

GOING FISHING

QUICK GUIDE

# SEARCH FIRST FISHING

*The Five-Step Decision Framework  
for Commercial Anglers*

**Christene Jayne Backhouse**

[going-fishing.co.uk](http://going-fishing.co.uk)

# Contents

Introduction .....	3
What Is Search First Fishing?.....	4
Step 1 — Observe .....	5
Step 2 — Interpret.....	6
Step 3 — Decide.....	7
Step 4 — Fish .....	8
Step 5 — Review .....	9
The Search First Fishing Checklist.....	10
Common Mistakes .....	11
Putting It Into Practice.....	12
About Going Fishing .....	13

# Introduction

Most anglers arrive at a peg with a plan.

Successful anglers arrive with a process.

There's a difference. A plan is fixed. It tells you what you intend to do. A process is adaptive. It tells you how to respond to what you find.

Search First Fishing is a practical decision-making framework designed to help you read what the fish are telling you and make better tactical decisions throughout a session — from the moment you arrive to the final review on the drive home.

Rather than relying on habit, guesswork, or copying the angler three pegs down, Search First Fishing gives you a structured method for observing conditions, interpreting the information in front of you, making deliberate decisions, and refining your approach as the session develops.

This guide introduces the five-step framework and shows how you can begin applying it immediately.

# What Is Search First Fishing?

A commercial fishery produces a constant stream of information.

Water colour. Surface activity. Wind direction. How other anglers are fishing. What's coming out and from where. Bites. Lost fish. Changes in temperature and light.

The fish are always communicating. The challenge — and the skill — is learning to listen.

Most anglers process some of this information instinctively. They notice the obvious signals and respond to them. But instinct alone isn't a system. It doesn't tell you what to prioritise, how to weigh conflicting signals, or when to change and when to hold firm.

Search First Fishing provides a structured method for turning observations into decisions. It won't fish the rod for you. But it will ensure that every tactical choice you make has a reason behind it — and that you leave every session knowing more than when you arrived.

# Step 1 — Observe

## *What can you see before you start?*

The single most common error in commercial fishing is picking up the rod before you've taken in the peg.

Observation isn't simply looking around. It's a deliberate information-gathering exercise. You're building a picture of the water, the conditions, and the environment before you commit to anything.

Before you set up, take two to three minutes to assess:

- **Water clarity** — clear, coloured, or carrying colour from recent rain?
- **Wind direction and strength** — which bank is it pushing into? Where is it creating surface drift?
- **Surface activity** — any signs of fish moving or topping?
- **Margins** — any fizzing, coloured water, or movement close in?
- **Other anglers** — what's working? Where are fish coming from?
- **Fishery information** — have conditions changed recently? What's the lake been doing this week?

The objective is simple: collect information before making decisions.

Everything that follows depends on the quality of this stage.

## Step 2 — Interpret

### ***What is this information actually telling you?***

Observation produces raw data. Interpretation turns that data into insight.

This is the most demanding step in the framework — and the most valuable. Two anglers can observe exactly the same conditions and draw completely different conclusions. The angler with better interpretation skills will make better decisions.

Ask yourself: ***What does this information mean for where the fish are and what they want?***

A few examples:

**Fizzing in the margins** often indicates feeding fish disturbing silt and releasing gas. The fish may already be in close — potentially before you've even fed.

**A clear lake after a dry spell** usually calls for refined presentation. Fish in clear water are more likely to inspect and refuse. Hookbait choice and rig subtlety become more significant.

**A strong crosswind pushing onto your bank** may concentrate fish along your margin and near the windward end of your peg — but it may also affect your ability to feed accurately at distance.

**Fish topping mid-water across the lake** could indicate fish moving but not feeding on the bottom — or it could indicate nothing at all if they're simply drifting.

The key question at every stage of interpretation is: *What is the most likely explanation for what I'm seeing, given everything else I know?*

Interpretation isn't about being right every time. It's about making the most informed decision available to you with the information you have.

## Step 3 — Decide

### *What are you going to do, and why?*

Every tactical choice you make should have a reason.

Peg choice. Starting line. Depth. Feed quantity and pattern. Bait selection. Rig construction. Hookbait presentation. All of these are decisions — and decisions made without reasoning are just guesses.

At this stage, you're translating your interpretation into an opening approach. You might decide to:

- Start on a short pole line at three metres based on marginal fizzing
- Set up a bomb at distance to cover open water where fish were moving
- Choose a heavier feed pattern based on warm conditions and active fish

The specific decision matters less than the discipline of making it deliberately. When you know why you've chosen an approach, you can evaluate it properly. You have a baseline. You can measure what happens next against what you expected — and that's where real learning begins.

Write it down if it helps. *I'm starting here because I expect...*

## Step 4 — Fish

### *Execute the decision properly before changing it.*

Once you've made a decision, commit to it — and fish it well.

This sounds obvious. It isn't. The most common mistake at this stage is abandoning a good approach before it's had time to work. A margin line that hasn't been fed for long enough. A depth change that was reversed after two minutes. A swim that was never given a proper chance.

Search First Fishing encourages controlled experimentation rather than random change. That means:

- **Fish accurately.** Present the rig where you intend. Feed where you're fishing. Every cast out of position is a missed data point.
- **Feed consistently.** Erratic feeding produces erratic results and makes it impossible to identify cause and effect.
- **Allow time.** As a working guide, give any new approach a minimum of fifteen to twenty minutes of quality fishing before drawing conclusions. In cooler conditions or on a difficult day, that window may need to be longer.
- **Observe while you fish.** Step 4 feeds directly back into Step 2. What is the fish response telling you? Are bites confident or tentative? Is the float behaving as you expected?

The goal isn't blind stubbornness. It's disciplined patience — with attention.

## Step 5 — Review

***What happened, why did it happen, and what does it mean for next time?***

Review is where improvement lives.

Most anglers pack away and drive home. Some replay the session mentally. Fewer still sit down and record what actually happened in a structured way. The anglers who consistently improve are almost always in that last group.

Effective review isn't about what you caught. It's about evaluating your decisions.

Ask yourself:

- What did I observe, and was my interpretation correct?
- Which decisions worked, and which didn't?
- Where did I change too early or too late?
- What would I do differently at the same peg in similar conditions?
- What do I now know that I didn't know before?

A session log doesn't need to be long. Three or four notes made while the session is fresh will tell you more in six months than you can imagine now. Patterns emerge. Mistakes stop repeating. Good instincts get reinforced.

This is how experience becomes knowledge — rather than simply time served.

# The Search First Fishing Checklist

## Before Fishing

- Observe water clarity, colour, and surface activity
- Assess wind direction and strength
- Look for fish activity — topping, fizzing, movement
- Identify likely feeding zones based on conditions
- Select an opening approach and record your reasoning

## During Fishing

- Monitor fish response — bites, missed bites, lost fish
- Record any changes you make and why
- Adjust deliberately, not reactively
- Allow each approach sufficient time before changing

## After Fishing

- Review each key decision — was it right?
- Record what worked and what didn't
- Note what you would do differently
- Identify one thing to carry into the next session

# Common Mistakes

**Fishing before observing.** Setting up and casting before you've taken in the peg means your opening decision is based on assumption rather than evidence. Two minutes of observation can save two hours of fishing the wrong line.

**Changing tactics without evidence.** If you're changing because you're impatient or uncomfortable, you're not using the framework. Change when the fish response tells you to change — not before.

**Copying others without understanding why.** Watching what other anglers do is part of observation. Copying them without understanding the reasoning behind it isn't a tactic — it's borrowing someone else's guess.

**Ignoring changing conditions.** Conditions shift during a session. Wind direction, light levels, temperature, and fish behaviour can all change. The angler who re-observes and re-interprets throughout the session adapts. The angler who sets up and switches off doesn't.

**Failing to review sessions.** Every session without a review is a missed learning opportunity. The session log is the simplest, highest-return habit in fishing.

## Putting it Into Practice

Here's how the framework plays out across a typical commercial session.

You arrive at an unfamiliar lake on a warm April morning. Overnight rain has coloured the water slightly. The wind is pushing gently onto your bank from the left.

**Observe.** You take a few minutes before setting up. The margins are slightly fizzing on the left side of the peg. Two anglers across the lake are catching on the waggler at around fifteen metres. Nothing is showing in your zone beyond the fizzing.

**Interpret.** The marginal fizzing suggests fish may already be active close in, possibly encouraged by the overnight rain. The coloured water gives you some cover. Fifteen metres into open water is working elsewhere, but that could reflect feeding patterns on that bank rather than yours. Your most immediate signal is the margin activity.

**Decide.** You set up a short pole at two and a half metres to the left margin, and a longer line at eight metres as a secondary option. You decide to start on the margin with small regular feed of micros, with the eight-metre line held in reserve.

**Fish.** You feed the margin carefully and hold off for five minutes before introducing the rig. Two small carp follow within twenty minutes. You're getting positive bites — confident dips rather than lifts and drops. The approach is working.

**Review.** At the end of the session, you note that the early margin decision was correct and the interpretation of the fizzing was sound. You also note that you were slow to move to the eight-metre line when the margin slowed after ninety minutes — bites became tentative but you held on for another thirty minutes before switching. That's the one thing to carry forward.

# About Going Fishing

Going Fishing is a practical publishing and content platform for anglers who want to fish smarter.

This document — **Search First Fishing Quick Guide** — introduces the decision framework at a practical level. It's designed to be used immediately, from your next session onwards.

**For a deeper exploration of the framework**, including float selection systems, the One Variable Rule, seasonal application, and pellet strategy for commercial venues, download **Listen To The Fish** — the complete commercial angling guide built around Search First Fishing.

Visit us at [going-fishing.co.uk](http://going-fishing.co.uk) for additional guides, the Resource Centre, and a growing library of practical fishing content.

*Christene Jayne*

# GOING FISHING

**Most anglers arrive at a peg with a plan. The best arrive with a process.**

A plan is fixed. It tells you what you intend to do. A process is adaptive — it tells you how to respond to what you find. Search First Fishing is a practical five-step decision framework designed to help you read what the fish are telling you and make better tactical decisions throughout a session, from the moment you arrive to the final review on the drive home.

Rather than relying on habit, guesswork, or copying the angler three pegs down, this quick guide gives you a structured method for observing conditions, interpreting the information in front of you, making deliberate decisions, and refining your approach as the session develops. Every tactical choice you make will have a reason behind it.



## **Christene Jayne Backhouse**

came back to fishing the hard way. In 2020 she spent seven weeks in a medical coma following a severe COVID-19 infection — one of the earliest recorded cases in the Wakefield area. Six and a half months in hospital followed. She relearned how to talk, eat, drink and walk. And somewhere in those long months of recovery, propped up in a hospital bed, she started watching fishing videos.

What began as something to fill the hours became something much more deliberate. At the end of 2024, with characteristic thoroughness, she picked up a rod again for the first time in decades — and decided that if she was going to fish, she was going to do it properly.

Fifteen months later she is a match angler, competing at venues across Yorkshire, with a system built from first principles rather than borrowed habit. The Going Fishing project — a growing library of ebooks, a YouTube channel, and a website — exists to share that system with anglers who are tired of guesswork and ready to start listening.

*Search First Fishing Quick Guide is part of the Going Fishing series.*