

Anatomy of a Salmon Fly

Reference web site:

<http://www.angelfire.com/wa/salmonid/index.html>



HOOK Salmon hooks are usually black and have a turned up eye (TUE). Whether they are for wet, dry, or double hooks, they come in various thicknesses of wire, lighter dry flies, and heavier wire for wet flies. The size varies from 5/0 to 8 (5/0 being the largest). In choosing a hook size, remember that with a number followed by a / and another number, e.g. 2/0, the larger the first number is, the larger the hook. With hook sizes designated with a single number, e.g. 2, the larger the number, the smaller the hook. What you use will depend on the fly pattern and your personal preference. My experience is that in fishing wets, I want a hook heavy enough to get down where the fish are. In fishing dries, I want a hook light enough to stay afloat, but strong enough to hold a large fish. I also prefer a hook that is sharp enough to penetrate that tough jaw. The most popular steelhead hook is probably the black, looped eye salmon hook. They are manufactured by such companies as Mustad, Partridge, and Tiemco. Others prefer the standard wet fly hook with a turned down eye (TDE). For both types of fishing, consider using barbless hooks for easy removal from the fishes jaw and a greater possibility of releasing the fish unharmed. For more information about salmon and steelhead hooks, see [Salmon and Steelhead Fly Tying Hooks](#).

- **TAG** Salmon flies and in many cases steelhead flies are almost always tied with a tag consisting of several turns of silver or gold tinsel or floss. This is tied in over the point of the barb of the hook. Sometimes the tag is tied in conjunction with a small tinsel segment called the "**TIP**" that is built up to the thickness of the tag and occupies a little more space on the hook shaft.
- **TAIL** The tail usually consists of a few strands of a topping like Golden Pheasant Crest. Consider purchasing a whole head of Golden Pheasant as you will undoubtedly be using a lot of those yellow feathers for future tying. The tail should be about one and a half times the gap of the hook. Choose one that is fairly straight but has a nice curve. When tying these in, applying a drop of cement over the tie will help hold it in place.

- **BUTT** The butt is a short segment tied just beyond the tag and over the ties holding the tag and tail. It is usually tied with a material like ostrich herl, which comes in various colors. The fibers around the hook shank should be about 1/8 inch long and fairly even.
- **RIBBING** The ribbing is tied in after the butt, but not wound forward until the body is finished. It is usually tied with flat or oval, gold or silver tinsel. It is spiraled up the body segment and tied off at the location called for in the pattern.
- **BODY** The body is tied in after the butt and is made from floss, wool, fur, or tinsel. It is wound forward to form a tapered appearance. Some tyers prefer to tie the body material in about 3/16" behind the eye, and then wind it rearward and forward. When a particular pattern calls for a number of different materials for the body, each will occupy a certain portion of the hook and will be tied in at different points.
- **WING** The wing is exactly as the name applies. It is placed over the body facing to the rear of the hook in the case of wet flies, facing upward in dry flies. It is made from a variety of materials, sometimes by themselves or in combination. Typical materials include bucktail, bear fur, squirrel tail, and mallard flank feathers.
- **TOPPING** Some salmon and steelhead flies are dressed with a Golden Pheasant crest feather over the wing. This is referred to as the topping. It is attached over the point the wing is tied in and runs along the top of the wing to the tip of the tail. A drop of cement also helps to hold this in place.
- **SHOULDER** The shoulder is tied in along the side of the wings. Typical materials for shoulders are Blue Kingfisher body feathers, sections of black-barred Wood Duck feathers, Jungle Cock, or Jungle Cock imitations. The term "shoulder" is sometimes used interchangeably with the term "**CHEEK**", but a pattern may call for both. The shoulder is longer than the cheek on a classic pattern and placed on before the cheek. A particular pattern may call for a shoulder, it may call for a cheek, or it may call for both.
- **THROAT** The throat is usually made from neck hackle feathers and forms a bunch of whiskers under what would be the neck area of the fly. It is usually tied in by the tip of the hackle feather and wound on as you would for the collar of any wet fly, i.e. pointing to the rear of the fly. The terms "throat" and "**COLLAR**" are sometimes used interchangeably, but a collar usually means wound evenly around the hook, and a throat is usually bunched toward the bottom.

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- **HORNS** The Horns are a narrow matching strips of material like blue or gold Macaw (usually just a couple strands), tied on the sides and extending rearward to the intersection of the tail and topping. They are usually tied on last, before the head is finished.
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- **HEAD** The head is where it all comes together. If the material tied in before the eye of the hook is not too bulky, the thread is wrapped around it to form a neatly tapered appearance. The color will vary according to the pattern and can be controlled by the color of the thread used or the color of the laquer it is finished with.

Basic Instructions for Tying Salmon and Steelhead Flies

This page contains basic instructions for tying Salmon and Steelhead flies. We are presuming that the tyer has some experience with the basics of fly tying. If not, basic fly tying can be learned from many fine authors or by taking classes, but is difficult to teach on the web. As with everything, there is nothing that substitutes for experience, so sometimes you just have to dive into it, then practice, practice, practice.

Modern day Salmon and Steelhead flies have evolved into simpler hairwing, reduced patterns and other variations that have proven very successful in catching fish. The older, Classic Atlantic Salmon Fly versions, fully dressed, require various colored feathers of large or exotic birds, blended together to make the wing, but they are the original flies on which all others are based. There are many tiers, that still tie the classic flies, and it is truly an art. The instructions here are based on the classic version of tying but leave out some details of tying the complicated wings. These instructions should, however, enable you to tie all the flies in these pages.

Begin by placing the hook in the fly-tying vise. Spiral thread onto the hook shank, starting just before the shank and winding to it.

The Tag and Tip



First tie in the tip material (usually about two or three inches of it). Hold one end of the tip material (usually tinsel) diagonally between the hook shank and the thread. Bind down the tinsel about four turns of the thread. Wind the tinsel to the rear, into the bend and then back to the thread. Secure the tinsel with the thread and clip the excess. The tip should be about 1/8 inch long. Cut a single strand of the tag material (usually floss). Tie that in where you left off from the tip. Let the thread dangle from the bobbin. Wind the floss to the rear, covering part of the tip so that only about a sixteenth of the tip is exposed. Wind the floss forward to the point where you left the thread. Tie down the floss (tag) and clip the excess. The tag should extend to a point directly above the point of the hook.

The Tail

Next comes the tail. Place the tail material on top of the hook shank at the place where the thread is dangling, making sure that the natural curvature of the material bends up, away from bend of the hook. Tie in with three turns of the thread over the same area. For a dual tail, tie in the second tail material over the top of the first. For a dual tail, the second material should cover half the distance to the end of the first tail material.



The Butt

Next tie in the butt material (usually ostrich or peacock herl) directly over the area where the tail was secured. Wind about three turns forward, covering the area over the secured thread holding the tail. The butt should now lie directly over the point of the hook.



The Ribbing

Next tie in a five inch piece of the ribbing material (usually flat or oval tinsel). With oval tinsel, it is necessary to expose some of the cotton core at the end. This is the material that will be tied to the hook shank to prevent too much bulk at the tie. Tie this directly in front of the butt. Hold the ribbing material out of the way with a material clip.



The Body

Cut a section of body material (usually floss or fur) about six or seven inches long. Note that if fur is the body material you will have to use one of several methods to secure it to the thread. Wind it slightly to the rear, covering any exposed thread or bulky areas, and then wind it forward, making a slightly tapered body, covering about 1/4 inch from the hook eye, securing it with a few winds of the thread.



Note there are various body styles. Some call for two-toned bodies, some call for hackled bodies. If you use common sense, you should be able to determine at what point to tie in these materials and wind them on to the body. Now wind the ribbing material forward in an open spiral of about five or six turns.



The Throat or Collar

Next the throat is tied in. This usually made with a saddle or neck hackle feather. First fold it and tie it in tip end first at the point where the thread is dangling. Wind it around as a collar as you would for a wet fly. The Charles DeDeo method, an alternate way to tie in the throat is illustrated by clicking on the thumbnail. The throat or collar should be extend about midway along the length of the hook shank.



The Wing



Next the wing is tied in. This is probably the area where the most variation is encountered, so use your common sense again to determine the correct order and amounts. We will assume for this example that we are using mallard flank sections or similar material. Cut two matching mallard sections as downwings, match them and place over the top of the hook. Tie them in over the point on the hook shank where the collar was secured. Clip the excess ends at a taper toward the eye so that you can finish with a neatly tapered head.

The Shoulder

One of the last things to tie in, if it is called for, is the shoulder (usually jungle cock, similar material or an imitation). Select two of medium size. Place one on one side of the wings. Tie it in at that point. Take the other cheek feather and tie on the opposite side so that it matches the placement of the other.

Finishing The Fly

Now wind a neatly tapered head forward to the eye. Whip finish the thread, cut it, and finish with a few coats of lacquer or varnish for the affect you want (usually a smooth, glossy head).



SIMPLIFIED INSTRUCTIONS

1. Start working thread and tie in tinsel for the tip at end of hook shank
2. Wind tinsel tag and tie off. Tie in tag material.
3. Wind tip material forward and tie off.
4. Set tail material on hook. Tie down tail material.
5. Tie in butt material. Wind forward two or three turns and tie off.
6. Tie in ribbing material.
7. Wind thread forward to just before eye of hook and tie in body material.
8. Wind body material backward and forward tapering body. Tie off.
9. Wind ribbing material and tie off.
10. Cut hackle section and tie in. Wind to create throat.
11. Set pair of matched wings or other wing material on hook. Tie off.
12. Complete by setting topping on top of wings. Tie off.
13. Whip-finish head and lacquer.

<i>Proportion Chart</i>	
<u>Tip</u>	<i>The tip starts at the barb point and proceeds to the hook point.</i>
<u>Tag</u>	<i>Two or three turns in front of the tag usually floss.</i>
<u>Tail</u>	<i>Length is 1-1/2 of the hook gap.</i>
<u>Butt</u>	<i>3-5 wraps of material: usually ostrich, peacock herl, wool etc.</i>
<u>Body</u>	<i>From the butt to 1 hook-eye length back from the head.</i>
<u>Ribbing</u>	<i>Generally, 5 or 6 wraps from butt to head</i>
<u>Wing</u>	<i>Length is from the head to the end of the tail.</i>
<u>Topping</u>	<i>Length extends from the head to the end of the wing.</i>
<u>Shoulder</u>	<i>Length is approximately 2/3 the length of the wing, or to the butt.</i>
<u>Cheek</u>	<i>Length is generally 1/2 the length of the shoulder.</i>
<u>Horns</u>	<i>Length equal to intersection of topping and the tail.</i>
<u>Throat</u>	<i>Length should extend about midway along the hook shank.</i>
<u>Head</u>	<i>Evenly tapered and not too large. The smaller the better. Finish with gloss coat on heads tied with thread.</i>