

30 April 2008

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*Lake Washington Rowing Club*  
*Novice Sweep Rowing*  
*Lesson Plans*

*(c) 2003 Karyn Crouthamel*

*Appendix A: Coxing Cheat Sheet*  
*Appendix B: Trouble Shooting Rowing by Frank Cunningham*

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## Sweep Day 1

**Equipment:** VCR, Safety Video, Ergometer, Sweep Erg, Oar

**Objectives:** To learn about rowing safety.  
To learn the basic rowing stroke through the use of the erg.  
To begin understanding the hand hold and how the blade works.  
To learn about the equipment.

**Guidelines:**

Have all the students sign a waiver and collect their float test form. Take the class upstairs to the board room and watch the USRA Safety Video. You may elaborate on the immediate concerns they may run into i.e. crabbing, bad weather... but be careful not to confuse or scare the class before they can actually see what rowing is all about.

1) Bring the class down to the ergs and begin teaching and demonstrating the basic rowing stroke. You may want to point out the particulars to which the students should pay close attention too, like their posture. *Demonstrate with your feet on top of the straps.*

- For simplicity- you may explain that the stroke has 3 parts that ultimately will become one fluid motion: LEGS – BACKS- ARMS (shoulders).
- Explain the catch and finish, swinging from the hips and squeezing the shoulder blades together. Again, pay special attention to the way in which the lower back is positioned.
  - The best way to show students how this is done is to ask them to stretch their hamstrings while they are sitting on the floor with their legs straight in front of them. They will discover that they are tensing the muscles of the lower back as they ought to an instant before each catch.
- Keep Students relaxed, including relaxed hook - like hands positioned on the handles.
- After rowing upper body (arms and back), add ½ slide on up to full slide.

2) At the finish, they want to look like a begging puppy dog- elbows down with the handle all the way in (about their 3<sup>rd</sup> rib) and wrists up.

- *Demonstrate the difference between pulling only with the shoulders (high), and pulling with the latissimus muscles (low).*

3) After responding to any questions, move over to the sweep erg. *Demonstrate the placement of the hands and explain the duty of each hand.*

- The outside hand acts as the hook to pull the oar in while squeezing the shoulder blades to finish. This hand's pinky finger should run the circumference of the end of the handle.
- The inside hand begins to push the oar away at the finish, and at the catch, the fingers of the inside hand, square the blade. This hand should be in the middle of the wood or about 1-1/2 fists away from the outside hand.

4) *Demonstrate the body and hand movements as you go through the stroke. Keeping the shoulders square (no twisting of the torso); the outside arm reaches long and over, yet in the middle of the legs while keeping the legs parallel with each other. Wrists are flat and not cocked sideways at all; so one can run a straight line from the middle finger of the outside hand up to the shoulder. The middle finger is an anchor point. Imagine just hanging with one arm to do a pull up.*

- *Once you are ready to catch, the blade is squared by the flick of the fingers of the inside hand. Do not follow the oar with either hand as it turns, wrists should not bend.*
- As you come to the finish, just mention that you want to push the oar away and allow it to feather on its' own. **Reminder, only a loose hand will allow this to happen.**

- **Allow the class to take a few strokes on the sweep erg, paying particular attention to their back and shoulder positions. But do not go too in depth on details, for they have not even sat in a boat yet.**
- 5) After responding to questions, show the class where the club oars are. You may discuss briefly the differences between sweeps and sculls.
  - Point out the parts of the oar: Handle, shaft, button, collar and blade. Briefly mention the 3 flat sides of the collar: one for rowing normal on the square, one for resting in the feather position, and one for the backing position
- 6) If there is time, go ahead and start teaching the coxing commands (discussed in day 2) to take a boat (4+) off the rack and put it into slings. Otherwise you can have the class look upside down for a brief look, or pull out a 2-

## Sweep Day 2

**Equipment:** Lifejackets, launch key, gas and megaphone, cox box and cox bag

**Objectives:** To learn how to handle the equipment from inside the boathouse to being on the water.

To begin to learn the necessary commands needed to work as a team boat.

To begin to understand how the control of both the blade and boat are achieved through the senses of touch and hearing.

**Skills:** -Learn how to put the oars in the boat and how to enter and leave the boat safely, quickly and gracefully.

-Learn the concept of balancing the boat.

-Begin learning how to work together as a boat

``Learn how the blades work above and in the water: pulling and backing.

**Guidelines:**

1) After a brief review on the ergs, explain how to carry and where to put a set of oars down on the dock (carry blades in front, and tips down on the ground).

2) Explain the coxing commands systematically as needed (appendix A). You may have to continually remind the class to wait for the coxswain to state the command and then command it, i.e. "up and out of racks" "**and up**"...

➤ Explain where to put their hands (gunnels and hand holds) and the process of getting the boat out of the rack and into the slings outside. Then **You** cox it out.

➤ Once the boat is down in the slings, review the parts of the boat: seat placement (8-1), port/starboard, bow/stern, oarlocks, riggers, and where to step and not to step. Be sure they are all clear on the where the hand holds are too. They should not grab anything that is not structural, i.e. nailed cross bar in between the tracks.

➤ Cox the boat down into the water.

3) *Demonstrate how to put the oars in by placing a waterside oar in, so you can show them how to kneel either in the boat or on the dock.* People with flexibility problems, may have to kneel on the dock and reach over.

Then proceed into having them put their oars in the rest of the boat. **Remind the class about the purpose of the button, to keep waterside oars slid across the boat onto the dock until they are ready to get in, and to make sure the oars on the dock are tip down.**

4) While having a few students holding the boat steady, *demonstrate the process of rowing from hence forward:*

a) Oars across, step in and down. Reminder that the oar should be feathered on the water and you can lift up on the handle to help yourself down. (For some heavier set people, you may have to have them sit on the dock, put their feet in and lift themselves over the gunnel and onto the seat.)

b) **Tell the class the #1 rule: Never let go of the oar, always have one hand on the oar at all times.** *Demonstrate how to put the oar in between your chest and legs if you need both hands.*

c) Explain the importance of handle heights and the need to work on keeping the handle steady by matching the height of the person in front of them.

d) You want them to recognize how the blade is made to work. Point out that the blade does not lie flat, it is slightly curved. Therefore you can recover on the water with no problem, it slides across with ease. However when you need to slide the oar the other way across the water, into your body for the backing position; if left flat, the blade dives into the water. Therefore, we need to keep the leading edge up slightly. *Demonstrate sliding the oar back and forth several times. They should do this first thing when they get into the boat today.*

e) Review hand placement.

f) *Next demonstrate squaring-feathering-squaring-feathering and so on, using the inside fingers, not the wrist.* (Tell them to feel it lock on the flat side of the collar.)

g) *Demonstrate rowing with arms (shoulders) and body. At the catch, prepare your back by sitting up nice and tall, square and go. Pulling in with the outside arm and squeezing the shoulder blades. The blade should not square until they are ready to row. Again, reminders of the hand positions and duties of each hand may be necessary.*

h) There is no rush to catch. Tell them to reach, keeping the blades flat on the water, and square the blade only when they are ready to catch with the arms and back; that is when the back is ready to swing open.

i) *Demonstrate at the release, how the inside hand pushes the handle away as the blade falls feathered onto the water and continues to recover on the water all the way to the catch and repeat. Need Light Hands!* Explain to the class, that ultimately they will row with their blades off the water, but for beginning purposes, the reason we are recovering on the water is for easier balance and it allows you to get a firm grasp of the connection between the legs and blade as it enters the water. As well as there is no vertical movement needed yet with the handles, if you just turn the blade, it lies at the correct depth. In other words, they do not need to raise the handle to put the blade in the water yet.

j) No matter what they are doing, whether it is rowing or backing, the boat is to be balanced at all times. Point out blade depth and other points you may find simple but new-comers may not realize.

k) *Proceed into half slide, same as above except legs are now initiating the drive rather than the back. Then up to full slide.*

l) *Continuing to demonstrate, now move on to backing: start in at your body, push away with the arms and body only and recover with the leading edge up.*

m) *Finally demonstrate exiting the boat. Again they can lift on the handle to help themselves out.*

5) Rotate 4 at a time on the water side oars, having them do the previous drills together, following the leader; who should be going slow and easy. **When they are rowing on the dock, No pressure, pull very lightly.**

**Again just be sure not to overload your participants with too much information too quickly.**

6) Once you are comfortable with the class, you may assign them seats. Try to put those who seemed to be the most consistent, at the stern, four or bow seat. Your bow will need to be able to get the blade efficiently in the water when instructed.

7) The easiest way to get people started is to cox them yourself for the first day. If you are teaching in a 4+, you will need a launch out there. If there are more people than seats, you may have to do it in 2 shifts for this first day.

- Cox the rowers into the boat by 4's. Make sure no one's foot stretchers are set in the extremely wrong spot; you can teach them how to set their feet more properly in day 3.
- Once they are in, remind them to keep one hand on the dock and one on the oar. Give a quick quiz, by asking the starboards to raise their hand in the air, and then ports. You can also quiz them on their seat numbers as well. After you have gotten in the coxswain seat, have them walk the boat straight off the dock.
- **Constant reminders to keep blades on the water may be needed. They want to start sensing where the water is. Feel it under the blade.**
- Once clear of the dock, have them do the balance drill. On your call, ports push the handles down to the gunnels and starboards raise the handles, all while keeping the blades on the water and then switch and repeat several times. Then have them find the balance point. This will really start to help the students understand how much a little up and down movement of the handle can really affect the set of the boat.
- Have them check their blade depth points at the arms and body catch, and then the finish (by 4's, while the other 4 are stabilizing the boat).
- In pairs, have the class begin rowing arms and body. Then do it by 4's. If there is time and they are doing okay, add in ½ slide. **Remind them to push the legs down before the body swings.**
- When it comes time, you will have to have them back appropriately. Make sure they back with the arms and body only, and in order for them to stay together, **the cox needs to call out full commands: "Port sit ready to row", "and row"; "starboards sit ready to back", "and back"... Give them time to get into position.** This can be very tricky for some people. Make sure the blades are out of the water when their turns are over.

### **Drill Suggestions:**

Weather permitting; you may want to have them play fishy in the water with their hands. This can help them understand the proper use of the blade.

- ❖ Have the students put their arms up to their elbows under the water parallel to the surface, and row, turning their hands to push the water back (pull through), and to return for the next stroke (recovery).
- ❖ When they can manage this without bringing the hand to the surface, ask them what they observed about the turning of the hand at each end of the stroke. Did it precede or follow the change of direction of the hand and arm? *ANSWER: The hand/blade should turn AFTER the arm/oar moves to propel the water. At the end of the stroke, the hand/blade turns in anticipation of the change in direction.*
- ❖ Next, the students should continue to experiment, bringing the arm to the surface so that the "feathered" hand skims the surface and the "squared" hand takes the

## Sweep Day 4

**Equipment:** Lifejackets, launch key, gas and megaphone, cox box and cox bag.

**Review, Re-Demonstrate and Encourage.**

*Depending on class ability- Day 5 drill suggestions may be started today.*

**Objective:** To feel the cadence or rhythm of the stroke.  
To learn how to establish a quick forward reach from the hips.

**Guidelines:**

- 1) All of the students should be at full slide by this point. Now they want to begin to feel the rhythm of the stroke.
  - *You can use several different sequences to help explain the rhythm.* 1) A waltz or dance feel of a 1—2----3----. Count 1 is the drive through the release and the count of 2---3— are during the approach up the slide. So it is a quick, slow, slow.
  - Or 2) If you choose to count the release separately it would be a quick (Drive), quick (Release), slow, slow (2 beats up the slide on the recovery).
  - Or 3) After they reach ¼ slide have them do a full 3 second count: catching on the AND of the 3. Understanding the rhythm makes rowing easier and improves speed.
- 2) If they are having problems rushing up the slides, tell them just to follow the person in front of them up the slide: 7 follows 8, 6 follows 7, 5 follows 6 and so on. Tell them they do not want to be waiting at the catch for the rest of the boat.
- 3) If you have not already done so, start emphasizing the importance of establishing their reach early.
  - Remind them to keep their chest up as they gain position quickly after the release before moving up the slide. This allows one to be able to press the stomach into the legs to slow the slide, a natural braking system. This might help: “Flare (like a duck) or Glissando (slow sliding)” up to the Catch. Feel free to use Frank’s analogy of a duck landing: ducks flare their wings back right before they land. This will help the rhythm of the stroke as well.
- 4) During periods of Day 4, you can try rowing all 8 for short periods of time. If they are all over the place, then stop. It will be ineffective to keep rowing by all 8, rather give them spurts of it, so they know what to look forward too.

**Drill Ideas:**

Pause at arms and body away- Have the students complete a stroke, and then pause at arms and body away in order to establish the forward reach position quickly.

**Important Reminders for the students:**

- \*Balance, Balance, Balance.
- \*Hand Holds.

**For the Coach:**

- \*Speak encouragingly to the individuals as well as the group.

## Sweep Day 5

**Equipment:** Lifejackets, launch key, gas and megaphone, cox box and cox bag.

**Objective:** To learn how to catch.  
To learn good blade depth; this can come from a good catch.  
To continue learning the flow of the rowing stroke.

**Skills:** -Quick and sure manipulation of the handle, emphasizing the use of the fingers and reducing the play of the wrist to an absolute minimum.  
-Keying the engagement of the blade to the springing off of the stretcher or, if no slide is used, the quick throw of the back. In either case, the arms are to be used only to connect the hands (hooks) to the shoulders.  
-Become more comfortable in the boat as well as at all points in the stroke.  
-Become better at stopping the boat.

**Guidelines:**

1) Before going out- *Demonstrate the catch on the Model A Ergs, while holding the fan- the student should be lifted off the seat as he/she drives with the legs.*

- Watch for people catching with the arms. The catch should be made with the quads. Ask them if they feel it in their quads and then slowly let them down the track using the correct sequence.
- Tell them to relax, and then pull them up to the catch, by rotating the wheel. Arms and body go forward, hamstrings should feel a stretch, and then the seat goes up the slide while the back remains at the correct angle. They need to take this feeling into the boat.
- **Repeat this drill in a modified manner, briefly on the sweep erg.**

2) At the catch, one must be at a position of perfect stillness and repose, correct posture, and wrists flat.

- In order to make the catch, the oar is rolled quickly under the big knuckles of the inside hand, by flicking the fingers downward, and allowing the thumb to scrub over and end on top of the oar handle, parallel with the blade. When the oar is squared, both of the wrists are flat.
- At the moment of squaring, the legs are driven simultaneously, moving the body away from the foot stretcher.

3) Using Bill Tytus's analogy of the bike wheel- the idea of the catch is to pick the boat up quickly on every stroke. This keeps the boat on its water line.

- It is much more effective to catch while the ergometer wheel is still spinning, than to let it slow down and try to get it back up to speed on each stroke.

4) Having the class row between discussions is essential to give them time to work on what you have told them.

5) All of this discussion as well as the drills below should improve the effectiveness of their catches. If they learn to drive the legs before they swing the back and bend their arms, then their blade depth should be correct, but drills to work explicitly on depth are on Day 6.

**Drill Ideas:**

**Legs Only Drill**- Keep their upper body in its forward reach position and have them make a catch on your call using just the legs.

- ❖ Result should be that the legs move down the slide with the body in that forward reach position (a 45 degree angle or so). This also emphasizes the back posture at the catch.
- ❖ Moving the body as a unit is essential- Get them used to the feeling of stretching their arms and shoulders out at the catch.
- ❖ From this you can move to emphasizing holding the legs down at the finish and then swinging the body to the catch angle quickly. Note that there may be some people who continually stay very tense at the catch causing them to catch with their arms. The next drill is great for correcting this:

**The 12 Ounce Drill** – row with no pressure whatsoever. They want to put the blade in quickly but as soon as the blade goes in, they let the oar float in as their body follows it.

- ❖ This helps them realize the blades do know exactly what they want to do, and gives them a relaxed feeling through the stroke.

**Modified Catch Drill** - Certain members of the class may need simple reminders to square at the catch. Have them sit at about ½ slide and just square and feather continually and then have them row ½ slide one stroke at a time, on your call.

## Sweep Day 6

**Equipment:** Lifejackets, launch key, gas and megaphone, cox box and cox bag.

**Objective:** To continue advancing in skill.  
 To achieve a better understanding of the Finish or Release of the stroke.  
 To understand why what they are doing makes the boat move faster.  
 To refine blade work, as necessary.  
 To become more effective with rowing all 8.

**Guidelines:**

1) It is always important to give a brief review and some demonstrations addressing what problems your class may be having. You may find that the drills for Day 5 are more appropriate for Day 6. Become a stickler about their hand holds.

2) *Demonstrate in the boat, the hand-arm-shoulder position at the finish: Elbows are straight back, leaving a gap between it and your body, the shoulder squeezes back, when the handle is all the way in at your body.*

- In order to allow the handle to come all the way into your body, show them that the outside wrist has been raised slightly; in essence the **fingers** have lifted the handle as the shoulder blades squeeze together.
- By bringing the oar all the way in, the oar has nothing to do but to allow itself to snap back or rebound away from the body, due to it being a bent oar (there is pressure behind the blade) and the handle can not go towards the bow anymore so it will just snap back and out of the water with a slight tap downward with the inside hand.
- Remind them to have light hands, because the oar handle has to be able to roll in the outside hand. As soon as both hands move towards the stern, both wrists should be flat.

3) Discuss the toes at the release: they will want to keep the toes down on the foot boards while applying the pressure all the way through to the body, by squeezing the shoulder blades, while at the same time moving your head out of bow.

- Be careful not to confuse those who are not ready for it, but feel free to start the thought process.

4) Drills should be done in 4's or even pairs, but feel free to start having them row for longer periods of time by all 8. You may have to have yourself or the coxswain call each stroke to row, at least at first to get the crew rowing together.

### **Drill Ideas:**

**Finish Drill** – For those who seem ready, you can try the finish drill: Sitting with legs down, in the layback position, arms out about a foot with a slight bend of the elbows. On your call they pull hard with the shoulders; squeezing the shoulder blades together; drawing the hands all the way in then shoving them away and ending at ½ slide.

- ❖ The result is to become aware of what happens to the toes and how to prevent the toes from coming off the foot board as well as being able to squeeze the finish and letting the release just happen, quickly and quietly.

**The 12 Ounce Drill** combined with the **Finish Drill**. The result would be an emphasis on seeing what the blade does at the time of release and all that is needed is to push away and get the forward reach established.

**1/2 Blade** – Rowing ½ blade gives them an idea of where their body and arms need to be in relation to the blade. Having them pull in with ½ the blade covered will help them establish the proper handle height and a quick catch.

- ❖ Generally when rowers do the ½ blade drill, they actually are in the correct depth. So it's a self correcting drill more than anything.
- ❖ If they are at the correct depth, the release will be easier, since they will not be trying to get the blade out of the water by pulling down.

## Sweep Day 7 - 8

**Equipment:** Lifejackets, launch key, gas and megaphone, cox box and cox bag.

**Objective:** To continue learning and advancing the skills introduced over the last 6 classes.  
To row efficiently as a team.

**Guidelines:**

1) Spend ½ the day on the catch and utilizing the legs to drive the blade in the water, connecting it to the squaring of the blade. Describe to the class that they want to get it in and go, while keeping the slide under control. Allow the boat to move under them as they recover.

2) In the 2<sup>nd</sup> half, review the finish from day 6.

3) Continue to do drills, i.e. the catch drill, finish drill, and pause drills.

4) You can start to introduce **recovering off the water**. Start with rowing in 4's or 6's, and then add in all 8.

- At the release, the handles will need to be pushed away in a slight downward angle in order to lift the oars off the water. When they go to catch, it is a **slight lift of the outside arm** that drops the oar into the water. Again though, keeping the connection with the legs quick and sharp. The oar should just plop into the correct depth.

**Drill Ideas:**

Pause Drills - Pausing at arms and body, and then at ½ slide are good to keep working on quickness of getting around the corner as well as doing it together.

Catch Drill - The crew (first in 4's) will get the blade in the water and push the heels down just enough to engage the oar. They should not go down there slide at all. They just want the oar to get locked in place by the use of the legs, not the body or arms.

**Please have your class complete the Evaluation Forms located in the LTR Box.**

## Appendix A: THE COXSWAIN CHEAT SHEET

**STEERING:** Right hand forward – Bow goes Right/ Left hand Forward - Bow goes Left.

**Equipment:** LWRC Cox Box, Coxswain Fanny Pack, Battery (if needed), basket for water bottles and clothes.

**Reminder:** Speak loudly and announce. Speak abruptly- not wishy washy. **Sign Out!**

### IN THE BOATHOUSE:

Call your crew to ***“Hands On”***

***“Up an inch and out of rack” - “And Out”***

(Have them switch sides if necessary, taking turns)

***“Up to Shoulders” - “And Up”***

***“Walk it straight out, watching the riggers” – “And Out”*** (Keep a preventative eye on boat)

### IF PLACING IN SLINGS:

***“Reach for the opposite gunnel”***

***“Up and Over Heads” – “And Up”***

***“Find your hand holds and Roll to High Waste”*** (Give Direction to ROLL) – ***“And Roll”***

***“Down into Slings” – “And Down”***

### WALKING DOWN TO THE DOCK:

***“Reach for the opposite gunnel”***

***“Up and Over Heads” – “And Up”***

***“Toes to the Edge”***

***“Roll to high waste” – “And Roll”***

\*(Stand at the fin to make sure the crew does not hit the fin on the dock.)

***“Down and away into the water” – “And Down”***

### EATING THE CREW:

***“Oars Across”***

***“1 foot in” – “And Down”***

Walk the boat straight off the dock when possible.

### COMMANDS ON THE WATER:

***“Sit Ready to Row (at catch)” – “And Row”***

***“In 2, Way Enough” – “1 (stroke), 2 (stroke), Way Enough”***

Best habit is to do the majority of commands ***“IN 2”***

### DOCKING:

Line the bow ball up with the edge of the dock. Once the crew is ½ way in the cove, have stern pair (8 & 7) row it in. Make minimal adjustments with steering, best to use the rowers to row and adjust ***Very Slowly*** into the dock.

Tell the crew to ***“Lean Away”*** once the oars go over the dock.

### EXITING THE BOAT:

***“One foot back” – “And Out”***

### LIFTING THE BOAT FROM THE WATER:

***“Hands On”***

***“Up to high waste” – “And Up”***

If CREW is SMALL: ***“Rock the boat for a count of 3 and heave up and over heads” – “1 – 2 – 3 And Up”***

Otherwise: ***“Up and Over Heads” – “And Up”***

***“Split to shoulders opposite the person in front of you” – “And Split”***

***“Walk it up” – “And Walk”***

**Reminder:** Make sure the boat does not hit anything as they walk, Sign back in, and put equipment away.

