**BIR Coxing**

The coxswain is responsible for ensuring that the crew works together as a coordinated unit. This set of hints, when combined with common sense and enthusiasm, will enable novice coxswains to face the more routine situations with a reasonable idea of what is expected of them. Some of this information is specific to Eagle Harbor and Bainbridge Island Rowing. All rowers, and coxswains, are expected to read the *BIR Safety Guidelines* (available in boatyard shed and online at BIR website).

The most important thing the coxswain does is keep people and boats safe. The duties of a coxswain (in order of priority): Safety, Seeing, Steering, Giving Commands, Enthusiasm and Motivation, Technical Corrections and Advice.

**I. Giving Commands**

The coxswain will give specific commands in a clear, authoritative voice. Most of the commands will be based on a three-part sequence, starting with the **description**, then the **question**, “READY?” - and finally by the **command** to move. These commands should come in an even cadence so that the crew will act in unison. Make sure everyone is quiet and listening. Speak loudly. Do not proceed if you do not have everyone’s attention.

**1) Moving Boats**

→***To move a boat stored on a rack to slings so foot stretchers can be adjusted:***

* “HANDS ON (the name of the boat)”

* “READY TO LIFT AND SHIFT?” (pause) “READY” (pause) “LIFT” (pause) “AND SHIFT” (riggers of the boat being carried must stay clear of the riggers of stored boats)
* “READY TO GO UP TO SHOULDERS” (pause) “READY” (pause) “UP”

* “READY TO GO UP AND OVER HEAD” (pause) ”READY” (pause) “UP”

 (state whether you want them facing in-the-house or out-of-the-house)

* “AND ROLL DOWN TO STRETCHERS”.

*Rowers adjust foot stretchers, check spacers and rigging nuts.*

*Cox checks that pin bolts are secure, and that cox box and microphone work.*

→***To move a boat that is right side up from stretchers to water:***

Make sure you have your cox equipment ready (cox box, microphone, cushion, pfd) before you start commands to move the boat

Make sure everyone is on same side of boat, two or four at bow, two or four at stern

Have rowers pair up by height. Shorter rowers at stern.

* “HANDS ON”

* “READY TO GO UP AND OVER HEAD” (pause) “READY” (pause) “UP”

* “SPLIT FROM BOW”

***First person at bow will prepare to move RIGHT***

***Rowers alternate sides from that person*** *(2nd person moves left, 3rd person moves right,*

***ALL Rowers in one movement*** *SPLIT Right, Left, etc. AND lower boat to SHOULDERS*

*Cox makes sure all rowers are clear of the riggers.*

* “WALK IT OUT, WATCH THE RIGGERS”

*Cox and Rowers make certain that the riggers of the boat being carried do not hit entrance gate*

*Remind rowers they should all have both hands on the boat and should feel the weight of the boat on their shoulders. If they don’t feel the weight, they need to push UP with their hands and arms to bear their portion of the boat’s weight.*

*The cox will then guide the boat to the edge of the water with the bow facing city dock. Stop at water’s edge – have boat parallel to the water. Decide whether there is enough room for launching. If not, do an “about face” and walk down the beach towards Queen City Dock.*

* “READY TO WALK IT IN “ (pause) “WALK IT IN.

*Make sure all rowers walk in to high calf/low knee water height. Make sure bow and stern are even, parallel to shore.*

* “READY TO GO UP AND OVER HEAD” (pause) “READY ” (pause) “UP”

* “READY TO ROLL IT IN” (pause) “READY” (pause) “ROLL IT IN”

* “PORTS GET OARS, STARBOARDS OPEN OARLOCKS”

→***Getting in the boat:***

*Rowers ready their oar, check gate nut, stow gear*

*Cox plugs in cox box and makes sure it works*

* “COUNT DOWN FROM BOW WHEN READY”

*Cox gets in the boat before or as the rowers are getting in*

* “READY?” (pause) “ONE FOOT UP”, “AND IN”
* “BOW PUSH OFF”
* “TWO SEAT ROW”

→***When approaching the beach after the row:***

*Ask bow seat to keep an eye on the shore and water depth. If necessary, bow seat will need to exit the boat to keep the shell and crew safe. The entire crew is responsible for the safety.*

→***To Get Boat from Water to Stretchers:***

*After landing boat at beach,*

* “READY” “ONE FOOT UP AND OUT”
* “STARBOARDS TAKE OARS TO THE BEACH”
* “PORTS CLOSE OARLOCK GATES”

*Cox removes coxbox, microphone and cushion seat from boat*

*Rowers remove water bottles, and any extra gear*

*Once everyone is ready to take boat out of water:*

* “HANDS ON”

* “READY TO GO UP AND OVER HEAD FACING CITY DOCK” (pause) “READY” (pause) “UP”

* “SPLIT FROM STERN”

*Remind rowers to keep straight arms so everyone can get heads out from under the boat before it comes down to shoulders.*

*Boats normally go up to boatyard STERN-FIRST*

***First person at stern will prepare to move RIGHT***

***Rowers alternate sides from that person*** *(2nd person moves left, 3rd person moves right,*

***ALL Rowers in one movement*** *SPLIT Right, Left, etc. AND lower boat to SHOULDERS*

*Cox makes sure all rowers are clear of the riggers.*

* “WALK IT UP, STERN SWING LEFT”

*Rowers walk the boat up to boatyard,*

*Cox makes sure boatyard gate is unlocked and open. Have rowers “weigh enough” on the flat road and lower boat to high waist, if necessary, while cox opens gate. Watch that bow of boat (back end going up) does not hit tree. Cox get stretchers set up in boatyard. When 7 and 2 seats are even with stretchers, call:*

* “WEIGH ENOUGH”
* “READY TO GO DOWN TO HIGH WAIST” (pause) ”DOWN TO HIGH WAIST” (pause) “AND SETTLE TO STRETCHERS”

 *Cox should watch position of stretchers and make sure stretchers do not hit rigging.*

Rowers bring up oars and spray with fresh water.

Spray boat with fresh water, inside and out. Wipe down outside of boat with clean rags. Flip boat over (can repeat commands to go up and overhead and down or roll the boat in stretchers)

Wipe down tracks with clean, dry rag.

Report any damage or equipment problems to coach and red flag any problems.

Put boat away (all rowers on same side of boat, hands on, up and overhead, split to shoulders...) on proper rack.

Clean and dry cox box and microphone and put back in boat shed. Make sure cox box is turned OFF and plugged in for charging.

**2) On the Water**

Row away from the beach by fours, once past docks, weigh enough, have rowers tie in and count down from bow when ready.

When giving a command to row, include:

1. **Who** will be rowing, i.e., “All Eight” “Bow Four” “Stern Four”

2. **Where** to sit to start (at the catch, or at the release, or half-slide, etc.) and what kind of stroke you want. i.e., arms only, legs only, half-slide, full-slide

3. **What** power: paddle, half-pressure, full-pressure

4. **How** are the oars to row “Square blade or feather”

5. **How long** they’ll be rowing i.e., 30 strokes, 3 minutes, 500 meters…..

6. **When**: i.e. “In two…” “Five to build and then…”

It is useful to have rowers start rowing from the release. Rowers should sit at the release, with oars squared and buried. Have them check their marks (what height is oar handle when oar is fully buried? That is where rower should pull in to on each stroke).

* “SIT AT THE RELEASE” “OARS SQUARED AND BURIED”
* “READY ALL” (pause) “ROW”

Remind your crew to push down with the outside hand before pushing oar away from body. An unbalanced finish happens when the blades are feathered out versus a correct clean down and away of the hands.

Remember when giving commands while rowers are rowing, start with **WHEN**.

* For example, “**IN TWO”** “BRING THE RATE DOWN TWO” “THAT’S ONE AND TWO”.

By starting the command with **WHEN**, the rowers can anticipate and prepare.

When underway, novice coxswains do not need to comment on making the crew faster or improving technique. Leave that to the coach.

Listen to what the coach says, and use that information to remind the crew what to focus on as you move through the piece. Your main job is ***seeing*** and ***steering*** a straight course.

**a) Seeing**

Sit still and upright in the seat. You may need to sit on a cushion or life jacket for some bottom support. The Jim and Ted (Fours) are the most comfortable to cox. You may need to tilt your head to the side to check what is in front of you, but try not to lean your body out of the boat.

The main way to keep the crew safe is to watch. Watch all around you. Watch for floating logs and dead heads in the water, especially after high tides. Yes, a coxswain should focus on the rowers and where the bow is pointing. But s/he also should continually scan the waters off the port and starboard sides of the boat. Don’t forget to scan behind the boat too. Many accidents occur when a coxswain calls “weigh enough” and stops the boat without first looking behind to see if any traffic is coming. Stay in control of your environment as much as possible. You are the eyes for your crew.

Be extra aware when rowing at sunset and sunrise. Heading into the sun can be blinding. If you can’t see what is fifty feet ahead of you “WEIGH ENOUGH” (stop).

**b) Steering**

1) To steer the boat, you’ll use a line connected to the rudder. Hold the rudder lines lightly between thumb and forefinger. If you’re in a stern-loader, the line will be at your sides. You turn the rudder by pushing or pulling on one of the lines.

2) Making a boat turn is fairly simple. Pushing your left hand forward on the left line turns the boat to PORT (your left); pushing your right hand forward turns the boat to STARBOARD (your right). In other words, whichever hand you push forward is the direction the bow will turn.

3) How quickly the boat responds to the rudder depends on how quickly the boat is moving (which often depends on how many rowers are actually rowing). Novice coxs often think the rudder “is not working.” Practice steering in open water to get the feel of how the boat reacts to rudder steering. Pushing all the way forward on the line will turn the boat faster and more sharply than by pushing on it an inch at a time. This is an important point. In most situations, you’ll want to make small adjustments with the rudder. This is because the boat continues to turn one or two strokes after you make a correction.

4) **Always under-steer** your final target. When you are starting to cox give yourself plenty of time to react. The only situations in which you should make more than minor adjustments are when an obstacle appears suddenly in your path or you’re about to enter a big turn. In these types of situations, your job is to do whatever is necessary to keep your boat safe. For practice, if you see a buoy, see how quickly you can bring the boat to a stop. Use “WEIGH ENOUGH” (stop rowing) and “CHECK IT DOWN” (lightly square blades in water). How much time you have depends on the speed you were going and the current.

5) If the shell is in danger of hitting something, command “HOLD WATER NOW”. Rowers will square their blades in the water to stop the shell.

6) You may have heard debate about whether the cox should push on the steering line during the drive or during the recovery. If you’re new to coxing, don’t worry about this. Just concern yourself with getting your crew from Point A to Point B safely.

7) You can also turn the boat by calling for more or less rowing pressure between port and starboard rowers, or even one rower. For example, calling for “PRESSURE PORT FOR TWO” would mean all port rowers would row harder for two strokes. This should turn your bow to starboard (right). You may need to remind the rowers to return to “EVEN PRESSURE”, which means both sides pull equally.

8) Holding Your Point - Unless you are in the rare situation of being on flat water with no current, no wind and rowers who match each other perfectly, steering straight is not as easy as it might seem. Here’s how to do it. Look off your bow and find something tall in the distance in the direction you wish to travel. Say it’s a tree. You keep your bow pointing toward that tree by making small adjustments with the line. When heading out to Wycoff stay to the right but stay wide of the point, especially at low tide and if it’s clear pick a building in Seattle to aim for. Make small adjustments with the rudder to correct course.

Sometimes wind will blow you “off your point” a few degrees. Try to figure out ahead of time which way the wind will blow you so you can adjust your course before you get started. For example, if you decide to point on a tree but you notice your bow keeps drifting to the left of the tree, when maneuvering for your point place, aim your bow to the RIGHT of the tree, that is, into the wind. This will help you start on your point when it is time to go.

**II. Working With the Coach**

Find out from the Coach what the rowing plan is for the day. What is your crew working on? What drills will you do? Should you start by heading out of the harbor or in? What other boats are out?

You should keep your boat within sight of the Safety Launch at all times, unless otherwise instructed by the Coach. This might require you to stop, slow your crew, do pause drills, or row in a circle to allow the launch to catch up.

Whenever the coach is alongside working with the boat, it is important that you listen to what s/he is saying. You'll need to know what the focus is and what the problems are to assist the crew. Whenever a coach addresses you specifically, you should always raise your hand as an indication that you heard them. Whenever the coach is speaking, you must remain silent. If both of you are talking, the crew will hear nothing at all.

**III. Clothing and Warmth**

The general rule is that “too much is better than too little.” Dress in layers and be prepared for all weather. Dress to conserve heat in your head, neck, groin, sides of chest, hands and feet. They are, in approximately that order, the areas of greatest heat loss. Dressing in layers is the key, and long-sleeve synthetic t-shirts are an adaptable way to add layers under, over, or between your other clothes. They’re inexpensive, easy to wash, dry quickly, and you can put on quite a few without impairing your movement too seriously.

Turtlenecks are ideal for cold-weather coxing. A good combination is to wear a CoolMax shirt under a cotton, or a cotton blend shirt and then layer with fleeces and shells over them. You want to avoid cotton itself next to your skin because it holds moisture and wicks away heat.

Bicycling gloves are another form of non-rowing gear that works very well. They’re thinner and lighter and thus more dexterous for steering. Most of them are made out of a fabric which breathes a little, so they also work well worn as liners inside heavier gloves to add a layer when the weather turns very cold.

Polyester training pants for keeping warm, are moderately waterproof, and good for making it fairly easy to slide in and out of the bow compartment. It’s nice to have a pair of lined, and unlined pants to cover a range of temperatures. The lined pants, which lacrosse players wear, are excellent for coxing.

Hats – one for warmth (if necessary) and a baseball cap to block sun and rain – are good to have. Make sure you can position the microphone head strap over your hat. Sunglasses (especially polarized lenses that cut glare on the water) are also important.

High boots, waterproof socks, or dry socks to put on once you are in the boat will help keep your feet warm.

**IV. Equipment**

CHECK all pin bolts for tightness

CHECK Cox Box & Microphone in the boat for volume and if working properly

Cushion

PFD

Sunglasses

Hat

Cell phone or VHF radio to communicate with coach

Spacer tool

Spare parts: spacers, 7/16” wrench, or crescent wrench

Air Horn

Band-aids

**V. ROWING COMMANDS AND TERMS**

"READY ALL, ROW" – Coxswain call to begin rowing.

"WAY-ENOUGH! " (Also “WEIGH ENOUGH”) - Coxswain call to have all rowers stop rowing or stop walking with the boat overhead on the dock (used only in the US). Call actually sounds like "way-nuff".

"CHECK IT DOWN! " - Coxswain call that makes all the rowers drag their oar blades through the water perpendicularly, effectively stopping the boat.

"HOLD WATER! " - Coxswain call. Another way of saying CHECK IT DOWN.

"LET IT RUN! " - A command to stop rowing, holding the blades out of the water and parallel to the surface so the boat continues to glide.

BACK OR BACKING - To propel the shell backwards or to turn the boat by pushing the handle away from the body while the blade is in the water. Often one side of the boat backs while the other side rows in order to spin the shell around.

ONE FOOT UP, AND OUT” - command for exiting a team boat.

FULL SLIDE - Type of stroke where the seat is moved on the tracks, and the rower uses full movement of legs, back and arms.

HALF PRESSURE - The application of power in a racing shell such that the rowers are rowing half as hard as they can at full pressure. The rowers are pulling harder than they would at paddle pressure, but not as hard as if they were rowing at full pressure.

LAYBACK - The rower’s act of leaning back toward the bow during the stroke. Layback should not be more than a few degrees past vertical.

MISSING WATER - When the blade comes out of the water during the drive – creating surface waves, losing power and unsteadying the shell. Usually caused by not getting the blade in the water soon enough at the catch. Missed water equals less movement of the boat.

WASHING OUT - Similar to MISSING WATER except it means taking the blade out of the water too soon at the release.

PIECE - A term referring to any period of work performed in the shell or in training on the ergs: a "ten minute piece," a "500 meter piece," or a "20 stroke piece," for example.

"POWER 10" (or 20 or 30 etc.) - Coxswain call to take a certain number of power strokes. A power stroke is a stroke that musters all the strength you can give.

PUDDLES - The marks left by the blade on the water after the release. The puddles indicate the “run” of the boat by showing how far it has traveled since the previous stroke.

RATING - The number of strokes rowed per minute.

REPECHAGE - A "second-chance" race for those crews that fail to qualify for a final from an opening heat. Repechage qualifiers move on to semifinals or finals, depending on the number of entries in an event.

RUN - The distance the boat moves after a stroke. Long run is very good. Run can be visually measured by the distance between the last puddle made by two-seat and where eight-seat's blade enters the water.

RUSHING THE SLIDE - Bad technique that causes check. Caused by sliding too quickly and abruptly toward the stern.

SET - The balance of the boat.

SETTLE - The part of the race (or other piece) where the crew decreases the rating from the initial high stroke rate to a lower pace that the crew will maintain until the final sprint.

SKYING - The incorrect action of carrying the hands too low during the recovery, especially when the rower dips his/her hands just prior to the catch. This action usually results in the blade being too high off the water’s surface.

SWING - Occurs when the entire crew is moving perfectly in unison and the shell seems to be moving very fast without much effort.

CRAB - A stroke that goes bad. The oar blade slices into the water at an angle and gets caught under the surface. A bad crab can catapult you out of the boat.

ERG (ERGO/ERGOMETER/ERG MACHINE) - A rowing machine designed to simulate the actual rowing motion; used for training and testing.

REGATTA - An organized crew race.

HEAD STYLE RACING is done in the fall and can be done on a river, where there are twists and turns. The shells do not line-up, but race against the clock, after starting one behind the other. You need not pass another crew to beat it, but if you pass someone that started in front of you, you have surely beat their time. The race distance is usually 3 miles long.

SPRINT RACING is done with the crews starting with the bow of their shells even and shells race parallel to each other. They start together, and the first crew to cross the finish line wins. We do this racing in the spring. On the collegiate level and internationally, the race distance is 2000 meters. High schools race 1500 meters. Master rowers (age 27 and older) race 1000 meters.

NOVICE - a rower in their first 12 months of rowing. Since it takes most people a while to refine the basics of rowing and racing, they can row against others of similar experience level.

From the *BIR Safety Guidelines*:

**Coxswains**

Qualifications and training

Coxswains will be trained by coaches, other experienced coxswains, and/or experienced rowers.

Coxswains will have reviewed the USRowing Safety Video “Ready All, Row” and, if possible, ridden in a shell or launch with an experienced rower/launch operator over the entire length of Eagle Harbor (east of the Aquatic Conservancy for launches) before executing coxswain duties the first time.

Off-water/preparatory safety

1. Do not row if there exists or is a threat of a) high winds, b) an electrical storm, or c) severely

restricted visibility (fog or driving rain/snow).

2. Ensure that your shell’s bow ball is present and fastened securely.

3. Before sunrise or if the boat will be underway after sunset, outfit your shell with navigation

lights with good batteries before launching.

4. Take unambiguous charge of boat handling from rack to slings, slings to water, and the reverse,

using standard commands with which rowers are familiar. Know these commands and exercise

them clearly and with authority.

On-water safety

1. Take unambiguous charge of boat operations from launching to landing using standard

commands with which rowers are familiar. Know these commands and exercise them clearly

and with authority.

2. Know and adhere to the Eagle Harbor traffic pattern (see Part 3, Other Information: Eagle

Harbor Traffic Pattern). Know the location of permanent mooring balls, pencil buoys, and

lighted buoys.

3. Be alert for the unexpected: entry of row boats into the channel between live-aboard boats and

docks, entry of power or sailing vessels into the channel that may not see you, logs or other large

objects adrift on the water, boats moored in unexpected locations, wakes from passing power

boats, etc. Do not hesitate to rapidly stop the boat if necessary by yelling “Way enough! Hold

water!”

4. Be attentive to the condition of the tide and its effect on creating shoal water, particularly at

Stetson Point and at the head of Eagle Harbor. Do not run the boat aground!

5. Return to shore immediately if there arises a) an electrical storm, b) high winds, or c) severely

restricted visibility (fog or driving rain/snow). If an electrical storm arises, head for nearest

shore, not the boatyard!

6. Make note of equipment issues in the boat and work with rowers to ensure they are recorded in

the logbook upon landing and brought to the attention of the coach. If the issue is serious, seek

help from the coach/launch operator. If appropriate, return the boat ashore immediately for

repair.

7. All coxswains should be familiar with and prepared to carry out the Emergency Procedures

described in Part 2 of the *BIR Safety Guidelines*.