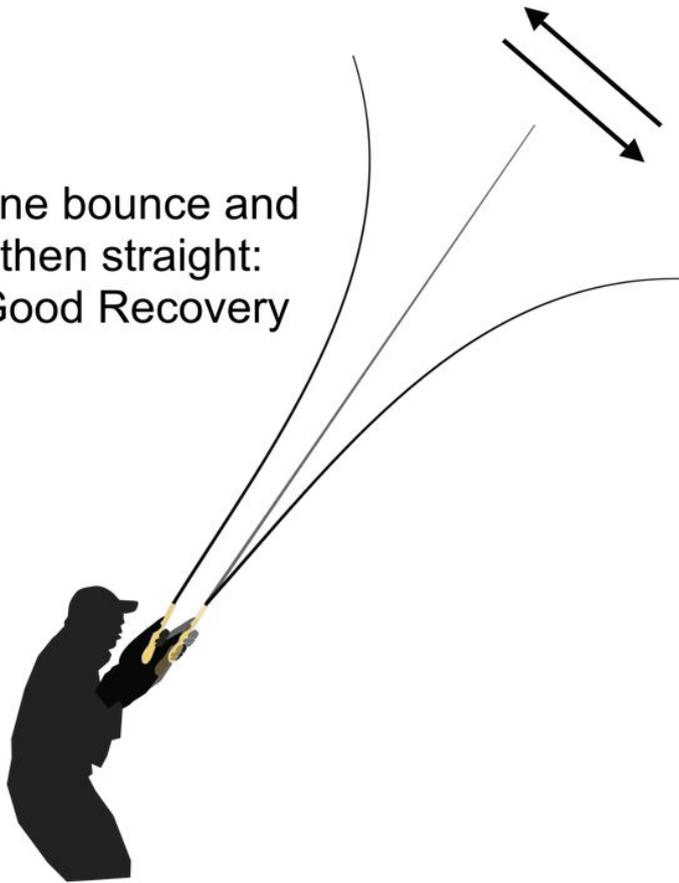
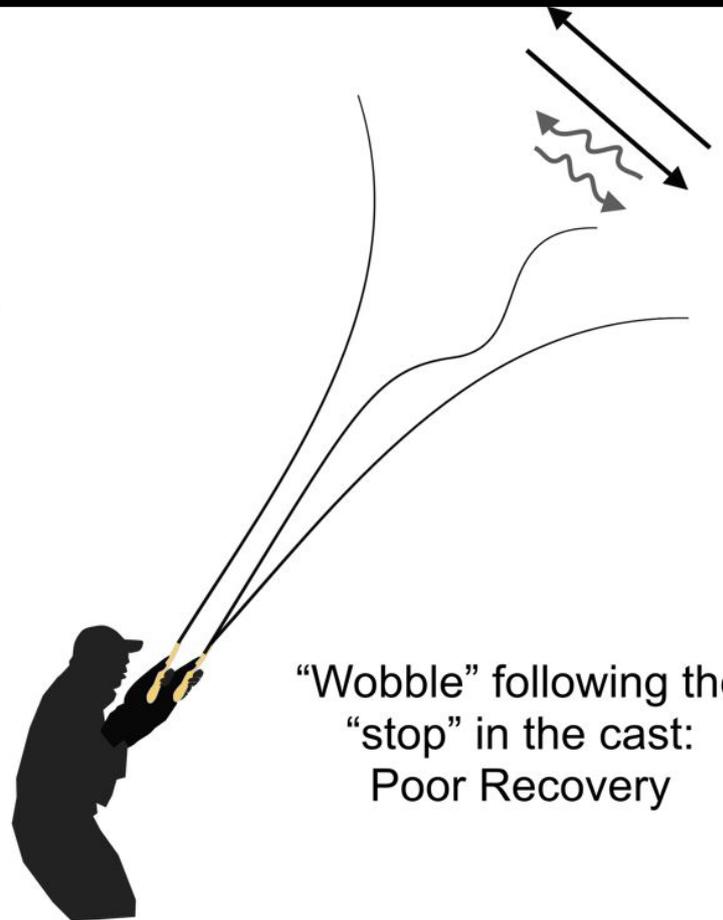


# The 10 Essential Tests You Need to Know Before Buying a Tenkara Rod

One bounce and then straight:  
Good Recovery



“Wobble” following the  
“stop” in the cast:  
Poor Recovery



# The 10 Essential Tests You Need to Know Before Buying a Tenkara Rod

Virtually anyone can hook themselves up with a factory and start producing fishing rods. Tenkara rods are no exception. As with any industry there is a wide range of manufacturing quality and design - from very bad up to excellent. In fact, **tenkara rods are particularly prone to bad design and manufacturing.** Until very, very recently, only a handful of Japanese companies made them - and only a few of those companies had truly expert tenkara anglers as designers and testers.

With many more brand new producers entering the market, the problem for consumers is:

*How do I avoid buying junk?"*

Now this is a tricky question because most companies are not truly aware of what makes an excellent tenkara rod. So it is not always that customers are being deliberately misled. It can be just that designers and manufacturers may not have the right

experience to guide what they create...So, you might wonder what a good tenkara rod feels like?

Perhaps apart from ultra-specialist "huge fish rods", the ultimate tenkara rod would cast the lightest lines (down to #2 or less on the Japanese scale) with precision. It would be light with an action that brings the whole rod into play when casting a range of lines and landing fish. It **MUST** have EXCELLENT recovery. This means that it must not "wobble" after you stop the rod at the end of a cast.

*A tenkara rod should feel light and sensitive for its length - but still be strong. It is extremely difficult to combine lightness, strength AND good recovery in one rod. But there is some good news...*

You can now benefit from our ground-breaking set of "insider tests" to check the quality of any tenkara rod that you want to buy (or have bought already). There is no rod - yet - that can score perfectly on each of these counts. **BUT, the more that you pay for a rod, the higher it needs to score in the following checks and tests.**

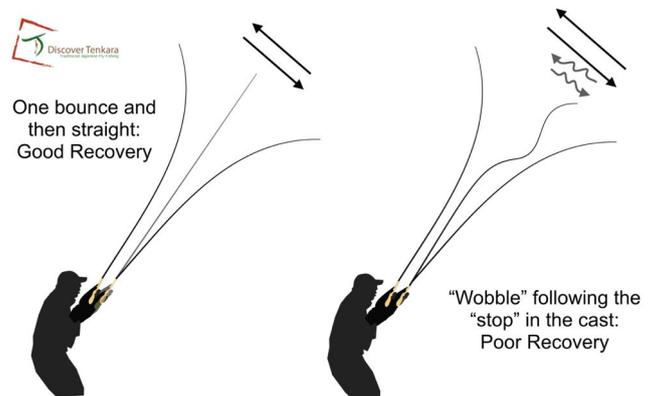
**By giving you this information, you can now make informed and educated buying decisions.**

We are proud to say that any rod bearing a DT logo stands shoulder to shoulder with the very best Japanese rods in the world. That is why we are confident to share these industry-insider methods of testing our rods against all others. So here goes:

## The 3 Critical Types of Recovery that you Need to Check

### Simple Linear Recovery (lack of wobble)

Extend your rod without a casting line attached. Now make a short overhead casting motion. The casting arc should be around 15 to 20 degrees and should finish with a definite "stop" on the forward cast. As you make this stop, you should soften your grip ever so slightly to allow the rod to recover.

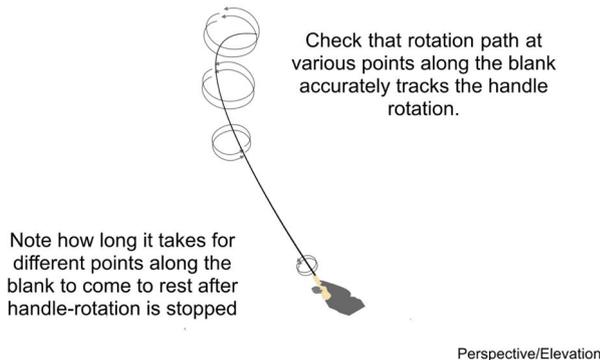


Ideally you should be able to easily make the rod do "one bounce" and then come back to being straight with no persistent wobble. The harder you need to work to do this, the worse the recovery. In the worst rods, you will find it impossible to stop it wobbling.

## Rotational Recovery

Again, with the rod extended and with no line attached, hold the rod out in front of you, parallel to the ground. Now “draw” a rapid series of small circles in the air with the rod tip. Think of this like a really high speed skipping rope!

Abruptly stop the motion and notice how long it takes for the rod to stop moving. Notice also where the rod recovers first and how long it takes for the rest of the rod to “catch up”. At the same time - look out for any part of the rod that wants to kick out away from a perfect circle. This is where certain areas of stiffness or weakness are making the rod bend and wobble in different planes.



The more quickly the rod recovers and becomes still and the closer the rotating path of the rod tracks your hand movement; the better the rotational recovery. The better this factor is - the more accurate the rod will tend to be because it gives you more control over the casting loop.

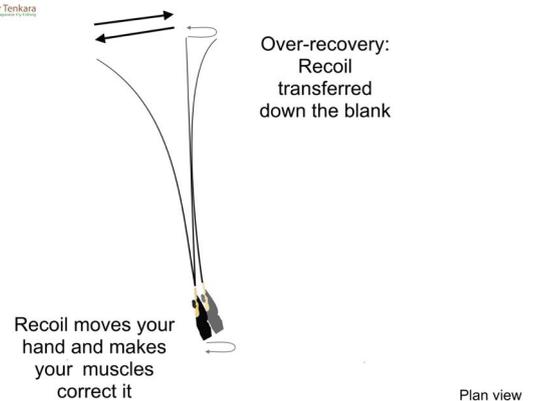
What you do with your hand is more accurately transmitted to the line. It also means the rod is less likely to “kick out” sideways away from the plane of your intended cast. We will look directly at symmetry in the next section - but first you should check for...

## Over-recovery – the Surprising Fault with Some of the Best-selling Tenkara Rods in the World!

Start out again with the rod held out in front of you, parallel to the ground. Now make a firm side-casting motion with a narrow arc of 15 or 20 degrees. When the rod comes straight - does it make your hand “rebound” a bit like a mini recoil from firing a gun?

This happens when the rod recovers so well that the tip comes back past straight and, because the tip is a little too stiff (and therefore has little or no wobble) the full elastic flex of the rod pulls the tip back straight with a force great enough to move your hand. Over the course of a day, fighting this rebound can cause unnecessary strain on the forearm. It also introduces a small “dip” into the bottom leg of your casting loop and reduces accuracy.

Rods that suffer from this make it very difficult to cast with lines rated as a #2.5 or lower.



## Construction Symmetry = Strength and the 3 Vital Checks You Must Make

### Square cut on butt-end of sections

Now unscrew the cap on the butt of the rod handle. In turn, carefully reverse out each section by a short distance. Look at how close to 90-degrees the cut face of each section is. Each cut should be as close to square as possible - and not cut at an angle like a slice of French bread.



Figure 1: A nice, square-cut on a prototype rod section

### Wall thickness

Now look straight down the open face of each section in turn. You probably know that when a rod is made, the carbon fibre and resin cloth is wrapped around a tapered former called a mandrel. It is very difficult to get the long edges of the wrapped cloth to perfectly meet and produce a perfectly uniform thickness to the wall of the rod blank.



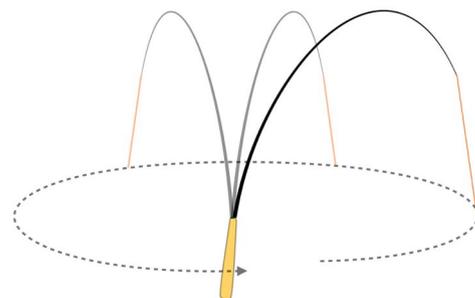
Figure 2: Not the worst example - but there is a marked difference in wall thickness in this prototype test-blank. The more you pay for a rod - the better this aspect needs to be. This one was sent back for improvements to manufacturing process on a premium rod.

As a result, the more expensive the rod, the more even that wall thickness should be around its full diameter. Often, more expensive rods will also have thinner walls to their blanks - which means that any slight deviations will show up even more easily - and changes in wall thickness will have a greater effect on the strength (and rotational recovery) of the rod.

### “Walk-around Test” For Carbon Cloth Density and Construction

Sometimes, weak areas or unevenness in the blank thickness are not easy to spot visually. A very practical and quick way to check for these over the whole length of the blank is to attach a short length of line to the tip of the rod and then extend the rod, and hold it out, parallel to the ground.

Then have someone hold onto the line while you raise the rod up into a good “fighting bend” (this doesn’t need to be excessive - just enough to put a



Smooth Curve should be retained all the way round

decent bend into the blank). Now, while you maintain the same pressure on the handle, have your assistant slowly walk around you in a circle - keeping their hand that is holding the line a constant distance above the ground.

As they make their way around you, check to see if the shape of the curve in the rod changes. See whether any flat spots develop or if the rod suddenly loses tension at a certain point. The more even the wall thickness and the better the construction, the more similar the shape of the bend in that rod around the full 360 degrees of pressure.

Because tenkara rods have no line guides/rod rings - they should not have a “spine”. All sections can be fitted together without “lining them up” rotationally. They will, therefore, be cast and bent in all directions during use. It is important that they are equally strong when bent in any plane.

## The Surprising Pitfall That Most Anglers AND Tenkara Rod Designers Fall Into...

Many manufacturers have the idea that “big fish” rods should have fast, tip actions. This seems to convince the angler that they can “bully” the big fish. In fact, this works great for fish up to a certain size...Only, it goes disastrously wrong if the fish is just outside that convenient size!

For a fish that is fractionally too strong to bully - it will bust a stiff rod like matchwood. This will generally happen below the middle of the blank. The most common place is actually in the butt section (you’ve probably seen photos or had it happen to you directly).

Once you get away from the false idea of “stiff and super-fast/tip-actioned rods” for big fish, you need to know the things that are better for coping with big, strong fish.

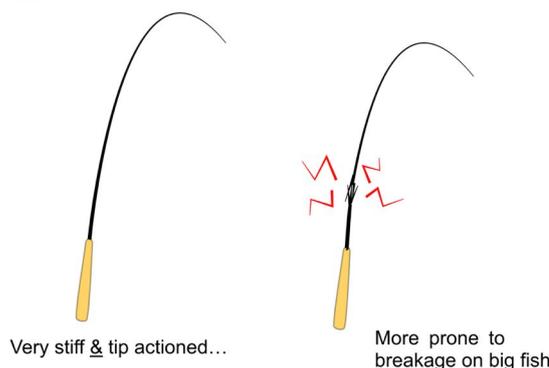
You need a rod to have a **progressive curve** with no flat-spots at all. Under extreme pressure it should bend right down through the handle. The ultimate big fish rod will achieve that progressive action and excellent casting recovery **BUT WITHOUT BRITTLENESS**.

That is a really difficult thing to achieve. BUT I bet you didn’t know that the Japanese already have a name for this property; right? I also bet you’ve never heard any other “expert” rod manufacturer

mention it?

That property of a rod holding a great shape for casting and recovering but while having a very strong, elastic bend right through the full blank for landing big fish is sometimes called “nebari” in Japan. Another name for the same quality is “koshi”.

Beware most “big fish rods” that are stiff like a poker with extreme tip actions - they are probably also very brittle.



## Balance – and perceived weight; how a lighter rod can still give you more arm strain

A great tenkara rod shouldn’t feel “nose-heavy”. Over the course of a day, having your muscles correct for that imbalance can bring out aches and pains. Something we are very hot on is making sure that the handles on rods with a Discover Tenkara label always counterbalance the fully-extended blank.

A balanced rod feels lighter than it actually is (or, another way to say it is that they feel lighter than other, nose-heavy, models that weigh a similar amount overall). Rather than try to hide the fact that we ensure the mass and size of our handles produce this comfortable balance-point - we are rather proud of it.

There are only so many things that you can do to make a three or four metre-long lever balance in your hand - no matter how light the blank is!

Check any rod that you are thinking about buying (preferably alongside other rods) and see if you can find a position for your hand on the handle where the rod does not feel “nose-heavy” when you cast.

## Have you ever checked the “overlap” of tenkara rod sections? You should...

Why? Well, if each joint doesn't have enough of the next (narrower) section of blank overlapping inside it - then the rod will be in danger of failing unexpectedly.

Here is how you need to check it.

- Reverse each section of the rod out from the back of the handle and lay each piece on a soft surface where they won't roll onto the floor.
- Taking each section in turn (starting with the first section after the handle) - reverse the section and gently slide into the next section down until it is just snug. This shows how much of the blank remains inside the previous section when it is extended during fishing use.



Figure 3: First withdraw the finer section from the rear of the next largest section in the blank.



Figure 4: Then turn the smaller section around so that its thin end is pointing towards the thin end of the larger section - and carefully slide it into the larger section until it fits snugly. Do not force the two joints together!



The amount of the smaller section that remains outside of the larger section is the length of overlap



Figure 5: This gives a good indication of how much overlap there is between the two sections when they are fitted together conventionally. If this distance is too short - there can be problems and weakness.

There needs to be enough of the blank in contact with the inside of the previous section to provide strength - and to avoid developing a weak spot by forming a “hinge” that bends and fatigues the blank; normally somewhere around two finger-widths (or a little more) is in the ballpark of a sensible overlap for most of the sections in a rod. It is perfectly normal for the amount of overlap to get less as you get nearer the tip. Much less than a single finger-width is a worry. The worst case is where the section is in danger of pulling right through when you hook a strong fish.

The other aspect of good joint overlap is to make sure that all of both surfaces inside each overlap are in contact with each other. So...

**When you flex the rod during casting, the joints should NOT creak - feel for this when you test any rod.**

Now there will be many other, personal, considerations that you'll take into account when testing rods - as well as other tests we've not yet come up with. But you can trust us when we tell you that any rod with a Discover Tenkara logo on it will score really, really highly across all of the tests above.

*We are so confident in their performance that we really want you to go out and try the rods that we at Discover Tenkara curate, design or recommend against any and all other rods on the market.*

## The Bottom Line Benefit for You

If you use the information in this guide - you are guaranteed to make a smart, informed and educated buying decision.

*We want you to have the very best tenkara experience possible - and it does not pay us in the long-run to have you buy either the wrong rod for your needs or an out and out crap rod. We want you to love any rod that you buy and also love the experience it gives you on stream.*

With that in mind, we'd be delighted if you gave a thorough test to the following rods - and give us your verdict.

**Paul and John**, Discover Tenkara.

<http://www.discovertenkara.co.uk/tenkara-rods.html>

To see to see our recommended tenkara rods that will ship immediately to UK and Europe.