

Catch Walleyes with Jigs by Jason Mitchell



Most people who spend some time fishing have a comfort zone. Most anglers have a favorite lake, favorite tactic, favorite lure, favorite spot, etc. The old saying that there are many ways to skin a cat applies to fishing. When we look at just walleye fishing with jigs, there are a lot of different opinions, situations, applications and uses. Is there a correct or wrong way to fish a jig? Never say never with fishing and never say always. There are many ways to skin the cat and the more ways you can learn, the more walleyes you will catch this season. If you can force yourself out of your comfort zone and learn to fish with different styles, different approaches and basically force yourself to fish like somebody else where you can shut off your confidence and own cadence, your ability to turn off or on that switch can make you a better angler.

We all have our own way to do this. We all have our own confidence in what is going to work. You can take ten really good jig fisherman and turn them loose and they will all fish a jig drastically different and have much differing reasons on the why and how. The worst thing we can do however as anglers however is believe that our own way is the only or best way every day on the water. There is no such thing because conditions or situations are always changing. Fishing weeds for example might be much different than deep current. Hitting tight to the bottom fish with a jig that is making constant bottom contact is much different than swimming a jig high through the water where fish are up off the bottom soaking the sun along a shallow shoreline or over emerging vegetation we can't see.

So often with fishing, people make the mistake of making proclamations that they believe should be regarded as truths or gospel but with fishing, the target is moving and things are changing. Again, don't say never and never believe in always. Let's look at different mindsets with jigs and walleyes as there is a lesson to be learned from each and again by being able to turn on or off these switches, we can become much more dangerous with a jig.

For many years, using the lightest jig and line possible was drilled into our heads. Walleyes were believed to be able to suck in the lighter jig easier particularly when the jig was presented properly on light line. Obviously light is relative, the mentality that the lightest jig and line possible is going to vary in extremes. Light line and light jigs are all good but here are a few hang ups with not being able to adjust. Light jigs have to be reeled much slower or they might hang much higher in the water which might not be good if you are riding too far above the fish.

Light jigs might take more line to drag them behind the boat so boat control becomes much more difficult in the sense that the boat is on top of fish but the jig is somewhere else. The boat has to move much slower which eliminates the amount of water you can cover. Light line tends to break easier on hook sets when in timber, when fishing in rocks and weeds which I know as I have lost a number of fish to broken line by fishing with too light of gear.

So is the lightest jig combined with the lightest line great all the time? Absolutely not but there is definitely a time and place for this mentality, here are a few situations where light line combined with light jigs really shined for us over the years. Early in the season when I can keep the boat still and I know exactly where the fish are, we sometimes cleaned up on fish by using lighter line and lighter jigs than what we normally might try. Whenever fish are just tearing the backs of the minnow or snipping at the tails, lightening up can pay big dividends. Cold water early in the season especially on still water often calls for lighter gear to be successful. Casting really light jigs and just letting them hang in the water on really slow retrieves was also a very productive tactic early in the season or whenever fish were really shallow and we didn't have to worry about wrestling fish out of timber or weeds. Dragging or long lining a light jig way behind the boat is another very productive way to fish shallow flats and shorelines particularly the first half of the season.

The trouble, however is that we often taste some success on this light line, light jig mentality early in the season and then as conditions change, we have a hard time adjusting. There is also a time for using the heaviest jig possible and that is a serious switch up that many anglers struggle with. Whenever we need to fish below the boat for example as the depth or current increases, we need to use the heaviest jig necessary to keep that line straight up and down. If the jig gets out at an angle, the jig might get snagged more or not fall straight down where fish can hone in easier. Rivers for example might sweep too light of jigs up off the bottom away from fish that are sticking to current edges. Heavier jigs also thump the bottom differently and over rocks and some other bottoms, this audible seems to attract and trigger walleyes. There are also times when the fish seem to like the jig snapping or lifting up and dropping straight up and down in a predictable line of sight. They seemingly hone in on the jig easier at times when it can drop straight down. Now between these two extremes or schools of thought regarding going light, fishing slow or letting out a lot of line behind the boat and going heavy, fishing fast or keeping the jig right below the boat in any kind of depth or current, there are a lot of angles to choose from. When we look at all of the different depths we encounter along with all of the different speeds we fish, we can see why many anglers have jig boxes with a lot of different jigs.

If you are getting out fished by somebody however in either your own boat or a different boat, first thing to match is the angle of the line. If somebody is catching fish, see what angle the line is taking from the rod tip to the water. Then match up jig weight if you can tell and finally figure out the stroke as there are many ways to fish a jig from dragging in a rod holder to aggressively snapping and short lifts. There is an incredible amount of room for experimentation. Color is last on my list of importance and most anglers make way too big of a deal over color. Put it this way, I think that it is absolutely idiotic that anglers worry about red hooks yet don't have a hook file or hook sharpener in the boat. The best hook is a sharp hook. There are several adjustments to make before color just based from my own experiences. The other factors can often stem from just being efficient. If you are fouling up with wire grass for example, you might need to lighten up on the bottom contact by either using a lighter jig or by speeding up. If you are over a clean bottom and know that most of the fish are on the bottom, you might need to rely on a heavier bottom contact to trigger fish.

Other details like long shank hook versus short shank hook or jig head shapes and styles can also be experimented with. For soft plastics or for threading a half crawler or minnow so that the hook is further back on the bait, a long shank hook is often better for example. As far as jig head shape or style, it will disappoint many of you to know that most of these jigs look essentially the same under water when we get under water footage. Stand up jigs for example spend part of the time tipped on the side just like a round head jig. Some jigs styles however do cut current better and some jig head styles do seem to swim through the water truer but again, focus on the right speed, weight and angle to really fine tune your fishing success for walleyes this season. With jig fishing in regards to rods, we have designed a series of high performance rod actions that will increase your success with better response and feel which can be looked up online at www.jasonmitchellrods.com. Good luck on the water and we hope you make an effort this season to expand your confidence with jigs for walleyes by being able to adjust outside of your own comfort zone.

Editors Note: The author, Jason Mitchell earned a legendary reputation as a fishing guide on Devils Lake, North Dakota before hosting the television program, Jason Mitchell Outdoors which airs on FSN North and FSN Midwest on Sunday and Saturday mornings. More information can be found at www.jasonmitchelloutdoors.com or www.facebook.com/jasonmitchelloutdoors.

Photo: Jason Mitchell has caught more than his share of walleyes with jigs. Mitchell believes that the weight of the jig, the speed fished, jig stroke and the angle of the line are primary items of importance when attempting to catch fish.