

The Ultimate

BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO INSHORE SALTWATER FISHING

HOW TO CATCH REDFISH, SEA TROUT, SNOOK & FLOUNDER
EVEN IF YOU'VE NEVER FISHED A DAY IN YOUR LIFE



Salt STRONG

START CATCHING FISH

Faster Than You Imagined

(AND AVOID WASTING TIME & MONEY)

The Ultimate Beginner's Guide To Inshore Saltwater Fishing

How To Catch **Redfish, Sea Trout, Snook & Flounder**
... Even If You've Never Fished a Day In Your Life

My purpose with this guide is to give you the kind of no-nonsense resource I wished I had when I started fishing. I want to help shortcut the process for you:

1. So You Don't Waste TIME and MONEY on Tackle You Don't Need, and...

- **AVOID** spending hours and hours watching random YouTube videos trying to figure out what the "fishing gurus" are using
- **AVOID** filling your Amazon cart with products you're not 100% sure you need
- **AVOID** staring blankly at the WALLS of tackle at your local tackle shop not even knowing where to start...and too self-conscious to ask for help.

...and **instead, only get what you NEED** to catch redfish, speckled trout, snook & flounder, and other inshore species.

2. So you can STOP Wasting TIME on the Water, and...

- **AVOID** fishing in dead zones where you have ZERO chance of catching anything
- **AVOID** wasting your best fishing hours trying to catch live bait...and instead spend that time *actually catching* redfish, trout, snook & flounder.
- **AVOID** catching nasty, slimy **DANGEROUS** saltwater catfish.

3. So You Can Make Fewer Dumb Mistakes, and...

- **AVOID** buying the wrong rod & reel (*only to replace them in less than a year, costing you hundreds of dollars*)
- **AVOID** using the wrong knots or tying them the wrong way - causing you to **LOSE FISH**
- **AVOID** casting & retrieval mistakes that will cause you to **spook fish** and ruin your chances of catching anything

Enjoy!

Barry Nicholson
Salt Strong Digital Marketing Specialist & "Former" Beginner ;)

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Introduction

“I’m going to take up fishing” I declared to my wife.

“Okaaaaay” she responded sarcastically.

It was July 2020 and we were at Nokomis Beach, Florida. There I was in my normal beach position - under an umbrella, out from under the burning hot Florida sun, beer in hand, staring at the ocean...thinking.

We were in the middle of the pandemic. Much of the world was still in lockdown. In other states, people couldn’t even leave their houses. In Florida, at least we could go to the beach.

So that’s where my wife and I found ourselves most weekends, for lack of anything better to do.

As I sat staring at the open ocean, the only activity on the horizon (other than people in the water) was a steady stream of boats leaving from the nearby jetty.

We’d lived in Florida since 2008, and I had failed miserably at befriending anyone with a boat. So here I sat, stuck on dry land.

“Let’s get some kayaks too”. I added, after the second beer.

“I’d be OK with that” she answered.

I knew she’d like that idea.

A month before, we were forced to staycation, since there was really no place else to go, again thanks to COVID-19.

As part of our staycation, my wife basically booked any “Florida-ish” outdoor activity she could find that we could enjoy with our 16-year-old daughter and 21-year-old son.

And one of those activities was a guided kayak trip through mangrove tunnels in Longboat Key.

I was 50 years old. I had never been on a kayak until that day. And I wouldn’t have known a redfish if one had jumped in the boat with me.

I hadn’t fished since I was 8 years old, when my uncle took me fishing for bluegill in Indiana.

So now you're probably wondering...how in the WORLD is this guy qualified to write "The *Ultimate* Beginner's Guide To Inshore Saltwater Fishing"????

Roll with me here...

A Lot Can Happen In a Year (Especially In a Pandemic)

During the middle of the pandemic, the government decided to start handing out stimulus checks to everyone in the country. Fortunately, my wife and I were still employed, so the stimmy check was just money for us to burn. So, I did my best to stimulate the *fishing economy* from that point.

I spent HOURS on YouTube, watching countless review videos from saltwater anglers. As they made their suggestions, I'd add yet another product to my Amazon cart.

Each day, there would be a new pile of Amazon boxes sitting at my door. My wife would give me "that look", and I would just smile and say, "*don't ask*", as I whisked that day's shipment into my man cave.

So before long, I had all the stuff I needed (including a kayak) and I was ready to actually *GO fishing*.

There was one big problem...

I Didn't Actually Know HOW To Fish ...Or Even What I Was *Fishing FOR*

I live about 5 minutes from the intercoastal waterway (ICW) in Sarasota, Florida. The ICW is an 1100-mile system of canals, rivers, bays, and inlets that stretches all the way from Florida to Texas on the Gulf of Mexico side (there's also an ICW on the Pacific side as well).

On any given weekend, thousands of boaters and kayakers cruise up and down the ICW...many of them fishing the various grass flats, oyster beds, bridges, docks and other structure along the way.

When I started, I only knew 2 things: 1) I was going to take my kayak out on the ICW 2) I was going to attempt to catch fish from my kayak with this spiffy, new fishing gear I just bought.

I didn't know: 1) WHAT I was fishing for 2) or how to catch it.

So, I went back to YouTube to search for answers. After watching countless “fishing gurus” with various tips & tricks, as well as many channels of “influencers” who seemed to have basically their own fishing TV shows (*but never really gave much in the way of helpful instruction*) ...

I Found Myself Coming Back To The [Salt Strong YouTube Channel](#) Over and Over

Salt Strong was unlike any other YouTube channel I found. Virtually ALL of their videos were instructional, and they ONLY talked about inshore saltwater fishing. I really liked their teaching style, and their videos proved to be absolutely instrumental in helping me get started.

I learned quickly that **redfish, speckled sea trout, snook & flounder** were the species I should be targeting. Sure, there are other “bonus” species you can catch along the way, like jack crevalle, grouper, snapper, Spanish mackerel, sheepshead, juvenile tarpon, tripletail, black drum, and others. But these 4 species are predators, with behavior similar to largemouth bass in freshwater. They have predictable feeding behavior, and they’re plentiful along the ICW.

So now I knew what I was fishing for...but didn’t have the first clue as to HOW to catch these fish. It’s a BIG ocean...especially if you’re on a kayak and you can only cover a certain amount of water per day.

Like most people, I have a regular day job and a family (*not to mention I’m also a semi-professional musician who performs most weekends*). I only get to fish MAYBE once per weekend, for about 4-5 hours.

I’d prefer to spend those hours *CATCHING* fish rather than paddling around cluelessly on the open water, wondering where I should be casting my lure.

To figure this out, it was going to take more than just watching random YouTube videos...

I Needed Someone To SHOW Me Where The Fish Were

But who? Sure, I could spend hundreds of dollars to hire a guide for an afternoon of fishing. Would they show me where the fish were? Yep. Would they show me HOW to find fish on my own? Maybe. But even if they did, there’s simply NO WAY I could become an *ANGLER* in one day (*any more than I could become a “tennis player” after a single tennis lesson*).

I needed someone who would both **SHOW ME where the fish were** on any given weekend **AND** tell me how they came to that conclusion. That way, I could **start catching some fish FAST**, and over time, I would learn *WHY* the fish were there.

But where in the world would I find such a person?

...And That's When I Discovered *The Weekend Game Plan Lesson*

As I was watching another one of Salt Strong's many YouTube videos, one of their founders & fishing coaches mentioned that he offered a "weekend game plan lesson" every week as part of their Insider Club membership.

For less than \$2 a week, I could have a professional fishing coach send me a video every Friday that **shows me WHERE to fish that weekend**, and explain WHY he chose those particular spots.

Are you kidding me? I signed up without hesitation. This was *EXACTLY* what I was looking for!

PLUS, as an Insider, I gained access to tons of training courses, received up to 20% discounts at their FishStrong.com tackle store, and tons of other benefits.

(Truth is, I would have paid the same amount JUST for the weekend game plan alone.)

So I Started Fishing The Types of Spots Luke Told Me To Fish

Using the weekend game plan lesson as my guide, I would look for spots in my area that were similar to what Luke described in his videos.

Using Google Maps, he would show me the types of spots I needed to look for, based on the trends for that week.

Salt Strong has an entire stable of coaches on the water every week, PLUS over 30,000 Insider Members who report their catches in the Insider Community (including the actual spots where they caught the fish). So, they definitely *KNOW* the trends!

Redfish, speckled sea trout, snook & flounder don't stay in one spot year-round, they *MOVE*. There are a lot of factors at play: wind, current, tide, water temperature, presence of bait, proximity to structure, and more. So not only would Luke show the best types of spots for that week, but he would also explain the reasons WHY these spots were the best choice.

So, I followed Luke's weekend game plan every Friday to plan my trips...

...And Before Long I Was Consistently Catching Redfish, Speckled Sea Trout, Snook & Flounder

Rather than just going out there and mindlessly casting my lure into open water, I now know where the redfish, sea trout, snook, & flounder are *most likely* to be.

Are they always there? Of course not. But if they're not in one spot, I have more than one spot planned (based on Luke's advice) so I can increase my chances of getting on the fish, and not wasting my time on dead spots.

As a result, I'm more consistently catching redfish, sea trout, snook, & flounder with every trip, and decreasing my chances of getting skunked (*i.e., not catching anything*).

Am I an expert angler? No. But I'm a solid novice ☺

Oh yeah, a funny thing happened along the way...

I Ended Up Working for Salt Strong In Their Marketing Department!

I may be a novice fisherman, but when it comes to marketing, I'm a veteran ;) I was so impressed with Salt Strong's products, training materials, and overall mission – that I approached Joe & Luke Simonds, the owners of Salt Strong, about working for them. One thing led to another, and I got the gig!

Now I'm "immersed" in fishing every day! I'm super proud to be associated with the company who taught me how to fish.

So, after reading my story, you may be wondering...

Am I Qualified To Teach You How To Catch Redfish, Speckled Sea Trout, Snook & Flounder?

Actually, the answer is *NO*. I'm NOT qualified! That's Luke's job, as well as all the other great coaches on the Salt Strong team.

What I AM uniquely qualified to do is to guide you from a "recent beginner's" perspective – and give you the kind of **no-nonsense resource I wished I had when I started**. I want to help shortcut the process.

After reading this short guide, you'll have the confidence of knowing that you have the RIGHT tackle...and none of what you don't need.

You'll also have a MUCH better understanding of the *basics* of catching redfish, trout, snook & flounder, year-round.

Note: this is a *beginner's* guide. It's not going to make you an expert angler. But it will get you started on your way to become a consistent angler.

Let's go!

Tackle

What You Need (and DO NOT Need) To Get Started



You Don't Need 90% Of This Stuff. Read Below To See What You DO Need.

When I started, I literally had nothing. No old rod & reel in the garage, no tackle box gathering dust in the corner - I mean *nothing*. So, I had to buy 100% of what I'm about to detail here.

Problem is, I didn't have anyone telling me what I needed and what I didn't. So, I ended up buying a BUNCH of stuff I didn't need...and now it's gathering dust in the corner.

But you won't have that problem ;)

Rods



Need? Yes

Bottom line: buy a quality 7'6" rod. Spend at least \$100.

Rod: your rod is where you should spend the most money - NOT your reel. Your rod should cost you at *LEAST* \$100. I know, I know, it seems counterintuitive.

Here's why: with inshore saltwater fishing, casting distance is SUPER important. Bottom line, you want to launch your lure FAR away from you. This is because you're going to spend MOST of your time fishing in less than 3 feet of water (a.k.a. "skinny water").

In skinny water, the fish KNOW you're there. Their lateral lines can sense your movement in the water, whether you're in a boat, kayak or wading. So, the further you can cast the lure away from you, the better.

In fact, he or she who can cast the furthest (and most accurate) will catch the most fish.

Think of your rod not as a "stick", but a *SLING*. Cheap fiberglass rods are like wet noodles. You simply can't cast very far with them. And when you're fishing inshore, you'll do a LOT of casting.

The #1 thing that affects your casting distance is your rod - not your arm strength or your technique - your *rod*. Get a good one.

Here's what I suggest:

[TFO PRO S Professional - 7'6" Medium](#)

Reels



Need? Yes

Bottom line: buy a decent spinning reel for around \$100.

First of all, you'll want to get a spinning reel, not a baitcaster. Baitcasters are more commonly used by bass fisherman, not inshore anglers.

All spinning reels basically do the same thing. They don't have any effect on casting distance, they simply let your line out and reel it back in. However, there are a few factors you want to consider with reels:

- Weight: since you'll be doing a LOT of casting, you'll want a lighter weight reel since it will cause less fatigue. A great starter reel that's lightweight is the [Daiwa Fuego](#), which weighs only 7.6oz and costs around \$100.
- Size: 2500 is the most common size used for inshore saltwater fishing but a 3000 will work great also if you plan on fishing from the beach or going after larger fish.
- Saltwater Protection: higher quality, more expensive reels have special technology that helps protect the reel from saltwater. You can expect to pay around \$200 or more for these types of reels. The [Daiwa Ballistic MQ](#) is a good

example of a reel with saltwater protection.

A Word of Caution About Saltwater:

You'll definitely want to get in the habit of spraying off your reels with fresh water and wiping them down with a towel at the end of every trip. In fact, I like to spray off EVERYTHING I use on my trip if possible. If it can rust, it *WILL* rust if you leave saltwater on it.

Saltwater has the amazing ability to work its way into those tiny little gears and destroy pretty much anything in its path. And don't ever let your reels become fully submerged in saltwater if you can avoid it. This will give "grinding your gears" whole new meaning. Ask me how I know :P

Fishing Line



Need? Yes

Bottom line: use 10lb braid as your main line.

For this type of fishing, you'll want to spool your reel with **10lb braid**. Braid looks like thread, because that's basically what it is...*really strong* braided thread. As you're looking at the various braid sizes, you might think "10lb seems really light, won't it break if I catch a big fish? Shouldn't I get something stronger?" Nope.

10lb braid is *plenty* strong enough to catch the biggest inshore fish. The fact that it's lightweight is the MAIN reason you want it, because it casts further.

And remember, he or she who can cast the farthest (and most accurate) catches the most fish.

[How To Spool Braid onto Your Spinning Reel](#)

Leader Line

Need? Yes

Bottom line: use 20lb mono.

You don't want to tie your braid straight to the hook. Instead, you need to tie your braid to a 20lb leader line. The leader ties to the hook.

A leader is a 12" to 24" length of monofilament line (aka "mono"). Mono is the good ol' fishing line that everyone's familiar with.

You'll also see fluorocarbon ("flouro") leader lines, which is basically fancier, more expensive mono that some people say is better. *It's not.* Just stick with 20lb mono.

Note: if you are fishing in areas with lots of structure (like docks, oyster bars, etc), you can upgrade to 25 or 30lb mono.

[How To Tie a Leader](#)



Hooks



Need? Yes

Bottom line: you only need jig heads & weedless weighted hooks. Live bait hooks are optional.

Fisherman LOVE to buy different rigs (i.e., lure/hook combinations), and the industry loves to sell it to them. But I'm here to you tell you to AVOID filling your tackle box with stuff you'll never use.

Instead, this is ALL you need to catch tons of redfish, speckled trout, snook & flounder:

Weighted Weedless Hooks

If you're fishing in less than 2.5' of water, you'll want to use a weedless weighted hook with a paddletail, jerk shad, or shrimp imitation lure (*more about lures later*).



Weedless weighted hooks are made to hide the hook point slightly below the surface of the lure, so the hook doesn't get snagged on sea grass or

“weeds” (hence the name “weedless”) as you’re reeling it in. These hooks are also great for pitching under docks & into mangroves for the same reason.

You’ll also be using artificial shrimp lures, and casting them under docks, into mangroves, around bridges, etc. These are all areas where you will easily get snagged if you don’t use a weedless hook. Shrimp lures require a different type of weedless hook than paddletails or jerk shads, so you’ll need weedless hooks designed for both.

We suggest:

[Hoss Helix Hooks](#) (includes video with rigging instructions)

Jig Heads

You’ll want to use a jig head if you’re fishing in more than 2.5’ of water. A jig head is a hook with a small weight on the tying end. A lot of the jig heads you’ll see have “eyes” painted onto the weight. The weight helps you sink faster and get the lure into the critically important “strike zone” for the fish.



Jigging basically means bouncing the lure along the bottom as you reel it towards you, which makes it look like an injured bait fish. Redfish, speckled trout, snook, flounder and other inshore species can’t resist an easy meal like this.

The weight and the length of the hook matters because it directly affects the action of the lure in the water. The color of the “eye” (yellow, blue, etc.) doesn’t really matter.

We recommend these jig heads:

[Z-Man Trout Eye](#)

[Saltwater Assassin Pro Elite](#)

[How To Retrieve a Jig Head](#)

Live Bait Hooks (for shrimp):

So far, everything I've listed relates to using artificial lures. I highly recommend using artificials most of the time, as opposed to using live bait (*more on that topic in a moment*).

However, there will likely come a time you'll want to use live shrimp, because it's readily available at any bait shop, and everything eats shrimp.



[We recommend these hooks for live shrimp](#)

Corks/Weights/Clips/Swivels

Popping Corks

[Need: maybe](#)

[Bottom line: it depends on where you fish.](#)

You may be wondering if you need something that makes your rig float, like a cork or a bobber. The answer is maybe.



Usually if the water is clear, you can catch redfish, trout, snook & flounder all day with a paddletail, jerk shad or shrimp lure on a weighted weedless hook or a jig head. No cork required. *HOWEVER*, there are some (*very good*) anglers who fish in not-so-clear water who swear by using popping corks.

Popping corks have 2 main purposes: 1) to keep the lure floating in the strike zone, without allowing it to sink all the way to the bottom and get snagged in the grass 2) the rattle in the popping cork makes a noise when you yank on the line (pop it), which may attract some fish, especially if the water is murky and visibility is limited.

I don't personally use popping corks, but that may be because the water in the west coast of Florida is clear most of the time, so I don't feel the need. However, if you do choose to use a popping cork:

[Here's the popping cork we recommend](#)

[Here's how to rig a popping cork](#)

Weights/Sinkers

Need: Not really
Bottom line: you can do without.

99% of the time, you're not going to need any kind of weight or sinker. Most of the time, you'll simply be using a paddletail, jerk bait or shrimp lure on a weighted weedless hook or a jig head. You definitely do NOT want to use a weight or a sinker with these rigs.



The only time you might need a weight if you're fishing with live shrimp in deep water (ex. next to a bridge), and you need the shrimp to sink to the bottom. Or if you're using a Carolina rig. But again, these are exceptions and not really necessary.

In that case, we recommend using split shot weights.

[How to rig a split shot](#)

Clips

Need: No
Bottom line: don't use them.

Some anglers use tiny clips that make it easier to switch lures. For example, say you're fishing with a shrimp lure and you want to switch to a paddletail instead. If you're using a clip, you can easily switch it out, rather than having to tie a new leader-to-hook knot every time.



The problem is, those tiny clips create more potential weak points in your rig, which could lead to more break-offs. In the interest of saving time & hassle, you could be losing more fish.

My recommendation? Don't use clips. Just get good at tying a couple knots. It's not difficult. There are really only a couple of good knots you need to know, anyway. We'll talk about knots a bit later.

Swivels

Need: Not really
Bottom line: you can do without.

The only time you might need a swivel is if you're using a spoon lure.



More about spoons in the lure section below. A spoon is basically a piece of metal with a hook. They spin a lot when you reel them in, so it's recommended you use a swivel when you use a spoon, otherwise you could end up with twists in your line.

However, most of the time you'll be using paddletails, jerk baits & shrimp lures, which don't require swivels.

Lures



Fisherman LOVE to try new lures. This is why the average tackle shop has about 1000 to choose from – because *people will buy anything* if they think it's going to help them catch more fish.

But you should avoid that line of thinking. *The truth is...*

Paddletails, jerk baits, shrimp imitations and topwater lures are the **ONLY** lures you really need to catch redfish, speckled trout, snook and flounder.

Paddletails

Need: Yes

Bottom line: *you'll be using paddletails MOST of the time.*

A paddletail is a soft plastic lure that looks like a small baitfish. It has a tail on the back that wiggles back and forth when you reel it in in, which creates vibration that fish can sense, especially in calm water conditions.



The most common size paddletail you'll use to catch redfish, speckled trout, snook & flounder is 3.5", which is around the size of a small baitfish. However, in late summer and fall, as baitfish are growing, you may want to switch to a 4" or 5" paddletail to match their size.

Paddletails are swim baits, so a lot of the time you'll be "swimming" it (reeling it straight in). Or you may be pausing it every now and then, and/or giving it a twitch, depending on the situation.

Paddletails come in all kinds of colors, but you really only need a few.

Here are what we recommend:

- [Slam Shady](#)
- [F.R.E.D.](#)
- [Gold Digger](#)

[How to Rig Paddletails](#)

[How to Retrieve Paddletails](#)

Jerk Baits

Need: Yes

Bottom line: when fish are spooky, a jerk bait may be your best option.

The only downside to a paddletail is that sometimes the wiggling motion of the tail can be a little too much in still, shallow water and scare off the fish.



That's where jerk baits come in. Jerk baits look like paddletails without the paddle. If you retrieve them straight, they create virtually no disturbance in the water. If you're in a situation where the fish are easily spooked, like very still water, this method may work.

However, usually the best way to retrieve a jerk bait is the twitch/twitch/pause method, where you're working the lure to make it look more like a shrimp or an injured bait fish.

Here's what we recommend:

- [Alabama Leprechaun](#)
- [FRED the Jerk](#)
- [Slam Shady jerk shad](#)

[How to Rig & Retrieve Jerk Baits](#)

Shrimp Imitations

Need: Yes

Bottom line: avoid hyper-realistic shrimp lures. Only buy shrimp lures that look natural to fish as they are being retrieved.

Everything eats shrimp, so a good shrimp lure should definitely be in your arsenal.



BUYER BEWARE: just because a shrimp lure looks more “realistic” doesn't mean it catches more fish. In fact, *the opposite may be true*. Here's why: those hyper-realistic shrimp lures with all the appendages, antennas, etc., are made to be sold to *humans*. Fish don't care about that stuff.

What fish DO care about is whether the shrimp looks real *in the water*. And that's where those lures fail. All those things sticking off the lure causes resistance in the water and make it look unnatural in the water when you're retrieving it. Fish know when something doesn't seem right. It's critical that you use a shrimp lure that looks – and *behaves* - like an actual shrimp underwater.

[Here's the Shrimp Lure we recommend](#)

[How to Rig & Retrieve Shrimp Lures](#)

Topwater

Need: Yes

Bottom line: use topwater in the spring, summer & fall during low light conditions.

A topwater lure (aka 'plug') is a rounded cylinder that floats on top of the water. It has eyes in the front, a rattle inside, and 2 sets of hooks (usually treble) hanging down on the front and the back of the lure.



Topwater lures are usually retrieved by twitching them with a side-to-side motion (aka "walk the dog"). Between the noise of the rattle and the walk the dog retrieve, the topwater is meant to cause a commotion that fish can't ignore.

Topwater lures are commonly used in low light conditions, like early morning, late evening or overcast skies when the fish's visibility is low.

One thing we don't like about topwater lures are treble hooks, which are hard on the fish, as well as fisherman (*you have 3x the likelihood of hooking yourself*). For that reason, we recommend using single in-line hooks instead.

[Here's the Topwater we recommend](#)

[Where, When & How To Use Topwater Lures](#)

[How To Rig Topwater Lures](#)

Other Types of Lures

Spoons

Need: Not really

Bottom line: some anglers swear by spoons. Other very successful anglers rarely if ever use them anymore.

A spoon is a piece of metal with a hook, usually either gold or silver. This type of lure has (literally) been around for 100 years, and some anglers still swear by them. They create a lot of flash in the water and predator fish like redfish, trout & snook, as well as Spanish mackerel & bluefish will instinctually strike at them.



If you're going to use a spoon, here's what we recommend:

- [Regular](#)
- [Weedless](#)

[How To Retrieve Spoons](#)

[How To Rig Spoons](#)

Suspending Twitch Baits

Need: Not really

Bottom line: some anglers swear by suspending twitch baits. Other very successful anglers rarely if ever use them.

A suspending twitch bait is sort of like a topwater, but rather than floating on top of the water, the suspending twitch bait is meant to suspend below the surface of the water.

In some states (like Texas), suspending twitch baits are much more commonly used, especially the Paul Brown Soft Dine XL (aka "Corky").



If you're going to use a suspending twitch bait, here's what we recommend:

[Suspending twitch bait we recommend](#)

[Rigging & Retrieving Suspending Twitch Baits](#)

Other Accessories You'll Need

Fish Grips

Redfish and snook don't have much in the way of teeth, so you're good just grabbing them by the mouth to remove the hook.

However, speckled sea trout and flounder are toothy critters, so you'll likely want to use fish grips to handle them. Not to mention the other species might catch along the way, like bluefish and juvenile barracuda – you *definitely* don't want to stick your bare thumb in their mouths...assuming you want to keep your thumb attached to your hand ;)



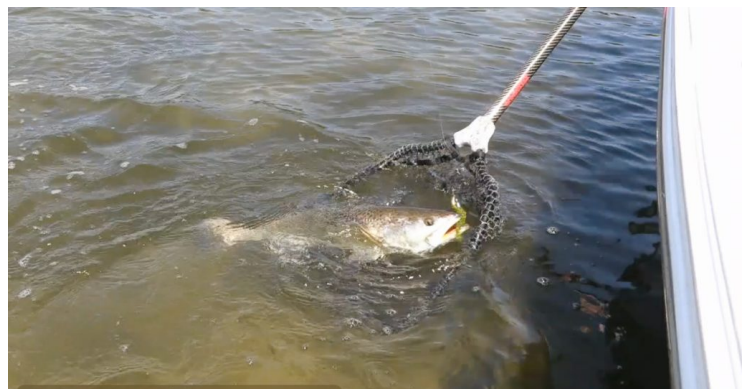
We recommend the fish grips that are made of plastic rather than metal, since the wide plastic surface is much less apt to damage the mouths of the fish.

[Here are the fish grips we recommend](#)

Landing Net

You'll want to have a net on hand to land the fish. Nothing is more heartbreaking than reeling in a nice fish...only have it to break off at the last second because you didn't have a good way to land it.

We recommend nets with a rubberized material. The rubber



surface does less damage to the fragile slime coating of the fish, and the smaller holes are less apt to damage the fish's gills and/or tail.

[Here's the landing net we recommend](#)

[Landing net for kayaks](#)

Fishing Pliers

You'll want to have a pair of fishing pliers on hand so you can get the hook out of the fish's mouth. Needle nose pliers from your toolbox at home will work in a pinch...but they'll likely rust solid after your first trip after the saltwater does its thing ☹️ So instead, just do yourself a favor and get yourself a pair of real fishing pliers instead.



[Here are the pliers we recommend](#)

Fishing Scissors

Sea grass and algae have the annoying ability to find their way on even the least bit of tag (excess) ends that are sticking up from your leader or your hook. So, you'll want to cut the tag ends *super* close. So having a small pair of fishing scissors for this purpose really helps.



[Here are the scissors we recommend](#)

Cords/Clips

I really like having cords to attach my pliers, lip grips and scissors to my belt loops. This way, when I've got a nice big fish in my net, I'm not fumbling around, trying to get my stuff out of my pocket - or worse - dropping it in the water ☹️

There are plenty of these types of clips/cords on Amazon. [Here's an example.](#)

Fish Scent

Believe it or not, a fish's sense of smell is *1000 times* that of a dog. So, if you're using mostly artificial lures (which we recommend), it's a great idea to add scent to your lures. We highly recommend Dr. Juice, because it's an oil-based scent that sticks to your lures better than water-based scents, plus it just plain works – fish LOVE it.

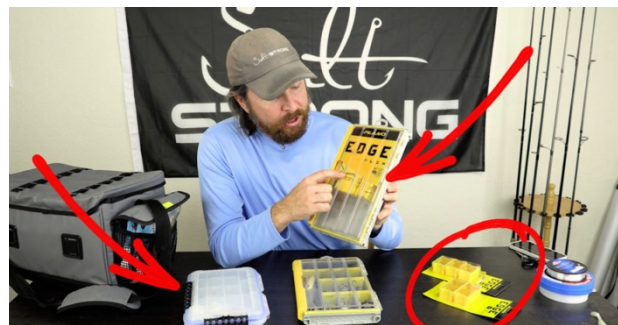


We worked with Dr. Juice to create a formula that appeals especially to redfish, speckled trout, snook & flounder called Saltwater Slam. Just a drop on your lure and fish can't resist. I won't fish without it!

[Here's the scent we recommend](#)

Tackle Bag / Tackle Trays

The #1 thing you should consider when it comes to *WHERE* you're going to store your tackle is: "*will this keep saltwater out?*" So, it's an absolute *MUST* to use sealed tackle trays.



The same is true with tackle bags or boxes. Ask yourself...is there anything on this tackle bag that could rust (like zippers)? If so, don't buy it. It's much better to use a saltwater tacklebox with plastic clasps.

[Tackle Trays we recommend](#)

[Tackle Bag we recommend](#)

Tackle Storage Tips

Hook Storage: Believe it or not, if you put a “used” hook in a tackle tray with new hooks, even the tiniest bit of rust will find its way from the old hooks to the new hooks. I keep my new and used hooks separated into different tackle trays for this reason. I also put little silica gel packets in both trays to cut down on moisture.

Plastic Lure Storage: it’s best to keep your plastic lures in the package they come in, and just put all the various lure packages in your tackle box.

WARNING: don’t store lures of different plastics together in a tackle tray, as it can cause a chemical reaction that makes them melt. Bottom line, it’s best just to leave them in their original packaging and separated from each other.

[Here’s some more tips on how to store your lures:](#)

Live Bait Bucket w/Bubbler

Every now and then you’ll want to use live shrimp. So, you’ll need a way to keep them alive. There are TONS of options out there, but I prefer to keep it simple and just use a [Cool Bubbles bucket with a Bubble box](#). They’re inexpensive, run all day on 2 AA batteries, and they’re available at virtually every tackle store.

BUBBLER BATTERY TIP: be SURE to take your batteries OUT of the bubbler at the end of your trip, wipe them down, and put them in a baggie. If you leave them in, they will rust, and your bubbler may be ruined for the next trip.



The Ultimate Inshore Angler Tackle Bundle

Get the tackle you need for catching redfish, seatrout, snook, and/or flounder - and **save \$\$!** The Ultimate Inshore Angler Tackle Bundle ensures that you have all the tools in your tackle box to maximize your results - from 6 inches all the way down to 10+ feet.

[Click here to get the bundle.](#)



Fishing Apps You'll Need

There are TONS of fishing apps available, but you should avoid the temptation to sign up for a bunch of them. Chances are good you'll only use one or two over time, and forget you have the others. Or worse, you'll pay for a subscription and forget about it until you realize you've given them \$100 or more over time for something you rarely if ever used.

Here are the apps we recommend:

Fish Rules

Chances are good you'll catch a fish that you: 1) don't know what it is 2) don't know if you can keep it. Fish Rules has a visual directory that's easy to use, so you can identify your catch. Plus, the app uses your GPS to see where you're located, and will give you the up-to-date fish regulations for that particular county.

Note: if you don't know what species a fish is and/or if you can keep it, don't spend 10 minutes trying to figure out what is while it's struggling for its life in your net. Instead, just snap a pic of the fish, release it...and *THEN* use the picture to identify what you just caught. You'll have proof that you actually caught something, PLUS the fish will live – so everybody wins ;)

Smart Fishing Spots

Salt Strong has just released Smart Fishing Spots – **the last fishing app you'll EVER need**. All Salt Strong Insider Club members have access to Smart Fishing Spots.



It includes everything the inshore saltwater angler could ever want in an app, including:

3D Contour maps that allow you see underwater, so you can see the structure where the fish most likely are located (even in super deep water!). Plus, wind charts, sonar, tide reports, depth charts, weather reports, chart plotter, satellite view and more.

Knots



Now that you know the types of main line, leader line, and lures you need, it's time to (literally) tie them all together.

WARNING: Resist the temptation to search YouTube for “fishing knots”, or you will quickly fall into the chasm of endless “my knot is better than your knot” debates. *The truth is...*

You only need to know 3 knots.

You read that right. *Only 3.* Here they are:

1. **Double Uni Knot** for tying main line-to-leader
2. **Non-Slip Loop Knot** for tying leader to hook
3. **Snug Knot** for tying leader to hook

[This video will show you how to tie each knot, and explain when you will want to use each.](#)

Are there other “better” knots? Maybe. But as a beginner, you should start with these.

It's **CRITICAL** that you practice and memorize tying these knots. You will need to re-tie when you're on the water, probably several times per trip. You don't want to count on pulling up knot-tying videos in the bright, blazing sun while you're in the middle of the ocean (*ask me how I know*).

I highly suggest prepping your rod(s) & reel(s) the night before your fishing trip, so you can tie and re-tie these knots over and over in a relaxed environment.

Stuff You Don't Need

Tackle stores are FULL of stuff you *don't* need. Basically, if it's not listed above, you don't need it. But I wanted to make special mention of these items:

- ✘ **Fish Handling Gloves** - fish have a protective slime coating on their skin. When the slime is removed, it's basically like having an open sore leaving them vulnerable to infection, potentially killing them. Fish handling gloves have a rough surface that removes fish slime. It's best just not to use them.
- ✘ **Cast Net:** Cast nets are used for catching live bait. A LOT of anglers are convinced that the only way you can catch redfish, trout, snook & flounder is with live bait. So, you'll often see them throwing cast nets from boats or from shore before they actually start fishing, trying to fill their live wells or bait buckets with baitfish. But it's simply not true. You can catch TONS of inshore species without live bait. You **ONLY** need the artificial lures I listed above. So, if you're only using artificial lures, there's no need for a cast net.
- ✘ **Chum:** chum is basically fish food, not unlike what you see people spreading at the top of their saltwater tanks. It's used to attract bait fish, so they can be caught with the cast net. But since you don't really need to catch live bait or use a cast net, there's no need to use chum.
- ✘ **Sabiki Rigs:** Sabiki rigs are pre-rigged leader lines with several tiny little hooks paired with colorful feathers. They're used to catch bait fish. Again, since you don't really need to use live bait, there's no need to use Sabiki rigs.

Artificial Lures vs Live Bait vs Live Shrimp

As you see, I'm a big proponent of using lures, as opposed to live bait – except for using live shrimp. Here's why:

To use live baitfish like pilchard, greenbacks, pogies, mullet, minnows, pinfish...there's one big problem: you have to catch them first. Sure, there are some bait shops that carry them, but you'll pay a LOT per fish (*most of the bait shops I've seen don't even carry baitfish*).



So that means you'll have to either use a cast net and/or a Sabiki rig and go catch baitfish yourself. So, you're stuck spending a bunch of time fishing for *little fish*...before you can go catch the *big fish*!

I don't know about you, but I don't have the time (or the patience) for all that. I'd rather start fishing as soon as I hit the water

The Pros & Cons of Live Shrimp

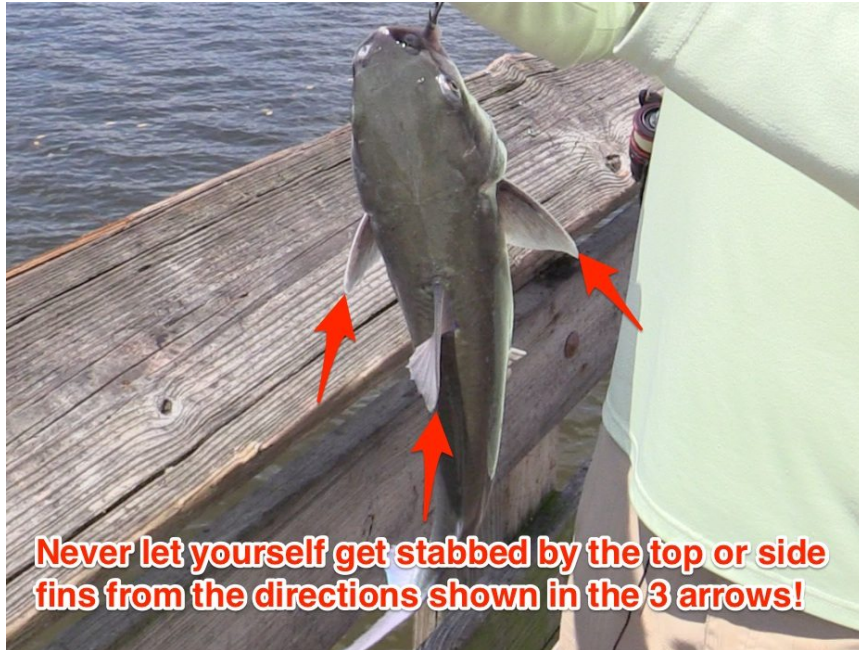
One exception with live bait is shrimp. Pretty much every bait shop carries live shrimp, and they're relatively cheap (*at the time of writing, I can fish for a whole day with a couple dozen, usually costs me \$20 or less*).



The other great thing about live shrimp is that everything eats it. Redfish, speckled sea trout, snook & flounder will definitely eat shrimp. So do jacks, grouper, snapper, tarpon, Spanish mackerel...the list goes on.

But that's also the downside of live shrimp. Pesky fish like ladyfish, pinfish, and pufferfish will also eat it. Tiny fish will peck away at it as soon as it hits the water, reducing your shrimp down to a nub quickly, if not stealing it altogether.

Even worse, *saltwater catfish* LOVE shrimp...



Never let yourself get stabbed by the top or side fins from the directions shown in the 3 arrows!

BEWARE OF CATFISH!

Saltwater catfish have lateral fins and a larger dorsal fin with very sharp spines that can puncture your skin and even cut through shoes. If you're barbed by a catfish, it is quite painful and can be very dangerous. One of our Salt Strong Insiders had to be hospitalized and undergo multiple surgeries because his catfish wound got infected!

[Here's how you can quickly release catfish without touching it](#)

When To Use Live Shrimp

If you're taking out a friend or family member who doesn't fish often, it can be fun for them to just get some tight lines. And one of the easiest ways to do that is by using live shrimp, either at bridge pilings or under docks. Chances are good they'll catch a few snapper, grouper, and maybe even a sheepshead.

Here's are a few articles on fishing with live shrimp:

[How To Rig A Live Shrimp Weedless On A Jighead](#)

[How to Fish Docks with Live Shrimp](#)

[How To Catch Fish with Live Shrimp in the Shallows](#)

Why You Should Use Artificial Lures Most of The Time

But for catching the main predator species (redfish, speckled trout, snook & flounder), we recommend getting good at using the artificial lures we've listed above.



Here's why: artificial lures like paddletails, jerk shads, topwater plugs and shrimp imitations give you the ability to start fishing *quickly*. There's no need to stop at the bait shop for live shrimp. No need to use a cast net. No pressure of filling up your live well with baitfish before you ever make your first cast.

With artificial lures, you just get to your spot and *start fishing*. And that's important because: **More Casts = More chances to catch fish.**

When you're fishing for redfish, speckled trout, snook & flounder, you're going to do a LOT of casting. You'll probably use paddletail lures most of the time. Paddletails are *swim baits*. Meaning, to use them correctly, they need to look like they're swimming.

So the further you cast, and the more often you cast, the more water you'll cover, and the more chances you'll get that swimbait in front of a hungry predator fish.

But you don't want to cast your lure just *anywhere, do you?* You need to understand WHERE to find redfish, speckled trout, snook & flounder.

That's where **choosing the right spots** comes in.

How To Find Fish

It's a big ocean, even inshore. The ability to **find feeding fish** is the master skill of any angler. Without it, you're just wasting time throwing a piece of plastic into empty water.

Remember this: *90% Of the Fish Are In 10% Of the Water.* The bad news is 90% of that water is empty. Only 10% holds fish at any given time. We call this **The 90/10 Zone.**

The good news is, redfish, sea trout, snook & flounder are predictable. By understanding how they react to the weather, tides, wind, structure & current, you can predict where that 10% zone is going to be most of the time.

[Here's an entire training on the 90/10 Zone](#)

Focus On Structure

Redfish, sea trout, snook, & flounder are **ambush predators**.

Imagine if you were a kid, and you wanted to ambush your little brother and pelt him with snowballs. What would you do? You would *HIDE* behind something, right?

Redfish, sea trout, snook, & flounder do the same thing (*minus the snowballs*). **They hide behind grass, ledges, potholes, points, mangroves, docks, oyster beds and other underwater structure** to sneak up on bait fish.

Another reason they hide behind structure is that it provides them protection against fish that would eat *them* – mainly dolphin. Dolphins can't swim in super-shallow water. So redfish, sea trout and snook will often be found in areas with deep water that's close to shallow water, like a canal next to a grass flat.

HINT: *find the structure, find the fish.*

Here's how:

Step 1: Look at an online map

Use your favorite online mapping software (Google, Bing, Mapquest..any will work) and look at the satellite view of the area you're thinking of fishing.

Find a grass flat. Now look for areas where the grass is missing. These could be potholes or propeller scars (we call these areas "camo-bottom", since it looks like camouflage).



Trout and redfish like to position themselves in these camo-bottom areas. As bait fish swim out of the grass and into these open areas, the predators are there, ready to ambush and gobble them up.

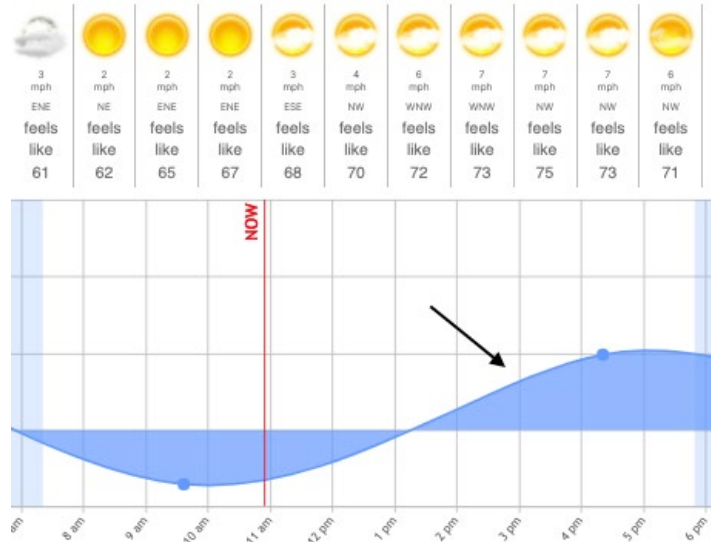
This exercise helps you **think like an ambush predator**.

Step 2: Look at a tide chart

When the tide is changing (high to low or vice versa), water is moving and creating **current**. Ambush predators **LOVE** to **FACE** the current. Why? Because it brings food to them like a sushi conveyor belt.

Look at a tide chart like <https://tides4fishing.com> (or if you're a Salt Strong Insider Member, you can use our proprietary Smart Tides app).

Look up the tide station closest to you. Now look at the example below. See where the slope is greatest? This is indicating that around 3pm would be the time when the current is moving the fastest. And hopefully, the time when the fish will actively be feeding. Note: [You can find an in-depth video on this topic here](#).



Step 3: Look for Bait

When you're on the water, look down. See any little fish swimming around you? Or do you notice anything on the water that looks like raindrops...without it actually raining? If so, those are probably schools of small baitfish swimming close to the surface. *That's a good sign.*



How about fish jumping? If so, it's most likely mullet. Predator fish eat mullet. *That's also good sign.*

How about birds? See any birds (preferably White Egrets) on the shoreline, diving or looking like they just ate?

All of these are signs that there's bait nearby. **If you don't see signs of bait, there's probably no predators nearby. It's time to move to another spot. Don't spend longer than 15 minutes in any spot if you're not getting a bite!**

Step 4: Put it all together

In Step #1, you found a grass flat with some good camo-bottom areas (potholes & prop scars). So now you know *where* to fish.

In Step #2, you figured what time the current was flowing the fastest. So now you know *when* to fish.

In Step #3, you looked for bait. If you don't see signs of bait, you know it's NOT the right spot. Time to find another spot.

See how that works?

However, *remember this important lesson about finding spots...*

Fish Move. ...Especially When Seasons Change.

One of the **biggest mistakes** beginner and experienced anglers make is **returning to the same spots year-round**. Here's why this doesn't make any sense:

- Winter: fish are cold-blooded. So, when it's cold outside, they will go wherever they can to regulate their body temperature. In the daytime, they'll look for shallow water with dark surfaces that attract sunlight (like mud flats or oyster beds). But when it's dark, they'll head to deeper water. They're also much more apt to head into creek systems.
- Spring: in the spring, they'll come out of the creeks and into the grass flats and open bays to feed on small bait fish.
- Summer: the hotter it gets, the less dissolved oxygen there is in shallow water. In other words, the fish can't breathe – at least not as well. So, they definitely won't be hanging out on the same shallow grass flats all day long like they did in the spring. They'll go where there's more dissolved oxygen available, ideally close to an inlet (*a place that opens to the open ocean, like a bay, jetty, pass or a gulf*).
- Fall: when it starts cooling down, the fish will be fired up and hungry. And they'll be looking for big baitfish, not small bait like they did in the spring. However, as the fall temperatures can vary from day to day, fish will either hang out in deep water if it's cold, shallow water if it's warm.

This is a clear example of why it's SO important to understand fish behavior to find fish.

**To Be a Successful Angler
There's NOTHING More Important
Then Knowing Where to Find Fish**

It doesn't matter if you have a \$1000 rod and \$2000 reel, a \$100,000 boat, a live well full of live bait, AND every lure ever developed...

If you can't **FIND** redfish, sea trout, snook, & flounder, you won't **CATCH** any.

So, you need to decide, **do you want to find fish the EASY way**, or the (*very*) hard way?

Do you want to start catching fish *NOW*, or in 6 months (*maybe*)?

If You Want to Catch Redfish, Sea Trout, Snook & Flounder Consistently You NEED a Coach

If you've read this far, it's clear you don't want to STAY a beginner. You want to start catching fish *NOW*, not "someday".

Anyone could take this beginner's guide and buy all the stuff you need. But owning a bunch of fishing gear doesn't make you an angler. In the same way buying a set of golf clubs and watching some YouTube videos doesn't make you a golfer.

If you wanted to learn to play golf, you would probably: 1) hire a pro to give you lessons 2) go out and play golf as much as possible.

Inshore saltwater fishing is no different. You need 1) a PRO to show you where to find the fish, and how to catch fish once you find them 2) get out and go fishing as much as possible.

That's the only thing that's going to move you from beginner to novice to "experienced angler" – a fisherman who **NEVER gets skunked**, who **ALWAYS finds the fish**, and has **TONS of fun on the water**. If that's what you want...

You're Invited To Join The Salt Strong Insider Club

The Insider Club is **all the inshore saltwater fishing help you could ever ask for, all in one place**. For pennies per day, you get access to ALL these incredible resources:

- **The Interactive "Foolproof" Smart Fishing Spot Software & App** – the ultimate trip-planning software for *FINDING FISH*. An absolute must-have.

- **10-Minute "Show You Where To Fish" Video System Built For Busy Anglers** – this is the “Weekend Game Plan” Luke does every Friday, telling you WHERE to fish. I watch it religiously before planning all my trips.
- **On The Water "Real-Time" Fishing Reports** every day, our coaches film their trips and show you everything – from the pre-trip planning, on-the-water results, and their post-trip analysis. They’ll show you everything in detail – their spots, lures, rigs – you name it.
- **Honey Hole Satellite Map Fishing Spot Dissection Library** – watch as our coaches dissect an area using online maps, so you can see how they uncover hidden honey holes.
- **Best Day, Time, & Tide To Fish Software** this software takes all the guesswork out of “when is the best day and time to fish in my area?”
- **Our Entire Mini-Course Library** we’ve created mini-courses to help you learn everything from lure retrieval, kayak fishing, to rigging plastic lures - and much, much more.
- **“Phone A Fishing Coach” Interactive Coaching & Community:** have questions? Our coaches are here to answer! PLUS, we also have tens of thousands of experienced anglers in our private community who are happy to help.
- **“FISHING COLLEGE”** – 600+ members-only “How To” videos (in-depth training you can’t find on Youtube), PLUS access to our Top 3 Mastery Courses so you can master the basics of inshore fishing...*fast!*
- **PDF "Cheat Sheet" Library** – quick answers on everything you need to know about finding fish, rigging, picking lures, rod and reel pairing, and more.
- **Insider Tackle Discount Program** – up to 20% discounts on brands you’re already buying PLUS discounts on our proprietary tackle – the best stuff you can’t find anywhere else!
- **2 FREE tickets to our in-person annual event** – every year we get together for a full day of Fishing Seminar Breakouts, Tackle Giveaways, Fellowship, and Fun.

When I started, it took me about 30 seconds to make the decision to join the Insider Club. There’s simply NOTHING on the planet like it. **For me, joining the club was a no-brainer.** Hopefully it is for you, too.

[Click here to learn more and join the Insider Club.](#)

Conclusion

Here’s what you should do next:

1. [Join the Insider Club](#)
2. **Buy the gear you need** using the guide above. Most of the gear is available at [Fishstrong.com](#), and as an Insider you’ll get up to a 20% discount.

3. **Watch the 3 Mastery Courses** that are included as part of your membership: Inshore Fishing 101, Finding Spots Mastery and Positioning & Approach Mastery. These will give you an excellent foundation to get started.
4. **Get Your Rig Setup.** Once your shipment arrives, it's time to setup your rig: spool your reel, tie your leader, tie your hook, and rig your lure. You'll want to do all this *before* you get on the water. Refer to those sections above.
5. **Plan your trip** using the Weekend Game Plan (sent every Friday via email) as your guide.
6. **Use the Smart Fishing Spots App** to choose your spots, based on the intel provided in the Weekend Game Plan. Mark your spots in the app and save them.
7. **When you're on the water** use the Smart Fishing Spots App on your phone, to make sure you're actually on the spot you identified.
8. **START FISHING** and put into practice what you learned in the Mastery Courses from Step 3.

Steps 4-8 are literally what I do EVERY time I go fishing - because it works.

And I'm not the only one. The Salt Strong Insider Club has grown to over 30,000 passionate anglers in just a few short years because this system works for them, too. Follow it, and you'll be successful.

We look forward to seeing you inside the club!

Sincerely,

Barry Nicholson, Joe Simonds, Luke Simonds and the rest of the Salt Strong Family.

