

The Fly Dressers' Guild

Fly-Tying Awards

Instructor's guide

Overview

The Fly Dressers' Guild exists to promote fly-tying as an interest for all, regardless of age sex race or ability.

Fly-tying is fun. It is important that tiers of all levels enjoy their sessions and see progress from one session to the next.

The instructor's role, whether at an organised branch meeting or as a long distance mentor, is important in maintaining standards, ensuring progression and rectifying mistakes and avoiding the learning of bad habits.

Qualifications

We are an organisation that seeks to promote excellence and good practice. It is therefore important that we use suitably qualified instructors and assessors. While a formal qualification is desirable, it is not imperative. For the purposes of getting the Guild Awards Scheme underway, each branch was originally asked to nominate instructors who were either formally qualified (STANIC or GAIA) or who had suitable fly-tying and teaching experience.

These initial instructors form the backbone of the Awards Scheme and we are very grateful to all who have taken on this most important role for the time and efforts made on behalf of FDG members.

The instructor's role at branch level

Instructors within branches will normally lead organised sessions with a set schedule of flies to be tied, whether this schedule is based on one or more of the awards booklets or designed to meet local needs.

The instructors should ensure that any programme is structured, measurable and achievable and that an evaluation is carried out at the end of each course. A proper evaluation of strengths and weaknesses will enable changes to be made that benefit the candidate.

Instructors may also be called upon by individual branch members to mentor them in the awards process, especially where the branch is not following any of the awards syllabi

Instructor's role for members outside of branches.

Members who are not in any branch (or in a branch that does not participate in the Guild Awards Scheme) can still take part in the Scheme. They should contact the Guild Awards Manager

(awards@flydressersguild.org), who will try to find an instructor as locally as possible who can act as their mentor. While there is a certain level of expectation for instructors to work within their branches, there is no obligation to work outside of the branch. However it is hoped the majority of instructors will welcome the opportunity to assist members not fortunate enough to have a nearby branch.

Members outside of branches and instructors should make arrangements that are mutually acceptable, mentoring may take place by telephone, email or online meeting although for proper critiques to be made, flies should be produced for examination on a regular basis.

Before teaching a class/candidate

Evaluate their needs. Do they want to reach a particular award level or are they just learning to tie flies to fill their own boxes? Is their equipment (vice, tools etc.) up to the job

Explain that there is no substitute for experience and practice.

Manage their expectations. Give them appropriate time scales in which to achieve their goals.

Methods of teaching

While those with formal qualifications will have completed a course containing some or more aspects of this section, those with no formal teaching qualification may benefit for a brief introduction to teaching methods.

There are two extremes of teaching, the first is an autocratic style where the instructor dictates everything that happens and follows a rigid syllabus. The other extreme is the communal style where all candidates and instructors discuss each topic and how it is going to be taught.

Clearly the ideal is somewhere between these extremes and in practice the instructor needs to have a clear picture of what they are trying to impart, know the place of that specific technique or fly pattern within the structure of the course and retain the flexibility to deal with unexpected problems and changes to the syllabus.

A good model for teaching fly tying that is tried and trusted by many teaching establishments is as follows:

- 1) Tell the candidates what they are going to learn. Explain the materials, describe the fly, tell them how it is fished and identify any potential problem areas in the tying of the fly.
- 2) Tie the fly slowly for the candidates, explaining the steps as you go.
- 3) Tie the fly with the candidates following each step.
- 4) Allow the candidates free practice on the fly until they are confident in tying it. This is the instructor's opportunity to deal with problems arising on an individual basis.

As all instructors and candidates are individuals clearly this method of teaching will not suit everybody.

Instructors should be aware that different candidates will learn things in different ways. Some need to be shown how to do things, others prefer detailed explanation and visual aids. The difference in learning styles is a whole area of study.

Equally the instructor has to be aware of the needs of individuals. For example, do the candidates have good eyesight? Do they have shaky hands or are they of advanced age? Are the conditions where the class is being held fit for purpose? Are the lighting and seating adequate? All these factors will impact on how candidates perform and how well they learn.

Add in the question of motivation, do they really want to tie to a standard or are they happy with flies that will catch fish

With all these factors considered it can be seen that the instructor's role is not necessarily an easy one. To keep the interest of the candidates, ensure progression and motivate them to achieve their potential is demanding.

Duty of Care

Instructors have a duty of care to anyone they are teaching.

While first aid training is not imperative it is a good skill for any instructor to have.

Health and safety issues are also the responsibility of the instructor. Branches should have in place a risk assessment to cover any classes and the instructors should familiarise themselves with this document and carry out any required activity. This is particularly important for any insurance claim that may arise out of a class.

The syllabi

The three syllabi have been designed to teach techniques to three distinct levels. They have been carefully thought out to include as many techniques as possible in each level and provide a genuine test of abilities. There is a limit to the number of techniques that can be taught at each level. We have deliberately ignored the fully dressed salmon flies and realistic flies as these are a very specialised area and there are currently insufficient instructors able to teach at this level for the whole Guild.

The Bronze level is aimed at candidates with around 2 years of fly-tying experience and covers basic techniques.

The Silver level is aimed at candidates with 2 to 5 years of experience.

The Gold level is aimed at all silver level holders who wish to develop their skills further.

Gold tiers who wish to progress further are encouraged to take the APGAI level 2 awards.

These are not prescriptive levels and an able candidate may well achieve silver standard quickly. However, it is usually preferable to structure a course to include the techniques and carry out assessment at the end of the course.

The syllabus will be reviewed at the end of each year and instructors are asked to pass on their comments and suggestions to the Guild Awards Manager.

The techniques

Starting the thread

A very basic technique that is fundamental to almost every pattern. Without a firm bed of silk, materials can slip or spin on the shank. Try to get candidates into the habit of making a full underbody for all flies except those that specifically do not require it.

Key errors

- Starting the silk in the wrong place.
- Uneven turns.
- Over-wrapping.
- Unnecessary turns of thread.
- Thread around hook point.

Pinch and loop

The pinch and loop is the most efficient way of attaching any material to the top of the hook shank. If done badly it can lead to all sorts of issues with placing of materials especially wings. Take time to teach this properly as it will save time later on.

Key errors

- Loop is not pinched correctly and compression of materials begins too early.
- The compression pull is not made in the vertical plane causing one side of the loop to compress faster than the other and roll the materials on the shank.
- Compression turn is made too tight and the materials roll before the compression pull is made.

Wool Tails

A popular tailing material but often mishandled. Ensure candidates understand the need for balance, examine different types of wool, naturals and synthetics, multi strand etc.

Key errors

- Too much wool. Ensure the tail is not too heavy for the pattern.
- Not tied in along body, this gives an uneven under body and/or a step in the dressing.
- Wool not cut square giving an uneven tail.
- Wool not brushed out. Unless otherwise dictated by the pattern the wool tails should be fluffed or brushed out.

Tails of Feather fibre

Pheasant tail, cock hackle fibres, hen hackle fibres and more fall into this category. Teach candidates how to select best feathers, how to remove fibres from stem and keep tips aligned.

Key errors

- Tail is not proportionate to fly, too much or too little feather fibre giving an unbalanced fly.
- Tail is too long or too short.
- Tail is not appropriate for the type of fly.
- The tips of the feather fibres are uneven.
- The tail is not tied in on top of the hook or have slipped during the dressing of the fly.
- Tails are not of equal length on examples submitted for assessment.

Tails of Golden Pheasant Tippet

This material is a joy to use but candidates often experience difficulty in cutting a bunch of fibres without getting the tips out of alignment.

Key errors

- Tail is not proportionate to fly, too much or too little feather fibre giving an unbalanced fly.
- Tail is too long or too short.
- The tips of the feather fibres are uneven.
- The tail is not tied in on top of the hook or has slipped round the hook during the dressing of the fly.
- Tails are not of equal length on the examples submitted for assessment.
- Certain patterns call for the middle black bar to be seen, it is important to select the correct size feather to show this bar and keep the tail at an appropriate length.

Tails of Marabou

Marabou is probably the most popular natural material in use in modern fly tying. It is easy to use but care should be taken to ensure candidates understand how to get a correct length of tail without cutting the marabou, how to remove it from the stalk without misaligning the tips. Candidates should know the different types of marabou feather. Candidates should also be able to shorten marabou tails and wings without resorting to use of scissors.

Key errors

- Tail is not proportionate to fly, too much or too little marabou giving an unbalanced fly.
- Tail is too long or too short.
- Tail is not tied in along hook shank giving an uneven underbody and/or a step in the dressing.
- The tips of the feather fibres are uneven.
- The tail is not tied in on top of the hook or has slipped round the hook during the dressing of the fly.
- Tips of tail have been shortened by cutting.
- Tails are not of equal length on examples submitted for assessment.

Feather fibres as a body material

Feather fibres such as pheasant tails, turkey quill slips and peacock herl are all popular body materials and there are many different ways to tie in and wrap them. Try to get candidates to experiment with the different types of feather fibre and understand their properties. They need to be able to select appropriate length fibres for the body and be aware of the fragility of some fibres. Candidates should know where to tie in the fibres and how to avoid gaps in the body and leaving silk showing at the rear.

Key errors

- Uneven body, fibres have become twisted or wrapped unevenly.
- Broken fibres. Too much pressure or hook point has been caught while wrapping.
- Not tightly wrapped or loose body.
- Thread showing obviously at the tail.

Floss as a body material

Floss can be difficult to work with and candidates should understand the need for clean hands and smooth skin. Different types of floss have different properties and candidates should understand these differences. Ensure they know how much floss to work with. They should know how to flatten or twist the floss to achieve the desired profile.

Key errors

- Dirty body caused by staining from the fingers or dirt.
- Uneven body caused by poor underbody.
- Uneven body caused by uneven wrapping.
- Broken strands caused by hook point or uneven pressure when wrapping.

Chenille as a body material

- Rapidly going out of fashion, chenille is none the less important in many patterns.
- Candidates should understand the structure of basic chenille and what happens if it is twisted in either direction. Different sizes and types of chenille should be examined.
- Candidates should know how to strip the fluff from the core and how to wrap with and without hackle pliers.

Key errors

- Uneven body caused by poor underbody.
- Uneven body caused by uneven wrapping.
- Thread showing at rear of hook.
- Wrong size of chenille for hook size.
- Body wrapped too close to head.
- Body wrapped loosely, chenille moves on shank.

Dubbing and Dubbing as a body material

Candidates need to know how to dub different materials onto the thread. At Bronze level it is sufficient that they know one way of dubbing but for the higher levels the different ways should be taught.

While wax may be used to improve the grip on the thread, the use of glues and the like to stick material to the thread should be strongly discouraged.

Candidates should understand the “staple” stiffness and density of different materials and be able to choose suitable dubbing for different types of fly.

Key errors

- Too much or too little dubbing.
- Wrong type of dubbing for selected fly.
- Dubbing not even.
- Dubbing loose.
- Dubbing slipping off rear of fly.
- Dubbing too close to head of the fly.

Body Hackles

Palmering a hackle is a skill that all candidates should know well. They need to know when to tie in a feather by the tip and when to tie it in by the stem and whether it is better to take the hackle forwards or backwards along the body (this will often be dictated by the pattern tied). Feather choice is an important skill to learn and candidates should know the differences between the various types of cock hackle.

Key errors

- Hackle unevenly wrapped.
- Wrong size hackle for hook.
- Hackle fibres trapped by rib.
- Unsuitable feather selected.

Ribbing

Candidates must understand why they are applying a rib to a fly, whether it is for decoration or to protect other materials (or both).

Candidates need to understand the different types of tinsels both ancient and modern and where to use them appropriately. Spacing of the rib is important as is keeping feather fibres from being trapped by a wound rib. Candidates should know where to tie in the ribbing to avoid it appearing on the side of the hook.

Key errors

- Ribbing is uneven.
- Wrong size material chosen for ribbing.
- Wrong type of material chosen for ribbing.
- Hackle fibres trapped.
- Rib is tied in on side of hook.
- Ribbing is loose.
- Ribbing is over the tail pushing it out of shape/position.
- Ribbing is wrapped around hook point.

Marabou wings

The problems mentioned in the section on marabou tails apply equally to wings of marabou.

Key errors

As for tails of marabou but also:

- Marabou tied too close to the hook eye and blocking eye.
- Wing does not reach end of tail (too long/too short).
- Wing is not centred on top of the hook.

Thorax covers

Candidates should understand the mechanics of a thorax cover, how to tie it in securely and how to tie it off and avoid fibres slipping out. They should be able to choose the correct amount of material to give a proportionate thorax cover.

Key errors

- Thorax cover not on top of hook.
- Thorax cover too long or too short.
- Thorax cover wrong size, insufficient fibres used.
- Thorax cover tied in too heavily (large head of thread).
- Thorax cover not tied in properly and fibres escaping.

Head Hackle (Cock)

Hackles should be tied in correctly with the good side facing forwards. Candidates should be able to select the correct length hackle fibre for any given size of hook.

Candidates should take care to ensure that wraps of hackle do not overlap (unless deliberate in accordance with a pattern) and that the wraps are close together.

It is important that candidates know how to trim off the excess leaving no stalk at the eye.

Key errors

- Hackle fibres too long or too short. Difficulty in sourcing correct sizes should be considered.
- Hackle too thin or too thick (too few or too many turns).

- Hackle fibres trapped and untidy.
- Hackle too close to eye of hook.
- Hackle too far back from eye of hook.
- Hackle is wrapped over itself.
- Hackle not clipped cleanly, stalk showing.

Head Hackle (Hen)

The instructions for the cock hackles are equally valid here. In addition, hen hackles should be doubled or folded back while wrapping to ensure fibres do not protrude forwards.

Key errors

- Hackle fibres too long or too short.
- Hackle too thin or too thick (too few or too many turns).
- Hackle fibres trapped and untidy.
- Hackle too close to eye of hook.
- Hackle too far back from eye of hook.
- Hackle is wrapped on itself.
- Hackle not folded back.
- Hackle not clipped cleanly, stalk showing.

Finishing the Fly

The head of a fly should be neat, proportionate and clean. Candidates should know how and when to form a neat head. It is useful to know the different ways of whip finishing or half hitching a fly and how to use the various tools available. They should know how to use different types of varnish to secure the fly and achieve a fine finish.

Key errors

- Head too big, unnecessary turns of thread used.
- Eye of the fly is obstructed by thread, materials or varnish.
- Head is not firmly secured and thread comes loose.

Final note

The above list is not exhaustive. Experience shows that candidates can invent new ways of making mistakes and messing up techniques with an ingenuity that is beyond belief. However, it should serve to give instructors a good grounding on what is likely to go wrong.