



FLY FISHING 101

Sharing the Sport

Background

Orvis started offering Fly Fishing 101 on a widespread basis in 2010, and since then over 250,000 people have gone through the program at their local Orvis dealership or company-owned store. The program's aim is simple; to give a people a free and friendly [introduction](#) to fly fishing. Orvis didn't invent the idea of free fly fishing lessons, but we were the first to offer and market a program on a nationwide basis and in partnership with a national conservation organization, Trout Unlimited. The results have been powerful.

Why Dealers Should Offer FF 101

New People There's no question that FF 101 will bring new people to your shop. Orvis dealers that get behind the program and market locally are seldom disappointed by the turnout. Will all of those FF 101 participants immediately start fishing and become your customers? No. But what if even 10% do, and the other 90% now know who you are and have good things to say about you? Here's what just a few fly shops think:

- *For years I would meet people in my community that sincerely wanted to go fly fishing, but what I found was we as an industry had made the sport too complicated for the average person to even consider trying. This is where the Orvis FF101 program has helped me the most, in that it gives my business **a way to market "Fly Fishing" in an easy to understand format** and no initial cost to discover if fly fishing is something they might consider as a new past-time activity.
David Leinweber, Anglers Covey, CO*
- *We have been doing "intro" classes for years, but when the Orvis FF101 classes started being marketed; we had much more consistency of filling our classes. The Orvis FF101 program has a very **recognizable name and following**, which helps us fill our classes whenever we offer this program. Great program!
Bob Marriotts Fly Fishing Store, CA*
- *As a destination shop the Orvis FF101 program has put us on the map for more than guided trips. Offering this program and doing these lessons makes us a more well-rounded shop and a more year-round business. We get to build **long term relationships** with these students who come back and book guide trips with us. Kudo's to Orvis for developing this program.
Breckenridge Outfitters, CO.*

Marketing Potential FF 101 gets [national buzz](#) and has the feel of a movement behind it. It offers an experience, and people want to join in. Also, because it's a free, educational event in cooperation with a conservation group, you'll find that no-cost marketing avenues will open up to you if you seek them. We've had dealers get free TV and radio time because of FF 101 –examples of some free press from past years are [here](#) and [here](#).

The current national marketing plan includes regional press hits and links to participating shops in Orvis FF 101 email blasts, on Orvis.com, and in geo-targeted digital ads. For dealer use, we'll provide signage files, flyer files, digital assets, a handout on freshwater fly selection and rigging, and Trout Unlimited membership info (FF 101 participants get a free one-year membership, a \$35 value).

How To Offer FF 101

In General The number and frequency of your FF 101 classes is up to you and your schedule. The more often you can hold the classes the better results you'll see, but even if you can only hold a few each season you'll reach new people.

You'll obviously need a space large enough to let your participants cast, which may be a challenge. Because it's a not-for-profit class, you may be able to use public parks and other public spaces – check with your municipality or parks department if there's a question. If you do go off-site, ending the class at your shop is valuable. You want people to know where you are and what you offer.

If you need instructors (many small-staff shops do), a source for volunteers may be your local Trout Unlimited chapter. Be sure to discuss things with your instructors to make sure they understand your goals for the class. Provide the TU folks a few minutes of time to talk to the class about their organization.

Ideally, you'll want a rod outfit for every participant to cast. Orvis will help you with below-wholesale discounts on any equipment you need to run your classes.

Have your participants sign up at the beginning of your classes with their name and email address. A printable sign-up sheet to use is at the end of this document. More on this later.

Class Content What you decide to teach is up to you, but we have some recommendations on what we've found makes an effective class, and you'll find a suggested syllabus at the end of this document. In a nutshell, we think it's important to remember that FF 101 isn't designed to create skilled anglers – it's designed to give a fun and friendly introduction to the sport (and to you), and to provide the groundwork for people to get started.

- Classes don't need to be longer than 90 minutes. Keep it simple and don't overwhelm. Let people know they can visit your shop later for advanced explanations, and that fly fishing doesn't have to be complex – a few flies and tools and a panfish pond is all it takes to start.
- Keep the language simple; your participants may have never held a fishing rod before, so don't assume they'll know what things are called or what they're for.
- Think about the most elementary steps needed to start fishing; putting your rod together, adding a leader and tippet, having some idea about what fly to try, tying the fly on, and getting the fly to the water. Let these steps guide what you teach. We recommend four class segments:
 - Very basic description of the rod/reel/fly line and how to assemble them
 - Overhead cast lesson
 - Rigging: leader-to-line connection, tippet-to-leader knot, fly-to-tippet knot
 - Overview of flies and necessary accessories

A class handout on freshwater rigging and fly selection is provided at the end of this document.

Selling Tips During the casting instruction, make conversation with the attendees to determine the ones with sincere interest. Focus on them and your sales will be better.

The rigging part of the class is the opportunity for conversion. Do this portion at your shop if possible. Keep it simple and just show two knots (maybe a surgeon's and a clinch), and then focus on the basics needed to get fishing. Show that it's affordable – a basic outfit and loaded lanyard with a few flies and the customer can get on the water. Keep the messaging simple.

Follow Up and Next Steps We've found it helps to provide your FF101 participants with a "next step" in their fly fishing progression, as well as to maintain contact with them after the class. Here's a few strategies:

- **Follow up** Be sure your FF 101 participants leave you their names and email addresses, not only for your own mailing list, but because the sign-up for membership to Trout Unlimited is done on TU's website. Tell your participants you'll email them the sign-up link. It's a perfect opportunity to follow up— send participants a "Thank You For Attending" email along with the TU link, and let them know you'd love to see them again. A sign-up sheet for your use is provided at the end of this document.
- **Give up some spots** Direct your participants to a few local spots to try. A printed handout or map with your shop info on it is a nice touch. Send them to easy-to-access places with an open shoreline where they'll have a chance at getting a few fish – a panfish or bass pond or a stocked trout pond, for instance.
- **A next step** Provide something to keep your participants involved after the class. Most Orvis-owned stores provide a FF 201 session – a short trip (usually for a small fee) to a local fishing spot for more in-depth instruction. If you're able to do this it'll help retain your participants, even if it's just a casual evening trip to a local panfish pond.

If you have, or work with, a guide service, this is an obvious next-step recommendation, as are any advanced schools, lessons or hosted trips you have to offer.

If you can't offer any of the above, be creative – maybe offer a short movie night and show a few instructional videos, or give a quick advanced rigging or entomology class. The point is to maintain the relationships you've begun with your participants, and to keep them involved.

Market It! While Orvis will provide national marketing, you'll get far better results if you do your own local marketing. The nature of the program (free, national, educational, TU partnership) will open up no-cost marketing avenues for you. Take advantage of this and be proactive and creative. Below are some ideas that have worked in the past:

- Start with your in-store traffic, email list, and social media followers – let them help spread the word. Orvis will provide in-store signage and digital assets. Share action pictures of your classes on social media to stir further interest.

- Contact your local newspapers and the regional /weekend publications that promote upcoming events or "things to do". Contact outdoor, sports and lifestyle writers and bloggers. It's a free educational event so many will publish the event information.
- Google search "things to do in _____(city/town, state)." You should find sites where you can list your announcement. Here's just a few examples of sites that have posted FF 101 classes:
 - [Downtown Boulder](#), [Explore Minnesota](#), [Hilton Sandestin](#), [Explore Kentucky](#)
- Contact your local Chamber of Commerce.
- A free event gets permission to advertise in lots of places, so place your flyers wherever they're allowed; coffee shops, hotels, libraries, post offices, boat launches, marinas, hiking trailheads, campgrounds, state parks, etc.
- Touch base with your local fish and wildlife representatives. They may post the event or give you additional exposure.
- Reach out to local fishing clubs and groups and other outdoorsy clubs (hiking, birdwatching, biking, gardening, shooting, archery) as well as your local TU, CCA, Stripers Forever, etc. to make them aware.
- Cross-pollinate with other outdoor stores in your area; a hiking, biking, kayak, birdwatching, or archery shop may help promote your FF 101 sessions in exchange for your help with marketing one of their non-profit events.

In Closing

With years of history behind it, we know that the Orvis Fly Fishing 101 program reaches people. If you offer it and get behind it, it'll bring new people to your shop and broaden your marketing opportunities. We hope these pages have given you enough incentive and information to join in and get started. Please contact your Orvis Regional Business Manager if you need more details. Thank you, and the best of luck to you with your FF 101 classes.