

Basics of Coxing

'Don't make a noise, make a difference'

Introduction:

Coxing is the role of steering the boat, commanding and coordinating the efforts of the rowers in the crew so as to maximise their output.

Coxing is often misunderstood and underappreciated. A Good cox is 'the difference', turning a group of good rowers into an outstanding crew.

Steering:

The most obvious role of the cox is to steer the boat on the water. This is done by either pulling on strings running down either side of the seat position (in an 8) or moving a lever from side to side (as in a 4). Usually the way you push the lever or string is the way the boat will go.

The boat must also be steered on land, this is done by way of commanding the crew to lift, carry and walk the boat in the desired direction including taking the boat on and off it's rack in the boathouse and placing it on and off the water before and after an outing.



Command of the boat:

The cox is in charge of the boat, this means that they are in charge of the craft itself and the crew within it. A good cox commands the crew through every procedure, this is made possible by the cox earning the respect and trust of their crew in training and racing.

The best coxes are excellent problem solvers and have a clear voice with no need to shout or lose their temper. They do need to be on the small side, a women's cox can be as light as 50kg while a men's cox can be 55kg.

The top coxes will act as the coach's eyes and voice during training and bring this knowledge to racing with the objective of getting every last bit of efficient energy out of their crew at the right time in the race.

Rowing Terms

There are a lot of things to remember when coxing. How to steer and where to be on the river are fairly simple tasks initially, when compared to the problem of remembering what the name of everything is.

Coxing is like driving a car by voice control. You have to know the names of each part if you want it to work properly. Let's start with the basics. The front of the boat is called the **bow**. There must always be a bow ball. The back end of the boat (where you sit in most **shells**) is called the **stern**. In some boats, the cox lies down at the front (**front-** or **bow-loaders**).

Let's look now at how you talk to the rowers. You are not expected to know everyone's name and work out where they are sitting. Instead there is a numbering system starting from the bows. The only quirk in the system is that the person closest to the bows is called "**bow**", not "1", and the person closest to you is called "**stroke**", not "8". In a smaller boat the numbering starts the same way from bow, so the rowers in a four-place boat are called, in order, **Bow, 2, 3 and Stroke**.

All the rowers with blades on your left are called **stroke side**, and all the rowers blades on your right are called **bow side**. In most boats, the stroke-siders have even numbers and the bow-siders odd numbers

You can talk to individual rowers by using their number, or by grouping them together in pairs, fours or sides. **Bow pair** is the pair of rowers closest to the bow (bow and 2), and **stern pair** is the pair nearest you. Similarly for **bow four** and **stern four**. You may also refer to **middle four** (3,4,5,6), **bow**

side and stroke side.

See the full glossary later for more details and the rest of the rowing terms in common use.

Manoeuvring the Boat

Your boat can be moved around when stationary by using individual rowers or groups of rowers. If you want to move forward or backward slowly, then use "bow pair", "stern pair", "bow four" or "stern four".

Being able to stop the boat is also of the utmost importance. "Hold her up!" or "Hold it" is the command to use, or in emergencies, "HOLD HER HARD" shouted at top volume. The rowers will stop rowing and square their blades in the water to slow the boat down rapidly. If you had been rowing along at full speed before saying this, it will take you 1-3 lengths to come to a halt, so LOOK AHEAD.

When the boat has stopped, you can no longer steer with the rudder, but you still need to move the boat around. To do this, rowers can either "row on" or "back down".

ROWING ON: This is taking a normal stroke in the water with one or more people. When you get someone to do this, the bows of their boat move away from their blade. For example, if you get the bow-man to row on for one stroke, the bows will swing to the left. If you use the 2-man, the bows will swing to the right. It is very important to notice that the boat will also move forward a little way, so don't row on if you are going to hit anything!

BACKING DOWN: To do this, the rower should sit with his or her blade-handle close to the chest, the blade turned around the wrong way from normal and in the water. Pushing the handle away towards the toes causes the reverse of a normal stroke. If you "back down" with your stroke-man or 7-man, it has a similar effect to "rowing on" with bow or 2 respectively. This will also move the boat slightly backwards. If you get tangled in a tree or another boat, back down with your stern pair or stern four to get out of trouble, rather than continuing to row on.

You must have your wits about you and be decisive. Call the name of the person you want to use, and tell them what to do: it's simple when you have learnt the numbers. For instance, commands you might use are "Bow, take a stroke!" or "7, back it down!". If they don't do it straight away, say it again and be forceful - remember you are in charge.

If you want the boat to turn but not move forward or backward, then get diagonally opposite rowers to move together. For example, asking 2 to row on and stroke to back down will pivot the boat about its centre. You can get a bigger effect and a quicker turn by using more rowers, for example bow and 3 rowing on, stroke and 6 backing down.

Turning the boat around completely then becomes an extension of these methods. You can get the whole of bow side to row on and the whole of stroke side to back down. You can do it the other way round, but this method is more usual, since boats tend to stick to the right side of the river and therefore need to turn their bows to the left to spin round. For novice boats, you will find that each side has to take it in turns with the other side, so that each rower has enough space to move in. As you become more experienced, you can use shorter strokes and begin to move together, since each rower needs less space. The ultimate "show-off" manoeuvre is a "tap-turn", where the blades just chop up and down in unison, one side turned as if for backing down. But whatever the skill of the crew, the fastest turn is half-strokes in unison, so use this in strong stream or wind.

An example of stopping the boat, turning it and then rowing off again with bow four is shown below to give some examples of commands. All commands themselves are written in CAPITALS.

"NEXT STROKE, EASY OARS" The rowers stop rowing

"STROKE SIDE, HOLD IT UP" The stroke side rowers square their blades in the water. This slows the boat down on stroke side but not bow side, and it starts to swing left and decelerate. This command isn't essential, but it gets the boat half-way round without any extra effort.

"SPINNING THE BOAT, STROKE SIDE BACKING, BOW SIDE ROWING ON. STARTING STROKE SIDE. READY?, GO". The rowers will turn the boat around (spinning) as described before, and will keep going until you stop by saying "EASY OARS" again. You could start with bow side, depending on your position on the river. You could also back down on bow side and row on with stroke side, in which case you would spin in the opposite direction.

"TWO, TAKE A STROKE" A slight adjustment to the angle of the boat so that you are pointing in the right direction before rowing off. You might not have to do this, or might have to do it in the opposite direction, but always make sure you are lined up correctly down the river before moving off.

"BOW FOUR, COME FORWARD TO ROW. ARE YOU READY? GO" Bow four rowers will get ready to row, and then start rowing on your command "GO". You may need to tell them what style or pressure to row before you say "ARE YOU READY?"

Steering in further detail

The cox is provided with a looped string attached to the rudder, with a handle of some kind on each side of the boat. One handle is held in each hand, and in nearly all stern-coxed boats, you steer by moving your hand forward on the side that you want to go towards. If you want to steer to the right, you move your right hand forwards, etc.

Most coxes steer too much. There are usually two reasons for this: a) they do not look far enough ahead and so have to steer suddenly to avoid obstacles and other crews, or to turn corners. b) they steer too far in one direction (because the boat turns slowly) and then have to steer back again. This often results a snaking line down the river.

Boats appear to steer very slowly. Always remember that where your bows are pointing is where you will be in about three strokes time, even though by the time you get there your bows may be pointing in a new direction. You must steer, therefore, by thinking about two or three lengths ahead of your current positions.

Sometimes you will be in a position where the boat cannot turn quickly enough. In this case you can get the rowers on the outside of the corner to pull harder by saying "STROKE SIDE, HARDEN UP" or "BOW SIDE, SHARPEN FOR TWO STROKES" or similar. This makes the boat turn quicker. Remember to go back to normal when the boat is straight again by saying "EVEN PRESSURE".

When it is very windy, you should steer to angle the boat into the wind slightly, so that you don't get blown out of control across the river.

When approaching a slower moving crew, make sure that you steer in plenty of time to be able to get round them without panic. You should try to overtake on the left if possible, but get back close to the right-hand bank as soon as possible. The only exception to this is on a very fast river, moving against the stream. In this one case, you need to stay directly behind the slower crew until you are close, and then move out to pass them. It is more important for you to learn how to steer properly than it is for you to try and coach or encourage the crew, until you are confident.

Glossary

This is as comprehensive as possible while still maintaining the basic level. Again the important words are in capitals with meanings next to them. In order of related information.

BLADE Another name for an oar.

SPOON Painted part of the blade which goes in the water.

LOOM Long stem of the blade.

HANDLE Wooden bit of the blade which you hold on to.

MACONS Spoon shaped blades, popular for most of this century.

HATCHETS Blades with cleaver-shaped spoons, introduced in 1992, used by top crews.

SQUARED Blade perpendicular to the water.

FEATHERED Blade parallel to the water.

PIN Vertical metal bit onto which the swivel is mounted.

SWIVEL Plastic bit of rigger which holds the blade and swivels to let the blade pivot.

GATE Metal bit at the top of the swivel which holds the blade in place.

RIGGER Metal stays fixed to the side of the boat that carry the blade. Riggers let the boat itself be very narrow while having a wide leverage on the blade.

BUTTON The plastic ring on the blade which pushes on the inside of the swivel/gate.

CATCH The part of the stroke where the blade is put into the water.

FINISH The part of the stroke where the blade is taken out of the water.

DRAW The part of the stroke where the spoon is pulled through the water

DRIVE The phase of the stroke during the draw when the legs are driving downward.

STRIKE DOWN When the rower pushes the handle down to lever the blade out of the water.

RECOVERY The part of the stroke where the rower moves up the slide for the next catch.

FRONTSTOPS Where you take the catch on a full slide stroke.

BACKSTOPS Where you take the finish, legs flat, sitting back.

SLIDE Each rower sits on a seat which moves on small wheels. These wheels run up and down the slide-runners. The slide is adjustable and there is one pair of runners for each rower.

SIT THE BOAT Blade feathered/flat on the water, holding the boat steady.

SPINNING Turning the boat around.

BACKING Doing a reverse stroke to go backwards.

SCRATCH ON This is when 3 rows with 2's blade or 2 with bow's blade. Paddling with another rower's blade very close to the boat: moves the boat sideways very quickly.

INSIDE HAND The one nearest the gate (it does the squaring and feathering).

OUTSIDE HAND The one away from the gate, which does the pulling and striking down.

HALF SLIDE Taking the catch halfway to frontstops instead of at full slide. Also 1/4, 3/4.

BODY ROCK What you do with legs flat before you go up the slide during the recovery.

LIGHT PRESSURE Not pulling very hard.

FULL PRESSURE Pulling as hard as possible. Also FIRM PRESSURE.

HALF PRESSURE In between (theoretically). Also quarter-pressure or three-quarter.

RATING The number of strokes taken in a minute. Measured by a RATE METER.

RATIO The ratio of time pulling the stroke against time sliding on the recovery.

STROKE SIDE The left hand side of the boat when sitting in the cox's seat. All those rowers.

BOW SIDE The right hand side of the boat from the cox's seat, and those rowers.

STROKE (1) The person sitting nearest the cox, who sets the rhythm and rate.

STROKE (2) The repeating cycle of movements made by the rower and blade.

TAKE A CATCH Do a light part-stroke to straighten the boat out.

ROW ON Start paddling until told to stop.

EASY Stop rowing, as in EASY ALL or EASY OARS, EASY THERE. Blade off water.

DROP Drop the blade back onto the water after easying.

HOLD IT Blades squared in the water to slow or brake the boat.

HOLD IT HARD Shouted at top volume to avoid a crash: emergency stop.

BOW RIGGED A boat with the stroke person on bow side.

TANDEM A line-up where two consecutive rowers are on the same side.

CATCHING A CRAB When a blade gets stuck in the water and the handle knocks the rower flat.

Commands

This list is arranged so that the place in the stroke when each item is said can be seen.

Always give a "GO" so that the rowers are certain when you want them to obey you.

Try always to give about half a stroke between the GO and the time you want the change.

CATCH

FINISH

CATCH

LIGHT PRESSURE	GO	
QUARTER PRESSURE	GO	
HALF PRESSURE	GO	
THREE QUARTER PRESSURE	GO	
FULL PRESSURE	GO	
TEN FIRM (ten hard strokes)	GO	
WIND DOWN (after a burst)	GO	
PUSH FOR TEN	GO	
OUTSIDE HANDS ON/OFF	GO	
INSIDE HANDS DOWN LOOM	GO	
SQUARE BLADES	GO	
FEATHERED BLADES	GO	
NORMAL SQUARING	GO	
DELAYED FEATHERING	GO	
(examples of various types)		
NEXT STROKE	HANDS ONLY	GO
NEXT STROKE	BODY ROCK	GO
	QUARTER SLIDE	GO
	HALF SLIDE	GO
	THREE QUARTER SLIDE	GO
FULL SLIDE	NEXT STROKE	GO
(combined commands)		
HALF PRESSURE	HALF SLIDE	GO
FULL PRESSURE	FEATHERED BLADES	
GO		

EEEEEEAAAAAASY

THERE!

When going into single strokes etc., give an "EASY THERE" command, then "SINGLE STROKES TO HANDS AWAY", or "DOUBLE STROKE TO QUARTER SLIDE" etc, followed by "GO!"

When stopping a piece of quarter or half pressure, you can go straight into light pressure. When stopping a piece of fast, hard firm or three quarter pressure, wind down first, then call for light pressure.

An Outing

1. Land based warm-up and stretch. Either a run or exercises. Prevents injuries.
2. The crew get the blades out then the boat out and put it on the water, facing in the correct direction.
3. Get the crew into the boat.
4. The cox checks the river is clear and then gets in, always the last to get in.
5. Check again that the river is clear and push off the raft.
6. Water-based warm-up.
7. THE OUTING.
8. Check the river is clear, return to boathouse, stop and land.
9. Cox gets out.
10. Crew get out and take blades out while cox looks after the boat.
11. Crew gets the boat out of the water and puts it and blades away in the boathouse.
12. Land based warm-down and stretch.

Coming out of the boathouse

To get the boat out of the boathouse, spread the crew along the boat, each opposite their own rigger. The general command for this is "HANDS ON". Then say "LIFT" or "BRING IT OUT" - here you must watch the rudder and fin at the stern to make sure they aren't damaged by knocking against something. Remind the crew to "WATCH THE RIGGERS" as you "WALK IT OUT" of the boathouse at "SHOULDERS" or "WAISTS" height. Stand at the doorway while the last few rowers leave so you can see both ends of the boat are clear. You have to be the eyes for the crew while they are carrying the boat. When there is enough space to swing the boat, give a call such as "CLEAR, BOWS TO THE RIGHT" or "STERN LEFT" etc.

Putting the boat on the water

Turn the boat over. The best way except with very light boats is to roll it over at waists, telling the crew which way, eg "RIVER SIDE RIGGERS GOING UP". Then one by one, move the people on the water side, eg "BOW SIDE HOLDING, STROKE SIDE GOING UNDER FROM STROKE". When everyone is on the bank side, "FEEL FOR THE EDGE WITH THE FOOT" and then "DOWN, STRIKE OUT": keep an eye on the fin/rudder so that they don't scrape on the raft. If you have a light boat and a strong crew, you can "toss the boat". This involves everyone lifting the boat to head height "UP TO HEADS, GO" and then swinging it down together. When the boat is in the water, hold it by a rigger so that it doesn't float away while the crew go and get their blades. [You should be careful about leaning blades up against boathouses, since they can be knocked over by the wind.]

To get the crew into the boat: You need bow side to fix their blades into their riggers before anyone gets in. Then they can hold the boat level and steady while stroke side climb in (making sure they don't stand on the thin skin at the bottom of the boat) "BOW SIDE HOLDING, STROKE SIDE IN". Stroke side must first of all put their blades into their riggers and do the gates up securely, before taking off shoes and kit, doing up feet, etc. They should then tuck their blade handles under their arms to hold the boat steady while "BOW SIDE IN". As the rest of the rowers climb into the boat, it will sink in the water a small way: make sure that the weight of the boat is not resting on the fragile bow side riggers "PUSH IT OFF THE RIGGERS".

Get the crew to "NUMBER OFF FROM BOW WHEN READY" if they shout their numbers in order. This tells you the crew is ready to row and reminds each person of their seat number that day. Check that the river is clear and then hop in, telling the crew to "PUSH OFF BOW SIDE".

Often outings in eights will start with only pairs or fours rowing. This makes your boat very slow, so keep well into the bank out of the way of faster crews behind.

Coming in off the water (Landing)

For all landings, LOOK AROUND to make sure that it is safe to stop without impeding anyone else. Move to the right and stop early if you need to. Be aware of whether the wind and stream are going to push you into the raft or away. Easy the boat about one raft length early, aim the bows into the raft at a small angle (about 10-20 degrees) and glide in or paddle in with the stern pair or four. When close enough, warn "BOW SIDE, MIND YOUR BLADES" and if needed, paddle on a bit more with a stroke side person. When overlapping sufficiently with the raft, get the closest person to you on stroke side to hold it up, which will swing the stern towards the raft. You get out first.

If you get into trouble, be ready to back the boat down and try again, or go onto another clear raft further ahead. The most common problem is coming to a stop too far away from the raft. One very good way to solve this is (for a normal rig) to ask your stroke-man to back down with his/her blade as close to the boat as possible, and get 3 to scratch on with 2's blade (see glossary). These two actions together will move the boat sideways to bow side. While you are learning to land, don't be embarrassed to ask people on the bank to pull you in. Landing is fairly difficult, so don't expect to get it right straight away.

Getting the boat off the water

To get the boat off the water, first "BOW SIDE OUT AND HOLD THE BOAT", then "STROKE

SIDE OUT" with their blades. The crew puts their blades away while you hold the boat on the raft. Then "HANDS ON - LIFTING TO WAISTS - GO", making sure that the crew lift with their legs and don't hurt their backs. "STROKE SIDE GOING UNDER, FROM STROKE" one by one, leaving half the crew each side of the boat. Then "ROLL THE BOAT, RIVER SIDE RIGGERS GOING OVER" and walk it up into the boathouse at waists or shoulders. You watch that it goes straight into the boathouse, reminding the crew to "MIND THE RIGGERS". Put the boat back on its rack, making sure that it isn't resting on riggers or any weak spots. Put lights away if used and relax. The crew should stretch or warm down: your job is finished.

Conclusion

Be sensible! Rowing can be dangerous, but only if you abuse the rules.

Be polite! We share the river with other clubs.

Don't take risks - SAFETY IS YOUR FIRST PRIORITY.

ENJOY YOURSELF: It's a great sport.