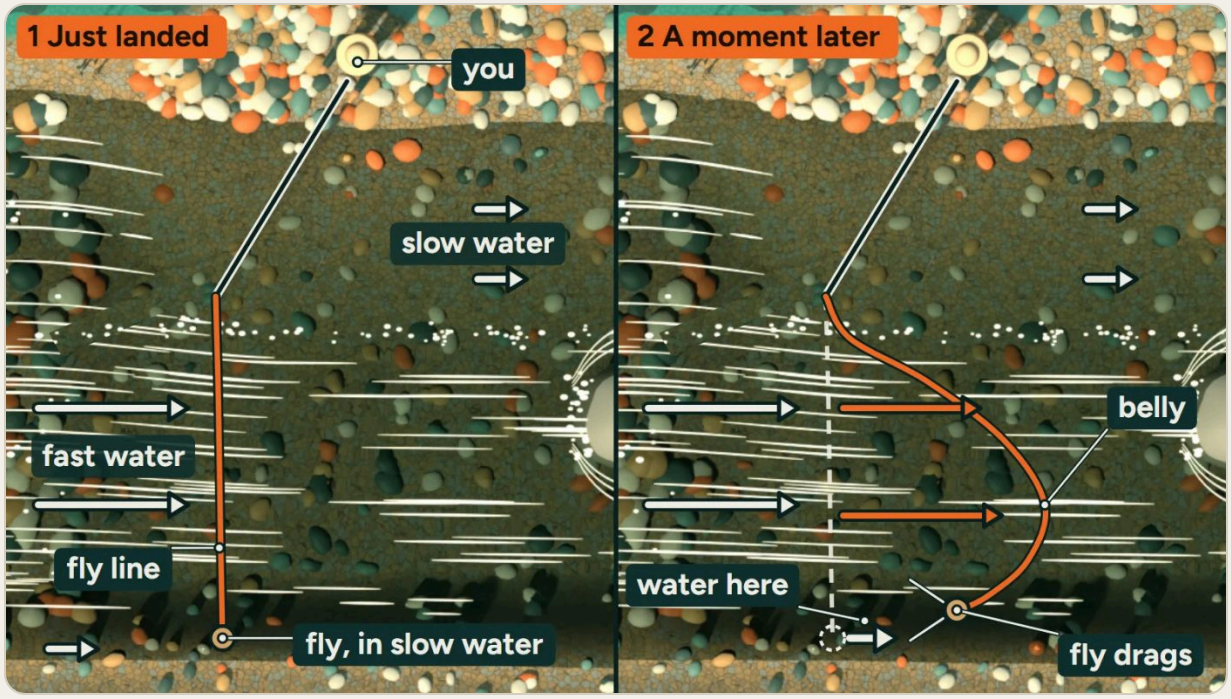
WHAT IS DRAG, AND HOW DO I GET A DEAD DRIFT?

Drag is your fly moving faster, slower or in a different direction than the water it sits in, because current is pulling on your line or leader. A dead drift is the fly moving with the water, at its speed and in its direction.

Water across a river moves at different speeds. Line lying on fast water runs downstream ahead of the rest and bows into a belly, and the belly tows the fly.



Seen from above, current left to right. 1: the line lands straight across fast and slow water. 2: the fast water bows it into a belly and the fly is pulled faster than the water beside it. Illustration: Fly Findr

HOW TO SEE DRAG

Watch the fly against the foam beside it. If they drift together, the drift is dead. If the fly pulls ahead, falls behind or slides across, it is dragging.

Watch an indicator against the bubbles. Treat an indicator racing ahead of the bubbles, or lagging behind them, as a dragging nymph.

Look for a wake. A dragging dry fly leaves a small V on the water behind it.

Watch the line. A belly growing downstream comes before the drag. Mend before it reaches the fly.

THREE FIXES, IN THIS ORDER

1	**Change where you stand**	Move so your line crosses fewer speeds of water, cast shorter, and hold the rod tip up to keep line off fast water near you.
2	**Mend upstream**	When fast water is between you and the fly, lift the rod tip and roll the middle of the line upstream as soon as it lands. Mend again when a new belly starts.
3	**Put slack in the cast**	Reach cast: move the rod upstream while the line falls, then follow the fly with the rod tip. Pile cast: stop the rod high and drop the tip, so the leader lands in loose curves.

Movement on purpose is different: a streamer is usually retrieved, and some anglers twitch a grasshopper pattern. Learn the dead drift first.