

A Manual for Coxswains
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Steering

Steering is really just one aspect of a coxswain's job, however, it is the one which must be learned before all others. This becomes especially important when using restricted waterways, such as our lagoon, where there is no room for error. You must quickly learn how to avoid fishermen, ducks, walls, and other traffic before you can concentrate on your role as leader and coach.

To steer, point in the direction you want to go. In other words, to turn the boat to the right (starboard), pull the right rudder line forward (toward the rowers). To turn left, pull the left rudder line forward. Most boats will take about two strokes to change course after you've pulled the rudder lines, so plan ahead, and be patient. Don't let the delay fool you into overcompensating, or you will end up weaving back and forth.

These steering maneuvers must also be coordinated with the rowers' stroke, or the motion of the boat may be disrupted. The rudder should only be moved on the pull-through of the stroke, when the oars are in the water. It should be in a straight position on the recovery, when the oars are out of the water. The boat is less stable at this time, so if the rudder isn't kept straight, the boat will lean to one side. To keep the line steady, hold it between your thumb and first two fingers, and hang your two outer fingers over the gunwhales. Move the rudder lines by sliding your hand along the gunwhales.

There are a few situations under which these rules do not apply.

Emergencies--Do whatever it takes! Don't crash into another boat or a wall just because the rowers are on the recovery. First steer out of danger or stop (weigh enough), and apologize to the rowers who have just banged their knuckles on the gunwhales.

Landing--See the paragraph on landing. *Turning around*--After you have called "weigh enough," while the boat is still gliding, use the rudder to give the boat a gentle curve in the direction you want to turn.

Novice Boats--Before the rowers have mastered coordination and timing, the oars are seldom all in the water at the same time, and bigger and more frequent rudder maneuvers are often necessary.

Coaching

It can take anywhere from a couple of days to a couple of weeks to distinguish your port from your starboard with confidence. When this finally happens, and steering becomes natural, then it is time to begin coaching. You will soon note differences in oar heights, hand speeds, slide speeds and timing. Comments such as "Roll it up earlier" and "Fast hands, slow

slides" may seem very basic, but they refer to common rowing mistakes and are useful reminders for everyone. Eventually, by listening to the coach as he/she critiques your boat, and by being a careful observer, you will be able to make more specific comments on problems the individuals in your boat may have.

Commands, Coordination and Counting

As the coxswain, you are in charge of your boat. However, if you want to be in command, you must first get your crew to listen to you. Here are a few suggestions.

Get their attention--When you are speaking to individual rowers, call out their names or seat numbers before giving your command. Most rowers like to think the boat's problems result from other people's errors, and unless they hear their numbers they will assume you are speaking to someone else.

Enunciate--This is essential. If you cannot be understood you will be ignored.

Be concise--If you talk too much and say unnecessary things, it can break your crew's concentration and the rowers will tune you out. A coxswain should never speak just to fill the void. Commands must be concise and timely, as well as authoritative.

Commands and stroke counts, like steering, must be coordinated with the rowers' movements. For example, commands should be issued on the pull-through of the stroke. If you ask the rowers to weigh enough as they are coming up their slides (on the recovery), someone is bound to get hit in the back with an oar handle. Also, when counting out strokes for a power piece, interval or drill you must watch the oar of the stroke (the person directly in front of you) and count when he/she catches, just as the blade hits the water. Do not second-guess the rating, or beat the stroke into the water, for this can throw off the entire crew.

The ability to count to ten at the rowers' pace while concentrating on other things is also a valuable skill for a coxswain to develop. A power ten does not mean eleven strokes.

Estimating distances is another another skill which involves counting and is especially important during a race. You should be able to judge accurately the number of strokes and/or meters to the finish line.

If you tell your crew that there are twenty strokes left, they will give all they have for those twenty strokes. If you have misjudged the distance, and more than twenty remain, the last strokes will be physically and psychologically hard to find the energy for, and a lot of races may be lost at the finish line. You should also be able to estimate the distances between your boat and others in your event. Let your crew know often where they stand so as to eliminate the temptation to look over their shoulders. They must concentrate on moving the boat.

Rowing, like any other sport, involves a lot of pain. The rowers need goals, inspiration and encouragement to keep them going. When you earn the trust of your boat by learning to work with them, you will be a respected and appreciated member of the crew.

Dock Procedure

Taking Off

Dock procedure begins when the rowers are standing at the edge of the dock, ready to lower the boat into the water. It is very important that the rudder (tiller) and the skeg (fin) do not hit the dock or slap the water. The coxswain should stand at the stern where he can remind the stroke of this, or, if necessary, physically slow down and guide the descent of the boat himself.

When the shell is in the water the cox should remain with the stern and the bowman with the bow while the other rowers are getting the oars. If it is windy or the water is rough, the cox should have more rowers stay with the boat, usually the starboard side. This prevents the shell from smashing against the dock or drifting away. (Starboard to boat, Port to oars.) If the seats are not secured in the boat the coxswain should bring them out, or assign someone to else. After the equipment is in place, the oars in their locks, the locks secured, the cox asks for a count. When everyone is ready, there are two ways to take off from the dock. Usually the coxswain and rowers can shove themselves off as they get into the boat (Oars out, One foot in center, Ready to

shove, Shove). However, if it is a boat with first time rowers, or there is a stiff wind blowing towards the dock, shoving off can be difficult. Instead, after the oars are out, the coxswain should get into the boat, have the rowers sit in, and then have someone standing on the dock shove the boat off. (Sit in one at a time from bow). Before giving any command to shove off, be sure your rowers, especially novices, are in position and holding their oars down on the gunwhales correctly and that water and traffic conditions are right. Accidents with other boats, being swamped by wakes, having rowers fall in or hit by flying oar handles are all catastrophes that the coxswain can avoid if he is paying attention.

After the oars have cleared the dock the cox gives the command to sit. Then, using the bow pair (or four), he moves the boat slowly away from the dock (Bow pair, Ready, Row). If at all possible, Weigh Enough away from the dock but out of the path of oncoming traffic. The crew should then put on socks, adjust stretchers, tie in, check bolts and oar locks, etc. (Tie in, Count off from bow when ready). The coxswain is in charge of and responsible for the equipment from the time it leaves the house until it is back on the racks again. The cox must look out for other boats and objects in the water at all times and when necessary even interrupt the coach to give commands to protect equipment.

Landing

When landing the shell, the angle and the speed with which it approaches the dock are very important. The boat should be moving slowly, using only the the bow or stern four, dropping to bow or stern pair when near the dock. The bow should be pointed towards the dock (at an angle of about 35 degrees). As the boat gets nearer, use the rudder to aim the boat farther up the dock, at less of an angle the closer the boat gets. When very near the dock have everyone Weigh Enough, but stay lightly on the rudder. Have the crew lean slightly away from the dock to keep the oars up off of it. This will cause the oars on the other side to drag, which will also serve to slide the stern towards the dock and the bow away. When the shell is completely stopped have the side whose oars are on the dock get out first and hold the boat while the other side gets out and takes the oars. (Starboard, One foot in center, ready, up and out, hold the boat. Ports, etc. Starboard to boat, port to oars).

Before giving commands to take the boat out of the water, the coxswain should first check its position, making sure that it is clear of walls, the coach boat, etc. and that the rowers are all in place. He should then stand at the stern while the boat is lifted up and out of the water.

Equipment

Coxswains are in charge of the equipment any time it is not stored in the boathouse. This includes loose seats, oars, megaphones, tools and grease. The cox must make sure that all of

the needed equipment is brought out before before practice and take special care to see that it is returned after practice. It should be standard practice to survey the dock area for any forgotten equipment before locking up.