Fishing Equipment Definitions and Usage: Fishing Rods

The purpose of this article is to give the you general knowledge of common terms for fishing equipment. There is not an industry standard for terms, so these are basic guidelines. Think in general terms, such as "mostly" or "rarely."

For instance, a motorcycle can get you to work during a snowstorm but an SUV would be more efficient, comfortable and the better choice. So, try and use the information below for the situation that your equipment is needed for.

This article will focus on fishing rods.

Fishing rod. Casts your lure or bait. Allows you to feel fish biting and lures action. Rods have a rating label on them that includes: power, action, length, line rating and lure weight. There is no standard for any of these ratings. One company's medium power can be another company's heavy power. These ratings should be used as general guidelines.

Fishing Rod Power. The rod's ability to handle strain. A good rule of thumb is heavy action is for heavier lures and has more power/strength to pull fish away from wood, snags, grass, etc.

Medium-heavy action is still able to pull fish out of most situations and can cast some heavy lures and lures on the "lighter" side. Medium power can cast medium-weight lures and has some ability to pull fish away from isolated cover. Medium-light power is for casting smaller-sized lures, has limited ability to pull fish, and best used for lighter lures, and arear with little to no snags. Light and ultra-light action is used for the lightest lures, lightest line and smallest fish; and it has almost no ability to pull fish.

Fishing Rod Action. Where the rod initially flexes with a given weight. I generally use the following guideline, and it is not exact. Apply approximately 4 pounds of pressure with your wrist to the rod handle, with the tip of the rod on a soft surface, with the fishing rod guides facing opposite of soft surface.

An extra-fast action will bend in the upper 1/4 of the rod length, a fast action in the upper 1/3, a moderate action about halfway, and a slow action near the rod handle. Each action is desirable for different applications. A general rule of thumb here is for faster bite detection and hook sets, the faster action you will want. For baits that can pull out of a fish's mouth and crankbaits, a more moderate action is often desired. This is just a guideline and others choose differently but for drop-shots and finesse plastics, I like an extra-fast action. For jigs, jerk baits and spinnerbaits, I like a fast action. For crankbaits, a moderate action. These are just guidelines and there are always exceptions.

Fishing Rod Lure ratings. This is generally rated in ounces and gives a range. For instance, 1/4 to 5/8 ounce. This is a weight range that the manufacturer believes the rod is capable of casting.

I have found that lures on the low and high ends often do not cast as well as the lures in the middle of the range. In this case, a 3/8-ounce lure will generally cast better than a 1/4-ounce or 5/8-ounce lure. This is also a general guideline, as there are rods that are sometimes rated too low or too high.

Also, how you use the rod makes a difference. For instance, the above rod could be used to vertical jig, just dropping the lure straight down and not casting a lure heavier than the higher lure rating.

Fishing Line Rating. This rating informs you of the suggested line sizes for the rod. There will be a rating, such as 8-14-pound line. The numerical value is the breaking strength of the line. You would hope it corresponds to the breaking strength of the rod and does in general terms. It is, however, not exact. Heavier and lighter lines can be used, but know that the chances increase of a rod breaking, before your line, with every pound test size you go over the lines rating.

Fishing Rod Length. The rod's length is determined in feet and inches. A 6-feet, 6-inch rod will be labeled 6'6". Rod length has its advantages and disadvantages. Shorter rods are often used for constricted areas, casting under trees and docks. Longer rods are more favorable for longer casts and techniques, such as flipping.

Fishing Rod Material. What the rod is made of. There are graphite (or some form), fiberglass (different types), and composite (a mixture). Generally, everything being equal, a lighter and stiffer rod will be more sensitive than a heavier and less stiff rod. This is because less weight is needed to make a lighter and stiffer rod move. The drawback is that, generally, a lighter and stiffer rod is also easier to break or more or less forgiving with user error. Each type of material is often used for a specific fishing technique. Most people prefer graphite for fishing plastic lures, and it is hard to beat fiberglass or a composite rod for fishing crankbaits.

Handle/Grip Material. This is the type of material your handle is made of. Some of the types include cork, EVA, hypatholon and carbon fiber. Each has its advantages and disadvantages. Cork is classic, comfortable, but damages and dirties easier than others. EVA and hypatholon are durable but heavier. Carbon fiber is tough, lightweight but sometimes more expensive, and can sometimes get slippery when wet or coated with slime (from fish).

Fishing Rod Guides. The rings on the rod that gather the line when casting. The frames are generally stainless steel or titanium. The rings inside the frame can be of several different materials. Most guide ring material can handle braided lines. One exception is stainless steel guides with stainless steel frames. Over time, this type of guide frame will develop grooves in the ring which will cause line damage.