

CAPITAL ROWING CLUB INTRO TO COXING

GENERAL POINTS ABOUT COXING

You are in charge

You won't feel like you are ready to be in charge, but no one else can be so you must give commands that the crew can understand and follow together, in unison, without confusion.

Be authoritative. Don't hesitate, or mumble, or let things sound like a question. Channel a stereotypical drill sergeant: it really makes it easier for the rowers. Remember, even if the command isn't really the right one – say it is not yet time for shoulders, or some other pair should sit out – we are better off doing the wrong thing together than half of us doing the right thing. (Within reason. We assume you won't say “throw your oars in the air on 2”!) All of us going to shoulders 10 feet early is way better than half trying to go to shoulders. On the other hand, if you really are unsure, then ask authoritatively. A clear “Yo: What do I do now?” is fine. We all get confused now and then. Just be clear.

Try not to apologize, chat about random things, or explain that you don't know what to do. It is totally fine to ask your stroke, or coach, if you don't know what to do. But cover the mic so the rest of the boat knows this isn't command time. It is hard to sit in the bow and be trying to figure out if that was a command that you didn't really hear or something else.

Be loud and clear. Even with the mic working – hardly a given with club equipment - a soft, muffled, or mumbled command may not come across clearly.

Remember that virtually all commands are “on 2”. (Before boat is in the water, some folks like to say “and x” instead of 1-2 – as in “ready to go overhead, ... And UP!” but that is also two clear syllables, two beats so make that rhythmic. We need to hear the rhythm, so we all go on 2, so a randomly timed 1-2 won't help. In the water, time that 1-2 with the catch. If bow pair is coming in on 2, they want to know which strokes are 1 and 2. That is communicated by timing with the catch of the stroke.

The commands as they occur during the day

Starting in the boathouse

Once you are assigned as cox for the day, you go to the CRC cage in the same tent where the ergs are, but one door to the right, and get equipment. You are picking up three things: A cox box with attached headset, a lanyard, and a yoga block.

The cox box will come from the set labeled “Club”. You must disconnect the power cord first. Then turn it on to make sure it is working. If you don't see anything when it is on, get another one.

The lanyard should have a light stick, a whistle, a tool, and a little plastic coin purse. In there should be some spacers, a wing nut, and regular nuts in case someone needs them in the boat.

The Yoga block is to save your hips. Most rowers don't fit comfortably in the coxing seat.

Then go back to meet your crew. At this point, be sure you know what the plan for the day is, what the warm-up is, and where your coach wants you to stop the warm-up. If it isn't totally clear, check in with coach.

Next is getting the boat out. You make sure the whole crew is present and ready and say "Hands On [The Endurance]" (Make sure two people have hands on the rollers.)

Next command is "Roll it out". (here if it is on the ground rollers, we roll it to the middle of the aisle and then have people go to the other side of the boat, hands on, up to waste, up to shoulders – command: Up to waste. And Up! (should be an even three beats there.) - and walk it out. You must pay attention to riggers, and other obstacles.

If the boat was on a higher rack, you roll it out to the extension of the rolling rack. Then the commands are "up an inch. And up!" (Be attentive that they don't lift too high and scratch the bottom of the boat on the riggers above.) Then "Slowly walk it out". Then "up to shoulders" and "walk it out".

It is different with lifts. Here, make sure two experienced people have the lifts. You can help most by standing past one end of the boat to get a clear line of sight on the lifts. It is hard to line them up when you are behind them. After then bring the boat down to low head on the lifts, you give the commands – "up and overhead! And Up!" then you and another person swing the lifts out of the way, being really careful not to hit a boat with them, then "indicate heads" "down to shoulders, and Down!" and "Walk it out."

Getting down to the river

You are the eyes of the boat. As you know, you can't really see much when carrying so continue to walk it straight – bow first- until the stern is clear of the boathouse. Then you swing. If going down the middle ramp, have the bow swing and just keep heading in the same direction. If down the first ramp, you go stern-first. The commands are "Way enough?" "Turn around" "Swing the stern". Be on the lookout for obstacles: slings, scullers, random dazed rowers. spectators standing around, ..."

When you get to about the top of the ramp, you say "Ready to go overhead! And UP!" Then make sure they stay slow. As they get to the bottom of the ramp, either "Swing the Stern left" or "Swing the bow right" Watch carefully here. This turn is the most dangerous part of the trip. (If you are doing this with LTR people, I'd always be ready to grab the boat in case they let go.)

Then "Toes to the edge" "Ready to roll! And Roll!"

Then "Ports get oars, Starboards oarlocks" (or vice versa – it's up to you) and note whether you might need to walk the boat down to make room for other boats.

At this point, you attach your cox box to the wiring in the boat, turn it on, and test the mic. As if the bow can hear you. Then when the oars are back, you call for a countdown from bow when ready. Once everyone is ready, the commands, in order are:

"Port Oars across!"

"One foot in"

“And down”

“Hold for cox”

Then you get in, get the headset on, and call for another countdown. When you get the full count:

“One hand on the dock!”

“Ready to shove in two – one, two!”

“Bow pry us off.”

Be sure to look at the other boats on the dock when doing this. If another boat is about to launch, wait for them. Best to do this one at a time. Also, check in with your coaches before launching to make sure that you know they are ready for you to go. We often have launch issues (or low river issues) and we don't want you out there without a coach.

ON THE RIVER

Launching

You are now semi-launched but you may be too close to the dock or too close to another boat, etc. This is a tricky part of the steering. You may need to have the bow row – to go to the left and once away from the dock you may need a stroke from 2 seat to turn back right. You may want a stroke or two from the bow pair to get away from the dock.

STAY AS CLOSE TO THE DOCK AS POSSIBLE!! There is a big sandbar just off our dock that extends upstream nearly to the powerboats, and downstream 50 feet past the bridge. Now you are ready for the warm-up.

Steering

This is your most important job on the river. By far! Some of the advanced coxes do a bit of coaching. It is easier, for example, to see blade heights and depths from the cox seat than the launch, and sometimes timing as well. The really experienced coxswains do much more but you should not worry about that at all when getting used to the job. Coaches will coach. Just avoid hitting things and give the basic commands that we need from you. Even the commands can come from the launch. But steering is the priority. Basically, you need to watch out for other boats, for getting through the correct arches, for following a reasonable course staying to the right on the river, for marinas, and for random debris.

The basic rule is that you grasp the string with both hands, and push right hand forward to go right, and left hand forward to go left. (Opposite of a horse, fwiw.) Bow-loader 4s are slightly different, but not much and I don't think a coach will make you do that your first time out. Note that these boats are long and have tiny rudders, so they turn **slowly**. You need to be looking ahead for where you need to be and start the turn early. Site on a point at least 100m ahead of you and try to turn as little as possible, and to do so with small adjustments. This makes it easier on the crew. But again, getting the right course is more important.

Obstacles

There are lots of obstacles on our lovely river: bits of trees, entire trees, telephone polls, cans, bottles, dead animals, stray nuclear waste containers, ... If you hit some of these, you will break the boat so consider any practice where you hit nothing to be a win! This means that you must be constantly attentive. Sometimes you will see a floating log just seconds before hitting it. (Sometimes you won't see it at all either. That can happen to the best of us.) Try to steer around things, but if you suddenly

see something that you don't think you can avoid or see a huge field of debris you know you can't avoid, do not hesitate to give the "Way Enough! Check it Hard!" command. Then pick it up by a pair very slowly through the debris. Err on the side of caution. A coach might be momentarily annoyed to have a set interrupted, but s/he will be much more annoyed if you crack a boat.

Bridges

The basic rule of our bridges is that you don't go through the middle arch. You go through an arch to the right of the middle in either direction. And if there is a tiny arch barely on the water, you don't go through that. A detailed map of our river is available [here](#). A bird's eye flyover video is available [here](#).

Rule of thumb, like driving, stay right (Similarly for following the bending river). You generally want to stay right without getting too close to piers. We'll go over the course.

Frederick Douglass Memorial Bridge (formerly South Capital Bridge) has been completed. Pass through the right side of the middle arch going downstream and the farthest closest to shore on the right returning to the boathouse.

Sandbars

There are at least 3 major sandbars you need to avoid. They are marked by spherical white buoys. The first is on the way back to the boathouse as you come through the Frederick Douglass Memorial Bridge and go around the little river turn to the right. You need to steer a bit toward the center of the river. The second, and largest, is as you come through the 11th St bridge. It is big. Go almost to the center of the river exiting that bridge. Finally, there is one that is just off our dock. In high tide, it is not much of an issue, but it really is when it is low so make two sharp turns coming into the dock; don't cut diagonally across. This gets bigger every year.

Buoys and general course

In general, follow the shoreline. You do not want to be way out in the middle of the river so head out from our dock, as you go through the first bridge – Pennsylvania Avenue – you will often stop at the 500m mark. (Big tree on the left coast, white pole in the water on the right. Pull toward shore into the little bay there. Don't block others coming through the bridge. Similarly, after 11th St, the river turns right and there is a ton of water down by National's Stadium. Move that way. Once you pass the pier, angle toward the DC Water building – the big all glass building. Loop for right. You will see a red buoy in the middle of the river, in front of our arch. Go well right of that, and then turn toward the bridge.

Docking

Docking is probably the hardest thing for beginners. Caution first here.

The basic course is that you turn perpendicular to the up-river end of the dock. Coming from the middle of the river, you are aiming to ram right into the end of the dock. Of course, you are going very slow. Have 4 row at the beginning and drop to 2. Then as you get close – i.e. one boat length out- you turn – a combination of 8 and 6 holding water and bow rowing – until your boat is at about a 30d angle to the dock. (Think of pulling into a parallel parking space.) then you drift in **very** slowly, usually with the stern pair rowing very light, making little adjustments to line up with the

dock and miss other boats. There is no substitute for practice on this.

Don't come to dock without someone there to catch you. At the beginning you will usually miss. You'll either be too close or too far away. A coach or club member can grab oars and direct you in. Please use that safety net when you are new. And if a boat is coming in on its own and you are nearby, please be that safety net.

Also, when docking, you must pay close attention to wind and current – and inexperienced rowers who might not instantly do what you tell them!

Commands for exiting boat:

"Hold for Cox!" Take off the headset and disconnect the cox box.

"One foot out and out"

"Starboards get oars, ports locks"

See whether the boat is in a good place to go up the ramp you want to go up. When all rowers are back it's,

"Hands On!"

"Ready to go overheads! And up!", swing up the ramp.

"Indicate Heads", as the stern hits the top of the ramp,

"Ready to go to shoulders, and down!"

Then walk it to the boathouse, making sure that stern is going in first.

Now you need to check on whether the boathouse is clear to enter. If not, you go down to waist to wait. Then you go in and basically do the reverse of leaving. Enter at shoulders, you pull out the sliding racks or lifts, get them to whatever height you need, slide it onto lifts, and slide it in.

After getting the boat back on the racks, assign one side of the boat to get the oars and the other to wipe the boat down.

Last General Point

Volunteering for Learn To Row is a great way to get coxing practice in a low-pressure (and high sunlight) environment.