Fly fishing is more an art form than a sport. Between reading the river, knowing the aquatic insects, tying the flies, and thinking like a trout, fly fishing requires an alphabet of knowledge, skills and talent.
To catch a trout, you have to think like a trout.

The greatest pride that someone can take away from fly fishing is locating the fish, skillfully presenting the fly, and fooling a fish into striking a fly. To land fast and wily trout, fly fishers need to anticipate where they will look for air, food, shelter and water.
Here’s a beginner’s ABC of fly fishing.

A is for Air
Trout require high levels of oxygen to breathe. The only way oxygen can get to the fish is if the water is constantly mixed with air by tumbling through rapids or other river features which cause the water to splash or churn.

B is for Bug Bunker
If you want to know what’s hatching, roll over some rocks. Aquatic insects are commonly found under rocks in the stream. Falling victim to quick currents, the aquatic insects build homes or cling to the underside of rocks to make their living.

C is for Composite Flies
Trout are opportunistic and will strike at things in the water that look edible or interesting enough. A composite fly called an attractor has been tied to look like a combination of different flies but at the same time, nothing specific. Attractor flies excite the trout into striking. These fly patterns are highly prized when it is proven to work. One of the most productive fly patterns tied today is called the AuSable Wulff. Tied by Fran Betters, he has put over forty years of experience on the AuSable River into tying this fly.

TWO ATTRACTORS: The Royal Coachman has flat feather wings and the Royal Wulff has poofy white wings.
D is for “Downstream V”

Next time you’re on a river, notice the turbulent, well-oxygenated water pouring onto the lower water surface downstream. **When white water forms a V shape, it indicates the deepest water is flowing over an obstruction.** With so much of the river’s water converging through this point, trout food is being swept through this area. A trout can sit to one side of the main current and wait for lunch to float by.

E is for Entomology

A good fly angler has to be a good entomologist (a scientist who studies insects). If a trout has been eating stoneflies all week and an artificial Dobson fly floats by, the trout won’t take any interest. It’s not on the current menu. **A fly fisher has to examine what insects are hatching and then figure out what tied fly matches that specific living specimen.**
F is for Fly Fishing

In fly-fishing the weight of the line carries the fly, so you are actually casting the line—the fly is just along for the ride. To begin you pull line off the reel with your hand and then attempt to establish proper technique and rhythm with the rod to move the line through the air and cast to a target. In spin casting—the more prevalent method of fishing—the weighted lure carries the line with it as it flies, which is a lot easier.

G is for Grinner Knot

Grinner Knots are for joining together two sections of nylon. Other knots to learn: needle knot; cove, water or surgeon’s knots and turle knot.

H is for Hatch of the Day

Without knowing what is hatching it is almost impossible to catch trout. Trout eat whatever is currently hatching in the water. Hundreds of mayflies can hatch in one day, tempting trout to indiscriminately gorge themselves on mayflies. They throw caution to the current, and go into a feeding frenzy. The one odd-looking mayfly may be the fake one on the end of your line. You must match the hatch!
I is for **Insects**
Trout mainly feed on **aquatic insects** that share some of the same benefits of living in a stream. Unfortunately for them, if they get swept away in the current they stand the chance of being eaten.

J is for **Jigging, Spinning, Fly**
The use of a fishing rod is known as **angling**. **Jigging rods are thick and stiff** in order to reach bottom fish such as halibut and cod on the ocean floor. **Spin casting requires a single, quick, over-hand motion** before releasing the line. The **long, thin, flexible fly rods** are considered to be one of the most difficult sport fishing rods to use.

K is for **Know the River Features**
The river provides for most of a trouts' needs. If you find a combination of eddies, overhanging vegetation, clear pools, and undercut banks, there is a good chance you will find trout too.

L is for **Lures, “Loaded,” Lines**
A fishing **lure** adds weight to conventional tackle. Since a fly’s chief distinction is its lack of weight, fly fishers use a fly rod to cast out a fly because only a fly rod can be **“loaded”** or bent by a fly **line** which provides the weight needed to carry out the fly.
M is for Meniscus
A concave surface of a liquid resulting from surface tension. From our perspective, the surface of calm waters appears flat. To creatures 1 millimeter in length, these slopes appear as frictionless mountains and they are unable to climb them using ordinary means of propulsion. To climb the slippery meniscus, water-walking insects need special techniques like a running start, sprinting, or non-wetting claws. Poor swimmers, like larvae arch their back to generate a torque to drive it up the meniscus.

An upward sloping meniscus generated by an overhanging plant.

For more amazing photos of aquatic insects and the meniscus, visit: http://www.math.mit.edu/~dhu and click on “meniscus climbers.”

N is for Nymphs, Nymphing (Nymph fishing)
In some insects, the young are called nymphs and are similar in form to the adults except that the wings are not developed until the adult stage. Nymph fishing is probably the most challenging of all fly fishing techniques. There are four main categories of flies to learn to tie: dry fly, wet fly, streamer fly and nymph. A nymph fly resembles an insect or stage of insect living underwater.

A rock home to a typical mayfly nymph.
**O** is for **Overhanging Vegetation**

Near shore, **trout feed on all kinds of insects that haphazardly fall into the stream.** Trout wait greedily under trees, bushes, and long grasses to scoop up insects that are blown onto the river on a windy day.

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**P&Q** are for **Peace & Quiet**

For an angler, there’s no other human pastime that slows your pace, calms you down or gives you inner peace more than a few hours of fishing. No matter how, where or when you fish—fly fishing or spin casting; river, stream or lake; close to the city or deep in wilderness; morning, afternoon or evening—**the actual catching of a fish is simply not the point.** Fishing so wholly involves all your senses that it doesn’t matter if you fish for hours without a bite, you will be satisfied deep into your soul.

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**The AuSable River:** You can catch Brook Trout, the only trout native to the eastern United States. The river is also stocked with Brown Trout and Rainbow Trout.
R is for Reading the River
Once feared as a sure way to flip canoes, we now better understand the way eddies re-circulate water. Imagine the momentum of the river is moving fast enough to push the water past a submerged rock. This leaves a depression on the downstream side of the rock. In an effort to fill in the “empty” space, water is drawn back upstream towards the rock. **A tired trout can sit in an eddy without struggling against the current.** (In big enough eddies, a canoeist can do the same). As water rushes past, it carries aquatic insects right over the trout’s nose.

S is for Shelter
It’s not easy being a trout. **Trout don’t like to constantly swim against the current.** Imagine... it’s like walking on a treadmill all day and all night. Trout take advantage of the features in the river, which will allow them to ‘step off,’ out of the current, and into a calm pool.

T is for Trout Pools
Deep, cool and clear pools at the bottom of falls are a welcome rest area for trout. The constant splash keeps mixing new oxygen into the water and the cold temperatures holds the oxygen content in the water. **Trout are able to relax in the slow moving water** but are still able to watch for aquatic insects that get carried over the falls.

U is for Undercut Banks
The faster water moves, the more erosion takes place. When water gets directed around an obstacle or is pushed around a bend in the river, it can erode the shoreline. But **if the shoreline has a matrix of plant roots anchoring the soil, the top of the shore ends up hanging over the river’s edge** creating an undercut bank. On sunny days, in search of cool shade, the trout will hide here.
V is for Vision
The vision of a trout! Trout hunt by sight. Their eyes are specially adapted to the optical properties of water.

W is for Water
Trout are fussy about what temperatures they’ll feed in. For water to contain peak levels of oxygen it needs to be cold and clear. A cool 45–70˚F is what a trout likes.

X is for “Xpert”
You don’t have to be one!

Y is for Yarn
The brightly-colored indicator yarn on the leader to detect a “take.”

Z is for Zug Bug
A nymph fly popularized by the great American flyfisher Arnold Gingrich on the Esopus Creek in the Catskill Mountains of New York State.