

Salt STRONG

PRESENTS...

LIVE BAIT FISHING BLUEPRINT



What bait to use in every situation



When to use each bait for all four seasons



How to use each bait to catch trophy inshore fish



**THIS 3-STEP LIVE BAIT
FORMULA WORKS EVERY TIME**

Module 1: Know Thy Bait	6
Overview	6
The 3 Big Live Bait Fishing Mistakes	6
Mistake #1 – Not Actively Fishing the Live Bait	6
Mistake #2 – Not Matching the Equipment to the Bait	6
Mistake #3 – Not Using Trophy Baits	6
<i>What You Really Need To Know (Key Takeaways)</i>	6
Winter / Spring Baits	7
Shrimp	7
Mojarra	7
Pinfish	7
<i>What You Really Need To Know</i>	7
Summer / Fall Baits	8
Mullet	8
Shrimp	8
Pigfish	8
Croaker	8
<i>What You Really Need To Know</i>	8
Whitebait	9
Shrimp	10
<i>What You Really Need To Know</i>	10
Rigging Whitebait	11
Surface Fishing	11
Flats Fishing	11
<i>What You Really Need To Know</i>	12
Mainline to Hook Rigs	12
<i>What You Really Need To Know</i>	13
Rigging Mullet	14
Rigging Through The Nose	14
Rigging Through The Back	14
Weedless Rig For Structure	15
Rigging Large Mullet	16
<i>What You Really Need To Know</i>	16
Rigging Bottom Baits	17
Shallow Water Fishing	17
Deeper Water Fishing	17
Pigfish	17

Croakers	18
Pinfish	18
<i>What You Really Need To Know</i>	18
Rigging Shrimp	19
<i>What You Really Need To Know</i>	21
Mullet & Whitebait Tactics	22
Tail Hooking	22
Nose Hooking	22
<i>What You Really Need To Know</i>	22
Bottom Bait Tactics	23
Tail Hooking	23
Nose Hooking	23
<i>What You Really Need To Know</i>	23
Shrimp Tactics	24
Free-Lining	24
Bobber Rig	24
Weighted Rig	24
<i>What You Really Need To Know</i>	25
Catching Pilchards with Sabiki	25
<i>What You Really Need To Know</i>	25
Shallow Cast Netting	25
Deep Cast Netting	26
<i>What You Really Need To Know</i>	26
Livewell Tips	26
<i>What You Really Need To Know</i>	26
Bait Pens	27
When to Replace Baits	27
<i>What You Really Need To Know:</i>	27
Module 2: Finding Feeding Fish	28
Overview	28
Tides, Current, Wind	28
<i>What You Really Need To Know</i>	28
Passes, Inlets & Jetties	29
Drifting	29
Anchoring	29
<i>What You Really Need To Know</i>	29
Grass Flats	29

<i>What You Really Need To Know</i>	30
Bars, Docks, Mangroves	30
Oyster Bars	30
Docks	30
Mangroves	30
Sandbars	30
Bridges & Piers	31
<i>What You Really Need To Know</i>	31
Murky Water	31
Winter Tactics	31
Spring Tactics	32
Summer Tactics	32
Fall Tactics	32
<i>What You Really Need To Know</i>	32
On the Water Spot Analysis	33
Using a Depth Finder	33
Using Google Maps	33
<i>What You Really Need To Know</i>	33
Module 3: Equipment	34
Overview	35
Fishing with Shrimp	35
Fishing with Bottom Baits	36
Fishing with Mullet	36
Finger Mullet	36
Big Mullet	36
Fishing with Whitebaits	37
Smaller Whitebaits	37
Bigger Whitebaits	37
Fishing with Crab	37
Blue Crabs	37
Pass Crabs	38
Fiddler Crabs	38
Bait Bubblers	38
Cast Nets	39
Sabiki Rigs	40
Anchoring Systems	40
<i>What You Really Need To Know</i>	40

Module 4: Position Management	41
Overview	41
Shallow Water Positioning	41
Positioning Demo	41
Fishing a Point	41
Fishing Docks / Structure	41
Winter / Spring Bonus Tips	42
Deep Water Positioning	42
Using a Trolling Motor	42
When To Leave a Dead-zone	43
<i>What You Really Need To Know</i>	<i>43</i>
Conclusion	44
Bonus Material	45
Redfish Tactics	45
Winter	45
Spring	45
Summer	45
Fall	45
Snook Tactics	45
Gator Trout Tactics	45
Tarpon Tactics	46
Live Bait Tournament Tactics	46
Fresh Bait vs. Frozen Bait	46
Cut Bait Tips	46

If you want to see the entire video-based interactive Live Bait Mastery course, go here for a special book buyers only offer: www.SaltStrong.com/LBC

Module 1

Know Thy Bait

Overview

- Module 1 will cover all you need to know about live baits for inshore game fish, including:
 - Where to find the baits
 - How to catch the baits
 - How to keep the baits alive
- There are 3 methods to acquire live baits:
 - Catch them with a cast net
 - Catch them with a hook and line
 - Buy them

The 3 Big Live Bait Fishing Mistakes

Mistake #1 – Not Actively Fishing the Live Bait

- A common misconception is that live bait fishing is a “lazy man’s fishing” where you throw the live bait out and wait for a fish to come and get it
- You must “fish” the bait, even more so than a lure to make it look natural
- The key is to make the live bait look and act like it would if it was not attached to a line
- Big fish, trophy fish are smart. They have grown to that size because they are discerning and particular
- Big fish know what a bait is supposed to look like and act like. If the bait doesn’t look right the fish won’t eat it

Mistake #2 – Not Matching the Equipment to the Bait

- Most people match their equipment to the fish they are targeting, when they should be matching their equipment to the bait they are using
- Hook to line to rod to reel all need to match the bait being used
- Most commonly people use gear that is way too big/heavy for the bait they are using. This does not allow the bait to look natural in the water

Mistake #3 – Not Using Trophy Baits

- Catching trophy-size fish requires trophy-size bait
- Bigger fish tend to be lazier and as such will primarily feed on the bottom. They are not inclined to chase little bait fish on the surface
- Big fish want a big bait and usually, close to the bottom
- The health of the bait is critical - 5 healthy, strong baits is preferable to 100 weak, soft baits
- Don’t be scared to use a bigger bait than you think you need when targeting trophy fish

What You Really Need To Know (Key Takeaways)

- You *must* actually “fish” the live bait - work it and make it look natural in the water
- Match your equipment to the bait you use, not to the fish you’re targeting
- Trophy-sized fish eat trophy-sized baits
- Healthy, lively good swimming baits are critical

Winter / Spring Baits

Shrimp

- Fish tend to crave shrimp in colder temperatures
- Shrimp do not swim very fast so are relatively easy targets



Mojarra

- Mojarra are relatively slow moving
- Lethargic fish will eat these much quicker than they will a fast-moving mullet
- Very easy to catch in the winter & spring

Mojarra



Pinfish

- Pinfish are born in in the spring (so too small for bait then) and by the winter they are usually one pound fish, so too big for bait
- 4-5" is the ideal size

Pinfish



What You Really Need To Know

- Game fish crave shrimp and crustaceans in cold temperatures
- Mojarra and pinfish are good Winter baitfish to use

To see the course's video footage, check out the book buyers only special:

www.SaltStrong.com/LBC

Summer / Fall Baits

Mullet

- Mullet migrations take place during the end of spring & early summer, and again at the end of summer & start of fall
- Mullet migrate from Virginia down the East coast to the the Florida coast and from Texas around the Gulf coast to Florida
- They are everywhere. Because of this you need to “match the hatch.” That is, fish with the bait that is abundant in the area you’re fishing

Shrimp

- Extremely effective year round
- Always have live shrimp in your livewell or bait bucket

Pigfish

- Pigfish are basically a small Grunt and are easy to catch
- They are found everywhere along the coast from Texas to Virginia
- They spawn in late winter and by June/July they are about 5” in length This is the size you want for bait.
- These sized pigfish are the secret bait of the commercial trout fishermen
- In the fall, pigfish get a little bigger and migrate out of the passes to spawn in the ocean. This is where a lot of fish focus on them so this is a great time of year to use them as bait
- Pigfish make a croaking noise that attracts trout from a long way away - they love them!

Croaker

- Great bait fish - fish crave them!
- Difficult to acquire as they cannot be bought, must be caught
- Big snook love them, trout and redfish also eat them
- They are great on the beach, in the surf, in the passes and in the river
- They are a bottom-swimming bait

What You Really Need To Know

- Mullet, shrimp, pigfish and croaker are all great summer / fall baits
- “Match the Hatch” - fish with the bait that is abundant in the area you’re fishing

Finger Mullet



Pigfish

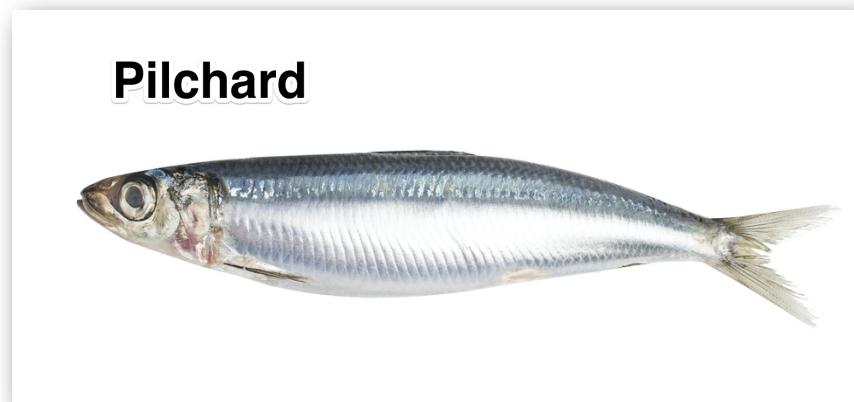
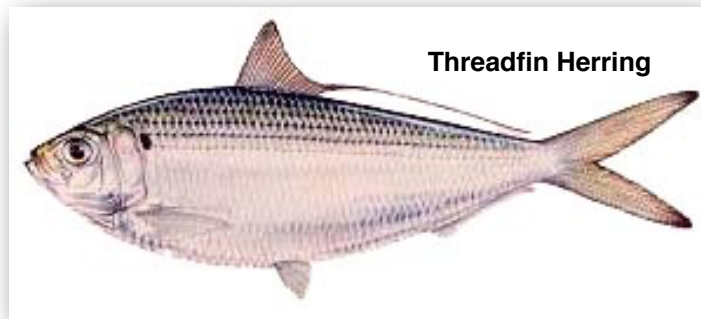


Croaker



Whitebait

- Whitebait is the universal term for pilchards, sardines and threadfin herring
- Every predator fish eats them
- These baits are “high oxygen-demand” so your livewell requires a lot of bubbles or a lot of water circulation to keep them alive
- They are good to use year-round and can be caught at any size
- The bigger ones can be caught with Sabiki rigs, the smaller ones with cast nets
- They are abundant everywhere and when there are too many of them, the fish tend to stay away from them - this is particularly true in the summer and fall
- You can catch thousands of them in one throw of a cast net
- The bigger fish will pick off weak white baits here and there, but throwing a pinfish, pigfish or croaker in the vicinity of these schools of white bait will draw the attention of the really big game fish



Shrimp

- Shrimp is a universal bait fish used all over the world
- Very easy to keep alive
- If you intend to keep shrimp and bait fish in the same livewell, place the shrimp by themselves into a small bait bucket then place the bait bucket into the livewell. This will prevent them from getting banged up by the other fish and also prevent them from disappearing out the drain
- Always keep at least a dozen shrimp on your boat

**** PRO TIPS ****

- Most bait shops get their delivery of live shrimp mid-morning
- When you go to the bait shop in the early morning, you are getting the picked-through shrimp from the day before
- The best time to get your shrimp is the afternoon before the morning you wish to fish
- Take a 5-gallon bucket with a bubbler and put some ice in it to keep the water cold
- This is how you get your hand-picked shrimp and keep them alive overnight
- Medium-size shrimp are best for the winter, large shrimp are best for the summer

What You Really Need To Know

- Whitebait is the universal name for pilchards, sardines and threadfin herring
- These are “high oxygen-demand” baits so they require good livewell circulation
- Separate shrimp and whitebaits being kept in the same livewell by putting the shrimp in a bait bucket
- If buying live bait, do so the day before your fishing trip to get choice of the best baits
- Always keep live shrimp on your vessel

Want To Maximize Your Results While Saving Time?

Then order the video-based Live Bait Mastery course because it shows everything in this book (plus more) in organized video tutorials so that you can more easily see and understand the needed tips.

Plus, you can get your questions answered and see the Q&A activity from other anglers.

Learn more about it here: www.SaltStrong.com/LBC

Rigging Whitebait

- This lesson addresses rigging larger whitebaits about 5” in length
- This size whitebait will catch slot-size redfish, big snook, big and small trout, and tarpon

Surface Fishing

- This method makes the bait look extremely natural
- Great for surface fishing, fishing close to the boat, fishing in clear water for tarpon, fishing for snook under mangroves, sight fishing, doing a lot of casting. Also good for slow-trolling tarpon
- Use a 3/0 J-Hook, hooked sideways through the cartilage of the nose (Fig. 1.1)
- Hooking the bait sideways allows the target fish to be hooked in the corner of the mouth, rather than the roof of the month which in some fish is a difficult hook set



Flats Fishing

- This method is used for rigging whitebaits when fishing flats where the water level is under 4-5', fishing for snook, trout and redfish
- This method uses a 7/0 octopus J-Hook
- Hook the bait above the spine, in the back (Fig. 1.2)
- Hooking the bait too far towards the tail will cause it's nose to come up, the bait will get weak quickly, struggle on the surface and look unnatural. You can however cast the bait a mile hooking it here
- Hooking it in the middle of the back will allow it to carry the hook better but will make for a very ineffective cast
- Hooking the bait too far forward towards the nose will result in you turning the bait back towards you whenever you pull on the line and you will not be able to get the bait to swim away from you, which does not work for flats fishing. This does however work well in scenarios such as bridge-fishing or fishing under a bobber where you need the bait to stay in place
- The ideal place to hook the bait is about 3/4 of the way towards the tail of the bait. This will allow for effective casting, bigger hook usage and the ability to drift the bait away from the boat with the current (after rigging the bait be sure to remove any scales from the end of the hook)
- Rigging the hook using this method also allows you to control the direction the bait swims - if he changes direction or starts swimming back towards you, pulling on the line will turn his head and force him to swim away from you again
- Hooking the baitfish sideways through the nose with a small 2/0 circle hook is effective for fishing giant snook and big tarpon. The smaller hook does not weigh the bait down and allows it to swim very naturally. This method also allows for easier hook sets
- When using the 2/0 circle hook, 30lb test leader should be your maximum strength leader you use. Any heavy leader and a 5/0 circle hook would be more appropriate



**** PRO TIPS ****

- When choosing a hook, regardless of the brand, choose one with a thin wire and ensure the hook tip is always extremely sharp
- There is no standard for hook sizes or shapes between manufacturers - a 2/0 Gamakatsu circle hook, may be a different size than a 2/0 Mustad circle hook, so look at the size of them closely before you purchase

What You Really Need To Know

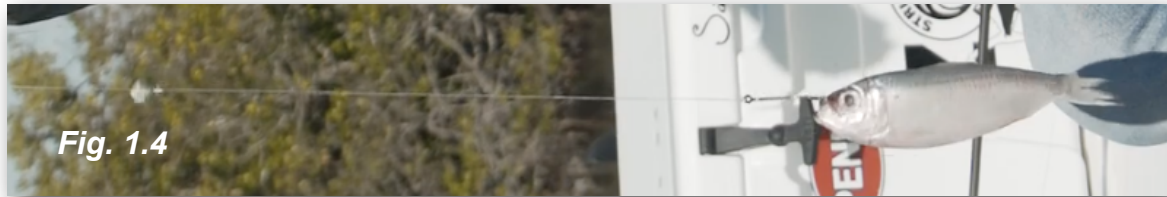
- For surface fishing whitebaits use a 3/0 J-Hook, hooked sideways through the cartilage of the nose
- For flats fishing with whitebait, hook the bait 3/4 of the way down the back, above the spine with a 7/0 octopus J-Hook

Mainline to Hook Rigs

- Braided line on your reel is highly recommended
- Fish can see braided line “True” fluorocarbon or “soft” fluorocarbon is invisible to the fish (Berkeley Vanish is one brand)
- The harder fluorocarbon is a baked material and while it is abrasion-resistant, it is visible in the water
- When pulling the true fluorocarbon off the spool, it will be loopy so stretching it is advised to straighten it. This will stiffen the line and make it significantly thinner
- When targeting Snook, Tarpon or big Redfish on the flats take 5-6’ of 20lb “true” fluorocarbon and attach it to a 12-18” section of 40lb leader material with your knot of choice (a Blood Knot works well). Attach the hook to the 40LB leader with your knot of choice (an [Orvis Knot](#) works well). Use this rig with the bait hooked towards the tail for drifting it with the current, or rigged through the nose for pitching up under mangroves. (Fig. 1.3)
- When targeting smaller fish, 15-20lb leader material will suffice



- When fishing under docks, place a 3/8oz slit-shot sinker right above the blood knot which will slow the bait fish down but the bait fish will still be able to carry the weight (Fig. 1.4)



- Hooking a whitebait below the spine in the back quarter will cause the bait to swim down to the bottom. While this is an effective method for getting a bait to swim down and is good for drifting the bait in the current, the bait will tend to get weaker more quickly. Eventually the bait will turn on it's side, flounder near the surface and attract birds who will steal the bait
- Rigging smaller whitebaits will still catch the occasional bigger fish, but more often you'll catch smaller fish. Using smaller bait fish is great for catching fish in numbers which is a great family-orientated approach. They are fished and hooked the same way as the larger whitebaits. Using smaller 1/0 or 2/0 circle hooks on these is effective as the smaller White baits are softer and do not require much of a hook set

What You Really Need To Know

- "True" fluorocarbon or "soft" fluorocarbon is invisible to the fish (Berkeley Vanish is a good brand) and should be stretched before use to stiffen it and make it thinner
- When targeting snook, tarpon or big redfish on the flats, take 5-6' of 20lb "true" fluorocarbon and attach it to a 12-18" section of 40lb leader material with your knot of choice (a Blood Knot works well)
- When targeting smaller fish 15-20lb leader material will suffice

Want To Become a Live Bait Fishing Expert?

Then see the full video-based Live Bait Mastery course! The course has everything in this book (plus more) in comprehensive video tutorials so that you can more easily see and understand the needed tips.

Learn more about it here: www.SaltStrong.com/LBC

Rigging Mullet

- Finger mullet are the most commonly recommended live bait
- Mullet are great bait fish due to their excellent swimming ability and their ability to cover a great deal of water. This makes them an exceptional choice for 'finding' fish
- Mullet are surface-swimmers

Rigging Through The Nose

- Hook the bait through the cartilage above the top lip (Fig. 1.5). Do not pin both lips together as this will drown the bait. Do not hook the bait too far up the nose as this will pierce the brain and kill the bait instantly. This method is best used for the following techniques:
 - Fishing in current
 - Sight fishing
 - Dragging/pitching/reeling the bait a lot
- The ideal hook to use for a bait this size is a 3/0 Octopus J-Hook
- If trolling to look for fish, you can drag a bait hooked this way by your boat and it will live for an hour or more



Fig. 1.5

Rigging Through The Back

- Another hooking method is through the back quarter of the body, above the spine (Fig. 1.6)
- Do not hook through the spine as this will kill the bait
- Effective for flats fishing in up to 4 feet of water
- Hooking in the back forces the fish to swim away from you
- Pulling gently on your line will straighten the bait up and get it swimming away again if it has turned towards you or started swimming sideways



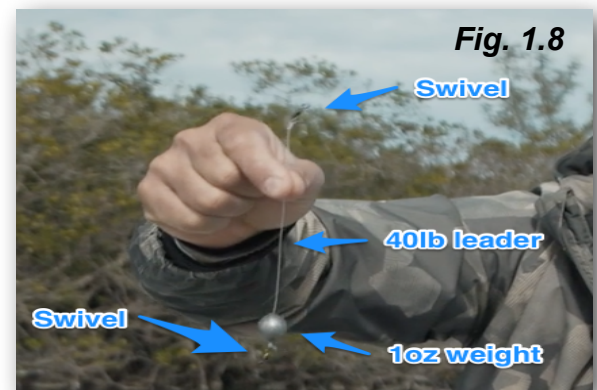
Fig. 1.6

Weedless Rig For Structure

- Gamakatsu (Fig. 1.7), Mustad and Eagle Claw also make weedless hooks which are an excellent choice if you are going to be fishing structure like pitching around docks, mangroves or bridge pylons. Rig as shown in Fig. 1.5 using a 2/0 hook
- The weedless setup prevents you from hooking up on the structure and the rigging technique through the nose allows you to retrieve and re-pitch the bait without drowning it
- When targeting redfish (only), rig the bait as shown in Fig. 1.5 and use the leader technique shown in Fig. 1.4 with a 1/4oz split-shot weight. Finger mullet will out-swim redfish, so the weight slows them down enough for the redfish to catch them, while still allowing them to swim naturally



- The following rig works well when sight-fishing redfish on a shoreline or a cove with no current where the fish are congregated together in a tight spot. Especially when it's windy in the winter or spring and temps are cold.
 - Tie a swivel on either end of a 6-8" length of 40lb leader (Fig. 1.8)
 - Attach this to an 18-24" length of 15-20lb true fluorocarbon, hooking the mullet in the back as shown in Fig. 1.6
 - Placing the weight on a short leader between two swivels allows you to remain directly connected to your bait and helps tremendously in casting accuracy (Fig. 1.9)
 - Using the heavier weight pins the bait to the bottom, with the leader allowing it enough leeway to swim around a little
 - Pitch this rig up into the school of fish and it will spook them off maybe 15-20 feet. Then sit and wait. Do not reel, twitch, wiggle or drag the bait. Eventually the vibrations the struggling bait is making will cause the target fish to return to eat the bait



Rigging Large Mullet

- Use bigger baits for bigger fish. Fish eat much larger baits than what you would ordinarily think
- Large mullet are great baits for big snook, big trout and bigger tarpon (Fig. 1.10)
- The bait must be lively and swimming well to get a strike
- Large mullet can be hooked through the nose or through the back as shown for the smaller finger mullets in Figures 1.5 and 1.6, using a 7/0 to 9/0 Octopus J-Hook
- You will need a very hard hook-set once you get the strike to be able to rip the hook out of the bait
- Use 5' of 40lb Fluorocarbon attached to about an 18" piece of at least 60lb (even 80lb is ok) Hard-Baked Fluorocarbon (Fig. 1.11)



Fig. 1.10

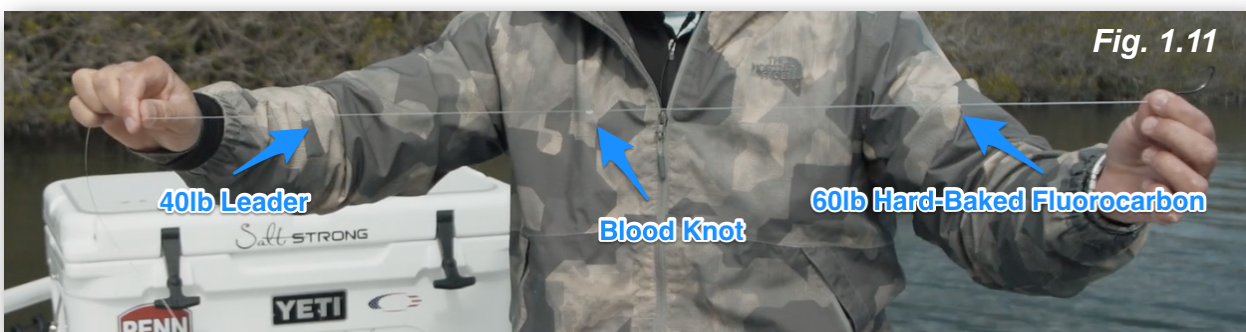


Fig. 1.11

What You Really Need To Know

- Mullet are surface-swimmers
- Rig finger mullet through the nose with a 3/0 Octopus J-Hook for fishing in current, sight fishing or dragging/pitching applications
- Rig finger mullet through the back quarter above the spine for flats fishing in up to 4' of water
- Large mullet are great baits for big snook, big trout and bigger tarpon
- Large mullet can be hooked through the nose or through the back using 7/0-9/0 Octopus J-Hooks and 5' of 40lb Fluorocarbon attached to about an 18" piece of at least 60lb Hard-Baked Fluorocarbon

Want even more Live Bait Mastery info? Check out the entire live bait course in video format by going to this link: www.SaltStrong.com/LBC

Rigging Bottom Baits

- Pigfish (Grunts), pinfish, croaker and mojarra are all considered “bottom baits”
- They are great baits for both shallow and deep water
- These baits are great for fishing the flats, positioning your vessel up current and drifting the bait down to the fish
- Match the hook size to the bait using J-Hooks, not circle hooks (for example, a 4” Mojarra will need a 3/0 Octopus J-Hook)
- These baits have leathery skin which will require a relatively hard hook-set
- Predator fish expect these baits to be on the bottom or very close to it. If the bait is not on the bottom, they will not eat it

Shallow Water Fishing

- For shallower water fishing, hook the bait in the back quarter, again, above the spine (Fig. 1.12)
- Hooking this way makes for an aerodynamic cast and the ability to free-line the bait, keeping the line loose, allowing it to swim and look natural
- Again, if the bait turns to start swimming towards you, pulling on the line will straighten it up and get it swimming away from you once more



Deeper Water Fishing

- For deeper water fishing, hook the bait in the front of the mouth, forcing it to swim down
- When fishing weaker baits like mojarra and croakers, hook straight up through the mouth, again, do not pin both lips shut (Fig. 1.13)
- Rig the bait the same way, if attaching a weight to the line. This will hold the bait close to the bottom (Fig. 1.14). This works well to prevent a tired baitfish from floating up towards the surface
- When fishing the heartier baits like pinfish and pigfish, hook them in the mouth and out the side. This causes them to fish much stronger and dig down much harder, getting the bait to the bottom faster. This is especially productive in inlets where there is stronger current or pitching them around deeper docks
- If these heartier baits get tired or if you are using a weight, rig them straight up through the nose as seen in Fig. 1.13. Hooking them in the side of the mouth in these situations will cause the bait to helicopter and look extremely unnatural



Pigfish

- Pigfish are very seasonal with relation to their size. Summertime is when they are most abundant and available in bait stores. You can also catch them on hook and line or cast net them.
- Trout, snook and redfish crave them
- They are relatively small and do not carry a hook very well so using a small popping cork, matching it to the size of the bait is a good tactic
- Use the smallest cork possible that's buoyant enough to keep the baitfish from sinking it (Fig 1.15)
- The leader-length should be such that the bait sits a couple inches off the bottom



- Hook the bait in the back, above the spine about 3/4 of the way back (Fig. 1.16)
- Allow the line to be loose, free-line if you wish but jerk on the line every minute or two. This will cause the popper to make a noise like a feeding fish and the pigfish will also make a grunting noise, both of which will attract nearby fish



Fig. 1.16

Croakers

- Croakers are a weaker bait that does not live very well, but snook and trout crave them
- A croaker this size warrants a 7/0 hook (Fig. 1.17)
- Like the other baits, fishing them straight up through the nose (see Fig.1.13) is the appropriate rigging technique for fishing in current. Rigging through the back above the spine towards the tail (see Fig. 1.16) is the rigging choice for fishing the flats and drifting the bait



Fig. 1.17

Pinfish

- A common rigging method for pinfish is to hook them in the shoulder (Fig. 1.18)
- This is a good technique for fishing the bait under a bobber, or if you need this fish to swim quickly to a deep bottom in strong current
- In strong current though a tiring bait (just a couple of minutes in that current) will begin to roll due to the un-streamlined hook placement



Fig. 1.18

What You Really Need To Know

- Pigfish, pinfish, croaker and mojarra are “bottom baits”
- These baits have leathery skin which will require a relatively hard hook-set
- Predator fish expect these baits to be on the bottom or very close to it. If the bait is not on the bottom, they will not eat it
- For shallower water fishing, hook the bait in the back quarter, again, above the spine
- For deeper water fishing, hook the bait in the front of the mouth, forcing it to swim down
- Pigfish are most abundant in the summertime, can be caught on hook and line or caught in a cast net. Trout, snook and redfish crave them
- Croakers are a weaker bait that does not live very well, but snook and trout crave them

Rigging Shrimp

- Match the size shrimp you use to the type of fish you're targeting
- In the winter, lively, medium-sized shrimp (about 3") work best rigged on a #1 hook
- There are five preferred ways to hook a live shrimp
 - Method 1: Used when casting a lot, sight fishing, in current where there is a lot of movement and tension on your line. Hook the bait straight up and down, from underneath, behind its eyes, centering its body right through the top of the horn. (Figs. 1.19 & 1.20). Hooked this way, he will be able to swim very well and will not sink in the current.



Fig. 1.19



Fig. 1.20

- Method 2: Hook the live shrimp right under the horn, back behind the eyes (Figs. 1.21 & 1.22). Do not pierce the black spot (brain) further back on the head as this will kill the bait instantly (Fig. 1.23).
- When retrieving this bait, the hooking method will cause it to spin and will eventually kill the bait, so avoid retrieving too often. This method is ideal when targeting big snook with bigger hand-picked shrimp.



Fig. 1.21



Fig. 1.22

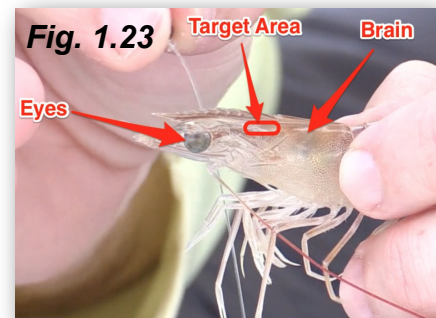


Fig. 1.23

- Method 3: Hook the shrimp through the very end of the tail, from one side to the other (Figs. 1.24). Rigged this way, the shrimp will swim reasonably well and can be cast relatively frequently. The main problem with this rigging method is the hook will weigh down the shrimp's tail when tension is on the line, hindering it's ability to right itself and causing it to die relatively quickly. This is a decent method when flipping shrimp or fishing in current.



Fig. 1.24

- Method 4: Pick the end of the shrimps tail off, releasing fish attracting scent and push the hook up through the bottom of the shrimp & through the middle of the back (Fig 1.25)



Fig. 1.25

- Method 5: When fishing for redfish or bonefish in grass and doing a lot of casting, use a 2/0 hook attached to a length of 20lb leader. Pinch the tail off the shrimp and insert the hook into the meat at the broken end of the tail rolling the hook to bring it out on the underside of the shrimp (Fig. 1.26). From here pull the knot and eye of the hook through. Turn the hook so the point is facing towards the underside of the shrimp and push the hook back into the body, not into the head area and gently pull on the line to secure the hook in the bait (Fig. 1.27). You can work this setup like a weedless lure, jiggling it then letting it sit, allowing the scent to do it's job.



Fig. 1.26



Fig. 1.27

- Popping corks are popular methods for use with live shrimp. Popping corks without the rattles are preferred to entice larger game fish. Allowing the bait to sit there under the popping cork, while popping it once every minute or so is the desired technique. Ideally the leader under the cork will be as long as the depth you are fishing is deep, so the shrimp gets right to the bottom (Fig. 1.28). The shrimp is rigged through the head as shown in Figs. 1.21 & 1.22.



Fig. 1.28

- A great family fishing technique that works well for catching numbers of smaller fish, rather than trophy fish which involves pinching the tail off the shrimp (Fig. 1.29) and rigging it as shown in Fig. 1.25. Placing a small 3/8 oz split-shot weight on a 20lb Fluorocarbon leader about 8" from a 1/0 hook holds the bait in place on the bottom, but also allows the shrimp enough room to move in the water column. (Fig. 1.30)



Fig. 1.29



Fig. 1.30

What You Really Need To Know

- Match the size shrimp you use to the type of fish you're targeting
- In the winter, lively, medium-sized shrimp (about 3") work best rigged on a #1 hook
- There are 5 main ways to rig shrimp:
 - Straight up and down, from underneath, behind it's eyes, centering it's body right through the top of the horn
 - Under the horn, back behind the eyes
 - Through the very end of the tail, from one side to the other
 - Up through the bottom of the shrimp and through the middle of the back after pulling the tail off
 - Insert the hook into the meat at the broken end of the tail, rolling the hook to bring it out on the underside of the shrimp

Mullet & Whitebait Tactics

The following are techniques for fishing the faster swimming baits like mullet and whitebaits:

Tail Hooking

- For a tail-hooked bait (see Fig. 1.6), cast it out and then with an open bail, you want to be constantly paying out your line into the water, whether the bait, the wind or the current is taking the line
- Do not allow the line to become taught. A loose bow in the line is ideal (Fig. 1.31).
- Every 30 seconds or so, close the bail, lift your rod tip up, pulling the line up out of the water and reel up quickly, getting tight to the bait but avoiding dragging the bait backwards. This will startle the bait at which point you immediately open the bail again and let the bait catapult off
- Every minute or so you can also jerk your rod back once sharply, tightening the line, again making the bait jump and take off
- The farther you get your bait from the boat, the more comfortable your target fish will be and the more readily they will take your bait
- Ensure your drag is tight initially to give you the power you need on the hook-set to rip the hook out of the bait and into the fish's mouth. Once you have the fish hooked, you can loosen the drag a little
- When a fish strikes, your line will start ripping out off the spool (bail is still open here). Once you feel the fish has genuinely got the bait, close the bail by reeling, rather than trying to flip it with your hand. At this point reel as fast as you can to take up all the slack line and get the line tight to the fish before solidly setting the hook

Fig. 1.31



Nose Hooking

- Nose hooking (see Fig. 1.5) is most effective when fishing strong current, when sight fishing or when pitching and reeling the bait a lot. This is because this keeps the water flowing through the bait's gills and keeps them lively and healthy
- Nose hooking forces the fish to dive down to the bottom, which is key for redfish and trout
- The problem with this method is the bait will never swim away from you, not even with the current. Subtle tension in the line that you may not feel, will cause the bait to swim back towards the line

What You Really Need To Know

- For a tail-hooked bait, cast it out and then with an open bail, you want to be constantly paying out your line into the water, whether the bait, the wind or the current is taking the line.
- Nose hooking is most effective when fishing strong current, when sight fishing or when pitching and reeling the bait a lot
- Nose hooking forces the fish to dive down to the bottom

Bottom Bait Tactics

The following are techniques for fishing bottom-dwelling baits like pinfish, pigfish, croakers and mojarra:

Tail Hooking

- Hook the bait in the tail as shown in Fig. 1.12
- Fishing these baits in current is preferable as it pushes them a little more - they tend not to want to swim a lot
- Again, keeping the bail open and paying line out is key. Any tension in the line will lift the bait off the bottom. Big fish will not eat these baits if they are not on the bottom
- While paying out the line, about every 30 seconds or so, give the rod a pop
- Every now and then, close the bail and quickly wind up the slack bringing the line tight to the fish. At this point the fish is kicking wildly but not going anywhere. Immediately open the bail again and this will catapult the fish forward making a commotion in the process that will attract your target fish

Nose Hooking

- Nose hooking (see Fig. 1.13) is best used in current, in deeper water or if you are using a weight
- With a weight attached, flip the bait out and allow it to sink to the bottom. Once it's on the bottom, let out a few feet of line and close the bail. At this point *do not move the bait!*
- Bottom-dwelling baits have thick, tough skin, requiring a fast, hard hook-set to knock the hook out of the bait and into the fish's mouth
- Again, when you get the strike, the fish will take off with the bait, and you will see your line ripping off the spool. Start reeling very fast which will close the bail, continue to reel until you have the line tight to the fish then set the hook

What You Really Need To Know

- Tail-hook bottom baits to drift them in current or on the flats
- Nose-hook bottom baits for fishing deeper water currents or if using a weight

Want To Maximize Your Fishing Time?

Check out the full video-based Live Bait Mastery course which has everything in this book and more in professional video tutorials so that you can easily understand the best fishing tactics.

Learn more about it here: www.SaltStrong.com/LBC

Shrimp Tactics

Free-Lining

- When free-lining shrimp with no weight or bobber hooked in the head (see Figs.1.21 & 1.22), avoid just letting him sit out there as he will burrow into the sand. You want to fish this bait actively

Bobber Rig

- When using a bobber, hook the shrimp through the horn as shown in Figs. 1.21 and 1.22. A weighted bobber is preferred - if you have an unweighted bobber you can add a split-shot just below the bobber. This keeps the bobber sitting upright in the water (Fig. 1.32)
- Pay the line out and allow the bobber to drift with the current - do not close the bail
- Pop the rod every 45-60 seconds to activate the sound the popping cork is named for, which attracts nearby predator fish
- While you do not require a hard hook-set when using a shrimp, you do require a fast one. By the time your bobber goes down, the fish eating your shrimp is already panicked feeling the resistance of the bobber. At this point quickly reel your line tight to the fish and set the hook. If using a circle hook, the hook-set is more of a drag than a snap



Fig. 1.32

Weighted Rig

- Pinching off the shrimp's tail releases scent which is great for attracting the scent-feeding fish like black drum, redfish and sheepshead
- Hooking it in that end tail section (see Fig. 1.25) will still allow the shrimp to swim and will be attractive for the snook and trout when you move and jig the bait
- Use a 20lb Fluorocarbon leader (40lb if there are big fish present) with a 1/4 - 1/8oz split shot attached 12" back from the hook (Fig. 1.33)
- Keep a tight line at all times so you can set the hook as soon as you feel the bite
- Every few seconds, give the rod a gentle little pop to lift the shrimp up about 6" off the bottom and then fall back down again. Allow the bait to sit for a few seconds and repeat the process, worming the bait along the bottom in this fashion



Fig. 1.33

What You Really Need To Know

- Fish free-lined shrimp actively or they will bury themselves into the sand
- Drift weighted bobbers with the current popping the bobber every minute or so
- For a weighted rig, use a 20lb Fluorocarbon leader (40lb if there are big fish present) with a 1/4 - 1/8oz split shit attached bait 12" back from the hook

Catching Pilchards with Sabiki

- Sabiki rigs (Fig. 1.34) consist of any number (usually between 6 and 10) of small hooks, each one on individual dropper lines which are a few inches long
- Bigger pilchards and threadfins are great springtime bait but can be difficult to catch with a cast net
- Match the weight to the depth you are fishing in. In really shallow water, a heavy weight works well as you can jig the line, without moving it, instead the little baits are just dancing around with the vibrations of the jigging
- In deeper water, a 1/2oz weight works well to pull it up and let it fall again through the water column
- Sabiki's come with a swivel on one end and a clip on the other. The swivel attaches to your line, while a weight goes on the clip

** PRO TIPS**

- Attach the Sabiki to your line and the weight before removing it from its cardboard backing
- Put your rod tip out over the water and snap the rod. This will cause the Sabiki to unravel itself from the cardboard. Be sure to pick up the cardboard now floating in the water!
- Tipping your Sabiki hooks with very small cut up chunks of Gulp baits is an extremely effective way to catch your baitfish

What You Really Need To Know

- Sabiki rigs consist of any number (usually between 6 and 10) of small hooks, each one on individual dropper lines which are a few inches long
- Sabiki's come with a swivel on one end and a clip on the other
- The swivel attaches to your line, while a weight goes on the clip
- Match the weight to the depth you are fishing in

Shallow Cast Netting

- The first thing you are looking for is surface activity - birds, dolphins, baits flicking or jumping on the surface
- In cold temperatures or stiff winds, look for areas 2-3 feet deep against a shoreline and out of the wind. The calmer the water, the better
- A 10' cast net with 3/8" mesh works well
- A trolling motor is necessary to sneak up on the baits but if push-poling is an option, that is preferable while standing on the bow to spot the bait, looking for flashes in the water
- Once you have cast the net and want to retrieve, cut your angle by backing off on your net
- Avoid pulling your net straight up off the bottom
- When casting your net, wait until the bait is swimming over sand to avoid tearing your net on rocks or pulling up a bunch of sea grass that damages the ecosystem and makes a mess of your vessel



Deep Cast Netting

- You will need a fish finder to locate bait in deer creeks and channels - once you locate a school, mark them on your finder
- The ideal technique is to drift over the bait school, throwing a heavier net with 1/2" mesh that allows for a faster sink to the bait
- In cold temperatures, mojarra will congregate in the deeper canals. Snook, trout and redfish love them!

What You Really Need To Know

- Throw your cast net in areas where you see birds, bait or boils
- In cold temperatures cast in calm waters on shorelines 2-3' deep
- A 10' net with 3/8" mesh works well in shallower water
- Use a heavier net with 1/2" mesh in deeper water

Livewell Tips

These tips are designed to keep your bait as lively and healthy as possible:

- Keep your water cold - placing a bag of ice (still in the bag) is a great way to ensure your livewell remains cold. Freezing water bottles and putting those in your livewell also works well. This slows their metabolism, slows their waste and reduces their oxygen demand
- "Baitfresh" by BassMedics is a great product designed to sustain and re-energize fresh and saltwater bait. Put a cap or two full into your livewell. You can purchase Baitfresh [here](#).
- When not on the water, air compressors with an air-stone attached to the end work very well in livewells. Unlike recirculators, they do not emulsify the waste of the bait
- If keeping Shrimp and bait fish in the same livewell, place the shrimp by themselves into a small bait bucket then place the bait bucket into the livewell. This will prevent them getting banged up by the other fish and also prevent them disappearing out the drain
- If your vessel is in an area with good quality water - clean, cold, not stagnant, then operating your recirculators going is preferable. You can also add a bubbler if desired
- At the start of the day, select your baits by hand. This will prevent any net you may use from banging up all the baitfish and constantly removing their slime, which will dramatically weaken them and even kill them. Only use your net once there are so few in your livewell they are too difficult to catch by hand
- When retrieving baits with a cast net, do so as quickly as possible and shake them out of the net directly into your livewell
- Do not overcrowd your livewell. This will cause all the baits to be swimming into one another, weakening them



What You Really Need To Know

- Keep your water cold, using ice if necessary
- Air compressors with an air-stone attached to the end work very well in livewells
- Use your hands to select as many baits as possible from your livewell before using a net
- Shake baits directly from your cast net into your livewell if possible
- Do not overcrowd your livewell

Bait Pens

- Bait pens attached to a dock or a boat are vital for keeping baits for extended periods of time
- The bait pen should be round, should sink, and be made of metal. Some have a rubber or plastic coating on the metal which helps protect the fish's slime coating
- Bottom-dwelling baitfish can live in a bait pen indefinitely as long as they are not overcrowded and fed every couple of days with some shrimp or a chum block
- High-oxygen demand fish will only last a couple days

When to Replace Baits

- Surface-swimming baits like threadfin, pilchards, mullet, whitebait need to be changed once they start sinking down to the bottom (assuming you are free-lining them and do not have a weight attached)
- Bottom-dwelling baits like mojarra, croaker, pigfish and pinfish need to be replaced once they start floundering in the mid-to-upper water column
- Remember, the big, smart fish know what baits swim where and will not eat a bait that is out of place

What You Really Need To Know:

- Bait pens are vital for keeping baits for extended periods of time
- The bait pen should be round, should sink, and be made of metal
- Surface-swimming baits like threadfin, pilchards, mullet, whitebait need to be changed once they start sinking down to the bottom column

Want Even More Live Bait Mastery Info?

Then order the video-based Live Bait Mastery course. The course gives you all the info in this book and more in easy-to-use video tutorials to give you an even better understanding of the needed tips.

Plus, you can get your questions answered and see the Q&A activity from other anglers.

Learn more about it here: www.SaltStrong.com/LBC

Module 2

Finding Feeding Fish

Overview

This module covers how to find the fish you wish to target in a variety of different scenarios and environments:

- Always start with an online map - Google, Google Earth, Bing, etc.
- Satellite maps allow us to see the bottom and structure
- Ideally you will familiarize yourself with the online maps the night before you intend to fish
- Some things to identify on online maps include:
 - Shallower 2-3 feet deep shorelines
 - Sandbars that break or almost break the water surface
 - Oyster bars
 - Docks in shallower water
 - Mangrove shorelines
- A scouting trip looking for fish using the spots you identified online is always a great ploy
- Avoid fishing an area in which you have not visually seen fish
- Spooked fish will return to eat live bait, much more readily than they would to eat artificial, so do not be afraid of spooking them while trying to locate them. If you do spook fish, back up and throw your line to them - they will usually return to that general area

Tides, Current, Wind

- Timing a fishing trip with a low tide is the desired approach as the fish are funneled into one area
- Ideally you would find the fish on the low tide then fish them on the incoming tide - this is the time that fish feed best
- Fish love to feed on the windward shore (the shoreline facing the wind) where the water is rough and choppy. However it is difficult to find fish in these conditions
- The ideal scenario is to be fishing where the wind is going the same way as the current as this allows you to cast with the wind and drift the bait down with the current
- Sandbars with cuts running through them are productive areas, especially on a falling tide as the fish must use these cuts to exit the area to avoid being stranded on the low tide. In these situations you want to leave your bait pretty stationary (use a weight if necessary) and the fish will have to swim past it. You can also fish your bait weightless through the cut with the current

What You Really Need To Know

- Finding fish starts with using online maps followed by a scouting trip to visually look for fish
- Spooked fish will return to eat live bait
- If possible begin fishing at low tide continuing into the incoming tide
- Fish love to feed on the windward shore
- Drifting baits with the current and the wind at your back is the ideal scenario

Passes, Inlets & Jetties

- On an outgoing tide fish tend to go out into the bay or ocean and sit on the edges of the current - they do not want to be in the brunt force of the current
- On an incoming tide, the fish funnel into the inlets and passes and sit on the edges
- Snook, tarpon, redfish and trout will school up on the bottom at the edge of the current
- When fishing inlets and passes from a boat, you can anchor up or drift

Drifting

- Use as lighter weight as possible (if any)
- If using a surface-swimming bait, use a 1oz weight in heavy current or a lighter split-shot if the current is lighter
- If using a bottom-dwelling bait, a weight is likely not necessary if you just keep feeding line while you're drifting.
- If fishing the incoming tide, fish the edges of the current inside the pass
- If fishing the outgoing tide, fish the edges of the current outside the pass

Anchoring

- Avoid anchoring right in the middle where the current is strongest
- Anchor your boat where the current is least, casting your hair into the edges and allowing it to sweep by the boat
- You can also use a 2-4oz weight on a swivel rig to throw into the current and allow it to drag your bait across the bottom with the current. If the weight is too light, the current will lift your bait off the bottom - you want it just heavy enough to be dragged by the current but remain on the bottom
- Big fish escape the current by hugging the bottom

What You Really Need To Know

- Fish the edges of the current inside the inlet/pass on an incoming tide
- Fish the edges of the current outside the inlet/pass on an outgoing tide
- When drifting make sure you're paying out line to keep your bait on the bottom
- When anchored, make sure you have a heavy enough weight to keep your bait on the bottom

Grass Flats

- There are two types of fish on grass flats - big fish and small fish
- Small fish tend to be on the 2-5 feet flats, in the potholes
- Big fish will inhabit flats as shallow as they can comfortably get as this enables them to be clear of their predators, dolphins and sharks. The biggest fish are in the shallowest water
- Big fish will follow the tides out and in
- Structure on shallow flats will hold big fish as it provides something for them to hide behind if danger approaches
- The best grass flats to fish will be the ones that visibly hold life - looks for bait fish swimming over the potholes
- Little whitebaits on the surface is a good sign
- Big striped mullet jumping are often a good indicator that there are bigger redfish and trout around

What You Really Need To Know

- Small fish tend to be on the 2-5 feet flats, in the potholes
- Big fish will inhabit flats as shallow as they can comfortably get, following the tides in and out
- Structure on shallow flats will hold big fish
- The best grass flats to fish will be the ones that visibly hold life

Bars, Docks, Mangroves

Oyster Bars

- The key to fishing on oyster bars is locating oyster bars with low water levels - this will congregate the fish closer together
- Avoid areas with vast amounts of oyster bars as the fish will be too dispersed
- Look for one or two oyster bars near the edge of some mangroves or other type of environment, this attracts the fish to them

Docks

- Finding fish on docks is challenging - there's no formula to which dock in a line of docks will be the one holding the fish
- Start at the end of the dock and troll the length of the dock, looking for fish - they want to be on that structure so if you spook them off, they will return quickly

Mangroves

- Mangroves are a great habitat for bait fish, which attracts bigger predator fish
- At high water the fish will go up under the mangrove roots
- At lower water they sit on the outside edges
- When looking for fish in a new area, start with mangroves with about 2 feet of water
- Ideally you're looking for mangroves where the low water is just low enough for the fish to feel comfortable being on the edges and at high water they can retreat back into the Mangroves a little
- Troll or push pole-down the mangrove shoreline looking for fish. You can pitch a strip or a nose-hooked mullet as you go
- Once you find fish, you may spook them. Circle out of the immediate vicinity and give the fish 15-20 minutes to return then fish them by casting in towards the mangrove line, rather than parallel as you were when looking for them
- Fishing close to the mangrove line results in a lot of break offs as fish dart back into the cover of the mangroves to escape
- Most mangrove roots do not go all the way to the bottom, so when you have a fish on that wants to swim into the Mangroves, lower your rod tip as far as you can (even to the bottom) which will allow your line to sweep under the Mangrove roots and prevent break offs

Sandbars

- Sandbars are excellent structure to fish for trophy fish
- Target sandbars that are exposed at low water and covered at high water
- Narrow sandbars with deeper channels either side are ideal, especially with current running parallel to the sandbar
- Sandbars are ambush point for big fish and they also use them to escape from their own predators
- Drifting baits in the current on the edge of sandbars is a very productive technique

Bridges & Piers

- Fish will congregate around the pilings on bridges and piers
- Due to the depth of the water around most bridges and piers, you will need to rely on your fish finder
- Zig-zag around the pilings to locate the fish
- Most commonly the fish will be found up-current and to the side of the bridge pilings
- When fishing a bridge, don't anchor behind the bridge, but rather just ahead of the bridge casting a weighted, nose-rigged bait to the spot where your finder located the fish. Make sure your weight is heavy enough to pin the bait to the spot
- If fishing an area with little current next to a pier, use your fish finder while trolling to locate the fish

What You Really Need To Know

- Locate oyster bars with low water levels
- One or two oyster bars near the edge of some mangroves is a great environment
- Troll the length of docks to locate fish
- At high water the fish will go up under the mangrove roots, at lower water they sit on the outside edges
- Most mangrove roots do not go all the way to the bottom, so when you have a fish on that wants to swim into the mangroves, lower your rod tip as far as you can (even to the bottom) which will allow your line to sweep under the mangrove roots and prevent break offs
- Fish mangroves positioned out off the mangrove line, rather than close to it

Murky Water

- Fish tend to be in the same kinds of environment in murky water as they are in cleaner water
- Look for fish visually at lower tides
- The advantage of dirtier water is that you can get closer to the fish as they are less spooky
- Remember the big fish you're targeting will not be in 3-4 feet of water, so while at that depth in murky water, you will not be able to see the bottom, you will be in the shallower 1-2 feet areas, where the big fish are
- In the rare instances where the water is indeed too dirty to see the fish in the shallows, look for boils and V-wakes the fish are making just below the surface

Winter Tactics

- In really cold winters big trophy fish will move out into the ocean via inlets and passes or way back up into muddy-bottom creeks and canals
- Residential areas are also great places to find these fish in really cold temperatures
- The muddy bottoms hold heat and therefore fish
- Using your fish finder, look for fish anywhere from 6-20 feet deep
- Creeks that feed into inlets and passes are productive spots as the warmer ocean water washes into them
- Look for birds and baitfish, using bigger baits and fishing them on or near the bottom
- In cold weather, when fishing deeper water like residential canals, shrimp is the best bait

Spring Tactics

- Sandbars and islands near where the fish were holding in the winter are ideal springtime target areas - for example a residential area with a lot of canals emptying out into the bay with sandbars and/or islands out in front
- Springtime is the ideal time to chase trophy trout and snook as they are coming out of their 'hibernation' and are hungry and looking to eat
- Look for these big fish around these sandbars and islands in the 1-3 foot range

Summer Tactics

- In the summertime big trophy fish are found everywhere, mixed in with all other kinds of fish
- Snook spawn in the summer and congregate in big numbers in and around inlets and passes
- Use a fish finder to locate large schools of snook in inlets and passes
- Tarpon are prevalent all over in the summer - look for them rolling
- Big trout are mixed in with the smaller trout on the sandbars, mangroves and shallow flats

Fall Tactics

- Targeting trophy fish in the fall can be challenging
- The mullet migration occurs in the fall, so key in on where they are migrating to catch the bigger fish
- Mullet will be found in numbers, migrating off the coast along the beaches, so this is a great area to target
- Snook and tarpon will be on these mullet schools
- Redfish spawn in the fall in inlets and passes so these are great areas to target big trophy reds
- Catching big trophy trout in the fall is challenging, as they are mixed in with the smaller trout
- Snook, tarpon and redfish are the best targets in the fall

What You Really Need To Know

- In murky water look for fish at low tide
- Fish tend to be in the same kinds of environment in murky water as they are in cleaner water
- Springtime trophy fish are going to be found around sandbars and islands close to where they were holding up in the winter - so near residential canals and creeks near inlets and passes
- In cold winters big trophy fish will move out into the ocean via inlets and passes or way back up into muddy-bottom creeks and canals. Shrimp are the best baits in these cold temperatures
- Muddy bottoms hold heat and therefore fish
- Creeks that feed into inlets and passes are productive spots as the warmer ocean water washes into them
- Sandbars and islands near where the fish were holding in the winter are ideal springtime target areas, which is the perfect time to target trophy trout and snook
- Snook spawn in the summer and congregate in big numbers in and around inlets and passes
- Tarpon are prevalent all over in the summer - look for them rolling
- Big trout are mixed in with the smaller trout on the sandbars, mangroves and shallow flats
- The mullet migration occurs in the fall, so key in on where they are migrating to catch the bigger fish
- Redfish spawn in the fall in inlets and passes

On the Water Spot Analysis

- After identifying a potentially good spot on a map, the next step is to go to it in your vessel
- The following items will help you visually locate the fish:
 - Polarized sunglasses
 - A hat to keep the sun out of your eyes
 - A platform to stand on (a robust cooler works well)
- Stand on your platform, using the trolling motor to slowly navigate the shoreline, visually looking for fish
- Trolling the shoreline against the current is a good practice, as the fish you spook (and you will spook fish) will not be inclined to battle the current as much so they will not spook off as far as they would if they were fleeing with the current. This also prevents those spooked fish from disrupting any fish that may be ahead of them down current
- Once you come across fish, make a wide arc off the shore and head up current about 100 yards beyond the fish you saw allowing you to drift live baits back with the current into the school you located
- Remember to cast towards the mangrove line (if that's where you are fishing) rather than on the line and parallel with it
- Keep your trolling motor on a constant speed. Speed variations with your trolling motor cause vibrations the fish will feel resulting in spooking them

Using a Depth Finder

- Obviously a depth finder is used in areas where it's too deep to see the fish, so remember, you're not going to see any surface activity like jumping or waking. You will rely solely on your depth finder
- Having a trolling motor with a GPS anchor system is ideal. This way as soon as you locate your fish on the finder, you deploy the GPS anchor mode and you stay anchored above those fish

Using Google Maps

- When planning to fish a new or unfamiliar area, the first step is to try and get an idea of the general area where the fish will be - local knowledge, Salt Strong Insider Reports, TopSpot Maps, tackle stores are all great places to go to for this information
- Once you have the general area identified, use a satellite map to isolate where you think the fish are going to be
- Once on the water and in the spot you have identified, visually locate your target fish
- Satellite maps like Google Earth allow you a three dimensional view into the water at structure and contours (Fig. 2.1)
- TopSpot maps are great resources to show you specific areas where there are fish

What You Really Need To Know

- Troll the shoreline against the current as the fish you spook will not be inclined to battle the current as much so they will not spook off as far as they would if they were fleeing with the current
- Once you come across fish, make a wide arc off the shore and head up current about 100 yards beyond the fish you saw, allowing you to drift live baits back with the current into the school you located
- Keep your trolling motor on a constant speed



Want to see the entire video-based interactive Live Bait Mastery course? Go here for a special book buyers only offer: www.SaltStrong.com/LBC

Module 3

Equipment

Overview

This module will cover the equipment you need to use to catch the best fish and the best live bait and most importantly, how to match your equipment to the live bait:

Fishing with Shrimp

- Shrimp is the baitfish everywhere that every fish wants to eat
- Using a smaller rod and reel wound with really light line with shrimp allows you to cast the bait further
- A sensitive 7'-7'6" graphite rod paired with a 2000 reel spooled with 10-15lb test braid
- Small hooks work best with shrimp, like the Gamukatsu #1 Octopus J-Hooks (Fig. 3.1) as they allow the shrimp to swim around
- If fishing on the bottom, use small split shot weights
- If fishing an area with heavy grass or mangroves use a weedless hook (See Fig. 1.7)
- Match the leader to the fish you're going to catch - the lighter the better (20lb Fluorocarbon works well)
- Bobbers are a great option when using live shrimp and in particular a 2" weighted popping bobber or popping cork with no rattle. (Fig.3.2)
- Smaller game fish will be attracted to rattles, but the bigger trophy fish are far wavier so a silent bobber works best
- The technique here is to jerk the rod slightly every now and then which makes a popping nose that sounds like a game fish feeding on the surface, thus attracting fish
- The smaller bobbers are recommended because the shrimp is still able to swim with it and drag it around, while a bigger bobber will be pushed around by the wind
- Small, 2/10 1/16oz jig-heads with a short shank hook (Fig.3.3) are great options to use with live shrimp. Cast the jig head out and bump it along the bottom, imitating what a shrimp looks like naturally on its own. You can either hook it in the tip of the head or the tip of the tail with the tail fins pinched off. Always hook top to bottom as that's how jig heads are meant to track



Fig. 3.1

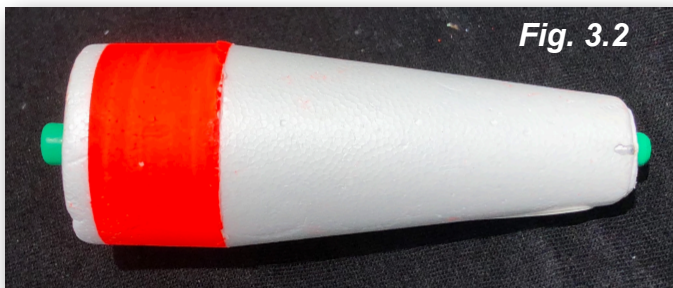


Fig. 3.2



Fig. 3.3

Fishing with Bottom Baits

- Bottom baits (pigfish, pinfish and croakers) are the prized baitfish and are the most likely to catch you the big trophy game fish
- Larger baits will require larger equipment. A fast action 7' rod paired with a 4000 works well in these applications
- While this type of rod may be a little stiffer the 4000 reel on it allows you to set the hook out of the baitfish much easier (remember, they have thicker skin)
- Getting the hook out of the bait and into the fish is critical when using bottom-dwelling baits
- Octopus J-Hooks are excellent options for bottom baits
- Matching the size of the hook to the size of the baitfish you're using is key. For example, a 7/0 hook would be used with baitfish in the 5-8" range
- Always keep some 3oz dropper weights and some 1oz egg weights in your tackle box (Fig. 3.4)
- A good, high quality leader is critical. Berkley Vanish 20lb true 100% Fluorocarbon Leader is a great choice (Fig. 3.5). It's a leader material that the fish absolutely cannot see



Fishing with Mullet

- Mullet is a universal baitfish, almost everything eats them, they are plentiful and easy to catch
- There are two species of mullet and both are equally good baitfish:
 - Striped: These are the ones people eat
 - Silver: These get to about 10" long
- More importantly is the size you use. You will typically use either finger mullet (3"-5") or big mullet (8"-12" long)

Finger Mullet

- A 3000 reel spooled with 15lb braid, paired with a 7'6" fast action rod is ideal. The longer rod allows for greater casting distance while the sturdier tip allows for more powerful hook-sets
- Mullet always have to swim, so again, matching hook-size to bait-size is key
- A 3/0 octopus J-Hook works for a 5-6" finger mullet
- 3oz dropper weight and 1oz egg sinkers (See Fig. 3.5) are again useful
- Have a packet of swivels in your tackle box as they are important when fishing with finger mullet in the wintertime
- 20lb and 40lb leader tied together as described in the "Mainline to Hook Rigs" module (See Fig. 1.3) is the leader of choice in this application

Big Mullet

- A heavier setup is required here with a fast action rod from 7 1/2 to 8 1/3 foot paired with a 4000 or a 5000 reel, spooled with 40 - 50lb braid
- When fishing with big Mullet, no weights or swivels are used, just a 7/0 - 12/0 octopus J-Hook
- 40lb true Fluorocarbon (like Berkley Vanish) tied to a harder 60lb Fluorocarbon (like Seagur) in the same fashion as described again, in the "Mainline to Hook Rigs" module and Fig. 1.3.

Fishing with Whitebaits

- Whitebaits are a high oxygen-demand fish and encompass the sardine and herring species

Smaller Whitebaits

- A 3000 reel spooled with 15lb braid, paired with a 7'6" fast action rod is ideal
- 20lb true 100% Fluorocarbon Leader again is ideal here - heavier leader will inhibit the fish's ability to swim
- 1/0 to 3/0 Octopus J-Hooks are the go in this application

Bigger Whitebaits

- 6" - 12" Herring and Pilchards will require a heavier setup
- A 7'6" fast action rod rated for 10-30lb braid, paired with a 4000 reel spooled with 30lb braid
- A straight-shot 40lb true Fluorocarbon leader is used here
- When hooking the bait in the nose, a smaller 3/0 octopus J-Hook is required
- For tail/back hooking use a 7/0 octopus J-Hook

Fishing with Crab

- There are three species of crabs typically used - Blue Crabs, Pass Crabs and Fiddler Crabs

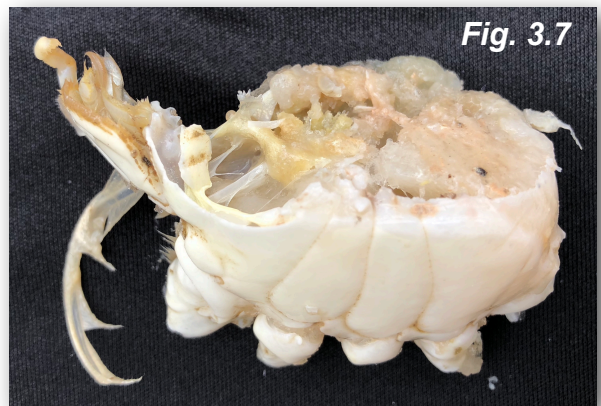
Blue Crabs

- Blue Crabs (Fig. 3.6) average 4" in size (carapace width)
- 7'6" fast action rod rated for 10-40lb braid, paired with a 5000 reel spooled with 40lb test
- The heavier setup helps to fight the larger fish that typically eat these types of crabs and the fish that you will have to pull out of structure
- Blue Crabs are cut up into big pieces (Fig. 3.7) which releases the strong crab scent - a powerful fish attractant
- 3/0 - 5/0 octopus J-Hooks are used for Blue Crabs
- Fish eating these crabs will suck the bait in, crush it up and spit the shell out so as soon as you feel the bite you'll want to set the hook
- When fishing around structure with cut crab, 60lb hard Fluorocarbon is recommended (like seagur)

Fig. 3.6



Fig. 3.7



Pass Crabs

- Pass Crabs (Fig. 3.8) average 3" in size (carapace width)
- Pass Crabs are best used for fishing permit and tarpon
- When fishing for tarpon, the crab needs to be floating on the surface
- 1/0 - 2/0 octopus J-Hooks are used for Pass Crabs - the hook needs to be light enough for the crab to swim up
- A long length of light 20lb Fluorocarbon leader tied to a short length of 40lb Fluorocarbon is recommended when fishing with Pass Crabs
- If fishing for permit, a straight length of 20lb leader is fine, but for tarpon you'll want to use that shorter length of 40-60lb leader to prevent the Tarpon from wearing through the line



Fig. 3.8

Fiddler Crabs

- Fiddler Crabs (Fig. 3.9) average 1-2" inches in size (carapace width)
- Fiddler Crabs are best fished around structure with a small hooked jig-head (see Fig. 3.3). This works great for sheepshead, black drum, etc.
- Again, light 20lb Fluorocarbon leader is used in this application
- A 7' fast action rod rated 6 - 15lb with a 10lb braid spooled on a 2000 reel works well here



Fig. 3.9

Bait Bubblers

- Keeping your live baits alive and healthy is of the utmost importance with live bait fishing
- Shrimp can be kept in a bait bucket with an O-Tab but larger higher oxygen-demand baits require a recirculating livewell
- The "Power Bubbles" air pump is a great option for infusing oxygen into the water (Fig. 3.10). They run off a 12 volt battery but can also hook up to the power at your house. The benefit of this system is that it pulls clean air, putting it into the water and then filters the water as the bubbles come up, pulling a lot of the toxins out of the water
- Other types of recirculation and aeration systems foam up the water with the toxins the baitfish are excreting, which then gets into the fish's gills, killing them

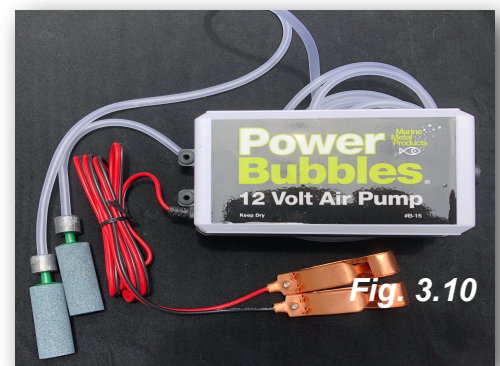


Fig. 3.10

Cast Nets

- Target baitfish, water depth, wind and current are all factors to consider when determining which type of cast net to use
- A good all-round net would be a mid-weight 8 foot net with 1/4" mesh
- For catching larger mullet, a net at least 10 feet in diameter with 1" mesh will work best
- For smaller finger mullet 1/4 - 3/4" meshing on a smaller net, as small as 5 feet, in shallower water
- In deeper water or fast moving current, the net will need to sink quickly to catch the bait you are targeting
- A general rule of thumb is to match the mesh size to the size of the bait being targeted and the net weight to the depth being fished
- Make an effort to select as many of your baits from your livewell by hand. This will prevent any net you may use from banging up all the baitfish and constantly removing their slime, which will dramatically weaken them and even kill them
- It's far more preferable to have a few very healthy baits than dozens of sick baits as trophy game fish will shy away from sickly looking baits

Want To Master Live Bait Fishing?

Then see the video-based Live Bait Mastery course. The course gives you all the info found here and more in video tutorials to give you an even better understanding of what you need to do on the water.

Learn more about it here: www.SaltStrong.com/LBC

Sabiki Rigs

- Sabiki rigs (See Fig. 1.35) are great for catching bait hook-and-line style
- A variety of different colors will come in handy when the bait fish are being picky
- Size #4 is ideal for inshore sized thread fins or pilchards
- Sabiki rigs will work on any rod although there are specialized Sabiki Rods. Alternatively some creative work with PVC pipe makes an excellent Sabiki Rod
- When targeting anything dwelling on the bottom, a hand-made rig works best. 15-20lb leader rigged with #6 Kahle Hooks (Fig. 3.11). These will not gut-hook the baitfish
- Keep a variation of weights on hand. A couple of sizes of split-shots (1/4 - 1/2oz), some dropper weights, matching the weight to the depth and current
- In shallow water or no current smaller 3/oz split-shots are ideal
- In deep water a 3oz dropper weight would be required



Fig. 3.11

Anchoring Systems

- Positioning yourself to fish is key in any kind of vessel
- Power-poles, Push Poles and weighing anchors are all options for holding your vessel in position on the fish
- GPS anchoring systems on trolling motors are also awesome options, especially for water over 10' deep

** PRO TIPS **

- When anchoring your boat in shallow calm water, avoid using a Power-Pole as this can stop the boat abruptly and spook the fish. Similarly using a push pole will spook fish if you happen to slam it down onto a clam shell, that noise reverberates through the water and spooks the fish
- Instead use a claw anchor (Fig. 3.12) tied to a light line, sliding it stealthy into the water and slowly stopping the boat by paying line out
- Claw anchors also work great as a second anchor to help position your boat to face in your desired direction



Fig. 3.12

What You Really Need To Know

- Match your equipment to the bait you're using, not to the fish you're targeting. Matching to the bait allows you to effectively fish the live bait to get the strike from the big fish you're targeting
- Using the wrong tackle with live bait defeats the whole purpose of using live bait to begin with - don't overwhelm a live bait with too heavy of equipment
- Match your cast net to the live bait you're targeting and the environment you're throwing it in

Module 4

Position Management

Overview

- Positioning will be based around the presence or lack of current and/or tide and wind direction

Shallow Water Positioning

- When positioning your vessel in current in shallow water, use the current to your advantage to carry your baits away from your vessel.
- You cannot hide the presence of your boat - the fish know it's there and will often move just out of casting range. This is where live bait holds a significant advantage over artificial, as you're able to drift and swim your unweighted baits down to the fish
- Positioning your vessel up-current is key so the current carries your bait towards the fish
- Your target fish's predators will always approach from deeper water, so avoid this in your boat - approach instead from the bank. This will spook the fish less

Positioning Demo

- When approaching an area you have confidence is holding fish, approach it as quietly and as slowly as possible
- Use your trolling motor to stealthily approach the area where the fish are holding. Turn your trolling motor off when you are just outside casting range
- Have your anchor system, whatever you will be using, prepared to deploy
- Be quiet!
- If you catch a fish, you can expect the remaining fish to lift away from the boat down current, but free-lining your bait with the current will allow you to continue to catch fish
- The farther you drift your bait with the current, the more likely you are to catch the bigger fish

Fishing a Point

- When approaching fish near a point, ideally, you'll want to approach them from behind the point, hugging it and using that structure as a means to hide your presence as much as you can
- Again, positioning up-current and drifting baits down to the fish is key

Fishing Docks / Structure

- Although fish are very spooky to boats in shallow water, if they are on structure, they are there for protection and they won't want to leave it
- Position your vessel about 30 yards off the dock, up-current and drifts baits through the dock a little, then bring them back
- If you get too close to the structure, the structure will hold the fish there, but they will not want to bite

Winter / Spring Bonus Tips

- In the cooler temperatures of the winter or spring, the fish will sit of the lee shoreline (the shoreline protected from the wind)
- Free-lining a mullet in these conditions is not productive as the fish are lethargic and will likely not pursue a fast-swimming mullet
- Similarly, free-lining a shrimp is also unproductive as it will likely just sit on the bottom
- Tail-hooking a Mullet on a 2 foot length of 20-30lb leader attached to a swivel and a 1oz weight. Because you have a weight, you can position yourself further from the fish, lessening the likelihood of spooking them and make a long cast to them. The weight will pin the leader to the bottom allowing the mullet to swim/wiggle around that 2 foot area - irresistible for game fish

Deep Water Positioning

- When fishing the banks from deeper water, position your boat directly off where you're going to fish, allowing you to pull the fish out of and away from that structure
- When the fish are in the middle of the water column (not on the surface or the bottom), nose-hook an unweighted bait, casting it up ahead of the boat/current, and slowly drift it back with the current towards the boat, picking up the loose line as it drifts. Allow the bait to drift past you, now opening the bail and letting the current take your bait
- Once you start getting strikes, you'll have keyed in on where the fish are and you can better position your boat
- Stealth is critical when the fish are not holding on structure. If they are spooked, they will likely leave the area in the absence of structure that would otherwise compel them to stay
- Fishing in at least 10' of water is usually deep enough to allow you to navigate over them in your boat without causing them to spook off
- Once you have located the fish with your fish finder and marked them, you'll want to engage your trolling motor's GPS anchor, sitting right on top of them
- Nose-hook your bait, weighting it according to the depth, and cast a little up-current, letting the bait drift back underneath your boat, where the fish are (if there's no current, cast it out the same way, but just slowly drag the bait back with slow, controlled pulls on the rod)
- This is an awesome technique for big trout on the bottom in the winter and big snook on the bottom in the summer
- If you don't have a GPS trolling motor, use an anchor (without a chain) dropping the anchor quietly up-current then letting your boat drift back over the fish

Using a Trolling Motor

- When positioning your boat in either deep or shallow water, keep your boat at a constant slow speed to avoid spooking fish. Fluctuations in speed are detectable by the fish and will cause them to spook off

For all of the live bait course's video footage, click here:

www.SaltStrong.com/LBC

When To Leave a Dead-zone

- Before you even go to fish an area, you should have a game plan that includes knowing if there are fish there, what kind of fish are there and how you intend to fish them
- If you are sight-fishing your target fish, throwing your baits to them and they are not eating, do not waste any more than 10-15 minutes in this spot. If they intended to eat, they would have done so by this point
- Fish will typically always eat live bait, provided you're positioned correctly and fishing the bait correctly. If you're unable to see the fish and getting no strikes with everything else set-up right, the fish probably are not present
- When fishing live bait, don't fish in an area that "looks good" or where you "think" there's fish. You have to "know" the fish are there - and this is where pre-planning and scouting is fundamentally critical
- There are often "tide-driven fish" - those fish that come into and out of an area based on the tide
- The best time to fish a flat typically is when the tide is at its lowest and starting to come in. In this scenario you may indeed wait an hour or more for a bite, but this is an acceptable circumstance to wait on because you do know these fish will be coming onto this flat, it's just a matter of time
- The bottom line is, if you feel like you're positioned right, you have the right bait and the right technique, and you're there at the right time, but you're not catching anything, move on - the fish aren't there

What You Really Need To Know

- When positioning your boat to fish, stealth is absolutely critical - approach on a steady slow speed with your trolling motor, shut it off, using the current and wind to your advantage by approaching the fish up-current and up-wind
- If possible put something (like a mangrove point, an oyster bar or sandbar) between you and the fish - at least on your approach
- Have your anchoring device at the ready so you can stop exactly where you need to be
- Pitch your baits up-current and drift them with the bail open with the current onto the fish. Feed line out faster than the current is taking your bait to keep the presentation looking natural. Every now and then reel up the slack tight to the bait, to make sure it's where you need it to be then open the bail again
- While you can be a little louder in deeper water, you do have to be "on" the fish
- When fishing a mangrove line, avoid positioning close to the line or fishing parallel with it. Any fish that strikes your bait will immediately retreat into the mangroves and you will have no leverage to pull it out. Positioning out off the mangrove line allows you to pull any fish you hook straight out regardless of the angle the fish takes off on
- In deep water, rely heavily on your fish finder and GPS (or other) anchor system and anchor up directly over them. This way if they do slide off a little, you can quickly locate them again with a few casts

Conclusion

A lifetime of knowledge and application has gone into this document. Apply these techniques and you *will* be successful!

Salt Strong and Captain Peter Deeks thank you for the investment of your time and sincerely hope your fishing game benefits from this info!

Best of luck, now go out there and catch some big ones!

Want even more Live Bait Mastery expertise? Check out the book buyers only special for the course's video format: www.SaltStrong.com/LBC

Bonus Material

Redfish Tactics

- Redfish are bottom-dwellers, finding it difficult to hit topwaters or other baits on the surface
- When possible, using a weight is preferred, always nose-hooking the bait
- Redfish are scent-feeders so cut bait is extremely effective fished on the bottom, as long as the current is not too strong. If the bait is being picked up off the bottom by the current and spinning, its not effective

Winter

- Redfish crave live shrimp in the wintertime
- They are an amazing bait this time of the year

Spring

- In the Springtime, whitebait and finger mullet are very effective on the flats

Summer

- In the warmer water of the summer as the redfish become more lethargic, cut bait works very well
- Cut ladyfish, cut mullet, cut crabs are all great, but any fresh cut bait will suffice
- Weigh the cut bait down. Redfish will not eat a floating cut bait

Fall

- In the fall, pinfish and pigfish especially are moving from the inside, out, so match the hatch
- In the fall, throw a large pinfish or pigfish into the Inlets and passes the reds are spawning in to hook big bull redfish

Snook Tactics

- While snook will come up and explode on surface baits, they are bottom-feeders
- Use a weight to hold your bait to the bottom and be still with your rod, leaving your line loose
- Excessive movements of your line will be detectable by the snook and will turn them off the bite
- Have patience and let the bait sit until you get the strike

Gator Trout Tactics

- The biggest of big trout move into as shallow water as they can get at night, often with their backs almost out of the water. In the day they will slink back into slightly deeper water, but never too deep
- Big trout stay close to shorelines, oyster bars or sandbars as a means to quickly escape their only real predators: sharks and dolphin
- When targeting big trout, fish as shallow as you can where you see bait

Tarpon Tactics

- Tarpon like to cat-and-mouse their baits, they also like to track their bait. They will come up behind the bait to do this
- Nose or mouth-hook your baits when fishing for tarpon. A tail or back-hooked bait will likely result in the tarpon hitting your leader as they track it from behind and spooking them off
- Additionally, if the tarpon is not eating it, you can give a nose/mouth-hooked bait a little jerk to provide a natural looking movement to entice the fish to eat

Live Bait Tournament Tactics

- Spend some time a day or two before, pre-planning and pre-fishing. You need to know where the fish are
- You need to have a game plan so if you're getting skunked at your first spot, you have identified other spots you can hit
- You must have all of the live bait you will need before the tournament begins - having to catch live bait on tournament day wastes valuable fishing time and makes a mess of your boat

Fresh Bait vs. Frozen Bait

- Catching live bait and putting it on ice if you wish to fish dead baits is preferable to buying frozen bait from a store
- Hooks tear out of store-bought frozen baits very easily and the meat disintegrates in the water
- Pouring rock salt or kosher salt onto your fresh baits while on ice (brining) will firm up the meat and keep them good for up to a week
- Frozen Shrimp are ok for catching baitfish like pinfish. They are ok for family-type fishing but they do not hold well on a hook and the head will come straight off as soon as you cast it
- There is nothing visually appealing about a frozen Shrimp. It's really nothing more than a piece of scent
- You may catch small reds, sheepshead or black drum on frozen shrimp but you will not catch trophy fish or any trout or snook on frozen shrimp as these are visual predators and a frozen shrimp offers nothing visually
- Fresh dead shrimp (unfrozen) can work by ripping off the tail, hooking them through the tail and working it as you would a live shrimp

Cut Bait Tips

- Any type of bait fish will work for cut bait but larger 10-12" Mullet work best
- Catching fresh bait and using that is far more preferable over cutting up frozen baits for the same reasons discussed above
- Fresh ladyfish and pinfish are also good choices
- You will primarily catch redfish with cut bait, although you may tag the odd shark
- Have a cutting board of some description to protect your vessel and a good sharp knife
- When cutting up your fresh bait, first cut off and discard the tail
- For smaller redfish a 2-3" chunk of mullet is ideal
- Larger bull reds will require a 3-4" chunk (Fig. B.1)



Fig. B.1

- A mullet head is an excellent bait also (Fig. B.2). A bonus of using the mullet head is that the smaller catfish cannot eat it and get hooked
- Circle hooks from 4/0 to 7/0 (depending on the size of the target fish) are used
- Rig the bait first through the meat part of the chunk then out through the skin (Fig. B.3). The skin is tougher which will help hold the bait on the hook. Make sure you remove any scales from the hook point.
- There is no need to work the bait in any way - just allow it to sit, weighted on the bottom and the redfish will locate it



Thank you so much for investing in this Live Bait Blueprint book. I trust you received a ton of value and we can't wait to hear about the transformation in your inshore fishing game. If you'd like to see ALL of the exclusive footage from the course at a special low rate (for book buyers like you only), then go to the link here: www.SaltStrong.com/LBC