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The Mighty Big Thing about Small Hooks

Set the Hook Once and get the Fish

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I'm going to beat a dead horse here on the issue of hooks; bear with me and you'll see why it's important to address this issue; it really works and is worthy of reading this very important article entirely. Saltwater fishing has requirements that may often call for larger hooks and heavier line test which will make it appropriate to use larger hooks, but that is not the same for freshwater fishing. Rivers and lakes do not need to be fished with large hooks; it is a detriment to the fisherman and the fish. The smaller the hook is the greater the penetrating power is going to be. Smaller hooks penetrate the jaw of any anadromous species, as well as any indigenous freshwater species, of fish with ease. It is the surface area of the tine that is crucial; the smaller the surface area there is the better the sinking power of the hook.

The hook-set on this impressively large Chinook, was done with a size two hook, ten-pound test leader with a reverse six-pound mainline, and a ten foot six inch rod. The penetration of the hook was so deep in the bone I couldn't get it out of the maxillary without breaking the hook or the jaw of the fish. It never came out. I only had to set the hook once to deeply sink it.



The point diameter comes into play as fish fight to throw the hook. Since the tine of the hook is so far away from the shank on the 2/0 it is more likely that a sizeable fish will bend or throw the hook much more often than a size 2 hook. The 2/0 hook is very large in diameter and it's the width of the point that doesn't allow for good hook-sets; the length of the shank takes away power from setting the hook because it is further away from the tine. Don't misunderstand; hooks of any size can be thrown; more often than not, smaller hooks are thrown fewer times than larger ones because of the simple dynamic flaws of using long rods with large hooks. The longer a rod is the less power the hook-set is going to be due to less direct tension on the hook itself; conversely, the shorter the rod is the more tension is placed directly on the hook; that's why halibut fishermen use very short rods and very large hooks. The size of hooks used for halibut fishing are almost always going to be larger than 5/0, and that's a very large hook indeed. The power needed to sink it is directly proportionate to the length of the rod. Consider that it is the weight of the halibut that alerts the fisherman a strike has been made and has nothing to do with the sensitivity of the rod. The longer a rod is the more sensitive it's going to be regardless of the "weight classification" of the rod. A long heavy action rod is going to be sensitive enough to feel the hits of either bass or catfish, but the length of a long heavy action rod will still sacrifice hook setting power. Match the hook to the longer rod by using smaller hooks and it will turn out to be the match you're looking for for good hook-



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setting power with little effort.

Whether you sharpen the hooks or not it is easily seen that a larger hook may offer more body but does not necessarily mean better hook-sets. The diameter of the point is vital when entertaining salt or freshwater fishing.

Proportionately speaking, the larger your line is the larger your hook is going to be, or at least "should be". Typically, fishermen that use large hooks use very heavy test. Typically, the heavy test is then proportionate to the capabilities of the rods of which are both stout and shorter than rods used for drift-fishing where sensitivity is a must. Fishermen that use small hooks use line test to match the hook somewhere in the range of 6 to 12 pounds and the rods are long and more sensitive while those that use larger hooks have line test that ranges from 17 to 80 pounds and short rods by comparison, there's really no choice. While it is very true fishermen using the heavier test and larger hooks may land fish they are fighting, it is more likely that each fish hooked by the extra heavy test will be thrown, broken, or bent; which is not the same for smaller hooks. All of this is based on the premise that anglers that opt for larger test will invariably choose the larger hooks automatically.



This large native chum took a small corkie (lil' corky), yarn, and hook. Chum are renowned for their incredibly large teeth and dense jaws yet the tiny hook in the photograph easily penetrated the maxillary. The strength of small hook never faltered allowing me to concentrate on the fight rather than the idea that the fish might be able to throw the hook.

Fish biting into the offering almost always overlook the light test and smaller hook. The natural appearance of the drift, due to smaller hooks, allow offerings to make presentations at a strata of neutral buoyancy and as such put fish "on" the bite rather than "off" regardless of the water clarity.

The distance between the tine and the shank comes largely into play when determining hooks that will get thrown versus those that don't. Larger hooks require much heavier hook-sets than do smaller hooks; the force needed to deliver, on the line, to set the hook is limited. Regardless of how hard a fisherman pulls back on the rod he can only exert so much pressure and that limits the sinking capabilities of the surface area of the tine to penetrate bone. Pondering the dilemma of straightened out hooks and how it how it can happen if fishermen only exert a certain amount of force is not a quandary; it is the immovable object meeting the irresistible force. When the twain meet, chaos can erupt. The irresistible force is the fish and the immovable object is the hook. The hook is static. Nothing known to man can make a hook move in any way without aid from an outside force. The retrieval of your line has inertia as the line travels back onto the spool immediately after casting and retrieval begins. Fish attempting to pick up the lure are going to strike the hook and as they do will exert a certain amount of force directly to the hook, more often than not, in the opposite direction of the cast. It is the force and momentum of the strike, coupled with the minimal force of the hook traveling in the opposite direction that straightens out the hook; but there's more. The size of the hook will determine how much force is expressed on the "eye and bend" of the hook. The greater the distance between the point and the shank of the

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hook the more it becomes weakened with each strike or snag. A hook with a distance of $\frac{3}{4}$ of an inch will become weaker than a hook that has a distance of $\frac{1}{2}$ inch between the point and shank. With large hooks, the strike encompasses only a portion of the hook, of which, the surface area of the tine is wide enough that it prevents the necessary penetration for a good hook-set. In some cases, the force of the strike makes the hook bend outward or forces the hook to invert backwards due to the pull and poor penetration of a large hook. The hook, as it is bent to the side or backwards, acts like a razor to the fish. As the tine is thrown from the jaw of a fish the tip of it slices through any portion of the fish's body that it touches. The effect of the exerted forces can slice open a Chinook or Atlantic killing it slowly and painfully; it does happen, but only with the larger hooks, which is not the case with smaller ones. "See, I told you I would be a dead horse, but are you getting it?"

The single best way to ensure that the rod and hook complement each other is to consider the species of fish. Each species has rod requirements and the rod has line-test ranges of what to use and the line will tell you the appropriate size of hook to use. Stay within those set ranges and you will have a stable template from which to fall back on if you don't already know what to do. Just remember that the physical properties are always the same. The larger the surface area of hooks are the more power is required to set it, conversely, the smaller it is the less power is needed. Recall that there are conditions where large hooks and small rods should be used; however, those conditions will likely never happen while fishing for salmon, steelhead, and trout while they're in fresh waterways.