

Fishing Weights: Which should I use?

There is a lot to learn about fishing. There are things to learn about how to catch fish, what fish you're likely to catch, when you're most likely to catch one, and who else is crazy enough to go out regardless of bad weather, no time to really do it, and an addiction to the sport and lifestyle. There is tackle, there are accessories, and there are sunglasses. Among the many accessories and tackle items, Fishing Weights are something we should all learn more about. Even in the sport of Fly Fishing – where anglers use feathers – weighted fly-line is utilized. In addition, many fly anglers use split-shots to add small amounts of weight to the line.



This image from Amazon.com shows two multi-pack of small 'split-shot' fishing weights.

Types of Fishing Weights

There are many different fishing weights. So many, in fact, that to really understand them, it is better to split them into general major categories. There are only three things that a sinker (weight) can do. Let's assume they all sink in one way or another. Fishing weights never float. They might not sink far, but they never float. Sinkers are designed to do one of three things:

Inline

They are literally tied onto your leader or are tied (or otherwise connected) in between your line and leader. You can drop them alongside the dock or pier you're fishing from and they will sink as far as you let them, but they're really designed to cast, to let flow with the tide almost invisibly, or to be cast with a lure or a bait hanging onto them on a leader.

- Split Shot
- Torpedo Leads of various designs

Bouncing, Hanging, and Rolling Fishing Weights

This category of fishing weights include things like Bell Weights, which we use for connecting to the bottom of Sabiki Rigs, which are small leaders with six or more tiny hooks attached and are used to catch baitfish for freshwater and saltwater fishing. These kinds of fishing weights come in other shapes such as round ones and flat round disks. They are very effective if you want a bait to stay on the bottom but also want it to move with the tide. Increasing or decreasing the weight lets you fine-tune the bounce-rate the sinker allows for the bait. It's a real skill to use them right, but if you learn, you can catch fish such as Pompano that hang exactly near the bottom of pilings and must be presented baits at exactly the pace of the water current at that location.



This "bell weight" is inexpensive and effective. You can use them for fishing with sabikis and anytime you want bait to stay down in the water column but also keep it moving with the tide.

Fishing with Weights That Stick to the Bottom...

The third category of fishing weights lets you stick baits (live or dead) to the bottom. They are meant to sink the bait to the bottom underneath your boat and keep the bait there. They can be much heavier than they need to be to work, because they are not designed to cast. That is not to say you cannot cast them though. Surf fishing – a place many of us learned to fish from – are ideal places to cast a pyramid sinker like we show here and have it stay exactly where you meant to put it. They are ideal for situations like surf fishing, where wave action will move a bell lead inshore to your feet in 30 seconds when the wind's blowing right. You must choose the proper weight for the intended purpose. Pyramids are the last weight you want on coral, where the sharp corners will get you stuck or rip the living coral off the reef. Ask for help on our forums and you will find advice you can trust.



You can find pyramid sinkers like this at any tackle shop. They're inexpensive, and when you put them in the water they sink and stick to the bottom where they land. If they are too light they will not prove effective, but do not choose them heavier than they need to be. Surf fishing is a great place to try them. You can cast them beyond the waves and reach the ridges that are normally there and that often hold fish looking for food.

Different Types of Inline Fishing Weights

There are a few popular inline fishing weights you can start with:

Split Shot

Split-shots are the most popular – to us at least – of all the fishing weights in the world. Not really sinkers, they're meant to add just a little bit of weight to the line – often just to the leader. You can use ones of different sizes (they come pretty big, actually) but it's usually better to use only the weight you need to accomplish what you're trying to do.

You do not want baits or lures flying through a strong current so fast they pass by the fish, but you also do not want them laying on the bottom. You need to control where the bait sits in the water column and how fast it moves in current. You can start with one split-shot, add one or two, and change the presentation of a bait.

The best way to start with them is to get a box with different sizes. Also – be sure to get the ones you can pinch on and off! The other ones are no good and getting them on and off will break your teeth and really test your patience. We've used them, but we've also cut off the hook to slide them off and had to re-tie the knots. That's what sucks about them.



Eagle Claw Split Shot Sinker Assortment.

Torpedo Weights:

Torpedo weights come with and without attached swivels. One of the pinch weights is actually a torpedo – and one we use to get baits deeper in the water column when we're scouting tarpon in the spring and summer. We start with a small pinch torpedo and a live threadfin behind the boat being pulled by the outgoing or incoming tide. A lighter weight will let us keep the live bait higher and near the surface, and if that doesn't draw a strike, we un-pinch one and pinch on a larger and heavier torpedo. The ones with the rings and swivels are cool, but changing them requires cutting and retying two knots – too much work for us.



Torpedoes come in a lot of different sizes and shapes, but some very cool ones we use are the colored ones on the upper left. It makes us want to paint some of our regular old lead ones -- with the swivels attached like the one on the upper right. Pinch weights like the ones on the left make for rapid change when you're trolling, and the standard on the lower right with fixed rings works perfectly, but they do require more tying than pinches do.

Overall Thoughts About Inline Fishing Weights

The video we started this article with shows you that even fly anglers can use fishing weights. It's all about where the fish you're targeting is at when you're out there fishing for them. Some species only occupy specific places in the water; others move around and will eat bait floating on the surface on a sunny day.

Bouncing and sliding sinkers are designed to perform two actions:

1. Sliders: Let your leaders slide through them. This allows a fish to pick up a bait, run away with it, and not feel the weight of the sinker until you set the hook. These are the sliders.
2. Bouncers: They are firmly connected to your line or leader, but they weigh just enough to allow the water to move them on the bottom. These are the bouncers.

Different Types of Slider and Bouncing Sinkers

There are times when you want the bait near the bottom, but also want it to move with the tide and current at a specific speed. Since the length of your line in the water imparts its own pull, the bait or lure attached to it is often pulled as the line forms a large loop being pushed by the current. To overcome for this extra push from the line, a coin (and similar) fishing weight will let an angler put enough lead (weight) on to compensate for the extra push but still move at the right speed.

Coins

Using a coin or a similar bouncing weight will take some time and practice. Fish that live near the bottom – like the huge redfish and black drum that sometimes populate the big bridges in spring and fall as they transition between seasons, want naturally moving baits.



The one on the left is a Coin, middle is a Bank sinker, on the right is a Pear or Bug.

You might be pleasantly surprised if you try a coin for pompano, to get the crab (bait) to bounce properly in a specific tidal flow, or how a bug can be used in a river to perfectly match the flow of the water to the presentation of the bait. Experience comes from time on the water trying new stuff. The beauty of fishing is that there are no rules -- whether we're talking about which fishing weight is best for what fish, or we are talking about how hard it is to catch a snook on a flyrod. But people do it.

Egg or Ball Sinkers:

Egg and Ball Sinkers are designed to let the line (or leader) slide through them. This is the one sinker we use that we do not attach to the leader or between the leader and the line (like we do with trolling torpedoes with swivels on them). When we rig this weight, we slide the main fishing line through the hole and tie on a swivel.

We use egg and ball sinkers for Fishfinder rigs – the most valuable bottom-fishing rig in the world. The rig will work anywhere for any fish that look down or pick up bait from the bottom. They come with fixed rings and swivels, but we like the kind with holes in them. We use a toothpick to stabilize them and keep the line from sliding through them. The slide and freedom of the bait is what makes the bait so natural to hungry fish.



If you want the fish to not feel the weight, consider using an Egg or Ball sinker without the swivels. For deep-water fish like Grouper and Snapper, keeping the slack out of the line seems more effective.

Finding the Correct Slider

The right weight for the rig you're fishing at the time -- and the ones you like the most -- largely depends on the fish you're targeting and your experience. Weights meant to bounce on the bottom or slide on your line all do it right; but feel them out and try a few different kinds before you decide what to rely on. Pear and egg sinkers all work well. Bank sinkers in one size can bounce, but if you use one that is heavy enough, it will stick to the bottom as hard as a pyramid. The difference is if you have to cast them or you're just gonna' drop them under the boat.

Sometimes – like when fishing very close to big bridge pilings or near seawalls – you are gonna' want to drop the weight and bait and let them bounce away. Other times you are gonna' cast to one corner of a piece of structure and you're gonna' want it to bounce with the tide to another. Weight selection is a very personal thing. Know, however, that there are three main categories, and if you want to start with a basic overview of what those three categories are and when to pick what kind of bait, read the article we wrote about Picking the Right Fishing Weight.

- See more at: <http://www.theonlinefisherman.com/weights/bouncing-hanging-rolling-fishing-weights#sthash.3131h7nu.dpuf>