effective with most types and sizes of line. Don't be afraid to cut the end short. It'll hold.

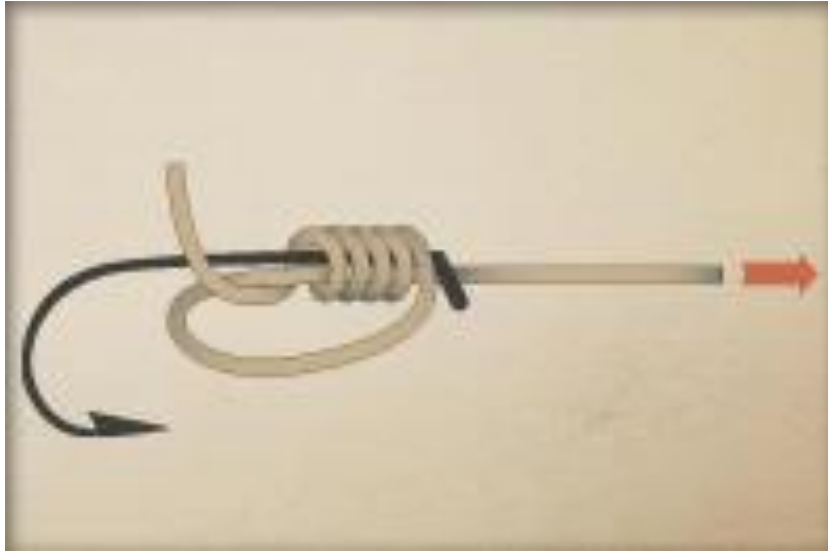
Non-Slip Loop Knot



Non-Slip Loop Knot

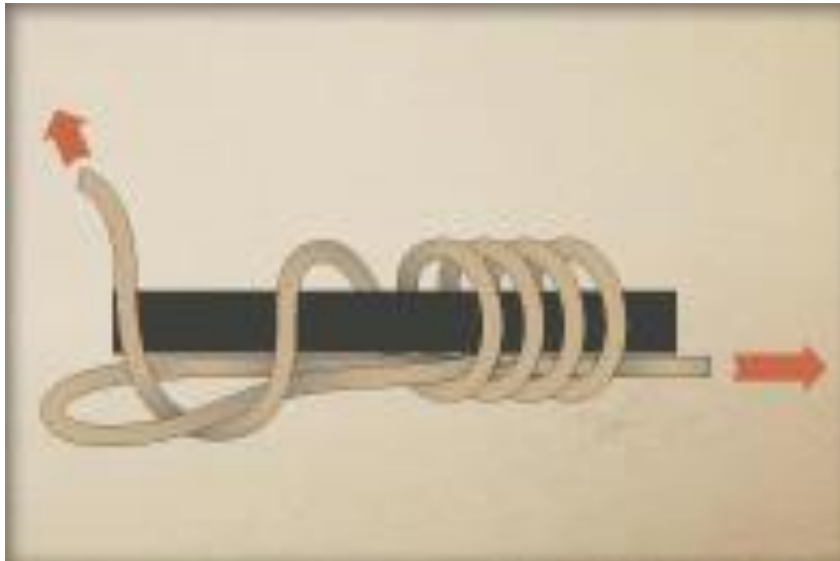
It creates a fixed loop so a hook can move freely. It is best with larger lines where a tight knot, such as the Improved Clinch can impede hook, [bait](#) or lure movement.

Snelling an Eyed Hook



Snelling means tying the knot away from the eye of the hook. It's used often in sea fishing, but works well for any type of fishing to increase strength and improve catch rates with bigger fish.

Spade-End Knot

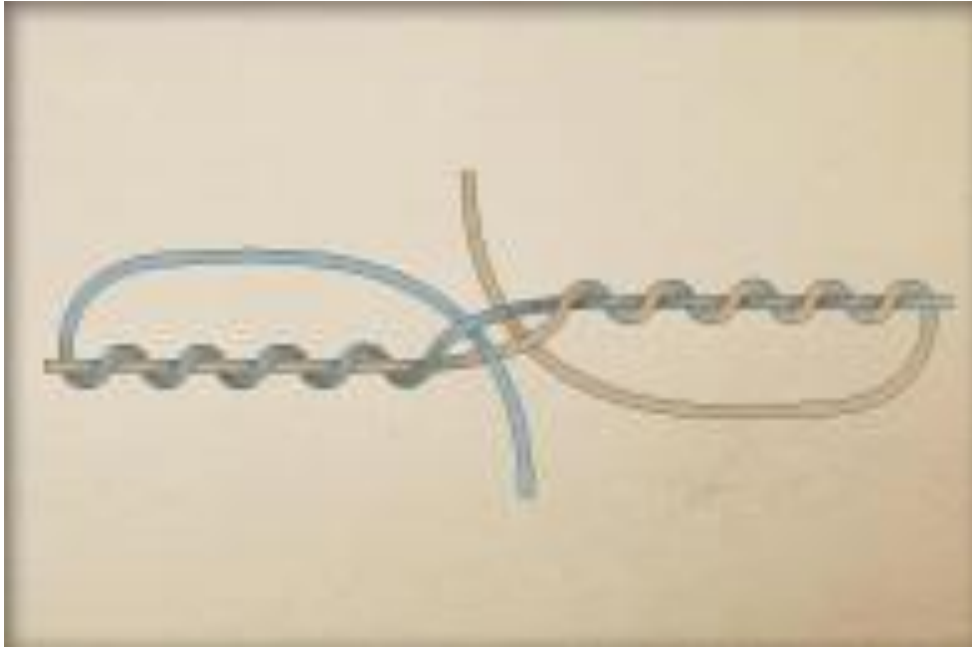


A spade hook has no eye. So you have to tie a knot next to the flat, bent end of the hook shank. Spade hooks are small. So don't worry, it will hold.

Line Joining Knots

Tying line to line is critical. And when it's called for (for example, when you have a killer [rig](#) on 15-pound test line and you want to attach it to the 20-pound test line on your [reel](#) without having to retie the whole rig) you need a really good knot. These knots are tested and reliable for joining two pieces of fishing line.

Blood Knot



A blood knot (Barrel knot) is most usefully employed for joining sections of monofilament nylon line while maintaining a high portion of the line's inherent strength. Other knots used for this purpose can cause a substantial loss of strength. In fly fishing, this serves to build a leader of gradually decreasing diameter with an easy cast fly line attached at the large diameter end and the fly or [hook](#) at the small diameter end. The principal drawback to the blood knot is the dexterity required to tie it. In tying the blood knot, the two lines to be joined are overlapped for 6-8 cm with the short ends of the two lines in opposite directions. The short end of one line is then wrapped 4-6 times around the second line and the remaining portion of the first short end brought back and passed between the lines at the beginning of the wraps. The short end of the second line is then wrapped 4-6 times around the first line and the end of this line brought back and passed through what is now an oval space between the first wrap of each set.

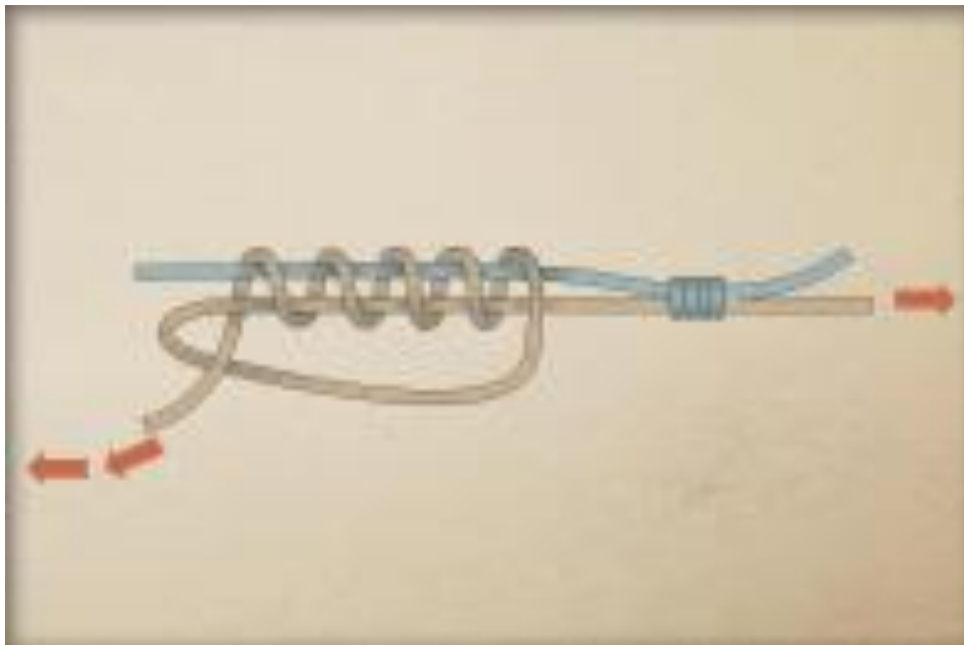
The above method has been called by Stanle Barnes (Anglers' Knots in Gut & Nylon, 2nd ed., 1951) "outcoil", and is contrasted with the method that resembles the finished knot from the start, "incoil". The images here are incorrect to present the finished knot as having its free/"tag" ends go from the center of the knot to the extreme ends; they in

fact will immediately coil around the standing parts towards the extreme ends. In fishing line, and in other material if not deliberately set snug and maybe re-set after some initial tensioning, the outcoil form will transform into the incoil form.

The lines are moistened and the wraps tightened by pulling on the long ends of the line. This causes the wraps to tighten and compress, creating 2 short sections of 'barrel', which look much like a 'hangman's knot', that slide together. The short ends of the line are then trimmed close to the wraps, or one of the ends may be left intact to be used for a second fly or lure, called a 'dropper.'

This knot requires five turns of line, with each tag end around the overlapped standing end of line. Make one series of turns and tuck the tag end between the two lines. Then repeat with the second line. You can even tie together lines of different diameter. It's good for tying 15-pound to 20-pound test line but not so great for tying 15-pound to 50-pound test line.

Double Uni-Knot



It's two knots tied back to back, then placed together to form a strong connection. Leave plenty of line at the end of the knot on each piece of line you're joining. The ends help pull the two knots into one. Clip ends short after the double knot is created.

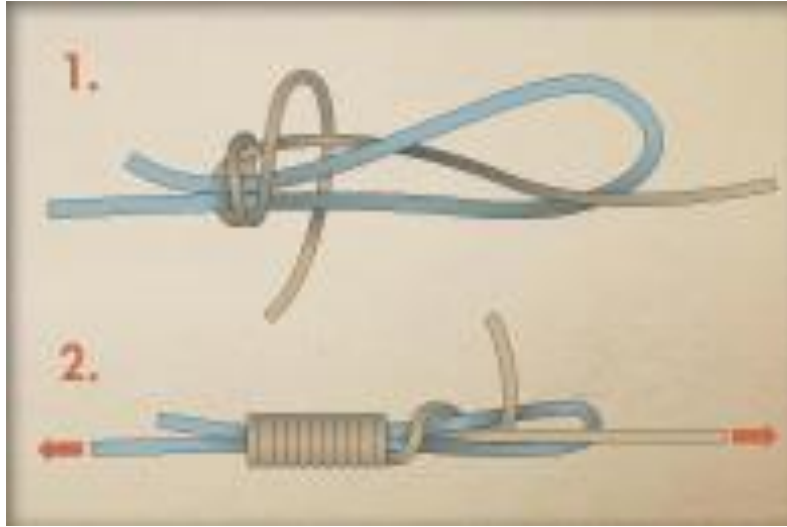
Surgeon's Knot



The surgeon's knot is a simple modification to the reef knot. It adds an extra twist when tying the first throw, forming a Double overhand knot, thus adding friction which makes the knot more secure. This knot is named for the fact that it is commonly used by surgeons in situations where it is important to maintain tension on a suture. Surgeon's knots are used in fly fishing as well as in tying quilts.

This knot makes it easy to join two lines, but one line must be short, since you have to bring the one end through the formed overhand loop. As with other lines, use a lot of overlapping line so that you can pull on all four ends to make it properly tight. Work with both lines together as you tie this, and make sure both loops are the same size to assure a strong knot.

Albright Knot



One of the most reliable knots for tying together two lines of unequal diameter, the Albright works well when you have to tie the 15-pound test line on your rig to the 20-pound test you currently have on your [reel](#) spool or when tying monofilament backing to a fly line.

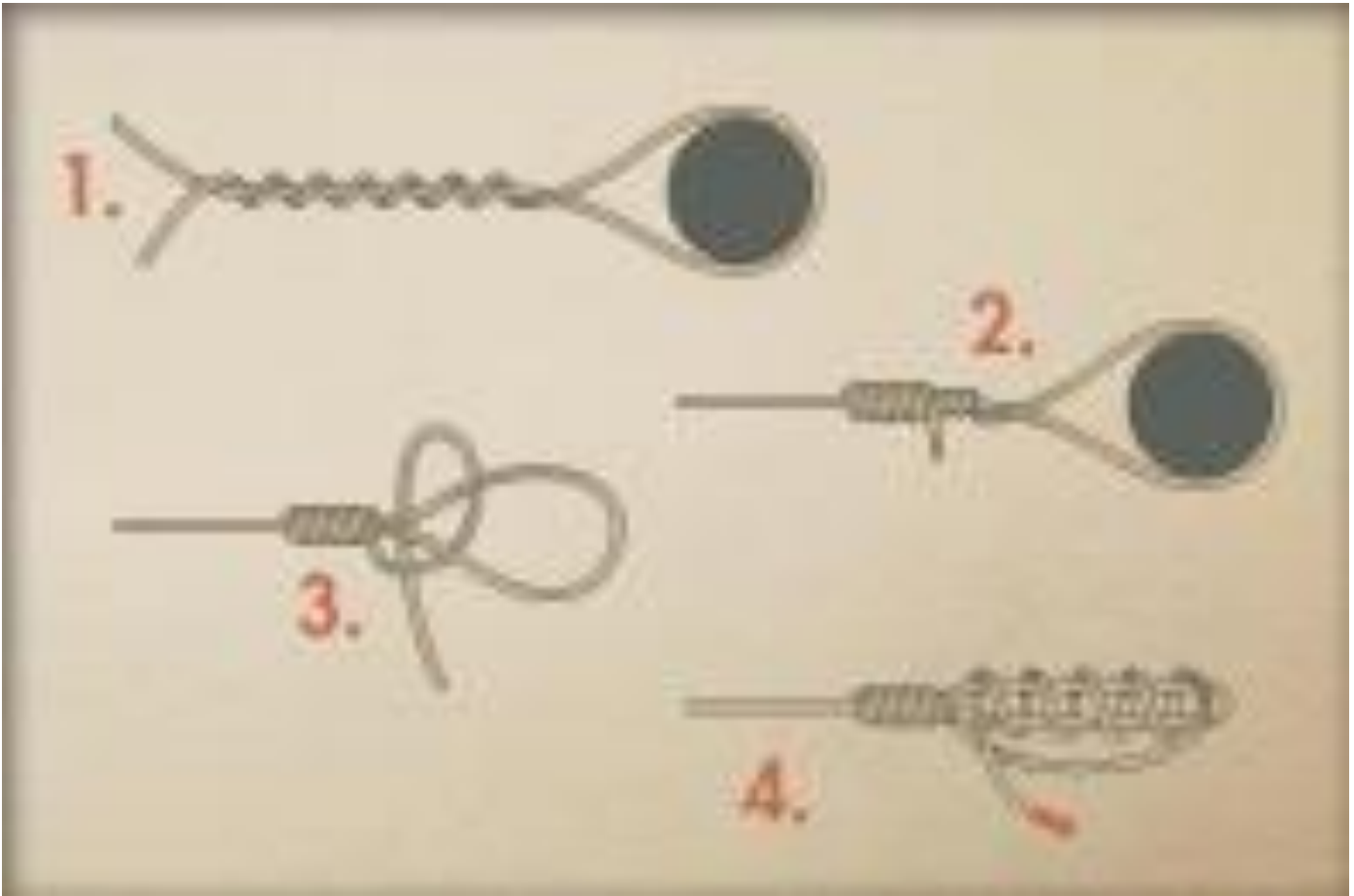
Surgeon's Loop



The surgeon' is Similar to the Surgeon's Knot for joining lines. It is tied the same as the Surgeon's knot but with a double strand. As such, this knot does use more line than most. It is a tad bulky but is great for making quick, strong loops at the end of lines and leaders for connecting to other loops.

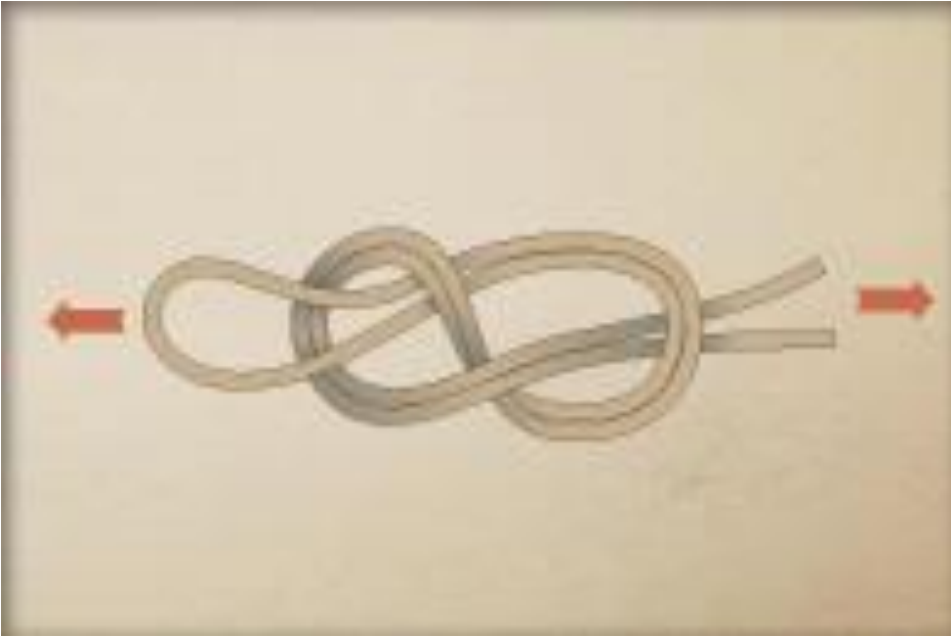
Fold over the tag end of line and form the knot using both strands to make a double overhand knot. Pull up carefully on both ends and the loop.

Bimini Twist Loop



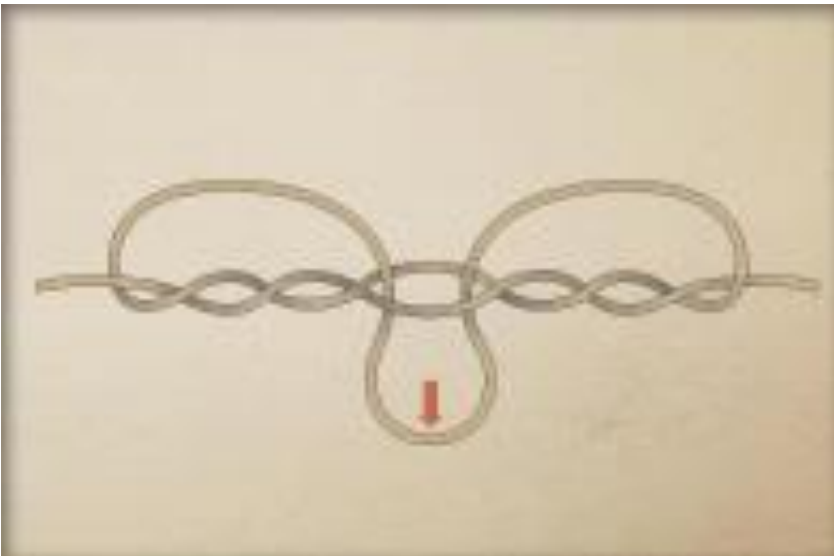
We'll go out on a limb here. This knot provides nearly 100 percent of original line strength. It's like a hangman's knot. It might take a lot of practice, but it's very, very effective. The Bimini twist knot is used for offshore trolling and sport fishing and the creation of double-line leaders. A Bimini twist creates a loop at the end of the line in which it is tied. The loop is secured at the top with a long barrel of coiled line created by the tying process. A Bimini twist loop is stronger than the line itself. It is one of the rare knots that do not weaken the line in which it is tied. It is a simple method of doubling your fishing line in order to prevent chaffing or to create the necessary loop in order to attach a wind-on leader without using strength in the mainline. Most people in the past have said the more turns the better.

Figure-Eight Loop



This loop knot is easy to tie. Fold over the tag end of line (leave lots of line for this) and then form a figure-eight bend with the two lines, ending by going through the first loop. As with the Surgeon's Loop, pull tight on the loop and both tag ends.

In-Line Dropper



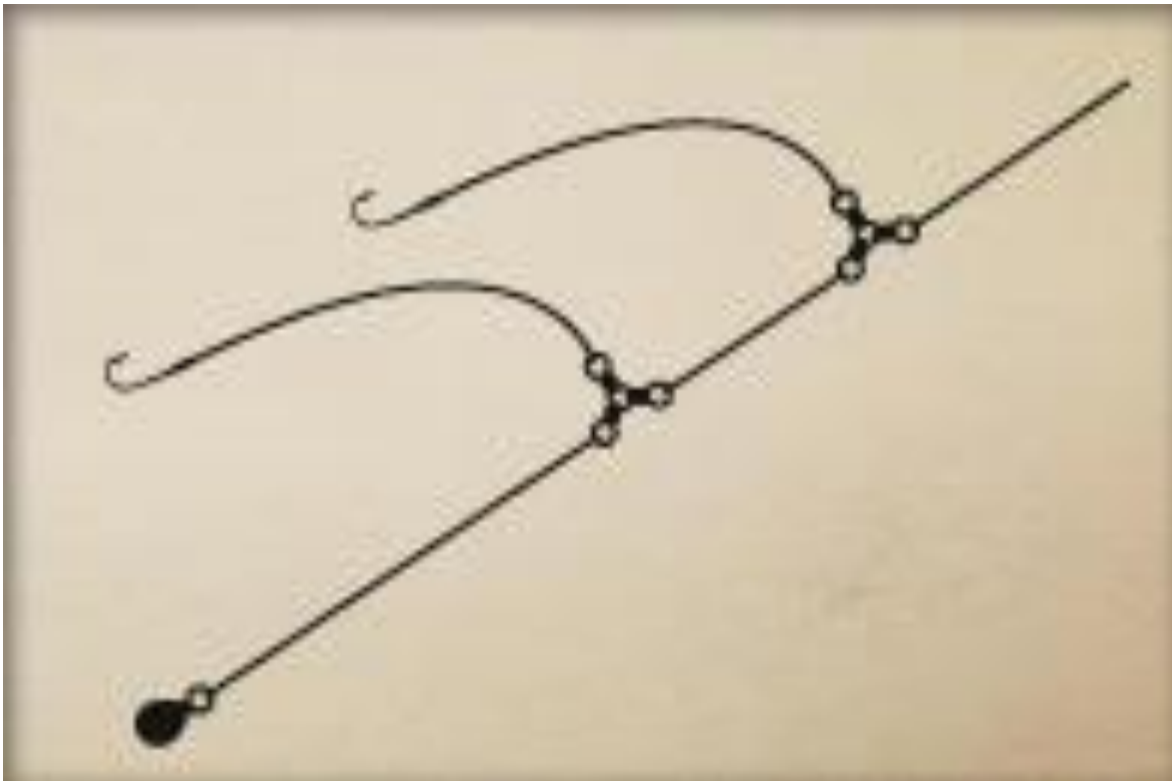
Use this knot to make a loop in the middle of your line to attach a [hook](#) or another rig. This knot is often used on multi-hook fishing lines. Fold the line back over itself to make a loop and then twist the two overlapping line sections four or five times. Pull the loop through this center twist. Pull tight.

Saltwater Fishing Knots

There are hundreds of saltwater fishing knots, but most anglers only need to know a handful of knots. A uni knot is easy to tie and very strong. It's good for connecting line to lures, snaps or swivels. A blood knot will join two similar pieces of line, but a bimini twist or an Albright knot is best for joining fishing lines of different diameters. Learn how to tie a dropper loop, and you'll be able to tie your own bottom rigs.

Saltwater Fishing Swivels, Snaps and Crimps

Fishing swivels, snaps and crimps are the weakest links in the fishing chain. Choosing the correct connectors will strengthen the system. The best fishing swivels use ball bearings to turn freely and increase strength. The latest generation of fishing swivels is ultra-small and very strong. Snap swivels are great for changing out lures or rigs without having to re-tie, but they are weaker than straight swivels. For heavy line (more than 100 pound test), metal crimps replace knots. Fishing swivels and snaps are rated by pound test or size number; be sure that the size of the connector matches or exceeds the pound test of the line.



Two Hook Bottom Rig

A two-hook bottom rig is probably the most versatile saltwater fishing rig. You can use a two-hook bottom rig to catch everything from pan fish to giant grouper.

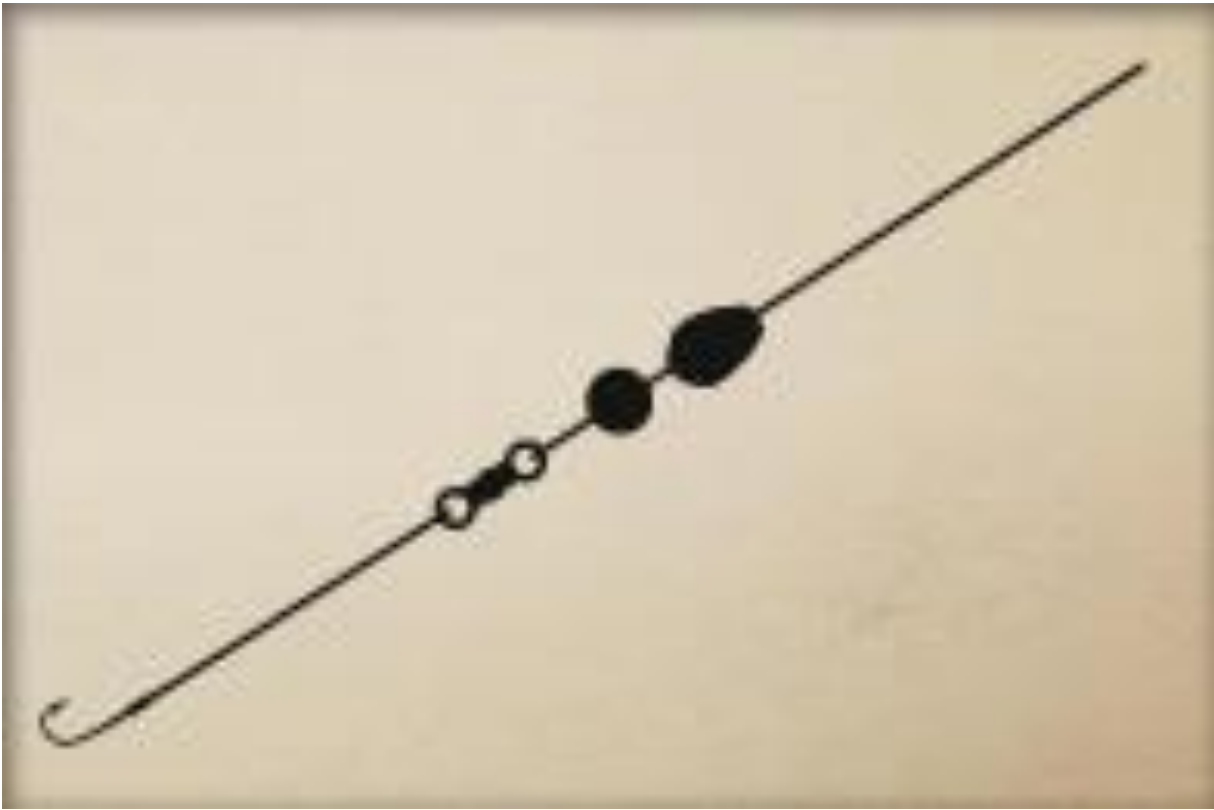
While premade saltwater fishing rigs are available, it is easy to tie your own. For smaller fish, start with an arm's length of 30- to 50-pound monofilament and tie four 2- to 3-inch dropper loops 3 to 4 inches apart. Attach a sinker to the bottom loop, a hook to each of the two middle loops, and the line running from your fishing reel to the top loop.

For larger fish, use 50- to 100-pound test leader, a snap swivel, two three-way swivels and a regular swivel. Tie a 6- to 8-inch piece of leader between the snap swivel and one of the three ways. From the second eye of the three-way, attach an 8- to 10-inch piece of leader and tie on the second three-way. Attach another 6- to 8-inch piece of leader to the second eye of the second three-way and tie on the swivel. From each of the remaining three-way eyes, tie a short piece of leader snelled to a hook. Make sure the leaders are short enough that the hooks don't become tangled. The hooks can be dressed up with bucktail hair, beads, spinners or floats to attract fish.



Three-way Rig

A three-way rig is similar to a two-hook bottom rig, except that it only has one hook. Start with a three-way swivel, tie a short piece of leader to one of the eyes, and then tie a longer piece to the other eye. The shorter piece of leader gets a sinker or jig, and the longer piece of leader gets a hook or another lure. The idea is that when the three-way is dropped, drifted or trolled, the lure or bait on the longer piece of leader hovers just over the bottom.



Carolina Rig or Fish finder Rig

A Carolina rig can be used with artificial or natural bait. This rig puts the bait close to the bottom while keeping it from getting hung up on the bottom. To make a Carolina rig, start by threading the main line through the hole in an egg sinker. Tie a swivel to the mainline and attach a 6- to 12-inch piece of leader that is snelled to a hook or artificial bait like a soft plastic or a jig. A Carolina rig works with egg sinkers up to 3 or 4 ounces. For a heavier weight, replace the egg sinker with a fish finder slide and clip on a heavier weight. To keep the sinker or fish finder from snagging on the terminal tackle, place a small plastic bead on the mainline between the weight and the swivel. The advantage of a Carolina rig or fish finder rig is that it allows the fish to pick up the bait without detecting the weight of the sinker.



Popping Cork

A popping cork preys on a fish's keen sense of sound and features a short piece of stiff wire threaded through a foam or cork float and a couple of metal or plastic beads. A loop at one end of the wire is tied to the mainline, while the loop at the other end is tied to a piece of leader long enough to dangle a jig or natural bait just over the bottom. A quick snap of the rod tip makes the float pop against the beads and causes the bait to hop below. Let the float settle before popping it again. This rig works best where shrimp or baitfish are popping on the surface.

Fishing line is the most important connection between you and your catch. Fortunately, today's saltwater fishing line is strong and subtle, capable of casting a long distance, transmitting the slightest tap, resisting abrasion and stopping a big fish. Fishing line is classified by "pound-test," or the pounds of pressure it takes to break the line.

The pound-test of the line you use is determined more by the amount of [drag pressure](#) you apply than it is by the size of the fish you might catch. Huge fish are caught on light line by anglers using little drag and a lot of patience. Lighter line will cast farther and sink faster, while heavier line is stronger and stiffer.

Look closely at line color, too. High-visibility saltwater fishing line is easier to see, but camouflaged or clear line will be virtually invisible to the fish. Once you've settled on the pound test and color of the line, the next step is to choose monofilament, fluorocarbon or braid.

Monofilament Saltwater Fishing Line

Monofilament, or mono, is the most popular fishing line for most applications. Mono is thin, strong and subtle. It is also water resistant and has good knot strength.

Monofilament is more abrasion-resistant than braided line, but it has greater width-to-pound test and stretches more than braid. The best mono will have a thin diameter and low memory, which means it doesn't retain loops when it comes off the spool. Look for line with the lowest diameter-to-pound test ratio for the best performance.

Monofilament will break down when exposed to direct sunlight and should be changed every six months to a year depending on how often it is used.

Braided Saltwater Fishing Line

Unlike mono, braided lines are made by fusing several strands of fibers together. Braided lines are stronger per diameter than monofilament — you can often get 60 pounds of breaking strength in braided line that has the same diameter as 30-pound test monofilament. For this reason, braided line will cast farther and cut through the water faster than mono. Unlike mono, braided lines do not break down in the sun and salt so they last longer. Braid also has very low stretch and is very sensitive, making it perfect for bottom fishing. On the other hand, low-stretch line does not work well for trolling and requires a lighter drag setting and softer hand (less aggressive technique) when fighting fish.

Fluorocarbon Saltwater Fishing Line

Fluorocarbon is a new type of fishing line. The major advantage of fluorocarbon line over mono and braid is that it has very low light refraction, making it virtually invisible underwater. Fluorocarbon is stiffer than mono and more abrasion resistant. It is also denser, meaning that it sinks faster. For the most part, fluorocarbon line is used for tying [leaders](#) to saltwater fishing lines. Fluorocarbon is stiffer than mono, making it difficult to use to tie knots. It also breaks down in sunlight, losing its strength and invisibility.

Wire

Wire is an effective leader material when facing toothy fish. You can also use wire or lead-core line to troll bait deep in the water. Wire comes in two varieties: braided and single strand. Single strand is thinner and stronger than braided wire, but it doesn't bend well. Braided wire is easy to work with and bends easily enough to be tied in knots and used as main line. Situations that require you to troll at a specific depth require lead-core line.

Spooling Fishing Line

Spooling saltwater fishing line is more difficult than it may seem. For the best results, take your reels to a pro shop to have them filled. For do-it-yourselfers, the key is to keep the line from twisting. To spool a [saltwater spinning reel](#), lay the spool on the floor, run the line through the guides on the rod, and use an arbor knot to attach the line to the reel spool. Before tying braid fishing line to the spool, wrap a short piece of electrical tape around the arbor of the reel to prevent the line from slipping. Pinch the line between your fingers in front of the reel and turn the reel handle to put a dozen wraps on the spool.

To test if the saltwater fishing line is going on correctly, drop your [saltwater fishing rod](#) tip to put slack in the line. If the fishing line starts to twist and spin into loops, then it is twisting. Flip the feeder spool over and continue to fill the reel. To fill a conventional [saltwater fishing reel](#), place a pencil through the center of the feeder spool and hold it so the line comes off the top of the spool. Always wind the fishing line under pressure and fill the reel to one-eighth of an inch below the top of the spool. Be sure to recycle your old monofilament and dispose of braided line so that it doesn't get into the water.

Setting the Drag

Drag is the amount of pressure that the reel applies to the line when a fish is pulling on it and should be set at one-third the pound-test of the line. For example, 30-pound line can handle 10 pounds of drag. To set the drag, put the rod in a holder and pull on the line with a hand scale. Tighten the drag until the scale indicates the desired amount of pressure.

Hooks are the unsung heroes of fishing. So much thought goes into rigs, lures, rods and reels that most take their saltwater fishing hooks for granted. But the rest is a waste without good saltwater hooks. In some cases, you may be required by law to use a specific type of hook.

Fishing hook size is measured at the gap between the [point](#) and the [shank](#). When considering what size and shape hook to use, consider the size and shape of the bait and the fish. Fish with small mouths will require small hooks. If you are using small pieces of bait or live bait, even for big fish, you may still want to use a small hook, as a larger hook may be difficult to hide in a small piece of cut bait, or could hinder the action of a live bait.

Saltwater fish hook sizes start at a tiny No. 32 and run up to a huge 19/0. From size 32 to 1, saltwater hook size increases while the number decreases. From size 1/0 to 19/0, the hook size increases along with the number. There is no standard in hook sizes, so one brand's 3/0 may be larger than that of another brand. While saltwater fishing hooks come in many sizes and shapes, they are generally made out of two materials: stainless steel or high-carbon steel. The first is corrosion-resistant but brittle, while the second will rust but is more forgiving of bends and twists. Both require care and maintenance to sustain. Sharpen fishing hooks with a file or hook sharpener and always rinse them with fresh water and coat with light oil between uses to help extend use.



J-hooks

J-hooks come in different styles for different types of saltwater fishing. Choose a hook that matches the size of the [saltwater fishing bait](#) you will use and the size of the fish that you will target. Some styles of J-hook work better with a particular species of fish. For example, summer flounder anglers prefer Kahle hooks because flat fish have a mouth that closes horizontally. Bait fishermen usually choose long-shank saltwater fishing hooks that are easy to remove from a fish's mouth. Some types of hooks are specially designed to work with a particular type of bait. For example, offshore anglers use O'Shaughnessy hooks to rig ballyhoo baits. The width of the fishing hook's wire is also important. Use beefy hooks for big fish; a thinner wire on delicate baits like shrimp or worms. Hooks for artificial [saltwater fishing lures](#) are specially designed to work with a particular type of lure. Still, you may want to change the factory hooks with a different size or style hook to match your type of fishing. [Saltwater fishing jigs](#) should have a hook that matches the size of the trailer that you'll use. When striking a fish with a J-hook, lift the rod tip straight up while reeling in any slack in the line. To avoid deep-hooking a fish (getting the hook down into the fish's gut or gills rather than just the mouth), set the hook at the slightest tap on the line before the fish has a chance to swallow the bait.



Circle Fishing Hooks

The birth of catch-and-release fishing spawned the invention of circle fishing hooks. These are shaped so that the point turns toward the hook shank, almost making a circle. Circle hooks are mostly used with live or cut saltwater fishing bait because the shape of the hook keeps it from becoming lodged in the fish's gut. When a fish swallows a bait on a circle fishing hook and swims away, the line pulls the hook out of the fish's stomach and into its mouth, where it will catch in the jaw. Circle hooks are almost foolproof. Instead of jerking the rod to set the hook, simply apply steady pressure until the hook finds its way into the fish's mouth. Studies have shown that circle hooks dramatically reduce the number of fish that die after being released. In some fisheries, the use of circle hooks is even required by law. When fishing with natural baits, circle hooks just make sense.



Treble Fishing Hooks

Treble fishing hooks work by snagging the fish when it hits a bait. Treble fishing hooks are sized the same way as other hooks, but it usually takes a smaller treble hook to catch the same size fish as a circle or J-hook. Most [plugs](#) use treble hooks so that when the fish realizes it has eaten a lure instead of a real fish, it is already hooked. Still, many anglers switch treble hooks for J-hooks on their lures to help protect the fish and their fingers. To change out the hooks, you'll need a pair of split-ring pliers. Use the finger at the end of the pliers to pry apart the wires on the split-ring, and then remove the old hook just like taking a key off a key ring.

Fishing sinkers get the bait into the feeding zone. Whether [saltwater trolling](#), drifting or fishing at anchor, sinkers of different sizes and shapes will put the bait at different depths in the water column. The general rule of thumb is to use the lightest sinker that will keep the bait in the feeding zone. Saltwater fishing sinkers are just as specialized as hooks and rigs. Most are made out of lead, but some anglers are experimenting with biodegradable sinkers made with pressurized iron oxide, and even clear models made from silica crystal. Regardless of size, shape or content, using the right sinker will put your bait in the feeding zone.



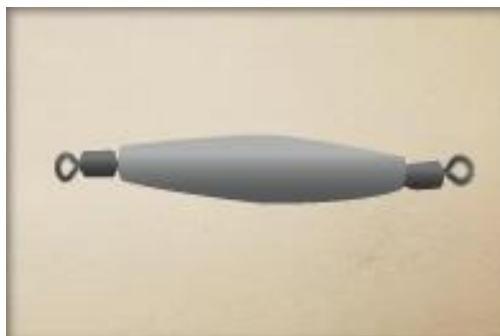
Bank Sinkers

Bank sinkers are usually used to put a bait close to the bottom. Most are round or bell-shaped so they don't get snagged in the structure. Some bank sinkers connect to the line with a swivel to reduce line twist. Others feature sharp edges and points to stick in soft sand or have wires that stick out and hold like an anchor. Bank sinkers can either be tied to the end of the rig or attached to a fish finder slide above the hook. The objective of a bank sinker is to stay on the bottom without getting stuck in the bottom.



Egg Sinkers

Fish will avoid a bait if they detect anything suspicious. Use an egg sinker to keep the fish from detecting the weight of the sinker when it picks up the bait. An egg sinker is shaped like an egg and has a hole running through it. Pass the line through the sinker and tie on the rig. When the fish picks up the bait, the line passes through the sinker and the fish doesn't feel the weight. Egg sinkers work best with live or cut bait because you can let the fish eat the bait before setting the hook.



Trolling Sinkers

Use a trolling sinker to troll baits at different depths. Trolling sinkers are long and slender and pass through the water easily. The best models have [swivels](#) at either end to keep the sinker from twisting the line. How much lead you use depends on how fast

you are trolling and the size of your bait. Use a long leader to keep the sinker as far as possible from the bait. To get a bait even deeper, use a planer, which features a metal wing that pulls the line deep in the water. When a fish hits the bait, it trips the wing and the angler can fight the fish. Another way to troll a bait deep is to use a downrigger. A downrigger consists of a short boom and winch attached with cable to a heavy lead ball. The fishing line is clipped to the ball and dropped to the desired depth with the boom and winch. Regardless of how you troll, use high-quality bearing swivels at all connections to avoid line twists.



Split-shot Sinkers

You can pinch one of these small balls of lead on the leader above the hook to carry the bait a few feet under the surface. Split-shot sinkers work best with small baits, light line or low current.

Special Sinkers

Many types of fishing require special types of sinkers. Salmon anglers in California, for example, use breakaway sinkers that drop from their line when a fish hits the bait. Fishermen who are slow-trolling live baits use big jig heads, while those fishing over rocky terrain may use slender sinkers. Whatever type of saltwater fishing you do, there is a sinker that will keep your bait in the feeding zone.

When choosing saltwater lures or bait, consider how fish feed. Fish detect a meal in three ways — by scent, sound and movement. Fish use sound to communicate and find prey. Since sound travels faster through water than through air, fish can hear friends and food or saltwater lures that are a long way off. Scent is another powerful weapon for fish; they can pick up one particle of scent and use it to hone in on prey, communicate danger or navigate through the water. Fish actually have a sixth sense that humans do not. The lateral line running down each side of a fish is filled with tiny hairs that can detect movement in the water. A fish can pick up a moving object, such as a fishing lure or bait, even in complete darkness. Just before it strikes, the fish will use sight to check out its victim. Even in clear water, fish can only see about 15 feet, but they can see colors and shapes. Finally, a fish will use its highly sensitive sense of taste to verify that what it has eaten is actually edible. To fool a fish, you must first fool all of its senses.



Live Saltwater Fishing Bait

When trying to trick a fish, nothing beats live fishing bait. Live bait may be hard to catch and hard to keep, but it's hard to beat when targeting finicky fish. Whether you catch live bait with a hook or a net, avoid touching the bait before putting it on the hook. The live well in which you store your bait should simulate current, oxygen content and temperature of the bait's natural environment. You can transport bait short distances in a bucket with a battery-operated aerator. When fishing with live bait, use the lightest hooks, leader and line possible to avoid further stressing the fish. Passing the hook through the bait fish's lips, eye sockets or nostrils will allow it to swim most naturally. Hooking the bait in front of the dorsal fin will encourage the bait to swim down. For delicate baitfish, tie a bridal out of rigging floss to hold the hook.

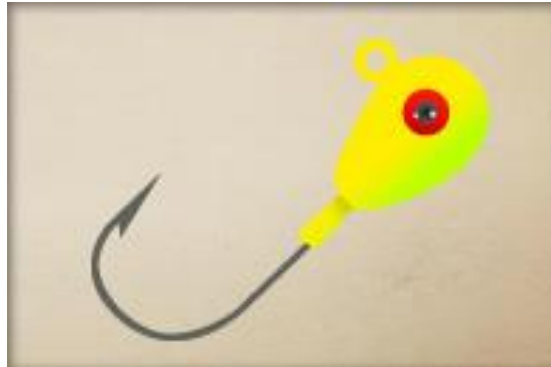


Cut Bait

The next best thing to live bait is cut bait; however, cut bait can be as difficult to obtain and maintain as the live version. Use the freshest saltwater fishing bait you can find. Natural fishing bait should be firm and smell fresh. Fish that will be used for cut bait should have clear eyes and red gills. Frozen bait should be vacuum-packed and free from freezer burn. Keep the bait on ice in a well-drained cooler. Typically, it's best to use the smallest piece of bait that you can get on the hook. Larger chunks give fish the opportunity to nibble the bait off the hook. To keep the bait from falling off, try to run the hook through bone, skin or shell. The rule for any bait is: If you wouldn't eat it, then neither will the fish.

Scented Saltwater Fishing Baits

In the last few years, scientists have developed artificial saltwater fishing baits laced with powerful fish attractants. Scented fishing baits come in a variety of shapes and sizes, from popular trailers for jigs to flat sheets for cut bait. These soft plastic baits last longer than natural bait and don't require refrigeration. Always keep a scented bait in the liquid it came in, and never leave it on your hook or it will harden like a rock and become impossible to remove.



Lead-headed Jigs:

Jigs are probably the most popular artificial saltwater fishing lure. Consisting of a hook with a lead head and a trailer, jigs imitate everything from saltwater bait fish to crustaceans to invertebrates. A streamlined jig head will sink faster, while a wider head will flutter down or work higher in the water column. A jig with deer hair tied to its head is called a bucktail. The size of the hook on the jig should match the size of the trailer. Thread the trailer on the jig so that the hook comes out of the trailer ahead of the bend. When using a strip bait trailer, pass the hook once through the wide end of the trailer. The newest generation of jigs, which feature squid-shaped heads and living-rubber skirts, make great saltwater fishing lures. "Living rubber" is extremely pliant, soft rubber that moves in a lifelike manner. Drop one of these rubber jigs to the bottom and crank it up a few feet, then pause for a few seconds before dropping it again. Fish see the jig hovering over the bottom and come in to investigate. They will often nibble their way up the skirt to the hook, so use a light drag and a soft-tipped rod to feed the fish.



Metal Jigs

Metal jigs can be bounced across the bottom or cast out and worked back. Deeper jigs will be narrow, while casting jigs are wider. It is a good idea to add a short piece of leader and a swivel to the jig to keep it from twisting the line. The latest generation of jigs, called vertical jigs, is designed to be worked through the water very quickly while jerking the rod up and down. These jigs usually have a hook attached to a short piece of braided line and a split ring at the top of the jig. Always tie a leader to the split ring on these jigs so that when you're fighting a fish, you're not also fighting the weight of the jig.



Poppers

Popping plugs, or "poppers," are saltwater fishing lures that splash across the surface, drawing a reaction bite from aggressive predators, and work best at dawn and dusk when fish are more likely to feed on the surface. To work a popper, reel at a steady pace while jerking the rod tip to make the lure splash and chug. "Walking the Dog" is a special technique used with torpedo-shaped top water plugs. Hold the rod with the tip pointing toward the water and retrieve line while jerking the tip from left to right, making the fishing lure zigzag across the surface.



Plug Fishing Lures

Plug fishing lures are carved out of wood or molded out of plastic to imitate the shape and action of a swimming fish. Some plugs use a plastic or metal lip to dive deeper. Other plugs use rattles, even lights and electronic vibrations, to attract fish. Most plugs are specially designed to troll or retrieve at a specific speed. Since plugs get their action from their design, they don't usually require any extra action from you. Simply cast the plug out and retrieve at a steady pace. Offshore anglers troll big plugs with hard plastic heads and rubber skirts. These lures can be rigged with a natural bait or left bare.



Spoon Fishing Lures

Like the name implies, spoons are metal saltwater fishing lures that are usually wider at one end and concave so they wobble and flash like a swimming fish. Spoon lures come in two styles: casting and trolling. Casting spoon lures are heavier than trolling spoons so they can be thrown a long distance. Trolling spoons are either high speed or slow speed. High-speed spoon lures are narrower and heavier than slow-speed models.

If you're trolling a spoon behind a weight, use a long leader to get the lure far away from the other tackle. Casting spoons work great when you need to imitate small bait, as they can be cast out and retrieved, or dropped to the bottom and bounced. Casting and trolling spoons should be used with high-quality snaps and swivels to avoid line twist.



Spinner baits

Stealing a tactic from the freshwater playbook, saltwater anglers are using spinner baits on a variety of inshore species. Featuring a lead head, wire arm and metal blade, a spinner bait does not look like anything that swims; instead, it fools a fish's sense of sound and movement. The lead head is usually dressed with a soft plastic jig or rubber skirt. The arm and blade should be made out of non-corrosive material. Cast out a spinner bait and work it quickly to propel it across the surface, or retrieve it slowly to drag the jig along the bottom.



Soft Plastic Lures

Soft plastic lures come in a variety of colors, shapes and sizes and can be used in many ways. Twister tails and shad bodies make good lure additions to jigs and buck tails. Flukes also look good as a trailer, or they can be rigged on a hook without any weight to sink slowly or shoot across the surface. Swim baits feature a lead-head jig molded inside a soft plastic body. Use a soft plastic that matches the size of the bait. These baits come in a variety of colors, sizes and shapes. Bright colors work best on sunny days while darker colors present a better silhouette against overcast or dark skies. Soft plastics can be cast and retrieved, dropped to the bottom and bounced, even used in place of live or cut bait. The only limit to the way soft plastics can be used is your own imagination.

To survive in salt water, your saltwater fishing tools have to be as tough as the fish and the conditions. Nets, gaffs, pliers and hook removers need to come together to land the fish of a lifetime.



Saltwater Fishing Gaffs and Nets

If you're planning on keeping a fish, nothing puts it in the box faster than a gaff. Fishing gaffs come in various hook sizes and handle lengths; the best fishing gaffs have a tapered aluminum handle, non-slip grips and a triangular point. Short gaffs are effective for handling big fish close to the boat, while longer gaffs are good for reaching out and grabbing a smaller fish. The size of the hook bite should match the size of the fish that will be gaffed. For really big fish, use a flying gaff with a detachable hook that is attached to a rope. A gaff should only be used when you plan to keep a fish. If you will be releasing the fish, use a landing net or a pair of wet gloves. The size of the landing net should match the size of the fish that you are aiming to land. Look for a fishing net with a wide hoop, double-walled aluminum handle, and deep net. Fishing nets with rubber mesh help protect the fish's slime coat and scales if it will be released after landing. With increased catch limits and conservation efforts, [catch-and-release](#) fishing is more popular than ever. While lip grippers aren't the best tool for landing a fish, they work well for holding and releasing the fish without putting your fingers in its gills or mouth. Look for a lip gripper that is constructed out of non-corrosive aluminum or stainless steel. Many lip grippers also have a fish scale incorporated into the handle. Clip the lip gripper on the fish's lower jaw, but never hold a fish vertically by the lip gripper. This can damage the fish's organs and jaw. Instead, support the belly of the fish with a wet glove on your free hand.



Saltwater Fishing Pliers and Scissors

A good pair of saltwater pliers incorporates a half-dozen tools to do everything from cut wire to tighten knots and remove hooks. First, to avoid corrosion, saltwater pliers should be made of stainless steel or titanium. Shorter, more compact saltwater pliers provide power for removing hooks or cutting thick wire. Longer, needle-nose pliers can get into tight places for delicate work. All fishing pliers combine jaws for gripping and blades for cutting. The best saltwater pliers will have replaceable cutting blades. Multi-tools may also incorporate screwdrivers, knives, scissors and other tools. To replace hooks on plugs and jigs, use a pair of split-ring pliers. For big-game fishing, crimping pliers will snug down metal crimps and cut heavy monofilament and wire. A good pair of scissors is another indispensable tool for cutting line and bait.



Saltwater Fishing Knives

A razor-sharp knife with a high-carbon steel blade makes cleaning fish and cutting bait quick and easy. A short, stout knife will make quick work of cut bait. When preparing fish for bait, look for a knife with a serrated edge. A longer knife with a thinner blade will fillet and skin a fish. When there is a pile of fish to clean, nothing beats an electric fillet knife. For fish that will be cooked whole, use a scaling and gutting tool.



Saltwater Hook Remover

Sometimes getting the hook out of a fish can be harder than getting the hook into the fish. Hook-removal tools make the job quick and safe. With toothy saltwater fish, removing the hook with your hands or even a pair of pliers can be dangerous. When releasing a fish, it is best to remove the hook without even taking the fish out of the water. The latest generation of hook-removal tools works beautifully. Long-handled tools pop the hook out while the fish is still in the water. Shorter tools remove the hook and drop the fish in the ice box with a flick of the wrist. Both styles of tool remove the hook by using the fish's weight to back the barb out of the hole in its jaw.

A good saltwater rod and reel are the foundation for successful saltwater fishing. Today's saltwater rods and reels are high-tech tools that use space-age materials and precision workmanship to handle tough elements and tough fish. When purchasing a saltwater rod, consider the length, power and action you need. Longer rods cast farther, while shorter rods provide more power for fighting fish. Action is rated from "fast" for a rod that is stiff to "slow" for a rod that bends all the way to the handle. "Power" is the weight that the rod can lift from light to extra heavy. Rods are also categorized by the pound-test line or lure weight that they are designed to work with. Most saltwater fishing rods are made of graphite or fiberglass. Graphite rods are stiffer and more sensitive, while fiberglass fishing rods are tougher and more powerful. Saltwater fishing reels are classified as high-speed or low-speed. High-speed reels use a gear ratio greater than 6:1 to retrieve baits at breakneck speed. Low-speed reels, with a ratio less than 4:1, offer more power for fighting big fish. Some reels allow anglers to switch from high speed to low speed with the push of a button. Another quality to consider when picking out a reel is line capacity, which will usually be marked on the body of the reel in feet or yards per pound test of line. Drag pressure is measured in pounds and should be adjusted to one-third the breaking strength of the line. Use a saltwater reel that matches the recommended line weight marked on the rod. To pick the right rod for the type of saltwater fishing you want to do, look at the recommended lure weight and match it to the size bait or lure you intend to use.



Spinning Rod and Reel

Spinning gear uses a spinning reel with a fixed spool that is mounted below the spinning rod. Because the spool of the spinning reel is stationary, it is more difficult for the angler to tangle the line when casting. A spinning rod will have wider guides to catch the large loops of line leaving the spool on the cast.

Many anglers prefer spinning reels for working lures such as top-water poppers and high-speed plugs. Also, spinning reels can cast lighter saltwater lures and baits than conventional reels. To fish with a spinning reel, hold the rod and reel in your dominant hand and crank the handle with the other hand. Most spinning reels have handles that are easy to change from left handed to right handed. Spinning reels suffer from loops in the line called "wind knots" when the line becomes twisted or is not retrieved under pressure. This problem can usually be solved by adding a small swivel between the line and the leader.

When spooling line on a spinning rod, lay the spool on the floor so that the line is leaving the spool in the same direction that it is going onto the reel. To test if the line is going on correctly, pinch the line between your thumb and forefinger and make a dozen cranks of the reel handle. Then, stop winding line and drop the rod tip to put slack in the line. If the line starts to spin and twist, then you're putting it on in the wrong direction. Simply flip the spool over and continue to fill the reel.



Saltwater Bait casting Rods and Reels

Bait casting reels hold more line, cast farther and produce smoother drag than spinning reels; however, bait casting reels are more difficult to cast.

A bait casting reel has a revolving spool and sits on top of the bait casting rod, which has smaller eyes than a spinning rod. Bait casting reels work well where long casts or big baits are necessary. Also, bait casting reels are better for bottom fishing and jigging. Reels with a closed face and line guide are used for working lighter lures and baits. Open-face reels without a line guide work better for casting or jigging because the line can be let out and retrieved more quickly. One potential problem with bait casting rods and reels comes when casting. If the spool is turning faster than the line is leaving the rod, the line gets backed up and explodes into a tangled mess called a "bird's nest." If the backlash isn't too severe, it can usually be picked out by pulling line off the reel.

To slow your cast, most bait casting reels have either a magnetic, centrifugal or electronic cast control. But even with the best cast control, you still need to learn to use your thumb to slow the speed of the spool.

Saltwater Trolling

A saltwater trolling rod is a beefed-up version of its bait casting cousin with a revolving spool reel that sits on top of the rod.

Saltwater trolling reels typically use a lever drag system instead of a star drag. This allows you to set the maximum drag, and then adjust the amount of pressure with a lever on the side of the saltwater trolling reel. These reels also carry a lot of line and have large bodies to handle the extreme pressure of fighting a big fish. Saltwater trolling rods are shorter and stouter than casting rods with a notched butt that fits into the gimbal on a fighting belt or chair. Saltwater trolling rods either use high-strength round eyes or roller guides to support the line. Saltwater trolling rods and reels are categorized by the line-test that they are intended to support. A 20-pound combo will tackle smaller fish including sailfish, dolphin and white marlin; while a 130-pound outfit will subdue monster billfish and Bluefin tuna. Saltwater trolling rods used for stand-up fishing will usually be shorter with a longer butt, while rods made to be used in a fighting chair will be longer with a shorter butt. Lighter action trolling combos also make good heavy-duty bottom fishing and bait fishing rods.

Saltwater Jigging Rods and Reels

Fishing with metal jigs is one of the oldest tricks in the book, but in recent years the method has taken on a new life with the invention of vertical and rubber jigs. Vertical jigging uses high-speed rods and reels to retrieve a streamlined metal lure at top speeds. On the other hand, rubber jigs are designed to bounce slowly and hover off the bottom. These techniques require specialized tackle to either work a lure very quickly or very slowly.

For vertical jigging, use a medium-fast spinning or casting rod with a whippy tip that will quickly retrieve the jig. Vertical jigs require high-speed reels with a retrieve ratio of 6:1 or faster that can hold hundreds of yards of braided line. Rubber jigs, on the other hand, are designed to move slowly and hover over their target. These jigs require an 8-foot, light-action rod that allows the fish to nibble its way to the hook without feeling any resistance. A reel with a slow retrieve ratio (below 5:1) will apply steady pressure to set the hook. Braided line and a highly sensitive rod will allow the angler to feel the slightest tap of a fish.