

## Suggested Hand Position For Mounting A Feather Wing

In 1985 while teaching a feather wing class, I was asked why my wing after tying on stayed parallel with the hook shank and the other students wings were more vertical. As the instructor, I was expected to have the answer. It goes without saying that the teacher has to know more than the student. In this situation I did not know the answer, but was determined to figure it out. Luckily it did not take long to discover that when tying on the wing slips, the angle I held my fingers over the slips was influential in establishing the ultimate angle that the wing would take in relationship to the body. This, I have since learned, applies when tying any sort of similar feather wing, whether it be a Lead Wing Coachman wet fly or a Black Doctor salmon fly.

Most vise heads have a jaw angle of approximately 30 degrees off horizontal. In teaching, I have found that if the student's vise head can be tilted upward to approach 35-45 degrees, this allows more opportunity to get the heel of the "wing hand" down which in turn allows the fingers gripping the slips to be more parallel with the hook shank. Ultimately this leads to a wing more parallel to the hook shank.

I also encourage the student to grip the wing slips with thumb and middle finger rather than thumb and index finger. Whether the vise head does or does not allow for an increased angle, the use of thumb and middle finger will by itself place the grip on the wing slips more parallel to the hook shank than thumb and index can. To prove this place the hand that normally holds the wing slips out in a normal position for mounting a wing. Place the index finger against the thumb, then switch the index with the middle finger. Note that the index finger lays at a different plane when compared to that of the thumb, where that the middle finger is in direct apposition with the thumb. (Actually the ring finger is closer still than the middle finger to apposition with the thumb, but there is less strength and dexterity in the former.) The middle finger is also generally more equal in breadth to the thumb than is the index to the thumb. This equality of width allows a more even hold of pressure on the wing slips.

From the lesson I learned several years ago, I now teach control of finger position and an improved equalness of pressure on the wing slips which in turn has eliminated having my students wings at a different plane than the one that I am attempting to teach. If the student chooses to have a parallel wing or a higher wing, it can now be done purposefully rather than by accident. Any wing can be mounted with confidence and in a desirable position as long as the foundation is flat, the various textures of wing strips are properly positioned and married, the thread is properly positioned and pulled, **and** the hand and fingers are properly positioned to hold the slips.