

Saugatuck Junior Rowing Coxswain Guidelines

Coxswains are in some ways the most important members of a crew. They are the individual responsible for the steering of the shell and also giving commands to the rowers in order 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 we expect our coxswains to be leaders off the water as well. The coxswain is an integral part of the crew, and can have a large effect on the success of the crew. Unprepared coxswains have played a large part in many races lost and on the contrary, races can and have been won with the help of well-prepared ones.

The qualities a good coxswain will possess are confidence, intelligence, positive attitude, the ability to think ahead, and the ability to understand and follow through on instructions. Other things that will help a cox improve over time is their willingness to seek out advice from rowers, coaches, and other coxswains, and adapt themselves to better interact with their crews. Just as the rowers are constantly trying to improve themselves, a coxswain must also be continually looking for ways to get better at what they do.

How to be a good Cox

Learn from other coxswains

Other coxswains can be a very good resource. Chances are other coxswains in your program will know something about the role. Talk to them, watch them. If they don't mind ask them to make a recording or a race or even a practice. If you have the chance, go to a camp or a coxswain clinic. The more knowledge and experience you have, chances are the better you'll become.

Learn how to row

One of the most important things that one must do if they are to master the art is to learn how to row. Don't just watch videos or other people row. Jump in the boat and do it! If you can't row yourself, your abilities will be limited. You could know the correct technique, and everything there is to know, but it's not the same as actually doing it. Physically taking strokes on the water will help you to better understand the movements involved which will help you in correcting the oarsmen with their strokes.

Listen to Coxswain Recordings

Find as many audio recordings as possible. Coxswaincafe.com and coxie.com have great stuff, and it's always informative to poke around row2k.com, as well as usrowing.org. Record yourself during both practices and races, and listen to it carefully. Transcribe some of it to get a greater sense of what you're saying. Ask other coxswains for some of their recordings.

Motivational skills

You must be able to motivate your crew. Pay close attention to them both on the water and off, and listen to what they say. Short of coming out and asking them "what motivates you?" this is the best way to glean this information. Put yourself in their stretchers and think about what you'd like to hear. Try things at practice and pay attention to what works and what doesn't. Ask other crews what they like to hear from their coxswain to get some ideas.

Develop your own style. 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.

Earn respect

As a coxswain you have responsibility. Don't go on a "power trip". You are a leader and motivator, but you are still part of the crew, and in that way equal to each rower. Don't let yourself sound bossy or 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 will be more likely to win. It's not about you telling them what to do; it's about you helping them get the most out of their work. Ask others how you come across, and be willing to accept their answers.

Know how to do your job. Know the workouts. Know the lineups. Know how to make correct calls, how to dock, how to rig, and above all, how to steer. If they look over the stern and see a crazy serpentine wake or feel the boat constantly losing set to your drastic adjustments, you can bet you'll have to work hard to get them to trust you again.

Know your crew

Know the names of every rower in your boat. Write it down if you need to. Don't just use their number when talking to them. Sometimes rowers forget where they are sitting. During a race they will respond better to their own name rather than to a number. Also, try to build a relationship with the rowers on your boat. It's a big plus if your rowers like you.

Personality and Style

Personality is an important issue. Oarsmen tend to like it if their coxswain has a personality. Be able to be serious but have a sense of humor at the same time. Style is another important part. Style is what you say and how you say it. Some coxswains like to verbally attack their opponents during a race. Some are able to stay calm the whole race, but still have the control and burning desire. And some are true motivational masters. Style is up to you. Find what works with your crew.

Duties of a coxswain, *in order of importance*:

1. Safety of Crew and Craft
2. Steering
3. Giving Commands
4. Enthusiasm and Motivation
5. Technical Corrections and Advice

Safe Management of Crew and Equipment

The underlying goal of any program 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 keen observation and a great deal of forethought.

Know the proper emergency procedures. Know how to handle your crew if the boat swamps or flips. Be familiar with using hand signals the coach, who is almost always out of earshot. Know where you are in the river and what to do if lightning or thunder is observed.

Additionally, the 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 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.

Steering

Sit still with a slight forward lean 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. Place all but their pointer finger and thumb on the outside of the shell and then hold the string between the pointer finger and thumb. This way you feel your hand moving against the boat, which will serve as a reminder not to over-steer. Also, make sure you steer with the wrists, not the arms (No Nordic Track steering).

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.

Since a shell slides through the water, the shell will continue to swing after the rudder has stopped being used. Therefore, slightly under steer from 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 course.

The boat is very long, so it takes a while for it to turn. This often makes the cox think that the boat isn't turning, and they will respond by pushing harder on the rudder. The cox must be patient, so he does not over-correct. Also, it should be noted that a 4 responds faster than an 8, and individual boats have their own steering idiosyncrasies.

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. 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, *slightly* lean over to one side to view directly in front of your bow.

Giving Commands

When calling commands, it must be done clearly and confidently, and with a definite cadence. And 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 are telling the crew firstly, what they are going to do, secondly, when to do it, and finally, to actually execute the command. Examples are: "Weight enough in two. One, two, weigh enough," and "Hands on. Up an inch, ready, up." Each of these commands should be given with a definite rhythm, or pace (cadence), so the crew can easily predict when 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 heads, *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.")

Enthusiasm and Motivation

Always be **POSITIVE** and **ENTHUSIASTIC** with your crew, you want them to improve and 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.

Technical Corrections and Advice to Rowers

There is a tremendous amount of information a knowledgeable coxswain can see and feel from the cox seat. Blades moving in perfect unison, both in drive and recovery speed as well as height, roll ups, clean catches and releases with appropriate puddles are all 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, but it is very easy for a coxswain to fall into the roll 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. Take special care to avoid talking over the coach in all but emergency situations. You should be listening as attentively to the coach as the rowers are, and if you are both talking, nothing gets heard. If you need to make a call such as switching a pair, or to weigh enough, RAISE YOUR HAND before you begin to let the coach know you need to talk. Do not hesitate if you feel the call is urgent enough. . A coach doesn't always see everything you see, and will respect your judgment if the safety of the crew and craft are at stake.

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 them 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 you don't know exactly what you're talking about, it may be best to remain quiet.

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 manner, the boat will be racked and you and your crew will erg for the day. If the boat is repairable, you might be able to row in it the next day. If not, you and your crew could be on land for some time.

The best way to keep your boat safe is to keep your crew under control, and to be thinking TWO STEPS AHEAD at all times. Do you have your cox box and tools? Line-up and work out? When you're getting hands on, are there people standing in the doorway? Is there a boat on slings in the yard? As you come up to the dock, is your bow facing the right direction? Are there boats ahead of you? Are boats coming off the water? Because the boat is long, heavy, and awkward to maneuver, it's far easier to avoid a problem by thinking about it before it comes up.

Remember, you are the coxswain. The boat is YOUR responsibility. If it gets damaged, the coach will come down on you first, because you are in charge. At hands on, the coxswain's attitude must change from "being one of the guys" to being serious and in control.

Proper calls to the water:

Make sure your crew is balanced bow and stern BY HEIGHT, and arranged at the first two and last two (bow and 2, 7 and stroke) riggers.

Call as follows:

- "Hands On" Crew grabs 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 it from the rack.
- "Walk it out slow"
- "Up and over heads. Ready, UP"
- "Face the stern/bow."

- "Split to the shoulders from stern/bow. Ready, split."
 - Before the boat moves forward call out "heads up!"
 - "Walk it forward" Make sure the riggers will clear both sides of the bay door.
 - Depending on which side of the dock you'll be launching from take the stern to the left or right to align the boat for a clean approach to the dock. BE VERY AWARE OF THE BOW AND STERN AT THIS POINT. KEEP A CONSTANT EYE.
 - "Up and over heads. Ready, UP" Overheads down the ramp
 - Proceed with the boat onto the dock, sending the front four left or right. When in position call "weigh enough" and stand ready by the skeg.
 - *It is important to perform the following commands in as fluidly and quickly as possible:*
 - "Toe the edge"
 - "Roll to the waist. Press it out. And down."
- Make sure they lean out over the water, and have a hand on the stern to make sure the skeg clears.

On the dock:

The aim is to get the boat launched as quickly as possible in less than two minutes. The line up is to be set before "hands on." There is to be minimal talking; no chit chat.

Call one side to oars, the other to locks. If time and traffic permits, adjust stretchers if necessary. It may be necessary to make adjustments on the water.

- "Countdown from bow when ready."
- "Extend port oars. One foot in, and down. Tie in, and count down. Check riggers."
- "Lean away. Push off in two. One, two, push off."

Docking:

APPROACH THE DOCK SLOWLY

As you approach the dock have the 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 pair. The idea being to slow the boat down but still keep it moving.

Approach the dock from upstream at a 15° angle. As your bow nears the dock have the stern pair weigh enough, apply a little left rudder, have the starboards raise their oars and have the crew lean away.

Call as follows:

- "Untie and count down."
- "On foot on the dock, one on the strip. And up."
- Call on 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 heading up. This is crucial for efficiency in removing the boat from the dock.*
- Again stand by the skeg, calling the next segment quickly:
- "Hands on. Up to waist, ready, UP. UP and over heads, ready, UP. Turn and face the bow /stern. Walk it up."
- As you reach the top of the ramp: "Split to shoulders from bow/stern, ready, split."

Most boats go in the boathouse stern first. Again be careful of the riggers on the bay doors. Once on the racks go get the oars from the dock and return them to the appropriate rack. Then wait for your coach to give you permission to leave.

Practice

Practice is a very important time used for developing the technique and ultimately the speed of a crew. Practice is the most important time for the coxswain to act as a leader in the boat. It is the time when all the kinks in the rowers' technique can be ironed out. The coxswain must aid in this progressive environment by setting a positive and focused tone for the practice. Once the crew gets "hands on" and hits the water, everything is serious. The crew must use their time wisely and not waste it. Wasted time in practice will mean lost seconds during a race.

Most programs have coaches who are on the water with the crews providing instruction. The coxswain should listen to the coach. The coach will tell the coxswain what the workout will be, so he should pay attention, for coaches don't like to say things more than once. If the coxswain needs the coach to repeat something he should just ask. It is better to have the coach repeat his directions than for a coxswain to begin a workout when he does not know what he should be doing. The coxswain should just not make a habit of asking the coach to repeat himself. The coach will also provide feedback to the rowers while on the water. The coxswain should listen to what the coach tells each of the rowers and watch their oars so he can learn more about how to fix certain technique issues. While the coach is talking to the crew, whether to provide workout instructions or technical feedback, the coxswain should remain silent, so the instructions of the coach can be heard.

Coxswains should make a habit of using hand signals on the water. ANYTIME a coach or official speak directly to the cox, they should raise their hand as an acknowledgement. If you do not, the person speaking has no idea if they've been understood. If you cannot hear or do not understand, a generally understood signal is to point at your ear and shake your head ("I didn't hear you.") Avoid making a circle in the air with your finger tip while doing this; it conveys an entirely different meaning.

If there are multiple crews on the water working with the same coach, the coxswains of each crew should work to keep the boats close together, unless instructed otherwise. If one boat gets ahead, the coxswain of that crew should tell his crew to ease up on the pressure, slow down the stroke rate, or even add a pause in the stroke. For crews that are behind, the coxswain should have the crew increase the pressure, or increase the rate. It is likewise necessary to keep the boats close if they are side by side. Anything over half a boat width (the length of an oar) is to be avoided.

It is vitally important that a coxswain knows what the coach wants from both they and the crew. Make sure you know the workout for the practice, or the race plan at the regatta. WRITE IT DOWN. You will be expected to know these things, so have them written in your notepad, and be able to execute them without necessarily having the coach present.

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.

Reverse 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 blade 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 necessary. Inside hand moves toward the oarlock, holing 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 eyes closed (rowers only). Forces crew to listen for slide and catch timing, and to feel the body positioning. Helps timing, slide rush, catch, and lean problems.

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 because there are a limited number of them belonging to the club, and they are relatively fragile if handled improperly. Always carry the CB 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.

Any self-respecting coxswain will own a watch with a stop-watch function.

Coxswains should also carry with them a small bag of tools including:

- A 10mm and 13mm wrench
- An adjustable wrench which opens up to 1"
- A Phillips and flathead screwdriver
- A roll of electrical tape
- A roll of athletic tape
- Some Band-aids
- A small bag of spare parts (nuts, washers, rigger spacers)
- A whistle (3 short burst is a universal call for help)
- A notepad with a pen or pencil for writing down daily line-ups and workouts, and a zip lock baggie to keep these things dry in the boat.

Racing

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 will 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 he/she may be, to calm the crew. Before the race is not the time to add anything new or to try and fix problems which were unable to 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.

Sprint Racing

Sprint races are the type of racing which take place during the spring and summer months. The distance of these races is usually 2000 meters but sometimes may be only 1000m or 1500m. The coach will inform you of the distance well before the race. 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. Some sprint races may make use of a starting platform where a person holds the stern of the boat in place and makes certain each crew is aligned. Others may use a floating start. In both cases listen carefully to the referees and follow all instructions closely.

The Start

The coxswain must line the crew up on the line when their event is called for. If the boat must be backed into a starting dock, the coxswain should do so carefully and slowly!

If not pointed correctly down the course once on the line, the coxswain should raise his hand until he 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 are not advised, especially if on a starting dock, full strokes make it very difficult for the person holding the stern to hold on. When using a stake dock, it is advised to have either 2 row with 1's oar or 3 row with 2's oar to straighten the boat. This is called "pinching it" sometimes it's also called "sculling it".

If there are no stake docks, the official will give commands to the boats racing in order to get them aligned. If the official says "touch it up stern pair", the crew should row lightly 7 & 8. If the official says, "check it down", the crew should angle the oars into the water to slow the boat's forward movement.

When the official asks the crew if they are ready, the coxswain should raise his hand briefly and have the crew sit ready to row. If there is a problem at the start, the coxswain must raise his hand and keep it up, and must also tell the bowman to raise his hand. This makes it more clear to the officials that there is a problem. Keep you hand up until the problem is fixed. Hands down to an official means you are ready.

Sprint races are started by an official who will give starting commands to the crews. Most sprint races begin with either a countdown start or a two command start. An example of a countdown start is "5...4...3...2...1...ATTENTION! ROW!" A two command start would just be "ATTENTION! ROW!"

The coxswain should pay attention in the morning coach/cox meeting as to what start will be used in the race. The cox should then tell their boat what the start will sound like so they aren't surprised.

The Body

Sprint races are a straight shot from the starting line to the finish line. Coxswains should steer as straight as possible.

What commands should one use in a sprint race? There are some very basic commands like calling the racing start, calling power 10s and 20s, and calling the sprint. All coxswains should know these commands 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. Sometimes if a coxswain goes wild and starts to yell like a madman, especially in inexperienced crews, the crew can get overexcited and lose control which can slow

the boat down. Keep that wild fire saved away for when the crew gets experienced, it can work wonders then.

The coxswain should know the race plan and be able to control the crew to stick to it. Adhere to the rates and strategies worked on in practice. The cox should know what the crew is capable of, and be able to keep the crew within their abilities.

However, the race is a fast and dynamic thing. The cox will most likely need to adapt the plan to fit the circumstances, but always within the abilities of the crew.

The Finish

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. The coxswain should give them technical reminders to sit-up, breathe, relax, and to keep rowing full strokes. And although technique is certainly important here, there is nothing wrong with calling for more power during the sprint. Motivation from the cox is very important here – rowing is all about pushing your body past its limits, and it is the coxswain's job to make sure their rowers do that.

A very important part of the finish is the sprint. Many races have been lost by a 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. Inexperienced crews can fall apart very easily during the final sprint.

Something to avoid is calling a specific number of strokes to the finish line. Far too often you may underestimate. A crew that has just been asked to give you their "last 10!" will not appreciate, nor perhaps be able to, give you ten more because you guessed wrong.

After the race, congratulate the winner (if it's not you), and thank the losers for a good race. You should not sit there and celebrate/cry/recover/die. There will likely be more races coming down shortly after, and the boats that have finished should move out of the way and head back to the dock.

Head Racing

Head races are usually 3 miles and contain turns. 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, other boats, and they should pay attention to their course.

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 space between each boat's start.

As the crew approaches the line they should be rowing with all oarsmen, entering what is known as the chute. This is a buoyed lane about 100m long in which the boats come up to speed gradually as the marshals are calling you up. By the time you cross the line you will have been at race pace for 5 or so strokes. You should start your cox clock as you cross the line, and you will hear the official calling "you are on the clock."

The Body

Unlike sprint races, there is no sure way to tell how good a boat is doing. The coxswain and oarsmen should be concerned if a boat closes in from behind. This means they are faster. If a boat is passing, the coxswain should steer out of their way. This generally means giving way by

moving towards the shore to be passed, towards the center of the river to overtake. 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 15 minutes or more to talk during the race. He must make sure that he reminds the oarsmen about their technique. Technique is very important during a head race.

The coxswain should also not forget to motivate the crew during head races, this is very important. The coxswain does not have to talk the whole race. If everything is going well and he doesn't have anything to say, he 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 that he does talk when needed. He shouldn't let a severe problem with an oarsman's technique go unnoticed, he'll regret it when he finds out he lost the race.

The cox must make sure to know the rules and penalties for the particular course they are on. They must know which side to pass on, when they have to move over to be passed, whether the oars or shell marks out of bounds, and a variety of other things. Head races tend to have more variation on rules than sprint races, so coach/cox meetings – and the coxswain's memory – become very important.

The Finish

The sprint in a head race can be strange for new crews. Their opponents aren't next to them, and there is no way of telling what place they are in. This is where the coxswain becomes very important. The cox needs to create that competitive drive of the sprint at the end of the race in order to get that final push out of the rowers.

Advice for a New Coxswain

- Keep a journal. Write down everything and look at it often. 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 during the summer, cox for other boats, volunteer to cox whenever you can.
- Row as much as possible. Erg. Erg correctly. These lessons can be invaluable.
- Watch rowing as much as possible. Take home video, ask to ride in the launch even when you don't have to. Ask to ride in the other squads coach's' launches.
- Work out with the team. You can learn a lot about yourself, your teammates, and you can earn a great deal of respect.
- Running into things sucks. 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 the straightest damn course ever. 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.
- Get a bad-ass pair of sunglasses.
- Put together a very small bag that you carry with you in the boat. Carry a 10mm straight handle wrench, an adjustable, some electrical and medical tape, spare bolts, a cough drop, spare pair of glasses if you wear contacts, and a small notepad.
- Buy a small recorder. Carry it around and try making calls into it - play it back and see how they sound. Bring your recorder with you in the boat and tape drills, practice pieces, and especially races. Listen to your tapes often.

- 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 if you want to be an athlete. Athletes don't wear jeans and a polo shirt to practice so why should a coxswain?
- Knowledge is power, so find out all you can about boat makers, workouts, the national team, other crews, different courses, other races. The more you know the more confident you'll be, and confidence is the foundation for good coxing.
- Always be on time. On time to practice, on time to the line, on time back to the dock,
- 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.
- And finally, be yourself. Develop your own style. Be creative. Coxing is a way to find out who you are and what you're made of.