Glossary of Terms



*(This is a list of only a few common crew terms. Some terms are hard to explain but these should at least help you get a better understanding of what they mean.)*

ALIGNER - The person at the starting dock who aligns the boats evenly for a fair start.

BACKSTAY - the portion of the rigger that runs from the oarlock toward the bow. It connects to the shell near the feet of the rower immediately behind.

BACK SPLASH - spray kicked up toward the bow of the boat that is created as the oar enters the water as it is still traveling toward the bow on the recovery. An ideal catch is generally thought to have equal front splash and back splash.

BLADE (HATCHET OR SPOON) - The face of the oar that pushes against the water.

BODY ANGLE - Leaning to the left or to the right in the boat. Ideally, a rower should sit upright for the entire stroke except a slight lean into the rigger at the catch. Improper body angle can result in bad keel.

BOW - End of the boat closest to the direction of travel. See diagram. Also can be used to refer to one-seat, or in conjunction with either four or pair. Bow-four refers to seats four through one. Bow-pair refers to seats two and one.

BOWMAN - the oarsman who sits nearest the front of the shell. In coxless boats, this oarsman is responsible for planning the course of the shell, although he may not necessarily be the oarsman who actually steers.

BOWBALL - a rubber ball attached to the bow tip of a shell to protect against damage and injury in the case of collisions.

BUTTON - a collar around the shaft of the oar which keeps the oar from slipping through the oarlock and holds it against the oarlock. The button is secured against a sleeve, and can be adjusted up and down the oar, thus making the leverage greater or less.

CATCH - The part of the stroke where the oar enters the water. See How To Take a Stroke.

CHECK - Bad technique that slows the boat down. Essentially, the momentum of the rowers sends the boat in the opposite direction.

"CHECK IT DOWN!" - emergency command used to stop the boat by jamming the oars into the water so as to create massive drag. For less critical situations, "hold water" will suffice.

COURSE - A straight race course for rowers that has 4-6 lanes. Whether in high school, college, or olympic level events, the length is always 2000 meters.

Cox Box - A small electronic device which aids the coxswain by amplifying his voice, and giving him a readout of various information.

COXSWAIN - steers the shell, usually from a seat in the stern, though in some pairs, fours and eights, the coxswain's space is located in the bow-deck of the shell so that the coxswain actually slides his/her legs into the bow-deck of the shell. These "bow-coxed" or "bow-loader" arrangements are created to better distribute the weight in the boat, maximizing speed.

CRAB - occurs when an oarsman's blade jams in the water and he/she finds it impossible to get the oar out of the water at the end of the pull-through. An "over-the-head" crab denotes a crab where the oarsman's blade gets jammed in the water and the handle of the blade swings around toward bow past the oarsman and becomes stuck in a position parallel to the shell.

DOUBLE - a sculling boat for two rowers.

DRIVE - Part of the stroke where the rower pulls the blade through the water to propel the boat.

ERG (ERGO/ERGOMETER/ERG MACHINE) - Rowing machine that most closely simulates rowing in a boat.

EIGHT - a sweep boat with eight rowers and coxswain.

FEATHERING - Rotating the oar in the oarlock so that the blade is parallel to the surface of the water.

FIN/ SKEG - a small flat piece of wood or plastic attached perpendicularly to the bottom of the shell to help keep the shell on a true course. Also know as a skeg. Similar to the centerboard on a sailboat.

FINISH - Part of the stroke after the drive where the blades come out of the water.

FOOT STRETCHER - Part of the boat where the shoes are attached and where the rower pushes his legs against on the drive.

FOUR - a sweep boat for four rowers, either with or without a coxswain.

FRONT SPLASH - spray kicked up as the oar enters the water at the catch and the oarsman begins to apply pressure before the blade is completely submerged. See related - Back Splash

HEAVYWEIGHT - Heaviest of the three major weight categories in competitive rowing.

HANDLE - the part of the oar which is held by the oarsman. Typically made with wood; some newer handles are coated with easy-grip foam coating.

"HOLD WATER!" - Coxswain call. Another way of saying "check it down".

KEEL - The steadiness of the boat. If the boat alternates leaning from side to side, it is a sign of bad technique.

LAYBACK - Term for how much you lean back at the finish. Too much is bad, too little is, well, bad also.

"LET IT RUN!" - Coxswain call for all rowers to stop rowing and to pause at the finish, letting the boat glide through the water and coast to a stop. Used as a drill to build balance.

LEG DRIVE - Term used for driving the legs against the foot stretchers on the drive.

LIGHTWEIGHT - Lightest of the three major weight classes in competitive rowing. In collegiate rowing, the average boat weight needs to be no more than 165 lbs. for men and 135 lbs for women, and each rower needs to weigh at or below 165/135 lbs.

MIDWEIGHT - Basically those rowers that are too heavy for lightweight, and too light to be a heavyweight.

MISSING WATER - Bad technique where you aren't moving the blade through the water as much as you could. Usually caused by not getting the blade in the water soon enough at the catch. Therefore, missed water equals less movement of the boat.

OAR (sweep) - about twelve-feet long, the lever that the oarsman uses to propel the shell through the water. The distance between the end of the handle and the oarlock is called the inboard, while the part remaining, out to the tip of the blade, is called the outboard.

OARLOCK - Square latch to hold the oar and provide a fulcrum for the stroke against the rigger.

OARSMAN or OARSWOMAN - Another term for a rower.

OFFICIAL - An official regatta race administrator that follows behind the current race in a motorboat. The official makes sure all boats stay in their designated lanes.

PORT - Side of the boat to the coxswain's left and to the rowers' right. See diagram.

"POWER 10 (or 20 or 30 etc.)" - Coxswain call to take a certain number of power strokes. A power stroke is a stroke that musters all the strength you can give.

PUDDLES - A measure of your power (and of run). If your blade leaves behind little dinky ripples, then you're not pulling hard enough. If you leave tidal waves after you pull your blade out of the water, then you're pulling just right.

RACE-PACE - A stroke rating that you can hold for the entire race. Our race pace this year was a 34.

RECOVERY - Part of the stroke where the rower comes back up the slide slowly towards the catch. See How To Take a Stroke.

REGATTA - An organized crew race.

RELEASE - Another term for finish.

RIGGER - An apparatus on the side of the boat to provide a fulcrum for the lever (oar).

RIGGING - The settings for the riggers to create the perfect stroke. (i.e. pitch, inboard, outboard)

RUDDER - A little fin on the bottom of the boat that the coxswain can control to steer the boat.

RUN - The distance the boat moves after a stroke. Long run is very good. Run can be visually measured by the distance between the last puddle made by two-seat and where eight-seat's blade enters the water.

RUSHING THE SLIDE - Bad technique that causes check. Comes from coming towards the catch from the recovery too fast.

SCULLING - Opposite of sweep. Sculling is rowing with two oars (an oar on each side of the boat).

SCULLER - A rower who sculls.

SCULLS - the shorter oars (9-foot 6-inches to 10-feet in length) used in pairs for Singles, Doubles, Quads, or Octs. Each sculler rows with two oars, one on each side.

SHELL - Another term for a boat. Specifically, a boat used in racing.

SINGLE - a sculling boat for one person.

SKYING - Bad technique where the blade is too high off of the surface of the water at the catch.

SLIDE - The tracks in which the rolling seat rolls.

SPLIT-TIME - Projected amount of time it would take to row 500 meters at this specific power at this specific pace. Calculated by erg monitors and cox boxes.

SPRINT - The last 500 meters of the race. This is the point where everyone is exhausted, and whoever has the guts to go even faster wins.

STARBOARD - Side of the boat to the coxswain's right and to the rowers' left. See diagram.

START (and STARTING-CALL ) - When all the boats are aligned, the starter says "We have alignment." Sometimes they do the starting call in French. "Etes-vous pret? Partez!" In English, the call (most of the time) is "Are you ready? Row!" Sometimes there are subtle variations on that.

START-SEQUENCE - A sequence of very quick (sometimes short) strokes at the very beginning of the race to shoot out into the lead. Our sequence this year was to start out taking five short strokes, then a power 20, and then a 10 to settle down to race pace.

STARTING-DOCK - Dock at the strating line where all the boats are aligned.

STANDARD RIG - uniform alternation of riggers (and hence oars and rowers) in a shell.

STERN -End of the boat farthest fromthe direction of travel. See diagram. Also can be used in conjunction with either four or pair. Stern-four refers to seats eight through five. Stern-pair refers to seats eight and seven.

Stroke - One full motion to move a boat. Consists of the catch, drive, finish, and recovery. See How To Take a Stroke. Can also be used to refer to eight-seat.

Stroke Rate - How fast a stroke is being taken. In terms of strokes per minute.

SWEEP -Opposite of scull. Rowing with one oar on one side of the boat.

WAKE - Waves that motorboats leave behind. "Getting waked" in a race means you're behind a boat, either another shell or an official. Getting waked by an official is very bad. It means you've either got a bad official or you're really far behind in a race.

WASHING OUT - Similar to missing water except it means taking the blade out of the water too soon at the finish.

"WEIGH-ENOUGH!" - Coxswain call to have all rowers stop rowing. A common misconception: this term sounds like “wane –off”.