

Safe Coxing Essentials

These notes offer a few tips on how to cox a boat safely on the river at Upton. There is a more comprehensive guide available for people who want to cox more regularly, particularly in competitive crews.

What to wear

Firstly think about your own comfort and safety, and particularly what to wear. Especially in winter, you should make sure that you are dressed warmly. It is always colder on the water than it is on dry land, and unlike the crew you don't have the benefit of exercise to keep you warm. Wear enough layers to keep the cold out, waterproof clothing if it is wet, and gloves and a hat if it is very cold. **You must wear a life-jacket at all times in the boat** (and this must be the top layer, not worn underneath anything else). You shouldn't wear wellies in the boat because in the unlikely event that you end up in the river they fill with water and weigh you down.

Commands

As the cox **you are in charge of the boat**, and the crew shouldn't do anything except in response to your commands. These are explained in more detail in the more comprehensive guide, but at this stage you can pick them up from the stroke of the crew if you don't know them already.

Steering

Your most important job is to look out ahead and steer the boat. To make it turn, you have to push the rudder string away from you on the side that you want to turn to. What actually happens is that the stern of the boat is pushed to the opposite side by the flow of water pushing against the rudder. It only works when the boat is moving forward relative to the water, so you can't steer when you are drifting, nor when the crew is paddling it backwards. Always keep the rudder strings tight, don't let them go and let the rudder flap about.

What makes it tricky is that the rudder has a rather delayed effect, and nothing much happens for the first couple of strokes after you have applied the rudder. Similarly, once it starts to turn, it may keep turning for a stroke or two even after you have straightened the rudder. So you need to think ahead and allow for this delay.

You also need to watch for the effects of the wind and the current, and be ready to counteract their tendency to push you off course.

To steer safely you must obey the rule of the river, which **at Upton is to keep to the right** (i.e. the opposite of the rule of the road) and leave plenty of room for oncoming boats to pass on your left. If you are overtaking another boat going in the same direction you should pass it on the left, having made sure that it is safe to do so. If another boat is passing you, keep well in to the right bank and give it plenty of room.

As well as keeping a lookout ahead of the boat you need to **be aware of what is happening behind you**. Good communication with the stroke of the boat, who of course is looking to stern, will help particularly if there is a lot of traffic coming up behind you. Low-lying debris in the water is a hazard often experienced when the river is in spate so extra vigilance is needed.

Don't cut the corners on bends; stay parallel to the bank in a smooth curve round the bend.

If you are in danger of hitting anything (like the bank/another boat/any other obstacle) **just stop**. If it's a real emergency and you need to stop in a hurry, shout 'EASY ALL' and then 'HOLD THE BOAT', to get the crew to bury their blades in the water to put the brakes on as hard as they can.

Always remember that boats don't stop immediately – they will run on for two or three lengths after the crew stops rowing, so you must allow for this whenever you give the command to easy.

Manoeuvring

There are a number of common manoeuvres that are quite difficult to execute at first, and the notes that follow offer some hints. As with everything else, however, the real secret is practice.

Leaving the landing stage

Our launching position in the marina is quite awkward, because you have to make a right angle turn as soon as you leave the landing stage. Get the stroke side members of the crew to push off as far as possible from the stage with their oars, and then get 2 to paddle on to bring you round.

Leaving the marina

Approach the entrance slowly, sound the horn and easy as you come up to the bridge so that you drift gently out into the river, being ready to take any avoiding action if another boat appears. Watch out for the current as you enter the river because it will swing your bows downstream, and if there is a very strong current you should turn left and go downstream rather than try to fight against it, and then turn round a short way down the river if you want to go upstream. If the current is not too strong and you want to go directly upstream, get stroke side to pull the boat round once you are clear of the marina entrance. If you find that that is taking you too far across the river, get bow side to back down alternately (as in a normal turn – see below).

Turning round

The best way to turn round is to have the crew members on opposite sides of the boat paddling on and backing down alternately. Because the rule of the river is to keep to the right, it is usual to turn round to the left – i.e. with stroke side backing down and bow side paddling on – but you need to be sure you have enough room on the side that you are turning towards. (If you run out of room, just tell those paddling on to easy until you have enough space again.) Also, watch out for the wind or current in case it might push you across the river or into obstacles such as moored boats.

Re-entering the marina

If there is not much current or wind, this is quite easy. Just stop opposite the entrance, turn the boat through 90 degrees so that you are facing into the marina, check that it is clear, sound the horn and paddle slowly in. However, if the current is strong it will carry the whole boat sideways relative to the entrance, so you'll need to stop a little farther upstream. Also, as you move off the river the current will catch the stern of the boat and swing it round, so you have to allow for this and be ready to correct it with the rudder.

Approaching the landing stage

Paddle slowly towards the slipway and stop a couple of lengths short of it, then get bow to paddle on to bring the bows round (and perhaps get stroke to back down to assist the turn). Once you are aiming at the landing stage at a shallow angle (say 30°) you can use stern pair to paddle very gently to bring you in. You should aim for the *near* end of the stage and then use the rudder to turn the bows away from it as you get closer, which brings the boat parallel to the stage with the stern at the near end of the stage. Do the whole thing slowly; ideally, you should have just enough momentum to reach the stage and no more. Allow for the wind – the flags will show you whether it is blowing you towards the shore or away from it – and beware of shallow water, staying well off the bank if there is any danger of running aground. The shallowest water is immediately to the left of the bottom of the concrete slipway.