

SLRC COXING INFORMATION

Adapted from coxing clinic

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Coxing

SLRC operates under an “everyone coxes” approach in order to enable us to get as many rowers out on the water as possible. It is important that all rowers have a level of coxing proficiency so that when it is your turn in the cox seat, the coach and your rowers have confidence in you so that everyone has a safe and productive rowing session. Coxing may not be your favorite role, but keep in mind that knowing how to cox will make you a better rower.

Without a proficient coxswain, the boat does not steer straight, the crew may not be properly relaxed and focused for workouts or races, and most importantly, rower safety may be compromised. A proficient coxswain has safety in mind as a first priority, steers straight, can motivate the crew to row their best, provide some humor when it is most needed, and keep his or her head in difficult situations. A proficient cox will also make the workout more efficient by anticipating and starting, staying and stopping next to the other crews. Remember, a cox'n is a valuable part of practice; if you are more prepared to do the job right, you and your boat will have a better row!

Safety

Your primary concern as a cox is to **maintain the safety of the people and equipment** in your charge. It is your responsibility to see that no one is hurt getting the boat in or out of the water, and that the boat is not damaged in the process. On the water, even if you remember nothing else, you must give steering first priority. If you see a hazardous situation developing, do not hesitate to bring the boat to a stop (“Weigh enough! Check it hard!”) if that is the only way to avoid a collision with debris, the shore, another boat, or a launch. Because there are often a number of crews on the water at the same time, we need to be especially alert.

In an emergency, you, the Cox, will be responsible for directing your crew out of danger. If you believe a crewmember or a piece of equipment is in trouble, immediately “weigh enough!” to stop the boat and assess the situation. Be prepared to flag the coach for further help.

Communication

After ensuring the safety of your crew and equipment, your biggest task as a cox is to communicate effectively. You play several roles. **You are the ninth (or fifth) member of the team.** You are in charge of your boat, giving the rest of the crew directions. Occasionally, you will need to act as their coach as well. And you are the only means of communication between the coach and your rowers out on the water. The more you cox, the better your communication skills will become.

- **Clarity:** Be sure your commands are decisive, loud and easily understood. For example, prepare your rowers for a command by hesitating after saying “ready all?...” Be clear when explaining drills, and make sure YOU understand what the coach wants you to do before you proceed. If you are in doubt about a coach’s instructions, raise your hand and ask him/her to repeat the commands.
- **Tone:** Everyone responds to an upbeat, encouraging tone of voice. Be firm when necessary, but above all, keep a sense of humor. Misunderstandings are going to occur, and you can choose to get on with the practice with a cheerful response. **Although you are in charge, be part of your team;** let your rowers know you’d welcome their help and are prepared to admit your mistakes. However, since you are in charge of the crew, it is important that you do not let your own nervousness take over the boat. **Never panic.**

- **Coaching:** Don't be seduced by the sense of power that comes with giving orders. **The coach is in charge.** No matter how much you think you know about rowing, you don't know as much as he/she does. Except in an emergency, don't talk while the coach is speaking. Especially in the beginning, stick to giving directions, with only an occasional comment. We're all tempted to tell someone what they're doing wrong – remember to tell them when they're doing something right. Phrasing corrections in a positive way is more helpful to your crew. For example, instead of the negative, "don't sky your blade," say "raise your hands at the finish."
- **Silence is golden:** Sometimes it's tempting to talk too much as a cox. Remember it's helpful to let your crew to row in silence. You have a lot to think about to do your job well, and so do your rowers. Try to find a balance of talking and quiet times. If it's not essential, don't say it; you'll only distract your rowers. If you talk nonstop, your rowers will tune you out.

Equipment

When you've confirmed that you will be coxing, collect the gear you will need to take with you. Cox boxes, buckets for shoes/water bottles can be found in the boathouse.

- **Extra clothes:** It's always colder than you think on the water, so when it's cool, take an extra jacket (preferably water-resistant), hat and gloves. Check the lost and found for extra layers. A foam seat pad or towel can also help. Don't hesitate to make yourself as comfortable as is practical, since you will be able to concentrate better if you're not shivering or constantly shifting in your seat.
- **Cox Box:** Unplug one of the boxes sitting in the cox box rack; check to make sure it's adequately charged. Your cox box should have a head strap. When plugging into the boat, make sure that the plugs inside the connector line up with the holes in the cox box. Test for sound and adjust the volume so that the whole boat can hear you. **Cox boxes should always be carried by their handles, never by the microphone cords.** Any broken boxes should be reported to the coach. Always plug a box back in for charging upon its return to the rack.

Getting the Boat Out of the House

Once you have your equipment in hand, get your crew together near your assigned boat. Make sure they have taken the correct oars out first. Take a minute to figure out the best way to get the boat off the rack and out of the boathouse. This will depend on which rack the boat is located.

Over-head:

- Carefully lift the boat slightly and move it off the rack. (**Hands on. Up an inch. And out of racks.**)
- Down to shoulders, splitting opposite the riggers. (**Split to shoulders, and split.**)
- Walk the boat slowly out of the boathouse. (**Walk it out slowly, watch the riggers.**)

Shoulder-high:

- Carefully lift the boat slightly and move it off the rack. (**Hands on. Up an inch and Up. Slide it out.**)
- Over head, down to shoulders, splitting opposite the riggers. (**Up over head, and Up. Show your split, and Down.**)
- Walk the boat out slowly. (**Walk it out, watch the riggers.**)

Waist-high:

- Each rower reaches across the boat and grips the gunnels or sides of the boat. Carefully lift the boat slightly and move it off the rack. (**Hands On. Up an inch, and Up. Walk it out of racks.**)

- While rowers cradle the boat, starting at bow end, every other rower ducks under or walks around one at a time, and grips the side of the boat. (**Every other rower go around.**)
- Each rower should now be holding only their side of the boat, at waist height.
- Lift to shoulders opposite the riggers. (**Up to shoulders, and Up.**)
- Walk the boat slowly out of the boathouse. (**Walk it Out. Watch the riggers.**)

On the Floor:

- Roll boat out from under the rack by placing hands on the boat and rolling to center of boat bay. (**Hands On. Roll it out.**)
- Rowers walk around and line up opposite their riggers. (**Every other rower walk around.**)
- Lift to shoulders. Walk the boat slowly out of the house. (**Up to waist, and Up. Up to shoulders, and Up. Walk it out, and watch the riggers.**)

Important things to remember:

- Stand at the bow while coxing the boat out of the boathouse.
- Watch the riggers on the boat on the rack above yours. The most common accident is scraping the bottom of your boat against the riggers above. You may have to tell your crew to lower the boat to clear the riggers above.
- Be sure the boat is walked out through the center of the doors (make sure the doors are opened completely) and that the riggers on both sides are clear.

Getting the Boat into the Water

The rowers will stand at the edge of the dock, take the boat overhead and then roll it down into the water. (**Weigh Enough. Over head, and Up. Toes to the edge. Roll to waist, and Roll. Gently place it in the water.**) Make sure when placing the boat in the water that the skeg is protected at the stern of the boat. The skeg must not touch the dock, or it will break off.

Ports to get oars, starboards to get oarlocks. Plug the cox box in and test it.

Getting into the Boat

Ask the rowers to count down when ready. Ask the rowers on the water side to push out their oars. (**Oars Out or Run Your Oars. One foot in, and down.**) Cox gets in the boat LAST.

Have everyone lean away from the dock to keep the riggers clear of it as you walk the boat down the dock. When there are a number of crews trying to launch, you may have to tell your crew to make their adjustments of foot stretchers/poppers on the water. You will take the boat out by pairs or fours, rowing lightly under the **MIDDLE** of the bridge. (**Lean away and walk it down, watching the riggers. Stern pair, from the catch, Ready, Row.**)

Traffic Flow

The general traffic pattern on Creve Coeur Lake is clockwise. However, go in the direction the coach tells you. More often than not, finding good water to row in does not allow for following the proper traffic pattern.

Stay alert for the following hazards:

- Wakes—Alert your crew to stay relaxed as they row through a wake. Tell them which side it's coming from.

- Debris—Steer around it. If you get close to something floating in the water, tell the rowers on that side to “watch your oars”.
- Fishing boats/kayaks/canoes—Don’t expect them to move. We share the lake with others, so please be considerate of them; it is your who must get out of the way (go around them)

Steering

Once you’re away from the dock, the workout has started. Your most important job on the water is to steer clear of any hazards, and to maintain as straight a course as possible.

To steer: Grasp the cords at your sides with both hands. Push your right hand forward to turn right. Push your left hand forward to turn left. In a bow-coxed four, push the lever to the right to turn right; push the lever to the left to turn left.

It takes practice to learn how a boat will react to steering. Usually we all over-steer, and over correct, as novice coxes. Remember that the faster a boat goes, the greater the effect of the rudder. In other words, at high speeds, a small steering correction is all that is needed. When the boat is going very slowly, you won’t be able to steer with the rudder and will have to have the rowers adjust your direction by pulling harder/leg pressure.

Ideally, you will steer only when the oars are in the water, not on the recovery. Steering this way takes practice, but it will affect the set of the boat less (when rowing by all eight). It is also possible to ask for more pressure from either ports or starboards to help get you around a corner. Remember to ask for equal pressure again when you are headed correctly.

Warn rowers when it’s your steering that is causing the boat to go ‘off keel’. They will appreciate knowing what’s causing the change in the set of the boat.

To steer a straight course, set a point. Look ahead of the boat and pick a target, such as a tall tree or other easily distinguishable feature. By keeping that point ahead of you, you will avoid carving a serpentine path down the lake. Always make sure you are aiming correctly before giving the command to row. At a standstill, you can adjust your point, by asking the bow or 2-seat to “touch it” or “tap it”, or take a light stroke.

Avoid collisions and confusion; remember to communicate as often as necessary with the coach and other boats.

Warm-Up

As you begin the practice, it is important to let the rowers loosen up. Row away from the dock by twos (or fours) at light pressure. Wait for the coach on the far side of the bridge, but row to a location where you will not obstruct the other boats entering or exiting the bridge area. Usually the coach will direct you from there, starting drills as a warm-up. In general, warm-up includes drills where rowers are rotated every two minutes. When rowers are not rowing, remind them to set the boat for their teammates by keeping a steady upward pressure on the underside of the oar handle. If it’s cold outside, be sure to switch rowers more often so that no one sits shivering for more than 1-2 minutes.

Turning the Boat

To turn the boat, you ask one side to row and the other to back it down. (**Starboards to row, Ports to back. Ready, Row.**)

Landing

Bringing the boat into the dock can be a nerve-wracking event, even for experienced coxes. There are a few things to keep in mind.

- Come directly under the middle of the bridge. When the water level is low in the lake, there are many rocks near the shore lurking just below the surface, waiting to catch blades or, worse yet, the hull of the boat.
- Once clear of the bridge, have the stern pair row arms and back only to bring you slowly towards the dock at no pressure for absolutely minimum boat speed. Be ready to ask one side or the other to add pressure or go light. Be sure that all other rowers know to sit still as movement in the boat with throw off the boat's point.
- Approach the dock slowly, but with some momentum. At a point which you will recognize as you become more experienced, stop rowing and ask the rowers to lean away from the dock. This action will turn the boat parallel to the dock, and your momentum should carry you close enough for a perfect landing. Remember that someone should be on the dock to catch you before you land, either a coach or a rower from a crew which landed before you.
- After docking, Cox gets out of the boat first.
- To ensure the boat doesn't flip, make sure all rowers are out of the boat before any of the oars are pulled across. **(One foot Up, and Out. Starboards take oars up.)**

Getting the Boat Out of the Water

Once you have your equipment in hand, get your crew together near the boat. Have the rowers get hands on and lift the boats to waist and over head. Split to correct side and walk it up the dock. Once the boat is clear of the dock have the rowers turn the boat around so the stern enters the boathouse first. **(Hands on. Up to waist and Up. Up over heads, and Up. Split to shoulders, and Split. Walk it up.)**

Once you're closer to the boathouse, have the rowers weigh enough and drop the boat to waist while you quickly wipe the boat down with a towel. **(Weigh Enough. Down to waist, and Down.)** Once the boat is wiped down, bring it back up to shoulders and walk it into the boathouse. **(Up to Shoulders, and Up)** Put the boat back on its assigned rack, making sure that the boat's gunnels rest on the racks, not on a rigger or on the bow/stern deck. Hang up the wet towel and plug in the cox box.

Overhead:

- Lift the boat overhead. **(Up over head, and Up.)**
- Slide the boat back on to the rack. Watch the riggers. **(Slide it in slowly, Watch the riggers.)**

Shoulder high:

- Gently slide the boat onto the rack. Watch the riggers. **(Up over head, and Up. Down to low head, and Down. Slide it in slowly. Watch the riggers.)**

Waist high:

- Drop the boat down to waist. Have one side go around the boat, one at a time. **(Down to waists, and Down. Cradle it. One at a time, go around, and Go.)**
- Carefully slide the boat onto the rack. **(Walk it in slowly. Watch the riggers, and Down.)**

On the floor:

- Bring the boat down to waists, roll the lowboys (rollers) into position, then gently place the boat down. Move the crew to one side and roll the boat in. **(Down to waists, and Down. Set it down gently. Walk around. Hands on. Roll it in slowly. Watch the riggers.)**

Some Miscellaneous Items

Rowers all have pet peeves and favorite coxing styles. Think of the ways that certain coxes have helped you to row better. Sometimes, it's helpful to ask your crew for comments about what worked and what didn't work during your practice. When giving commands, tell the rowers what they are going to do and then have them do it. When on the water, tell rowers in advance what is going to happen. For example: (**Bow pair IN in 2. This is 1, and 2**).

When in doubt, ASK. If you ever pass a boat, make sure that they know you are there. **Never** overtake a boat when coming under the bridge to land. Wait your turn.

Try to sit still; you can really affect the set of the boat.

We all make mistakes; just learn from them and move on.