



Glossary of Rowing Terms

Air Shot- A rower error where the oar's blade is not placed in the water at the beginning of a stroke. This results in a complete lack of power and usually a loss of balance.

Anchor - A rower who slows a crew down. Like towing an anchor behind the boat.

Backsplash - Water thrown back toward the bow direction by the blade as it enters the water. Less is best. This indicates that the blade has been properly placed before the rower initiates the drive.

Blade - The part of an oar that goes into the water.

Body Angle - Amount of forward lean of rower's body from hips at the catch.

Bow - Front of the boat, since both ends are pointy, it is the end with the small rubber ball on the tip.

Bow Pair - The pair of sweep rowers in bow of the boat. This would be seats 1 and 2 in an eight or a four.

Button- A wide plastic ring placed around the sleeve of an oar. The button stops the oar from slipping through the gate (oarlock).

Catch - The moment the blade enters the water.

Check - The reverse momentum resulting from the crew's body weight moving toward stern during the recovery. Check is unavoidable but can be minimized through proper technique for optimal speed.

Cox or Coxswain - The person who steers and calls out commands to the rowers (typically under 55kg and hence many are women).

Cox box - A microphone system used by the cox that plugs into a speaker system in the boat.

Crab - When an oar blade enters the water at an angle, instead of perpendicularly and gets caught under the surface. The oar handle drives into the stomach and has the potential to throw a rower out of the boat entirely! Even if not that disastrous, "catching a crab" will certainly interrupt the flow of the boat slowing it down or even stopping it.

Digging - Rower error when the blade of the oar goes deeper in the water than it should, slowing the boat down.

Double - A two-person, four-oared scull.



Drive - The part of the stroke when the blade is in the water, and is the portion of the stroke that propels the boat through the water. The drive starts with the blade in the water and ends with the release of the blade from the water. The main power for the drive is generated by the rower's legs pushing off the footstretchers.

Engine Room - The rowers in the middle of the boat. For an eight, these would be seats 6, 5, 4, and 3. Generally the largest and most powerful rower's in the boat.

Eight - A nine-person, eight-oared sweep boat.

Erg - A rowing machine, usually a Concept 2. Used for training and testing.

Falling in - Occupational hazard for novice rowers or winning coxwains.

Fin – thin piece of flat metal or plastic that helps to stabilize the shell in the water.

Feathering – The act of rotating the oar after its release from the water (the finish) so that the oars blade is parallel to the water during recovery. When the blades are brought out of the water they should all move horizontally at the same height, just above the water. The rower is "skying" if the hands are dropped too low before the entry (catch), causing the oar blade to rise before it drops into the water. Proper feathering is always difficult, but becomes extremely challenging in choppy water.

Finish - The end of the drive when the rower removes the oar from the water and then feathers. Also called the release.

Four - A four-person, four-oared sweep boat.

Front stop - Refers to the stern ending of the track a rower's seat slides on. The wheels of the seat should almost reach the frontstops at the catch of each stroke.

Gate – The pivoting mechanism that keeps the oar in place on the rigger. Also called the oarlock.

Gunwale - The sides of the boat.

Head race – Long distance race, usually on a twisting course with the start being staggered.

Handle – The part of the oar that the rowers hold and pull with during the stroke.

Lay Back - The amount of backward pivot of a rower's torso stemming from the hips during the second half of the drive for a proper finish position.

Missing Water - A rower error where the rower begins the leg drive before the catch has been completed.

Paddle - Rowing lightly.



Pair - A two-person, two-oared sweep boat.

Pitch - The angle between a "squared" blade and a line perpendicular to the water's surface.

Pressure - How hard you're rowing, expressed as a percentage of how hard you can row. One might row 100% in a sprint race, 80% in a longer race and 50% on the paddle.

Puddles - The disturbances in the water made by the blade during each stroke.

Quad - A four-person, eight-oared scull. Can be coxed or coxless.

Rate: How many strokes per minute you're taking. 20 is low while 30 is high. Olympians may row at a 40. (Remember, harder doesn't mean faster, it's possible to row at 100% at an 18 stroke rating).

Ratio - The relationship between the time taken between the drive and recovery portions of the stroke. A good ratio will have about twice as much time taken during the recovery as the drive.

Recovery: The part of the stroke when the blade is out of the water and the rower is getting in position to take the next stroke. The recovery is usually slower than the drive. The portion of the stroke after the rower releases the oar from the water and returns to the catch position.

Regatta – Any competitive rowing event.

Release - The end of the drive when the rower removes the oar from the water and then feathers. Also called the finish.

Rigger - The framework that supports the gate (oarlock) about 60cm from the side of the boat.

Rudder - Small pivoting fin mounted under the keel that steers the boat.

Run - The distance the shell moves during one stroke. This can be seen by looking at the distance between the puddles made by the same oar.

Rush - A rower error where the rower moves toward the stern during the recovery before the rest of the crew. This increases the amount of check during each stroke.

Scull - A boat in which each rower has two oars, OR the oars used in one of these boats.

Seat- Molded seat mounted on wheels on which the rower sits. A secondary meaning is of location in the shell, the bow seat is one, and is numbered upward to the stroke seat (8, in an 8-man shell). Thirdly can mean a competitive advantage in a race, to lead a competitor by a seat is to be in front of them by the length of a single rower's section of a shell.



Seat Race - A coach's tool for comparing two rowers. Two boats race against each other once. One rower from each boat switches positions and the two boats race again. Relative performance in the two races is used to compare the abilities of the two rowers.

Set - The balance and feel of the boat. The most efficient boats are balanced evenly over the centre line and remain so throughout the strokes. If rowers are not aligned properly, or a rower swings off centre as part of his or her motion during a stroke, or if rowers on one side of the boat are pulling with more or less force than the other side, the set of the boat can be altered, introducing drag into its motion. An unbalanced boat will lean and drop to either the bow or stroke side.

Settle - Refers to a down shift in stroke rate after the start of a sprint race. Crews use the settle to get to their base stroke rating they will row the body of the race.

Shell - Any sweep or scull rowing boat.

Shooting the Slide - A rower error when the rower's legs drive the seat toward the bow without bringing the weight of the water with them through the torso and shoulders. It also means that the oarsman's seat moves toward the bow faster than his shoulders.

Single - A one-person, two-oared boat.

Skying - A rower error where the rower drops their hands just prior to the catch. This causes the blade to move higher off the water and will disrupt the set of the shell.

Sleeve- A thick piece of plastic around the oar to keep the oar lock from wearing out the shaft of the oar (typically carbon fibre).

Split - The amount of time it would take a rower or crew to complete 500 meters at their current pace. This can be applied to both a crew on the water or a person on an erg.

Square - The act of rotating the oar prior to the catch so that the blade is perpendicular to the water. The opposite of the feathered position.

Stern – back of the boat.

Stretcher - An adjustable footplate, to which a pair of shoes is typically attached, which allows the rower to easily adjust his or her physical position relative to the slide and the oarlock. The footplate can be moved (or "stretched") either closer to or farther away from the slides frontstops.

Stroke side - The left side of the boat, facing forward. But remember rowers sit backwards, the coxswain is the only one facing forward.

Stroke - The rearmost rower in any boat but a single, who sets the rate for all rowers in the boat.

Sweep - Opposite of scull, each rower has 1 oar.



Swing or rhythm - The inexpressible "feel" of a boat that is moving together as a single unit. The feeling in the boat when all rowers are driving and finishing their strokes together.

Washing Out - A rower error when an oar comes partially out of the water during the drive and creates surface wash. This results in a reduction in boat speed and can disrupt the balance of the boat.