



**ROWING
CANADA
AVIRON**



LEARN TO ROW

PARTICIPANT HANDBOOK #1



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WELCOME TO THE WORLD OF ROWING!

Rowing Canada Aviron (RCA) is Canada's national sport body and has the responsibility of ensuring that Canadian rowing is a social, diverse, safe, and inclusive sport for all able-bodied and participants with an impairment. RCA's philosophy is that sport drives physical and mental wellbeing where individuals can challenge themselves and grow - whether that be internationally or at home.

This Learn to Row Participant Handbook is Rowing Canada Aviron's effort to create a concise, easy-to-use handbook that provides beginning rowers with the foundational skills and information to begin rowing and embark upon a fulfilling recreational or competitive career as a rower. As you read through this, it's important to remember that you don't need to have this memorized - your coaches and teammates will help you learn.

We hope you enjoy using this handbook as you build the skills and knowledge to become rowers for life. You are welcome to use the checklist at the end of this handbook as you prepare for practice and reflect and improve on your rowing development. Work with your coach to grow in all areas of rowing and keep challenging yourself through the years!



ROWING CANADA AVIRON



SAFETY

In the introduction to rowing program, you should be briefed on the safety procedures of your club. Rowers and coaches must be aware of their respective responsibilities for their own safety, as well as that of others and the equipment. Please review the RCA user-friendly safety modules accessible on our website.

Because rowing is an on-water activity, it is possible that one day you may find yourself in the water. With this in mind, it is strongly recommended that you be able to swim a minimum of 50 metres while wearing light clothing. Your club's safety code may, in fact, have this as a prerequisite to being allowed to row.



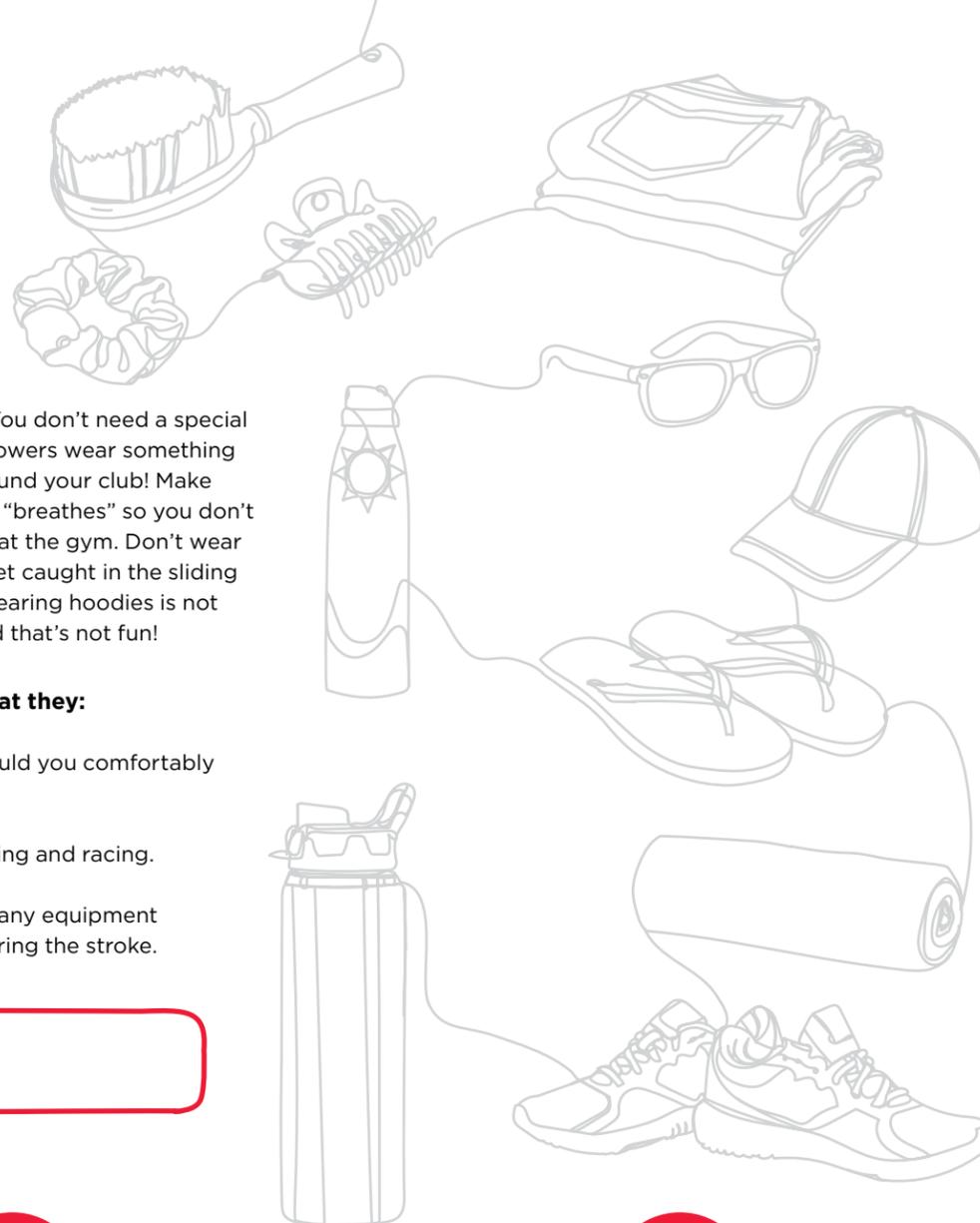
There are questions you can answer and see how much you have learned!
safety.rowingcanada.org/en

The safety position involves sitting still with your legs down and both hands on the oar(s), with the blade in the feather position, oar(s) on the water, and perpendicular to the boat. This position is the resting position, as well, while you wait for further instruction or are commanded by the coxswain to keep rowing.

Lifejackets or PFD (Personal Flotation Device): In general, you should have a life-jacket in the rowing shell with you (one per person) or in the coach boat accompanying the rowing shell. Your club will have these available to you unless they advise you otherwise.

! Make sure you know how to use the lifejackets or PFDs (personal flotation device) in the unlikely event of an emergency.

WHAT TO BRING



BEING PREPARED

Getting ready for your first rowing practice is exciting! Here's a list of some useful items to bring with you so you can focus on having fun and learning:

1. Running shoes/sandals (non-slip footwear)
2. Hat and/or sunglasses
3. Sunscreen
4. Water bottle
5. Change of clothes and towel
6. Hair band to tie back hair

CLOTHING

Appropriate clothing for rowing is important! You don't need a special uniform for rowing though many competitive rowers wear something called a "uni" or unisuit. You may see some around your club! Make sure you wear clothing that is comfortable and "breathes" so you don't get too hot, like you would wear for a workout at the gym. Don't wear anything baggy or with strings as they could get caught in the sliding seat. You also don't want pockets in front so wearing hoodies is not recommended. Your oars could get caught and that's not fun!

The main criteria for rowing clothing are that they:

1. Do not restrict the correct movement (i.e. could you comfortably do a squat in your clothing).
2. Allow for the dissipation of heat during training and racing.
3. Do not hang out so that it can be caught on any equipment or cause the fingers to catch at any point during the stroke.

! It is extremely important to dress properly in cold weather or hot weather.



COLD WEATHER

Several layers of clothing are better than one thick one. Wear two pairs of socks with the first one being a little lighter than the second. Wool or sweat wicking clothing as your initial layer is great because it draws sweat away from the skin. Tops and bottoms that have spandex material are particularly effective. Sweatpants that are not too loose, and windbreakers are also very effective. Remember your hat/toque!



HOT WEATHER

In summer, the weather can be extremely hot and humid. A rower should always wear a hat, one that covers the ears and neck. Sun protection (e.g. sunscreen, UPF or lightweight and light-coloured clothing, etc.).

Always bring extra dry clothes with you in both winter and summer. Your coach and your teammates can help guide you toward gear that feels comfortable for the season and for your training intensity.

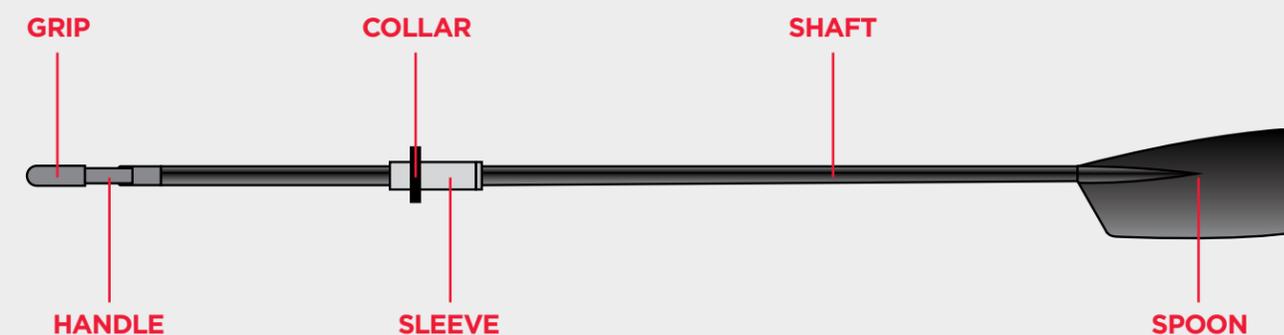


WARMING UP

Flexibility is important to prevent injury. Consider a warm-up prior to and stretching following your row. Your program will provide an on-water warm-up as part of the practice.



PARTS OF THE OAR



EQUIPMENT

Understanding your equipment is important for both safety and learning to row. Your club will guide you in caring for, cleaning, and storing the equipment to ensure your rowing experience is smooth and enjoyable.

FOOTSTRETCHER ADJUSTMENTS

New rowers will learn how to adjust their footstretcher. This involves loosening two wing nuts and a thumbscrew located on the footstretcher. After loosening these, the participant can move the footstretcher towards the bow or the stern. Your coach will help you determine where your footstretcher should be.

EQUIPMENT CHECK:

- Always go over your equipment before heading out on the water. If anything jiggles (nuts or bolts), let your coach know!
- Adjust footstretcher to correct position (with help of your coach).
- Once ready to push off, ensure oarlock is closed properly and top nut is tight. If your gate isn't closed properly, your oar can come out, and that's not good!

TYPES OF ROWING BOATS

(ALSO KNOWN AS SHELLS)

SINGLE: The smallest of boats used in the sport. The single shell is used by one athlete with a sculling blade (oar) in each hand. Training in a single may be the best overall method to learn to row because performance feedback is immediate and therefore the rate of learning is usually higher than in any other boat type.

PAIR: A shell rowed by two athletes, each using a sweep oar.

DOUBLE: A shell in which two athletes row using a set of sculling oars each. The athlete has a sculling blade (oar) in each hand.

STRAIGHT FOUR: A shell in which four athletes row, each using a sweep oar (port or starboard oar). The rower in the bow of the boat steers with a rudder by a tiller wire attached to their foot.

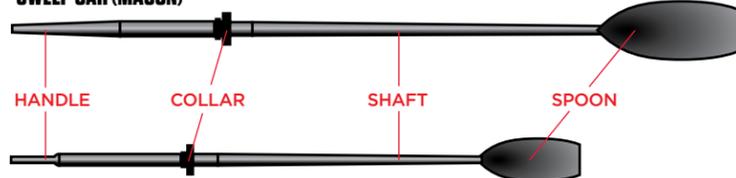
QUAD: A shell in which four athletes row using a set of sculling oars. The athlete has a sculling blade (oar) in each hand.

COXED FOUR: A shell in which four athletes row and a cox steers. The cox may be placed in the bow or stern depending on the shell design. In both cases, the cox steers with rudder lines.

COXED EIGHT: A shell in which eight athletes row and a coxswain steers. (port or starboard oar). The rowers use a sweep oar and the cox steers by rudder lines.

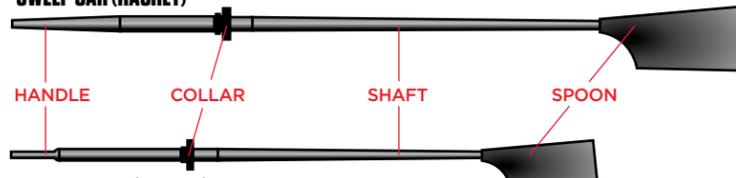
PARTS OF THE OAR

SWEEP OAR (MAGON)



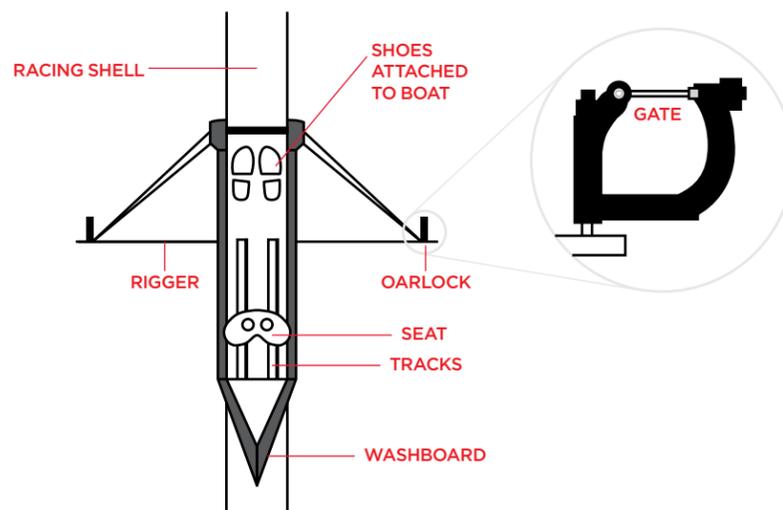
SCULLING OAR (MAGON)

SWEEP OAR (HACHET)

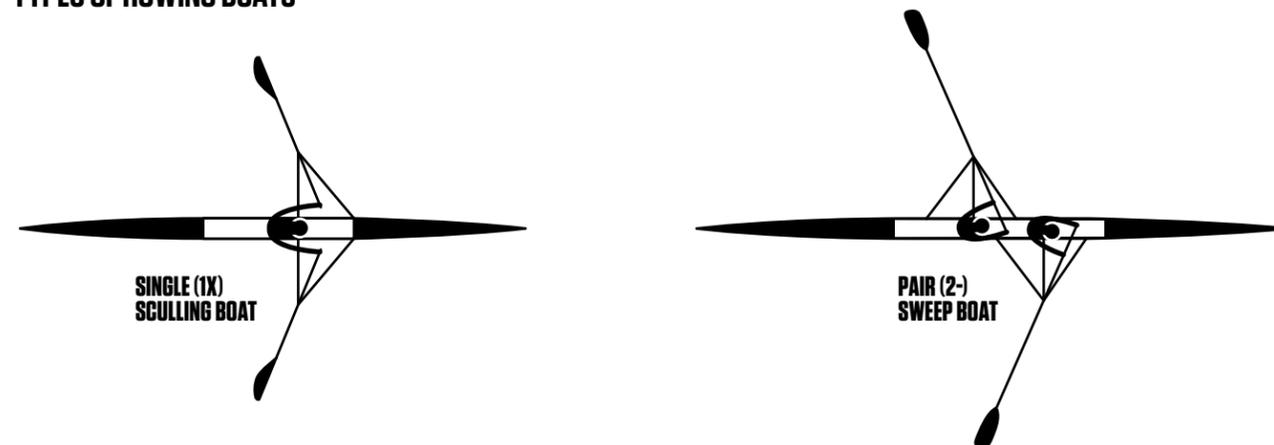


SCULLING OAR (HACHET)

PARTS OF THE BOAT



TYPES OF ROWING BOATS



WHAT IS COASTAL ROWING?

Coastal rowing takes the sport off the calm lakes and rivers and into the open seas. Known for its adventurous races, coastal rowing involves navigating through waves, tides, and the ever-changing conditions of the ocean. Coastal boats are larger and more stable due to their width and hull design, and therefore are great for rowers new to rough water.

TERMINOLOGY

COMMON TERMS

BLADES: Another term for oars.

BOW: (front of the boat): also refers to the person who is sitting in the front of the boat. (Hint: the bow is the first person who crosses the finish line and is also referred to as 1 seat.)

BOW BALL: A tiny white ball on the bow. It's to prevent the sharp point of the bow from injuring anyone.

COLLAR: The plastic ring part way down the shaft of the oar that provides the fulcrum in conjunction with the oarlock. It's usually orange, pink or blue and should rest at all times against the oarlock.

COXSWAIN (cox, coxie): The person who steers the boat and gives the commands to the crew.

DECKING: The plastic material which is used to cover the bow and stern of the boat where no one sits.

FIN: A short piece of metal toward the stern of the boat on the bottom of the hull. This helps to keep the boat moving in a straight line. This is a delicate part of the boat, so when you place your boat in the water be mindful of the fin!

FOOTSTRETCHERS: This is where the participant places their feet when sitting in the boat. These are adjustable to permit shorter or taller people to sit in the same position relative to the desired arc of the oar. Some boats have clogs and other boats have shoes.

GATE: The top part of the oarlock which closes the oar into the oarlock.

GUNWALES: (or Gunnels): Located above the boat's hull, rowers sit between the gunwales and the riggers are attached here. It provides some rigidity but is not as strong as it looks. One of the main purposes of the gunwale is to keep water out of the shell in rough conditions.

OARLOCK: Holds the oar and acts as a swivel during the drive and recovery.

PORT: This is the right side of the boat if you are rowing (on the left side of the boat for the coxswain). In some clubs, port oars are marked with red tape. (You can remember this by thinking port (like the wine) is red, so port is red!)

RIGGER: The metal support that holds the oar. This is adjustable to make the participant more comfortable.

RUDDER: This can be located in the very stern of the boat or attached to the fin. It is used to steer the boat.

SCULLING: The participant rows with one oar in each hand.

SHAFT: The long "stick" part of the oar, usually black.

SLIDE: The two metal tracks that the seat slides on.

SPOON: The large flat part of the oar which is in the water during the stroke.

STARBOARD: This is the left side of the boat if you are rowing (the right side of the boat if you're the coxswain). In some clubs, starboard oars are marked with green tape.

STERN (back of the boat): This is usually where the coxswain sits (if there is one) and is where the rudder is located.

STRETCHERS: The slings that hold the boat when on land in order to make adjustments to the boat before going on the water.

STROKE SEAT: The rower who sits in the stern seat who sets the rhythm and pace for the crew. (Hint: they are the last person to cross the finish line, unless you have a coxswain.)

SWEEPING: The participant rows with both hands on the same oar.

ROWING TERMINOLOGY AND COMMANDS

Every club has their own local jargon. Here are some common commands and jargon you may hear. These are important to know as the coach/coxswain organizes the crew to bring the shells from the boat racks to the docks and into the water; these commands make it easier to provide specific directions quickly.

ARE YOU READY? ROW!: The command to start rowing.

CATCH A CRAB: The blade gets caught in the water as a result of going too deep or not getting the blade out quick enough at the release.

FEATHERING: During the recovery, the blade is rotated so the spoon (concave part) is carried parallel to the water.

HOLD WATER: The command used to stop the boat quickly. The blades are held slightly squared in the water.

INSIDE HAND: In sweep, it is the closest hand to the oarlock.

LET IT RUN: This is a command that means to let the boat glide and proceed to stop rowing and wait for the next command.

OUTSIDE HAND: In sweep, it is the hand that is farthest away from the oarlock.

SQUARE BLADES: The blade is in the working position and stays perpendicular to the water and is in the water throughout the stroke.



ROWING COMMANDS

Getting the boat to the water from boat rack to launching boat

HANDS ON THE BOAT: Crew places themselves along the boat across from the assigned seats and puts hands on the gunwales, standing ready to lift the boat.

TAKE THE WEIGHT, READY UP!: The crew lifts the boat off the racks on the command.

SHOULDER HEIGHT, READY UP!: Crew lifts the boat to carry it at shoulder height. This command may not be used depending on the club's boathouse, boat's location on the racks and the height of the riggers on boats in the boathouse.

WALK IT OUT! AND WATCH THE RIGGERS: Crew carefully walks the boat out of the boathouse, watching carefully to make sure that the riggers do not bang on anything. Everyone should avoid chatter except to call out a potential problem.

WHAT DOES A COXSWAIN DO? (1)

The coxswain sits in the stern position of the boat and steers and calls commands for the rowers. The rowers listen to the coxswain's commands as they are the eyes and ears of the boat.

BRIEFLY, A COXSWAIN:

- steers the shell
- gives the commands
- coaches the crew
- calls strategies during races
- provides motivation in training and races



The most important thing for rowers to do is to listen and respect their coxswain, which includes keeping chatter down in the boat during workouts.

OVER THE HEAD, READY UP!:

The boat is pushed from shoulder height to over the rowers' heads with arms stretched straight with one hand on each gunwale.

TOE TO THE EDGE!: Crew places foot at the edge of the dock to ensure that they do not place the boat on the dock and damage it.

INSIDE GRIPS... ROLLING IT TOWARD... : The rowers grab the cross pieces inside the boat and together roll it in the direction they are told. If the crew is going to put the boat onto stretchers, it is important that the boat be rolled away from the stretchers to avoid putting a hole in the boat.

ROLL IT TO THE WATER!: Slowly the crew rolls the shell toward the water and sets it down together.

WATER SIDE SLIDE THE OARS

ACROSS: The water side blades are pushed out so that the collar is against the oarlock and the blade is feathered on the water. This provides stability while the participants are getting into the boat.

ONE FOOT IN AND DOWN!: Participants step into the boat (instructor will demonstrate and assist) and sit on the seat and always hang on to the oar.

ONE HAND ON THE DOCK... READY? PUSH!: All crew members push the boat away from the dock.



GRIP

In any sport where an implement is held and there is a transfer of power, a proper grip is critical.

Learning how to hold the oar correctly is one of the most important lessons in rowing! There are two positions: feathered and squared. You can use a nice light touch to move from square to feather. Your grip should be relaxed and loose. If you grip TOO hard, you are going to get blisters and you don't want that!

It's not really a grip. The fingers function as more of a hook. The thumbs only assist with the feathering action. Relaxation is the key...loose and relaxed fingers.

SCULLING GRIP (1)

- Thumbs on the end of the oars
- Flat wrists
- Relaxed fingers
- Roll the oar from feather to square - don't use your wrists!

THE CROSSOVER (2)

- Right hand leads in, left hand leads out.
- Keep your left hand slightly in front of your right.
- When you push your hands out, the left is slightly ahead of the right.

SWEEP (3)

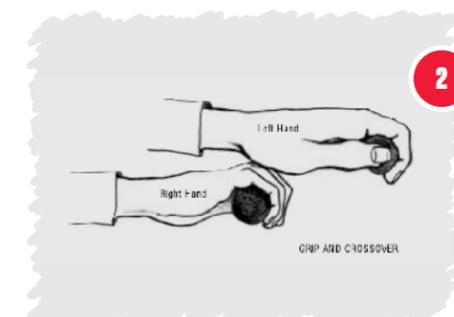
- The outside hand should be positioned on the end of the oar handle.
- The hands should be 10 to 15 cm apart.
- Put your hands on the oar and stretch both thumbs parallel to the oar handle. Your thumbs should just touch.
- Flat wrist with the second knuckle correctly positioned. This is how the hands should look holding the oar handle.

DURING THE DRIVE:

- The wrists are flat and both arms are straight at the beginning of the drive.
- The fingers are around the handle without squeezing it.

AFTER THE RELEASE:

- Hands move towards the stern.
- The inside hand conducts the squaring and feathering.
- Notice how the fingers tend to make more of a right angle to the wrist.
- The fingers are around the handle.
- The inside hand should look like this on the recovery.



TECHNIQUE

The purpose of this section is to provide basic information about rowing technique to assist you in learning more about the skill that you are trying to master. Correct posture will help you to be more comfortable as you learn this new skill. To discover more detail about the rowing stroke you can view the Canadian Model Rowing Technique on Rowing Canada Aviron's website.

RELEASE (1)

The release is the point in the stroke where the legs, back and arms have finished the work and the blade is taken out of the water square by pushing down on the handle.

AT THE RELEASE:

- Rower will be nearest to bow of the boat with the legs straight.
- Lean back but lower back should remain firm.
- Keep chin horizontal.
- Shoulders should be relaxed.
- Hands should be loose and relaxed at this point.
- Legs should be locked.
- Blade(s) should be feathered.

RECOVERY (2)

The recovery is the part of the stroke from the release to the entry, during which the boat should glide uninterrupted. A proper recovery sequence maximizes this glide: hands move first with the blade feathered, followed by steady arm extension and then the upper body swing.

KEY POINTS:

- Legs stay relaxed and down until the hands clear the knees and the body swings over the hips.
- The rower's weight is centered in the boat.
- Keep a loose, relaxed grip.
- As the next stroke begins, shoulders and upper body are ahead of the hips, the body is relaxed, knees start to bend, and the slide comes forward with relaxed, fully stretched arms.

APPROACHING THE ENTRY:

- The rower moves toward the stern, the upper body swing is complete, and the blade starts to square as the oar handle passes over the feet, becoming fully squared just before the entry.

ENTRY (3)

The entry is the point in the rowing stroke when the oar is placed in the water. It is a transition phase in the rowing cycle.

- Rower will be at the stern of the boat with the seat closest to footstretcher.
- The arms should be straight.
- The body should be in a strong position (strong back).
- There is a quick hand motion to put the oar(s) in the water.
- The knees are bent and shins should be as close to perpendicular as possible.
- Chin/head should be horizontal.

DRIVE (4)

The drive is the propulsive phase when the blade is secure in the water and the oar is pushing the boat ahead.

- The drive is initiated with the legs as soon as the blade is buried in the water.
- The back starts to pull as soon as the hands come over the knees.
- The arms start to bend as the oar comes to a right-angle position to the boat, and at this point the legs are almost straight, and the back is nearly vertical.

! Rowing is 60-70 percent legs!!! Then you use your core (or abs), then arms. But it's mainly your LEGS that will be powering the boat!



DRILLS

Your coach will teach you a number of drills that will help improve your rowing stroke. It is important to understand what the drill is and why it is being used to help you learn the rowing stroke.

1. SQUARE BLADE

In this drill, you will hold the blade on the square. The drill can be used to help teach and/or reinforce a number of rowing skills such as pushing the handle down at the release (before feathering), keeping the blade off the water on the recovery (one full blade width), and putting the blade into the water fully on the square.

2. PAUSE DRILLS

The coach will use this drill to help you get the proper sequence of the body on the recovery. It involves pausing part way through the recovery usually with the hands over the knees, the body angle set and legs flat. After this point, the rower glides up the slide keeping the upper body still and ready for the entry. This drill can also be used to help the crew with timing.

3. POSITIONING DRILL

The positioning drill is used to help reinforce the correct posture at the entry and at the release. Your coach will ask you to sit at the entry position and will likely coach your body and blade position. You will take a light stroke and your posture will be corrected at the release. The point is to get from the entry position and the release position with the correct posture and blade work. This drill may also be used from the release position to the entry position.

4. SQUARING AND FEATHERING THE BLADE

In sweep rowing, this drill could help you work on proper use of the inside hand for squaring and feathering the blade. The outside hand only drill could be used to practice taking the blade out of the water by pushing the handle down and away. This drill can also be used to reinforce the downward pressure of the outside hand to keep the blade off the water.



CONGRATULATIONS!

You have made it through the Learn to Row Participant Handbook. Don't forget to practice the skills you have learned here and get your coach to check off the components you have mastered. Keep up the good work!





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