

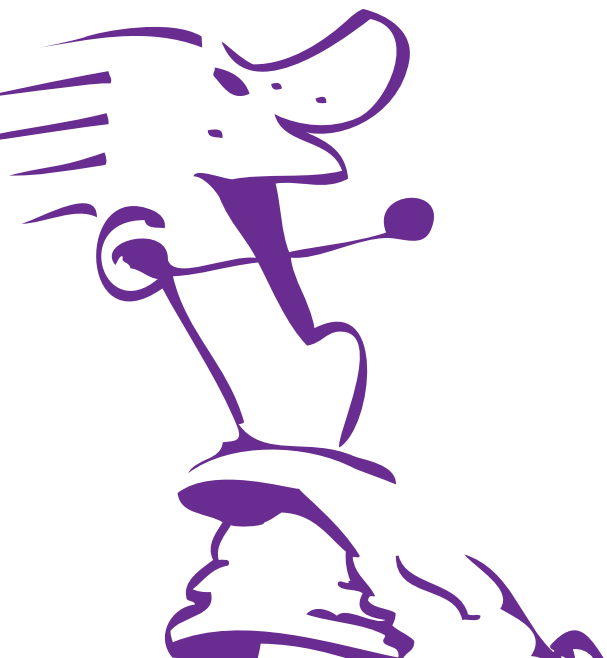
the good **COXSWAIN**

LAUNCHING &
LANDING THE BOAT



the good **COXSWAIN** 5

LAUNCHING &
LANDING THE BOAT



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*"Learning is like
rowing upstream;
not to advance
is to drop back"*

CHINESE PROVERB



the good COXSWAIN



5.1 INTRODUCTION

A good coxswain's leadership should be apparent before the boat is on the water. He will speak with confidence as the boat is prepared for the water and the rowers will follow with confidence. There will be no doubt that the coxswain is in command and has assumed responsibility for the safety of crewmembers and boat well before the crew takes its very first stroke.

A high percentage of injury and damage done to rowers and equipment can be attributed to the neglect shown during launching and landing. Too many conflicting commands, varying procedures and thoughtless actions before rowing, make a very simple task very hazardous.

The good coxswain will assume responsibility and immediately make his wishes clearly known. There cannot be conflicting demands upon the attention of the crew; they should hear only one voice. It will be that same voice that should be heard in the boat and it should be responded to in the very same way.

It is an ideal time to **"switch on"** the crew i.e. focus them and heighten their awareness. They should not only be aware of what they are about to do but also be aware of the voice that will direct them – they must know that they are in the hands of a good coxswain.

The coxswain is responsible for the boat and is in command of the boat at all times. It need not be moving on water it can be moving from the rack. The good coxswain will work to establish a routine for the launching of the boat. It is a routine with which the crew is familiar and encourages confidence in the coxswain's ability to take command. Early insistence upon following instruction in non-pressured, routine circumstances will develop a similar response when there are less predictable, more pressured circumstances on the water (especially at regattas).

I often thought that my job began when I sat in the boat. I would let the rowers get the boat out and then I would make a grand entrance. It made me feel like I had authority - they set the boat on the water for me. It also felt like I had them well trained - it would all happen without me saying anything - what control!

It was a long time before I realised that my crew could "take me, or leave me". The fact that I was expendable before the boat went on the water made me just as expendable when we were on the water - I didn't have to be listened to!

Xavier Bourke, Coxswain

5.2 CREW RESPONSIVENESS AT LAUNCH

The coxswain will have developed a sense of the crew's responsiveness before taking to the water and may be placed in a position to seek greater attention to his commands if there is no evidence of attentiveness (i.e. is the crew ready?) before the boat is on the water. Chief indicators to which the coxswain should be alert:



Unmotivated

Crew is slow to lay hands on the boat.



Distracted

Crew talking as commands are being given.



Unfocused

Forgotten items eg. clothing, water bottles, sunscreen, oar to water edge when the boat is to be placed on the water.



Unpunctual

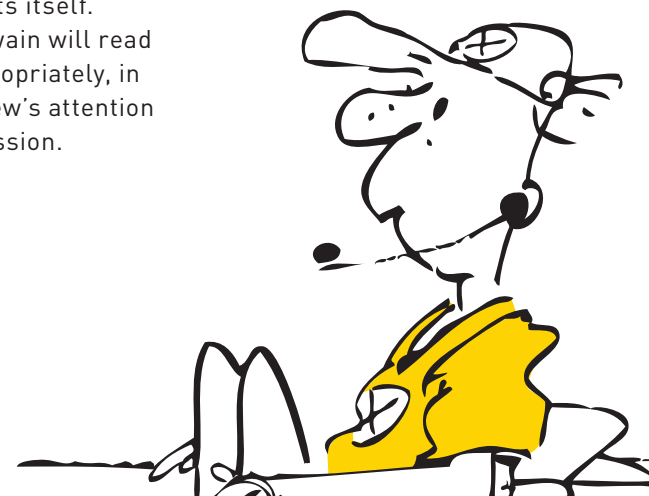
The need for rush i.e. haste and urgency in process.



Poor crew/cox dynamic

No immediate response to coxswain command.

The coach, as much as the coxswain, should be alert to these sign posts. In the first instance, the good coxswain should bring these observations to the attention of the coach when the opportunity presents itself. Nevertheless, the good coxswain will read these signs and respond appropriately, in order to be assured of the crew's attention to what is required for the session.



What are the acceptable working conditions for a coxswain to work toward?

Commonly, what is required for each session is:









- 1 *Crew Safety*
Avoid risk to the physical well-being of the rowers.
- 2 *Crew training focus or race focus*
Spend mental and physical energy only on what is necessary to achieve a faster boat.
- 3 *Crew respect*
Each rower is to recognise and appreciate the role of each crew member, including the coxswain.
- 4 *Boat care*
Equipment continues to function as it has been designed i.e. fast boat.

Each of these remain the constant theme for the coxswain throughout a rowing session. If any of these are put to question during the launching process, it is the immediate responsibility of the coxswain to address them.



STRATEGIES FOR GAINING THE CREW'S ATTENTION BEFORE LAUNCH

The following strategies may be helpful if the crew's inattentiveness is apparent:

-  The boat is returned, or remains on the rack, while the coxswain gathers the crew to remind them of their intentions for the session.
-  The coxswain "names, names" publicly identifying rowers that are not responding appropriately.
-  The coxswain speaks louder and with greater strength of purpose.
-  The coxswain insists upon crew silence as the launching process begins.
-  Make slow or late crew members aware of their failure to "think crew".
-  Give the crew a brief summary of the launching process before placing hands on the boat. Allow opportunity for questioning.
-  Be sure to remain consistent in commands and routine.
-  The coach supports/reinforces the coxswain and his launching procedure.

The routine and commands for launching the boat are obviously not an end in themselves; they are a means by which the crew and coxswain focus their attentions. They also establish the authority 'of' and respect 'for' the coxswain.



5.3 COMMUNICATION WITH THE COACH

The good coxswain should also remember to devote some time to speaking with the coach prior to launching. The coxswain must know the focus of the coach before going on the water and be prepared to ask questions:



What is going to be the technical focus for the session?



Are there any particular drills to be used?



Can you explain the drills to me?



How far do we want the crew to row?



What if... happens again?



What do you want me to report back on?

Be prepared to communicate with the coach prior to, during and immediately after a session.

The relationship with the coach is important because the cox must be able to speak on the coach's behalf with the full and confident endorsement of the coach.

Once armed with the coach's brief the coxswain may begin the process for launching.

5.4 MOVING THE BOAT FROM THE BOATHOUSE

It is worth noting that racking within the boathouse varies greatly from club to club. Some clubs have the luxury of unlimited space where the distance between racks causes no difficulty in the manoeuvring of a boat by rowers. However, most clubs do not have unlimited space and must show a great deal of care in taking a boat from the rack for example, lifting a boat too high will risk making contact with the riggers of a boat above. Not lifting a boat high enough risks scraping riggers along the hull of the boat below.

Also, boat-bays vary in width and sometimes make it impossible for rowers to walk either side of a fully overturned boat with any degree of comfort. The call, “**watch the riggers**” by any coxswain is a matter of necessity not just habit. The protrusion of riggers from the hull, make the riggers likely instruments of damage to bystanders and surrounding equipment. It certainly doesn’t add to the structural integrity of the boat being moved either, if it is constantly used as a battering ram.

The coxswain must be the eyes of the crew, even now. Rowers rely upon the coxswain to warn them of any likely collisions within the boatshed, let alone on the water. It is appropriate therefore that the coxswain place himself, prior to the boat being moved, in a place that allows him to have the best vantage point to warn of any likely damage or danger.

Commonly, the coxswain will stand at the stern of the boat where he may not only see the entire length of the hull but have a very direct care for the rudder and fin. **A guiding hand placed on the stern and a watchful eye looking along the boat will limit possible damage.**

The good coxswain will know the racking within the shed, it will dictate how much needs to be said and how much extra care needs to be taken. For example, if a boat bay is narrow, it may require the crew to roll the boat from the rack rather than pulling it straight out. **A rolled boat is a boat that has its riggers on one side facing up and on the other side facing down, rather than side to side.** This limits the carrying width of the boat within a narrow space. This is sometimes referred to as “**half-arming**” the boat.

Before moving the boat each rower has taken his oar to the water’s edge, removed shoes (replaced with water-suitable footwear), placed drink bottles and other items of necessity near the bank and has moved to the end of the boat opposite their rigger.

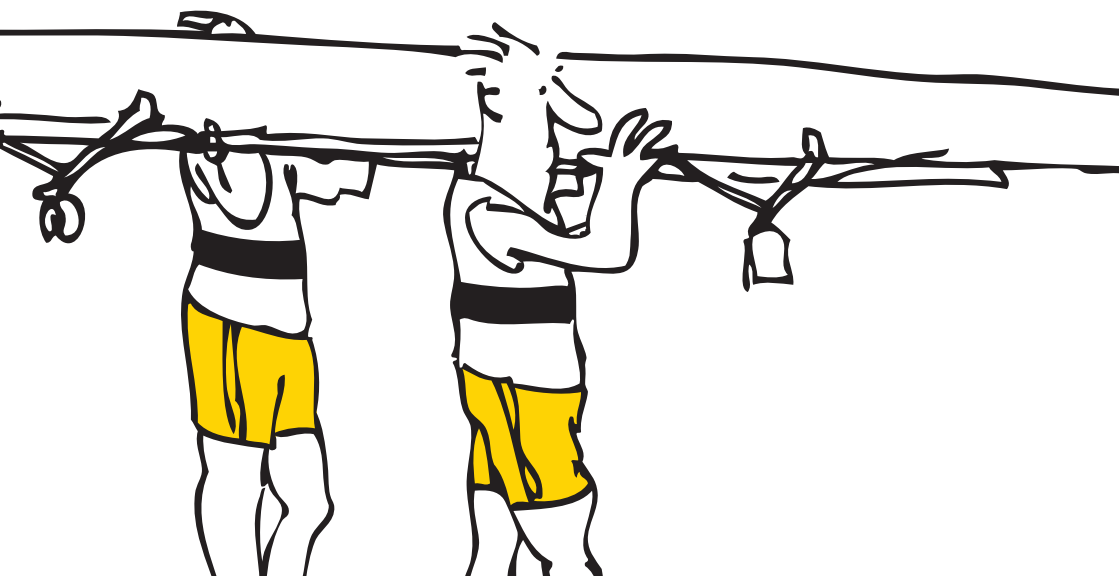
The coxswain, meanwhile, is suitably positioned at the stern, with cox box in hand. The coxswain or the stroke-seat rower is then ready to begin issuing commands. **Commonly, it will be the rower in stroke seat that issues the commands.** Nevertheless, the coxswain should know the sequence of commands and be instrumental in guaranteeing that each crewmember responds to the given command with urgency and due care.

The command sequence will vary slightly according to boat positioning within the boathouse but would commonly follow the sequence below.

But **before commands can be issued rowers are required to position themselves at either end of the boat.** Effective and efficient boat moving is not achieved if the rowers are spread haphazardly along the length of the boat.

Therefore, **stern-end rowers should be gathered at the stern of the boat; bow-end rowers should be gathered at the bow of the boat.**

Rowers should then be divided between either sides of the boat at their prospective ends. Ideally, this division will have the rower standing on the opposite side of the boat to his rigger.



The crew is then ready to lift the boat from the shelf by the gunwales.

If this is to be done from a shelf that is waist high or lower the command sequence would be:



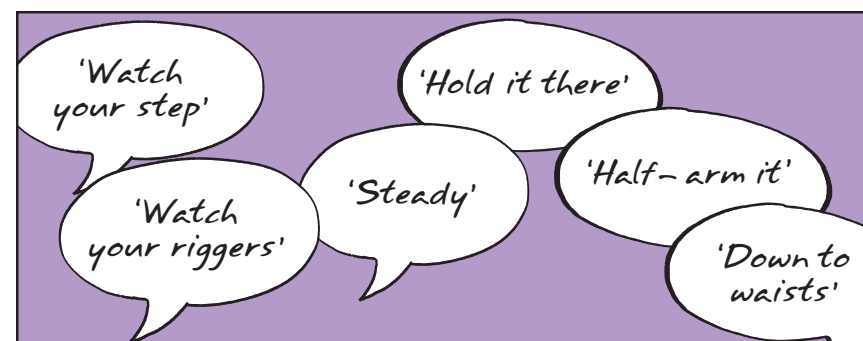
Often a crew will feel that the weight of a boat is more manageable if rested on the shoulder rather than carried at the waist with the arms. Although waist and shoulders are perfectly acceptable the rower's preference is often the easier shoulder position.



5.4 MOVING THE BOAT FROM THE BOATHOUSE cont'd...

Carrying a boat at shoulders requires the boat to be level with the rowers head and will limit his peripheral vision on the boat carrying side. It will also limit the rower's capacity to turn his head or look anywhere but straight ahead.

The coxswain must be aware of the limited vision the rower now has and should be vigilant for any unseen obstacles, human or otherwise, of which the rower is unaware. Stray oars or collapsed trestles can be unseen hurdles in the boat carrying area – the coxswain may remove them before carrying the boat from the shed or give due warning.



Any of the commands issued (note the speech bubbles above) would be the coxswain's prerogative if there was risk to the crew, equipment or bystanders. From the coxswain's position looking along the length of the boat or guiding from the leading end of the boat these hurdles should be obvious. **Where the coxswain stands will be according to the relative risk. It may be necessary to move between the stern and the bow.**

The cox may move to the bow of the boat (leading end) as the boat exits the doors of the boathouse and be able to guide the rowers into pedestrians or passing traffic. Once satisfied that all is clear the coxswain may retreat to the trailing end of the boat.

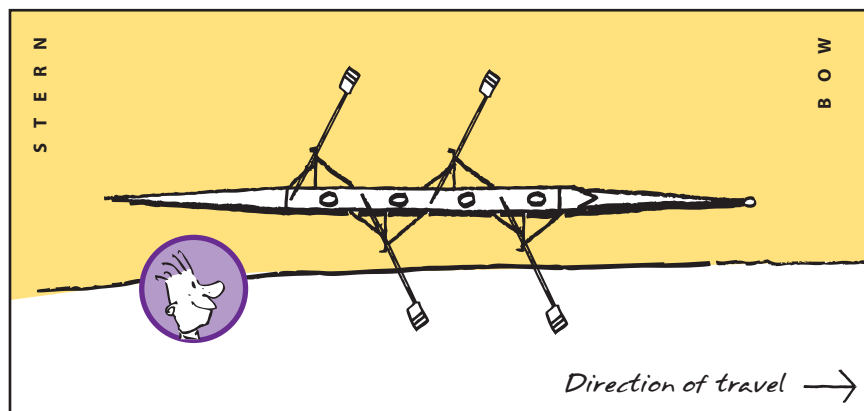
Understandably, the rowing boat is much like the heavy vehicles of the road – they need a wide turning arc – the leading end will swing one way, the trailing end the other. Coxswains should have a hand on trailing end to guide or be prepared to yell "Stop" or "All clear".



5.5 MOVING THE BOAT TO THE WATER

Which way should the boat swing as the crew turns the boat parallel to the waterway? Should the coxswain guide the rowers to swing the bow left or right?

Normally, **all boats when placed on the water will travel to the right** (in accordance with common traffic rules) therefore placing the stern to the left and bow to the right of the coxswain as he keeps the boat between himself and the water.



There will of course be exceptions but most waterways will require vessels to launch facing in the direction that will allow them to travel on the right hand side of the waterway (*or anti-clockwise*). **It pays to know your local water traffic management plan before placing the boat on the water.**

The coxswain will guide the inexperienced, or forgetful, rower to face the bow of the boat to the right as they move the boat parallel to the water's edge. As the rowers act upon this instruction with the coxswain watching

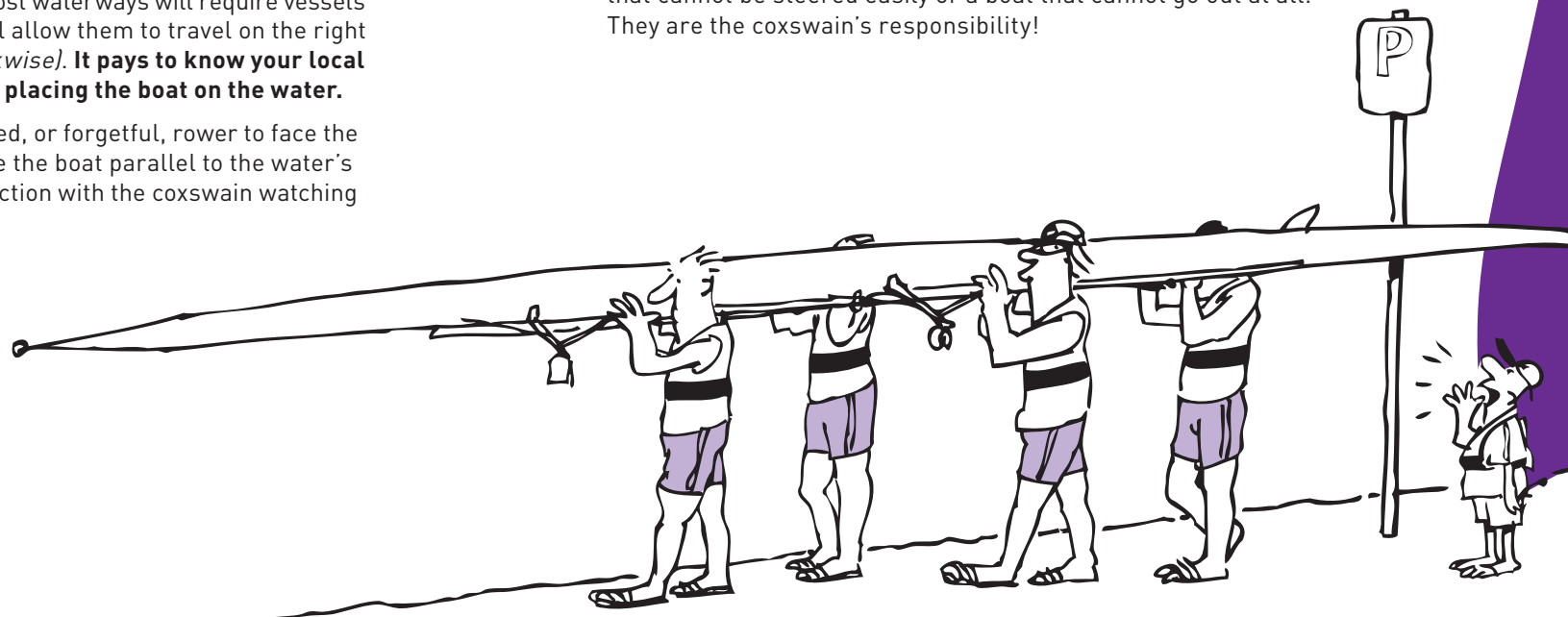
the bow and stern, **the coxswain can now move to the stern of the boat to keep a watchful eye on the rudder and fin of the boat.** These two boat parts will be of primary importance to the good coxswain.

Next, the coxswain (*or stroke*) must organise the crew members to one side of the boat so that all can proceed to the water's edge with the boat between themselves and the water. How this is done will vary according to the experience and strength of the crew.

Novice rowers with less strength and often a heavier boat **are advised to do this in a slow deliberate roll of the boat from 'waists' position.** More experienced crews with lighter boats can do this in a more dynamic "toss" or "flip" of the boat above their heads.

In the first instance, the rudder & fin are the most prone to damage in the process of placing the boat on the water and launching - they will be beneath the waterline and protruding from the hull, unseen. This makes them susceptible to contact with a sunken boat staging or jetty. Being made of thin, lightweight materials they can be easily damaged by the unwary.

Secondly, a well cared for rudder and fin make the coxswain's job of steering much easier. A moment's lapse in concentration can result in both boat parts being either bent or dislodged. The result is a boat that cannot be steered easily or a boat that cannot go out at all. They are the coxswain's responsibility!



HAZARDS OF WHICH TO BE AWARE WHEN MOVING TO THE WATER

The good coxswain will be sure to check relevant safety concerns before the boat is turned over and rowers move to one side of the boat. Be sure to check the following:



DEBRIS OR OBSTACLES BETWEEN THE CREW AND THE WATER

Very difficult to maintain balance and avoid injury if tripping over items littering the water's edge while carrying a boat. The coxswain should clear a path or warn crew members.



SLIPPERY OR UNSTABLE SURFACES FOR FOOTING

Most boat staging platforms or jetties when wet and exposed become very slippery. So also do embankments of grass or dirt after rain. The coxswain should check conditions and warn the crew to move slowly and with care.



WIND DIRECTION AND STRENGTH

If it is a very windy day, flipping a boat is liable to result in the boat being taken by the wind (like a sail) and causing rowers to lose control, especially if flipping or turning into the wind. Coxswains should be ready to instruct the crew to avoid "flipping" or turn the boat hull into the wind.



INJURY TO CREW MEMBERS

Crew members with injuries should be cautious when lifting and turning boats. An injury can quickly be exacerbated if the body is required to work outside the normal range of movements involved in the rowing stroke. A 'reserve' boat carrier should be enlisted or the rower warned of likely consequences. Also, an athlete who has not stretched or warmed up will be susceptible to injury in this process – especially if lifting with back and arms and not legs.

SAFETY ASSURED - The coxswain will allow his crew to proceed with placing the boat on the water. As was previously mentioned, this procedure can fall to the stroke to give the commands but coxswains are encouraged to exert their authority in this process where appropriate, thus it is included here.

5.5 MOVING THE BOAT TO THE WATER cont'd...

The commands most commonly used are below, they are divided between commands for rowers that can carry a boat above their head (stronger rowers / lighter boats) and those that cannot (weaker rowers / heavier boats).

FOR THOSE WHO ARE STRONGER WITH LIGHT BOATS

'Above heads...'

'Ready...
Up!'

'Down
together'

FOR THOSE WHO ARE LESS ABLE WITH HEAVIER BOATS

'Lower to
waists...'

'Ready...
Roll!'

'Roll
toward
stroke-side'

'Bow-side
hold,
Stroke-side
under'

From this point all **rowers will walk the boat carefully to the water** while the coxswain seeks to keep a watchful eye on the boat.

'Walk it down together'

'Place'

5.6 ATTACH BOAT LIGHTS BEFORE LAUNCH

If some part of the rowing session is to take place before sunrise or after sunset and visibility is poor, **the coxswain should attach lights to the boat.** Depending on the type and ease of light attachments, this can be either done before leaving the shed or when the boat is first placed on the water. If unsure, it is best to ascertain from the coach when would be most appropriate. The regulations for displaying lights on the water may vary greatly from waterway to waterway.

Commonly, a light must be displayed at the bow and stern of the boat in order to be seen by other boats. Each of these lights should be visible 180° (combined 360° visibility). Some waterways require the bow light to be a constant white light and the stern light to be a flashing white light on a rowing boat.

Normal maritime regulation requires the **port light to be red and the starboard light to be green.** However, there is currently no requirement for rowing boats to carry lights indicating either side of the boat. Nevertheless, the good coxswain must be sure to know the regulations for their particular waterway and follow them strictly.

On a darkened waterway the coxswain should also be able to identify the lights of other crews and interpret a boat's direction by these lights
eg: flashing = retreating, solid = advancing.



5.7 GETTING INTO THE BOAT

The command sequence for getting into the boat is as follows:
(assuming the bow-side is closest to the land/staging)



As the boat is now on the water the coxswain must be assured that the rowers are showing due care and diligence by not allowing the boat to float away or to be pushed onto the staging/bank by winds, wash or waves. Holding those riggers closest to the land will negate this risk. Greater damage can be done here than at any other point in the rowing session.

The good coxswain should observe closely all his rowers when they are stepping into the boat. They should **step only on the non-slip pad between the slides or onto the keel – never on to the exposed hull, seats or foot-stretcher etc.**

Before pushing out onto the water the coxswain should take a cautious look to see if the area is clear of other boats.

The coxswain, of course, should be on board before the boat leaves the land! It is not as rare as you would think, to see a coxswain calling helplessly from the bank as his crew pushes out onto the water. It says much for the involvement of the coxswain in the launching process if he is so easily forgotten! The good coxswain cannot be left if it is his order that has the boat launched and if he is sensitive and aware to his crew's movements.



Never step on the exposed hull!

THE COXSWAIN GETS INTO THE BOAT

When does the coxswain get in? This is normally done after the stroke-side rowers (*water side*) have secured their oars in the riggers. Ideally, having the bow-side, then the stroke-side oars in will give the boat enough stability for the coxswain to step in without the precarious nature of an unsteady boat. In order to add to his own stability the coxswain should place a hand on each gunwale, place a foot on the keel, or the supports provided in the coxswain's seat, and lower himself slowly and gently into the boat.

Also, it often falls to the coxswain to carry with him some items of importance for crew members eg. tools, medication, clothing etc., as well as cox box and tool kit for himself. But the good coxswain should be warned; trying to step into a boat with an armful of bits and pieces, only risks injury. The coxswain must place all items in the boat prior to getting in himself. It is also necessary to remember that the hull is thin and items cannot be dropped in from a great height – they must be placed; the coxswain must get his feet wet if necessary!

A full water bottle has been known to easily pass through a boat's hull when dropped into the coxswain's seat from a standing height.

Of course, as each item is placed in the boat and each rower steps into the boat, the boat becomes heavier and lower in the water. This observation is important when the coxswain is caring for the rudder and fin. What may have been deep enough water when the boat was first placed on the water may now be too shallow to accommodate the extrusions of the fin and rudder. As the boat gets deeper these parts draw closer to anything below. It is advised that the coxswain check the fin and rudder before stepping in and especially before giving the command for the crew to "push off".

A fin should never be parted from its boat!

Further to this addition of weight to the boat, it is important to remember that the **more weight a boat carries the slower it will become**. Therefore, coxswains are advised to carry as little as possible while still fulfilling necessary responsibilities – especially on race day.

It is not enough for the coxswain to be just simply in the boat, it is also **important that the coxswain know how to sit in the boat**, properly. If not properly positioned, the coxswain can make the boat slower by contributing to the boat's imbalance and by making the rower's task more difficult. The coxswain must be one with the boat, conforming to its line and movement. The good coxswain will "feel" the boat – be sensitive to its every movement. **There is a "heart beat" in every stroke and the coxswain should feel it in the boat.**

It seems pretty straight forward to me...
look after the fin. There are almost as many
bent or torn off fins out there as there are
coxswains. When are they going to learn that
a boat is stuffed if it does not have a fin?
It can't be rowed, it takes a couple of days
to fix and it costs money.

The cox should never, ever step into a boat
before checking that the fin is in at least a
foot of water. It's not that hard.

Kevin Godfrey, Coach

5.8 SITTING IN A STERN STEERED BOAT



Sit in the middle of the boat – do not sit or lean to one side or the other.



Sit still and relaxed – movement adds to a boat's imbalance, stiffness exaggerates weight shifts and does not allow the cox to "feel" the boat.



Sit upright and lean forward – slouching is consistent with the cox leaning away from the centre of the boat, leaning back will be unbalanced and cause the coxswain to rock uncontrollably with each stroke. Do not bump against the back of the seat.



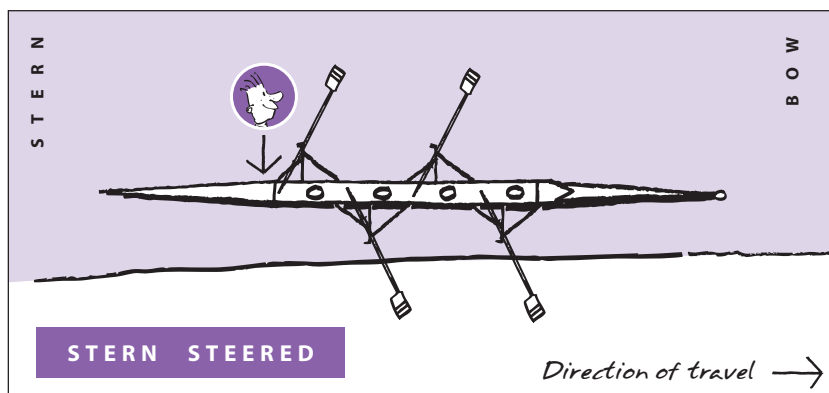
Sit with lower back pressed into back of seat – contributes to the stability of the coxswain in a moving boat, eliminating chances of bumping back of the seat.



Sit with legs braced – the body of the coxswain will be more likely to move without this added stability of knees tightly together or anchored. The feet can be braced against the foot rest or the knees between the coxswain's spread hands.



Sit with hands slightly forward of the body – holding the rudder strings between thumb and index finger, with palms on top of the gunwale. Allows for further bracing without unnecessary movement ('racing tadpole' position).



5.9 SITTING IN A BOW STEERED BOAT



Sit in the middle of the boat – do not lie or lean to one side or the other, sit with nose in line with bow ball.



Sit still and relaxed – movement adds to a boat's imbalance, stiffness exaggerates weight shifts and does not allow the cox to "feel" or move "to" the boat.



Sit low and lay back – the higher the cox sits the greater the wind resistance and the higher the centre of gravity contributing to imbalance.



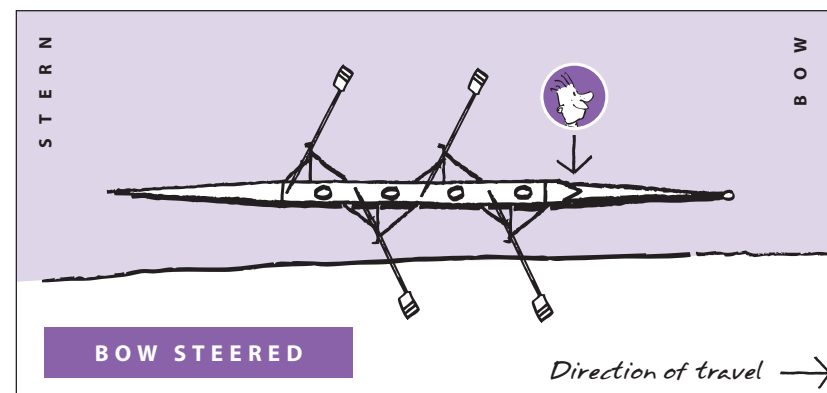
Sit with legs fully extended – distributes weight more evenly along the length of the boat. If tall use feet contact with bow compartment (bulk head) to add stability (if short the coxswain may place lightweight, water resistant materials in the bulk head to assist bracing with feet).



Sit with legs lightly braced – the body of the coxswain will be more likely to move without this added stability of knees pushed together or pushed into the side of the boat. The curve of the hull should conform comfortably to the body.



Sit with hands slightly forward of the body – holding the rudder strings between thumb and index finger (stops over steering), elbows to side of boat.



I thought it was pretty funny and so did the coach. It was the first time I had steered from the bow of the boat. I wasn't very big back then and I had plenty of room to fit in the cox seat - more chance than I would now. Anyway, I had room to spare; my feet were nowhere near touching the bulk head at the end of the cox compartment.

Well, it didn't take too long to realise that I had too much room. As the crew rowed some hard strong pieces I started to move - downward. With every stroke I slipped further and further out of view. Before long I had disappeared all together. We had to stop so I could climb back up out of the bottom of the boat into daylight. The crew had a great laugh and I stuffed some life-jackets down there the next time - just to keep me stable (and visible!).

'Midge' Harwood, Coxswain

I took two seasons before I figured out how to cox from the bow. There are a few things I would recommend:

- * Make sure that you and your bow communicate - very important
- * Push your legs up against the side of the hull
- * Push some part of your forearm up against the shell to get a feel for how the boat is moving stroke-side to bow-side
- * Memorise how all the little things feel when the coach says "That's great - keep that up"
- * Take a towel to help cushion your head.

Daniel Morgan, Coxswain



COMMANDS GIVEN ON THE WATER WHEN READY TO ROW



COMMAND



RESPONSE



CAUTION



"Number off from bow when ready"



Each rower takes time to ready their feet in the foot-stretcher. Each crew member shouts their seat number in order once they are ready to row. Eg. "Bow", "Two", "Three", "Stroke".



This will allow the crew time to make further adjustments. If it is a particularly windy day or the current is strong it is best to do this before pushing off. Do not allow this to happen for an extended period, especially in heavy traffic areas.



"All ready" or "sit up"



Crew gives full attention to coxswain and move to the front of the slide and places the squared oar in the water ready for the first stroke.



Telegraphing intentions to begin rowing and warning that no further time will be allowed before commencing. Crew may indicate a lack of preparedness at this stage. No response assumes that the crew is ready.



"Attention"



The crew listens for the command to begin rowing.



Forewarning to enable a unified movement when called. The rowing equivalent of the runners "set" call at the start.



"Row"



The rowers move back down the slide with the oar moving through the water.



Is the rowing equivalent of "GO"

"Commands can be given only by those who are in command - otherwise they are simply requests"



5.10 LANDING OR DOCKING THE BOAT

It would be a gross oversimplification to suggest that landing* is the reverse of launching. But there are elements of truth to this, especially in the process of taking the boat from the water and returning it to the shed; many of the same commands and actions apply. However, landing begins well in advance of this final process. In fact, landing begins with the decision to end the rowing session and point the boat homeward.

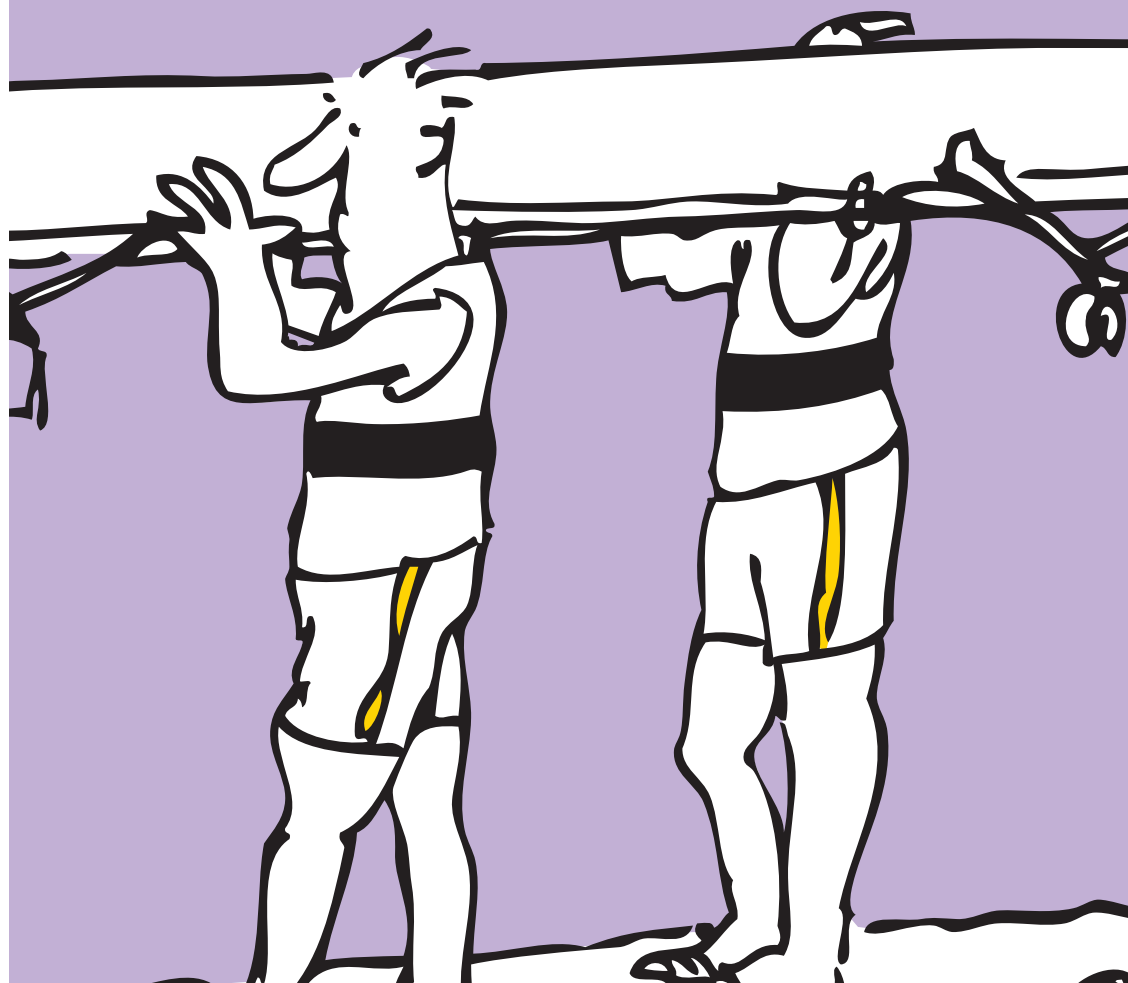
**The word 'landing' is interchanged with the word 'docking' in this resource. 'Landing' is also used to represent the platform from which the boats enter and exit the water. The word 'landing' in this context is also interchanged with 'dock', 'jetty' and 'staging'. Which of these words are most appropriate will depend on the common usage at particular venues.*

It is vital that the coxswain be aware of the water traffic rules that govern the direction of incoming boats to the landing area. This may vary from place to place and coxswains are advised to be familiar with the rules prior to launching.

Commonly, regulations dictate that all boats return to the landing area, travel in the same direction as the water traffic. There are very few waterways that would vary from **"stick to the right"** i.e. all water traffic travelling in opposite directions, is expected to pass stroke-side to stroke-side. (Sometimes, these rules will vary upon regatta day to the normal practice sessions, so be aware).

If the boat landing area is on the same side of the waterway as the direction of traffic flow i.e. the right bank on the homeward stretch, then the process is straightforward. However, if the landing area is on the opposite side of the river i.e. the left bank on the homeward stretch, the question that must be asked is: **at what point on the waterway are coxswains allowed to turn their boat?**

Turning on any waterway can be a hazardous process at the best of times. The coxswain risks blocking traffic that follows behind when initiating a turn and can also block traffic in the opposite direction when seeking to complete a turn. It is further complicated if the turn is being made at the same time and place by many others wishing to land their boats. It cannot therefore, be a random, haphazard procedure. It requires not only regulation and guidelines but a healthy dose of common-sense.



The worst case scenario for landing would unravel something like this:



Worst case scenario

Three boats travel down a river approaching the boathouse landing. They travel one behind the other: a coxed training four, a scull and an eight. In sight of the landing, each sees that there is limited space for their particular boat. Five crews have simultaneously docked their boats, filling all available space.

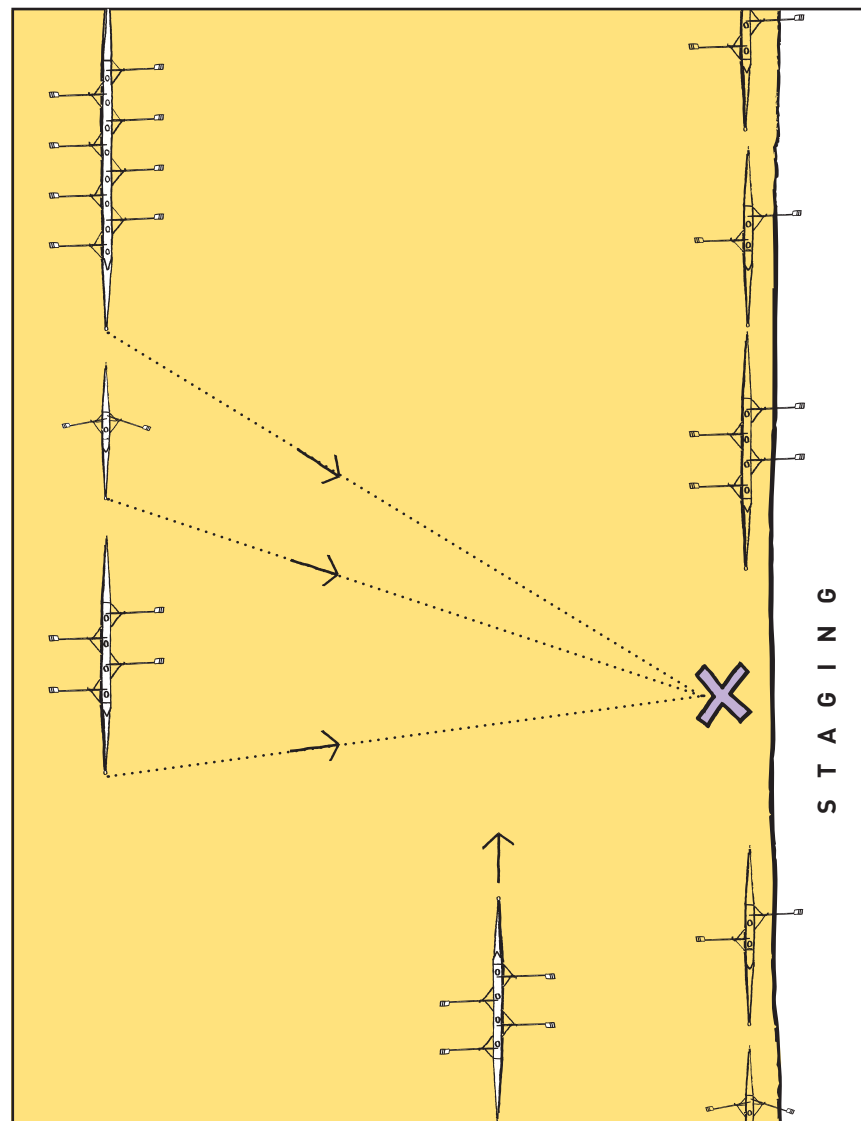
The river rules are Darwinian, regulated by the maxim that "only the fittest will survive". Each knows that the first in line behind the docked boats will be the next to land.

Therefore, the eight's coxswain, having spotted the need to act quickly and having the water equivalent of a semi-trailer, cuts diagonally, at speed, across to the other side of the river.

The sculler, seeing the intentions of the eight's cox, quickly turns to intercept the eight's proposed course and blocks their path. She knows that a scull has greater manoeuvrability, will require less space and is, after all, ahead of the eight.

The coxed training four with its novice crew members is slow to respond. The coxswain cannot get them to respond quickly enough due to their inexperience and the boat is heavier and less able to move at a speed equivalent to the other two boats. Nevertheless, knowing that he is closer to the staging than the other two, the cox directs his lumbering crew toward the landing point.

In the meantime, a coxed four travels at speed along the other side of the river. It is to complete a race piece down past the boat staging point.



All the ingredients are present for a disaster!

Regulation and common-sense are decidedly absent. The rules to regulate these circumstances should not be the "rule of the jungle" but the commonly agreed to, and adhered to, traffic rules shared by the users of the waterway.

GUIDELINES FOR AVOIDING A BAD LANDING

There cannot be a happy ending to the bad landing scenario. It is only in the application of the following that each of the parties could have completed a safe landing:



Crews must never travel against the flow of traffic to land.



On busy waterways boats cannot turn at random points to land.



Crews must slow to land boats.



Crews must be aligned with the dock prior to making their final approach.



Once a crew is aligned to begin landing they are not to be overtaken by the crew behind, until the crew ahead has landed.



Crews must wait behind those that have approached the landing before them.



When landing, crews must show courtesy to other boats.



Crews must not row at speed through or past landing points.



The crew must know how to respond to the coxswain's commands when landing.



The boat must meet the landing at a slight angle, not head on or completely parallel.

Most waterways will have predetermined turning points for boats to turn prior to landing. These will usually be marked by a buoy, significant landmark or identifiable feature. Crews are required to pass around this marker or move beyond this marker before returning to the boat landing.

If none of these features are present then it is recommended that a coxswain continue at least one hundred metres past the landing point before turning. This allows an orderly and safe approach to the landing, without dispute or confusion.

It is best that crews stop before turning, to better gauge traffic flow. But before stopping, the coxswains must also look around to make sure that it is safe to stop without impeding following traffic. The coxswain is advised to move to the right before stopping, to allow easy passage for any following crews wishing to continue rowing. The coxswain may then turn.

It is not always necessary to turn the boat prior to landing but the '100 metre landing zone' is a good rule of thumb for any coxswain looking to land their boat safely. It would be expected that within this area that the guidelines listed above should apply.

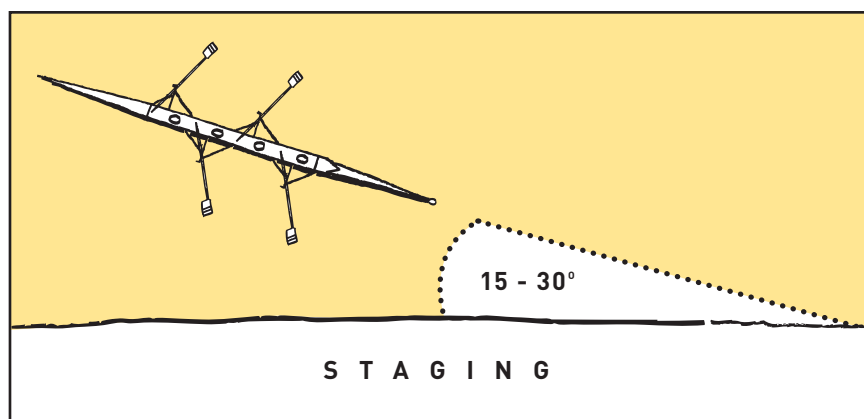
... the coxswain obviously didn't want his crew to get their feet wet so decided to steam in at an unreasonable rate of knots. I scrambled desperately over oars and drink bottles in a vain attempt to save them from certain calamity. I didn't get there - they did. As I lay rolling on the ground grasping my painful knee they stepped sheepishly from the boat torn between helping me and inspecting the great gash in the bow of the boat. The coxswain's only excuse: "They didn't 'check it' quick enough".

Terry Austin, Coach

5.11 THE ANGLE OF APPROACH WHEN LANDING A BOAT

Once facing in the same direction of traffic and heading to the boat landing, coxswains should begin by judging an appropriate line of approach. It may take the full distance of 100 metres to achieve an accurate line. Rudder adjustments and rower commands can effectively be done in this time. They should not be left to the very moment the boat draws level with the landing.

The boat should be far enough out from the bank or line of the landing point to **approach the landing at a slight angle of 15°- 30°**.



It is best to be aware of any wind push or tidal influence, which may push the boat off course, before beginning this approach.



Why an angled approach?



It allows the coxswain to see both the bow of the boat and the landing point simultaneously. Looking straight along a boat is often an impeded view, especially if coxing from the stern. The coxswain is well placed to see the closing distance between bow and landing space. The cox will be better able to judge speed and distance.



The angle allows for the possibility of glancing bow contact with the decking rather than full on impact; if worse comes to worst.



The vulnerable rudder and fin are kept well clear of submerged landing surfaces on the approach if the depth cannot be accurately gauged by the coxswain.



Boats on an angle are more likely to make an accurate landing at a given point rather than fall short or continue past the desired landing point if running parallel. The landing can be targeted.



The stroke-side oars and stern end rowers can be used by the coxswain to adjust course right up until the very last moment. A parallel boat running beside a landing stage will have neither the use of the bow-side oars or will not benefit positively from any stroke-side oar use.

Be sure to have the full attention of the crew before commencing a landing. It will take some time before a coxswain is experienced enough to completely master the landing process. Lack of experience can only be balanced with excessive care. If a boat is likely to be damaged, it is most probable during this process.

Always approach the landing with the slowest possible combination of crew members rowing (in pairs). If coxing an eight or four, use the stern pair (the pair closest to the stern) so that the boat can keep moving even if the rowers nearer the bow cannot use their oars. If you are in an eight and encountering strong resistance from wind, tide or both, four crew members may be needed.

As with launching, there are common commands for the process of landing. The crew's coach should be asked for the most preferred instructions for coxswains to give. The commands for docking appear in the table over the page.

5.12 COMMANDS FOR DOCKING THE BOAT

The following are typical of those seeking to land a rowing boat from the moment they enter the 100 metre landing zone:



COMMAND



RESPONSE

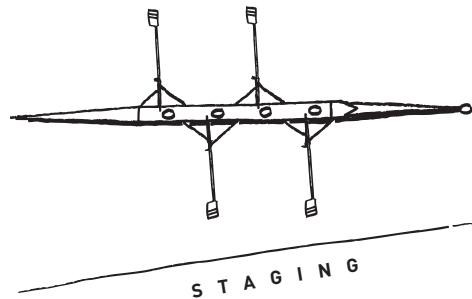


CAUTION

LET'S TAKE IT IN	Crew is prepared to act upon all the following commands for landing.	The crew is also enlisted to keep alert and prepared for all likely occurrences when looking to land.
ALL EIGHT SIT READY	Crew members are advised that they are all to row.	The coxswain will need to gauge distance and necessary speed over that distance. If further out and with the better part of 100 metres to cover, eight rowing would be appropriate, initially.
ATTENTION... ROW	The crew begins moving their oars through the water.	Having warned the crew that they are now proceeding to the landing they should be rating slowly and without much strength through the water.
IN TWO, I WANT BOW FOUR TO DROP OUT... ONE, TWO	Those rowers in the bow end of the boat are forewarned that they will stop rowing after two more strokes. The stern four should know that they are required to continue rowing.	As the crew advances on the landing area it is necessary to proceed with greater caution by slowing the boat. There should never be a need for a panicked and urgent stopping of the boat when landing.
IN TWO, I WANT STERN PAIR ONLY... ONE, TWO	All rowers except those named will now stop rowing and be aware that they are close to landing.	The boat slows by degrees and the sequence of commands places all crew members on alert. Crew members will be looking to the landing side of the boat but avoiding leaning to this side.
EASY ALL	All rowers stop rowing.	The coxswain must be close enough to the landing point before giving this command. It is advisable to give this call approximately one third of a boat length from the landing. But if there is a head wind, leave this until later. If there is a tail wind, the command must come sooner.
BOW-SIDE WATCH YOUR OARS... LEAN AWAY STROKE-SIDE	The bow-side takes special care - oars are lifted (if necessary) to avoid contact with the staging. Stroke-side help the lift of bow-side by transferring their weight away from the landing.	The lean away is not always necessary, especially if the landing stage does not protrude above the water line. However, a high staging can be a real danger and oars must be of a height to clear it. It is where most oars and riggers are damaged.
CHECK IT STROKE-SIDE!	All rowers on stroke-side place their oars square into the water and hold them there.	This command guarantees that the boat not only comes to a stop but narrows the 15° angle at which the boat approached the staging. With stroke-side checking their oars they create enough resistance for the bow of the boat to turn away from the landing and drawing the boat parallel.
HOLD OFF	All the crew are to keep the boat from making contact with the staging by fending off with hands or feet.	A precautionary command especially if the wind or wash is pushing the shell into the landing after it has come to a stop. It is to be done advisedly, avoiding jamming body parts between staging and boat, and shifting too much weight to the landing side of the boat.

Of course there will be many variables to contend with when docking and all will conspire against the inexperienced coxswain.

If the coxswain does not make the landing upon the first attempt and has avoided injuring boat or crew then nothing has been lost, except a little time. The coxswain should be prepared to back the boat down (i.e. push oars through the water backwards to reverse the boat) and try again. This is sometimes far easier than trying to manipulate a boat into position from an unfavourable starting point.



Scenario for failed landing

The boat has come to a stop level with the landing but two or three metres out from the landing. The oars are not within reach of the landing.

The boat is not parallel to the landing.

HERE ARE THREE OPTIONS A COXSWAIN MAY IMPLEMENT FOR FAILED LANDING:



Commands #1



"Check blades bow-side... touch it for three strokes, two and four... easy bow-side... easy four... rowing together bow pair... attention, row... easy... let it run... lift oars... check it gently bow-side."

Commands #2



"Back it down stroke-side, keep it checked bow side... easy stroke-side... pull it around two... easy bow-side... back it down seven... move in time two and seven... easy seven... lean away."

Commands #3



"Front of slide stroke... hand your oar to three, two... front half of slide only stroke - back it down... three tap it round with two's oar... easy... oars up."

Once oars overlap the staging, each of these solutions may require an assisting hand from someone on the bank.

Never be too embarrassed to ask someone to grab hold of an oar to draw the boat the rest of the way in to the staging. Better this than to be asking for someone to take a look at the hole in the boat!

Notably, it is always best to pull up short of the landing spot and take time to use the remaining distance between boat and landing to address any directional concerns. Do not be at the landing area before seeking a change in direction.

EXAMPLES OF COMMANDS TO HELP A SUCCESSFUL LANDING

HERE ARE TWO OPTIONS:

Commands #1



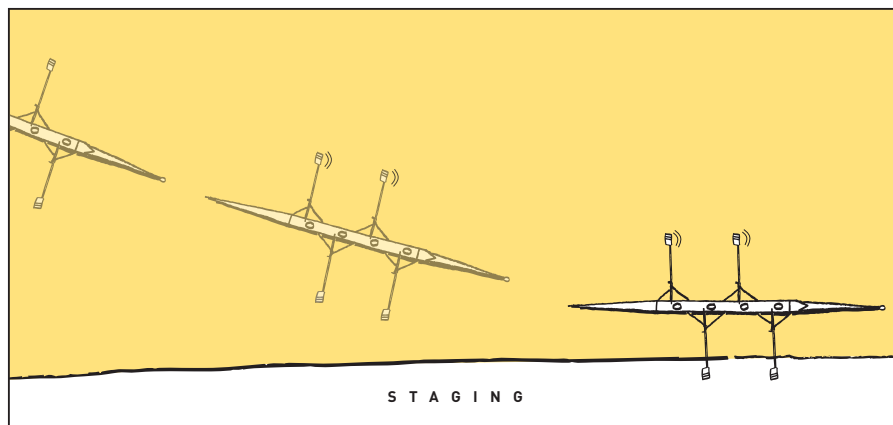
"Easy all... let it run... check it lightly stroke-side... watch your oars bow-side... lean away... hands out."
(In ideal circumstances)

Commands #2



"Bow four drop out...with firm pressure, stern four only... easy... check it lightly bow and three... easy.. watch your oars... lean away... hold off." (In strong head wind)

The boat glides slowly to the vacant space on the landing, its bow facing into the exact spot between crews. The oars are off the water and the crew fully focused on the coxswain's next command. The bow-side oars gently check and the boat draws parallel to the landing that is only centimetres away from the side of the boat.

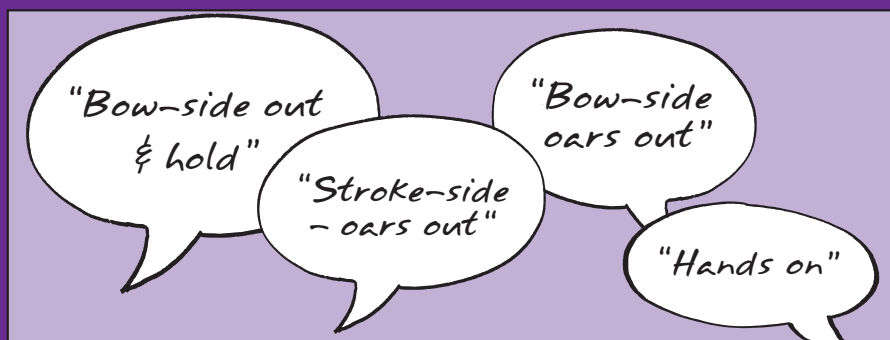


"Landings...
one small step
for a good cox,
one giant leap
for a bad cox"



5.13 COMMANDS FOR TAKING THE BOAT FROM THE WATER

The rowers must now respond immediately to the following commands of the cox to complete the exit from the water. The coxswain will be first from the boat if coxing from the stern and exit the boat after the bow-side rowers when coxing from the bow. Before leaving the boat, the coxswain should remember to disconnect their cox box and retrieve any other items from the cox seat.



Once again, the rowers closest to the staging (the first out of the boat) are best placed to secure the boat at the staging. They are able to use their rigger to keep the boat at a distance from the decking - avoiding likely buffeting, and they are able to hold the boat in position while oars are removed.

The coxswain, of course, will be party to this by holding the stern away from the staging to avoid damage to fin and rudder. Once all oars are removed and all crewmembers are evenly split between the bow and stern of the boat it can be lifted from the water by command of the stroke and under supervision of the good coxswain.



5.14 COMMANDS FOR ROLLING THE BOAT & WALKING TO THE BOATHOUSE

The boat will not necessarily be taken straight to the shed from this point. It is common practice for the boat to be placed on slings/trestles before entering the shed so that the boat may be washed down. It is worth noting that some boathouses have showering systems above doors, others wash boats after racking.

Of course, before this can be done **there must be slings in place, upon which the boat may be placed – this is the responsibility of the coxswain.** The good coxswain will complete this task as the crew approaches the boathouse door – it is best not to keep a tired crew waiting with boat in hand.

Once the boat has been carefully placed on sling (avoiding fins, riggers and vulnerable points in the hull) the coxswain (or the stroke) will split the crew between those that are to retrieve the oars and those that are to wash down the boat, eg. "bow-side get the oars, stroke-side wash the boat."

After the boat is washed and the oars are away, the coxswain can offer some degree of encouragement for crew members to place hands on the boat to return the boat to the racks. It may be a simple **"Let's get a move on"** or **"Hands on, crew"** to make this process a quick one.

Of course the same rules apply now, when the boat is being taken back to the racks, as they did earlier - no one is to speak, except the coxswain or stroke. A chorus of voices at this point will make it hard to hear the commands being given and offer distraction where focus is still required. The good coxswain may offer a general word of advice to the crew to guarantee their continued cooperation.

The process and commands for placing the boat back on the rack are the reverse of the launching and therefore do not need any further explanation than the commands below.



Having returned to the shed there is only one further thing for the good coxswain to do: **speak with the coach.**

5.14 DEBRIEFING WITH THE COACH AFTER LANDING

All good coaches will debrief their crew not long after the boat has been stored. **This debrief will be considerably enhanced by the contribution of a good coxswain.** Some coaches like to speak with their coxswain before speaking to the crew. They may do this while crew members are washing the boat or retrieving oars.

The reason why some debrief now is because the coach needs more information before formulating the content of his pending debrief with the rowers. However, some coaches will ask the opinion of all crew members during the debrief, including the coxswain.

If the coach does not ask for the coxswain's input before or during the debrief, the cox would be well advised to offer it anyway. Ideally, the cox will be asked but coaches often need reminding. The cox should speak with his coach alone and ask whether the coach would mind having a coxswain's perspective in every crew debrief.

Whether before or during the crew debrief, the professional coach expects that the good coxswain will be able to:



Confirm (or deny) the coaches own observations of the row.



Clarify what happened in the boat during the session.



Give a sense of the boat's run i.e. how fast, how balanced, how consistent.



Provide observations and opinions re the crew interaction.



Provide the coach with information gained through a cox box eg. ratings, splits and effort.

The good coxswain, having fulfilled all of his many responsibilities for launching and landing, will now have time to devote to something of equal importance: **being one of the crew.**

Relax, let the hair down and enjoy the company of all crew members – it is here that most of a good coxswain's best work is done. The camaraderie and the sense of a job well-done after rowing is a time when crewmembers connect. Enjoy this time. Life-long friendships and the glue that holds crews together are formed in the social interaction after a row. **Don't rush away – share some downtime.**



quick glossary

‘BACK IT DOWN’ Command given by coxswain directing the rowers to push their oar through the water backwards in order to reverse the direction of the boat.

BOW-SIDE The right hand side of the boat when facing in the direction of travel (to the rower’s left when sitting in the boat).

FOOT-STRETCHER A place into which a rowers feet are placed to hold them in a constant secure position.

GATE A part of the boat into which the oar is placed or the closing mechanism at the top of the swivel into which the oar is placed.

GUNWALES The top edge of a boats sides that runs the length of the boat.

HALF-ARM The tilting of a boat while being carried with riggers facing upward and downward not side to side.

‘HANDS ON’ Command given to initiate the placement of hands on an object to be lifted.

‘LET-IT-RUN’ Command given by the coxswain to the crew (after the rowers are given the command ‘easy all’) – the crew keeps oars off the water and allows the boat to come to a gradual stop.

RACK Storage space and weight support for the rowing boat within the boathouse – usually situated at either end of the boat’s gunwales.

RIGGERS Tubular metal protrusions from the side of the boat in which oars are attached.

ROLL / TURN OVER The slow deliberate movement at waist height to inverse a boat.

STAGING/JETTY A platform at water’s edge for boats to land.

STROKE-SIDE The left hand side of the boat when facing in the direction of travel (to the rower’s right when sitting in the boat).

SWIVEL Moving part of the rigger into which the oar is secured.

TOSS / FLIP The strong single movement used to move a boat from a waist high holding position to above head holding position while simultaneously inverting the boat.



the good COXSWAIN

THE GOOD COXSWAIN KNOWS:

- ✓ What the goals are for the session prior to launching.
- ✓ Where to stand while the boat is being carried from the boathouse.
- ✓ What commands are given to move the boat out of the boathouse and to the water.
- ✓ When and how the coxswain should get into the boat.
- ✓ What commands are given to the crew immediately after launching.
- ✓ How to sit in the boat.
- ✓ How to prepare for launch / land.
- ✓ What is required in a coach's debrief with the crew.



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