

Wormit Boating Club

Coxswains Guide



This guide gives you commands, rules and tips to become a safe and confident cox (coxswain) in a WBC skiff. The information comes from on-line resources, the SCRA cox training days and other Club members. We hope the guide is useful but it does not constitute legal advice in the event of an insurance claim or injury dispute.

EMERGENCY procedure on the back page

1. Everyone has responsibilities

At Wormit we ask our coxes to be responsible for:

1. The safety and well-being of the crew and boat while on the water – and when launching and retrieving if there is no beachmaster present.
2. Steering the boat.
3. Giving clear and audible orders to the rowers.
4. Operating the marine VHF radio.
5. Not letting the boat endanger other vessels or people on the water.

Not everything is down to the cox though. Everyone on board is responsible for:

- Their personal safety (e.g. checking their lifejacket is fitted properly, knowing how it works, making sure they are fit and healthy to row);
- Taking care of the club's equipment (e.g. not damaging the boat);
- Paying attention to the situation and the cox's commands (e.g. telling the cox if they can't hear what is being said, making the cox aware of something approaching from the stern).

If you change from coxing to rowing while you're out on the water, make sure the new cox knows what is expected of them.

2. Golden Rule and Top Ten tips for confident coxing

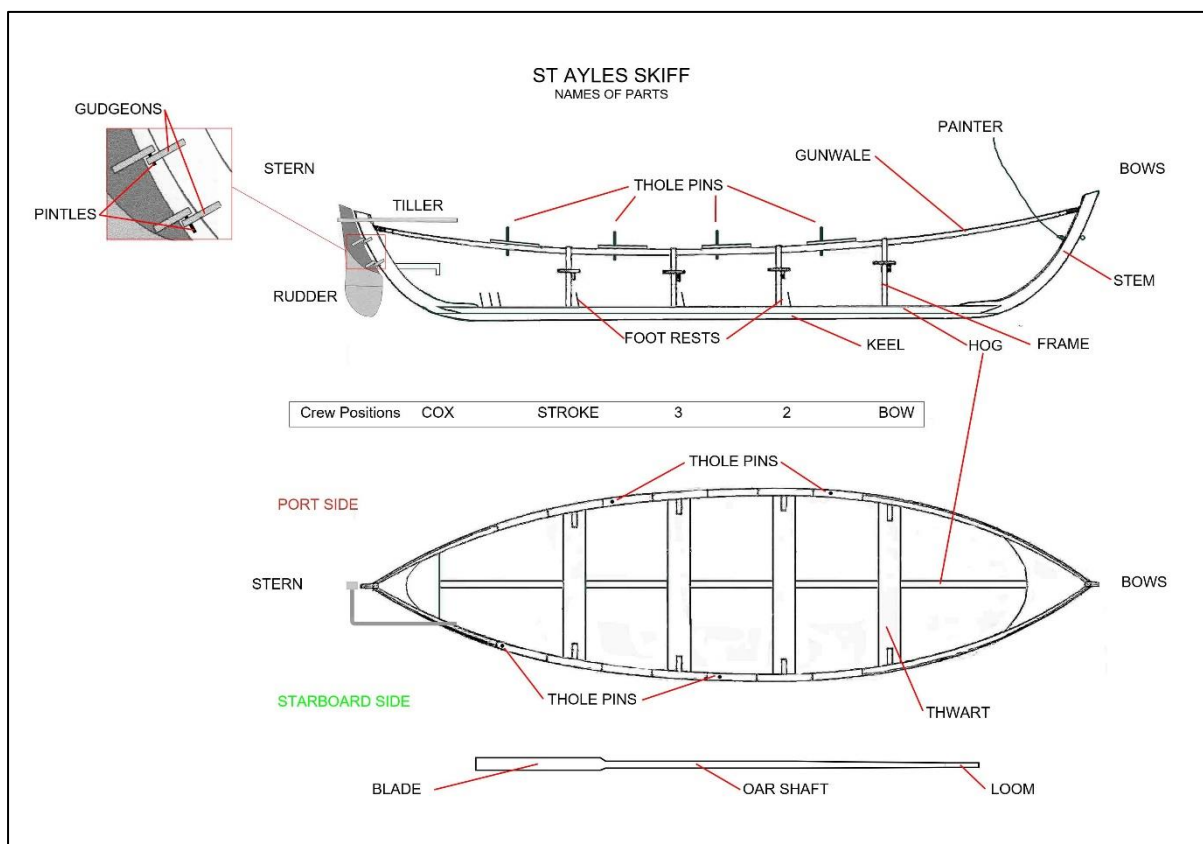
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| The club's Golden Rule is "If in doubt, don't go out". |
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Our Top Ten tips for confident coxing are:

1. Know the tide and weather conditions. If conditions are changeable, use your phone to check for last-minute updates. Don't be afraid to call off a row when the crew is assembled at the slipway.
2. Tell the beachmaster, or write on the excursion log sheet, where you plan to go.
3. Take a fully-charged phone with you (the radios don't have 100% coverage), ideally in a waterproof case, and a warm hat, gloves and waterproofs. Taking a small chocolate bar and bottle of water could help get a diabetic or seasick rower out of trouble. Make sure the painter and stern-line are secured to the bow / stern.
4. Once you've launched, check that everyone can hear you and that they are listening.
5. Look out for vessels, swimmers, canoes, paddleboarders and obstacles on the water. The Tay carries a lot of tree trunks and debris and they could damage the boat. Beware that a strong tide can quickly cause a collision with an obstacle.
6. Let the rowers know what to expect coming towards the boat (they can't see what's coming), but ask them to stay alert too.
7. Work closely with your Stroke rower. They can see behind you and can be a valuable second opinion. Use them as a quick fix – they can quickly row forwards or backwards to make a small manoeuvre.
8. You will see from the rowers' faces how they are doing. Be sensitive and use your discretion - if even just one is struggling, take the pace down and bring the boat home without them feeling they are to blame.
9. When coming back to shore ask the beachmaster well in advance if you should land on the beach or slipway, then give your rowers clear landing instructions. It is your responsibility while the boat and crew are on the water.
10. Once everyone is on land, the beachmaster is in charge. Your crew should follow the beachmaster's instructions from there on.

3. Know your boat and rowers

3.1 Parts of a boat (diagram by David Winch)



3.2 Who should go where, when

Our crews are usually a mix of experience. However, if conditions are challenging or you want to create a dream team, these are the ideal positions:

Stroke doesn't need to be strong, just good at rhythm and experienced enough to act on commands quickly.

Two and Three are the engine – their position propels the boat most efficiently, so ideally they will be of similar build and strength to row in time with each other easily and get the boat moving well.

Most leverage for turning comes from Bow, so have a strong rower there.

However, you will need to make sure that heavy and light members balance across the boat, known as trimming the boat.

4. Know the water

4.1 Understanding tides

Low tide - the river is shallower, often the water is calmer.

High tide – the river is higher, and it can be rough.

Spring tides - occur twice a month (at full moon and new moon) and cause very high and very low tides. The stream can be very strong during spring tides.

Neap tides – ‘middling tides’ with moderate levels and a weaker stream.

4.2 Wind and tide

If wind and tide are in the same direction, the water tends to be calmer. If wind and tide are in the opposite direction, the water tends to be choppy.

Be prepared. Know what the tide is going to do (usually noted on Spond but also check on-line or using the tide chart in the club house). Check the wind direction (from a weather forecast or the beachmaster).

- If you need to find how the boat is reacting to conditions, launch then stand-off, stop and monitor its movement in relation to the tide and wind.
- Look at a buoy, moored boat, bridge or something fixed in the river. The tail of distorted water will be downstream.

But understand that this can change:

- When the tide changes but the wind direction stays the same, calm water can become choppy, or choppy become calm.
- Going around a corner (e.g. the point just west of Woodhaven beach) can present different conditions.

4.3 Good practice on the water

- In a strong wind set off upwind, and in calm weather set off uptide. This makes the return journey easier, since your crew will be tired.
- No chit-chat on the radios – other vessels and clubs use the same channel.
- Learn to recognise the “points of sailing” of dinghies (running, beating, reaching, tacking, gybing) so that you can anticipate the likely actions of nearby dinghies.
- If there are waves when you come onto the beach, steer the boat so that the waves are coming in behind you, the cox (i.e the stern of the boat is into the waves). This will avoid the boat turning broadside to the waves and getting swamped with water. Instruct the shore party to keep the boat at right angles to the waves.

5. Commands

Your left = Port (RED stripes)

Your right = Starboard (GREEN stripes)

It is hard to direct four other people – you have to be accurate, succinct, and often quick.

- Call the most important part of the instruction first, with “Go” last in the sequence.
- Call the commands ‘Hold water’ and ‘Stop’ at the catch of the stroke when rowers have their blades furthest away from you and their body weight central.
- Other commands are better called at the finish of the stroke, when blades are nearest to you and rowers are leaning back, because from this position they can be most easily put into action
- For commands that require the crew to increase their energy, ensure there's enough time for them to hear the command and make any small adjustments, so call it at least one whole stroke in advance.

5.1 Commands to prepare and row the boat

| Command | | What the rowers should do |
|--------------------|-----------|---|
| Ship the Oars | | <i>In turn from bow to stern, each rower lifts their oar from the thwart and puts the hole on the oar plate over the thole pin.</i> |
| Back water all | <i>Go</i> | <i>Stay upright with hands to chest and blade in water. At ‘Go’ they push away from chest with hands and arms only, keeping time with stroke.</i> |
| Hold Water | | <i>Lower blades into the water and hold.</i> |
| Give Way Together | <i>Go</i> | <i>Lean forward, oar blade in water. At ‘Go’ they pull together, keeping time with stroke.</i> |
| Give Way Starboard | <i>Go</i> | <i>Starboard rowers only – lean forward with blade in water, then pull together.</i> |
| Give Way Port | <i>Go</i> | <i>Port rowers only – lean forward with blade in water, then pull together.</i> |
| Easy All | | <i>Complete the stroke and stop rowing, keeping the blade out of the water.</i> |
| STOP | | <i>Immediately stop rowing and put oar in the water while leaning forward. Push forward on the oar to avoid being knocked backward, and slice the oar up if this happens.</i> |
| Boat the Oars | | <i>In turn from bow to stern, each rower lifts their oar from the thole pin and place onto the thwarts, blades aft.</i> |

5.2 Commands to change direction

Whichever direction you want the boat to move in, rowers on the opposite side pull harder.

Pivot turns are when the boat turns on a stationary spot – use it in confined water (e.g. a small harbour) and near other boats (e.g. a regatta start line).

| Command | | What the rowers should do |
|----------------------|----|---|
| Turn to Port | Go | <i>Port – Carry on rowing, use smaller strokes. S/board – Pull harder</i> |
| Turn to Starboard | Go | <i>S/board – Carry on rowing, use smaller strokes. Port – Pull harder</i> |
| Pivot Turn Port | Go | <i>Port – small <u>back</u> strokes (arms only) S/board – small strokes (arms only)</i> |
| Pivot Turn Starboard | Go | <i>S/board – small <u>back</u> strokes (arms only) Port – small strokes (arms only)</i> |

5.3 Commands to leave alongside a harbour wall or pontoon

Your commands here depend on the wind and tide direction.

If the wind or tide will take you away from the pier or pontoon:

1. Let go of the stern line to allow the stern to fall away while the shore party keeps hold of the painter.
2. Nearest rowers pull in the fenders; all crew ship oars.
3. When the crew is ready to row, give the command “Let go” to the shore party. Give the crew whatever manoeuvring commands are required to clear all obstructions.

If the wind or tide will push you onto the pier or pontoon:

1. Give the command “Ship oars” to the outside pair of oars.
2. Use bow or stroke oar as appropriate, with the help of the shore party who are holding on the painter or stern line as appropriate, to push that end of the boat away.
3. Once the inside oars have room to be shipped, give them the command “Ship oars”.
4. When all oars are clear of obstruction give the command “Let go” to the shore party. Give the crew whatever manoeuvring commands are required to clear all obstructions.

| Command | | What the rowers should do |
|------------------------------|----|--|
| Leave alongside on port | Go | <i>S/board – Backwater slowly. Port – ship oars when clear</i> |
| Leave alongside on starboard | Go | <i>Port - Backwater slowly. S/board - ship oars when clear</i> |

5.4 Commands to come alongside a harbour wall or pontoon

Alert the beachmaster well in advance so that someone is there to catch your painter. Tell your rowers what to expect, e.g. if bow needs to throw the painter to someone onshore or if the in-side crew will need to hold on to the slipway. Approach slowly and at a shallow angle.

Preparing to come in:

1. Select the sheltered side of a pier or pontoon if possible, and remember the power of the wind to cause drift. If the wind is blowing off the pontoon then use both bow and stern lines to get alongside.
2. Decide which side to bring in and inform crew.
3. Cox and bow coil the stern-line / painter ready for throwing.
4. On command, rowers 2 & 3 deploy fenders on appropriate side.

Coming in:

1. Come in at an angle.
2. Bow throws painter ashore and if required, cox throws stern line.
3. Boat the shore-side oars as soon as one line is ashore. Use outside oars to manoeuvre alongside if required.
4. Shore party pulls the boat close alongside when both lines are ashore.

| Command | | What the rowers should do |
|-----------------------------|----|---|
| Come alongside on port | Go | <i>Port – Boat their oars. S/board – small strokes.</i> |
| Come alongside on starboard | Go | <i>S/board – Boat their oars. Port – small strokes</i> |

5.5 Gliding through a narrow entrance:

Be very cautious about this: do not attempt this if there is any risk of a blade hitting the obstruction or landing in the water in a way that causes a rower to be wedged between the gunwale and the oar as it pivots around the thole pin.

1. Gain sufficient speed. Give the command “Trail Oars”. Crew members stop rowing and move sideways along their thwart to allow the loom to pass behind them, holding them ready to move back to the rowing position.
2. Steer through the centre of the entrance and as soon as possible give the commands “Ready to row” and “Give way together”.

6 Using the Marine VHF radio

Before you get into the boat, check your radio is on **Channel 37** and with good battery power.

6.1 Routine messages

You (the sender) call out their name first, before using yours, so that they know to listen to your message.

| | |
|-------------------|---|
| Sender (you): | Catalina Beach, this is Flying Boat – OVER |
| Recipient (them): | Flying Boat, this is Catalina Beach, pass your message - OVER |
| Sender: | Catalina Beach, we are returning to the slipway in approximately 5 minutes and would like assistance to retrieve the boat. Please confirm if this is possible - OVER |
| Recipient: | Flying Boat, I will expect you in 5 minutes and have sufficient help ready for you on the slipway - OUT |

Use call signs between boats, or between boat and shore:

| Call sign | Who they are |
|------------------|---|
| Catalina Beach | = Beach master/shore party |
| Skiff Catalina | = Catalina (Skiff) |
| Flying Boat | = The Flying Boat (skiff) |
| Mars Base | = VHF base station in Race Box (used by Officer On Duty). |
| Vigilant | = Orange RIB (rescue boat) |
| Patrol | = Grey RIB (rescue boat) |

Note: We use the call sign “Skiff Catalina” because the charity Taymara operating from Tayport have a RIB called Catalina which has the call sign “Catalina RIB”.

Un-named boats use their type and bow number.

6.2 Other radio words

Roger - You have understood what has been said to you and agree.

Say again - You did not hear/ understand what was said to you

Over - You have finished speaking and await a reply.

Out - You have finished speaking and don't expect a reply. Never say 'over and out'.

6.3 Phonetic alphabet

Use the phonetic alphabet to spell a word out on the radio.

| | |
|-------------|--------------|
| A – Alpha | N - November |
| B - Bravo | O - Oscar |
| C - Charlie | P - Papa |
| D - Delta | Q - Quebec |
| E - Echo | R - Romeo |
| F - Foxtrot | S - Sierra |
| G - Golf | T - Tango |
| H - Hotel | U - Uniform |
| I - India | V - Victor |
| J - Juliet | W - Whisky |
| K - Kilo | X – X-ray |
| L - Lima | Y - Yankee |
| M - Mike | Z - Zulu |

7. “Rules of the road” at sea

7.1 All vessels must avoid collision

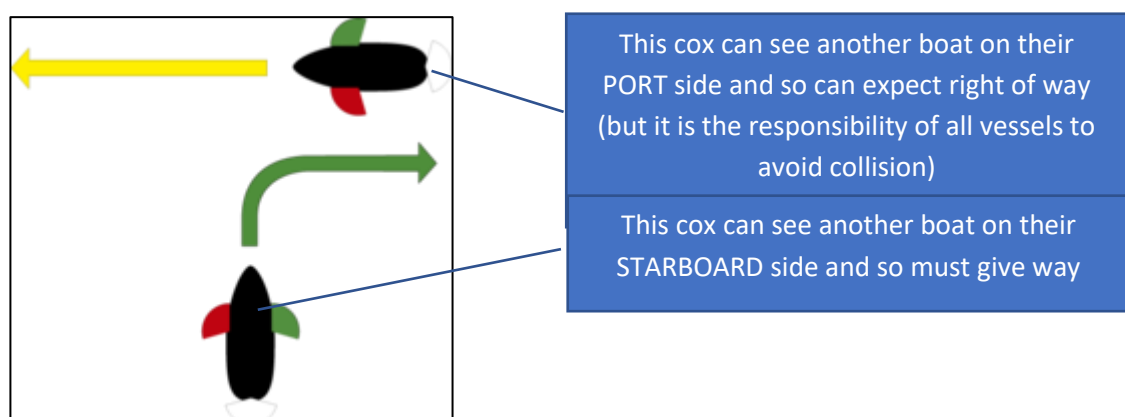
On the water, there are rules and practices to avoid collisions with other vessels (see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_Regulations_for_Preventing_Collisions_at_Sea.)

As a cox, you **must** understand these rules and practices to:

- keep your crew and other people on the water safe,
- avoid damaging the skiff and other vessels, and
- avoid liability for incidents and keep within maritime law (known as the International Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea).

Below is our understanding of what they mean for WBC coxes. Skiffs are ‘power-driven vessels’, as is anything run by motor or human effort. ‘Sailing vessels’ are powered only by the wind, e.g. dinghies.

1. No vessel ever has absolute ‘right of way’ over another. **It is the responsibility of all vessels to avoid collision.**
2. An overtaking boat must keep clear. Do not allow your oars to interfere with the oars of the boat you are overtaking.
3. Meeting head-on – move to starboard so that you pass port-to-port.
4. Crossing paths with a sailing boat - you **must** stop your skiff to let a sailing boat pass.
5. Crossing paths with another power-driven vessel at close quarters – give way to any vessel coming from starboard (this includes another skiff). Either alter your course so that you pass them port-to-port, or slow down / stop until they are clear and you can cross behind their stern. The vessel that has the right of way is required to stand on, i.e. maintain its course and speed, and only if a collision appears unavoidable should they alter course (and always to starboard, never to port).



6. Every vessel must keep a look-out in front and behind. If you can't do this for some reason, nominate a rower as look-out. Ask all your crew to keep a general look-out for hazards such as debris and fishing lines.

7. Use transit points - one or preferably two immovable objects that are in line with where you want to go - and head towards them. If your two objects are no longer lined up, your boat is moving out of line. Steer in the same direction as the front marker has moved, until the markers line up again.
8. Actions taken to avoid collision should be positive, obvious, and made in good time. In case of incident, being able to explain your actions would demonstrate that you took all reasonable steps to avoid a collision.
9. If you anticipate a problem, use the VHF early on to ask another vessel of their intentions (but never to modify the Rules of the Road). In close quarters do not use your VHF radio. Keep your crew quiet in case you or they need to shout.
10. If you risk being out in very low light or darkness, take a white light torch and show this in sufficient time to prevent collision. If it is likely that you will be out in very low light or darkness then you must have white lights attached to the stern and bow, visible for 360 degrees and 800m.

7.2 Avoiding collisions at regattas:

- If a boat risks hitting you (or someone else), shout their skiff or club name loudly in time for them to change direction or stop.
- Assume that others can't see you.
- Let people know in good time what you are doing, especially if you are in the wrong place.
- Only turn around in, or cross, the racing path if you have plenty of time.

7.3 Avoiding collisions with bridges

Bridges have strong currents so only go under one if you feel confident to do so.

1. At least five boat lengths before you reach the gap you have chosen to go through, line yourself up with the centre of the gap.
2. Steer the boat so that background appears at an equal rate from behind each side of the gap.

7.4 Signals from ships and motorboats

Understand and be aware of the international sound signals that ships and motorboats might make for your attention:

- [1 blast] - Altering their course to starboard
- [2 blasts] - Altering their course to port
- [3 blasts] - Engines going astern (engine in reverse)
- [5 blasts] – **Warning:** they believe you are not taking sufficient avoiding action.

8. Notes for the shore party

- Being on shore is a welcome time to relax but be aware of all water users that are out. This helps keep everyone safe.
- Look out for any approaching squall or fast-descending darkness that may require a skiff to come back in quickly.
- If conditions have changed while a boat is out, prepare what is needed to retrieve it. It might be safer to bring the boat alongside the slipway not directly onto it, even though it was launched straight out – or to use the short slipway. Radio the cox to advise.
- Keep an eye on the trailer while a crew is out – high tides can reach far up the slipway, possibly up to when the trailer was left.
- Everyone on shore should work as a team. A fast and safe launch, turn-around and retrieval helps everyone.
- When the boat is beached and there are significant waves, work together to keep its stern to the waves, to avoid swamping or ending broadside to the waves.
- Never haul the boat up while a crew member is moving in it.
- Respect the fishermen who often use the slipway, and work with them to make sure an incoming or outgoing boat avoids their fishing lines. Tell them if a boat is about to leave or come in.

EMERGENCY PROCEDURE

USE YOUR PHONE

Call 999 and ask for Coastguard.

OR USE YOUR VHF RADIO

- Switch your radio from Channel 37 to **Channel 16**.
- Aberdeen Coastguard will reply, as might nearby vessels.
- Keep your radio on and with you.

Emergency radio message

Three types of message:

- a. **Mayday** – when immediate assistance is required, e.g. capsize.
- b. **Pan** – for incidents that are not life-threatening.
- c. To report a significant incident and ask for assistance.

This is a textbook example - the coastguard will accept your call whatever words you use.

| | |
|----------------------|---|
| Sender (you): | Mayday, Mayday, Mayday. |
| Who | This is Skiff Catalina, Skiff Catalina, Skiff Catalina. |
| What | Coastal rowing boat with 5 people on board. |
| Where | We are 100 metres east of the Tay Rail Bridge. |
| What's wrong | We have capsized and cannot right the boat. |
| What you want | We request immediate assistance. |
| Who (again) | This is Skiff Catalina, over. |

- ! Have your crew ready to respond to the emergency services.
- ! Keep everyone calm; help is on its way.
- ! Do not leave the boat except in the last resort.