

## Coxes Guide (full)

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## Coxes Guide (full)

This guide focuses on controlling the boat, which is only part of the Cox's duties. All members should also familiarise themselves with the Health & Safety Guide, VHF guide, Emergency Procedures and the Self-assessment Checklist – Cox skills.

Learning to Cox really comes through experience on the water, getting used to the boats and crews, encountering different situations and conditions. The aim of our induction and this guide is simply to give you sufficient confidence and knowledge to build those skills safely.

### 1.0 Basic Rules:

- When at sea the Cox is in command of the skiff.
- Cox must give clear, audible and supportive instructions to crew at all times.
- Cox must cover boarding, launching procedures and make check that everyone understands the procedures before launching.
- Personal Flotation Devices (PFDs) must be provided for everyone in the boat and must be worn when on the boat or slipway. For non-swimmers the PFD must be a lifejacket.
- Children must wear PFDs at all times.
- All rowers must be in good health – if in doubt consult a doctor before taking part.
- Rowers are advised to take drinking water to help prevent dehydration.
- Once you've launched, check that everyone can hear you and that they are listening.
- Look out for vessels including ferries and recreational sailors, and obstacles on the water.
- Beware that strong winds can quickly cause a collision with an obstacle.
- Let the rowers know what to expect coming towards the boat (they can't see what's coming), but ask them to stay alert too.
- Work closely with your Stroke rower. They can see behind you and can be a valuable second opinion. Use them as a quick fix – they can quickly row forwards or backwards to make a small manoeuvre.
- You will see from the rowers' faces how they are doing. Be sensitive and use your discretion - if even just one is struggling, take the pace down and bring the boat home without them feeling they are to blame.
- When coming back to shore give your rowers clear landing instructions. It is your responsibility while the boat and crew are on the water. Once landed, give clear instructions for disembarking - one at a time on the windward side.
- Beware of the elements (wind, rain, sun, snow...) and dress accordingly. Contending with difficult weather conditions is part of the fun of rowing, but safe enjoyment is the aim, not recklessness.
- **If in doubt, don't go out**

## 2.0 Responsibilities

The Cox has many responsibilities, amongst them steering, giving commands, communication, strategy and coaching, but first and foremost is **SAFETY**.

We all have to take responsibility for our own safety and we each have a duty of care to others, but when at sea the Cox has a particular responsibility for the safety of the boat and crew. The Cox is *Master of the Vessel* under maritime law and can be held legally responsible in the event of a collision or accident. So keep safety in mind at all times and be alert to any potential hazards.

**Avoiding Collisions** – Rowing off the club slipway there are relatively few fixed hazards. There are rocks to the south of the slipway to be vigilant of in strong northerlies. To the north of the wall, approaching the clubhouse there are some rocks close to the wall. Strong Easterlies can make launching from clubhouse shore difficult.

When launching and berthing always be aware of ferry positions to read and anticipate the wake from the ferries. Judge if best to let the wake pass before bringing the boat ashore or launching.

At times there can also be a wide variety of other water users; swimmers, kayakers, sail boats, jet-skis, the other skiff etc.

### Collision Avoidance

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

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

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

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

It is important to be aware of your neighbours at all times and be considerate to them.

Also keep in mind the Navigation Rules:

- Motor gives way to muscle gives way to wind.
- Keep right (starboard), particularly when entering/exiting harbours.
- Overtaking vessels must keep clear.

But apply common sense to all situations and don't rely on other water users knowing what they should be doing.

**Be alert** – Keep a good look out at all times.

Something might happen in the boat that attracts your attention; someone crabs, a pin breaks, a footrest comes loose etc. You can't ignore things like that but be careful

they don't distract you from what's happening around the boat. **Remember – you're the only one that can see where the boat is going**

### 3.0 Mitigating Risk

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

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

### 4.0 Launching and Recovering the skiff.

#### **4.1 Launching**

Before launching the cox should assess all members rowing experience, swimming ability, PFD is on properly, that crew understand how to inflate it and confidence in the boat.

The cox should decide on the seating allocation of the boat and give clear instructions on how the boat will be launched, each crew's role and when they will enter the boat.

Once the boat is in the water all crew must hold the boat steady in the water by holding the gunnels on **each side**. The trolley should be placed off the slipway so as not to obstruct other users of the slipway.

The cox enters the boat first then clearly instructs each member to enter the boat on the windward side and to attach their oar. Each crew member once boarded must use their oar, under cox's instruction, to keep the boat aligned into the wind. Only once the previous crew member is ready can the next crew member board and only under instruction of the cox.

Once all crew are safely aboard the cox will instruct which crew members need to apply backing to take the boat out into calmer waters where the cox deems it safe to adjust footplates.

Cox must be aware of incoming ferries and the impact the wash will have on launching the skiff.

#### **4.2 Recovering the skiff**

The cox must assess wind speed and direction to safely bring the skiff onto the slip.

On approaching the slip the cox must communicate clearly with the crew to approach at an appropriate speed.

This can be controlled through less powerful strokes or through rowers 1 and 2 shipping oars ready for landing.

Crew must disembark one at a time, under cox instructions, **on the windward side** so that if they stumble the boat will move away from them and not on top of them. Number one can then hold the boat steady as the cox directs each crew member to disembark one at a time.

Once disembarked crew must spread themselves evenly on both sides of the gunnels and hold the gunnels keeping the skiff directed into the wind.

**The slipway at the club is narrow and it is important that all crew are aware of how much space they have either side of the boat to avoid slipping off the edge of the slipway.** If there is not enough room they should tell the cox who can instruct crew to align the boat to the centre of the slipway.

Cox can then direct who holds the boat steady, who takes hold of painter to refloat the boat while another crew member collects the trolley and wheels it under the boat while its afloat.

Using the painter tie the boat to the trolley and raise the boat up the slipway.

The boat is best pulled rather than pushed up the slipway.

If crew are struggling to raise the boat and trolley, make sure there are two crew on the trolley handles. Crew can also use the painter and pull the boat up the slipway.

Cox is responsible for making sure the boat and all equipment is stored correctly. The cox must notify bosun of any repairs needed to be carried out to the boats or equipment.

## **5.0 Steering**

You sit at the back and move the tiller in the opposite direction to the one you want to go in. However, there are various factors that affect the steering of the boat:

- The movement of the oars; forwards, backwards, one side or both
- The rudder only works when moving through the water
- The speed of the boat
- The condition and the balance of the crew.
- Currents and tides
- The wind; the strength and direction (head, tail, or cross etc.)

### **5.1 Steering – basics**

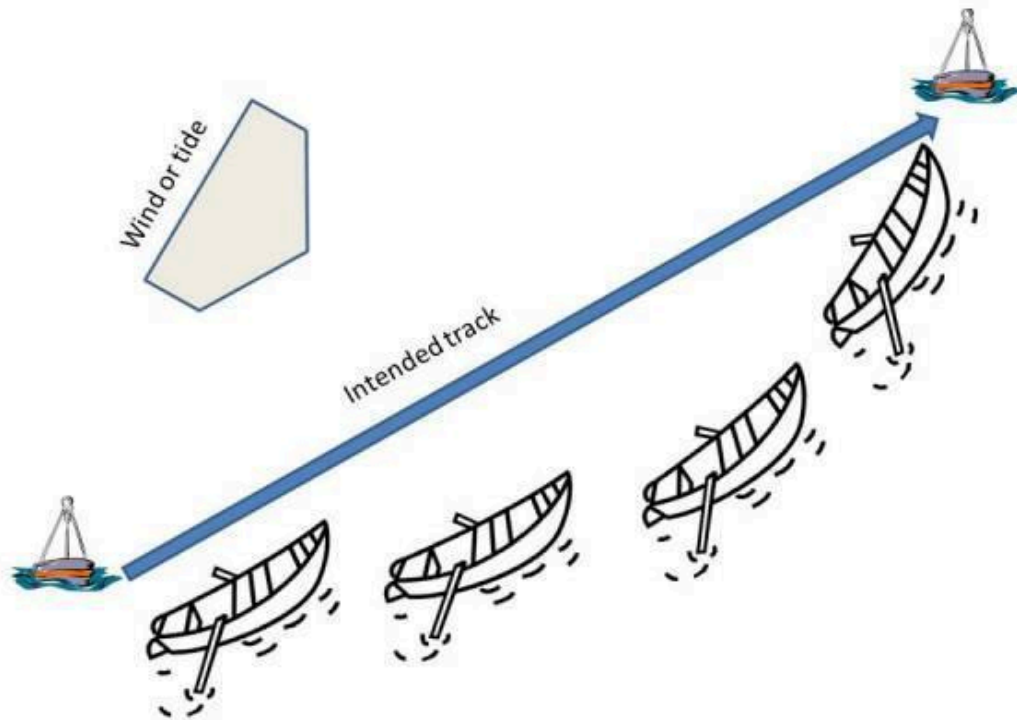
- The Cox should remain still and balanced.
- You should maintain a direct and constant course which takes into account the effect of tidal flow and wind.
- The rudder acts as a brake, slowing the boat, so keep rudder movements small and subtle. Try to anticipate steering so that the tiller is used only occasionally.
- Making adjustments when blades are in the water affects the balance of the boat less.

**5.2 Applying the rudder** – Moving the tiller and applying the rudder pushes the back of the boat out, but doesn't have much immediate effect on the bow. So in effect you're skidding the boat into a new direction. That's why you generally want small movements because any movement at all will act as a brake and slow the boat. This a very important factor when it comes to racing turns.

There's also a delay between applying the rudder and the change in direction, so be patient. You'll sometimes see Coxes over applying the tiller in one direction, then over correcting in the other, before over applying again. This not only slows the boat considerably, but is unnecessary. Ideally you should be moving the tiller as little as possible. There are only a few situations where large movements of the tiller are required.

**5.2 Steering a course** – Steering the optimum course can be very difficult as there are a considerable number of factors to consider; the balance of the crew, wind, currents and tides, other boats or hazards. But frequently the optimum **will not be** pointing the boat where you want to go and trying to head in a straight line.

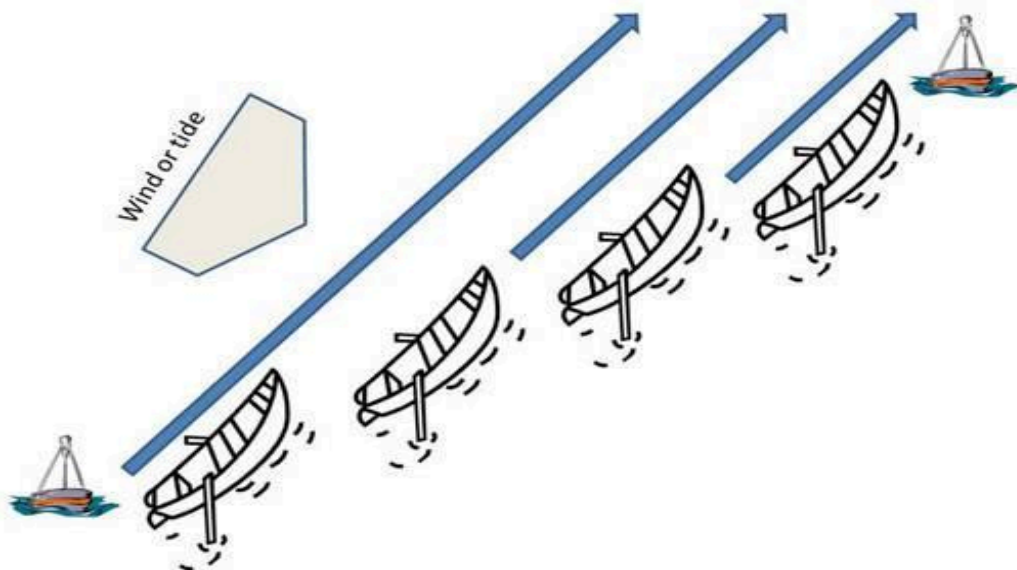
## Steering a course - NOT taking into account wind and tide



If you don't take into account factors such as wind and tide there is a significant chance you will:

- travel a longer route
- use the rudder more, slowing the boat
- or even put the boat in danger.

## Steering a course -taking into account wind and tide



Judging the optimum course is not easy. The wind is relatively easy to judge but the effect of tides and currents is harder to anticipate. In regattas the course is at least repeated several times, so if Coxes communicate with each other you may be able to build up a picture of the best line to take. It's also worth watching what other boats are doing.

**Steering – wind** – Wind can present real challenges. We're lucky in Rothesay in that we can have fairly strong winds yet fairly calm sea conditions, but even with a benign sea you should think twice before taking a weaker crew out with a strong off-shore wind. You also have to think about the balance of the crew; one side may be weaker than the other and find it very difficult to turn into a strong wind and so you may need to adjust your course accordingly. Even the strongest crews can be brought to a standstill by a strong enough head wind.

Remember:

- Wind conditions can change a lot quicker than sea conditions.
- Rowing into a strong wind can be VERY hard work, even for a strong crew.
- Don't row with the wind for too long, or you could have a very long row back.
- Row into the wind at the earliest opportunity so you can judge the strength.
- Don't go too far from shore

#### 5.4 Steering – Waves

- You may need the crew to vary the stroke length and stroke rate, to suit the conditions.
- Long swells are fun and the Cox can aid the speed of the boat by calling for faster shorter strokes as the boat rises on the wave. In this way the boat is borne along on the crest of the wave and can attain high speeds.
- If the boat is heading directly into waves it can become very hard work for the rowers. The waves check the speed of the boat and may break over the bow. In these conditions it may be more comfortable and faster to angle the boat to the waves.
- Short breaking following seas are much more difficult to deal with. As the boat starts to accelerate down the face of the wave the rudder becomes progressively less effective. In these conditions there is a risk of broaching.
- **Keep the boat at right angles to breaking waves.**
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#### 5.5 Steering – Broaching

The skiffs are very stable and unlikely to broach out at sea (the boat should not be out in conditions where this is a risk). Broaching when returning to the beach through the surf is a more likely occurrence. Broaching can be quite sudden and so preparedness is important. If returning to the beach in a breaking following sea there are different possible approaches:

- **If the tide is high and the breaking zone quite short, one approach is to row hard right onto the beach, with the waves directly behind you. The tiller becomes unresponsive in a following sea (with unusually large movements necessary) but by maintaining speed through the water there's less risk of the stern being caught and carried by a wave.**

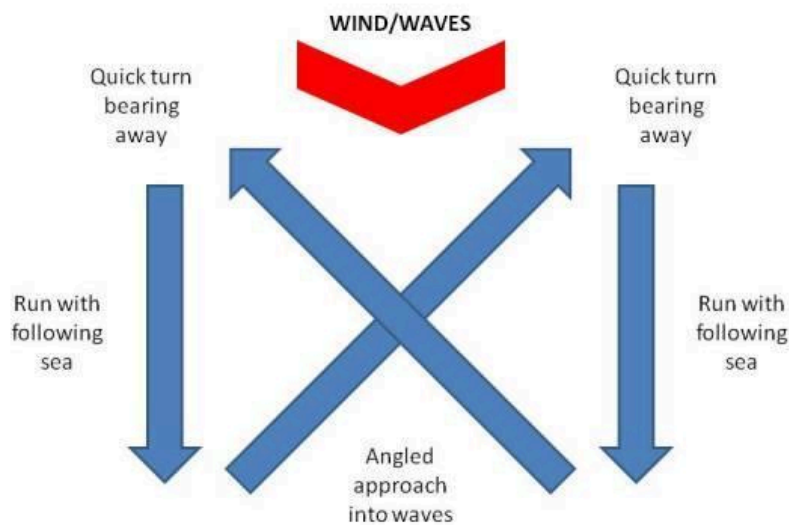
- If the tide is low and the breaking zone quite long (due to the shallow gradient of the beach) there are three traditional approaches; stern first, back into waves, deploy a drogue to reduce speed.
- *Stern first* – in very poor conditions row boats would come in stern first; point the bow out to sea and row backwards. This has the advantage that the Cox can see what's coming. Good to practice, as cox and crew. Crews need to become familiar with sustained back watering, and quick responses to cox commands.
- *Back into waves* – row in normally with the waves behind you but back water into big waves so they pass under the boat rather than carry it. This requires a fairly skilled crew as they have to switch easily from rowing forwards to backwards and back again. Also the Stroke may have to advise the Cox as they're in a better position to see the following waves.
- *Deploy a drogue* – a drogue acts like a parachute in the water behind the boat. It slows the boat so again waves tend to pass under rather than carry it along. With a drogue deployed the tiller will be very ineffective so you may need to rely on the oars to steer, but the boat will be more stable. A drogue is the simplest way to reduce the risk of broaching.

## 5.6 Steering – Turns

Turning can be done in a variety of ways; rudder alone, rudder and oars, oars alone. Other factors to be aware:

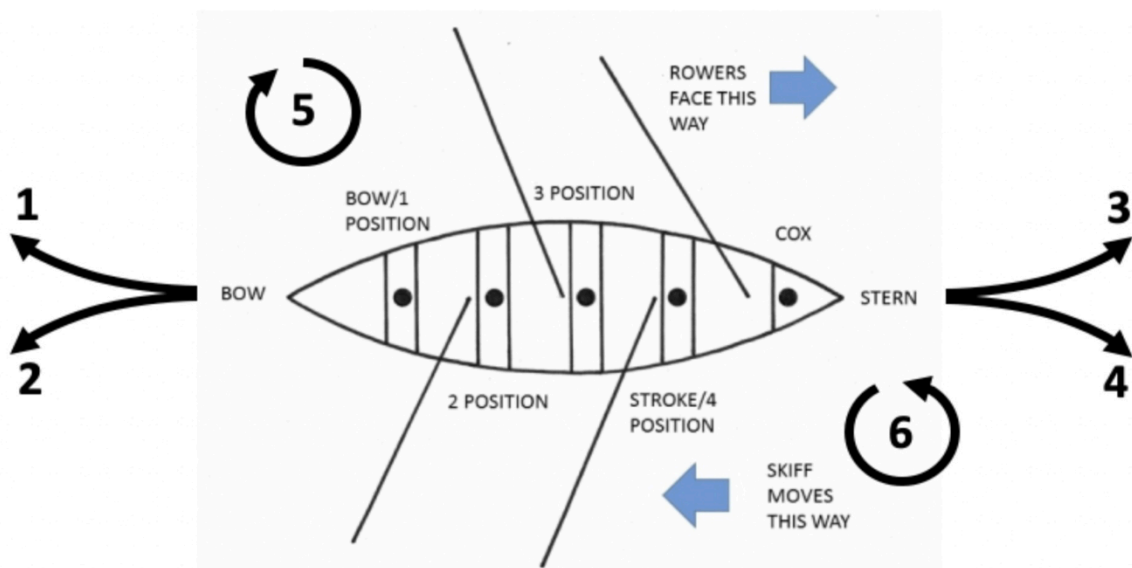
- The wind; a turn into a strong wind can be extremely difficult so it may be better, and quicker, to bear away and let the wind help take you round.
- You need to be aware of the capability of your crew. The crew may be unbalanced, with one side stronger than the other, so the turning capability may vary.
- Think about your course and the turns required to get back.
- You don't want to be side on to heavy seas. If the sea is rough, pick your moment and turn as quickly as possible.

## Steering – heavy conditions

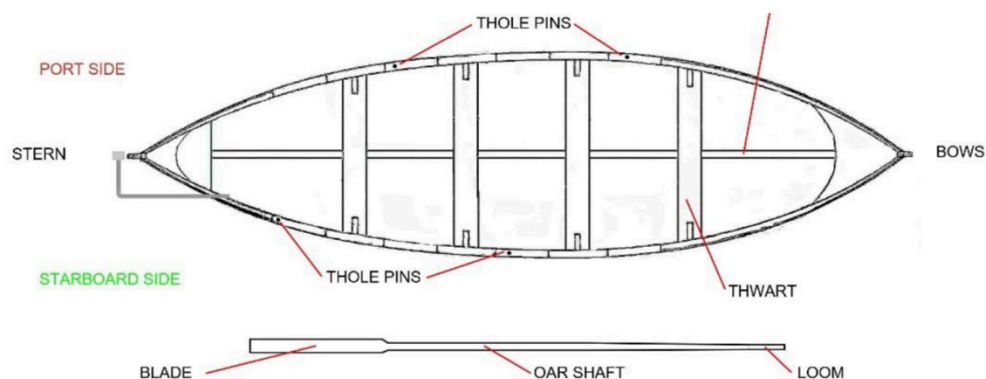
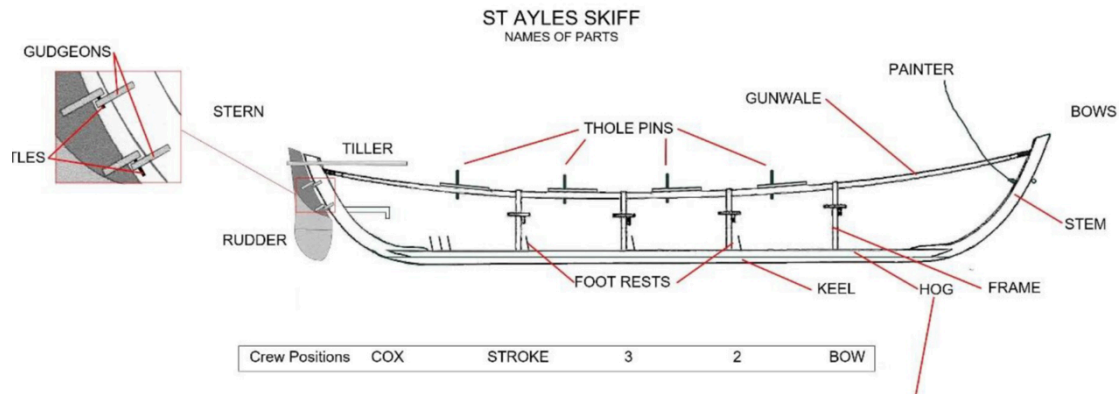


### 5.7 Positioning/Orientating the Boat

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



## 6.0 Parts of a Skiff



## 7.0 Who should go where, when

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

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

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

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

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

## 8.0 Rowing Technique

**Straight Back:** Erect but not stiff .....swinging from the loins only at the hips and not from any point in the middle of his back as a secondary pivot. [This] eases the respiratory organs by opening the chest cage.

**Swing:** The time occupied coming forward should be the body's rest; an erect head and open chest will enable the heart and lungs to work freely and easily. Any tendency to rush the swing must be checked ... As the body swings the hands should be at the same time stretching and reaching out as if constantly striving to touch something which is as constantly evading them.

**Use of the Arms:** The arms must be straight when swinging back. They must be considered as merely connecting rods between the body and oar. The use of the biceps in rowing should be discouraged, as the [rower] who finishes [their] stroke by the aid of the biceps infallibly dog ears [their] elbows and sticks them out at right angles to [their] ribs, giving a weak as well as a cramped and ugly finish ... It is important that the oar should be pulled into the chest and not the chest up to the oar. This latter will certainly shorten the stroke prematurely, and spoil the rhythm of the swing.

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

## 9.0 Commands

As a Cox you have to be able to communicate effectively. You are in charge of the boat and have to give instructions to the crew. On occasion you may also need to act as a coach, helping rowers improve their technique. And as the only member of the team that can see ahead you need to let the crew know what's happening and what to expect.

The more you Cox, the better your communication skills will become. Try to keep your instructions:

- Clear
- Consistent with terminology
- Concise
- Firm
- Simple
- Positive and encouraging

It can be helpful to count the strokes to help the crew keep time. But remember that Stroke sets the rate and count to their time. Being in time is key.

In races in particular, you also need to warn the crew about changes e.g. *"In 2--Bow turn--1--2--bow turn!"* and keep the crew informed about; the distance to next buoy, how close the next boat is, how well you are doing, how far to the end of the race, the stroke rate etc.

It also helps if Coxes are consistent in their terminology. The following are what we tend to use but other skiff clubs differ, so if you have any guest rowers it may be best clarifying.

- **‘Ready to row’** – Not a question, a command – rowers get ready to start rowing.
- **‘...and row’** – no explanation necessary
- **‘Oars’**- stop rowing
- **‘Hold water’** – rowers put blades in water to brake the boat
- **‘Stroke turn’** – stroke side keep rowing, bow side stops.
- **‘Bow turn’** – bow side keep rowing, stroke side stops.
- **‘Together’** – all rowers to come back in following a turn
- **‘Easy on stroke/bow’** – both sides keep rowing but one side eases off.
- **‘One up on bow’** – bow side rowers take one stroke (used to straighten the boat up at the start of a race, or to go head to wind on a rough day etc.)
- **‘Watch oars on stroke’** – there is an obstruction coming up on stroke side, be ready to lift your oars to avoid it
- **‘Stop’** – emergency stop. All oars in the water and hold them there.

## 10.0 Taking a skiff out

Skiffs can be booked on the club website. A designated cox must be present at all times a club skiff is out.

Cox must use RYA SafeTrx app to record their sail plan and designate another club member on land to be notified of the route and ETA.

On board Cox must have phone in a waterproof phone cover and make sure battery is adequately charged.

If skiff does not return on time the designated person can check app to see where boat is and phone cox to ascertain if there is an issue.

If the skiff cannot be contacted the designated person phones Coastguard giving last location according to the app.

## 10.0 Training a cox

Club designated coxes will need to have carried out a days in house training and then be able to demonstrate they understand the roles of a Cox and the risk assesment. They will also need to have demonstrated they can handle a boat by completing the cox competency tasks.

There may be occasions where a cox can allow a crew member who is training to be a cox to cox the boat under supervision of a designated club cox.

### **IBSC skiffs must have a recognised Cox on board when a crew is on the water.**

In practising coxing you will get a feel for how to handle the boat and can build your skills at your own pace and in a safe way. If you're unsure about anything or would like some advice on a particular aspect of Coxing then ask other Coxes.

| Coxing competency practical                                       | Completed |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| Manoeuvre skiff to pick up a floating buoy on a line              |           |
| Drop and safely manoeuvre away from the buoy                      |           |
| Complete turns on both hands, round buoys                         |           |
| Steer a straight course.                                          |           |
| Complete 360 degree turn                                          |           |
| Complete emergency stop                                           |           |
| Coxing checklist Oral/written                                     |           |
| Identify means of accessing weather, tidal and safety information |           |
| List safety procedure prior to launch                             |           |
| List no go circumstances                                          |           |
| List safety kit for normal rowing                                 |           |
| List correct launching and recovery procedures.                   |           |
| Describe how to deploy the anchor.                                |           |

|                                                                 |  |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------|--|
| Description of anchor equipment.                                |  |
| Describe Role of the Cox and Responsibilities                   |  |
| Identify areas locally where it is safe/not safe to go and why. |  |

### **Cox responsibilities**

#### **Checklist at Rothesay Bay**

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

### **Cox responsibilities**

#### **Checklist before launching**

- Reassess the weather and the sea condition as it can change very quickly. Do not go out if there is a neap or spring low tide as there is insufficient water to launch the skiff safely.
- If any crew member is unsure then cancel the row
- Check the bung is in
- Assign crew positions and make sure life jackets are on. Think about the experience

and balance of the crew.

- Remove the trolley and place trolley safely so it does not obstruct slipway users . If

you are doing a beach launch and need to move off quickly, place the oars across the boat.

- Instruct the crew to get in one at a time
- Position the rudder on the gudgeon
- Cox to move the boat safely away from the slip, carefully observing other marine traffic and buoy obstructions.
- When a few hundred yards out and when out of the wave zone, call "easy oars!" and let the rowers readjust their footrests etc.
- Adjust rowers to fix boat trim

#### **Assess the condition of the boat and equipment for any defects**

- Bail out any water
- Inspect hull for damage
- Check rudder and rudder brackets
- Check the boat deck including footstraps and pins, rowlocks, gates and oars.
- Check the safety bag and its contents. It should contain at least the following items:

VHF radio (with sufficient batter charge

