

What Kind of Line Should I Use?

Types of Lines Available Today, Advantages and Disadvantages

I'm often asked this question. I always answer by first stating, "most importantly, you need to use the line type and brand that you have confidence in and seems to work for you". The line, lure, bait, terminal rig (hook, bobber, swivel, weight, etc.) that you have confidence in causes you to fish better, which results in you catching more fish than if you are fishing with equipment you are uncertain or awkward with. That being said, there are qualities to each type of line that do make a difference depending on the kind of fishing we are doing. Some work **much** better than others in certain circumstances. That is why many pro fishermen carry several rods with them in the boat.

I recently read an article by a popular bass pro who, when he goes out on the water, has with him: a reel with Trilene XT monofilament, another with Fireline braid, a third Copolymer line, and one made of Fluorocarbon. He makes his living putting fish in the boat no matter what the circumstances.

Well, I'm not a pro, but I do love fishing. Quite honestly I can't spend this kind of money on just line! Especially since three of these four lines need to be replaced at the end of every season. Most of us can't.

So, I'm going to explain the differences between these types of lines and the pro's and con's of each. My intention is to give you some information you can use to choose what will work best for you. We all have our own preferences in line type. I have mine. But that doesn't mean what I use is the "best" line, or the line that is right for you. This is why I don't tell people, "Well I use xyz line". You're the best judge of what works for you!

Monofilament

Copolymer

Braided "super lines"

Fluorocarbon

First - Are different brands of the same type of line better than others?

Ans.: Definitely. Buy name brands. "Off brand names" that offer spools of 500 yards or more at low prices frequently use sub-standard extrusion processes that produce line which varies in diameter and consequently "test-strength". The minor savings in cost isn't worth losing that fish of a lifetime.

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Is there a best all-purpose line?

Ans.: No. Only a “best choice for your type of fishing. It will be different for Trout, different again for Bass, and yet again for Pike. It will also depend on the type of lure your using and what the water is like: mostly weeds, or sticks, bushes, trees, bull rushes, or open water with a gravel bottom?

Braided

Braided lines consist of intertwined strands of material, technically making them a multifilament product. Today that material is Dacron, gel-spun polyethylene fiber, or aramid fiber. In the early 1990s, braided lines made from high-tech fibers became available. Because these lines featured great strength with small diameter, and because the fiber and no-stretch characteristics enhanced sensitivity, they became known as “super lines” or “microfilaments.” Also called performance lines, microfilaments are braided from gel-spun polyethylene fiber (different grades or generations of Spectra, Dyneema, or Tekmillon) or from aramid fiber (Kevlar). The synthetic fiber itself, which is 10 times stronger than steel, has been used in industrial, aerospace, and military applications, and is incredibly strong yet very thin. Individual strands of fiber are married through an intricate, time-consuming, and costly braiding process. The result is an ultrathin, super-strong, and very sensitive line. Braided line definitely has its advantages. It's perfect for flipping, pitching, or drop-shooting into heavy cover. It has the raw strength when it comes time to start hauling big bass out of nasty cover. You can rest assure that the chances of this line being abraded from structure contact is absolutely minimal. Because of it's lack of stretch it's a good choice for trolling. Braided lines are stronger than any other type of line in any specific diameter, they are hard to break. Braided lines do wear over time but last many times longer than any other type of line. So, re-spooling your reels every four months or each season (depending on how much you fish) won't be necessary. However braid is very expensive.

Disadvantages: Unlike monofilaments, these lines have a personality all their own. First of all, when they hit the water they float! This takes some getting used to, and in many cases rigs and lures need to be altered to accommodate this. I wouldn't recommend this line for fishing top water lures. When you “start and stop”, or “walk” a top water lure the line can float back around the lure and get tangled in the hooks. Braided line also has a nasty habit of developing “wind knots”. When you cast with braided line it's thin light weight allows it to be buffeted by the wind and loop knots sometimes develop. When they do you can't get them out and end up having no choice but to cut the line.

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Because of the lack of stretch in these lines, it is easy to cut your fingers, bend hooks, pull lures away from fish when they strike, and they result in more broken rod tips. When using braided lines for hard striking and fighting fish it is important to remember to back off on the drag and to use a rod that has a lighter action tip to minimize the disadvantages of no-stretch.

Another very important fact about braided lines is that they have all the qualities of sandpaper when it comes in contact with rod and reel components. Unless your rod has titanium or another similar material lining the guides, I would not recommend these lines. These lines can make significant grooves and abrasions in rod guides. This also applies to line rollers on spinning reels and level-winds on baitcasting reels. Over time, they will be harmed from its ultra coarse texture as well.

Braided line has however made many advances since first introduced. If you didn't tie the right knot it would "untie" itself from your lure. A Palomar knot won't slip when used with braided lines. On the other hand, a clinch knot will. Fortunately there been improvements made recently. Line manufacturers have made the line easier to tie a knot in, available in many different colors yet still able to keep the no-stretch, no-break advantages as well as not as abrasive on fishing equipment. Fishermen's views of braided line are; you either love it or you hate it!

This brings up the issue of line stretch and why it's important to consider. As of late, "line stretch" has been banished from nearly every brand of line and replaced by the words "ultra-low-stretch" or "no-stretch". The wave of low-stretch monos has only appeared on the shelves of tackle shops in the past three or four years. They openly boast firmer, stronger hook-sets and fewer lost fish, and most of all, greater overall sensitivity. While all of this is very true, some stretch is better than no stretch at all. There are a couple of reasons why. Number one, some stretch provides shock absorption that can be a real plus in some circumstances. For example, if a fish makes a last minute run near the boat, when only a very short length of line is out. That line stretch will buy you those precious extra few seconds to get to the drag reduced or the spool released thus avoiding the loss of the fish, or worse a broken rod tip! Also, stretch can enhance the action to many lures, especially crankbaits. A wide wobbling, diving crankbait fished on no-stretch line will noticeably lose some of its attractiveness to Bass because it will look like its being dragged through the water, rather than swimming. The action wobble of these baits are what makes them so

What Kind of Line Should I Use?

Types of Lines Available Today, Advantages and Disadvantages

effective. It is also important to slow down your hookset. Because of the lack of stretch, when the strike occurs the angler, quick to set the hook, often pulls it away from the fish. Finally, although much thinner than an equal line weight in monofilament, braid is highly visible compared to all other line, especially in clear water.

Fluorocarbon

These lines offer the advantage of near-invisibility under water, a critical factor in clear water fishing applications. This is a real advantage when fishing clear water lakes, streams or rivers where, for example, fish have an extended amount of time to examine your bait when still-fishing from shore or boat with prepared bait, worms, minnows, etc.. Fluorocarbon line also has about half the stretch of mono and more sensitivity, making it ideal for the long casts necessary in clear water. It has more abrasion resistance than monofilament resulting in fewer break-offs. It also sinks well. It's density is much greater than monofilament. This is an advantage it has over other lines when fishing subsurface lures (crankbaits, spinnerbaits, spoons, stickbaits, etc.), and of course fishing with bait. It's as invisible as lines can get under water. There are 100% pure fluorocarbon lines like Berkley "Vanish", and there are many brands of "fluorocarbon coated" lines that maintain some degree of "invisibility"

But like other fishing lines, it has its limitations. Knots are one. As most fishermen know, when you tie a knot with monofilament, you want to wet it (spit on it) then pull the knot snug. With fluorocarbon you really want to wet it, and wet it again as you slowly, in increments, snug it down. And, if the knot doesn't look perfect, cut it off and retie it until it does! More so than any other type of line, line breakage at the knot can occur with fluorocarbon, and poor knot tying on the part of anglers is the cause.

Because of the nature of the chemical makeup of fluorocarbon, it is stiff and tends to retain line memory. On baitcasting reels this makes "backlashes" more likely and can be frustrating. Fluorocarbon can be a problem for beginning anglers to use on spinning reels. It is much more difficult to manage and control than regular monofilament. Initially there is somewhat of a learning period when you begin to use fluorocarbon on a spinning reel. You may be plagued by those funny looking "spring shaped coils" that pop-off your reel as if out of nowhere! Oh yes, then there are the loops with twists that form! The reason is because fluorocarbon line is stiff compared to monofilament. It is also impossible to spool your spinning reel with this stuff without getting line twists because of it's unforgiving nature. Fortunately however, after the line is used on several fishing trips it does get softer and behaves much better.

What Kind of Line Should I Use?

Types of Lines Available Today, Advantages and Disadvantages

However because of its density and resulting sinking qualities, it's not a good choice for fishing surface, "topwater" lures. It interferes with the ability of the angler to work these types of lures properly.

Finally, fluorocarbon is much more expensive than comparable monofilament and copolymer lines.

Monofilament

For half a century "mono" has been the line of choice for many fishermen and has been the standard in fishing lines. In the late 1950's the first nylon based monofilament fishing lines were made for Stren. Since then many companies have developed monofilament lines variety of colors, sizes line strengths and flexibility.

Monofilament lines maintain good knot strength, are usually cheaper than other types of lines, and work well in a variety of fishing conditions. It is designed to be limp and soft, and it casts easily on baitcasting, spinning and spincasting reels. It's inexpensive, reliable, and can be purchased with just about every color variation you could want. It's about as close as you can get to "The all around line".

Monofilament line stretches, which can be bad or good. Stretch makes line more forgiving when a big fish makes a strong run, but it also makes it harder to set the hook. The amount of stretch can be controlled in the manufacturing process and varies among brands, but all monofilament will stretch.

Advantages:

Monofilament line is easy to cut and it is the easiest line with which to learn to tie fishing knots and learning to cast. The flexibility and lack of stiffness in monofilament line makes it the best line for casting, as it comes off the reel and through the rod guides on a fishing pole much smoother than other types.

Its elasticity give it good shock absorbing qualities, making it less likely that a fish will tear itself free of the hook.

This shock absorbing quality means it's a good choice for leader material.

Compared to other line materials, it's relatively inexpensive

It's an easy line material in which to make lure to line, or line to line connections, using a variety of knots.

It's transparent, and less visible in the water than most other line materials, with exception of fluorocarbon.

What Kind of Line Should I Use?

Types of Lines Available Today, Advantages and Disadvantages

Disadvantages:

There is a distinct lack of quality control for cheap brands of monofilament fishing line. Buy brand names.

It has less abrasion resistance and a thicker diameter than other types of lines. “Limp” monofilament lines have moderate resistance to abrasion. The “Tough” monofilament lines have good abrasion resistance.

Its elasticity absorbs movement of your terminal tackle. This decreased sensitivity at the rod tip reduces the detection of bites.

Monofilament absorbs water. This contributes to increased “stretch” and line deterioration.

It suffers from ultra-violet degradation when exposed to direct sunlight.

It's absorbent to a small degree, a property that causes it to lose strength over time.

One of the disadvantages of monofilament line is that it retains memory. Monofilament line has a tendency to take on the shape of the spool of your reel over a season of fishing, making it come off in coiled shapes when you cast it.

Because of these last four qualities, it is a good idea to change your monofilament line at regular intervals. At least every year.

Copolymer:

Copolymer fishing line was introduced in the mid 1980's. Copolymer lines are made by mixing two or more kinds of polymer materials together, and, while they are fluid, extruding this blend through a small hole. They're actually monofilament lines because the end product is only one filament, but they're different from normal monofilaments since the materials are paired to produce a blend in order to achieve special qualities. Often a blend of polymers will give the best characteristics of each one while lowering its bad characteristics.

The outcome of this resulted in a material that has additional benefits than monofilament. Copolymer fishing line features are smaller line diameters, higher abrasion resistance, have a lower stretch factor, high tensile strength, higher impact and greater shock resistance. Copolymers can have a wide variety of qualities depending on how the materials are blended. Many are blended to combine flexibility with strength.

What Kind of Line Should I Use?

Types of Lines Available Today, Advantages and Disadvantages

and abrasion resistance. They can be thinner but stronger than regular monofilament but will usually be a little stiffer. They often have more memory than monofilament lines, but usually have less stretch. Visibility can be lowered in copolymers, too, giving them many qualities fishermen need while sacrificing only a little of the good qualities.

Over the years new formulas have been added notably the addition of fluorocarbon which adds invisibility stealth factor to the line. Berkley's new "Sensation" is an example of the evolution of copolymer lines. It is extremely supple and consequently is an excellent choice for spinning reels. At the same time it has retained the small diameter,

strength, low stretch, shock resistance, low visibility and abrasion resistance characteristic of copolymer lines.

Copolymer lines are an excellent choice for spinning and baitcasting reels. They cast well and their strength and low stretch give them the ideal qualities to detect strikes and set hooks in the toughest of bass. As far as fishing the ultra-heavy cover aspect, copolymer lines can take care of business just as well in these areas as braided line.

Copolymer lines are appropriate for fishing anything from crankbaits, stickbaits, spinnerbaits to plastics (worms, lizards, crawfish, creatures, etc..), live bait, spoons and spinners.