



# A safety guide for steering a coxless boat

Steering a sculling boat or coxless sweep-oared boat is difficult: (a) because you are going backwards, and (b) because you have to think about rowing at the same time. We don't want to have any accidents so here are some points that you need to follow when you are out in a coxless boat.

## 1. **Check the boat**

You and your crew should check that the boat is in good order before going afloat: Check the rudder, the fin, the heel restraints, the watertight compartments, the stretcher fittings, the riggers, and seats.

## 2. **How to steer**

In a scull you should row a longer stroke with one oar than with the other to steer, or put more pressure on one oar. When you are foot steering, just point your foot the way that you want to go.

## 3. **Looking around**

You should look right around often, usually at least every five strokes and more often when you are going round a corner. Doesn't worry if it messes up the balance, safety comes first. In time you will learn to balance the boat with your head turned round. The best time to look around is at the end of the stroke when your body is still and just your hands are moving.

## 4. **Rules of the river**

At Abingdon you should always travel on the right hand side of the river, i.e. with bow side nearest to the bank, and show consideration for the needs of other users.

## 5. **Shouting a warning**

Watch out for other boats and shout a *loud* warning if you think that they are going to get in your way: "Look ahead!"

## 6. **Watch out for sailing boats**

Be particularly careful when sailing craft are on the River. They need to manoeuvre against the direction of traffic and can change direction very suddenly. Be ready to stop suddenly when sailing boats are around and be sure to shout a loud warning to them if they are coming too close.

## 7. **Emergency stop**

Always be on your guard to do an emergency stop. It is a good idea to practise this often, just like people do when they are learning to drive.

## 8. **Give way to overtaking crews**

If another rowing crew wants to overtake you then their cox should call to you "May I come by?" You should then move over to give the overtaking crew the faster line: if going downstream, give the overtaking crew the middle (with the stream), but if going upstream, give the overtaking crew the bank side.

## 9. **Keep away from weirs**

Always make sure that you turn your boat around at least 100m before you get to a weir. When there is a lot of current you need to be even more careful and not go even within 400m of a weir.

## 10. **Don't cut corners**

Because you never know what might be around them.

## 11. **Objects in the water**

Watch out for swimmers and dogs. There are also sometimes large logs floating in the Thames.

## 12. **Fishermen**

They can be very grumpy. Try to keep out of their way and avoid catching their lines.

## 13. **If the boat overturns.**

If the boat overturns (which happens quite often when people are learning to scull) *it will not sink*. If this does happen then hold on to the boat and then swim it over to the bank, while getting as much as your body out of the water as possible. At this point you may be able to upright the boat, get back in and row it back home safely. But if the conditions are too rough, or the boat is too damaged you may need to lift the boat out and go to get help.

## 14. **Floods.**

Only experienced crews are permitted on the river when the stream is strong, as determined by yellow or red boards being shown at Abingdon lock. Remember that the stream will sweep you onto navigational hazards such as projecting trees and bends much more quickly. Allow substantially more distance in which to take action. In particular remember that the stream increases as one gets closer to the weir and in no circumstances go within 400m of the weir.

## 15. **Rowing in the dark.**

Don't go out after dark unless you are experienced and have the correct lights

Notes:

1. The rules of the river are in fact the Thames Bylaws, which are shown at the locks.
2. All steersmen and scullers should read British Rowing's Water Safety Code, which can be found on the BR website.