

Lake Union Crew

Coxswain Handbook

(updated September, 2006)

This handbook is designed to introduce you to boat handling at LUC, and assist you in navigating your way around the boat bays and the waterways.

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1. The Role of the Coxswain

The coxswain leads their crew on and off the water as well as steers the boat. A crew's performance is as dependent on a well-prepared coxswain as it is on the technical and athletic abilities of the rowers. The coxswain also plays an essential role in the psychology of the team, maintenance of the equipment, and the effectiveness and efficiency of a practice session.

Specific coxswain roles listed below

- Maintain a calm and purposeful manner when working with your crew. You set the tone for the practice or race.
- If you are focused and confident of your job, your crew will respond to your leadership. Even if you are not confident, fake it! Get all the information you can from your coach, then do your job the best you can.
- Ensure the safety of the rowers and the boat both on and off the water.
- Maximize practice time by motivating your crew to be quick and efficient in the boat bays and on the dock. Know where your coach expects you to meet him/her on the water.
- Steering, Launching, and Landing.
- Provide the leadership needed to maintain the attention and focus of the rowers.
- General care of the equipment you use. Report any damage to your coach, and write any repair needs on "repair board", which located as you enter/exit the boat bay from/into the tank room.
- Communication with the coach regarding the practice. The coach depends on you to assist in practice management and for feedback from your perspective in the boat. Express difficulties you may be having (i.e., steering, docking, motivation, crew member, etc.). Also report all boat successes (i.e., set, drill execution, etc.)
- Maximizing the quality of the practice by filling "down" time with drills (if you are not sure which drills are appropriate for your crew, ask your coach before practice).
- Giving specific direction to individual rowers for better oar handling, matching and blade work.

2. Steering, Stopping, and Turning

Steering Basics

- Push the steering mechanism or steering cable in the direction you want to turn.
- Keep on course by picking and maintaining a point high enough on the horizon, so that you can always see it over your rowers.
- Make small adjustments to keep the boat on course.
- Be aware that sharp steering will affect the set of the boat and may disrupt the rowers' focus.

- The coxswain may ask for more pressure on one side to assist in steering around a turn. However, this should not be a frequent request.
- Do not lean to either side. Keep your body weight centered and low in the boat.
- To steer the boat to one side when it has momentum and is coming to a stop, have one side hold down or drag their blades.
- During practice, boats should remain approximately one oar length apart, and should remain parallel while rowing. Do not wait for the coach to tell you to pull the boats together. If your boat gets behind the other boat, ask for more pressure; if your boat gets ahead of the other boat, add in a few pauses at half slide until the other boat comes even.

Advanced Steering

- The lag time between rudder application and hull response is from 3/4 of a stroke to 1 1/2 full strokes.
- Fours are more responsive, making them more difficult to keep straight.
- The rudder mechanism needs to be tight otherwise coxswains can unintentionally move the rudder in trying to stabilize their own bodies. Keep even pressure on the steering cables until you want to adjust your course. This will keep the rudder Movement of the coxswain can cause rowers to continually adjust to variables they cannot control. You can increase your stability by grasping both gunwales and the steering cable simultaneously. Hold the steering cable with 2 fingers only.

When to Steer

- Turning slows the boat because of rudder drag and because the rowers have a harder time setting the boat.
- Try to minimize your turning.
- Anticipate the need to steer, as the boat begins to move off course and make small corrections early.
- A shell is more stable when the blades are in the water. Try to steer while the blades are in the water.
- A shell is less stable when the blades are out of the water. Try not to steer when the blades are out of the water.
- The boat accelerates on the drive and decelerates on the recovery. Steering is less responsive the slower the boat is moving.

Coxing Style

- Always raise your hand when you have understood your coach's instruction. If you do not understand, signal your coach by putting your hand to your ear, or ask for clarification if your coach is close to you.
- Turn your Cox box OFF if you need to yell to your coach or others outside of your boat.
- When adjusting a point have your 7 or 8 seat back while your 1 or 2 seat rows. This will let you spin your boat without moving forward or backwards.

- When making a gradual turn, steer during the drive and straighten the rudder during the recovery.
- When making a sharp turn it is OK to keep the rudder to one side. However, tell your rowers when you are “on the tiller” and again when you’re “off the tiller”.

Steering Practice

- Refrain from steering for a given number of strokes. If your boat naturally steers straight, you will see how little you need to steer. If your boat tends to pull to one side you may need to work with the coach to find which rower(s) is being out-pulled. Over steering may hide what is really happening in the boat.

Stopping

- When having a crew stop you can give the command, “In two.... way-enough” or “on this one, way-enough. Always say when you want your crew to stop before you say way-enough. Say “way-enough” as the blades go through the water.
- You can stop your boat by holding down all eight. You can keep your boat from moving by having all eight square their blades and hold water.
- Always have your crew “glide” after they way-enough. Rowers should stop with their “hands away” and their blades off the water, and feathered.
- Always stop your crew even with the other boats or immediately pull your boat even after you have stopped by using your stern pair or four to row.
- Maintain your point and keep boats parallel while stopped. You should always be adjusting your point even if the coach is talking (use your stern or bow pair, make brief comments, trying not to interrupt the coach), so that you are ready to go when the practice is ready to continue. Communicate to other coxswains what you are doing and if you need their help. Do not wait for the coach to tell you to “get your point”.

Turning Around

- Always turn your boat into the wind, unless that causes you to violate the traffic pattern.
- Always begin the turn by backing first.
- Maintain a set boat during the entire turn.
- Unless otherwise directed, turn your boat one side at a time (i.e., ports to back, starboards to row, ready back, row, back”, etc...).
- If two or more boats are turning, stagger the boats so that all boats can turn without collision.
- Always turn your boat so that you end up facing in the right direction for the traffic pattern when you finish your turn.

3. Commands

Your voice, execution of drills and workouts set the tone for your boat. A coxswain with a confident voice and precise calling of commands will ensure the focus of your rowers and the quality of your row.

Attitude

- Have confidence in your ability to make accurate decisions and in correcting mistakes. Do not apologize. Just make the change in your command and then continue.
- Demand attention and focus from your rowers on and off the water.
- Treat the rowers with respect.

Voice

- Use a deep voice versus a high/shrill squeal.
- Don't be afraid to be quiet as you assess a situation and then make a decision. Try not to think out loud.
- If you anticipate a tight situation, or there is a wake coming, give the rowers a calm warning. "Starboards, we're passing another crew on your side, heads up." Or "Wake coming from the port side in 3 strokes."
- As the intensity of a practice or race increases, your voice needs to remain calm and relaxed. Do not increase the volume or speed of your voice unless it is for specific emphasis (i.e., power ten, passing a boat, etc...). Increase the intensity of your voice rather than the volume.
- Your voice affects your rowers. If you talk fast, the slide will tend to increase. If you panic, your rowers will panic. When you're nervous, your rowers will be nervous. It is very important that you remain clam under stress whether you are lining up for a race or trying to maneuver your boat in a tricky situation during practice.
- Use a strong and assertive speaking voice. Never yell or scream at your rowers. Remember that just because you speak loudly in the bays, you do not have to take an angry tone.

Timing

- Always count your strokes at precisely the same moment as the stroke's catch. Calling the count before or after the catch will confuse your rowers and can lead to unmatched rowing. Never count at the release.
- Always tell your crew what they are supposed to do and then say "in two..." or "on this one..." depending on the situation.

Miscellaneous

- Always raise your hand after a coach gives you instruction, to acknowledge that you understand.
- Keep your hand in the air or signal the coach if you do not understand an instruction. Always ask questions if you do not understand an instruction.
- Always stop even with other crews or immediately pull your boat up to the other boats by fours or pairs (do not wait for the coach to tell you to do this).
- Contribute your ideas to the coach. Communicate problems/concerns (i.e., not understanding instructions, internal boat conflicts, etc...) to your coach.
- There should be no talking in the boat other than from you or unless rowers are responding to a question or have an emergency (i.e., broken equipment, injury, etc...).
- Do not speak when the coach is talking. Keep the count in your head and then continue calling the piece when the coach has stopped talking. Use silence to your benefit by letting the rowers hear the rhythm and listen for the bubbles, while giving yourself a break too. If you talk nonstop, rowers will tune you out.

4. Boat Handling

Carrying boats

- There should be no talking other than from you in the boat bay or as you walk your boat.
- Demand that all rowers carry the boat at their shoulders, or just above if they are not as tall as others.
- Have rowers split opposite their riggers (i.e., ports split right, starboards split left). People helping carry a heavier boat should split so that sides are equal (have rowers tip their heads in the direction they are going to go, while the boat is still overheads).

Launching

- Stand and face your rowers as you call your commands. They cannot hear you if you turn your face away from them.
- As the boat is rolled into the water, move to the stern and make sure the skag does not hit the dock.
- Designate, for example, ports to carry oars and have starboards undo the oarlocks. We get oars after the boat is in the water. Make sure rowers hustle as they retrieve the oars.
- When your crew is placing the oars in the boat or removing them use the following order.
 - a. Launching: Have dockside oars in first. Hold the boat for waterside oar placement.
 - b. Docking: Have waterside oars removed first. Make sure you and others are Dockside oars go tips down on the dock.

- Have rowers count down from bow and immediately have the water side rowers push out their oars (“outside oars across”). Make sure this motion occurs at the same time. Hands should not leave the oars after this point.
- Make sure the boat is held a couple of inches away from the dock so the bolts won’t get caught on the dock as rowers get in/out of the boat. No part of any boat should ever touch anything except water, the rack or rowers.
- Call for the rowers to enter the boat by pairs “one foot in, and down”, (when not loading the entire boat at one time.....depending on the skill of the crew). You always enter last.
- Always make sure rowers keep their hands on their oars.
- Immediately walk (or push) the boat off the dock.
- Back off the dock only by stern pair followed by stern four. Do not back off all eight! Make sure everyone is backing together.
- If you are waiting for another boat to launch and join your practice, wait in the area just off the dock and tie into the foot stretchers on the water. If you are the last boat to launch, row to the rest of the boats in your practice by stern four (full slide) while the bow four tie in and then switch fours.
- If you have tied in and are waiting for other crews or for the coach, check your marks at the catch and the release and do catch/release drills.
- Always leave the dock going north, to stay in the traffic patten. When clear, you can then cut directly across to the west shore, if that is where your coach has directed you to meet.

Docking

- Always approach the dock slowly by pairs (sometimes fours works, but use good judgment).
- Notice which way the wind will blow you and adjust for it.
- Remember that if you have your rowers lean to one side, the boat will travel in that direction.
- Zero wind landings:
 - In clam weather, approach the dock at a 15-degree angle aiming for the beginning of the dock. Approach the dock slowly dropping from all eight 5 to 6 boat lengths away to stern four, to stern pair for the last boat length or two. With stern pair rowing, approach until one of their blades is almost on top of the dock. Then glide it in as everyone leans away from the dock to lift the riggers over the dock edge & bumper.
- Cross wind landings:
 - In strong crosswinds that push you off the dock, you will often require help from someone on the dock. Decrease your angle of docking to 5-10 degrees for cross winds off the dock. If you have the opportunity, dock on the side in which the wind will blow you towards the dock. Keep a 15-degree angle in this situation. Remember that the wind will either continually blow you closer to the dock as you approach it, or it will blow you away. For this reason you may need to start your approach closer or further away than you would if there was no wind. In heavy winds you may need to use bow, 2 seat or the bow pair instead of, or in addition to, stern pair to help guide the bow to the dock.

- You are always the person to get out first. Hold the boat while your rowers get out and remove their oars.
- Have your rowers exit the boat by pairs or fours, after you get out. (Depending on skill).
- Boats are taken into the bays and stored on the racks bow first, unless the boat is starboard rigged, then it needs to go in stern first so that the riggers will nestle together on the racks.

5. Safety

Boat handling

- Always tell your rowers what it is you want them to do before you ask them to do Stand facing the rowers so that everyone can hear you.
- Make sure everyone on your boat is ready and quiet before you ask him or her to Make sure rowers synchronize their movements. For example, when setting the boat in the water or picking it up, make sure that everyone does so at the same time.
- Make sure everyone is carrying the boat at his or her shoulders or above.
- When pressing the boat “up and over heads” or setting the boat into the water, make sure everyone in your boat is working and contributing.
- There should be no talking during boat handling procedures.

Steering

- You must stay within the correct traffic pattern at all times. **STUDY THE TRAFFIC PATTERN MAP IN THIS HANDBOOK!** Traffic patterns are almost all counterclockwise, keeping the shore on your starboard side. Coxswains should always stay to their right and close to shore unless otherwise instructed by their coach.
- When turning your boat around, turn only 90 degrees and then pull your boat across the water before finishing the remaining 90-degree of your turn.
- Always strive to keep the other boats in your practice no more than an oars’ length away from you.
- Act quickly. Anticipate what will be asked of you next. Never let yourself drift into an undesired position. If your decision is wrong, at least you will know and can quickly change your command.
- Periodically check behind you to see what traffic is coming up. Commercial traffic has the right of way, and barges in particular are very difficult to maneuver or stop....get out of their way.
- If you are stopping, pull the boat over to the right and out of the way of other boats that may be coming up behind you later.

Rowing

- Rowers should remain quiet while on the water.
- Rowers should synchronize their motions so that the boat remains set at all times.

- Never let the boat ride or sit in an unset position. If it is down to the same side 2 strokes in a row, call for the rowers to set the boat immediately.
- Give clear commands so that the rowers know what is expected of them.
- Always raise your hand after a coach gives you an instruction to acknowledge.
- If you row in the dark, hook up a battery for the lights. After the row, be sure to disconnect the battery before lifting the boat out of the water, and put the battery into the ‘used battery’ box for recharging.

Traffic Patterns on Lake Union and Lake Washington leaving LUC

- Refer to Traffic Pattern Map provided.
- Always stay to the right.
- Never stop underneath a bridge.
- When heading north, leave the red buoy under the I-5 bridge on your right. Leave about 10 feet between you and the buoy.
- When heading west (towards the Ship Canal), row straight across from LUC, then along the other shore, leaving the green buoy near Gasworks on your left.
- When heading east (from the Ship Canal), leave the green buoy near Gasworks on your left. Leave about 3-4 boat lengths between you and the buoy.
- When heading east through the “cut”, leave all red buoys on the 2,000-meter racecourse on your right. Your starboard blades should pass within 10 feet of the buoys.
- When heading west (from Lake Washington), leave all the green buoys on the 2,000-meter course on your right (unless otherwise directed). Your starboard blades should pass within 10 feet of the buoys.
- When navigating the “cut”, keep your boat as close to the right wall as possible.
- When traveling under a bridge, keep your boat as close to the right wall as possible. Look up at the bridge (most are draw bridges) and keep your boat to the right of the center span (where the bridge opens up). The University Bridge is especially critical since it is on a turn in the waterway. If you are on the left side of center, traveling against the traffic pattern, you may not be seen by on coming traffic as you come under the bridge!

Obstruction in the water

- When something wraps around the fin and/or rudder, you will feel a vibration in the stern. You may also not be able to steer effectively. You (or Stroke in a bow-loader) should be able to clear it quickly by reaching under the boat and pulling the debris off.
- If you have snagged a line or other large objects on your fin, stop immediately so that it does not rip off your fin. Then reach under the boat and clear it.
- Do not push down on an object under the hull since it may push back up through the hull.
- If you run over a solid object you will probably hear a loud thunk. If the fin is ripped off, your boat will veer from side to side. The fin could also be bent or it could be pushed up through the hull of the boat. In any case, you must row back to the boathouse immediately. Remember, if there is damage to, or loss of the fin, your ability to steer will

be greatly impaired so row back with great caution. One way to do this is to row with stern 6, and have either bow or 2 seat row as needed for steering.

Miscellaneous

- Command: “Heads Up” - pay attention, something to watch out for is near you. This command should always be used when someone may not see your shell coming at him or her such as when leaving the boathouse or launching/carrying boats at a regatta.
- Always have one person at each end of the boat when launching/carrying at a regatta.

6. Equipment

Oars

- Oars should be carried tips up and set on the dock tips down.
- Make sure everyone has the correct oar and that it is placed in its oarlock correctly before launching.

Foot stretchers

- Foot stretchers should be set at “the catch”, meaning: When the rowers sits in the catch position, the center of the rower’s seat and the pin (the part of the rigger that holds the oarlock in place) of the rigger should be in the same line.

Oar height

- Make sure rowers have enough clearance as they row. Moving spacers above the oarlock will lower the height and moving spacers below the oarlock will increase the height. Set height at the release position.

Wiping boats down

- Boats should be wiped down after each row. Designate a pair from your boat to do so (you will find in some programs the rowers all automatically wipe the boat down.....nothing needs to be said in those cases). This job should not fall on your shoulders.

Cox Boxes

- Know where your Cox box is at all times. Always replace your Cox box immediately after you row and make sure it is plugged into its charger. Cox box **MUST** be turned off before plugging it into the charger.
- Always carry your Cox box by the handle and head-set (together).

- Never leave a Cox box on the dock or sitting in the boat bay.
- Cox box maker Nielsen Kellerman has published the following dos and don'ts list.

CoxBOX DOs and DON'Ts by Nielsen Kellerman

DO: Put the CoxBox on charge whenever it is not in use. The charging light to the right of the rubber plug will come on as soon as the charger is connected. If this light is NOT on the CoxBox is not being charged.

DO: Inspect the toggle switch seal daily for signs of tearing.

DO: Charge for at least 16 hours should the "BAT" warning come on.

DO: Wash well in fresh water after salt water use.

DO: Wash away grit before cleaning front panel.

DO: Use the mounting cup provided.

DO: Occasionally apply silicone (available from N/K) to the outside of the rubber plug.

DO: Occasionally apply Nyogel (available from N/K) inside the metal sockets only.

DO: Be sure to turn the CoxBox OFF when not in use and store in a cool, dry place.

DO: Contact N/K with questions or problems.

DON'T: Ignore the "BAT" warning on the display. Repeated or extended use with a low battery will shorten life.

DON'T: Pull on the microphone cable. The cable and connector will withstand a steady pull of 60 lbs. – neither will withstand the impact created by yanking the cable or dropping the CoxBox and catching it with the cable.

DON'T: Leave the CoxBox anywhere the temperature might exceed 120° F for an extended time.

DON'T: Fully lock the microphone connector to the CoxBox unless necessary – locking the connector will increase wear & tear and cause damage if the CoxBox is dropped.

DON'T: Leave the CoxBox on while charging.

DON'T: Leave the CoxBox on charge for extended periods, (more than a day or two) – this will shorten battery life.

DON'T: Attempt to open the CoxBox – there are no user-serviceable parts inside and the device uses sophisticated sealing procedures. Any attempt by untrained individuals to open the CoxBox to open the CoxBox will almost certainly cause damage to the equipment and will void the warranty.

DON'T: Use solvents on the front panel as they will cause stress cracks.

Clothing

- Always have rain gear accessible in case the weather is nasty or you are in a bow loader.

- Dress warmly at all times if the weather is less than perfect. Cold coxswains are less effective.
- Have a spare set of clothes at the boathouse to change into in case you get wet during practice.

Rigging Boats

- You should be able to take riggers off and put riggers back on. Be aware of the nuts and bolts required to hold a rigger onto the boat and know which order they go.
- On Empachers, Vespolis and Pockocks, we leave the hardware on the boat. On Kaschpers, the hardware stays with the riggers.
- Tighten all nuts 'finger tight' and let the coach do the final tightening with the tools.

