



A GUIDE FOR COXES

SAFETY - What you should know before going on the water

The cox's highest priority is the safety of the crew (including themselves), other river users and the safety of the equipment. The stroke is responsible for the use of the boat but the cox has control of the boat both on and off the water. What you say, goes, so if you are not happy about any aspect of safety then tell the crew. On the water you are the eyes of the boat and must be aware of what's happening around you.

Safety precautions

Always wear a lifejacket. It is virtually impossible to capsize an eight or a four but you must wear a lifejacket just in case and also because you are uninsured if you don't. Until you feel confident (i.e. after a number of outings) only go out on the water with a coach or an experienced Stroke. Make sure that you could get out of the boat in a hurry if you needed to - e.g. don't tie yourself up in knots with a coxbox. (Ideally you should not wear wellington boots in the boat as these can make swimming difficult - if available wear something warm but buoyant like windsurfing slippers.) During winter wear lots of layers - you can get very cold. Don't go out after dark unless you are experienced and have the correct lights. Never go out if the river has a very fast stream. Don't go out if the equipment is badly damaged. When the boat is being carried or lifted in or out of the water, watch both ends of the boat and, in particular the fin, to ensure the crew don't hit anything and don't damage the boat.

Navigation

The basic rule of the river is that craft should keep to the right. Keep a sharp lookout - overtake with care. Faster moving traffic must overtake by moving towards the middle of the river. Always look behind you before moving out to overtake. Craft have joint responsibility to avoid collision with other craft, even when racing. Craft in the navigation channel have priority over those crossing it but be prepared to give way to sailing craft. If you think another craft has not seen you and are on a collision course call "ahead". Always "spin" i.e. turn a boat below a bridge or an obstacle to avoid getting washed onto it unless you can be absolutely sure that it is safe to turn above.

Essential Commands

If in doubt - STOP. Do this by saying : "*Easy oar*" or if you need to stop suddenly add "*Hold it up!*"
If you are drifting towards the bank or another obstacle and want to straighten up then say:
"Take a stroke Bow/2" to move to your left or right.



THE BASICS - the first few outings

The job of the cox can be split into three parts: Steering, Giving commands and Coaching. It's not necessary to be familiar with all rowing terminology and commands before going out on the river as long as there is a coach going out with the crew or Stroke is relatively experienced. Neither is it necessary for a cox to be familiar with all the nuances of advanced steering or navigation, and effective coaching is only something a cox can do after years of experience.

Preparing for an outing

First things first. Make sure you are wearing a life jacket. If you are using a coxbox check to see if it works while the boat is still on the rack. It is useful to ask before the outing what work it is intended to be done. If there is a coach with you then you don't need to worry too much as they will tell you as you are going along. If there is no coach you need to discuss the work first and ask questions about anything you don't understand. You may need a ratemeter or a stopwatch.

Steering

This is obviously the most important part of the cox's job after ensuring the safety of the crew. This can only be learnt through experience and familiarity with the river. When you feel happy with the steering you can start to give commands. If in doubt, ask Stroke what to say or say nothing. It is the responsibility of the crew to teach you how to cox in the way which is going to be most helpful to them. They can't expect you to be a wonderful cox through some sort of method of telepathy! Listen to any commands given and use them later. At the end of the outing ask if there was a command used that you didn't understand. Remember as a cox you are a valuable commodity and it is up to the crew to make you happy enough to want to cox them again!

Using the rudder

Pulling the rudder string to the left turns the boat to the left (by pushing the stern to the right) and vice versa. Hold a rudder string in each hand with the rudder lines taut and the rudder straight. Only a very small movement of the hands is necessary. Steering an eight is like trying to drive a juggernaut from the back. Think ahead as far as possible and plan your course accordingly. Good anticipation and gentle corrective action that does not interfere with the run of the boat is the essence of good steering. Try only to use the rudder when the blades are in the water. Sit up straight and try to avoid moving. If the boat is unbalanced then it is up to the crew to try to correct it, not you, though at times it can be very difficult to ignore your instinct to lean out. Keep your eyes to the distance ahead, picking a fixed marker (tree, building, moored craft etc.) so as to be able to pick, and follow a straight course. If you need to look to the side (e.g. to judge proximity of adjacent craft) make it a very short (1 or 2 seconds maximum) glance and resume your look ahead. Longer looks to the side almost always result in an unwanted turn in that direction.

Avoiding the use of the rudder

Always try to set off straight without having to use the rudder. Ask for Bow or 2 to "Touch it. Go" before getting the whole crew to set off. If a tight turn is required for some reason, ask strokeside or bowside to paddle harder by saying: "Harder on strokeside (or bowside). Go." [As an alternative to strokeside and bowside you can call by colours – Red for Strokeside and Green for Bowside – as the blades have either a red or green band near the spoon for identification.]

Then when you are straight say "Together. Go" or "Even Pressure. Go".



Giving commands

Commands should be given in a loud clear voice. Refer to the crew as Bow, 2, 3 and Stroke (in a four) or Bow, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 and Stroke (in an eight). Refer to sides of the boat as "stroke-side" i.e. usually the side which is the same side as stroke (cox's left) or "bow-side" i.e. usually the side which is the same side as bow (cox's right). On the water half of the crew can be asked to do something by using "Stern pair/four" (the half closest to the cox) or "Bow pair/four". All crew members should wait for an order from the cox before proceeding. This is particularly important when the boat is being put in the water or taken out and also when you are turning or "spinning" the boat when on the water. Always state action required then "go" or make it quite clear how you will give an order before you give it. Two extremely useful phrases are : "Are you ready?" and " Next stroke" which both prepare the crew that there is a command coming up and "Easy oar" which stops the boat. Other useful commands are given within the following relevant sections. When on the water, try to time what you say with the catch and finish of the stroke. Think of two beats (catch, finish) and fit the words to this rhythm: "Back stops. Are you ready? Next stroke. Go." Always give the "go" at the finish so that the crew has time in the recovery to be ready on the catch. Occasionally stroke and bow are on not on their usual sides - this is extremely confusing and you are well within your rights to be confused! In this case ignore where stroke and bow are sitting. Strokeside is still cox's left and Bowside cox's right.

Carrying the boat out of the boathouse

You should stand at the end of the boat closest to the boat house doors so that you can direct and help with the carrying of the boat out of the boat house. To get the crew to stand by the boat give the command : "Hands on". To lift it, give the command : "Are you ready? Lift". There now follows a series of commands which become quite complicated depending which rack the boat is on. An experienced crew can take the boat out without too much guidance from the cox. See the next section for these commands when you are feeling more confident.

Putting the boat in the water

To put the boat in the water an experienced crew can "throw" the boat : " Throwing the boat above heads. Bowside moving. Are you ready? Go." Then : "And in". Other crews may wish to do it in four stages : "Half turn. Riverside riggers up. Go." Then : "Strokeside under. Go." Then : "As she floats." Then : "And in". If the boat is to be put onto trestles so that the crew can do some faffing around (traditional for a large proportion of outings!) then the boat needs to be rolled over : "As she floats. Bowside (or strokeside) riggers coming up. Are you ready? Go."

Getting into the boat and out onto the river

Bowside (usually) have to hold their riggers while strokeside get in : "Bowside holding. Strokeside in. Go." When all of strokeside's blades are in the gates and pushed out on the water ask bowside to get in : "Bowside in. Go" while you hold a rigger half way down the boat. You get in when all the crew appear to be ready. Before doing anything else ask the crew to: "Number off when ready." They will shout "Bow, 2, 3" etc. up the boat to stroke. Check for river traffic before moving off then say "Push off on bowside" to get the crew to push away from the bank.

Commands during the outing

Warming up

Ask the stroke how they want to warm up. Often it involves half the crew sitting the boat and the other half moving up the slide, possibly with square blades. e.g.: "Bow pair, backstops, square blades, hands only. Are you ready? Go." Then "next stroke, body swing. Go" then " next stroke, quarter slide. Go" etc. moving through half slide, three quarter slide to full slide. After bow pair/four have got to full slide taking five to ten strokes at each slide position ask them to "easy oar. Drop" and repeat with stern pair/four. To get the whole crew rowing together you can either



ask stern pair/four to stop rowing and get the whole crew to row together : "Backstops. Paddling light. Are you ready? Go" or you can ask stern pair to feather their blades : "Next stroke, feather. Go" and then get bow pair/four to join in by saying : "Bow pair, get ready to join in. Join in now." Increase the pressure by saying : "Next stroke, half pressure. Go" Give the crew one or more bursts of work by saying : "Get ready for ten firm. Next stroke, firm. Go" Some crews like to do five, ten, then fifteen firm with light or half pressure in between. On the penultimate stroke of each set say: "Next stroke, light. Go."

General commands and counting strokes

Whatever the pressure or work always set off by saying : "Backstops. Paddling light. Are you ready? Go." i.e. even if the crew wants to go firm start off light. After a few strokes call for half pressure then go into any stronger pressure rather than going straight from light to firm, say. Use your fingers to count strokes. If you have to call a change in stroke at the end of ten strokes which is not easily anticipated by the crew give them lots of warning. e.g. count six then say : "Get ready. Rating up two. Next stroke. Go" or some crews prefer (after five strokes): "Rating up two. In three. In two. In one. Go." Check with stroke which s/he prefers if possible. When you wish to stop, check behind for approaching boats, move towards the bank and say : "Next stroke, easy oar". Then say : "Drop". Reprimand crew for dropping the blades on the water before you wish them to as it can be useful to allow the boat to run on until it is in the position you want.

Getting out of the boat

Ask strokeside to lean towards the bank and hold on to allow you to get out Hold a rigger in the middle of the boat and say : " Strokeside out". Get strokeside to hold their riggers : " Strokeside holding the boat, bowside out".

Putting the boat away

Usually the crew will put their blades away while you hold the boat. When the crew is ready, ask for : " Hands on. Lifting the boat above hands, on three. Bowside moving. 1,2,3". Or if the crew don't wish to throw the boat, say : " Hands on. Lifting to waists. Are you ready? Go." Then " Half turn. Riverside riggers up." Then "Bowside under. Go." The boat should be carried to just outside the boathouse, put on trestles, then washed. Then ask for : "Hands on. Are you ready? Lift. Half turn on bowside shoulders. Go." (This works for racks that are to the left of the rowers as they carry the boat in, otherwise strokeside shoulders.) Carry into the boathouse slowly keeping an eye on gates which might get caught on the ceiling and other boats as it is put back on its rack.



BECOMING MORE AWARE

Taking the boat out of the boathouse

Boats sitting on trolleys can be pulled out and crews can step over them to position themselves opposite their riggers before lifting. Boats being lifted off the top racks involve half of the crew moving underneath to get on the other side of the boat as it is lifted off. Experienced crews will automatically work out who needs to move - if not you will need to tell them what to do: look at the rigger closest to you which is sticking out into the boathouse. If it is bow's rigger then bowside need to move under so that they end up opposite their riggers. Otherwise strokeside move. Say "Bowside moving. Are you ready? Lift." With racks that are at waist height all the crew will need to stay on the same side until there is room to ask bowside or strokeside to move under. Boats will need to be carried out of the boathouse on the "half turn", i.e. with the riggers vertical. Again many crews will do this automatically. If not, say : " Half turn. Bowside (or strokeside) shoulders. Go." As soon as possible, give the command : "Level" to allow the crew to carry the boat at a more comfortable position. If needs be, the boat can be carried at different heights to avoid obstacles. To achieve this say : "Shoulders", ".Above heads. Go.", "Waists", "Up in the bows".

Spinning

In a tight place you might need to ask just one side to paddle on then to get the other side to join in e.g. "Bowside only, paddle on. Go" then "Easy there" then " Strokeside hold it" then Strokeside paddle on" then "Bowside back it down, spinning alternately. Go." A completely different technique involves both sides "chopping" the water together with bowside paddling on and strokeside backing down just using hands only. If there is a strong stream, then you will only need one side to paddle on while the other side holds the boat.

Exercises

What follows are just a few of the most common exercises.

Every new coach or stroke is likely to have a repertoire of exercises that they particularly favour. Listen carefully to what they say and use these commands at a later stage. If you don't understand why a crew is being asked to do something then ask after the outing. If the command is quite complicated then explain what's going to happen first, then say " Get ready. Next stroke. Go" or "Get ready. Change. Go." Remember always to give the "Go" on the finish.

Slide work: see Warming Up section but with whole crew. e.g. : "Whole crew. Backstops. Hands only. Paddling light. Are you ready? Go." This helps to get the crew swinging together, swinging before sliding and sliding together.

Strong point rowing: "Three - quarter slide, three - quarter pressure. Are you ready? Go." This works on getting the catches together. Acceleration paddling: " Half pressure catch, three-quarter pressure finish. Next stroke. Change .Go." This is good for the finish and co-ordination.

Square-blade paddling: " Get ready for square-blade paddling. Next stroke. Go." This is to get everyone working the finish together, drawing up, thinking about consistent hand heights and making sure the finish is coming out square.

Alternate square-blade and feathering: (You need to really concentrate on the timing of the commands for this one!) "Get ready for alternate square blade and feathering. Next stroke, square blade. Go. Change. Go." etc.



Single strokes: "Single strokes to hands away, bodies over. Are you ready? Go." This concentrates the minds on moving together and letting the boat run. It can be done to a variety of positions. You need to shout "Go" after a brief pause then after a while increase to two strokes etc. by saying : " Two strokes. Go."

Changing hand positions: "Inside hand down the loom. Change. Go." "Hands together. Go." "Outside hand off. Go." "Normal paddling. Go." These get the crew to think about what each of their hands are doing and to draw the stroke through to the chest.

Feet out paddling: stop the boat and ask the crew to take their feet out. This gets the weight onto the feet and gets them drawing through the finish together. Work Listen very carefully to what the coach or stroke want you to say and ask again if you're not sure what is wanted. There is nothing worse for both you and the crew than to get half way through a piece and not be sure what to do next.

Work

Timed pieces: for this check you have a stopwatch. Ask what sort of rating is expected. If the watch doesn't work or you forget to start it then you can count strokes. Check the pressure wanted. It is likely to be firm for 1-3 minutes or half/three quarter pressure for five -ten minutes.

Steady state: This is about three-quarter pressure. Check whether a running start or racing start (i.e. stationary start) is wanted. For a running start, start off paddling light then say : "Build over five. Go." Count two then say : " Next stroke, firm. Go." If a short piece of work is in progress, give the time every minute: "One minute gone" . This however can be very depressing if there are nine more to go so for longer pieces give the time every two or four minutes. If the rating is about thirty, then the last ten strokes will be when there are 20 seconds to go. If in doubt always overestimate the number of strokes left. Say : "Last ten. Go" Tell the stroke at regular intervals what the rating is and if it's below what's being aimed for, ask her/him if s/he wants to take it up. If so : "Next stroke, rating up two. Go" Every so often if the pressure is going or concentration is being lost have a push for ten. This could be a push for ten on the legs, catches, finishes, length. Say " Get ready. Next stroke. Ten on the legs. Go." Most crews do not want you to count it. They can do that themselves if they wish. You must count silently however and could perhaps say : "Five more". At the end say : " Rhythm" or "Lengthen out" to let the crew know that the ten is over.

A "Pyramid": is where the rating goes up two and the time goes down a minute then it is reversed e.g. five mins rating 28, four mins rating 30, three rating 32, two rating 34, one minute rating 36 and back down again. At the end of each time period say : " Get ready. Next stroke, rating up. Go"

A "Castle": is where the rating goes up and down for fixed periods e.g. two minutes rating 26, two at 28 repeated a number of times.

"Fartlek": is a certain number of strokes firm then light e.g. twenty firm, ten light. In the light count 7 then say : "Next stroke, firm. Go". On the tenth stroke of the firm say : "Light. Go". At the end of a piece, say : "Next stroke, wind down."



ADVANCED TECHNIQUES

Coaching points

If in doubt, don't try to coach. There's nothing more infuriating for a crew than to be told to do something that doesn't make sense or makes the situation worse. If you are unsure then before the outing ask stroke to let you know if there's anything they want you to say.

How to make comments

Any comments you make should be phrased as positively as possible. It is much easier for a crew to think about doing something than not doing something. If one person has a particular fault, direct a comment at that person then let them know if it has improved. However once they know about it, don't keep on at them. They are probably trying as hard as possible to correct it. Every now and then remind them gently in an encouraging way : " Two, square earlier" then " Two, that's much better " "Well done, two. Keep thinking about your squaring." To let a crew know that they are improving slowly say : "Well done. That's starting to come. Keep thinking. It's getting better. That's better. That's much better. That's really good. Well done."

Correcting faults

The easiest fault that you can see is poor timing. To improve it say : "Timing. There, there. Catch and finish. Lift and send. Think about the ratio. Time on the slide." If the balance isn't good: "Weight onto the toes", "Push on your toes", "Think about your hand heights" If you can feel someone rushing : " Swing over", "Hold the knees down", "Control the last few inches of the slide", "Relax", "Breathe on the recovery", "Let it run". If the boat is down on one side ask that side to draw up and the other to push down : "Draw up on strokeside, hands down and away on bowside". When you are feeling really confident you can start to make suggestions to the crew as to the exercises they might do to correct a particular fault.

General comments

In the middle of long pieces you might feel you need to say something but don't know what. If in doubt, say nothing! What's most likely to happen is that the concentration will go or the pressure will drop.

- To improve concentration : " Keep thinking. Keep concentrating. Rhythm. Timing. Eyes in the boat. Heads up. Sit tall. Let it run."
- To improve the pressure : " Work in the water.. Positive catch. Strong finish. Send off the finish. Accelerate to the finish. Push off the finish. Power in the water. Long and hard. Increase the cover. Another few inches. Use the legs."
- When the crew are doing a fairly long piece of work, take the time to look at each member of the crew individually and give them something to think about : "Bow, use the outside arm, I can see your blade coming away from the gate." "2, sit tall, keep your head up." "3, hold onto your finishes - keep drawing up." " 4, you're skying at the catch. Lift your hands" "5, control the slide. " " 6, you're missing part of the stroke. Quicker hands at the catch." "7, watch the timing, you're a fraction late." "Stroke, keep swinging, hold your legs down."
- Also in a long piece you can concentrate on particular parts of the stroke in turn e.g. "Think about the finishes. Draw it up. Squeeze the finish. Send off the finish. Finishes there." Etc.
- For the catch : "Fast hands at the catch. Sit tall. Lock on. Use the legs."
- For the length : "Lengthen out. Sit back. Take your time at the finish. Swing over from backstops. Get the length from backstops. And stretch."
- Every now and then look at the puddles that the crew are making and the distance from the end of one set to the beginning of the next set. In an eight, "chaining" is where you can't see where one set ends and the next starts. If the distance drops, ask for "let's squeeze up the cover."



- You can also now and then concentrate on how comfortable you feel. If you are being jerked in the back every stroke then the boat is stopping at the catch which means people are rushing the last few inches of the slide or are jamming the blade into the water. Ask them to: "Let it run at the catch. Push on your toes coming into frontstops. Keep it smooth at the catch. Take the catch with your toes/legs."
- Use landmarks and other boats to increase the work and concentration e.g. going under a bridge "Heads up. Push away from the bridge" or alongside another crew : " Work off them. Squeeze past. Every stroke. Push away".
At the end of a piece or the end of an outing
Ask crew to take their outside hand off to give them a chance to catch their breath and go much lighter while also thinking about their feathering. Ask them to close their eyes. This forces them to concentrate on how it feels and also helps them to relax and wind down. To improve the ratio and as a final piece of relaxed but controlled rowing at the end of an outing, ask for : "Up one in the water, down one on the slide. Go."

Navigation - anticipating other craft

Navigate with consideration for other river users, including anglers. Show understanding to others when they are engaged in organised competition. Eights, coxless fours, quads, doubles and singles can move much faster than you might imagine. Make sure they have seen and heard you. If they have, you can usually aim to hold your own line as they will know what you are doing.

- Youngsters - They may not be experienced
- Uncoxed scullers - They are fast but not always vigilant
- Canoes often stick very close to the bank going upstream and paddle in a row going downstream
- Fishing boats
- Pleasure craft

Getting into the bank in difficult circumstances

A technique for moving a boat sideways which can be useful on occasions is when a member of the crew reaches round and takes the handle behind her/him. By paddling on with this blade you can make the boat go sideways. In the creek you will need to use someone on strokeside, say, 6 to paddle on with 5's blade.



RACING

The cox needs to be calm and in control throughout and can make the difference between victory and defeat. During the race, the first priority is still to steer effectively but the cox can also contribute hugely in managing and motivating the crew. Give encouragement and make comments in the same way that you do during outings and discuss with the crew beforehand any special pushes or tactics you plan to use.

Regattas

Before boating

Weigh in, pick up numbers and check which station you are on. If possible walk to the start of the race and watch crews getting on to the stake boats to see if any particular techniques work better than others. Look at the course to see where the best stream is and any bays or wide bends to avoid. Walk to the finish and try to identify where the last ten or twenty strokes start by counting strokes for crews in other races. Ensure the crew is ready (mentally prepared, equipped and appropriately warmed up) and is present at the boating area at the appropriate time (normally 30 mins prior to race time). Do not wait to be called over the public address system.

Going up to the start

Move out in the normal way taking special care to watch for races in progress or other boats. Remember that normal navigation rules apply within a restricted navigation channel - i.e. keep to the right. Take special care in a restricted navigation channel not to stray onto the course and show special consideration to other river users.

Discuss with the crew the warm-up they wish to do on the way to the start. It is best if it is as close as possible to what they normally do they it may need to be shortened. One or two practice starts help to settle the "butterflies" and reduce the risk of over-enthusiasm resulting in errors during the start.

Talk to the crew to keep them motivated - "calm but coiled". Focus the crew on their boat only - the cox looks after outside influences.

Move to the stake boats as directed by the start Marshall and show courtesy to the other competitors. Avoid being so quick as to have an over-long wait, or so slow as to hold up the start and have insufficient time to settle. You should normally turn beyond the end of the course and paddle gently past and close to the stake-boat then back down slowly to get the stern onto the stake-boat.

Be sure that your crew are ready, any warm clothing stripped off and last checks for tight rigger nuts etc. completed. The umpire will check crews and stations and confirm the start procedure. Keep your hand up until you are ready

Ask the crew to : "Come forward and get ready." You should ensure that the boat is pointing correctly down the middle of your station, allowing if necessary for any wind or cross current.

Call for corrections (usually minor - e.g. "Touch it Bow") from bow or 2. Make sure there is no run on the boat by asking the crew to "Take the run off".

When you are satisfied that you are straight and ready - drop your hand. If your hand is down, the umpire will assume that you are ready - so let your crew know: "hand down". The umpire will raise a Red Flag and command "Attention, Go" On the command "go", the umpire will also drop the flag.

The race

For the first fifteen/twenty strokes, just concentrate on your own crew. Try not to use the rudder at all to start with. Try not to look at your opposition as this is likely to cause you to steer towards them. You should stay within your station (your "water") unless you have clear water between you and the crew behind. Within this limitation you should take the most direct course possible.



Try to anticipate, and allow for wind or cross currents. If you are alongside your opposition you can encourage your crew to pass them by saying : "I've got 6. Give me 4." If you are up, tell the crew. They may not realise it. Tell them to : "Push away from them." Never lie to your crew. If you are behind they need to know. You can encourage them by saying : " We are still in contact. You're coming back. They're looking tired. Let's push back. Every stroke." "Well done you are gaining steadily." If the other crew pushes - call for a push immediately to negate theirs. Don't wait till they have finished theirs and got ahead. Give the crew times and landmarks so they know where they are on the course. Give the stroke ratings at regular intervals. After a race give the opponent three cheers : "Three cheers for Leander. Hip, hip Hooray. Hip, hip, Hooray. Hip, hip, Hooray.

The Umpire

If you have moved too far over the umpire will warn you and wave a white flag for course corrections or a red flag to stop the race and/or disqualify you. You must respond immediately to commands from the umpire to correct your course or you will be penalised. Such commands will normally consist only of calling your crew (by Club or station) and pointing a flag (which you cannot see!) in the necessary direction. You will not normally be penalised for straying outside your water if it does not interfere with other competitors. A boat in another's "water" will be held responsible for a clash. Both craft will be held responsible for a clash in neutral water. The Umpire alone can authorise a "stop" of the race. Equipment failure (in the first 50m of a race - this is typically the first ten strokes) should be appealed by a raised hand. The Umpire may stop the race (waving the red flag) after a clash (and disqualify and/or restart) or if other craft cause danger by straying onto the course. The race will not necessarily be voided if a cox decides to stop because of hazards on the course - but a cox should nevertheless "hold" the craft if she/he judges that a dangerous collision is otherwise inevitable. If, after the race, a crew want to object or make a point to the Umpire the coxes hand must be raised to attract the Umpire's attention before the umpire reports to the Judges tent and waves a white flag to signal "race OK.

Head races

Before boating

Collect numbers and find out as much as possible about the course before you boat. Head races are long distance so it is unlikely you can see both the start and the finish. If possible have a look at the finish to be absolutely clear where it is. In particular check which side of islands and which arches of bridges must be used. And read any marshalling instructions that have been sent.

Going to the start

Many of the same considerations as for regattas apply especially with regard to crew preparation and warming up) but there will not normally be such direct marshalling of boating and it will be up to the crew (controlled by the cox) to be at the start early enough. On the way to the start point out any landmarks along the course which you are going to use for pushes. In particular, if you row past the start, make sure the crew have seen it. The start will normally be under the control of shore marshals who will direct boats to their holding positions and instruct their movement to the start (which may involve a turn). If the race is downstream don't turn until you are told. You have much more control of the boat while it is pointing upstream. It is essential that the cox remains calm at all times. You are likely to be shouted at by a number of different people. Don't let them get to you. You must understand exactly where the start is so the crew can be commanded to go from light to half pressure then told to build appropriately. At the start line the judge will normally call the crew number and a command "go". The cox should then say "Firm. Go." Usually the timing doesn't actually start for another few strokes.



The race

Remember that normal navigation rules and race rules apply. You should avoid following in the turbulent water created by another crew however if it is possible for you to move over and wash down the other crew without being disqualified then this is to be desired. Use the current to the maximum (refer to section 4 above). You can watch crews ahead to see where the fastest water is and also the best water conditions. Tell the crew about other boats in the distance that you're gaining on and give them a regular update on the distance between you and them (as long as you are actually gaining on them!) After the race insist that your crew has a proper "wind down" to minimise stiffness.

based on DITTONS SKIFF & PUNTING CLUB'S A Guide For Coxswains

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Sources: "Notes for Coxswains" by Ray Pembery. Contributions from:-Fiona McAnena, Claire Wade, Joan and Simon Leifer, Ruth and Malcolm Knight, Charles Graham, Jan Pitcher, Bun Harvey, Christine Brady, Tim Lohmann, Fiona Andrews, Sue Woodbridge, Niall Trimble (Dittons Skiff and Punting Club)

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