



Coxswain Terminology, Tips and Resources

Role of the Coxswain

Basic Responsibilities

- Safety of the boat and rowers on and off the water
- Launching
- Steering (most important – concentrate on this to start with). This includes directing rowers to power up or down on port or starboard to achieve a course change.
- Executing Drills as directed by the coach
- Landing
- Taking care of equipment (eg cox box, lights)

Later Responsibilities

- Giving individual feedback to the rowers to help them towards better rowing style — as a coxswain, you are a member of the coaching staff!
- Add drills during warm ups or when rowing on the paddle to fix a problem in the boat (CARE HERE! Use drills very sparingly to avoid confusion, especially with a novice crew. Don't throw in drills during power pieces. Always listen to the coach, and don't ask the crew to do anything you are not sure about). Coaches will generally have a “theme of the day” for their drills. Ask the coach before introducing drills that stray from the areas of focus for that day.
- Provide enthusiasm and motivation for crews, particularly during race training. In this regard, pay attention to whether the boat is fading and call power tens to bring attention back onto the power in the stroke. And if the boat is beginning to fall apart, call a concentration ten to bring your rowers' attention back onto their technique.

Stay on the right (starboard) side of the river.

Be mindful of other rowing shells and motorboats.

Never press the right of way to the point of a collision

Basic Coxing Commands

When giving commands, at all times it is important to be clear and be CONSISTENT, so that the rowers always know what to expect. For instance, always count down in the same way, or



always give the same instructions when putting a boat in the water. Below are some of the more basic commands. Note: dots indicate pauses.

On the Water:

When starting to row from rest:

First state who is to row: "All four", "bow pair to row", "stern pair set the boat", "port side to row" etc.

Then state the type of stroke to be taken: "Full slide", "half slide", "backing strokes" etc.

“Sit ready...” (wait till the blades are in their proper position – hands against chest, lay back position – and the boat is set) “...ready all.....row”

To stop the boat: “Way enough”

To stop the boat fast: “Hold water!” or “Hold her hard!” (with urgency) – the rowers will square their blades in the water to stop the boat.

When rowing:

- Always give your commands as the rowers take the catch
- Say clearly what you are going to want the rowers to do, when you want them to do it, and then tell them to do it.
- In the following examples, the commands are said on the catch, and the dots reflect the pause during the succeeding stroke:

“take it up to full pressure in three strokes....three...two....one....go”

“half slide....next stroke...go”

“way enough in three....three....two....one, way enough”

(Some coxswains prefer to count down, though other people will count up. Never count above ten – count two sets of ten instead of one twenty)

When doing pieces, count out power tens every couple of minutes (in a short piece) or longer. Count groups of ten strokes concentrating on particular aspects of the stroke, such as fast hands or strong legs, to make the piece more interesting and focused for the crew.

On Land:



With all instructions on land, tell the rowers what to do...say 'ready'...then tell them to do it (or count down) e.g. "up to shoulders on three...one...two...three", or "up and over heads...ready...up". Rowers should expect to wait for the command rather than just doing it in their own time.

You should not leave them waiting too long for the final instruction.

Taking the boat out:

- Have rowers organize themselves by height and stand two at each
- end of the boat (if you are taking out a four) or four at each end of the boat (if you are taking out an eight).
- "Hands on, lift the boat an inch and slide it away from the rack"
- "Walk the boat carefully into the boathouse watching the riggers"
(For boats on higher racks, take it up to heads when the stern is clear of the end of the boathouse)
- "Swing the stern round carefully"
- "Lift on one side to avoid knocking the riggers"
- "Way enough!" (loudly)
- When out of the boathouse: "Take it up to shoulders...ready...up".
- Walk with the boat to the ramp, checking bow and stern to see if all is clear.
- On the ramp: "Up and over heads...ready...up; Walk it down slowly"
- On the dock (or in the water at ARC): "Feet to the edge....one hand center.." (don't keep them hanging around at this stage) "..Lower it gently into the water" Don't leave a crew holding a boat over their heads for any longer than is necessary.
- Be prepared to help here, especially with smaller rowers.
- When the boat is in the water, stay with it to keep it from drifting away. It helps to hold onto the boat while the oars are being put in for extra stability.
- Ports get oars for their pair, Starboards get oarlocks opened. Or vice versa depending on which side is the "water side" (water side gets oars)

Getting into the boat:

- "Slide the oars across; seats back"
- "Ports, one foot in.....down and in"
- "Starboards, one foot in.....down and in"
- "Tie in your footstretchers and count off from bow when ready"
- "Coxswain getting in" DO NOT STEP ON THE BOTTOM OF THE BOAT!
- When ready to go: "Push away from the dock"



Getting out of the boat and putting it away:

- “Coxswain getting out”
- “Untie and count off when ready”
- “All four, one foot back...up and out”
- “Bring the oars across”
- Hold onto the boat while the rowers remove their oars.
- The rowers distribute themselves along the boat:
- “Hands on....up and over heads...ready....up”
- “Walk it slowly up the ramp”
- “Split and down to shoulders....ready....down”
- “Slowly into the boathouse watching the riggers”

STEERING

Picture yourself pushing a shopping cart backwards. Naturally, you move the light end of the cart to one side or the other in order to push the heavy end of the cart around. The rudder in the boat works the way your hands would on the cart—it moves the stern to one side or the other to change the overall direction the boat is pointing in.

Now picture yourself pushing a shopping cart backwards... on an ice skating rink. The cart keeps sliding around after you’ve stopped pushing it. Instead of going straight from one end of the rink to the other, the cart makes giant S-shaped turns, much like the boat on the water.

The solution: during the drive, turn the rudder slightly and hold it there for one stroke, then straighten it. Keep the rudder in the neutral (straight) position until the point (the direction you’re heading) stops changing. Now try turning the rudder the same amount as you did before, but this time, hold it for two or three strokes before straightening it. Experiment with different amounts of rudder for different amounts of time. Eventually you will get a feel for the momentum*, and steering a boat will feel as natural as steering a car.

*Remember: the heavier the boat is, and the faster it’s going, the more it will keep turning after you stop steering.

There are two important things to remember when you’re at the rudder:

The boat steers from the rear

You’re moving on a frictionless surface

You’ve probably heard that it’s better to steer “with the oars” than with the rudder. This is true--after all, turning the rudder adds drag to the boat, and drag is bad. There are a few ways to use your rowers to get your boat to move the way you want it to.



The traditional way to steer without using the rudder is to ask one side of the boat to row harder--starboards take a power ten while ports hold the pressure--the starboards in this case are effectively forcing the bow around to port. If it's a really tight turn, you'd have one side increase pressure while the other side lightens up--starboards take some power strokes while ports go to half pressure--the starboards don't have to fight against the ports to get the bow to move over, and the boat makes a sharper turn. There is a better way, though.

First, some physics: the closer the blades are to the centerline of the boat, the more influence they have on the direction of the boat. This is why there is one rudder, right on the centerline.

This means rowers have more turning power at the ends of the stroke than they do in the middle of the drive. So instead of having one side simply row harder, try having them row longer (it's impossible for one side to row longer without rowing a little bit harder, since they still have to coordinate their catches and finishes with the side that isn't lengthening, but the emphasis will be correct). If it's an especially tight turn, you can have the rowers on the inside of the turn go down to three-quarter slide, or even half slide if they can make the timing work.

It takes some practice, and definitely requires planning ahead, but a huge benefit of turning this way is that the boat straightens out immediately after you have both sides row with equal length, no residual turning and no more comments about how you've been carving your name into the river.

TO STEER

Hold the rudder line toggles lightly between thumb and forefinger.

Push the rudder line away from you on the side you want to steer toward – so if you want to steer right, push the right hand forward. Make sure the toggle returns to its original position (i.e. the rudder is straight) when you finish steering

First rule of steering is don't unless you have to. When you feel comfortable, take your hands off the rudder for a few strokes and notice that in a reasonably fast moving boat not much steering is needed to stay in a straight line.

Steering slows down the boat (and ruins the set), so try and mainly steer when the blades are in the water, for more stability. A few small turns of the rudder over a few strokes are better than one long hard jamming of the rudder.



The boat takes a couple of strokes to respond to the rudder, so finish steering before you are pointing where you want to be to cope with this delayed response. Otherwise, you will need to compensate back the other way and will steer a wavy course.

To steer in a straight line aim at a distant object (or if you can't see any distant objects due to the tall people directly in front of you, note two points either side of the course you want to steer). Use small corrections to keep in line. If you need to see what is directly in your blind spot, lean out slightly to see round the rowers.

If you steer round a corner, ask the rowers to pull harder on one side than the other to help you round if you need to. Turning to port causes the boat to drop down on starboard side (and vice versa) – so tell the rowers when you are turning and they can compensate for the rudder.

Spinning (turning) the boat

Make sure you are not too close to the shore line or any other obstacle. Turn using one side backing down and the other side rowing (this side will be on the outside of the turn).

Rowers should only move their backs and arms when spinning the boat — no legs. When their oars are recovering, they should be dragged across the water. For the backing oars, this requires that the oar be over-feathered so that it does not slice into the water.

Experienced crews should spin a boat without minimal wobble or disturbance to the set of the boat. Scraping the blade on the recovery and paying attention to blade depths when rowing or backing is key to accomplishing this.

Balancing

Sit upright and still, bracing feet a little against the foot rest (you must keep your weight off the shell of the boat, just as you would when rowing)- if you are not braced, the body flops around and the balance of the boat is affected. In addition, your back tends to get slammed into the back of the cox seat at each stroke which can be very painful.

Do not be tempted to lean to one side or another to counteract a problem with the set – this will not help the rowers. I find that sitting on the flotation device can make balance more difficult as your center of gravity is raised up (this effect is most notable when the cox is tall) – so try putting it behind your back instead.

Links

<https://students.washington.edu/ubrc/coxing/basic-coxing-commands/>

<https://medium.com/ready-all-row/some-things-to-know-as-a-novice-coxswain-cce73abd39fc>