

THE ROWING COXSWAIN

In general the coxswain is the most important person in the boat. They lead the crew, steer the course and keep the boat safe. They are your coach riding in the boat with you.

What does the Coxswain do?

- steers the boat and keep it moving straight
- helps the crew keep the time
- communicates instructions to the crew on land and on water
- relays information from the coach
- controls the safety of the crew and equipment
- Calls the race plan
- keeps the crew focused and encouraged in a race
- listen to race officials and make changes based on their instructions

How does a Coxswain steer the boat?

The coxswain steers the boat in one of two ways.

1. By using the boats rudder

The rudder is controlled by handles attached to strings. Hold the handles in the “V” between the thumb and forefinger. The general rule is to move the hand forward in the direction you want to go. For example if you want to move boat to the left move your left hand forward.

The best time to move the rudder the boat is when your rowers are in the release. This will reduce drag of the boat when you are not steering. However if you need to make a big course correction start during the release of one stroke and hold the rudder there until you reach your target. Stopping and starting the rudder causes jerkiness so its best to just hold it through a few strokes if it takes longer to reach your target. Once you have acquired your point slowly ease the rudder line back into a straight position.

Since a shell slides through the water, the shell will continue to swing after the rudder has stopped being used. Therefore, slightly understeer from your final target. It is vital to anticipate the beginning and end of a corner, or a correction, otherwise the turn will have to be counteracted, and the boat will "fishtail" down the course.

When steering a straight line, the cox will find it easiest if he/she aims at some distant object. This is called steering by a point. Use SMALL CORRECTIONS as soon as the bow strays from this point, rather than making big corrections later.

2. *By asking the crew to pull harder on one side of the boat*

- By asking the crew to “ease it off”- the boat should move toward the SAME side assuming that the rowers on the opposite side are rowing with the same pressure. for example “**Ease it off Port**” will move the boat to port.
- By asking rowers to pull harder on one side should move the boat towards the OPPOSITE side. For Example:” **Hard on Port**”- should move the boat towards starboard.

How does a Coxswain make “calls”?

The coxswain should make calls in a clear, calm and firm voice. Speak loudly but, DO NOT YELL unless you need to in an urgent situation. There are a list of common calls a coxswain and rowing crew should be familiar with (see below).

Think of it this way: You are in charge of four or eight teammates who are relying on you for direction, encouragement, and lot information, and their safety. Always try to be positive!

You will use a “cox box” sound system that will enable you to speak to each rower as if you are sitting right next to her in the boat. All coxes work diligently to obtain a style of speaking that is comfortable for them and in a tone to which the rowers will respond. Some rowers try to emote what they are calling in the tone and cadence of how the speak the call. For example, when making a call to try and get the catches cleanly in the water together (“IN”) the tone and cadence will be sharp and short.

Sometimes its okay to hold back some information. If your boat is being walked through by a boat two lanes over, don't give them updates on how fast you're falling behind. You must keep your crew from losing hope, even if it means lying about gaining seats back.

Calls are always delivered in a format that lets the crew know what task to do, followed by a pause then a command to complete the task. The pause allows the crew to process what is asked of them and position themselves to complete the task. For example: “WALK IT FORWARD” (Task), “READY” (pause), “WALK” (complete task).

How does a Coxswain maintain a safe environment for the crew?

The coxswain must always be aware of what is happening around the boat both on land and on the water. The coxie must be in charge of all commands when moving the boat on land and on water. An awareness of possible obstacles including water hazards, bystanders and other boats is imperative. Be aware of changing weather conditions and how to accommodate them. This is especially important with wind and storms. The coxie should be aware of safety protocol if there should be an accident or if the boat should tip. Having proper safety equipment in the boat at all times is a must. The coxie

should know and follow the traffic pattern for the harbour or race course the crew will be rowing in.

*** Most importantly- the crew must be respectful of the coxie at ALL times. When the coxie requests silence this should be obeyed. In order to ensure a safe environment the crew must always be completely attentive to a coxie's order unless there is something that a coxie cannot see. ***

How does a Coxswain keep the crew focused and encouraged in a race?

The coxswain should keep a crew motivated during a race. Rowing is a sport of mental focus and it is easy to feel out of control when racing. The coxie must be able to refocus the crew to the task at hand and motivate them to pull harder. This is not accomplished by yelling at them. Here are some suggestions to help motivate your crew:

1. Before a race develop a race plan with your crew. Identify parts of the race where motivation can slide and create a list of strategies to move the crew forward.
2. Develop a list of motivating calls the crew would like relayed during a race.
3. Be positive but don't directly lie to them. Telling them they are almost there when they aren't won't get you anywhere.
4. Call each crew members name during the race to re-focus them in the boat. Give them a command they may need to focus on. This maybe a predetermined call the rower feels they may needed to be reminded of. For example "Sarah- quick hands away".
5. Tell the crew where they are in the race- For example- "We are at the 1000m mark" OR "Only 10 strokes to the finish".
6. Tell the crew where they are in relationship to the other boats in the race. Rowers can't see what is behind them. Let them know how close or far away they are from boats that may be beating them.
7. "Chase" other boats down. This is an excellent strategy to gain position. For example- "I have 6 seat, over the next 10 strokes get me 5 seat." OR "I have 5 give me 4 seat.". "Lets pull away and gain open water".
8. Don't yell at the crew. Speak in clear and firm voice. If you are in control, they will be in control. Be directive. You are their leader. It is ok to allow your tone to gain intensity and excitement if is appropriate. For example, get excited if you pass a boat or are in first at the finish!
9. Avoid repeating calls over and over again. This can lead to crew boredom and loss of focus.

On Dry Land

On dry land the coxswain is responsible for:

- organizing the crew
- reviewing last minutes instructions before the row
- calling the move of equipment and ensuring safety of the boat, crew and bystanders while equipment is being moved
- making sure the cox box is charged and ready for a row
- That proper safety equipment is in place if required (life jackets, whistles)

Common Dry Land Calls:

1. **“Hands on”**- Grab onto the boat and prepare to move it. Other variations: “ all eight hands on”, “Everybody hands on”.
2. **“Up in 2. One. Two. Up.”**- used when lifting boats off slings or racks.
3. **“Over the head. Ready. Press”**- to lift the boat to the over head position. This should be an even lifting motion with one side or end not beating the other to the top.
4. **“Split from Bow (stern)”**- When boat is pressed over head this command is used to direct rowers to move to the side of the boat for carry. Usually the rowers choose a side starting at either bow or stern depending on which part of the boat will be moving forward first.
5. **“Up (Down) to the shoulders. Ready. Up (down)”**- used to lift/lower the boat so that the gunwales are resting on the shoulders.
6. **“Down to Waist”**- to lower the boat to waist so that the arms are hanging straight down with the gunnals in hand. THIS is the easiest position to carry the boat. Rowers should be opposite each other and centered so that no one person is holding the majority of the weight. “Down to waist. Ready. Down.”
7. **“ Roll to Waist. Ready. Roll”**- from the overhead position roll the boat down to the waist position on one side. This command is most often used when preparing to transfer a boat to stretchers or into the water off a dock. Be sure to let the crew know what direction to roll the boat if it is not obvious. Ex. “ Roll to Waist, roll toward the tower. Ready. Roll”.
8. **“ Heads Up”**- Command given LOUDLY to alert the crew and those standing nearby to watch out. This should always be used when someone might not see your shell coming at them. Can be combined with a specific alert- for example” Heads Up. Watch the Bow”. OR “Heads up. Watch the Riggers”
9. **“Walk it Forward. Ready. Walk”**- to walk the boat from one location to the next.

10. “**Let ‘er run**”- to stop the boat. Used to alert the rowers to stop rowing or walking the boat. This is used on dry land and on the water.

Calling the Move from the Racks to the Water- DOCK LAUNCH

- “**Hands on**”- all crew lays hands to prepare and lift the boat
- “**Lift**”- all crew lifts the boat from the racks
- “**Bring it out**”/”**Walk it forward**”- all crew walks the boat off the racks and towards the water. Watch to ensure the rudder, bow, stern and riggers do not knock into an obstacle and get damaged. You have to be eyes for the crew while they carry the boat. The walk out can be done at waist or shoulder height depending on crew preference.
- “**Swing the Stern/Bow**” - Used to turn the boat in order to get it parallel to the river.
- “**Over the heads. Ready. Press**”-Once parallel with the river its time to get the boat turned over.
- “**Take an inside grip**”- getting a good grip to roll the boat over
- “**Toe the edge**” - all crews move close to the edge of the dock and feel the edge with their toes.
- “**Roll to the water. Ready. Down**”- Coxie must watch the rudder to ensure it does not get knocked off on the dock.
- “**Get your blades**”- the crew should be instructed to get and install their oars. Coxie should remain on the dock and hold the boat. This is a good time to get the cox box in place.
- “**Water side, Slide your blades across. One foot in and down**”- water side should get in first. The blades should be fully extended before entering the boat to ensure balance.
- “**Dock side, one foot in and down**”- dock side gets in second followed by the coxie.
- “**Number off from the bow when your ready**”- this allows the coxie to know when everyone is ready to row.
- “**All hands on the dock. Ready. Shove**”- when ready to launch the crew will all push off the dock together. Check the water is clear before you push off the dock.

On the Water

On the water the coxswain is responsible for:

- safety of the crew and equipment at all times
- communicating instructions to the crew
- motivating the crew
- identifying the crews technical mistakes and offer suggestions for improvement
- being aware of what is around the boat- water conditions, hazards, other boats etc...
- steering the boat
- organizing the practice and implementing the practice plan

Common On-the-Water Calls:

1. “**Up to the Catch**”- All rowers sitting up at the start of the stroke with oars lying flat on the water

2. **“Blades ready”**- Blades squared in and the water ready to start a stroke. Some times called as “Square on the ready” or shortened to just “Ready”.
3. **“Hold water”**- rowers will stop rowing and hold their oars in the water in a squared position to stop the boat. Ex. “All four hold water”, “Bow pair hold water”
4. **“Hold on Port (Starboard)”**- Having only one side drag their oars in the water on the square to help turn the boat. Can be combined with other calls for example, “port to hold, starboard to row. Ready. Row.”
5. **“Let ‘er Run”**- all rowers to stop rowing and let their oars glide OFF the water in a feathered position.
6. **“Weighenough”**- sounds like ‘ waynuff’. To have the rowers stop rowing and let their oars glide ON the water. (NOTE: Not used in our club. We would just call “let er run. Drop the oars”)
7. **“Power 10 (20, 30 etc)”**- call to take a certain number of high power strokes. This means only to increase pressure and rate of the stroke.
8. **“Hard 10 (20, 30 etc)”**- call to increase the pressure of the stroke but not the rate.
9. **“Fast 10 (20, 30 etc)”**- call to increase the rate of the stroke.
10. **“Slow the slide”**- used to correct a rush of the recovery.
11. **“Back it up”**- rowing backwards. The blades do not need to be turned in the oarlocks although they can be. ex. “Bow four, back it up”
12. **“Tap Down”**- push the hands down fully at the finish to give the blade height off the water.
13. **“Quick hands away”**- moving the hands down and away at the finish. This should be done quickly to maintain balance in the boat. Also can call “Down and Away”.
14. **“Early”**- to indicate that part of the stroke is early. This usually means that the catch is early. Ex. “ 6 -seat you’re early”
15. **“ Feather”**- rolling the blades so they are parallel to the water
16. **“Layback”**- at the finish, move to a layback position
17. **“Ease it off”** - row at no pressure in a relaxed manner.
18. **“Paddle Through”**- often used at the end of a drill to row in a relaxed manner when drill is complete.
19. **“Even Pressure”**- a reminder to keep pressure on both legs equally in order to keep the boat moving straight.

Docking a Boat and Calling the Move back to the Racks

Before making any landings, look around and make sure that it is safe to stop without impeding anyone else. Be aware of how weather, wind and current may change your course as you bring the boat into land. Ease the boat early to slow it down. If landing on a dock aim the bow into the dock at a SMALL angle (about 10-20 degrees) and glide or paddle in at a slow pace with only the stern pair/four.

- **“Ease it down”**- at least one dock length, away slow the pace.
- **“Stern pair/four arms only”**- this keeps the speed of the boat down and allows you control when docking.
- **“Dock side mind your blades”** OR **“Dock side Lean away”**- this tells the crew on the dock side of the boat to lift their blades off the dock as they glide over it.
- **“Stroke (or 7 seat) hold it up”**- Ask whoever is sitting closest to you on the WATER side to hold water and this will swing the boat into the dock evenly.

- **“Coxie out”**- the coxswain should always get out first and let the crew know you are getting out.
- **“Dock side one foot up and out”**- dock side rowers should get out after the coxie.
- **“Water side, one foot up and out”**- Water side is last to exit the boat and should bring their blades across with them.
- **“Hands on”**- once the blades are stowed and the boat is empty its time to move the boat back to the racks. All of the crew are required for hands on.
- **“Up to Waist. Ready. Up”**- lift the boat out of the water to the waist.
- **“Over the Heads. Ready. Press”**- bring the boat over the head for positioning.
- **“To the shoulders/waist. Ready. Down.”**- Bring the boat to the easiest walking position.
- **“Walk it forwards.”**- Walk to the racks or boathouse.
- **“Mind the riggers”**- when walking the boat watch for obstacles.
- **“Onto the racks. Ready. Down.”**- at the racks gently set the boat back down. Initiate clean up protocol.

Racing and the Coxswain

The coxswain’s most important role is during a race. They are responsible for:

1. Calling the race plan.
2. Letting the crew know the position of the boat in relationship to other competitors.
3. Letting the crew know how far they have raced and what is left.
4. Keep the boat running straight and in the allocated race lane.
5. Watching for obstacles or hazards.
6. Listening to the officials and communicating information to the crew.
7. Motivating the crew to keep rowing.

General Racing Checklist

During the race the coxswain has a lot to do to ensure that the crew is ready to row:

1. Before the race walk or bike the course so you know where the boat is going. Make sure you understand traffic patterns and have a general knowledge of water hazards.
2. Know your event number and race time. Also know what time you are expected to have your crew and equipment on the dock for launch.
3. Have your crew organized and prepared well in advance of launch time. Your crew may want dry land warm up time or a team meeting so ensure that those events are planned with enough time to prepare for launch.
4. Make sure all equipment is checked and set up before you get ready to move the boat to the water.
5. Listen for the call to get your boat on the water.
6. Check your bow number is secured and have your crew move the boat to the launch area.
7. Make sure you know which lane you will be in at the start.

8. Once on the dock you **MUST** move quickly to get the boat and crew launched. There is likely limited boat space on the dock and race officials will be insistent that you get moving out onto the water.
9. When launched be aware of racing happening around you. Stay out of the racing lanes and move, when safe, into the warmup area.
10. Follow the traffic pattern religiously. If an official asks you to redirect your course do so immediately.
11. Try to get to the race start area 5-10 minutes before the start.
12. If required check in with the race marshall to let them know you are there.
13. While you wait have the crew sip water and make any equipment or clothing adjustments. This is a good time to refocus and review the goals of the race.
14. Take this opportunity to listen to the races ahead of you being called. Get a sense of how the officials will start your race.
15. When your race is called move to the start area and get in your designated starting gate as quickly as possible without panicking your crew. Try to be in position to race with your course lined up with a few minutes to spare. Keep in mind wind direction and whether your crew will need to touch up your course while you wait.
16. Make sure your rudder position is straight before you race.
17. Listen closely to the starter and acknowledge any warnings they may have for you.

Types of Races

Classic Sprint Race

The most classic race is a 2000m straight shot however they can be any distance. It is usually a floating or gated start and typically about 6 lanes but can be as little as 2 lanes. The start is called by an official.

Race plans are typically split into:

1. The start to 250m

- 1/2, 1/2, 3/4, full
- wind it up for 5- 1,2,3,4,5
- Ten for the Rate
- Ten for the Power
- Ten to refocus
- Settle in

2. 250m- 500m

Use this opportunity to update the crew on:

- current rate
- their position
- position of the other boats

3. 500m-1000m

The crew will be feeling out of control because of a fast paced start. Make calls to refocus on technique and get them to settle in to a rate. Make calls to focus on the drive

and keep the boat moving. Let them know where they are in relationship to other boats and start to plan your move.

4. 1000-1500m

This is the toughest 500m. The crew will be tired, but like the last 500m it is a good opportunity to chase boats. Steer the boat straight and keep the crew informed on rate, position and race duration.

5. 500m-250m

Your crew will be very fatigued by this point. Remind them about technique. Remind them to sit up, breathe and keep rowing a full stroke. Get their heads in the boat. Call them by name with a specific technique reminder. This is your last opportunity to chase. If you have open water you must hold the other crews back. Tell the crew where they are and use what ever calls they find inspiring.

6. 250m to the finish

Sprint to the finish line. Every second counts. Keep them together as they sprint. Remember at this point the crew is hurting. Be relaxed and strong in your voice. Inspire them. Count down the strokes left if you can. Keep rowing until you are SURE you have crossed the finish line.

Head Races

Typically these are longer races (5000m) and may contain turns. Head races are a staggered rowing start and are a timed race. They are much more of a challenge for the coxswain to steer. The coxie should try to steer the shortest course possible because they are a race against the clock. Being aware of the course and possible obstacles is a MUST.

Race plans are typically divided into:

1. Race start

Head races have a staggered, rowing start. This means the boats row up to the start and through it usually about 10 sec apart. As you approach the line you should be rowing with the whole crew. Build up to a race pressure BEFORE you cross the line.

2. Race body

There is now way to tell how well your boat is doing. Because the start stagger is only about 10 seconds you do have an opportunity to catch slower boats. That said there is also a possibility that faster boats will pass you. Its a good opportunity to motivate the crew to hold them back. If you are passing a slower boat they should make way for you. If you are the slower boat you will need to move over and let a faster boat pass.

Technique is very important to a head race. They are likely 15minutes or more in length. Usually you will need to focus less on keeping higher rates and more on good technique at higher pressure.

Don't forget to motivate the crew. Its a LONG race so don't get stuck saying the same thing over and over-- Your crew will stop listening if you do. This is not the time to make many technical fixes. A small reminder about technique will often help but don't push the issue if its minor. At this point if the crew can't fix it with a simple reminder then they probably aren't going to. However-- don't let a **severe** technical error pass by, it may cost you minutes in your time.

3. Race finish

Always sprint for the finish line. Every second counts. Your crew will be tired so keep them motivated.

Coxswain Call List

Common Technique Race Calls

- Long drive
- Long under the water
- With the legs
- Drive back
- Lengthen out
- Tap it down
- Push back
- Bodies over
- Get sharp
- Legs on together
- Focus
- Focus on the drive (catch, power, movement, stroke, boat etc...)
- Focus on your boat not the others
- Heads in the boat
- Faster and longer
- Settling in
- With power
- Catches in quick
- Slice through the water
- Catch and push it away
- Drive together
- Quick hands away
- Rotate out to the riggers
- Lengthen with power
- Bury it
- Keep clean
- Remember to breathe
- Sit up tall

- Breath and fire
- Feeling good
- Swing together
- Drive and accelerate
- Settle and Relax

Common Motivational Calls

- Stand on it
- Squeeze it
- Keep building
- Dig Deep
- Give me everything you've got
- You need to move
- Make the move
- Move NOW
- This is your race
- One crew, together, all the way to the finish
- Take the water, take the race
- Take this race back
- We are not stopping here
- Attack!
- Walking off the drive
- We've got them
- Wipe them out
- Get on it
- Leave nothing on the water
- Empty the tank
- Stroke by Stroke
- They can't touch us
- They know we are coming
- No one can stop us
- Pound it to the finish
- They are fading
- Give me more
- We want more
- We want gold
- This is your time
- Prove yourselves
- Listen to the crowd - they are cheering for you
- Go crazy
- Bend the oar
- Pry it around
- Make this boat fly
- Reel them in

- Hold them off
- Keep the fire
- Make your self stronger HERE
- Hang on it
- Show me you want it
- Own it
- Take it here and now. Make the decision
- Make every stroke count.

Common Calls for the Catch

“Quick catch

“Lots of backslash!”

“Make that blade disappear!”

“Back those blades in!”

“Kick!”

“Sit-Up!”

“Legs!”

“Clean Catches!”

"CHAAA" - This magically helps them with: a) rhythm b) timing c) aggressive pressure d) if you draw out you "CHAAA" sound then it helps them hold on to it at the finish.

Common Calls for the Finish

“Clean release!”

“Clean finish!”

“Keep your blade buried!”

“Finish high!”

“Length the puddles”

Common Calls for Boat Set Up

“Set it up!”

“It’s on port (starboard) side, set it up!” -- whatever side it is leaning towards

“Watch your hand levels, straight in, straight out!”

“Keep it up off port” (or starboard- whichever it is resting on)

“Don’t drop your hands at the catch!”

“Keep your hand levels consistent!”

“Work together to set the boat!”

“Square up at the same time”

Common Calls for the Swing

“Move together!”

“Find that swing!”

“Focus straight ahead.”

“Follow the person in front of you!”

“Synchronize with your stroke!”

“Think of the drive as acceleration!”

“No pauses at the catch, connected stroke!”

“In together, out together!”

“One catch, one release”

Common Calls for the Drive/Release Ratio

“Long and strong!”

“Rhythm!”

“Feel the boat the run!”

Count the catches and the finishes in the rhythm of an appropriate stroke, such as

“Catch-2-3-4!”

Common Calls to Lower the Stroke Rate

(use a very calm, long cadence in your voice)

“Down from *a rate* to *a rate* in two, down one, down two!” “Lengthen it out!”

“Your wheels are inching up the track.”

“Keep it long!”

“Lengthen it out together! Timing!”

Common Calls to Bring up the Stroke Rate

“Bring it up from a rate to a rate in two, up one, up two!” – The rates are the rate you are at and the rate you need to be at.

“Hands are flying, in and away!”

“Quick hands out of the bow!”

“Hands away, shoulders follow!” “Quick drive!”

“In and away!”

“Quick hands!”

Special Considerations

Continue to learn and develop

Develop your own style and ask your crew what motivates them. There is no one simple “magic call” which will make a boat move faster. All crews respond to different things.

What works for one boat may not work for another. You should develop a broad base of knowledge so that you can put together the right thing to say at the right time. Don't be

afraid to make mistakes, sometimes calls just don't work. Learn from your mistakes. Learn from other coxies.

Earn respect

As a coxswain you have responsibility. Don't go on a "power trip". Don't let yourself sound bossy or your crew will immediately tune you out. Learn how to work with the other members of your team. If your crew respects you and trusts you, you will have a much better experience and will be more likely to win. It's not about you telling them what to do; it's about you helping them get the most out of their boat. Ask others how you come across, and be willing to accept their answers. Workout with your crew on dry land. If they have seen you pull harder they will likely pull harder for you.

Prepare for the Weather

Coxies are still in the boat and can get very cold on cool days. Dress warmly and let your coach/crew know if you are too cold to continue. Bring warm blankets if needed. On hot days dress very lightly, wear sunglasses, sunscreen and a hat. Bring lots of water

Coxswain's Tools and Equipment

The most important piece of equipment used by the coxswain, other than the boat itself, is the Cox Box. This is a compact and sophisticated (and expensive) electronic device which gives the cox various readings in the boats, most commonly strokes-per-minute (spm) and the clock.

The Cox Box should be treated with extreme care because there are a limited number of them belonging to the club, and they are relatively fragile if handled improperly. Always carry the CB by the attached handle— NEVER CARRY IT BY THE HEADSET WIRE. Also, be careful when plugging the unit into either the boat or the recharger. The connection pins bend easily if they are not aligned properly.

Any self-respecting coxswain will own a watch with a stop-watch function. Coxswains should also carry with them a small bag of tools including:

- A 7/16" wrench

- A stopwatch

- An adjustable wrench which opens up to 3/4" -A phillips screwdriver

- A roll of black electrical tape

- A roll of athletic tape

- Some Band-aids

- A small bag of spare parts (7/16 nuts, washers, rigger spacers.

- A whistle (3 short burst is a universal call for help)

-A notepad with a pen or pencil for writing down daily line-ups and workouts, and a ziplock baggie to keep these things dry in the boat.