

Typing this as I am in the middle of spring, it seems a perfect time to discuss the need for speed as part of effective presentations. Particularly in waters of moderate to high temperatures, say 70° or higher, finicky fish are often easier to trigger into reaction strikes with presentations including speed bursts. Sometimes, the entire presentation needs to be sped up to the extreme to be most effective. Two things taught me about the need for speed. One was a specific May day on which I was catching trout early on topwaters, using a standard, bread and butter dog-walking retrieve, mostly involving a steady pace to the side to side movement of the head of my lure. As often happens, a hot bite began to fizzle as the sun climbed higher and the floating grass became more and more of a hindrance to my efforts. Eventually, I'd make a cast and attempt to walk the dog, but the grass would gather on the prongs of the trebles hanging from my Skitterwalk and prevent it from achieving the desired movement pattern, so I'd be forced to reel in and start over. To my surprise, I began getting vicious strikes while reeling in the grass-covered plug! At first, I failed to perceive the significance of these blow ups, but after four or five, I realized I needed to stop trying to make a "pretty" presentation and just reel the lure in while shaking the rod tip to make it "skate" in at full speed. Once I altered the presentation this way, I began catching trout regularly, and the action lingered into the afternoon. For a couple of months that year, this strategy paid off big time, as I caught some monster trout on super fast presentations in the heat of the day. Ever since then, I recognize and employ fast presentations with topwaters and twitch baits on a daily basis, especially in spring and summer. The other thing that clues me in to the need for speed on a given occasion is the phenomenon of the "late strike" which often occurs during a relatively slow bite. Someone in the group will give up on a cast and start reeling the lure in when "boom"! a fish blows them up. Such an incident is a poignant clue to what the fish need in order to stir reaction strikes--what they need is speed. I generally employ speed in a presentation by turning the reel handle several times quickly without moving the rod tip. This causes a topwater or twitch bait to skim along the surface and create a wake and/or splash. When done while the lure is traveling cross-ways to a steady wind, such a tactic will produce even more speed. A speed burst of this type can also be produced by a long sweep of the rod tip, but when done this way, slack in the line is often produced at some point. Holding the rod tip steady and burning the reel handle eliminates the creation of slack and the need for taking it out of the line. Consequently, reacting to a strike is more efficient. Often, fish strike a lure when it's moving rapidly, or just as it stops after a speed burst. If the strike occurs at the moment the lure stops, a slack line will result in a lower hook-up ratio, while a tight line will allow for a quicker and better hookset.