

Coxing competencies

To safely conduct coastal rowing outings, the cox should become fully familiar with the details of the *LACRC General Risk Assessment* document (in preparation). The first responsibility of the cox is to ensure the safety of the crew. During outings, the cox needs to keep their head up to continually assess the local environment and the position of the boat relative to the shore, rocks, underwater hazards and other boats. This will require the cox to be knowledgeable about the local shoreline and sea charts to account for hazards which may or may not be come into play depending on the tide, sea and wind conditions. If conditions worsen, the cox must assess if the outing should be terminated given the strength and competency of the crew. When at sea the Cox is always in command of the skiff. However to allow others to gain experience of coxing, there may also be a designated skipper who will sit in stroke/No 4 position.

The ten commandments



1. The safety and well-being of the crew and boat while on the water – and when launching and retrieving
2. Steering the boat.
3. Giving clear and audible instructions to the rowers.
4. Operating the marine VHF radio.
5. Once you've launched, check that everyone can hear you and that they are listening.
6. Look out for vessels including ferries and recreational sailors, and obstacles on the water. Beware that a strong tide can quickly cause a collision with an obstacle.
7. Let the rowers know what to expect coming towards the boat (they can't see what's coming), but ask them to stay alert too.
8. Work closely with your Stroke rower. They can see behind you and can be a valuable second opinion. Use them as a quick fix – they can quickly row forwards or backwards to make a small manoeuvre.
9. You will see from the rowers' faces how they are doing. Be sensitive and use your discretion - if even just one is struggling, take the pace down and bring the boat home without them feeling they are to blame.
10. When coming back to shore give your rowers clear landing instructions. It is your responsibility while the boat and crew are on the water. Once landed, give clear instructions for disembarking - one at a time.

Mitigating Risk

There are simple ways of mitigating the risks identified in the *WCRC General Risk Assessment* document. Here are a few which should be considered when planning or executing a coastal rowing outing:

- The boat is seaworthy and well maintained
- People on land are aware that a crew is going out
- The crew has reliable means of communication
- There is appropriate safety equipment on-board
- The relative strength and experience of the crew is appropriate for the conditions and outing plans
- The crew is appropriately positioned in the boat according to their size, strength and ability
- The weather forecast and tidal timetable has been considered, particular if wind is predicted to strengthen
- Can another coastal rowing crew or motorised vessel available accompany the boat?



IF IN DOUBT, DON'T GO OUT

The new cox should work with an experienced cox and carry out the following checklist and log coxing hours and the weather conditions.

Coxing checklist practical	Completed
Manoeuvre skiff to pick up a floating buoy on a line	
Drop and safely manoeuvre away from the buoy	
Complete turns on both hands, round buoys	
Steer a straight course.	
Complete 360 degree turn	
Complete emergency stop	
Launch and recover skiff	

Coxing checklist Oral/written	Completed
Identify means of accessing weather, tidal and safety information	
List safety procedure prior to launch	
List no go circumstances	
List safety kit for normal rowing	
List correct launching and recovery procedures.	

Describe how to deploy the anchor. Description of anchor equipment.	
Describe Role of the Cox and Responsibilities	
Identify areas locally where it is safe/not safe to go and why.	
Name ten attributes, tasks and responsibilities of a cox	

Cox responsibilities

Checklist at Dunstaffnage marina

1. Assess if the weather and the tide is safe for rowing
2. Check there is a full crew and they are happy to go out and sufficiently experienced for the weather conditions.
3. Remove the skiff cover and cover support.
4. Check all crew have a lifejacket on
5. Wheel the skiff onto the slipway, watching out for other marina users and check the boat is handled correctly.

Cox responsibilities

Checklist before launching

1. Reassess the weather and the sea condition as it can change very quickly. Do not go out if there is a neap or spring low tide as there is insufficient water to launch the skiff safely.
2. If any crew member is unsure then cancel the row
3. Check the bung is in
4. Assign crew positions and make sure life jackets are on. Think about the experience and balance of the crew.
5. Remove the trolley and place trolley safely so it does not obstruct marina personel. If you are doing a beach launch and need to move off quickly, place the oars across the boat.
6. Instruct the crew to get in one at a time
7. Position the rudder on the gudgeon
8. Cox to move the boat safely away from the slip, carefully observing other marine traffic and buoy obstructions.

9. When a few hundred yards out and when out of the wave zone, call “easy oars!” and let the rowers readjust their footrests etc.

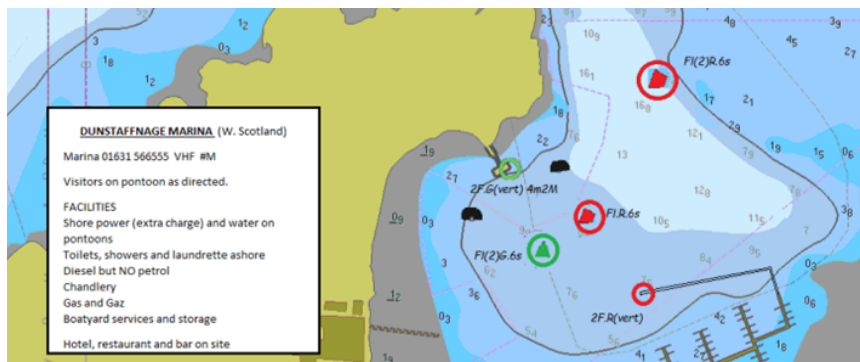
Assess the condition of the boat and equipment for any defects

- Bail out any water
- Inspect hull for damage
- Check rudder and rudder brackets
- Check the boat deck including footstraps and pins, rowlocks, gates and oars

Check the safety bag and its contents. It should contain at least the following items:

- VHF radio (with sufficient battery charge)
- Whistle
- Bailer
- It may also contain optional items – throw line, compass, torch, first aid kit, emergency locator beacon, air horn, etc.

Turn on radio, make sure it is set to the desirable channel (normally channel 16). Secure it your person. A PLB does not replace the VHF when at sea.



Coxing commands

It helps if coxes are consistent with their terminology. The following are what we use, but other clubs may differ slightly so if there are any guest rowers it may be best to clarify. The commands should be in time with the rhythm at the catch/finish of the stroke, and clear. The skiff is numbered from the bow who is 1, 2, 3 and stroke 4. Make sure your voice is loud enough to that everyone can hear clearly.

All rowers follow the stroke position’s movements and tempo	
Ship oars	Place oar on Thole Pin, hold with blade out of the water
Boat oars	Take oar off the Thole Pin and place lengthways in the boat
Ready to Row	Arms forward, blade tip just touching the water
Fold oars	Keep oars on the thole pin and bring the oar alongside the hull
... and Row	Begin to row, following the lead of the ‘Stroke’ oar
Easy Oars	Stop rowing, hold blade out of the water
Hold Water/ Dig In	Stop rowing, hold blade in the water, used to stop the boat and to hold the boat in position or help turn the boat when applied to Port or Starboard oars only
Back Water	Place blade in water then push handle

	away from body (opposite to normal rowing stroke). Used to reverse the direction of the boat
Each of these commands can be used to direct specific rower(s) when used with the oar number, or everyone e.g. "easy number 3" or "hold water 4"	
Counting	The Cox may use counting at the pace of the stroke to help rowers keep in time or to give advance notice of a change

Steering and Rudder Control

The initial job of the novice cox is to master boat steering using the rudder and the rowers in the boat to orientate and guide the boat under moderate environmental conditions. To steer the boat to the left, the left rudder string is pushed forward and vice versa. The typical rudder on a coastal rowing boat is large, so inexperienced coxes will typically oversteer by a large margin. Steering a boat in a straight line is much harder than it looks, especially if there are cross winds/currents or one side of the crew is stronger than the other. The rudder ropes should not be allowed to go slack with some tension maintained on each to ensure that a steering adjustment has an immediate effect.

It takes confidence for a novice cox to make the small steering adjustments required. While this is naturally important for collision avoidance and a safe outing, in training or in races profligate use of the rudder negatively influences the boat in the following ways:

- It increases the distance rowed by the crew
- It increases the drag on the boat slowing it down
- It affects the balance (roll) of the boat

Inexperienced coxes can gain confidence by practicing steering in a straight line by regularly looking at a buoy or landmark and to make small adjustments towards that target. In order to avoid oversteering, the cox can try holding the rudder string in one hand only for 3-4 strokes at a time before making a small adjustment. Further experience can be gained by steering sweeping turns around buoys and rowing alongside other boats.

Collision Avoidance

To prevent a collision, there a certain 'rules of the road' which need to be obeyed. Full details are available at <http://www.collisionregs.com/MSN1781.pdf> ; the pertinent points to remember are:

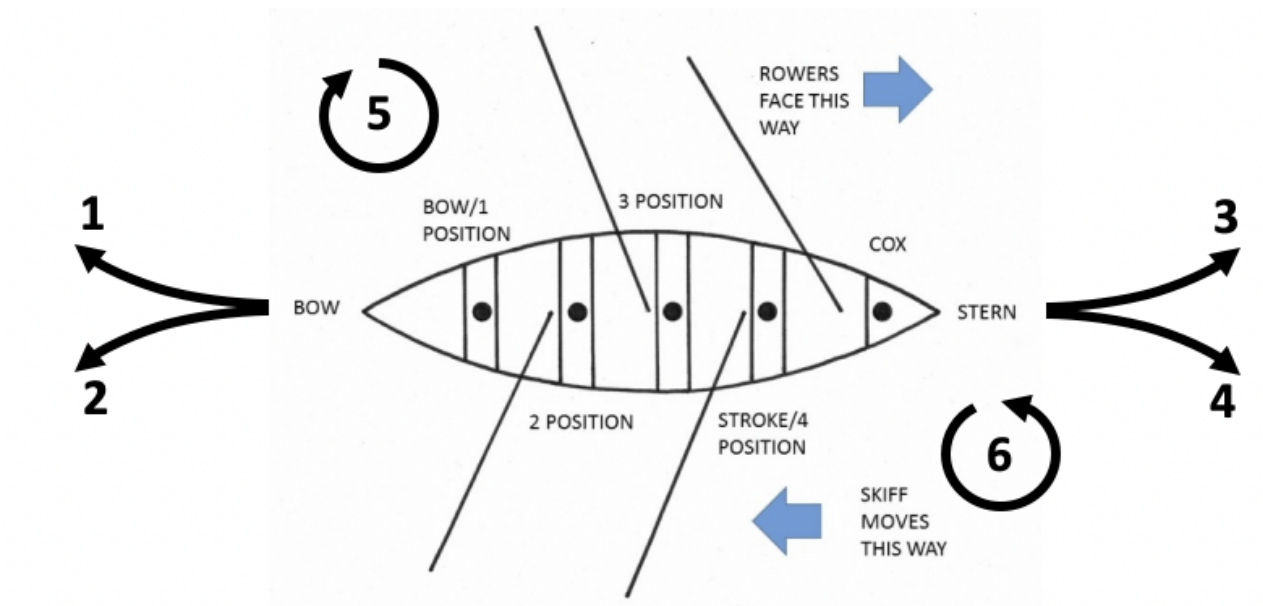
Rule 14 - Head on situation - each vessel alters course to starboard (right)

Rule 15 - Crossing situation - give way to traffic approaching from starboard (same rule as driving)

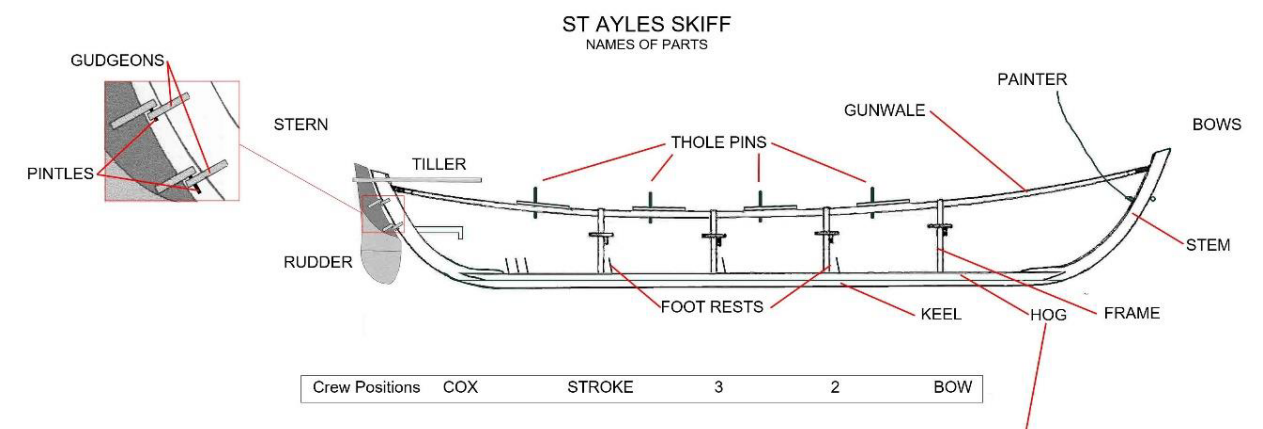
Rule 18 - Responsibilities between vessels - rowing vessels must give way to sailing vessels

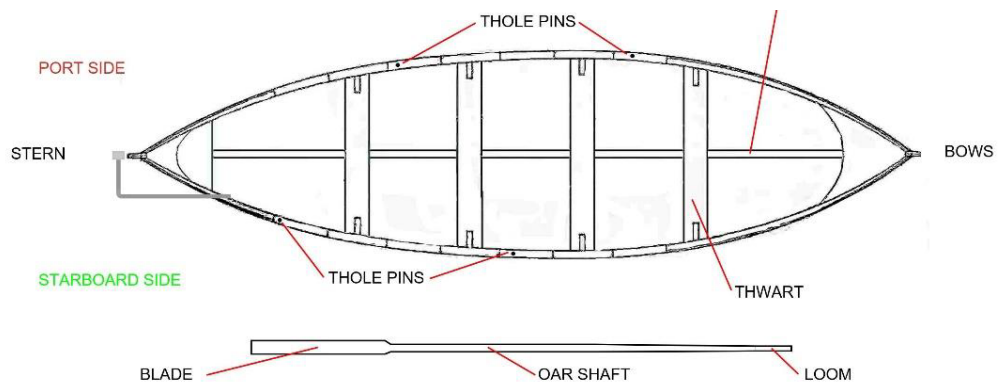
Positioning/Orientating the Boat

When operating close to a hazard, e.g. the slipway when launching or landing the boat when windy, the cox must be in full command to the crew in order to orientate the boat correctly and move away from the hazard. This requires the cox to be able to quickly identify and command individual rowers to row or back down.



Parts of a skiff





Who should go where, when

Our crews are usually a mix of fitness and experience. However, if conditions are challenging or you want to create a dream team, these are the ideal positions:

Stroke doesn't need to be strong, just good at keeping a consistent rhythm and experienced enough to act on commands quickly.

Two and Three are the engine – their position propels the boat most efficiently, so ideally they will be of similar build and strength to row in time with each other easily and get the boat moving well.

Most leverage for turning comes from Bow, so have a strong rower there and while this isn't as important during regular rowing, it is during a race.

Make sure that heavy and light members balance across the boat, known as trimming the boat.

Rowing Technique

- **Straight Back:** Erect but not stiff ... swinging from the loins only at the hips and not from any point in the middle of his back as a secondary pivot. [This] eases the respiratory organs by opening the chest cage.
- **Swing:** The time occupied coming forward should be the body's rest; an erect head and open chest will enable the heart and lungs to work freely and easily. Any tendency to rush the swing must be checked ... As the body swings the hands should be at the same time stretching and reaching out as if constantly striving to touch something which is as constantly evading them.
- **Use of the Arms:** The arms must be straight when swinging back. They must be considered as merely connecting rods between the body and oar. The use of the biceps in rowing should be discouraged, as the [rower] who finishes [their] stroke by the aid of the biceps infallibly dog ears [their] elbows and sticks them out at right angles to [their]

ribs, giving a weak as well as a cramped and ugly finish ... It is important that the oar should be pulled into the chest and not the chest up to the oar. This latter will certainly shorten the stroke prematurely, and spoil the rhythm of the swing.

- **Hanging at the Chest:** The oar must not hang at the chest. The hands must come away quickly, otherwise it will be necessary to rush forward in the swing to make up lost ground. This spoils the swing and taxes the endurance of the [rower] ...

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