

the good COXSWAIN

P R E P A R A T I O N
F O R T H E W A T E R



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"Just because you
can turn the key
in the ignition
doesn't mean
you're ready
to drive"



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4.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous booklets have provided the coxswain with the tools, and an outline of the skills, necessary to be a good coxswain. Hopefully, **the cox may now stride with confidence to the boathouse doors feeling that he has enough information and enough detailed direction** to cope with the likely challenges of an on water rowing session – that is in theory!

The reality requires a little more than the best of intentions and knowledge of the coxswain's tools – but it is the very best start!

Having read the past booklets the novice coxswain knows where his efforts are now to be directed. This booklet will now look to outline in more practical terms the coxswain's day. In the process you will be introduced to a whole new language, the language of rowing. Some of these words have been encountered in previous booklets (*Quick Glossaries*) but now they are going to be an integral part of the coxing experience. If at any time the reader becomes confused by, or forgets the meaning of particular words, then they may refer to the glossaries.

Welcome to reality. The day begins for a coxswain not when his hands contact the rudder strings or his rear end fills the coxswain's seat. In fact a coxswain's day can begin well before he sets eyes on a boat.

What are the fundamentals necessary for a trouble-free first day on the job?

"I can't swim!" It was a strange time to come to this conclusion with the boat filled almost to the gunwales with water but then again there were a lot of things I hadn't thought about. For instance, how was I to know that rowers weren't allowed in the ferry boat area - I certainly didn't know that a ferry could create so much wash.

Eliza Dane, Coxswain

I hadn't noticed the storm clouds due to the fact that it was still dark that early in the morning.

The t-shirt I had packed the night before quickly became water-logged and my knees began to knock in time with the crew. The rowers couldn't understand me due to the chatter of my teeth and my attention started to be more on getting in than on where I was going.

Cathy Hayes, Coxswain

Four kilometres from the boathouse and stroke's rigger came loose - not just loose but the whole arm had come off. There was nothing left to do but to turn around and go back. What an absolute waste of time - two out of four people rowing, no work being done - it was going to take us forever to get back. It would be far too late to go out again after fixing it. One spanner and one nut would have solved it. Since then I have made up my own 'Cox Kit' - I don't leave shore without it in training or at regattas!

- * small shifter
- * phillips head screwdriver
- * short flat head screwdriver
- * spare rigger nuts and bolts
- * 10mm spanner
- * electrical tape
- * pen and pad
- * horse-shoe spacers (washers)

- and I've always got my mobile phone.

Xavier Bourke, Coxswain

4.2 PREPARATION BEFORE LAUNCHING

CHECK WEATHER & TIME

Be an avid viewer of the evening news' weather reports or listen to the radio for updates. **Be ever watchful.** Check wind direction and speed, high/low tide, temperature, rain forecasts, thunderstorm activity.

Also, know what time of day the crew is rowing. The good coxswain will need to make some decisions in the light of the information received.

CLOTHING

A coxswain is prone to the elements, he more than any other crew member is going to feel the physical effects of the weather. He must dress appropriately. He does not have the physical benefits of movement and exertion and can make very few adjustments to improve his own comfort levels during the course of a rowing session. Therefore, **the coxswain should come prepared to training with weather observations and forecasts fully considered.**

- ➔ *If the weather is hot* - Hat, sunscreen, sunglasses, water bottle, light coloured clothing that is loose fitting and of lightweight material. These are precautionary measures for the avoidance of heat stroke, dehydration, impaired vision and general sunburn.
- ➔ *If the weather is cold* - Several layers of clothing particularly around the lower back, head wear, make sure wet weather clothing is available. These are precautionary measures for the avoidance of hypothermia and general discomfort that can, in themselves, cause short term loss of concentration and a threat of long term illness.
- ➔ *If the weather is wet* - Waterproof clothing covering a number of layers proportionate to temperature. Wet is a constant state for coxswains, in bow steered boats especially, therefore spray jackets, at least, should always be available. Heat loss will be greater if wet clothing is worn on a cold day. Coxswains should be prepared with a change of clothing available after the rowing session.
- ➔ *If it is early morning or late evening* - Temperatures at this time will be lower than during the day, especially on the water. Be prepared to dress for colder conditions at this time.
- ➔ *If it is bright sunny day* - Peaked hat and sunglasses. Direct sunlight, especially after sunrise and immediately before sunset, can be dangerous, especially if the boat is pointed directly into the sun. The coxswain must be able to see; peaked caps and sunglasses can assist. Also, the reflected glare off water can impede vision, therefore it is necessary to shade the eyes effectively.
- ➔ *If thunder and lightning are likely* - Clothing will not protect a boat on open water from a lightning strike. **DON'T GO OUT!**



WATER CONDITIONS

Wind and tide are two major contributors to the safety and direction of a boat. Close observance of prevailing conditions or predicted changes are important before going on the water. The coxswain's chosen course will vary according to prevailing conditions, therefore, the coach and coxswain should speak of this before launching.

As always – If in doubt, don't go out! 

- ➔ *If there are high winds* – If the winds are dangerously strong and no or little control of the boat is likely, don't go out. Remember strong winds will require greater caution and coxswains will need more experience, especially on launching and landing. Know from which direction the wind is blowing.
- ➔ *If there are strong tides or prevailing streams* – Often, when it can be most rough is when the tide (prevailing stream) and wind are working against each other – the novice cox will have to demonstrate caution. The coxswain should know how tide affects his particular rowing venue. The coach is the best source of this information.

RULES OF THE WATER

The driver of a motor vehicle must know, in advance of heading out on the road, the road rules. The coxswain must know before venturing out on the water those rules that pertain to water traffic. Each body of water has its own water traffic expectations. Generally, they are as follows:

- ➔ **Always stay to the right**
Pass stroke side to stroke side – keeping boats travelling in the opposite direction to the right hand side (opposite to motor traffic on the roads in Australia).
- ➔ **The overtaking boat always has right of way**
Any slow moving boat must pull to the right on narrow water ways and allow the faster moving boat to past on the left.
- ➔ **Boats will always travel in an anti-clockwise direction**
This is true on a wider unmarked body of water, especially a lake.
- ➔ **Boats on a marked rowing course have right of way**
This is the case especially at regattas.
- ➔ **Do not impede the progress of others**
Traffic should be permitted to keep moving at all times.
- ➔ **Before turning check in both directions**
Be aware of other water users travelling in either direction, do not turn in front of them, turn when clear only.
- ➔ **Use a loud voice to warn of impending danger**
The coxswain and the crew members should warn other rowing boats of their presence if a collision is likely.
- ➔ **Motorised boats must give way**
A rowing boat is less manoeuvrable and cannot respond with the same speed of movement.
- ➔ **Exercise common sense**
Do not place your crew or others in danger. Courteous behaviour is always appreciated.
- ➔ **Lights** – Before sunrise and after sunset lights are to be attached to boats. For example, a flashing white light is to be attached to the stern, a constant white light attached to the bow. Each light must cover 180° and be observable from 100 metres. *(See local requirements)*



PERSONAL SAFETY

Before going out on the water it is advisable that the coxswain give some thought to those details that guarantee his own personal well-being. Certainly, as has been indicated above, knowing the clothing to wear and the weather that should be avoided is an advantage.

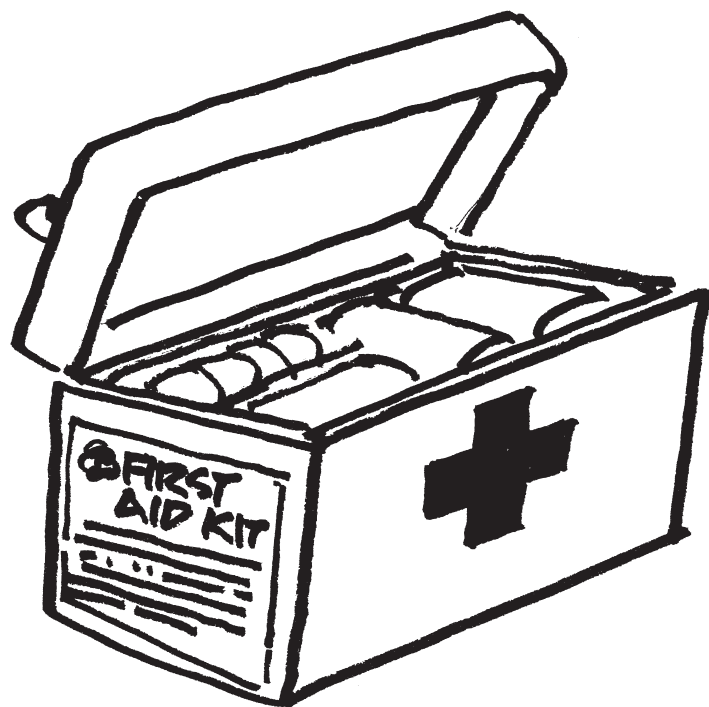
But the coxswain should also consider some personal fundamentals:

→ Can you swim?

The coxswain must be able to swim at least 50 metres in light clothing. The coxswain that is wearing thermals and several layers of clothing may need to have more than basic swimming ability. The chances of a boat being overturned or sinking is negligible but it does happen; so be prepared. Don't wear heavy footwear or anything that cannot be easily slipped off.

→ Do not fasten yourself to the boat or heavy items to yourself!

Once again it is important to keep the weight in the boat as light as possible but it is also important for the coxswain not to "go down with the boat"; the analogy of coxswain being boat captain does not go this far!



→ Footwear should be worn to and from the boat

Broken bottles, protruding nails, syringes, decaying matter and slippery surfaces can all be between the boathouse and the water's edge. The coxswain should wear footwear that will be light and easy to remove. If the coxswain must step into the water before launching then flip-flops, thongs or plastic sandals that are easily worn in water, are advised.

→ Make sure the coach is supervising

Novice coxswains in particular, should not venture out onto the water without a coach. If a coach is late in arriving do not go out. If the coach has arrived but is detained while the crew is on the water, wait. The novice coxswain must keep visual contact with the coach at all times.

→ Do you know what to do in the event of swamping?

A boat being holed or simply taking on water due to bad weather or boat wash will necessitate action. It is important for a coxswain to know in advance that a boat's capacity to continue is a judgement call made by the coxswain in consultation with the stroke seat rower (if the coach is unaware of the extent of the water taken on). Emergency procedures are outlined in *Booklet 10 - Safety on the Water* – make sure you are aware of these before going out.

COXSWAINS EQUIPMENT

Coxswains may sometimes need more than a rudder and their voice. Extra items that assist the coxswain in completing their job are sometimes provided by the club. The novice coxswain may ask if the following items are available for their use – a coxswain's kit, lights and a cox box. If the coxswain's kit or lights are not available then the coxswain may wish to purchase the items for himself.

- ➔ A small **coxswain's kit** (eg. a bum-bag) contains: electrical tape, adjustable spanner, 10-11mm spanner, small screw-driver, and spare nuts/washers. These items allow for running maintenance to be done on the boat. Optionally, the good coxswain may wish to add the following to his cox kit: band-aids, rower medication, pencil and small notebook (*or logbook*).
- ➔ If the crew is to row pre-dawn and post-sunset it will necessitate **boat lights**. The rowers will not give much thought to these and it will inevitably fall to the coxswain to provide lights (*e.g. one solid white light for the bow, one flashing white light for the stern*). These may be improvised bike lights adapted for this purpose or purpose-built lights that are now available on the market. Clubs should be able to source these.
- ➔ A **cox box** or **cox mate** can be the coxswain's best friend. It is part of the in-boat electronic amplification system for the coxswain's voice. It comes with a microphone that is strapped to the coxswain's head (*a headset*). The cox box with microphone is then attached to the in-boat speaker system leads, this is called the **loom**. It allows the coxswain to communicate effectively with the crew and the volume can be controlled via a knob on the cox box operating panel that has an LCD display. This display also counts the number of strokes taken, the number of strokes taken per minute (*rating*) and also allows timing. It is a detachable and portable. It can be taken to and from the boat before and after training.

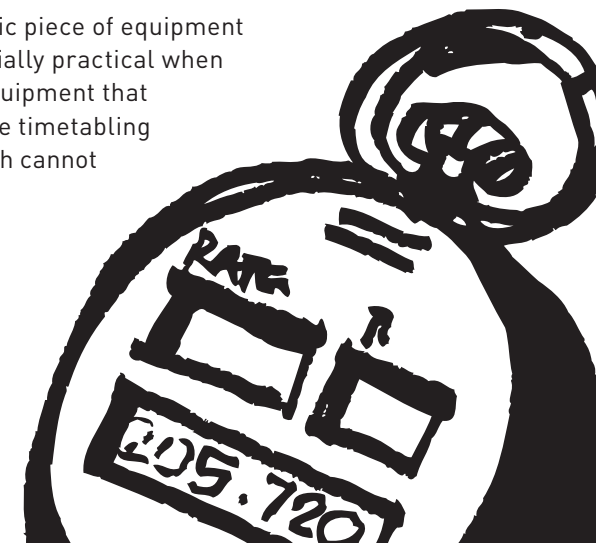
Novice coxswains will not always be given a cox box, especially if not coxing in a bow steered boat or eight, but should be very appreciative if issued with one. If in possession of one, the coxswain must be sure of its connections, applications and care before going on the water (*refer to the manufacturer's instruction booklet*).

The system's ability to measure stroke rate and the number of strokes depends upon a sensor that is placed on the decking beneath the moving seat of either stroke (*if stern steered*) or bow (*if bow steered*). The sensor senses the passing of a magnet that is attached to the underside of the rower's seat. The coxswain should check that the sensor and magnet is securely attached by either high quality tape or double sided adhesive. The tape can work loose if it is regularly wet and therefore contribute toward no readings or false readings on the cox box display. Check this at least once a week.

The cox box also requires regular charging if it is to operate as designed. It should be on charge whenever it is not in use; make sure that it is not switched on while this is happening. If the cox box does not operate after it has been charged or the sensors have been aligned, or the harness line is known to be complete and unbroken, then the coach should be told.

Ultimately, speakers, looms, sensors and coxbox are the responsibility of the coxswain. Abuse of these valuable tools will result in their failure. All blame will fall to the coxswain if the equipment fails during a race – so care is advised.

- ➔ A **wrist-watch** is also a basic piece of equipment worth having. This is especially practical when the crew is using shared equipment that depends strictly on accurate timetabling of boat use. Also, if the coach cannot be relied upon to stick to strict training times!



BOAT CARE

The good coxswain must know that it is his responsibility to guarantee the care of the boat, even before the boat takes to the water. For this to be done effectively, the coxswain must know where the boat is physically vulnerable to damage, or under what circumstances damage is likely to occur. Also, a coach would be very appreciative of the coxswain that can draw attention to maintenance issues in his boat.

Boats can be checked with greater ease if placed on foldaway stands or slings that support the boat when moved from the boat racks. They are often called trestles, slings or stretchers and are able to conform to the shape of the boat (much like a hammock/sling) due to the cradling fabric that is drawn between the fold away wooden or metal supports.

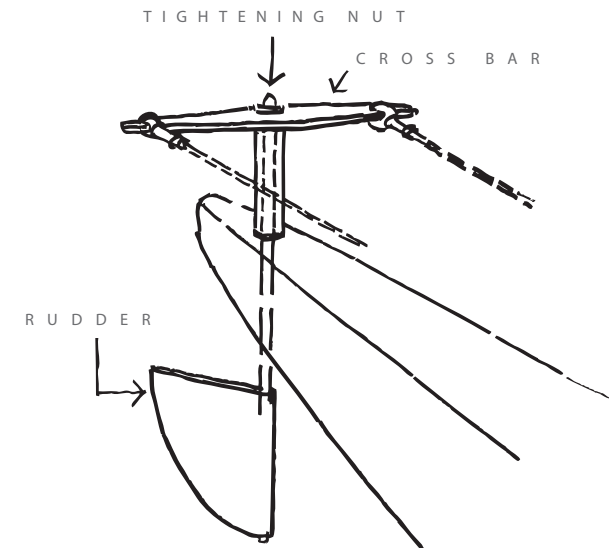
They are used to keep the boat sturdy for inspections and adjustments. It is desirable to have the boat down on slings for regular inspection and maintenance. Slings/trestles can also be used upon the boats return to the boathouse for a rinse and clean before shelving. The placement of these slings, equal to the distance between bow seat and stroke seat of the boat, falls upon the coxswain who can guide the rowers to the safe placement of the boat on these supports.

A pre-launch inspection should ideally take place to avoid troubling consequences. The coxswain should give particular attention to the parts of the boat by which he is directly affected: the fin, the rudder, rudder strings and the cox box speaker lines.



Fin

Thin metal plate toward the stern of the boat, attached to the hull. This boat part contributes toward the **stability of the boat in the water**. It stops the boat from rolling from side to side unduly and also guarantees a more direct and straight path forward through the water. With a fin that is loose, missing or bent there is an added difficulty to the coxswain's ability to make the boat travel in a straight line. Problems with fins usually occur due to poor supervision when setting the boat onto the water or taking it off (*refer to Booklet 5 - Launching and Landing*). Be sure to have an aligned fin.



Rudder

A rudder in good working order will continue the centre line of the boat when the rudder strings (toggles) are even. Or if placed completely straight will equate with completely level rudder strings.

Many modern boats will have their rudder included at the same point with the fin (these two parts should be perfectly aligned), or at the very stern of the boat. The coxswain should make sure that the cross bar found directly above the rudder is at 90° to the rudder beneath. Sometimes, when this is not the case it can be attributed to not tightening the nut at the very top of the cross bar (*or contact having been made with an immovable object*) skewing the alignment of rudder and cross bar. If it is too loose their will be no control through the rudder or if it is not aligned the boat will not travel straight.

➔ Rudder Strings

Check regularly for fraying or knotting. Many boats with thin wires will wear over time. This may be at the small pulleys that are used for ease and fluidity of movement or at incidental points of rubbing or contact. Be sure to inform your coach at the first signs of wear.

➔ Speaker lines

Other boats may have long hanging cox box speaker lines (**harness/loom**) – be sure to check that the line travels uninterrupted between each speaker. The connection between each speaker should be complete and not prone to being pulled on. Check that the point of contact between the speaker line and the cox box is greased and does not need forcing. Avoid an excessively long line that requires curling and that will hang from the boat when not being used – especially when the boat is being transported – it can be wrapped around the rudder line after a rowing session. Make sure that each speaker is working by asking for crew feedback occasionally or by attaching the cox box while the boat is on the boat racks.

There are other areas that the coxswain may look to as he becomes more experienced and his responsibilities broaden. However, be clear that you are not the personal assistant of each and every rower. The care of the boat is a joint responsibility shared between rowers, coach and coxswain. The coxswain must sometimes remind the crew of their responsibilities if he sees them neglected and can often lead by example.

Other areas that may be included: **boat washing, oar length set and button set** (*refer to parts*). Wear and tear on equipment is greatly increased if the nuts and screws of boats and oars are not frequently tightened. Additionally, there will be wear and tear if dirt is allowed to settle into moving parts. It is also worth remembering that a shiny, clean boat is a faster boat.

The boat is best washed with soapy water, followed by clear water after each row. A chamois (pronounced 'shammy') can be wiped over the hull to take up excess water. Sponges are not recommended unless they can be kept free of dirt and grime. Grit trapped in sponges can be an abrasive agent and do more harm than good when used, thus a chamois is more advisable.

It is also worth remembering to keep the oars and the slides clean. This can be easily done with a cloth dampened with water.



quick glossary

CHAMOIS A thin soft material with water absorbent properties used for the washing or polishing of boats.

COX BOX In-boat electronic amplification for the coxswain's voice. It also functions as an electronic timer and recorder of stroke rating.

COX KIT A collection of useful items to be carried in the boat by a coxswain for repairs to, or maintenance of, the boat.

FLIP-FLOPS Preferred open toed, all-purpose footwear of rowers and coxswains.

HARNESS/LOOM Leads between cox box and speakers in the boat.

HEADSET Microphone strapping to the cox's head for cox box use.

HYPOTHERMIA The condition of having an abnormally low body-temperature.

RIGGER The tubular metal supports protruding from the side of the boat to support the oar.

RIGGER-JIGGER A two ended ring spanner designed specifically to tighten nuts securing the rigger.

RUDDER CROSS BAR Point at which rudder strings are attached to the rudder for ease of movement.

SENSOR Attachment to the underside of a rowers sliding seat that registers stroke movement when passing over a corresponding attachment on the boat's decking. Facilitates the reading of the stroke rate on the cox box.

TOGGLES Points on the rudder strings used by coxswains to retain a comfortable firm grip and to indicate rudder position.

TRESTLE/SLING/STRETCHER A fold away stand that is used to support a boat when not in the water or on the boat rack.

WINDWARD The side from which the wind is blowing.



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THE GOOD COXSWAIN KNOWS:

- ✓ There are precautions to be taken before going out on the water.
- ✓ A coxswain should wear clothing appropriate for the weather.
- ✓ Wind and tide should be considered prior to going on the water.
- ✓ There are water traffic rules to be obeyed while coxing.
- ✓ There are steps to be taken to secure the cox's safety.
- ✓ There are pieces of equipment that are essential to the coxswain.
- ✓ The cox has certain responsibilities when caring for the boat.



First Published in 2006
Rowing Victoria Incorporated
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Printed in Australia

IN ASSOCIATION WITH:



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