

# Grateful Oars Rowing Club

## Basic Coxswain's Manual

8/28/2015

Based on College of Charleston/Ian Fox *Coxswain Manual 1, 2015*  
and Baltimore Rowing Club *Cox Concepts...for Beginners 7/14*  
The definitive coxswain manual is *The Coxswain Encyclopedia: from Rack to Racing*, by Simon, Stokes and Zalkind, 2012,  
Foundation for Rowing Education, Inc.  
**The coxing authority for GORC is Joe Vitale, the club's founding member.**

## Introduction

Grateful Oars Rowing Club is a community rowing club whose members row mainly for exercise and fitness, with a few members who race. This manual therefore concentrates on the coxswain's role in a recreational/exercise setting. Furthermore, most GORC coxswains are chiefly rowers who occasionally cox. This manual assumes that most GORC coxswains will be relatively inexperienced.

The coxswain is in some ways the most important member of a crew. Coxswains are responsible for steering the shell and giving commands to facilitate the safe and efficient operation of the crew as a unit. The coxswain is the leader of the crew while on the water, and while handling the shell off the water as well. The coxswain can have a large effect on the success of the crew.

The qualities a good coxswain will possess are confidence, intelligence, positive attitude, thinking ahead, and understanding and following through on instructions from the boat captain or coach. Beginning coxswains will improve over time if they are willing to seek out advice from rowers, coaches, and other coxswains. Just as rowers are constantly trying to improve themselves, coxswains must look for ways to get better at what they do.

## 1. How to be a good Cox

a. **Learn from other coxswains.** Other coxswains can be a very good resource and role model: talk to them and watch them work. The more knowledge and experience you have, the better you'll become.

b. **Know how to row well.** Don't just watch videos of other people rowing. If you can't row well yourself, your coxing abilities will be limited. You could come to know the correct technique, but it's not the same as actually doing it. You have to know what the rowers in front of you are going through. Taking strokes on the water will help you to better understand the movements involved, which will help you in correcting the oarsmen.

c. **Know the lake.** Norwood Lake is generally an excellent lake for rowing. However, the lake has an irregular shoreline, along which are private docks of varying lengths, moored boats, swim rafts, and a float plane. There are buoyed rocks near the river mouth, but rocks along the southern shoreline are unmarked. Stay well clear of any lily pads. Rocks extend north from the island fully 200 feet. There are no rocks for roughly one-half mile up river, but the river shallows well downstream from the paper company rapids in Unionville. There are usually stationary fishing boats on the lake, some of which can be hard to see from the cox position. Floating obstacles, such as parts of docks, logs and sticks, are common, as the lake is actually part of the

Raquette River. It is common, especially early in the season and after periods of heavy rain, for floating objects to come down the river into the lake. They will usually clear the lake in a day or so, but some larger objects, such as logs, can ground in shallow water such as found in mid-lake off the cemetery shore. Most floating objects are difficult to see from the cox seat. Refer to the dry-erase board in the boathouse for any notes about floaters, and add information about what you might see. Date your notation. Brookfield Power occasionally lowers the lake, and on rare occasions, drastically. When the water level is very low, watch out for stumps.

**d. Know the club's safe rowing pattern and follow it.** The Grateful Oars uses a clockwise circulation pattern on the lake. Clarkson University crews also use this pattern. There is a map of the lake and the pattern in the boathouse. Travel port side to the shore when possible. When necessary to travel against or across the pattern, be very careful to avoid colliding with other rowing shells. There have been both serious and minor collisions between rowing shells on Norwood Lake. A map of the lake and circulation pattern is at the end of this manual.

**e. Know the crew.** Come to know the varying abilities and strengths of the crew members. Refer to them by name, not by seat number. Try to arrange the seating to balance skill and power by pairings. In an 8, skilled rowers should be at bow and stroke positions, with heavier crew in middle positions (the "engine room"). Typical "pieces" for GORC crews are from five to twenty minutes long, followed by rest periods for water and adjustments to clothing and equipment. Encourage the crew to save talking for the rest breaks. Some crews welcome corrections to technique; others just want the cox to steer for their hour and a half on the water. Recreational rowers and racers can have very different views of the role of cox. Know what your crew wants and respond accordingly. If the crew is mainly out for exercise, recreation and socializing, take it easy on the technicalities. If in any doubt, have a conversation with the boat captain before the session begins.

**f. Motivate.** In learning or racing situations you must motivate your crew. Rowing is difficult to do well, and beginners can become discouraged if "muscle memory" takes a while to set in. Develop your own style and ask your crew what motivates them. There is no one simple "magic call" which will make a boat move faster. All crews respond to different things. What works for one boat may not work for another. You should develop a broad base of knowledge so that you can put together the right thing to say at the right time. Don't be afraid to make mistakes; sometimes calls just don't work. Learn from your mistakes.

**g. Earn respect.** As a coxswain you have responsibility. Don't go on a "power trip". Sound bossy and your crew will immediately tune you out. Learn how to work with the other members of your team. If your crew respects you and trusts you, you will have a much better experience and the crew will be more likely to do well. It's not about you telling them what to do; it's about you helping them get the most out of their boat. Ask others how you come across, and be willing to accept their answers.

## 2. Working with your Coach

Most GORC crews have no coach, but most respond favorably to efforts by the cox to correct problems with rowing, most experienced crews included. If there is a coach, it is vitally important that a coxswain knows what the coach wants from both them and the crew. Make sure you know the workout for the practice, or the race plan at the regatta. You should know these things, have them written in your notepad, and be able to execute them without necessarily having the coach present. Whenever the coach is alongside working with the boat, it is important that you are listening to what he/she is saying. You'll need to know what the focus is and what the problems are to assist the crew. Whenever a coach addresses you specifically, you should raise your hand as an indication that you heard them. (This is also the case when an official addresses you at a regatta.) Additionally, whenever the coach is speaking YOU MUST REMAIN SILENT. If both of

you are talking, the crew will hear nothing at all. If it is an emergency situation and you have to interrupt the coach, raise your hand and give the necessary commands. A coach doesn't always see everything you see, and will respect your judgments if the safety of the crew and craft are at stake.

### 3. Duties of a coxswain

a. **Care and Use of the Cox Box.** Coxes of the 8 and of For Pete's Sake should take advantage of the club's cox boxes. These devices are kept at a charging location on the workbench by the rear door. Each one has a head set that may need to be adjusted. Before the crew is instructed to lay hands on the boat on the rack, the cox should obtain and power on one of the units. Carry the cox box with you to the dock as you guide the crew off the rack and to the dock. As the crew prepares foot stretchers and oars, plug the cox box into the boat's wiring and test the volume setting. Be very careful not to damage or immerse the cox box, as they are very costly.

At the conclusion of the row, turn the unit off, remove it before the boat is inverted, and carry it into the boathouse with the crew and boat. Plug the cox box into the charging wire before leaving the boathouse, making sure the red charging light is on. Report any problems with the cox box on the maintenance clipboard at the bulletin board or tell Pat Luppens.

b. **Steering.** Sit still and upright in the seat, bracing the feet against the stretcher: not only is it detrimental to the set if the cox is not braced, but the beginning of each stroke will slam your back into the rear of the seat. Hold the rudder lines lightly in the V between thumb and forefinger. Move the rudder line away from you on the side to which you want to steer. To steer right, push your right hand forward, to steer left, push your left hand forward. This steering arrangement is reversed in the Vespoli 4+, *For Pete's Sake*. If in doubt, experiment.

The best time to steer the boat with the rudder is during the drive. This will reduce drag of the boat when you are not steering. Example: When the rowers are at the catch, you need to be ready to steer; then, when the drive begins, turn the rudder. Hold on to the rudder line to keep the rudder there until you have acquired your point (if the crew takes another stroke and you still don't have your point keep it there until you do). Once you have acquired your point, slowly ease the rudder line back into a straight position. Since a shell slides through the water, the shell will continue to swing after the rudder has stopped being used. Therefore, slightly under-steer toward your final target. It is vital to anticipate the beginning and end of a corner, or a correction, otherwise the turn will have to be counteracted, and the boat will "fishtail" down the lake. When steering a straight line, the cox will find it easiest if he/she aims at some distant object. This is called steering by a point. In a racing lane, use SMALL CORRECTIONS as soon as the bow strays from this point, rather than making big corrections later. Steer with your crew whenever possible by adjusting port and starboard pressure. Remember, there is a "blind spot" directly in front of the boat. Be constantly scanning the water in front of your boat for obstacles or debris in the water, and other shells. If necessary, lean slightly over to one side to view directly in front of your bow. Do this in mid-drive, not on the recovery.

A great deal of steering is by directing the crew to apply or reduce power, or hold water, or check the boat on one side or the other. This is called steering by pressure, as in "Ports, light; Starboards, heavy!"

c. **Safe Management of Crew and Equipment.** An underlying goal of any coxswain is 100% safety of both crew and equipment. To accomplish this, the cox must be in control of both the boat and the crew at all times. The cox should have a complete 360° awareness of the immediate vicinity on land and on the water. This requires continual observation and forethought.

Be familiar with the **GORC Safety Plan**, especially the circulation pattern and what to do in the event of thunder storms.

Additionally, the *racing* coxswain must be able to maintain the focus of the crew. Talking in the boat, joking around, unnecessary movement, and spacing-out will be highly disruptive to competition and racing practice and cannot be tolerated. It is the job of the cox to keep their crew in line and with their heads in the boat. Recreational settings can be much more informal.

d. **Giving Commands.** Calling commands must be done clearly, positively, confidently, and with a definite cadence. You must know what you're going to say before you say it. REMEMBER, the crew has their hands full trying to row or carry the boat; they do not have time to interpret your commands. You want to make it as easy as possible for them to understand and do what you want.

Each time you give a command, you will tell the crew what they are going to do, then when to do it, and finally, to execute the command. Examples are: "Way enough in two. One, two, way enough," and "Hands on. Up an inch, ready, up." Each of these command sequences should be given with a definite rhythm, or pace (cadence), so the crew can prepare to execute. On land the coxswain will use "ready" or "and" to tell the crews when to move ("Roll to waist, ready, roll." "Up and over head, and, up.") On the water, the cox will generally give two strokes prep time, calling the cadences at the Stroke's catch. ("Add bow pair in two. One, two, bow pair in.") Rowing has its own list of commands. "Stop" does not exist, only "Way enough" and "Let it run". These basic commands are those which should be learned in the first week or two as they are essential for you to communicate with your teammates. Some teams use slightly different commands; however, these are some examples of commands:

**Adjust the ratio** – Used to correct either a rush or sluggishness on the recovery. The ratio compares the time used by the hands away from the body motion to the slide speed. The classic ratio is similar to the 1-2-3 of "waltz time": with 1 for the drive and 2-3 for the recovery.

**Back it (down)** – Row backwards. "Bow four, back it down." (Note: no blades need to be turned around in the oarlocks for backing, but hatchet blades are more effective if inverted for longer periods of backing.

**Catch** – The beginning of a stroke when the blade enters the water. "At the catch, blades squared and buried."

**Check it down** – Drag the blades (not fully squared) on the water to slow and/or stop the boat from moving forward or backward. Having only one side checking blades results in a turn to that side. "Port to check it down, starboard to row".

**Early** – The catch is early. "Six-seat you are early".

**Finish** – The part of the stroke at which the rower's legs are straight and the oar handle is touching the body. Use this when you want to have the rowers start rowing without completely stopping the boat. "Sit at the finish".

**Feather** - Make the blade parallel to the water. "Roll and feather".

**Finish timing** – A reminder to the crew to align their finish times. "Five-seat, watch your finish timing". All blades should enter and leave the water at the same instant.

**Hands on (Lay hold)** – Grasp the boat and prepare to move it. "Hands on" or "Lay Hold all eight".

**Hold water** – Similar to "check it down", but fully squared and held firmly to stop the boat, not to slow it.

**Heads up** – Pay attention, something to watch out for is near you. This should always be used when someone may not see your shell coming at them such as when leaving the boathouse. "Heads up, shell coming out".

**Late** – A part of the stroke is late. Be itself, the term usually refers to the catch timing. Do not use this over and over without explaining which part of the stroke is late and how to correct it. "Three, you're late."

**Let it run** – Oarsmen to stop rowing at the finish, hands away, or on the gunwale and allow the boat to glide (run) across the water's surface without the blades touching it. Let it run. GORC crews usually let it run with blades touching.

**On the Paddle** – Row at no pressure. "All eight, on the paddle." For cooling down or slowing to approach a stop or the dock.

**Roll** – Two meanings: 1. When out of the water, roll the boat from the waist position to the overhead position or vice versa. 2. When on the water, roll the blade.

**Square** – Make the blade perpendicular to the water. "Square it up".

**Touch it up (Tap It)** – Row short, gently, to align or position the boat better. "Bow seat touch it up".

**Up and overhead** – To lift the boat to the overhead position. "Up and overhead, ready, up."

**Way enough** – Stop whatever you are doing such as rowing, a drill, etc. "All eight, way enough." ("Weigh" is sometimes used, but it is archaic. "Way" equates to motion, while "weigh" equates to lifting, as in weighing the anchor on a ship.)

e. **Enthusiasm and Motivation.** Think of it this way: you are in charge of four or eight teammates who are relying on you for direction, encouragement, lots of information, and their safety. Always try to be positive! Coxes should always try to speak with authority, clarity, and confidence. You will use a "cox box" sound system that will enable you to speak to each rower as if you are sitting right next to her in the boat. It gives you the ability to keep everyone working together and psyched. On the other hand, be aware that your teammates will hear everything you say as well as the differences in your voice such as whether you are tense, uncertain, and angry or psyched. All coxes work diligently to obtain a style of speaking that is comfortable for them and in a tone to which the rowers will respond. Just as you will be giving feedback to rowers about their technique during their rowing, try to get feedback from them after practice about what they like and don't like about how you cox them. All rowers have different preferences on what they would like to hear from their coxswain, male or female. Knowing this and knowing your rowers will help you determine what to say and how to say it.

Always be POSITIVE and ENTHUSIASTIC with your crew: you want them to improve and to have fun. Listen to how you're talking to them. Are you too bossy, too authoritative? Or the opposite—too quiet, too relaxed and unpredictable? Striking a good balance between too harsh and too nice takes a bit of practice, but is essential for the coxswain's relationship with the crew.

If you're giving critique, it will be much more readily accepted if it is phrased in a positive manner. Avoid words like "don't" and "stop" or generally telling them what not to do, but instead give them positive suggestions on how to do things correctly. Sometimes, believe it or not, the racing coxswain's job is to lie sometimes, if only just a little. If your boat is being walked through by a boat two lanes over, don't give them updates on how fast you're falling behind. You must keep your crew from losing hope, even if it means lying about gaining seats back. During the race you do not want repeat the same commands or motivational words over and over. Have a variety of commands and motivational words to keep them involve in the race and this is why we have race plans.

f. **Technical Corrections and Advice to Rowers.** There is much information a knowledgeable coxswain can see and feel from the cox seat: blades moving in perfect unison, both in drive and recovery; blade speed as well as height; blade angle on the square and feather; roll ups; clean catches and releases with appropriate puddles—all are hallmarks of good rowing and can be clearly seen from the stern. Likewise, variations in these motions are much like symptoms, indicating to the trained eye what the body is doing incorrectly. Additionally, the feel of how the boat lifts at the catch and runs at the release gives the coxswain, who is not in constant motion, a unique ability within the boat to diagnose the power performance. Reminding rowers of problem areas can be a good thing if done appropriately if there is a coach with the crew, but it is very easy for a coxswain to fall into the role of coach. This should be avoided for a number of reasons, not the least of which is that it can be extremely irritating for the rower and coach alike. Constant

or often repeated reminders will cause the rower to tune you out, and will distract the crew. Reminders about anything the coach is not actively working on will also be disruptive to the practice. Talking while the coach is talking is discourteous.

Notice this section was last on the list of coxswain duties. If the cox is knowledgeable enough and familiar enough with the crew, or if the coach has asked specifically for the cox to remind the crew on these points, then it is appropriate to give advice. Otherwise, be very cautious about how you work with your crew. If there is no coach, the cox may be expected to act like one. Discuss this with the crew if there is any doubt.

## 4. Moving a Boat

A boat is most susceptible to damage when it is moving on land, either in the hands of the rowers or on the trailer. **DO EVERYTHING IN YOUR POWER TO KEEP YOUR BOAT SAFE** on the way to the water. If you hit the boathouse door with the riggers, knock off the skeg on the dock, or damage the boat in any other way, the boat will be racked and you and your crew will have caused unnecessary damage. In Grateful Oars, there will be more than one crew using any boat, so causing damage can be doubly inconsiderate. GORC boats are repaired by volunteers as they have time and materials, so any damage could put a boat out of service for some time.

Before you move the boat, be sure the full crew is entered in the log sheets by the bulletin board.

a. **Calls to the water.** At the rack, make sure your crew is arranged bow to stern by height and arranged opposite their riggers.

Calls and the sequence of maneuvers:

- Have crew members carry oars, seat pads and sponges to near the land end of the dock. Have all personal items, like water bottles, at the dock as well.
- Have the crew pull the boat fully out on the rack slides.
- Assign rowers to seats. Rowers stand opposite their rigger. Half cross under.
- **"Hands On"**—crew grasps gunnels and is ready to lift. **NO TALKING FROM HANDS ON.**
- **"Up an inch, and, up."** In unison, raise the boat only enough to clear the rack. Be aware of oar locks on boats above your shell.
- **"Step to the center of the aisle and push in the slides."**
- **"Down to waist, and down."**
- **"Walk it forward"** Make sure the riggers clear racked boats and doorway.
- When clear, swing bow slightly right, then bring stern widely around to the right to align with the dock.
- Walk on, boat at waist. When bow reaches the end of the dock, loudly call
- **"Way enough"**, then
- **"Up and over heads. Ready, UP"**
- It is important to give the following commands loudly and as fluidly and quickly as possible:
- **Step to the right (or (left depending on launch side).** Launch on the upwind side of the dock. Allow for the sway of the floating dock: the closer to the end, the more motion.
- **"Toe the edge".**
- **"Roll to waist. Push it out. And down."**
- Make sure they lean out over the water, and have an arm on the stern to make sure the skeg (black fin) clears the dock.
- Close the watertight bow and stern compartments securely.

b. **Launching:** The aim is to get the boat launched as quickly as possible. At races, crews should launch in two minutes. GORC recreational crews take considerably longer. Try to speed up the process, which should be business-like. Call one side to oars, the other to locks. All crew adjust foot stretchers and sponge out wheel tracks. Rowers with clog foot stretchers clean the bottoms of their shoes. It may be necessary to make stretcher adjustments on the water. Race crews at regattas make adjustments before taking the boat to the launch dock. Cox plugs in cox box and tests volume.

- **"Extend water-side oars. Water-side rowers, one foot in, and down."**
- **"Dockside rowers, one foot in, and down."**
- **"Count down when ready."**
- **"Lean away. Walk it down. Careful with hands."**
- **"Oar blades on the water as you clear the dock."** Walk it down with hands until the bow four are clear.
- **"Bow pair at the catch, ready, paddle."**

c. **Shell is swamped** - Immediate command "way enough! Hold water!" A shell is swamped when the interior water reaches the gunwales. If rowers stay in the boat, the flotation ends may cause the boat to break apart.

a. Coxswain directs rowers to untie, and by seat number rowers should carefully, but quickly slip overboard.

b. If the boat is taking on excessive water, signal the launch and unload rowers by pairs - starting in the middle of the boat - as soon as possible in order to avoid damage to the boat. Pairs should form "buddies" and keep watch of each other. The cox should buddy with the stern pair.

c. If rescue is not imminent, take the following steps: 1) Remove oars and place them parallel to the shell. All persons should move to the two ends of the shell. It is dangerous to roll a shell when near riggers. 2) Roll the boat to form a more stable flotation platform so rowers can either lie on top of the hull or buddies can hold onto each other across the hull. 3) Remember that body heat loss occurs 25 times faster in the water. Do not attempt to roll the boat if rescue is on the way.

*[The above information on swamping is from Baltimore Rowing Club coxing manual.]*

d. **Thunder storm actions.** At the first sign of thunder, return to the dock immediately if it is nearby. If the crew cannot return to the dock within five minutes or less, row to the nearest shore and exit the boat. Secure the boat to the shore if possible and seek shelter. When the danger has passed for several minutes, return to the boat and row back to the dock. The session is over.

e. **Docking:** APPROACH THE DOCK SLOWLY. KNOW THE WIND DIRECTION. Become aligned three or four boat lengths from the dock. Docking a large shell on Norwood Lake is often difficult. Don't get discouraged if you blow a landing, but learn from it.

- **Check It Down; Way Enough.** Assess the wind while some distance out from the dock. The usual wind on Norwood Lake is from the Southwest at a small angle to the dock. Aim for the upwind side, which is usually the right-hand side (boathouse side) as you approach. Learn to judge the distance needed between the boat and the dock when docking in different wind conditions. Ultimately, you want the wind to assist in docking while you keep your point and stabilize the boat. There may be one or more boats at the dock preparing to launch or to take a boat out. *In such cases it will be best for the 8 to wait for a clear dock before landing. Depending on circumstances, fours should wait, as well.*

- **Bow 4 (or 2 in a 4+) drop out and set.** Then drop out 5&6. Then go to arms and back, and finally arms only with stern or bow pair, depending. Choose a pair you can depend upon. The idea is to slow the boat down but still keep it moving to maintain steerage.
- Approach the dock at a 15° angle (depends on the size of the boat and wind strength). As the bow nears the dock have the stern pair **way enough**.
- Final steering is by 7 or 8 seat quickly holding water and feathering to adjust the point of the boat before touchdown.
- **“Dock side rowers raise your oars. All crew lean away slightly.”**
- Cox removes the head set and leaves the boat first to hold a rigger down unless there is help on the dock.
- Call as follows when docked:
- **“Dock side rowers, one foot on the dock, one on the strip. And up.”**
- Call one side to oars, the other to locks. The idea here is that oar handlers get their shoes while the locks are being loosened, then the remaining crew can get their shoes while the oars are carried off. This promotes efficiency in removing the boat from the dock.
- Open the watertight compartments and check for leakage.
- Stand by the skeg, calling the next segment quickly:
- **"Hands on. Roll up to waist, ready, UP. UP and over heads, ready, UP. Turn and face the bow. Split to shoulders. Down to waist. Walk it off."**

#### f. Racking

- As soon as the stern clears the dock, swing the stern to the right, bow in place, and then swing both stern and bow to align with the boathouse, stern in first.
- Eights and fours go in stern first, bow toward the open door. Be careful of the riggers on the bay doors and racked boats. Stay at waist.
- Once on the racks, have four crew members wipe down and four put oars away.
- Cox returns the cox box to the charging station and plugs in.
- Sign in on the log sheet.

## 5. Common Drills:

- **Pick Drill:** Most common drill used every row as a warm-up. Half boat setting, half drilling. All square blade: quick pick- arms only, swing pick- arms and back, 1/4 slide, 1/2 slide, 3/4 slide, full slide, then add the feather. Allows crew to focus on the individual elements of the stroke.
- **Inverted Pick Drill:** Legs only, moving to legs and back, then legs back and arms (full stroke). Emphasizes proper drive sequence and good front-end suspension.
- **Outside arm only:** Rowing with the inside arm behind the back, blade squared. Focuses on the leverage of the outside arm, drawing of the handle into the body, and control of handle height during recovery. Helps the set throughout as well as catch and finish precision.
- **Wide grip:** Generally done on the square, but not necessarily. Inside hand moves toward the oarlock, holding the oar on the carbon-fiber shaft. Forces good lean around the pin, proper pivot towards the rigger, lower inside shoulder.
- **Pause drills:** One- or two-pause drills every 'x' strokes, pausing at various positions, depending on the portion of the recovery needing the most attention; finish, arms away, body prep, 1/4 slide, 1/2 slide. Works set, timing, and slide control.

- **Cut the cake:** Blades feather and recover to either hands away, body prep, 1/4 slide, or 1/2 slide before returning to the finish a second time, then continuing to normal recovery—blade height remains constant. This will help with all aspects of the set being off, as well as working quick hands away, stroke length, and rate.
- **Eyes closed:** Continuous rowing with rowers' eyes closed. Forces crew to listen for slide and catch timing, and to feel the body positioning. Helps timing, slide rush, catch, and lean problems.

## 6. Coxswain's Tools and Equipment

The most important piece of equipment used by the coxswain, other than the boat itself, is the Cox Box. This is a compact and sophisticated (and expensive) electronic device which gives the cox various readings in the boats, most commonly strokes-per-minute (spm) and the clock. The Cox Box should be treated with extreme care as they are expensive and relatively fragile. Always carry the Cox Box by the attached handle— NEVER CARRY IT BY THE HEADSET WIRE. Also, be careful when plugging the unit into either the boat or the recharger. The connection pins bend easily if they are not aligned properly. Frequent coxswains should put together a small bag of tools including:

- 7/16" wrench
- Stopwatch
- Adjustable wrench which opens up to 3/4"
- Phillips screwdriver
- Electrical tape
- Wide athletic tape
- Band-aids
- Small bag of spare parts ( 7/16 nuts, washers, rigger spacers.
- Whistle (3 short burst is the universal call for help)
- Notepad with a pen or pencil for writing down daily line-ups and workouts, and a
- Waterproof baggie to keep these things dry in the boat.

## 7. Racing

Since so few GORC crews race, this manual provides only basic advice on racing. Racing coxswains should refer to the manuals upon which this one is based at <http://cofcrew.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/02/Coxswain-Manual1.pdf> and <https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B5a1ogFAzkqecHVPQUUpMOXJjY3c/view>. The definitive manuals for coxswains include *The Down and Dirty Guide to Coxing* (<http://www.thecoxguide.com/index/html> ), \$24, and *The Coxswain Encyclopedia: from Rack to Racing*, by Simon, Stokes and Zalkind, 2012, Foundation for Rowing Education, Inc. (\$5.99 e-book for Kindle or \$35.00 from various sources like <http://www.nkhome.com/rowing-sports-products/coxswain-encyclopedia>.)

Racing is the test of all that has been learned in practice. Before the race itself, the crew will have to row to the starting line. The crew will use this time to warm-up for the race. In other words they get their bodies ready to perform. A warm-up will usually consist of brief technical work and then end with short, full pressure pieces. During the warm-up, the coxswain should maintain a positive and calm atmosphere in the boat. The rowers may be nervous and it is up to the coxswain, no matter how nervous, to calm the crew. Before the race is not the time to add anything new or to try and fix problems which could not be fixed in practice. The crew must focus

on doing the best they can with what they have and should not expect any major changes or improvements just moments before the race. Attempting to fix too much on race day can have a negative effect on the performance of the crew. Races in General - Your job on the day of the races:

- Keep the rowers together and talk about your plan for running the race.
- Keep your cox box working – plug it into your boat to make certain there are no problems (i.e. stroke rating and speakers.)
- Think through problems that might occur and how you'd handle them. Keep your cool.
- Check the boat and oars to ensure equipment and rigging is in order.
- Make sure the boat will pass inspection by the marshals, who will examine the shoe tie-downs and bow ball before allowing the crew to proceed to the dock to launch.
- Debrief with your crew after the race.
- Have a race plan (map of the course, know the teams that you are racing against, and have a variety of commands and motivational words)
- While waiting for the start: maintain a calm voice so the rowers maintain their confidence in you, have them take three deep breaths to calm and oxygenate themselves.

#### **a. Sprint Racing**

Sprint races take place during the spring and summer months. GORC crews rarely enter masters sprint races as they are seldom within commuting distance of Norwood. The distance of these races is 2000 meters for college and elite rowing, 1500 meters for high school rowing, and 1000 meters for masters rowing. Each race can have between two and six crews racing at the same time. The crews start even with each other. Each crew is assigned their own lane which they must stay in the entire race. Sprint races may make use of a starting platform or stake boat where a person holds the stern of the boat in place. An official called the Aligner makes certain each crew is aligned.

##### The Start.

The boat must be backed into the starting dock. Once on the line, the coxswain should raise one hand until the boat is straightened out, then lower it. The coxswain should have bow or 2 seat row shortened strokes (i.e. arms only) to straighten the boat. Full strokes make it very difficult for the person holding the stern to hold on. If a side wind is blowing, have either 2 row with 1's oar or 3 row with 2's oar to straighten the boat. This is called "pinching it". If there is no stake boat or dock, an official will give commands in order to get them aligned. When the official asks the crew if they are ready, the coxswain should raise one hand briefly and have the crew sit ready to row. Blades should be square and buried, with rowers at half slide as the start sequence begins.

Most sprint races begin with either a countdown start or a two command start immediately following a spoken listing of the entries. An example of a countdown start is "5...4...3...2...1...ATTENTION! ROW!". A two command start is "QUICK START. ATTENTION! ROW!"

The initial strokes are called by the cox: HALF, HALF, THREE QUARTERS, LENGTHEN, FULL. Settle into the agreed upon stroke rate for the first part of the race and follow the plan.

##### The Body.

Sprint races are straight from the starting line to the finish line. Coxswains should steer as straight as possible. The steering challenges are from wind and power differences in the crew. What commands should one use in a sprint race? There are some very basic commands like calling the racing start, calling power 10's, and calling the sprint. All

coxswains will have practiced these commands many times before racing. Besides these basic commands a coxswain should be able to motivate the crew. The coxswain should tell them where they are in a race, "300 meters left". Tell them where the competition is, "We're even with our opponent, let's take a 10 to walk through 'em." The coxswain should give encouragement to the rowers; tell them that they can do it. It is important the coxswain stay positive. The coxswain should also try to stay relaxed, yet confident and aggressive.

### The Final 250m

The finish is a very important part of a race, especially in a very close race. During the last 500 meters, the crew's power will be used up. All that will be pulling them through is technique. It is the job of the coxswain to make sure that they have that technique. The coxswain should remind them to sit-up, breathe, relax, and to keep rowing full strokes. A very important part of the finish is the sprint. Many races have been lost by boat that had the lead for the whole body of the race because a boat behind them had a better sprint. Sprints are fast and the rowers must give everything that they have. They should push themselves past their limits. All that matters is getting over the line first. The coxswain should make sure that the boat is together and at the same rate. Do not let them get sloppy. Inexperienced crews can fall apart very easily during the final sprint. Always over count your last strokes. When you yell out "Last 25 strokes left!" it should be with 20 strokes left.

### **b. Head Racing**

Head races of 2 to 3 miles (4 or 5 km) in length are the more typical races for GORC crews. GORC 4+ (the largest we can transport) often enter the Head of the Rideau in September and the Head of the Genesee (Rochester) in October. Because they include turns and obstacles, such as buoys, they are more of a challenge for a coxswain's steering abilities. Coxswains have to steer the shortest course possible. Coxswains should watch for obstacles and other boats, and they should pay attention to their course, all the while being aware of the competition, which will have started before or after, depending on the start order. Bow numbers are the key to knowing who is ahead and who has fallen behind.

### The Start

Head races begin with a rowing start. The boats are lined up in order of their bow numbers (numbers assigned to each crew before the race begins). There is usually about a 10 second interval between starters. As the crew approaches the line they should be rowing with all oarsmen. The official will tell the crews to row at half, then three-quarters, then full pressure. The crew should be at full pressure crossing the line. Settle into the race pace as soon as possible.

### The Body

Unlike sprint races, there is no sure way to tell how well a boat is doing beyond noting the bow numbers of boats during passing. The eventual winner may never pass you! The coxswain and oarsmen should be concerned if a boat closes in from behind. This means they are faster. Even so, they may not be in your crew's event, as head races have many events rowing together, especially if there are age categories, and age handicapping further complicates the guessing game of who's ahead. If a boat is passing, the coxswain should steer out of their way, taking the outside track on a bend in the river. The objective of most crews during a head race is to pass other boats. Technique is more of an issue in head races. The coxswain most likely will have up to 25 minutes or more to talk during the race. He must make sure to remind the oarsmen about their technique, which tends to fall apart as they tire.

The coxswain should also motivate the crew during head races. This is very important. The coxswain should not talk constantly. If everything is going well, the cox should keep quiet. Silence can help the oarsmen focus and feel what the boat is doing. Silence can be very

valuable. The coxswain should just make sure to talk when needed. Don't let a severe problem with an oarsman's technique go unnoticed.

#### The Finish Sprint.

This is very important. A good sprint at the end of a race can shave seconds off a crew's time. The final sprint at Head of the Rideau covers the final kilometer after the final bend is passed and the cox heads across the river toward the finish buoys off the park on river right.

**Be sure to pass between the finish buoys!** The final sprint at the Head of the Genesee starts as the crew passes under the pedestrian bridge and heads straight for the finish buoy at the white officials' tent on river left.

## 8. Becoming a Better Coxswain

- Keep a journal. Write down everything and review it. Write down workouts, head race courses, technical tips, what worked, what didn't, what rowers say, what the coach says ...
- Cox as much as possible. Cox for other boats, volunteer to cox whenever you can.
- Row as much as possible.
- Watch YouTube rowing as much as possible; ride in the launch even when you don't have to.
- Running into things isn't good. Even the dock. Don't do it.
- Ask questions. Ask them privately so you can still appear confident, but try to balance confidence with learning.
- Learn how to steer a straight. Make sure that your rowers get on you if you waver or else you will never get better. Steering is the most direct way to influence speed. Learn how to take any turn at any speed.
- Put together a very small bag of items listed above in #6, Coxswain's Tools.
- Write down the workout for the day and write down who's in your boat. If you don't want to be called coxie, cox, or coxswain then learn the rower's names and don't call them bow, 1, 2, etc.
- Dress like an athlete but wear layers appropriate to the weather. Coxing can be cold work.
- Always be on time.
- Strive to be a great coxswain, not just a good coxswain. Of all the coxswains in the world, probably 50% are just plain bad, 30% are decent, 15% are good and only 5% are great. Strive to be great.
- Be yourself. Develop your own style. Be creative. Coxing is a way to find out who you are and what you're made of.

## 9. Magic Words and Exhortations

### a. Catches

- “Quick catch!”
- “Lots of backsplash!”
- “Make that blade disappear!”
- “Quick/aggressive at the catch!”
- “Back those blades in!”
- “Backsplash!”
- “Kick!”
- “Sit-Up!”

"Legs!"

"Clean Catches!"

"Grip-It!"

"CHAAA" - This magically helps them with: a) rhythm b) timing c) aggressive pressure d) if you draw out you "CHAAA" sound then it helps them hold on to it at the finish.

b. Finishes

"Clean release!"

"Clean finish!"

"Keep your blade buried!"

"Finish high!"

"Lengthen the puddles"

c. Set

"Set it up!"

"It's on starboard (port), set it up!" – whatever side it is leaning towards

"Watch your hand levels, straight in, straight out!"

"Keep it up off side!" – Side is either port or starboard, whichever it is resting on

"Side it's not resting on, lower hands at the part of stroke the boat is flopping on."

– If the boat is diving towards one side at a point in the stroke, remind the rowers that their hands should be at the right level.

"Side [or people] don't let your hands dive at the catch!"

"Keep your hand levels consistent!"

"Work together to set the boat!"

"Keep your hands consistent!"

"Square up at the same time"

d. Swing

"Move together!"

"Find that swing!"

"[Seat] you're early/late."

"Focus straight ahead."

"Follow the person in front of you!"

"Synchronize with your stroke!"

"Think of the drive as acceleration!"

"No pauses at the catch, connected stroke!"

"In together, out together!"

"One catch, one release"

e. Ratio

"Long and strong!"

"Rhythm!"

"I need ratio NOW!" - note, this is best used as an "emergency" call, don't overuse it!

"Feel the boat the run!"

"Catch-2-3-4!" Count the catches and the finishes in the rhythm of an appropriate stroke.

f. Lowering the stroke rate (use a very calm, long cadence in your voice)

"Down from \*a rate\* to \*a rate\* in two, down one, down two!"

"Lengthen it out!"

"Your wheels are inching up the track."

"Keep it long!"

"Lengthen it out together! Timing!"

g. Raising the stroke rate

"Bring it up from a rate to a rate in two, up one, up two!" – The rates are the rate you are at and the rate you need to be at.

"Hands are flying, in and away!"

"Quick hands out of the bow!"

"Hands away, shoulders follow!"

"Quick drive!"

"In and away!"

"Quick hands!"

h. Motivate

"Stomp on those foot stretchers!"

"Bend the oar!"

"Squeeze!"

"Quick turn around out of the bow!"

"Make those hands fly!"

"Keep the fire!"

"Make it intense!"

"Put the power on it!"

"Empty the tanks!"

"Send that boat!"

"Swing it and bring it!"

"Pick the boat out of the water and make it fly!"

"You're invincible!"

"Nothing to faze us!"

"Hold 'em off!"

"Reel them in!"

"We're walking like crazy!"

"Move right through them!"

"Power it up!"

"Strong in the legs!"

"Quick through the water!"

"Strong through the water!"

"Power on the drive!"

"Try to make every stroke better than the last one!"

"Make yourself stronger HERE!"

"Body angle!"

"Breathe"

"Make it hurt!"

"Hang on it! Suspension!"

"Keep it up! Looking good! Nice!"

"Send it!"

"Show me you want it!"

"Own it!"

"Take it here and now, make a decision!"

"Make every stroke COUNT!"

## 10. The GORC/Clarkson clockwise circulation pattern



This GORC version of the Charleston and Baltimore manuals was prepared by Dick Mooers.