

Bass Fishing: Intermediate Mastery

INLAND FISHING EDUCATION - Thurs 2-3

Pattern fishing, offshore ledges, and the tournament mindset.

Pattern fishing, offshore ledge mastery, advanced jig technique, reading live conditions, forward-facing sonar, and your first tournament. For anglers who have the basics and are ready to fish like a pro.

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CHAPTER 01

Pattern Fishing

Reading and repeating the bite across an entire fishery

A beginner catches fish. An intermediate angler catches fish by design — using a repeatable pattern that tells them why the fish are where they are and allows them to duplicate the conditions across the entire lake or river.

WHAT A PATTERN IS

A pattern is a combination of: depth + cover/structure type + water temperature + lure + retrieve speed. When you catch a fish, the immediate question is: can I find 10 more fish in the same combination? If yes, you have a pattern. If the next 5 casts in identical conditions produce nothing, the first fish was a stray.

The Pattern-Building Process

Step First catch: Immediately note: exact depth, bottom type, cover type, water temp, lure, retrieve speed, and time of day.

Step Duplicate: Make 5 casts in identical conditions within 50 feet. 2+ fish = pattern candidate.

Step Expand: Move 200 yards to the next area with the same depth and structure profile. Repeat the presentation.

Step Confirm: 3+ locations producing on the same setup = a confirmed pattern that will work all day.

Step Refine: Once confirmed, adjust one variable at a time — depth, retrieve speed, trailer color — to optimize.

QUICK REFERENCE — PATTERN VARIABLES TO TRACK

- > Depth: Exact depth fish are holding (mark on graph)
- > Structure: Point / ledge / flat / channel / hump / bluff
- > Cover: Grass / wood / rock / dock / none
- > Water temp at depth (not just surface)
- > Lure: Specific bait, color, weight, trailer
- > Retrieve: Speed, cadence, pauses, direction of cast
- > Time of day when the bite was active

CHAPTER 02

Offshore Ledge Fishing

The summer masterclass — finding and catching deep bass

Offshore ledge fishing is the single most productive summer technique for catching large numbers of quality largemouth bass on reservoirs across the country. It is also the technique with the steepest learning curve. Most anglers never fish it. Those who do consistently outperform the field.

Finding Ledges with Electronics

- A ledge is any significant depth change on an offshore structure — a point dropping from 12 to 22 feet, a channel bank, a hump with a flat top.
- On your sonar: look for the hard, consistent bottom return at a consistent depth with a sudden transition to deeper water.
- Mark every transition you find. Fish them in order until you find where fish are concentrated.
- Fish will often show as arches or clouds just off the ledge face at a specific depth. Mark that depth.
- On the same ledge, fish often school at the same depth throughout the summer.

The Ledge Fishing Presentation Sequence

Order	Presentation	Why First?
1	Deep-diving crankbait (10XD, DD22)	Covers water fast, identifies active fish
2	Football jig + craw trailer	Bottom contact, best for lethargic fish
3	Carolina rig (1 oz, 24" leader)	Maximum coverage of transition zone
4	Drop shot (vertical)	When fish are visible on graph but not biting reaction
5	Swimbait on jighead	Imitates shad when bait is present on the ledge

CHAPTER 03

The Jig: Advanced Applications

Trailer selection, cover types, and the art of the drag

The jig is the highest-skill-ceiling bait in bass fishing. A beginner can catch fish on a jig. An expert catches fish on a jig in every condition, in every season, in every type of cover. The difference is trailer selection, presentation control, and reading the bite.

Jig Type	Best Cover	Weight Range	Trailer Pairing
Football Jig	Open bottom, gravel, offshore	3/8-3/4 oz	Craw trailer, creature bait
Flipping Jig	Grass mats, laydowns, docks	1/4-3/4 oz	Compact craw, chunk
Swim Jig	Open water, grass edges	1/4-3/8 oz	Swimbait trailer, paddle tail
Finesse Jig	Docks, clear water, finicky fish	3/16-1/4 oz	Small craw, Ned-style
Punch Rig	Matted grass (not technically a jig but similar)	1-2 oz	Compact creature bait

The Drag Retrieve — The Most Important Jig Skill

Most beginners hop a jig. Most fish are caught dragging a jig. The drag retrieve: lower the jig to bottom, take up slack, and drag the rod from 9 o'clock to 12 o'clock slowly — one foot of movement every 3-4 seconds. Let the jig stop completely after each drag. The bite almost always comes when the bait stops moving.

CHAPTER 04

Topwater: Conditions and Timing

When, where, and how to fish surface presentations

Topwater Type	Best Condition	Water Temp	Key Retrieve
Walking bait (Spook)	Early morning, evening calm	60-80F	Walk the dog — side to side rhythm
Popper	Calm surface, overcast	58-78F	Short pops with 2-3 second pauses
Buzzbait	Low light, bass active near surface	65-80F	Steady reel, just fast enough to stay up
Hollow frog	Matted grass, warm summer	68-90F	Walk over the mat, pause in pockets
Prop bait	Around schooling fish, open water	65-80F	Twitch-twitch-pause

THE TOPWATER TIMING RULE

The two most reliable topwater windows: the 90 minutes surrounding sunrise and the 60 minutes surrounding sunset. Cloud cover extends these windows. Full sun at midday collapses them. In fall, the midday topwater bite can remain active because surface water temperature is more comfortable for bass.

CHAPTER 05

Reading Live Conditions

Weather, pressure, and feeding windows in real time

Barometric Pressure — The Most Reliable Variable

Pressure State	Bass Activity	Best Approach
Rapidly falling	Pre-storm feeding frenzy — often excellent	Fast-moving reaction baits, cover water
Low and steady	Active, feeding in shallows	Moving baits, topwater, spinnerbait
High and steady	Normal feeding windows, finesse often needed	Slower presentations, natural colors
Rapidly rising	Post-front shutdown — very difficult	Deep, slow, finesse only

Cloud Cover and Wind

- Overcast: Bass feeding mode extends. Often the best day to fish reaction baits in normally clear-water fisheries.
- Wind on a point: Fish stack at the wind-blown tip. Cast into the wind, retrieve with it.
- East wind: Often correlates with weather changes — some of the toughest fishing.
- West wind after a cold front: Recovery bite. Usually the second day after the front is better than the first.

CHAPTER 06

Forward-Facing Sonar

What it does, how to use it, and whether you need it

Forward-facing sonar — Garmin LiveScope, Humminbird Mega Live, Lowrance ActiveTarget — shows you real-time images of fish and structure in front of your boat. Traditional sonar shows what was under your boat. FFS shows what is in front of you. This distinction changed tournament bass fishing more profoundly than any technology since the depthfinder.

For FFS to help you	You need
Targeting suspended fish	Clear water where FFS can see 20+ feet ahead
Sight fishing to specific bass	A visible individual fish on the screen
Precision depth matching	The ability to watch the bait on the screen
FFS lure: jighead minnow	3.5-inch swimbait on 1/8-3/8 oz jighead

DO YOU NEED IT?

For recreational fishing: probably not yet. The fish-finding skills to use FFS take a full season to develop. For serious tournament fishing: yes. The field uses it and you are at a disadvantage without it. For beginners: focus on fundamentals first. FFS before fundamentals produces confusion, not fish.

CHAPTER 07

Tournament Fishing 101

How to prepare, compete, and improve at any level

Your First Tournament — What to Expect

- Club tournaments (25-50 boats) are the best entry point. Low stakes, high learning, and experienced anglers around you.
- Practice the lake for 2-3 days before the tournament. Do not share your spots.
- Plan multiple patterns, not one. Your primary spot will be fished by others.
- Cull decisions (swapping smaller fish for larger) require practice. Do not wait until tournament day.
- The mental game is as important as the fishing game. Missed fish and slow starts are normal.

Tournament Day Strategy

Time Window	Priority	Rationale
Launch to 9 AM	Primary spot — your best bet	Most productive early window
9 AM - Noon	Secondary pattern — different location	Primary spot often slows
Noon - 2 PM	Find the day's best bite	Offshore or specific condition
2 PM - Check-in	Upgrade fish if possible	Cull the smallest fish

CHAPTER 08

Advanced Practice Drills

Building tournament-level casting and presentation skills

UNDER-PRESSURE DRILL

Simulates tournament casting pressure

- Set 6 targets at different distances and angles
- Start a 60-second timer
- Cast to each target in sequence — count hits vs. misses
- Record your hit rate. Tournament pressure increases miss rate significantly.
- Repeat weekly. Track improvement over 4 weeks.

THE BLIND FLIP DRILL

Builds muscle memory for heavy cover

- Set up targets just outside your peripheral vision
- Flip to targets you cannot directly look at
- This simulates flipping into grass mats where you cannot see the target precisely
- Critical for tournament flipping situations

THE DISTANCE DROP SHOT DRILL

Builds vertical presentation precision

- Drop a shot weight to a marked depth in your yard or a bathtub
- Practice the wrist shake with your eyes closed
- The goal: 6-inch tip movement, consistent rhythm, no forward or backward rod movement
- This drill builds the muscle memory for the correct in-place shake

CHAPTER 09

Intermediate Checklist

The benchmarks that separate intermediate from advanced

PATTERN FISHING

- I can identify and repeat a pattern on an unfamiliar lake within 3 hours
- I track my catch data systematically including depth, cover type, and conditions
- I can adjust a pattern when it stops producing rather than abandoning it entirely
- I fish multiple patterns per tournament and know when to switch

OFFSHORE FISHING

- I can find and fish a ledge at 20+ feet using sonar
- I can fish a deep-diving crankbait at correct depth on a ledge
- I have caught bass in 15+ feet of water on a jig or Carolina rig
- I understand how bass position on ledges vs. how they position in cover

ADVANCED PRESENTATIONS

- I can drag a jig correctly (not hop it) on open bottom
- I can match a trailer to a jig for the specific application
- I understand when to use each topwater presentation type
- I can fish a swimbait on a jighead for suspended fish

CONDITIONS AND TIMING

- I check barometric pressure before and during fishing trips
- I can identify a feeding window versus inactive fish within the first 30 minutes
- I understand how cloud cover affects the bite and adjust presentations accordingly
- I have successfully fished the pre-storm feeding window

READY FOR ADVANCED?

The Advanced Guide covers: sight fishing for spawning fish, big swimbait technique, competitive tournament strategy, forward-facing sonar mastery, and the mental game of professional bass fishing.