

Common Rowing Vocabulary

Coxswain Terms

“Backing”

A backwards stroke used to turn a boat or back a boat into starting blocks. Coxswain will call for picking, touching, or any length of backwards strokes.

“Check it”

A command sometimes used to get all oars on starboard or port to hold water causing the boat to turn.

“Count down”

The command the coxswain uses to confirm with each rower that they are ready to row. From bow to stern, each rower calls their number when they're ready.

“Hold water”

The command used to stop the boat quickly. Each rower squares their blade in the water creating drag. Like putting on the brakes. Also known as “Kill the Run.”

“Let it run”

The command used to have a crew stop rowing. Good crews will keep their blades in the air and let the boat coast to a stop.

“Pick drill”

A rapid stroke where rowers use only their arms and use minimal pressure. An effective and impressive way to turn a boat when done right.

“Swing it”

A command used when carrying a boat to start turning either bow or stern.

“Touch it/Touching”

A stroke where rowers use only their arms and back. Used mostly for warm-up or to turn a boat.

Boat Terminology

Body Angle

Amount of forward lean of rower's body from hips at the catch.

Bow Loader

A shell with four rowers, each using one sweep oar, and a cox laying down in the bow.

Bowman

The rower seated closest to the bow of the boat.

Catch

The point in the stroke cycle at which the blade enters the water.

Check

Describes an undesirable bobbing motion of the rowing shell at the catch or finish that interrupts the boat's momentum

Coxed four

A shell with four rowers, each using one sweep oar, and a cox

Coxed pair

A shell with two rowers, each using one sweep oar, and a cox. Rare in North America

Coxswain (Cox)

Member of the crew who sits stationary in the boat facing the bow. While the coxswain's main job is to steer the shell with a tiny rudder he or she also calls the race strategy and helps motivate the crew.

Crab

A dastardly accident when a rower loses control of his or her oar. The blade gets trapped in the water by the momentum of the boat and the oar handle flies backwards either over the rower's head or striking the rower's chest. In extreme cases the rower can be thrown from the boat.

Double

A boat with two rowers where each uses two sculling oars (sculls).

Eights

A shell with eight rowers, each using one sweep oar, and a cox.

Feathering

The turning of the oar after the blade is extracted making it parallel to the water.

Finish

The last part of the drive in the stroke cycle. The point when the rower pulls the oar to the body with the arms and then extracts the blade from the water.

FISA

Abbreviation for Fédération Internationale des Sociétés d'Aviron, the international governing body for rowing established in 1892.

Layback

Amount of backward lean of a rower's body at the finish of the drive. Optimally 15°.

Leg drive

Power applied to the stroke, at the catch, by the force of driving the legs down. Often heard being yelled from the coach boat.

Pair

A shell with two rowers, each using one sweep oar. Steered with a rudder attached to a rower's foot.

Puddles

"Footprints" in the water made by the oars. Little whirlpools.

Quad

A shell with four rowers each with two sculling oars (sculls).

Rate

Number of strokes per minute being rowed by the crew. This usually varies from 36 to 42 on the start, 32 to 38 during the body and 34 to 40 at the finish. Smaller shells do not rate as high as eights and the quads.

Recovery

The phase of the stroke cycle from release to catch when the rower is moving towards the stern of the shell in preparation for the next stroke.

Release

Part of the stroke cycle when the blade is extracted from the water.

Repechage

The “second chance” race given to those crews which fail to qualify for the finals from an opening heat. “Rep” qualifiers move onto semi-finals or finals depending on the number of entries. Used in international racing.

Rigger

An attachment to the gunwale to hold the oar in place as it rotates through the stroke. Modern shells use out-riggers that hold the oar away from the gunwale (upper edge of the side of the boat) and provide greater leverage than one would have in a fishing boat.

Rudder

Steering device at the stern of the shell controlled through cables and ropes.

Run

The distance the shell moves during one stroke. Measured by looking for the distance between puddles made by the same oar.

Rushing the Slide

When a crew or rower moves too quickly towards the catch after a rushed finish. Very bad yet very common technique that causes check in the boat.

Scullers/Sculling

Rowers who row with two oars each.

Single

A shell with one rower using two sculling oars (sculls). One is the loneliest number.

Skying

Term used to describe a blade that is too high off the surface of the water during the recovery. The rower’s hands are too low causing an upset to the balance of the boat (the “set”).

Straight four

A boat with four rowers where each uses one sweep oar. One of the rowers steers the boat with a rudder connected to their foot stretchers with cables. A shell with four rowers, each using one sweep oar. Steered with a rudder attached to a rower’s foot.

Stroke/Stroke seat

The rower sitting closest to the stern. The stroke sets the rhythm for the rest of the crew to follow.

Sweep

Boats in which the rowers each use a single sweep oar. A sweep oar is longer than a sculling oar and has a bigger blade.

Swing

That hard-to-define feeling when perfect synchronization of motion occurs thus enhancing performance. When a crew “gels.”

Washing out

When the blade comes out of the water early causing the blade to miss water. The blade should remain in the water from catch to release.

Parts of a Boat/Equipment

Blade

The end of the oar, often painted in a club's or country's colors. This part of the oar should be just beneath the surface when the rower is pulling the oar through the water.

Bow

The front of the boat, which is behind the rowers while sitting in the boat. The bow crosses the finish line first.

Bowball

A small white rubber ball attached to the bow designed to protect a rower in the event of a collision.

Collar/Button

A wide plastic ring placed around the sleeve of an oar. The button stops the oar from slipping through the oarlock.

Coxbox

A speaker system that runs through the boat with a microphone so the coxswain does not have to yell. The coxbox also displays the crew's stroke rate, which is measured by a magnet under the stroke seat.

Ergometer

An indoor torture device that best simulates the rowing motion without any of the pleasantness. The most common tool used for dry-land training is the Concept II, which uses a flywheel and digital readout showing your strokes per minute, power output, speed, and distance "travelled".

Footstretcher

The shoe assembly in a shell into which each rower laces his or her feet. Gate the bar across the oarlock that locks the oar in place.

Hatchet

A style of oar blade with a bigger surface area than the classic spoon-shaped blade. The blade extends downwards from the shaft at an angle level with the water. Its shape resembles a hatchet. Also called cleaver or big blade.

Inboard

The length of the oar shaft measured from the button to the handle. Keel Centre line of the shell running along the hull from bow to stern, which helps the shell run a straight course and increases stability.

Macon

The classic style of oar blade, which is shaped like a spoon.

Oarlock

The "U"-shaped swivel holding the oar in the rigger. It is mounted on the rigger "sill", rotates on an upright pin, and has a "gate" at the top to secure the oar.

Outboard

The length of the oar shaft measured from the button to the tip of the blade.

Port

The right-hand side of the shell while sitting in the boat. Port side riggers and oars are indicated by red paint or tape.

Rigger

An attachment to the gunwale to hold the oar in place as it rotates through the stroke. Modern shells use out-riggers that hold the oar away from the gunwale (upper edge of the side of the boat) and provide greater leverage than one would have in a fishing boat.

Rudder

Steering device at the stern of the shell controlled through cables and ropes.

Scull

Smaller oars used in sculling boats.

Shell

The correct term for a rowing boat.

Starboard

The left-hand side of the shell while sitting in the boat. Starboard riggers and oars are indicated by green paint or tape.

Stake boat

Stake boat a structure at the starting line of the race. The shell is "backed" into the starting gate. Once in the gates a mechanism, or person lying on the starting gate, holds the stern of the shell.

Stern

The rear of the shell. While in the boat, rowers face the stern.