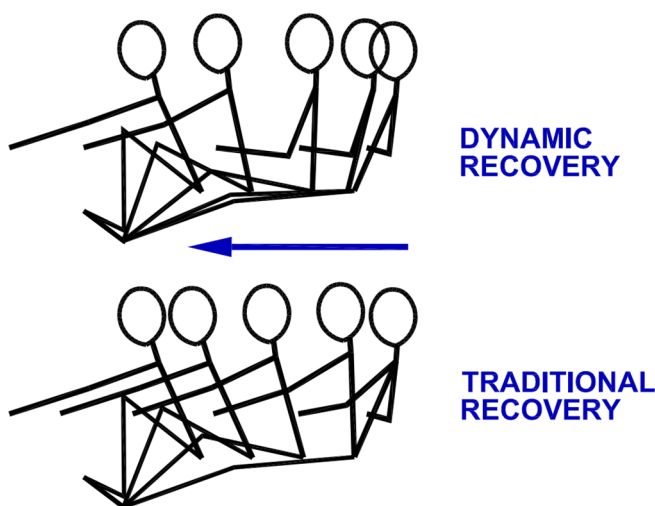


## 2.2 RECOVERY *by: Mike Purcer*

The recovery phase of the stroke begins when the athlete leaves the finish position with the body furthest to the bow of the boat and ends when the athlete achieves the full reach position closest to the stern. During this phase, the athlete utilizes their legs to pull their feet (footstops) toward their seat while simultaneously pivoting the torso forward and extending their arms to maximize their reach sternward in the full reach position.

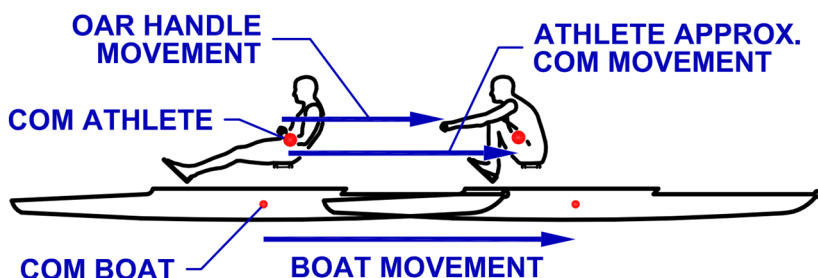
For most of the history of our sport, the recovery movements were taught in sequential order, with the hands and arms moving first, away from the body. The arm movement was followed by a forward torso swing, pivoting at the hips, and, lastly, by leg flexion at the knee to pull the athlete up the slide. Although these recovery movements were practiced in sequence, during racing, the legs, torso, and arms move simultaneously, accelerating the footstops toward the athlete moving to the next catch. Figure 2.2a Recovery Styles shows the difference in body movements between traditional practice recovery and the racing 'dynamic' movements that occur simultaneously.

Figure 2.2a Recovery Styles



It is important to recognize that although the graphic in Figure 2.2a shows the rower moving toward their footstops in the rowing shell, it is the footstops that move toward the rower. During the recovery, the rower's centre of mass (COM) continues to move in the same direction as the boat, toward the finish line. Figure 2.2b, Recovery Movements, shows a single sculler moving from the finish to the full-reach positions, with examples of the boat, body, and oar-handle speeds.

Figure 2.2b Recovery Movements



A strong understanding of the movements of the athletes and the boat changes traditional views and recognizes that the athlete does not move toward the boat's stern, but the stern moves toward the athlete during the recovery. This means the crew has no kinetic energy in the sternward direction during the recovery because they are continuously moving in the same direction as the boat. During the recovery, the athletes must continuously pull on the footstops until they achieve the full reach position, because approximately 90% of the resistance is on the boat's hull due to water drag. As the crew moves during the recovery, they transfer their momentum to the boat by pulling on the footstops and moving along the slide. Because the rower or crew has much greater mass than the boat, at racing rates, the boat will accelerate and reach maximum speed on the recovery (Sanderson & Martindale, 1986).

Figure 2.2c Full Reach Approach illustrates late recovery movements, in which the athlete pulls the boat toward their body while moving in the same direction as the boat. This figure shows the vector forces acting on the footstops throughout the recovery phase. As the athlete is constantly moving in the direction of the boat, they must apply a horizontal pulling force to achieve the full reach position.

Figure 2.2c

Full Reach Approach

During the approach to full reach, the knees rise, and the torso moves over the legs, resulting in a downward vertical force acting on the footstops, as shown in Figure 2.2c Full Reach Approach. It is important that athletes move horizontally, minimizing the downward force on the footstops, which is often caused by a slow approach or by reaching sternward with the torso after the seat has reached the frontstops. Excess downward force on the footstops adds to a downward stern movement and an increase in hull trim, which coaches may recognize as 'boat check'.

Below are descriptions of both traditional recovery and dynamic recovery to highlight the differences.

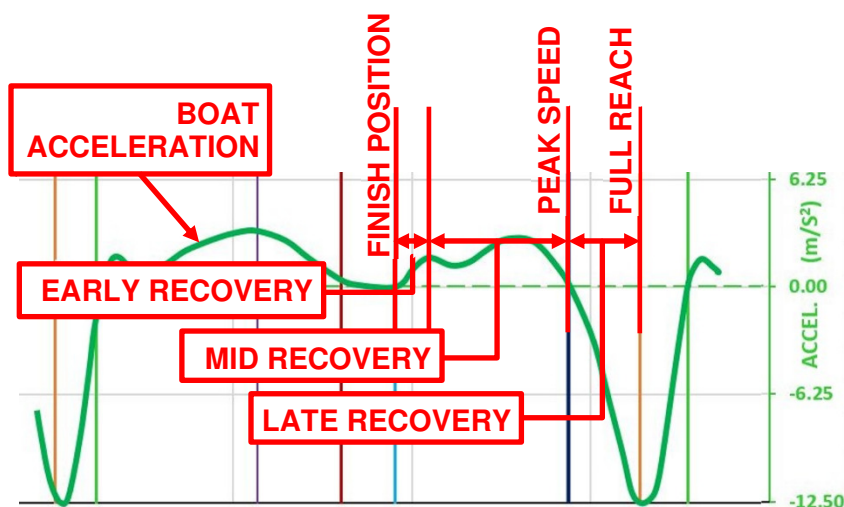
**Traditional Recovery.** Athletes are coached during practices at low rates so that their hands must be shot out to the full extent of the arms (Lehmann, 1919). As the arms straighten, the torso swings forward, pivoting from the hips while the legs remain straight. Once the torso passes the

perpendicular, the slide can begin to move forward slowly. The torso pivot and slide forward continue until the athlete achieves the full reach position. These traditional recovery movements, as outlined by Lehmann (1919), have undergone variations throughout the twentieth century, but all emphasize the sequential order: arms first, then torso pivot, followed by a slow, controlled slide. Traditional recovery movements are still very popular for teaching novice rowers.

**Dynamic Recovery** is the synchronized, simultaneous movement of the leg, torso, and arm during the recovery phase. The speeds of knee and hip joint flexion and elbow extension vary with movement distance, and the arms and torso achieve full reach before the legs. Dynamic Recovery emphasizes accelerating the body towards the next catch. In practice at low stroke rates, slow hands away from the body allow the torso and legs to engage and coordinate, matching the biomechanical movements that occur during racing. Practising the racing movement is supported by the 'principles of specificity of training'.

The recovery herein is divided into three stages, as shown in Figure 2.2d, Recovery Stages.

*Figure 2.2d* Recovery Stages



Stage one is the early recovery, when the legs, torso, and arms connect to initiate the movement. The second stage, mid-recovery, is when the leg, torso and arm move together to pull on and accelerate the footstops toward the athlete. The mid-recovery stage acceleration is extended as long as possible toward the next catch. Finally, in the late recovery stage, the athlete slows their acceleration as they approach the full reach position.

Video analysis of crews racing shows conclusively that the movements of the arms, torso, and legs work simultaneously during the recovery phase. The recovery is an opportunity to maximize boat speed by increasing stroke rates while utilizing the body's mass by simultaneously engaging the legs with the torso, and arms to transfer the body's momentum into increased boat speed. The technique described here is the movement exhibited by the majority of crews in racing. This text aims to promote the use of these racing movements during practice across all stroke rates.

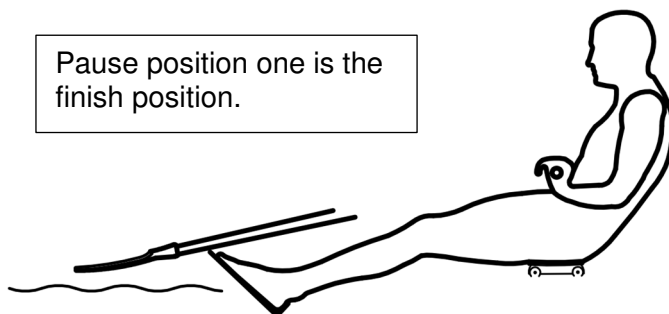
### **2.2.1 Finish Position**

The finish position is both the end of the drive and the beginning of the recovery, where the athlete changes direction. The recovery begins when the athlete starts their movement toward the stern of the boat. It is worth reviewing the finish position to ensure the athlete is in the correct position to begin their recovery. Figure 2.2.1a Finish Position shows the athlete ready to start the recovery. A description of the body positions is detailed below Figure 2.2.1a.

The finish position is often used for a pause drill to give coaches the opportunity to view and analyze the placement of the athlete's arms, shoulders, head, and torso. The Pause One (finish) position can be held for periods of up to two or three seconds. The pause can also be very short, such as a tenth of a second, which is referred to as a micro-pause. The micro-pause allows the athletes a physical break between the drive and recovery and may improve the timing of the crew at low rates. Along with the athlete's physical position, the pause exercises allow the coach to compare the finish positions of all the athletes in the crew to ensure they are similar.

It is worth noting that some athletes combine the release with the recovery by starting the torso forward (sternward) while the blade is being extracted and feathered. Moving the torso forward allows athletes to pull on the footstops and start hull acceleration during the blade extraction. This combined release-recovery movement is not currently popular. Still, it is used by a number of athletes, and the author feels it is worth noting as a variation from the beginning of the recovery.

Figure 2.2.1a

Finish Position**Legs**

- legs are straight, fully extended
- legs are relaxed
- There is no pushing on the footstops as the feet have transitioned from pushing to pulling in the shoes

**Torso**

- the lower back is straight
- torso in the layback position
- core muscles engaged, supporting the torso
- shoulders are down and back, having just completed the release
- head up, eyesight forward and level on the horizon

**Arms**

- arms are relaxed
- forearms are level with water
- upper arms back with elbows at or behind the torso
- hands holding the oar handle at the body
- sculling wrists down or sweep inside wrist only is down, holding the blade(s) in the feather position.

**Oar**

- the blade is above (off) the water and on the feather

### **2.2.2 Early Recovery**

The recovery begins when the athlete leaves the finish position, moving toward the full reach position.

The early recovery stage is the initial movement when the legs connect, and the torso and arms begin moving. Although the arms, torso, and legs move together, the arms (hands) and torso (shoulders) have to move a greater distance, and appear to start first from the finish position. It is important that athletes connect their legs, pulling on the footstops, to connect with the boat and support the upper body movements. The initial leg contraction (movement) is almost unnoticeable but critical to transfer body momentum to the boat.

The early recovery stage is very short, typically between one and two-tenths of a second. At racing rates, the shell's speed will increase immediately after the athletes connect with their legs pulling on the footstops. The speed of movement from the finish position must allow for constant acceleration towards the next catch. At practice (low) rates, the movements must start slowly to allow acceleration throughout the extended recovery time.

Figure 2.2.2a Early Recovery shows the athlete's movement in the initial recovery stage of the stroke.

The 'Pause Two Position' is the darker body position in Figure 2.2.2a, just following the initial movement out of the finish. This position allows coaches to see the simultaneous connection of legs, torso and arms. The hands are about 20cm from the body, the torso has started to pivot forward, and the leg muscles are contracted, pulling on the footstops.

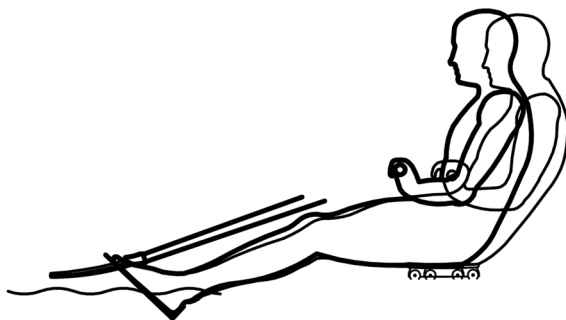
The crew's timing, starting the early drive together and moving at the same speed, is essential for crew rhythm and the effective transfer of crew momentum into boat speed.



Figure 2.2.2a

Early Recovery

(0 - 15%)

**Legs**

- the feet are connected, pulling on the shoes to initiate the recovery. the movement starts slowly
- hamstring muscles engage, contracting the knee joint and pulling footstops towards the seat.

**Torso**

- torso starts pivoting forward simultaneously as the legs engage
- lower back remains straight with a neutral spine as the torso begins pivot forward from the hips
- shoulders moving forward with the upper arms
- head remains level as eyes track the horizon

**Arms**

- arms move the hands toward the stern, simultaneously with torso and leg movements
- wrists (sculling) are flexed, holding the blade on the feather.
- in sweep rowing only the inside wrist is flexed, holding the blade on the feather, and the outside wrist is flat

**Oar**

- the blade is in the feather position above the water

### 2.2.3 Mid Recovery

In the mid recovery stage, the athlete accelerates their footstops towards their seat and body's centre of mass (COM). The legs, torso, and arms move simultaneously but at different speeds, as they travel different distances from finish to full reach positions. The mid recovery stage extends as long as possible to prolong the boat's acceleration and increase its average speed.

The athletes' acceleration of the footstops toward the seat provides a positive (forward) force on the hull. Acceleration is the key, as constant speed on the slide will result in the boat slowing down due to hull drag. Athlete acceleration on the slide should be uniform to minimize hull disruption. Excess or uneven acceleration of the body on the slide will result in a sudden surge of the boat, increasing hull drag due to turbulence and wave resistance (Scott, 1964). Extending acceleration at a constant rate will prolong the boat's acceleration and maximize the boat's speed.

Practices at lower rates allow the crew to learn to move together, accelerating toward the full reach position. The crew's movements during practices should match their racing movements, but at slower speeds. Starting slowly from the finish position allows the crew to extend their acceleration further on the recovery.

Drills such as 'Pause Three', Figure 2.2.3a allow the coach to evaluate the body positions of the crew at a point in the recovery.

Figure 2.2.3a

Pause Three Position

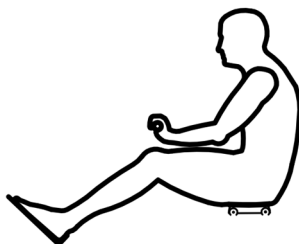
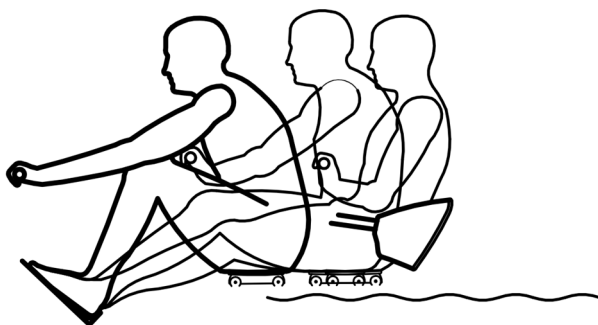


Figure 2.2.3b

Mid Recovery

(15%-65%)

**Legs**

- feet pulling on footstops
- legs continue to accelerate footstops toward the seat

**Torso**

- the torso continues to pivot from the hips
- the lower back remains straight with good posture, and a neutral spine is maintained
- shoulders down and shifting forward with upper arms
- head level with eyes on the horizon

**Arms**

- arms continue to extend and move the oar handle away from the body
- arms and wrists are as relaxed as possible
- hands holding the oar handle under the fingers

**Oar**

- the blade on the feather is high enough above the water to allow feathering without lowering the oar handle
- the blade begins to rotate to the square near the end of the mid recovery as the hands cross over the footstops

### **2.2.4 Late Recovery**

The late recovery starts following peak boat speed when the athletes begin to slow their movement toward the catch. At this point, the athletes decelerate on the slide at a very high rate as they must stop at the full reach position to change direction. During racing, this stage is about the last third of the recovery, typically sixty to seventy percent of the recovery time. Minimizing the time the boat is decelerating is essential to maintaining the highest average boat speed.

As the athlete and the shell move in the same direction toward the finish line, the athlete must pull on the footstops continuously until they arrive at the full reach position. In the final few inches of the late recovery, only the legs are moving as the arms are fully extended, and the torso has achieved the forward catch angle. When sweeping, the athlete's shoulders and upper torso twist to follow the rotation of their oar handle around the pin.

The late recovery is a critical part of the stroke in preparation for the catch. Typically, coaches discuss the catch in three parts: the approach, entry and connection. The approach to the catch is part of the late recovery stage and involves the preparation of the blade for entry into the water. As the athletes approach full reach, their arms rise as the wrists rotate up to square the blade. The oar handle rises to bring the squared blade down to touch the water as the athlete achieves the full reach position.

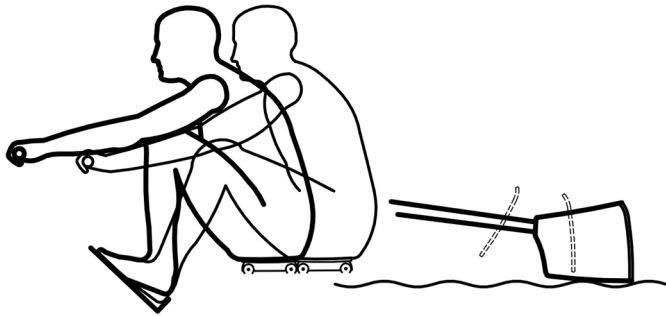
There are a number of drills geared to improving the catch that relate to the late recovery stage. Review Section 2.7.4 Catch Drills for examples.

Figure 2.2.4a Late Recovery shows the athlete in the final stage of the recovery.

Figure 2.2.4a

Late Recovery

(65%-100%)

**Legs**

- the athlete's heels lift as their shins approach the perpendicular
- legs slow as the athlete approaches full compression
- sweep rowing knees separate to allow torso compression

**Torso**

- the torso achieves the full catch angle before the seat reaches frontstops
- the torso compresses on the thighs when sculling, or inside thigh in sweep rowing lower back is straight
- shoulders are reaching forward
- sweep rowing shoulders are level but twist towards the oar handle

**Arms**

- oar handle is being held firmly in the fingers
- hands lifting the oar handle as the wrists rotate up, squaring the blade
- arms are straight

**Oar**

- blade squares and is brought down to the water's surface
- the square blade touches the surface of the water when the athlete achieves the full reach position

## 2.2.5 Full Reach Position

The full-reach position is the ending point of the recovery phase and the beginning of the drive phase. A clear description of the position allows coaches to observe the athlete at full reach. Full reach is not a pause position, as it can be a very unstable position for the crew. However, video of the athlete from the side and stern will allow a stop-action view of the full reach position. When viewing from the stern, holding the camera at an elevated height will allow viewing of athletes behind the rower in the stroke seat.

The full reach position in sculling is reviewed in relation to the athlete's hand spacing, Figure 2.2.5a

*Figure 2.2.5a      Full Reach Hand Spacing*

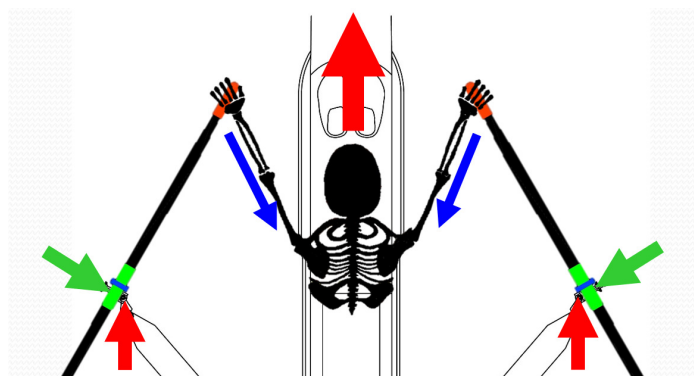
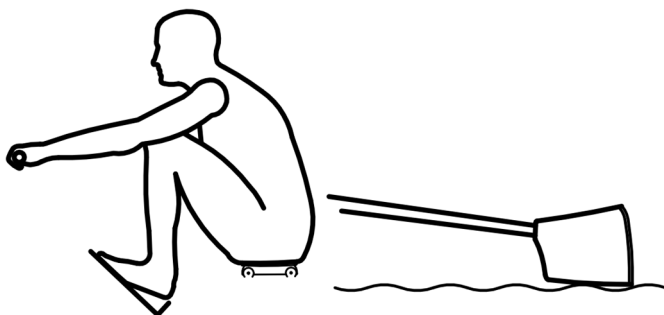


Figure 2.2.5b Full Reach Position shows the athlete in the full reach position. Below the figure is a description of the body positions.

Figure 2.2.5b

Full Reach Position

(100%)

**Legs**

- athlete on the balls of their feet
- shins are perpendicular
- knee joint compressed

**Torso**

- lower back (spine not collapsed)
- torso pivoted forward, reaching the stern
- shoulders (sweep) rotated toward the oar handle

**Arms**

- arms straight and fully extended
- wrists flat
- oar handle is held in fingers under the first knuckle
- hands (sculling) spread wide

**Oar**

- the oar is at the catch angle
- the blade is touching the water

## **2.2.6 Recovery Speed**

The movement acceleration during the recovery is critical to maximizing boat speed and stroke rhythm. Although the speed of the movements has been emphasized throughout this section, it is again referenced here to highlight its importance.

The average boat speed during the recovery will change based on the recovery time and technique. The timing of the crew's movements is critical as all athletes must move together on the slides. It is important to remember that although the recovery phase durations (speeds) are substantially different between racing and low-rate practices, the synchronization and simultaneous movements of the legs, torso, and arms remain the same, and only the duration of time and speed of the muscle contractions change.

## **2.2.7 Recovery Balance**

Balance is critical to an effective recovery as it allows the blades to stay off the water and the athlete to minimize unneeded physical movements at a racing rate. During low-rate practices at reduced intensities, a balanced boat allows better muscle relaxation. Balance on the recovery is the result of blade release timing, clean blade extractions, consistent blade height above the water and balanced controlled body movements.

The recovery is an opportunity to increase the average speed of the boat. Constant boat acceleration for a given stroke rate minimizes sudden increases in speed as uneven changes in hull acceleration increase drag. Continued acceleration as long as possible on the recovery reduces the time the boat is decelerating between peak speed and blade entry. Accelerating into the full reach position does not cause 'boat check' as the stern moves toward the athlete and not vice versa. The principles of specificity of training outline that athletes should practice the technique they use in competition.