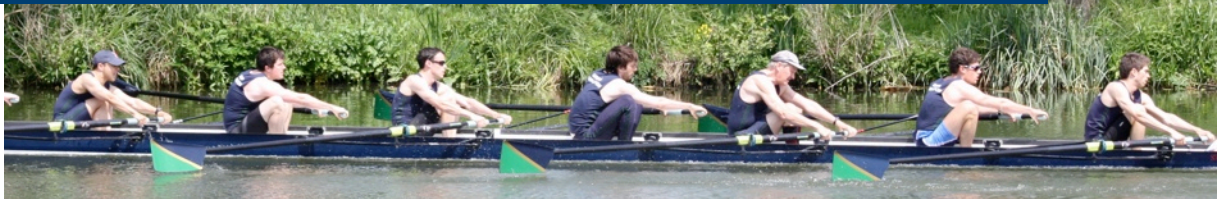




A Beginner's Guide to Rowing with GTBC



Dear Green Templeton rower,

Firstly, thank you for choosing to attend one of the Green Templeton Boat Club's (GTBC) rowing taster sessions. We are excited to see that so many have considered joining our community this year. GTBC is the youngest and fastest growing boat club at Oxford and it's fantastic to see so many people getting involved.

Rowing is at the core of the "Oxford Experience" and it is a highly rewarding sport to take part in. Last season, our club qualified for all of the Oxford University regattas and performed particularly well. This season, a number of these rowers will stay on with the club and share their experience with you, the new generation of rowers.

Each year our club takes in a number of novice rowers who are interested in learning the sport. In an effort to bring them up to speed as quickly as possible, we have compiled the following document as an abridged introduction to rowing. It is essential that each novice reads this document before coming to the taster session, as it provides an invaluable introduction to important terminology as well as crucial safety information.



Like all other sports, rowing has a number of risks associated with it. Most of these risks are identified by British Rowing, the organisation that oversees amateur rowing in the UK. They pass down rules to us, which we then pass on to you. Please pay careful attention to these rules, so that everybody has as much fun as possible on the water. However, keep in mind that getting into boat is like boarding an airplane: the crew starts talking about all possible emergencies, rather than the pleasure of flying. However, it gets really exciting once you do start it!

Lastly, I'd like to thank the previous Hertford, Templeton and Green Templeton committee members who have spent a countless number hours evolving this document to its current state.

We hope that you enjoy rowing with GTBC as much as we do.

Andrew Symington
Green Templeton Boat Club President 2010/2011



Your Safety

Green Templeton Boat Club is totally committed to the safety of its members. The following guidelines follow the Oxford University Rowing Clubs' (OURCs) rules of the river, the Amateur Rowing Association (ARA) water safety code, the University of Oxford Risk Assessment and current best practice. For full instructions on health and safety, please consult the Green Templeton Boat Club Safety Plan as well as the OURCs rules of the river and ARA water safety code.

Preparation

While we are doing all we can to ensure your safety, you have to take care of some aspects yourself.

Please carefully check your own physical condition. The club has to trust your own judgement in this respect and declines any liability for health risks you incur due to incorrect statements about your physical condition.

Rowing is a water sport and - although it is highly unlikely unless you deliberately turn your boat over - you may end up in the water. **Rowers have to be able to swim 100m in light clothing.** As there is no means of testing your ability, please be critical about your own capabilities and declare whether you are a confident. Please also read the detailed capsized procedure below.

Rowing is an all-weather sport and **there is no such thing as bad weather**, there is only bad clothing. Your sports kit should be light and should consist of several layers so you can adjust to different temperatures. Every participant should have a full set of dry clothing with him/her. There are no special shoes required, as the shoes are attached to the boat. Tight-fitting clothes are preferable, but by no means mandatory. Please pay particular attention that your lower back is kept warm and that a hat protects your head from either heat or cold.

Capsized and collision procedures

Again, capsizing is highly unlikely, but dangerous if it happens and the crew does not know what to do. So, please read on.

Once capsized, **rowers must roll forward out of the boat pulling their feet from out of the shoes.** All shoes have heel restraints that will pull the shoes off your heels when you roll forward far enough.

Stay with the boat as it will stay afloat no matter what degree of damage has been done. Hold on to your "rigger" (see terminology below) or the hull of the boat. To reduce heat loss keep clothes on except heavy top garments, which may drag you down.

The crew can right the boat by standing on a rigger and reaching over the boat to the opposite rigger and pulling it across. Care must be taken not to be hit by blades. The crew then swims the boat back to the bank by pulling the bow or riggers with one hand and kicking with the legs. **Do not attempt to swim in without the boat as it is your only method of support.**

Back ashore, run to the boathouse and **immediately remove wet clothing.**



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Roles and responsibilities

Your Coach - Every outing is accompanied by an experienced oarsman as coach and activity leader. He/She is responsible for the safety of all participants and for ensuring that the rules and guidelines of Green Templeton Boat Club (GTBC) and OURCs are followed at all times. He/She conducts the on site risk assessment of weather and streaming conditions and - together with the cox - makes the final decision on the viability of the outing.

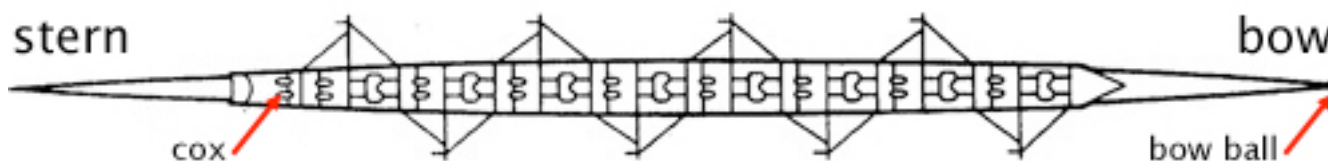
Your Cox - The cox is in command of the boat at all times. He/she steers it and is responsible for the safety of all participants while on the water. All commands are taken directly from him/her and are to be followed immediately.

You - Despite the cox being in command and the coach taking care of everybody's safety, it is everybody's responsibility to make the outing safe, efficient, and pleasant. Please be aware of your own capabilities and limitations. It is your duty to let cox and/or coach know should you feel uncomfortable or unsafe.

The boat

The basics

We start our short introduction to rowing with making you familiar with your boat. To be able to follow the cox's commands it is not only important to know the terminology, but also to know where you are and who you are in your crew. Please note that these instructions refer to a **stern-rigged stern-coxed eight**. There are a variety of different types of boat, but this is the one you will be starting in. With time, you will get used to rowing terminology, so the other boat layouts will become fairly obvious.

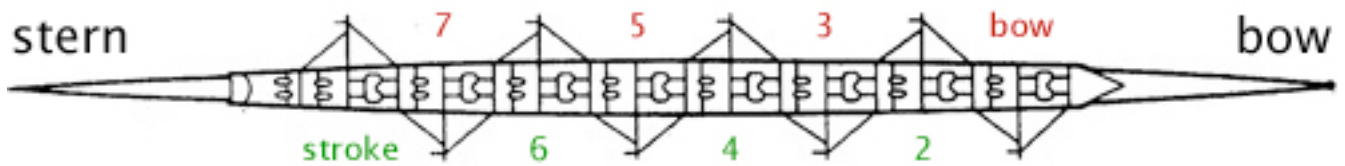


Numbers

The front of the boat is always called the **bow**, whereas the backend is called the **stern**. All rowers are numbered from front to back: **BOW (1), 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and STROKE (8)**. It is essential to remember which number you are as the cox will not know your name. You must listen to the cox at all time, as you may have to respond to his/her commands individually.

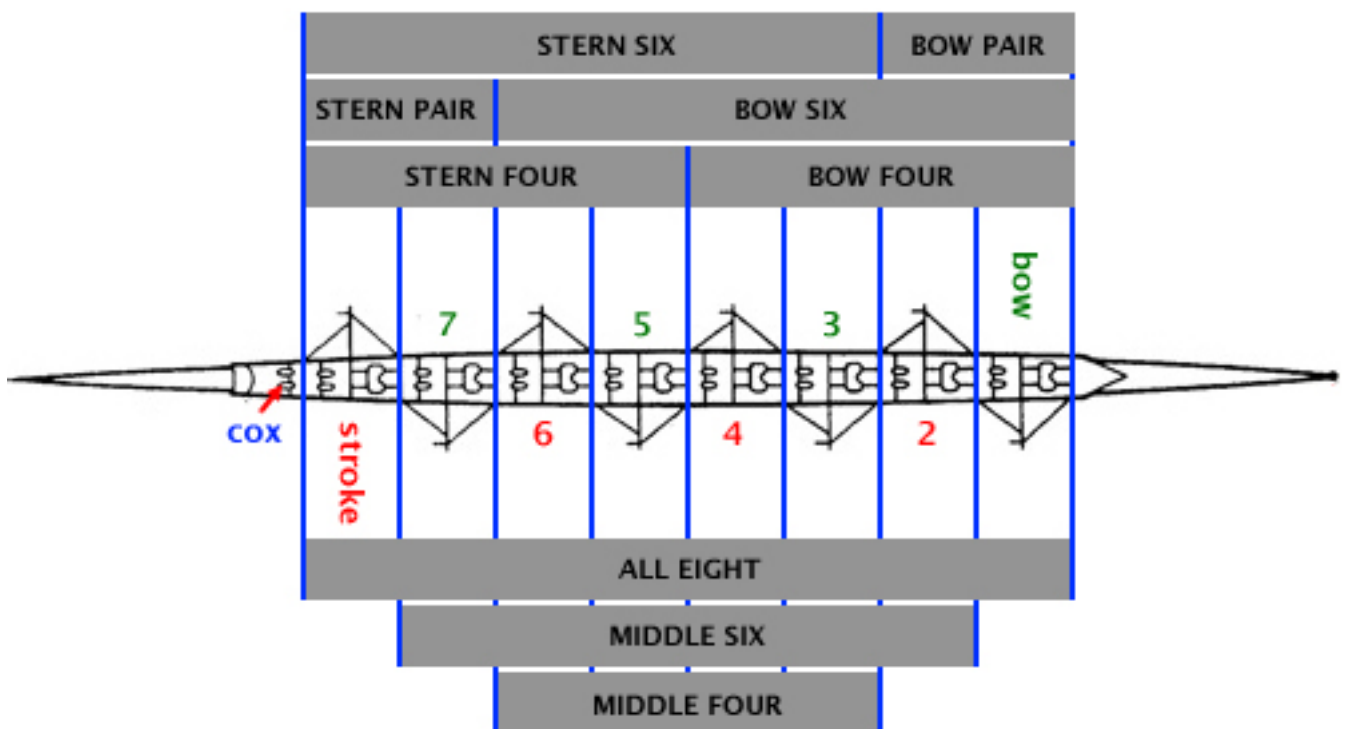


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Addressing rowers in the boat

The diagram above shows the numbering system, which starts at the front of the boat (**bow**) and ends at the back of the boat (**stern**). Rowers in the boat can be addressed individually by using their number. However, they can also be addressed in pairs, fours and sixes. It is important to know what calls like “bow six” and “stern pair” mean. The call system is pretty intuitive. However, we ask that you please make yourself familiar with the figure below.



In addition to the calls above there are three more calls:

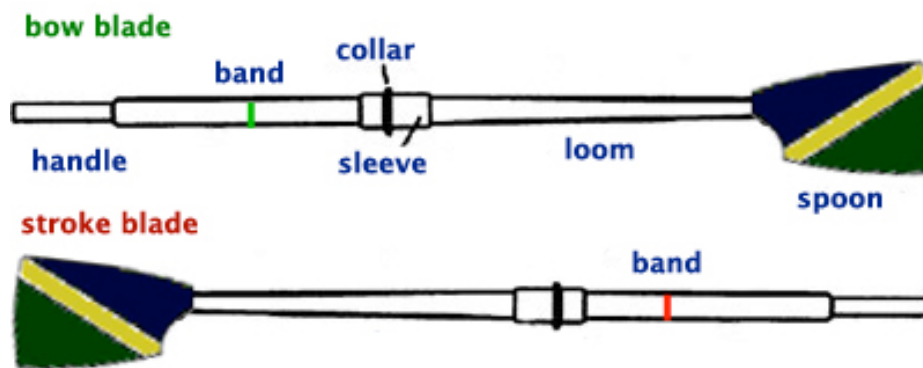
- ★ **BOW SIDE** - All rowers on bow side (odd numbers).
- ★ **STROKE SIDE** - All rowers on stroke side (even numbers).
- ★ **ALL EIGHT** - All rowers in the boat.



Other terminology

The blade

Your oars -- known more commonly as **blades** -- consist of a blade (the wooden shape that enters the water), a **shaft** (or **loom**), the **collar** (a plastic ring on the shaft) and the **handle**. Each blade has a colour-coded **band**.



Take note that, because we have two “sides” in a rowing boat (bow side and stroke side) there are two corresponding blades:

- ★ **BOW SIDE:** your blades stick out to your **LEFT** and have a **GREEN** band.
- ★ **STROKE SIDE:** your blades stick out to your **RIGHT** and have a **RED** band.

Riggers

The metal structures on the side of the boat are called **riggers** and support the blade while rowing. The blade swivels inside of a **gate** with the collar pressed against the inside of it. You fit the blade by loosening the horizontal screw, lifting it up, placing the blade in and tightening the screw back. **Please ensure that you screw the gate closed at the end of rowing.**

Other general terminology

Each rower in the boat has a **seat**, which has four **runners** (wheels) attached to the bottom. These runners connect to a **slide**, which allows the seat to move a limited distance along the length of the boat. This helps you apply more power!

Your feet rest in two **shoes** that are attached together by a **footstretcher**. This footstretcher is attached to a **footplate**, which is in turn attached to the boat. Your feet rest stationary while you move up and down the slide on your seat. The shoes are designed to release your feet when you roll over them!

The footplates, footstretcher and slide are all adjustable. In order to do so there are **wingnuts** that you need to loosen. The coach will help you with this. Finally, the plastic base of a boat is called a **shell**. A cross-section of a boat (from the bow ball) looks kind of like a “U”. The two end points of this shape (edges of the boat) are called the **saxboards**.



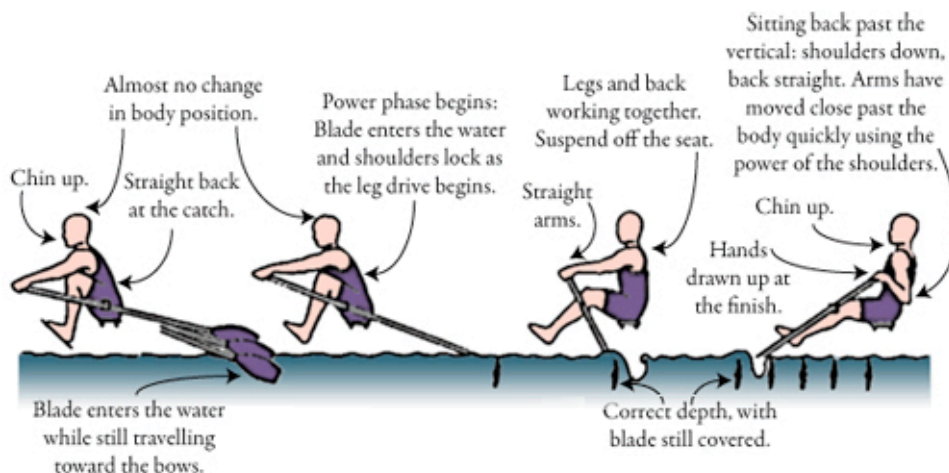
Rowing technique

It will probably take several outings for you to be comfortable with the rowing technique. However, no rower can ever say they have managed to perfect it!

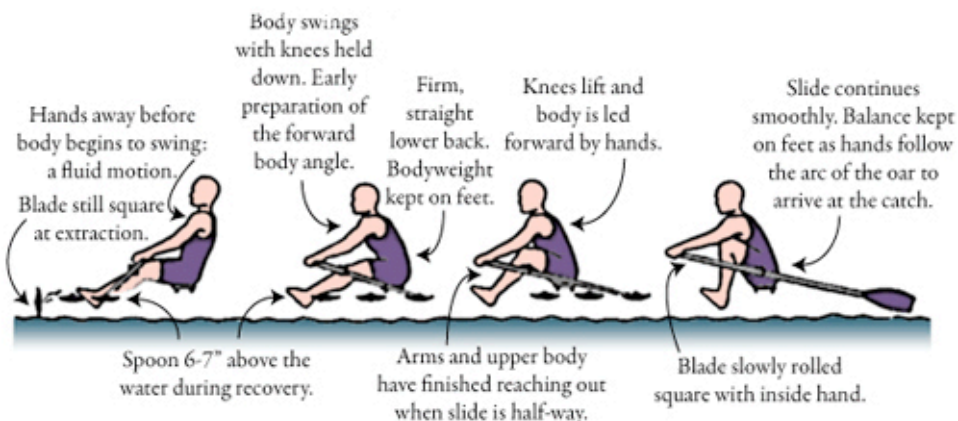
The basic goal of the rowing stroke is to apply a lot of controlled force when you pull on your blade in order to move the boat quickly. BUT, when the blade is out of the water you have to do everything in your power not to disturb the gentle deceleration of the boat. We call the way a boat moves, the **run** of the boat.

It is generally accepted that the rowing stroke is split into four distinct phases -- the **catch**, **drive**, **extraction** and **recover**. There are thousands of details that one can go in to perfecting the stroke. However, for your first outing, just examine the diagram below and try to copy it as best as possible when you row.

→ CATCH → DRIVE →



→ EXTRACT → RECOVER →





Off the water

It is very important for every rower to follow instructions **off the water**, when either removing or returning the boat from its rack. Each of these boats cost over £16,000, so they must be treated with the utmost respect.

Both of our eights are **racked** in the middle boat bay at Longbridges. First, spread the crew along the boat, each person at his/her position, starting from the bow and ending at the stern.

In order to get the boat off the rack the cox will then make the following calls:

1. **HANDS ON**, get a firm grip of the boat (**not the riggers**).
2. **LIFT IT OUT...READY...GO** - Lift the boat slightly, slide it off the rack and keep it above your head.
3. **SPLIT TO SIDES...READY...GO** - Move opposite your rigger and rest the edge of the boat on your shoulder.
4. **DOWN TO WAISTS ON BOWSIDE** - The bowsiders hold the edge of the boat and lower it to their waists. As the strokesiders keep their side at shoulder level, the boat tilts until vertical.
5. **WALK IT OUT** - Exit the boathouse straight onto the raft.
6. **SWING IT ROUND** - Once the bow is through the gate move it around until the boat parallels the edge of the raft (the boat is walked out stern first). Be very careful, as the boat is 17m long and, hence, has a large turning circle.
7. **BOTH SIDES TO SHOULDERS...READY...GO** - Bowsiders bring their side back to shoulder-level
8. **UP TO HEADS...GO** - Lift the boat above your heads with straight arms
9. **FEEL FOR THE EDGE** - Find the edge of the raft, in order to ensure that you place the boat on the water when lowering it. It is often helpful to put your leading foot somewhere on the edge of the raft, as it prevents you from putting the boat down on the raft, in stead of the water.
10. **ROLL IT IN GENTLY** - The boat rolls from above heads to waist-height in a semi-circle and is lowered into the water (not onto the raft).

All eight rowers then go to get their blades.

11. **BOWSIDE HOLDING, STROKESIDE IN** - Bowsiders hold their riggers down to stabilise the boat so strokesiders can get in. **Never step into the bottom of a boat, as it is very fragile.** Step on the black squares in between the slides.

Strokesiders get on their seats, then fit their blades into the gates to stabilise the boat further. Then they put their feet into the fitted shoes.

12. **STROKESIDE HOLDING; BOWSIDE IN** - Strokesiders hold on to their handles and keep their blades flat on the water to stabilise the boat. Bowsiders get in as strokesiders before.
13. **NUMBER OFF WHEN READY** - Starting at bow, each rower says their number (loud enough for the cox to hear). Only say your number once you are ready to row. That is, you have adjusted your footplate and tightened your gate.



14. **LEAN OUT AND PUSH OFF THE RAFT** - Lean out (away from the raft) and gently push the boat away from the raft, being careful that the riggers don't catch on the edge.

The procedure for getting out of the boat and putting it away is exactly the same as getting the boat out but in reverse. Crews must ensure that all boats, blades, and equipment has been put away before they think about getting changed.

On the water

The cox

The **cox** (shorthand for coxswain) is the person who "drives" the boat by voice control. They are the only person facing forward in the boat and, as such, they have the commanding seat in the boat. Once the crew is assembled by the boat in preparation for the outing, the cox is in charge, and all orders must come directly from him/her. From hereon we will refer to the rowers as the **crew**.

Format of a coxing call

A basic coxing call comprises of an optional address and an instruction. The address tells the rowers who should listen to the instruction. **In the case that there is no address, you must assume that the command applies to all rowers!** For example, the instruction "bow four, easy there!" means that the bow four rowers (remember this from earlier?) need to stop rowing.

To ensure that all commands are executed in time, every command is given in two steps. After giving the command, the cox says **GO** and only then the rowers execute the command. When on the water, the cox will announce a command by saying **NEXT STROKE** before the command is issued. This means that all rowers should make the change on the next stroke (not the current one). Basically, this helps everybody keep in time with one another.

This is a list of the key commands to be used on the water. Please make sure you are familiar with them to keep the boat maneuverable at all times.

- ★ **HOLD IT HARD!** - Emergency stop by placing the full blade vertically into the water and firmly holding on to the handle (This is the one of the very few exceptions where you don't wait for a **GO**).
- ★ **HOLD IT** - The more gentle way of stopping the boat by placing the lower part of the blade vertically into the water.
- ★ **EASY THERE** - Stop rowing with your arms outstretched. Your blade should be 90 degrees to the boat and raised slightly above the water.
- ★ **DROP** (only called after an EASY THERE) - drop your blades onto the water.
- ★ **SIT THE BOAT** - Balance the boat by placing the blade flat on the water
- ★ **TAKE A STROKE** - Rowing one single stroke.
- ★ **SQUARE BLADES** - Keep the spoon of the blade perpendicular to the water.
- ★ **FEATHERED BLADES** - Keep the spoon of the blade parallel to the water.
- ★ **FEATHER BLADE (NORMAL) ROWING** - Take a **drive** and after the **finish**, rotate your outside (the one closer to the saxboard) hand 90 degrees, so



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that the spoon of the blade is parallel with the surface of the water (feathered). As your hands pass your knees on the recovery, use your outside hand again to rotate the blade 90 degrees towards you, so that the blade is squared before you **catch**.

- ★ **FROM BACKSTOPS** - Start rowing from the position you would be in at the end of a **drive**. Your blade's spoon should be fully submerged in the water. Additionally, your legs should fully extended, back straight and slightly leaned backward, hands pulled into the chest.
- ★ **FROM FRONTSTOPS** - Start rowing from the catch. You should be all the way up the slide and your shins should be perpendicular to the water. Keep your back straight and your blade's spoon submerged.
- ★ **ROW(ING) ON / CONTINUOUS ROWING** - Start rowing continuously.
- ★ **BACKING DOWN** - Reverse a normal stroke by pushing the handle away towards the toes. Sit with the handle close to the chest, blade turned around the wrong way from normal and in the water and push instead of pull it through the water.
- ★ **SPINNING THE BOAT** - Both sides take alternate strokes with stroke side **BACKING DOWN** and bow side **ROWING ON**.

One extra thing to mention at this point is the idea of a "ratio". In rowing, the recovery should take a significantly longer time than the drive. At the low rates (18 strokes per minute) the ratio of recovery:drive is around 3:1. At some point the cox may call **WATCH THE RATIO** which means the same as **(TAKE YOUR) TIME ON THE RECOVERY**. This means that all of the rowers should make a concerted effort not to rush down their slide on the recovery. Take your time!

Basic exercises

There are a few basic exercises that coaches like to bring in early, as they are remarkably effective in helping a crew row well together. They are:

- ★ **SQUARE BLADE ROWING** - here, you do not feather the blade at all. The blade remains square during extraction, on the recovery and at the catch.
- ★ **PAUSE ROWING** - The objective of "pause rowing" is to synchronise your timing as a crew. The idea is simple: the rowers all drive and extract together. However, on the recovery -- specifically, when your hands are outstretched -- you pause rowing altogether. Sometime shortly after you have paused together the cox will say **GO!** and you resume the stroke together.
- ★ **CUTTING THE CAKE** - This is another great exercise that teaches timing. The idea is to modify only the recovery of the stroke, such that you zig-zag in a "Z" shape rather than going straight back on the recovery.

Usually, the cox will not go directly from a standing start into either pause rowing or cutting the cake. They will usually start with continuous rowing and then make the call to change to one of the exercises. Listen and follow the cox!

Stay vigilant

Whilst on the water the cox is the only person in charge. What he/she says must be followed. The crew should therefore be attentive at all times and alert to the cox's instructions. If you neglect to listen to the cox you are jeopardizing the



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safety of the entire crew. So, please please please keep your ears open and respond immediately to whatever they say. Likewise, the cox need to listen to the coach, as often they have a better view of river traffic from the side.

Circulation patterns

In contrast to road traffic, **rowing traffic sticks to the right side** of the river. The only exception to this rule is during **regattas** (rowing races), where a **circulation pattern** (instructions) will be given to the cox.

When not rowing the crew should **sit the boat**. That is, their blades should be flat on the water. Each member of the crew should hold on to the blade's handle lightly to maintain stability. Never let go of your rowing blade.

On a limited stretch of river the crew has to spin from time to time. The spinning procedure involves **ALTERNATE STROKES** once boat has stopped. This means that bowsiders **ROW ON** and strokesiders **BACK DOWN** alternately. The cox commands each stroke by saying **GO**. It helps if all rowers work in time.

Breaking down the recovery phase

Often, it is useful to break the recovery phase of the rowing stroke into different sections. You should be aware of the common divisions:

- ★ **QUARTER SLIDE** - Rowing with arms and body-rock plus gliding a quarter of the slide on the seat (the knees just start coming up).
- ★ **HALF SLIDE** - As above, but with knees coming up to a 90 degree angle.
- ★ **FULL SLIDE** - As above, but with legs getting fully compressed and upper body pressed against thighs.

Club ethos

Be polite

When on the water, please keep in mind that **you are representing our Club, College and University**. At times the river gets busy and many people make mistakes, which can be frustrating, especially for experienced rowers. However, please be patient and respect everybody else who shares the river with us.

Be punctual

It is absolutely critical that you **arrive to all of your training sessions on time**. If you arrive late or fail to show up, you are letting your down your teammates who have made an effort to arrive punctually.

Be respectful

Our club happily welcomes novices, and we do everything to make sure that they are given proper training in a relaxed and friendly atmosphere. Rowing is a great sport with a significant learning curve; some people therefore develop quicker than others, but regardless of your rowing experience, we ask you to **refrain from coaching your peers**. We hire paid and experienced coaches to give this type of advice.