

GUIDE TO STEERING AND COXING ROWING BOATS

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to familiarise both coxes and rowers at Doncaster Rowing Club with what is involved in steering a boat, both during training and when racing.

The main thrust of the paper is directed towards coxes but the majority of the content also applies to steersmen of coxless boats, including single scullers. Hence, where the text refers to “cox”, in most cases it will apply equally to all steersmen. Where the word “men” is used, it applies equally to women.

The first priority of anyone steering a boat is SAFETY. This cannot be emphasised enough. Even in the heat of a race, your first responsibility is the safety of your crew. This entails not only being aware of your surroundings but also being familiar with the rules and regulations of whichever river you are on.

As in any sport, the cox must attain a level of skill before being allowed to take charge of a boat. In this respect, all novice coxes must row with an experienced crew, with the stroke (or bow person in a “front-loader”) talking them through what to do and what commands to give to the crew.

It is essential that all those steering boats, including scullers, familiarise themselves with the contents of this paper and learn the “language” of rowing before proceeding onto the water.

THE JOB OF A COX/STEERSMAN

Apart from their first few outings as a novice, the cox or steersman, once trained, has absolute authority over the crew and is responsible for their safety as well as the boat itself. If the coach or the crew want you to change the way you cox then they can discuss it with you after the outing. During the outing the instructions of the cox are to be followed without discussion or argument.

This may seem intimidating but do not let it put you off. You will receive constant guidance and advice from your coaches and your stroke.

It is important to emphasise that although a cox is in charge during the outing, he must be willing to accept criticism and advice afterwards. At the end of each outing, you should discuss with your coach any queries which have arisen during the outing and you should ask your crew for their feedback.

Do not worry if things go wrong and you forget what to say or how to steer. The crew will help you and will understand that there is a lot to learn.

As stated above, the first and most important job of a cox is to ensure **SAFETY**.

The remainder of this section deals with the three tasks facing a cox:

1. Safety
2. Steering
3. Speech

1. SAFETY

Safety must be your first priority. No coach should ever ask you to do anything which is unsafe. However, sometimes they will think an action is safe but you, from within the boat, will disagree. Sometimes they will get carried away or not want you to get stuck in a queue and so will ask you to do something you consider dangerous. It is important to understand that safety decisions are yours and yours alone. If you believe a certain course of action is unsafe then, even if your coach has asked you to take it, you must not. You should not feel pressurised by either your crew or your coach into doing something you believe compromises safety. In general, your crew will be told to take commands from you and not the coach. However, there can be exceptions, such as when the speaker system breaks down or when the coach is calling for the start or end of a timed piece.

If you are rowing in poor light conditions, the bow person or single sculler should wear a hi-visibility waistcoat. This will not impede your rowing.

If you find yourself approaching boats moving more slowly than you, then you must take action. If the river ahead is clear then you may overtake. However, if you are in any doubt at all as to whether this is safe, then you must slow down and if necessary, stop.

The most common safety issue is boat collisions. These must be avoided at all costs. When you see another coxless boat approaching, always assume that they have not seen you. When they are within shouting distance call "Ahead sculler/pair/quad". If you are steering a coxless boat, look around as often as is practical (trying not to upset the balance) and when you see another coxless crew shout a warning and then watch them regularly, calling again if they appear to be heading for a collision. Stop the boat if necessary to avoid a collision.

If the river is busy and there are crews close behind you, if you do decide to stop you must make sure that you do not stop in the middle of the river where you might be in the path of an oncoming boat or a boat trying to overtake you. Be particularly careful of large pleasure boats or barges which cruise up and down the river. They are not very manoeuvrable, so you will have to get out of the way. One short blast means a boat intends to pass you to its left, two blasts means it will be passing you to its right. However, some pleasure vessel skippers may not know these signals.

Another important safety concern is the weather. Strong winds, a very fast stream or low visibility all make life much harder. If, in light of the conditions, you do not feel that you can maintain complete control, then you must not go out or if conditions worsen while you are on the water, either pull into the bank or head back to the boathouse. Your coach (and Captain) may be able to provide guidance but if you do not feel happy then you must not boat. More experienced coxes may also be able to advise you. If you do go out, then you must make sure that you regulate your speed so that you can always stop in the distance you can see. It is of paramount importance that you stick to the correct side of the river (which is nearly always the right-hand side). If visibility is very poor, you

should use lights. White lights, which can be visible from 180 degrees in front or behind, should be fixed to the stern and to the bow.

Be aware that behind where stroke sits you have a "blind spot". You must make sure you know what is there. If you have just turned a corner then you know what is in your blind spot. If necessary you can lean out of the boat occasionally to get a better view but this upsets the balance so should be avoided if possible. If you cannot tell what is ahead of you and nobody on the bank can reassure you that it's safe then you must stop and find out.

Try to spot floating branches before you reach them and take evasive action - they can cause a lot of damage. Also try to avoid overhanging branches. Even twigs can be very painful at firm pressure. If you must pass through overhanging branches then warn the crew. Similarly, try to avoid the blades crashing into the bank, underwater obstacles, tree branches or other boats. Blade clashes are a fact of life and the crew will not be too annoyed but it is not a pleasant experience to have your blade meet something solid with no warning. To avoid a hazard, simply call "bowside (or strokeside) blades in" if necessary. Make sure you do not get both sides to draw in their blades simultaneously or you will capsize!

A successful relationship between cox and oarsmen must be built on trust and this has to be earned. Warning the crew of overhanging branches or imminent blade clashes is very important in cultivating this relationship.

Locks are very dangerous. Try not to get too close to them. If you are spinning upstream of a lock then make sure you have plenty of room to spin because the stream could pull you towards the weir. Be aware that traffic may emerge from the lock at any time.

If you think there is a safety hazard of any nature then you must act. Simply "hoping it will be OK" is inadequate.

2. STEERING

The position of the rudder varies slightly from boat to boat. The fin (which stabilises the boat) is positioned on the underside of the boat between stroke's seat and the stern, underneath where the cox sits in a stern-loader. The rudder is normally either next to this, or at the end of the stern. The latter is very common in 4s.

In an 8+ or stern-loader 4+, the rudder is connected to a yoke, via a vertical bar. A wire (known as the rudder strings) is fastened to one side of the yoke, passed in front of the cox's seat where it is held in place by small wheels, and attached back to the other side of the yoke. This creates a continuous loop so that moving the left string forwards moves the right string backwards. As the strings are moved, the yoke operates the rudder. Wooden or plastic handles are fixed to the strings on each side of the cox for the cox to hold. Moving the right hand forwards (i.e., pushing the right string towards the bows) will make the boat turn right. Pushing the left hand forwards will make the boat turn left. The further the rudder is moved from the symmetric position, the more severe the turning action will be.

In a bow-loader 4+, the setup is slightly different. The cox lies down on his/her back in a hollowed out space within the bows. A small headrest allows the cox to keep his/her head up without it becoming uncomfortable to do so. It is much harder to coach a bow-loader as a cox because you cannot see the crew. However, the absence of a blind spot makes steering easier. In front of the cox is a metal rod which juts out horizontally. When it points straight forwards no rudder is being applied. Moving this rod to the left turns the boat to the left. Moving this rod to the right turns the boat to the right. Be aware of boats that are behind you. The bow person should alert you to these and help you to take any necessary evasive action; this is particularly important during head races, where a boat may be overtaking you.

It is important to note that the rudder will not start to act the instant you move the wires - it takes a couple of strokes to work. This delay time is dependant on the speed at which you are moving, as well as the size and make of the boat.

It is also important to remember that the rudder will take a corresponding length of time to stop acting so there will be a delay between the rudder being set to the off position and it ceasing to act.

In light of this, until you are very familiar with the responsiveness of a boat, you should use the rudder before it seems necessary. This anticipation can be difficult at first but will quickly become second nature. A common error is only to take the rudder off when you are pointing where you want to go. This can cause you to oversteer because of the delay in the reaction of the boat, resulting in a zigzag course (and a frustrated crew).

There are two schools of thought on how to take corners most efficiently. One option is to use the rudder. The other option is to get one side of the boat to pull harder. Most of the time the former will be the more appropriate. When going round sharp corners, particularly during a race, you might want to get one side to pull harder as well as using the rudder.

In single and double sculls, no rudder is required and the boat is steered by pulling harder on one side of the boat. In a double, the bow person can usually manage this, except on sharp corners, when they will ask for help from stroke.

FOR COXLESS BOATS (pairs and quad sculls) ONLY EXPERIENCED ROWERS SHOULD ATTEMPT TO STEER AND ON THEIR FIRST FEW OUTINGS SHOULD BE ACCOMPANIED BY A LAUNCH. It may be necessary for the steersman to adjust the foot steering control so that the boat runs straight when their foot is in a natural position to provide maximum thrust. Care must be taken when making adjustments so as not to damage the wire cable.

Some people will tell you that you should only apply the rudder during the drive phase. This has its merits on a straight course but is insufficient on windy rivers and quite difficult to do well. The best approach is to apply the rudder gently, to leave the rudder on for as long as necessary and then gently to take it off again. Also be aware that any sudden movement, either on the rudder or in your body will upset the balance. Experienced coxes can also help to balance the boat by moving their knees from side to side – but again in a smooth movement.

In an emergency use both the crew and the rudder to ensure that danger is averted.

If the steering suddenly stops responding, then it is possible that you might have hit something and damaged the rudder. Stop the boat and if possible, reach underneath the shell and remove any twigs or weeds jamming the rudder. If the rudder or fin is bent or broken then make your way back to the boathouse directly (but slowly) and use the crew to help you steer.

It is worth noting that it is the stern which is moved sideways when you apply the rudder, not the bow. Most of the time the difference is unimportant. However, if you are close to a wall and steering away from it, be aware that your stern will move closer to the wall. If this is the case you will have to apply the rudder gently until you have put adequate space between the boat and the wall.

If the boat is moving slowly you will find that steering with the rudder has very little effect. Therefore if you are moving very slowly (or are stationary) you will have to steer with the help of the crew.

If you want to move forwards slowly in a straight line you should ask bow four (or bow pair) to take a stroke. If you want to move backwards you should ask the crew (or just stern four or stern pair) to back it down (see "Commands" later this section). It is easier to back it down using only the arms than to try to use the slide.

To turn a stationary boat slightly to the left (and move it forwards slightly), you should ask someone on bowside (normally bow) to take a stroke. To turn a stationary boat to the right (and move it backwards slightly), you should ask someone on strokeside (normally stroke) to back it down. The obvious opposites of these instructions will turn the boat to the left.

Occasionally you will need to move the boat sideways without either turning the boat or moving it forwards or backwards. To move the boat to the left you should ask 2 to take bow's blade and row. If you wish to move the boat to the right you should ask 3 to row with 2's blade.

3. SPEECH

This section is broken down into three sections:

- a) Commands
- b) Motivation
- c) Coaching

First, a few general tips:

- You should be succinct. Use only as many words as are necessary to be clear.
- Do not bombard the crew with information. Say only what you need to say.
- Make sure your speech is clear and audible.
- You are giving instructions not requests - speak with authority.

- Do not interrupt the coach except where necessary to manoeuvre the boat to a safe position.
- Vary your tone of voice to keep the rowers concentrating. Monotone is dull.
- Speak in time with the stroke. It reinforces the rhythm.
- Always remain positive and enthusiastic.

Do not be afraid of silence, including during races. Just because you have a microphone, it does not mean you have to speak constantly. Too often you hear coxes screaming their heads off on every stroke of a race. This achieves little, as the crew soon “tune out” and regard the cox’s voice as background noise. Then their concentration can wander and the boat will slow down. Make your comments relevant and allow the crew time to think about your instructions and act on them (e.g., “For the next 10 strokes, let’s concentrate on feeling the weight on your feet during the recovery.”).

(a) Commands

Most commands can be divided into three categories:

- (i) Those given on land.
- (ii) Those given before the crew begins to row.
- (iii) Those given during the course of rowing.

There are also two special commands:

- (iv) "Easy Oar".
- (v) "Hold her up".

In this section, we will discuss the more common commands used. A more extensive list of commands in Appendix A.

(i) Commands given on land

There are a large number of instructions that relate to getting the boat out of the boathouse and into the water at the start of the outing and then removing the boat from the water at the end of the outing, cleaning the equipment and the stowing it safely on the rack. These are summarised in the order normally given in Appendix A.

The crucial factor is the safe handling of the boat and ensuring that it does not get damaged or cause injury to anyone.

Some basic rules to consider:

- Make sure that the crew stretches and warms up before getting onto the water. This will reduce injuries.
- When an outing is scheduled to start at a certain time (e.g., 10:00am) this means that you should be pulling away from the landing stage at 10:00am not starting to move out of the boathouse then.

(ii) Commands given before the crew begins to row

The following sequence is used:

- To whom are you giving the instruction?
Whole crew, Bowside, Strokeside, Bow four, stern pair, two, etc.
- Where in the stroke do they start?
Backstops, Frontstops, Arms away, etc.
- Any other information required. This can often be omitted.
Pressure, rating, amount of slide, square blades, etc.
- "Are you ready?" You must then pause in case someone is not ready.
- "Go"

(iii) Commands given during the course of rowing

Because of the noise of the oars in the water, it is important that commands are given clearly and as loud as is necessary for the whole crew to hear them. Before leaving the landing stages, the cox should do a loudness check ("can you all hear me OK?").

Experienced coxes will also speak with authority and raise their voices when appropriate to motivate the crew. For example, when going to full pressure, the cox will virtually shout "Full pressure" so that the crew hit the next stroke with enthusiasm.

Commands are normally given in time with the rowing rhythm at the catch and finish. For example, "Next stroke" will be called with the "Next" on the catch and the "Stroke" on the finish. In the examples below, this is shown as in this example: "Next – stroke".

Although apparently allowed at Oxford University, swearing by coxes or any other crew members will not be tolerated at Doncaster Rowing Club under any circumstances.

When rowing, the following sequence is used:

- Warn the crew that you are about to give a command. This is normally done by saying "Next - stroke".
- State your command at the next catch. If the command is a long one do not be afraid to say it over the course of two strokes.
- There are two schools of thought on when the command should apply:
 - To use the command "go" (more details below).
 - Or for the crew to act immediately after the command. For example: "Next-stroke" (in time with the catch and finish of the first warning stroke) "Full - pressure" (on the catch and finish of the instruction stroke). The crew will then apply full pressure on the next catch. More experienced crews tend to use this method, as it is simple and saves a stroke.

At DRC both of these options are used and it will depend upon the cox and crew as to which is preferred. In Appendix 1 the optional "go" commands are shown in parentheses.

- Finally, you must decide whether you expect your crew to make the change during the drive phase or during the recovery. If you expect the change to be made during the drive phase then say "go" at the finish after you have given

your instruction. If you expect the change to be made during the recovery then say "go" at the next catch. This gives the oarsmen the opportunity to react.

Sometimes the following approach is better:

- Give the command (e.g., "Full pressure") at the catch
- "In 3" at the next catch ...
- "In 2" at the next catch ...
- "In 1" at the next catch ...
- "Go". You should decide whether to say "go" on the catch or the finish in the same way as above.

The first two approaches are better for simple changes because they take less time to execute. The second may be preferable for changes which can take longer to instigate, like increasing the rating to race pace at the start of a head race. However, beware that using "go" can confuse people if there is inconsistency in the way it is used.

If your crew is working hard they may leap on anything the cox says which appears as though you are asking them to slow down. Be aware that "squeeze" can sound like "easy" and "overlap" can sound like "hold it up".

When rowing, in order of decreasing power, the following calls are used:

- Race pressure (rarely used, as it is obvious when you are racing!)
- Full pressure (or firm pressure)
- Three-quarters pressure
- Half pressure
- Quarter pressure (rarely used)
- Light pressure (or "paddle light").

In order of decreasing length of stroke, the following calls are used:

- Full slide
- Three-quarters slide
- Half slide (this is where the elbow joint is next to the knee at the catch)
- Quarter slide
- Body lean
- Arms only.

Other common calls include the following:

- "Take a stroke" asks for a stroke at full slide.
- "Tap it" asks for a stroke at half-slide.
- "Touch it" asks for a stroke at arms-only.
- "Back it down" instructs a rower to sit at backstops, turn their blade so that spoon faces the bows, bury the spoon and move up the slide, moving the boat backwards.
- "Wind it up to 28" or "wind it up to race rating" is used to increase the rating.
- "Wind it down" is used decrease the rate to a comfortable level (the precise rating is chosen by Stroke).

- "Up - 2" and "Down - 2" are used to change the rate precisely and will usually be done after a short conversation with the stroke.
- "Bow pair in" instructs Bow & 2 to begin rowing. This is used when some of the crew are already rowing in a warm-up sequence.
- "5 & 6 out" instructs 5 & 6 to stop rowing. This is used when other members of the crew are to continue rowing so "Easy Oar" would be inappropriate.
- "Sit the boat" tells people to concentrate on keeping the boat level. This is often necessary when rowing in fours, or just after an "easy oar" call (prior to "drop"), or when spinning the boat (see below).
- "Timing" or "Time". The former when people are not rowing together and the latter when they are rushing stroke (who will tell you).

(iv) "Easy Oar"

The following sequence is used:

- "Next - stroke" at the catch and finish respectively.
- Begin the word "Easy" at the next catch. Hold the word on for the duration of the stroke ("Eeeeeesy") and at the finish say "Oar". (Sometimes coxes will say "Easy - there" instead of "Easy - Oar".) The rowers will stop rowing and sit with their blades off the water.
- "Drop" tells the rowers that they can rest their blades on the water. Before doing this, it is a good discipline to get the crew to balance the boat (make sure there is plenty of room to do this, as the boat will still be moving). The cox may say, "Sit the boat". When the cox is satisfied with the balance, then say "drop".
- The boat takes some time to come to rest. If you want to brake the movement of the boat, say "take the run off". The crew will drop their blades horizontally (or at 45°) into the water and slow the boat.

(v) "Hold her up"

This command should be used when you need to stop suddenly. You do not need to warn the crew before using this command. If you have any warning of the need to stop you should use "easy oar". On the command "hold her up", the whole crew will stop rowing and place their blades in the water feathered. As the boat slows down they can then square their blades to bring the boat to a halt. "Hold her hard" conveys an even greater sense of urgency. Remember that these are emergency commands and should not be used unless absolutely necessary.

This list of commands is by no means comprehensive. Further examples are in Appendix A. Other commands are in regular use and you may also wish to invent some of your own. Any commands may be used as long as cox, coach and crew are absolutely clear what is meant by each command.

(b) Motivation

There is very little to be said about motivation. You will learn how to get the best out of your crew over the course of your outings. What works for one crew will not necessarily work for another. Foster your relationship with crew members.

You must be encouraging but also critical. If you feel someone is not putting in as much power as you have instructed, then you must tell them. Sometimes the crew will be trying as hard as they can but are being ineffective because they are too tense. If this is the case, then being aggressive makes matters worse.

Sometimes it is more important to calm a crew down and relax them rather than trying to get them to work harder. **Keeping a cool head under pressure is a recipe for success in rowing.**

It is important that you are motivated yourself. The crew will not respond to your demands unless you are also dedicated. This can mean accompanying them when they are training off the water. For example, going jogging with the crew will help to earn their respect, as well as getting you fit.

(c) Coaching

Initially you will find coaching pretty hard. Don't worry - it does get easier with practice. The only way to learn is to listen to what the coach says and to try and identify the symptoms of the error being coached. Stroke will also help you.

Read and learn as much as you can about rowing technique. In particular, read the DRC document "Rowing Technique at DRC", which you can see on notice boards, or obtain a copy from one of the Club captains or coaches.

Then, when you think you understand a particular coaching point, you should coach it yourself when you next observe the error. Try to find different ways of conveying the same message. The rower might respond better to a new way of thinking about the same thing.

Do not be afraid to tell a particular crew member that they are making an error. For example, "Watch your blade height on the recovery, two".

If more than one rower is suffering from a particular fault it is often worth making the point to the whole crew. They will then all focus on the same part of the stroke and will keep them focused when you make points to other oarsmen individually.

Sometimes you can tell from the way the boat feels that the crew are making an error even if you cannot see it. Try to learn what these feelings mean and how to correct the fault which causes them. In a race there will be no coach, so you have to be able to recognise as many errors as possible. For example, if the boat is always down on one side, observe the hand heights on the recovery. One person can completely upset the boat, so look at the blade heights on the recovery and make sure they are all the same.

As you get better you will identify many faults at once. However, it will be impossible for a rower to correct them all simultaneously so you should choose one or two to focus on. If the coach is working on one part of the stroke you

should not try to correct a completely different error at the same time because it will lead to confusion.

If you have an outing without a coach then you must concentrate more on trying to coach the crew yourself. Clearly you can only work on technical points which you can feel or see clearly. In the absence of a coach it is important that you assert your authority - you must not let the crew act like a committee!

Finally, do not allow talking amongst the crew, except when you ask them a question, which is usually when the boat is stationary. The only people who should talk are the cox and the stroke (who talks to the cox, who may then convey the message to the crew). The only time other crew members should talk is when they see a safety hazard, in which case they should shout it out for all to hear. If you hear crew members talking or shouting out when rowing tell them to shut up!

A TYPICAL OUTING

This section aims to familiarise you with some of the situations you will meet in the course of coxing.

1. MEETING

Once the crew have met up and are at the boathouse they should do a brief warm up. This normally consists of stretching and some work on the ergs (rowing machines), after which the crew should stretch again.

2. GETTING THE BOAT OUT

Before the boat is removed from the boathouse, each member of the crew should remove their blade from wherever it is stored and place it near the river but out of the way.

Then, on your command "Hands on", each crew member should stand by their seat. (These instructions assume that the boat is stored on a rack which will almost always be the case). You should position yourself by the stern to make sure no damage is done to the fin or rudder. Holding the stern of the boat with one hand is helpful because you can physically resist the crew if they are about to crash the stern into something. It is not necessary to pay such close attention to the bows because the oarsmen can see it themselves. You then call "Lifting on 3: 1, 2, 3". On "3" the whole crew should lift the boat slightly. The boat should not be lifted more than a few centimetres otherwise it will hit the rack above. The boat should be carefully moved away from the racking.

While this is taking place, half of the oarsmen should duck under the boat and hold it on the other side so that they are all opposite their rigger by the time the boat has been removed from the rack.

There are three heights at which a boat can be held:

- Waists - the crew stands with arms straight down and their hands under the saxboard.
- Shoulders - the crew put whichever hand is nearest the boat at shoulder-height underneath the saxboard.
- Heads - the crew stands with arms fully extended above their head with the boat directly above them.

Sometimes the boat will be between these heights when on the rack so once you have removed the boat from the rack you should give a height instruction e.g. "Shoulders on 3: 1, 2, 3".

As the crew walks out of the boathouse you should tell them whether to turn left or right. When the stern is clear of the boathouse you should say "stern clear" to indicate that the stern can be swung round so that the boat is parallel to the river. At this point you can let go of the stern and stand back so you can see the whole boat. At DRC all boats are launched pointing upstream, except at the head race.

Once you are parallel to the water's edge, call "Heads on 3: 1, 2, 3". On "3" the crew lifts the boat to heads. You then call "roll it down to waists" and the whole

crew should end up on the landward side of the boat holding both sides of the boat.

They should reach right out, with their toes over the edge. On the command "lower it in" they should place the boat gently in the water. You must check that the fin and rudder do not get damaged in the process.

Once the boat is in the water, you should take hold of the 4 or 6 rigger, while the crew get their blades. Strokeside blades will have red markings. Bowside blades will have green ones. Older blades are usually marked with the number of the corresponding rower but this is rare with most modern blades. Strokeside (assuming they are the landward side) should put their blades into the gates straight away. All the gates should be pointing towards the stern of the boat. The button should be on the boat-side of the gate and the gate should be done up tightly. Bowside should place their blades across the boat by their seat, with the blade resting next to the gate. Once strokeside blades are in, you should call "strokeside holding; bowside, hands across, one foot in - go". Strokeside then need to hold the boat steady by gripping their riggers, while bowside step in. It is important that the crew do not become complacent about holding the boat steady - if it is not done properly there is a serious risk that the boat will capsize.

Bowside should place their right feet between the sliders of their seats and sit down as they swing their left feet into their shoes. Before doing anything else, bowside must put their blades into their gates, tighten them, and push the blades as far out as they will go so that the buttons are pressing against the gates. Once all bowside blades are out, call "Bowside holding the landing stage, strokeside in". When all of the crew are in the boat you should get in yourself. You should try to avoid putting undue pressure on the bottom of the boat so it is better to get in by standing on the seat. If it is unavoidable then be gentle.

You should then plug in your coxbox and adjust the volume appropriately. Carry out a voice check to ensure everyone can hear you.

Call "number off from bow when ready" to make sure your whole crew are properly prepared. When bow is ready he will shout "bow" and each successive oarsman will shout their number when they have heard the number behind them and are ready. When you hear "stroke", you know you can push off.

Once your crew are ready you need to push away from the bank. Check that you there are not boats heading downstream and that you will not impede any other crews on the river and then call "strokeside pushing off." As the boat moves away from the landing stages, they will then bring their blades in until their blades are against the landing and push against it to move the boat out into the stream.

As soon as you are pushed out, move onto the right-hand side of the river and begin your warm up. This is to warm the muscles before any strenuous exercise and to get the crew moving together. It is also a good opportunity to correct basic errors because for most warm-ups some of the crew will not be rowing but will be stabilising the boat, making rowing easier.

3. WARMING-UP

Warm-ups take many forms. You should discuss an appropriate warm up with your coach before the start of the outing. However most coaches will use the following warm-up sequence (NB, an alternative sequence is often used by experienced crews, who row together all the time. In the interests of brevity, this will not be covered in this paper).

You should instruct stern four to sit the boat (rest their blades on the water and keep the boat level) while you start bow four rowing at arms only with square blades. ("Bow four, arms only, square blades, are you ready? Go"). You then progressively increase the stroke allowing 10 or 15 strokes at each stage. Thus after arms only, you call body lean, then quarter slide, half-slide, three-quarters slide and full-slide.

When stern four have completed this, you should tell them to easy ("easy - oar") and take the run off. They should then sit the boat while stern four warm up in the same way.

While warming up make sure you pay attention to other crews. If you are moving faster than the crews in front of you, tailor your warm-up to make you move more slowly until you can safely overtake. If you are holding up crews behind you, you can either speed up your warm-up or allow them to overtake.

Steering is extremely difficult during warm ups, since the boat speed will be very low. You should make use of your crew to steer the boat.

Once your warm-up is completed, you will either do a piece (a protracted period of hard work), or focus on technical aspects of the stroke. Both are discussed briefly so that you have some familiarity with them.

4. PIECES

A "piece" is usually over a set distance or time and it is your responsibility to start and stop the piece to conform to the instructions from the coach. The coach might also have specified a particular rating for the piece in which case you should monitor the rating and call "up 3", "down 1" etc. as necessary during the piece. In some cases, the coach will want to call the start and end to a piece.

The crew should find pieces challenging (if they don't then they may not trying hard enough!). It is your responsibility to motivate and encourage the crew. You and the stroke are responsible for "tactics" as you would be in a race, so you must call pushes (periods of extra effort) in appropriate places. A piece will seem shorter for the crew if it is broken down into shorter periods. You must not forget that you are also expected to coach the crew. Pushes or technical focuses should not last any longer than 15 strokes or concentration will wander. Sometimes it is useful to count the strokes in the push. Often, however, this is merely irritating so you should make sparing use of it.

It is important that you tell the crew how far they have gone or how far they have to go. If they have gone less than halfway, tell them how far they have gone. If they are more than halfway there, tell them how long they have remaining. If you

are practising over a particular course in preparation for a race it is a good idea to associate pushes and particular focuses with landmarks along the course. As you approach the finish you can tell the crew how many strokes they have left to take. However, you must make sure that you do not underestimate this distance or it will lead to demoralisation.

Bear in mind that doing a piece does not give you the right to ignore other crews and behave in an unsafe or reckless manner. You must be aware of crews around you, and, if necessary, wind down or stop. The boathouse reach can be a particularly hazardous area as there are often novices practicing there. They may not have the skill to get out of the way, so take adequate care.

5. TECHNICAL EXERCISES

The purpose of these exercises is to improve the rowers' technique. The coach will be concentrating and will not be paying attention to the other crews on the river. Coaches will not get upset with you if you interrupt their technical exercises to manoeuvre the boat for safety reasons.

Try to pay close attention to what your coach is saying, and reinforce it by rephrasing it in your own words. Remember to praise rowers when they correct their faults - often they will not know whether they have succeeded in doing what was asked for.

Before embarking on an exercise you should make sure that the whole crew is familiar with what it entails and what the benefits are.

6. SPINNING

Spinning (the process by which the boat is turned around) is one of the most hazardous parts of an outing.

You should check that you are not impeding any other crews by spinning. Assuming it is clear, you should "easy" on the right-hand side of the river. You should use the rudder to steer you left and have only strokeside take the run off. This will turn you substantially to the left, thereby reducing the length of time it will take to spin.

Sometimes you will need to spin using less than the full crew. This will be the case if the river is particularly narrow and you need extra control in spinning. Mostly, however, you will want the whole of strokeside to back it down and the whole of bowside to row on. You should give the command, "Strokeside backing it down, bowside rowing on, go". As strokeside back it down, bowside come forwards up the slide to take a stroke. As bowside take a stroke, strokeside return to backstops to back it down again. Spinning in this way results in the whole crew moving up and down the slide simultaneously. This avoids anybody being hit in the back by the oar of the person behind. You should be aware that bowside are moving the boat forwards and strokeside are moving the boat backwards. If necessary ask strokeside to stop before bowside so that you end up on the correct side of the river once you have finished turning.

When spinning, the cox and bow should watch the stern/bow of the boat and the clearance it has from the bank. With experience you will learn the length of the boat and be able to judge your clearance at the bows even though you can't see. In tight spaces it is often prudent to ask your coach to keep an eye on the bows and warn you if you are about to hit the bank.

In cases of strong winds or a fast stream, turning becomes harder. When you are pointing across the river you will move very quickly downstream. It is important that you warn the crew of this so they are ready to take powerful strokes to help you finish spinning.

7. PARKING

When you have finished your outing, you need to park the boat. Always approach the boathouse from downstream (i.e., rowing against the stream). There are two ways to do this though the second method should only be attempted once you have reached a reasonable level of competence as a cox.

“Easy” the crew a couple of lengths before the boathouse. Tell bow pair to paddle on gently. Steer towards the bank until your strokeside blades are only about a foot away from the landing stage. If necessary get bow to take a stroke on his/her own so that you are pointing towards the bank. Warn strokeside that you are about to park (“Watch your blades, strokeside”). They will lower their hands so that their blades rise up onto the landing stage. Finally, you need to straighten the boat up. Assuming you are travelling slowly this is normally best achieved by telling 7 (3 in a 4+) to hold it up. You should then jump out of the boat and pull 6's rigger into the bank.

Once you have parked, continue to hold 6's rigger and call "strokeside out". They should leave their blades in the gates and stand by their riggers. You should then call, "strokeside holding, bowside out." Once strokeside are holding their riggers, bowside should remove their blades from their gates, place them across the boat as they did when first getting in and do the gates up again. They should then get out of the boat, after which strokeside can remove their blades. You should hold the boat while the rowers put their blades in a safe position near the bank.

Remember that your coxbox needs to be detached from the boat. Then set up two trestles outside the boathouse.

To get the boat out of the water, each crew member stands by their seat. On your command "hands on" they should hold the nearside of the boat with one hand and reach across the boat to hold the bowside saxboard with the other. You should call "lift to waists on 3: 1, 2, 3" and the boat will be lifted to waists. You should make sure that neither the fin nor the rudder gets damaged. Then call "Heads on 3: 1, 2, 3", then “split to shoulders, go”, then “waists, go”, then “up the steps”. You should position yourself by the bows and walk it to the boathouse, where you will put the boat on trestles for wiping down. Normally bow or stern four either collect and clean the blades, while the other four washes down the boat.

Finally you should carry the boat into the boathouse and put it on the appropriate rack (making sure to avoid the boat resting on any riggers).

COURTESY

When coxing you should always treat other river users politely, even if they are abusive towards you. There are a few simple rules you should follow:

- If a crew interrupts their outing to avoid interrupting yours, whether or not they are obliged to do so, thank them for doing so.
- If you make a mistake and impede another crew as a result then apologise straight away. Everyone makes mistakes and people will be ready to forgive an error if you apologise for it. Failure to apologise will earn you a reputation of being arrogant and inconsiderate, and people will be less inclined to help you.
- When conversing with other crews, anglers and members of the public say "please" and "thank you".
- If you wish to overtake another crew you should say "Can we come by please". The cox in front should reply either "yes, come by" or "no, because...". "Yes, come by" indicates that the cox of the crew in front is happy for you to overtake them. However, it is not his/her responsibility to check that it is safe for you to do so. You must make that judgement yourself. A cox should only reply "No, because..." if there is a good reason to do so. Simply wanting to stay in front does not constitute a good reason. Even if you cannot hear precisely why the cox in front does not want you to overtake you should trust their judgement. It might be unsafe to do so or the crew might be about to start rowing at firm pressure and would therefore have to overtake you back almost immediately. If you do overtake, remember to thank the cox of the crew you are overtaking for their co-operation, either verbally or with some suitable gesture.
- Try to avoid keeping other crews waiting. It important to behave in a considerate way.
- If you are involved in an incident with any river users or members of the public you should report the incident to the Club Captain. If the incident involves another crew it is useful to record the registration number on the side of their boat.
- Try to be tolerant of crews which seem to be behaving in bizarre ways. Their cox is probably a novice and will undoubtedly appreciate your patience.

IF YOU ARE UNSURE OF ANYTHING, JUST ASK!

ENJOY YOUR COXING!

APPENDIX A – SUMMARY OF MAIN COMMANDS

Sources:

Richard Harpum; First & Third Trinity B.C., Cambridge

May 2013

APPENDIX A - SUMMARY OF MAIN COX COMMANDS

Note: Where “go” is shown in parentheses (- go), it is optional

- Hands on. Lifting on 3: 1, 2, 3
 - Bowside holding, strokeside under, go.
 - Shoulders on 3: 1, 2, 3.
 - Take her out.
 - (At top of steps) Waists on 3: 1, 2, 3.
 - Down the steps.
 - Shoulders on 3: 1, 2, 3
 - Heads on 3: 1, 2, 3
 - Down to waists on 3: 1, 2, 3
 - Lower her gently onto the water.
 - Strokeside holding, bowside get the blades.
 - Strokeside holding, bowside hands across, one foot in - go.
 - Bowside holding (the landing), strokeside in.
 - Cox getting in Can you all hear me? (i.e., check cox box is working)
 - Number off from bow when you're ready.
 - Pushing off strokeside.
 - 2 & 4 take 2 strokes.
 - Backstops. Stern four sitting the boat, bow four paddling on.
 - Bow four - arms only - square blades - are you ready - go
 - Next stroke – body lean (- go)
 - Next stroke – quarter slide (- go)
 - Just split the knees
 - Next - stroke – half - slide (- go)
 - Next - stroke – three-quarter slide (- go)
 - Next - stroke – full - slide (- go)
 - Next - stroke – feather - blades (- go)
 - Easy – oar..... hold her up gently
 - Backstops. Bow four sitting the boat, stern four paddling on - go
 - Stern four - arms only - square blades - are you ready - go
- (Same warm-up exercise as above)
- Backstops – whole crew - paddling light - are you ready - go

- (For a racing start) Attention GO!
 - Easy – oar..... hold her on strokeside
 - Strokeside spin - strokeside backing it down - bowsideside rowing on - go
 - Tops off; number off from bow when ready
 - Touch/tap her bow
 - Backstops - paddling light - are you ready – go
 - Next - stroke – half – pressure (- go)
 - Next - stroke – three-quarter pressure (- go)
 - Next - stroke – full - pressure (- go)
 - Wind - down
 - Proper light
 - Next – stroke - outside hands off (- go)
 - Alternate square and feather – next stroke – go
- (Repeat, as necessary)
- (Emergency stop) Easy - oar – hold her up hard!
 - Watch you blades strokeside/bowsideside
 - (Parking) Watch your blades strokeside
 - Strokeside out
 - Strokeside holding – bowsideside out
 - Hands on – to waists on 3: 1, 2, 3
 - Heads on 3: 1, 2, 3
 - Split
 - Shoulders on 3: 1, 2, 3
 - Waists on 3: 1, 2, 3
 - Carefully up the steps
 - OK - forward
 - Lower her gently onto the trestles
 - Bow four washing her down, stern four fetching the blades
- (After cleaning)
- Hands on – lift up
 - Bowsideside holding, strokesideside under, go
 - Lower her gently onto the rack