



Rowing Glossary

Disclaimer: Do not attempt to use rowing terms with a rower – particularly one who lives with you – unless you are willing to be subjected to extensive eye rolling.

ABOUT BOATS

Boats are generally divided into two general categories, sculls and sweep boats, related to the number of oars each rower uses. Further classifications come into play as to how many rowers are in each boat, and whether or not there is a coxswain in the boat.

Sculls: In a sculling boat, rowers use two oars each. In a regatta, sculling events are marked with an x, as in the single (one rower with a pair of oars) is a 1x, the double is 2x and the quad is a 4x.

Sweep: In a sweep boat, rowers use only one oar each. Sweep boats are pairs (for two people and a total of two oars), fours and the eight. On the regatta sheet, a sweep boats with coxswains will be marked with a + (e.g. 4+ is four rowers with a coxswain) while sweep boats without coxswains will be marked with a - (e.g. 4- is four rowers without a coxswain).

Eights are sweep boats, always have a coxswain, and are marked 8+ in the regatta sheet. Pairs and fours may or may not have a coxswain.

Shell: Can be used interchangeably with boat.

Straight: Refers to a shell without a coxswain i.e. a straight four or straight pair.

ABOUT BEING IN A BOAT

Bow: The bow is the forward part of the boat; the first part of the boat that crosses the finish line.

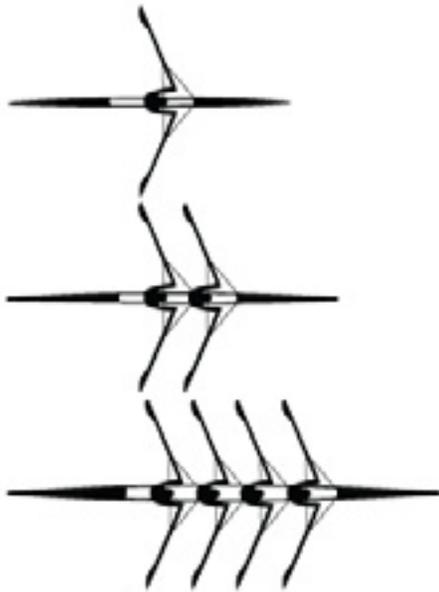
Stern: The rear of the boat; the direction the rowers are facing.

Bow seat: The person in the seat closest to the bow and crosses the finish line first. Bow Seat is also known as #1.

Coxswain: The Coxswain's responsibilities include steering, strategy and motivating the rowers. Traditionally, coxswains are thrown in the water after a winning race. [Watch the Flying Coxswain](#). Coxswain in the noun while to Cox is the verb.



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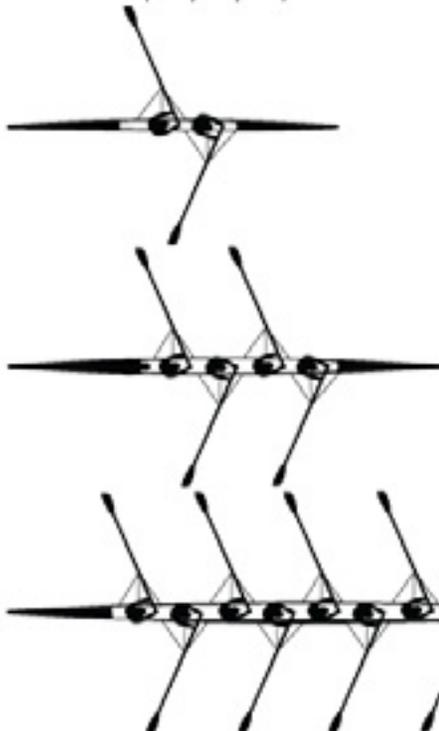


Sculling Boats

Single (1x): Approximately 26 feet long, 11 inches wide, and about 30 lbs. Rowed by one person using two oars.

Double (2x): Approximately 32 feet long, 13 inches wide, and about 60 lbs. Rowed by two people using two oars each.

Quad(4x): Approximately 42 feet long and about 115 lbs. Rowed by four people using two oars each.



Sweep Boats

Pair (2-): Approximately 32 feet long, 13 inches wide and about 60 lbs. Rowed by two people using one oar each.

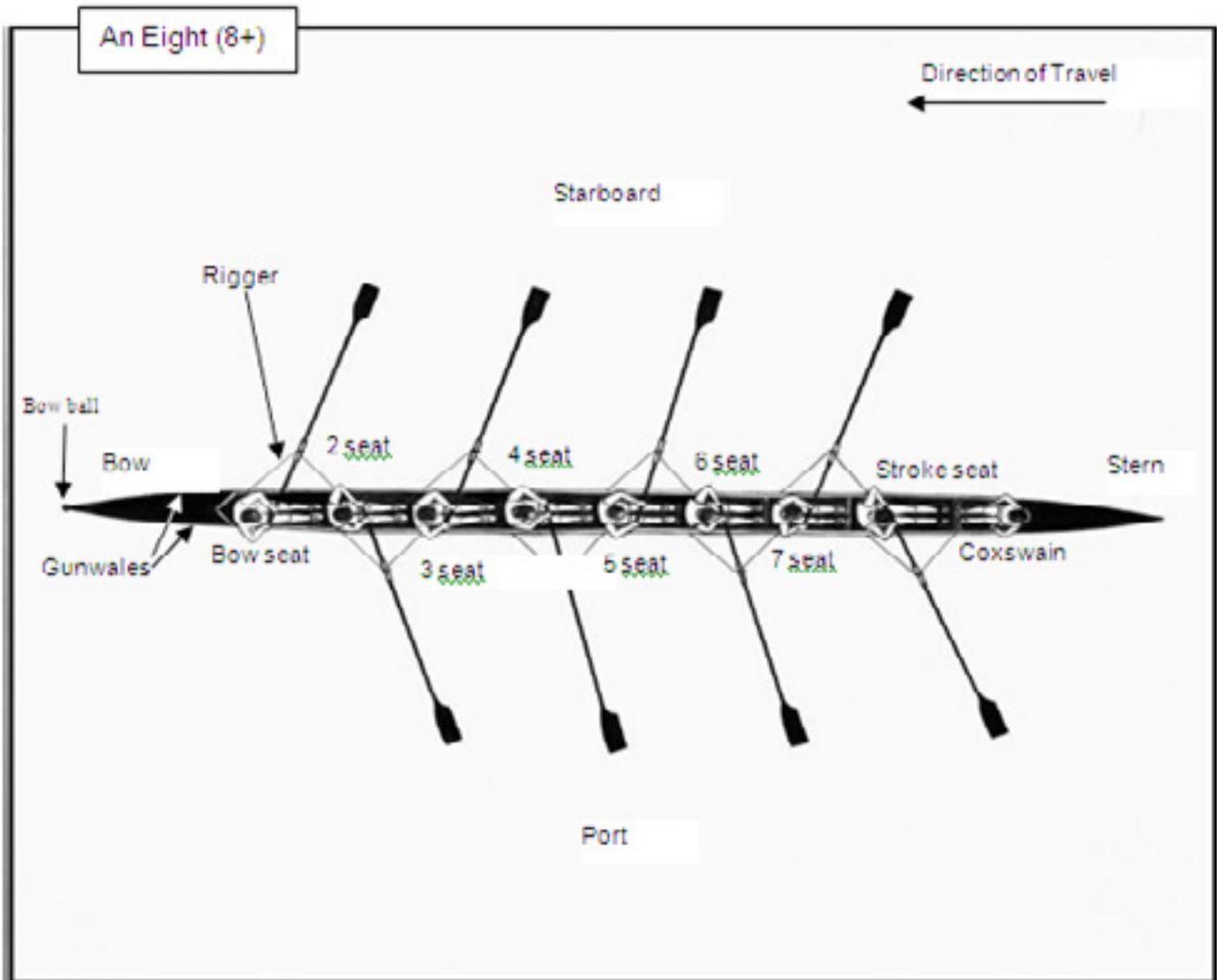
Four (4+): Approximately 42 feet long, 21 inches wide and about 112 lbs. Rowed by four people using one oar each. Coxswain can be in the bow or the stern.

A **Straight Four (4-)** is a similar boat but without a coxswain.

Eight (8): Approximately 60 feet long, 26 inches wide and about 210 lbs. Rowed by eight people using one oar each. Coxswain sits in the stern.



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Stroke: The rower who sits closest to the stern. The stroke sets the rhythm for the boat; others behind him must follow his cadence.

Bow coxed boat/Bow loader: A shell in which the coxswain is positioned lying down in the bow instead of sitting in the stern. It's hard to see the coxswain in this type of boat, because only the head is visible. Having the coxswain lying down in the bow reduces wind resistance, and the weight distribution is better. For an example: [Bow Coxed 4](#)

Port: Left side of the boat as seen while facing forward, in the direction of the movement. Rowers often confuse their friends in cars by saying 'watch your port side' to the driver. The boat seats that row on the port side of the boat are usually (from the stern side) stroke, #6, #4 and #2. At Lake Natoma regattas, spectators are viewing the port side of the boat for the finish.

Starboard: Right side of the boat as seen while facing forward, in the direction of movement. Oars on the starboard side of the boat are Bow, #3, #5 and #7.

Run: The run is the distance the shell moves during one stroke. You can figure the run by measuring the distance between the puddles (the swirling eddies) made by the same oar.

Set: Is the balance of the boat. The bow seat (and 2nd seat) 'sets' the boat and generally are the most technically proficient rowers with the most ability to adapt their stroke and weight to keep the boat balanced.

Swing: The hard-to-define feeling when near-perfect synchronization of motion occurs in the shell, enhancing the performance and speed.



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ABOUT STUFF IN A BOAT

Cox box: The PA system used by Coxswain in the boat, which also provides information such as time and stroke rate.

Bucket, German or tandem rigging: An alternative boat configuration where two consecutive rowers row on the same side of the boat (in a sweep boat) instead of alternating from side to side all the way down. Bucket rigging can improve the rhythm of a boat. Oxford University won the 2011 race (by four lengths) against Cambridge University with seats #4 and #5 bucket rigged. [Watch Bucket rigged win.](#)

Gate: The bar across the oarlock that keeps the oar in place.

Oar: Rowers do not use paddles. The oar is made up of a pole and blade. The colors on the oar are unique to the rowing club. Oakland Strokes blade colors are orange and white with a green stripe.

Rig/Derig: Adjusting and altering accessories in a shell, such as the riggers, foot stretchers, tracks, sliding seats etc. Sometimes it's the accessories themselves as in 'check the rigging'. If a rower is checking the tightness of nuts in a chair or door handle, they are absentmindedly checking the rigging.

Rigger: The triangular shaped metal device that is bolted onto the side of the boat and holds the oar. When rowers sit in class, they tend to lean towards their rigger.

Slide: The set of runners for the wheels of each seat in the boat. A rower is 'rushing the slide' when they move the seat too rapidly during recovery and 'shooting the slide' when they are failing to keep the seat directly under themselves (increasing the body angle). Real rowers are mildly surprised when any chair does not slide back and forth when they sit down.

Stretcher or Footstretcher: Where the rower's feet go. The stretcher consists of two inclined footrests that hold the rower's shoes. The rower's shoes are bolted into the footrests.



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ABOUT THE ACTION OF ROWING

Catch/Release: The catch is the point in the stroke at which the blade enters the water. The opposite of the catch is the 'release', when the blade comes out of the water.

- [Lucky it has Labels](#)

Crab: A crab is caused by turning the oar blade in the water so that the release from the water can't take place. If you see a rower thrown out of boat, they most likely 'caught a crab'. Luckily, crabs are rarely this dramatic. Novices often have a diet heavy in crab from the estuary. For a demonstration see:

- [How to catch a crab](#)
- [Catching a crab in the UK](#)

Drive: While the catch and release are the turning points in and out of the water, the drive and the recovery are two main parts of the stroke. After the oar catches the water, the rower pulls the oar through the water for the 'drive' part of the stroke. During the drive, the rower also pushes with the legs, making the seat slide towards the bow. After the oar is released from the water, the 'recovery' part of the stroke returns the oar for the drive position and the rower's seat is returned to the stern end of the slide. The whole stroke is catch, drive, release, recovery. Drive is also what Oakland Strokes parents spend a lot of time doing. And in slow mo its like this:

- [Kick Start Your Drive!](#)

Feathering: Action of turning the oar blade parallel to the surface of the water during recovery (or the half of the full rowing stroke cycle where the rower has the oar out of the water). Feathering cuts down the wind resistance of the blade and aids in releasing the oar from the water smoothly.

Finish: It has three meanings. As part of the stroke cycle, it's the last part of the drive before the oar is released from the water. During a race, it's when the prow (or tip) of the shell reaches the finish line. And it can also be used to describe the manner of the crew rows the final portion of the race as in 'strong' or 'weak' finish.

Leg power: Power applied to stroke by the force of the legs against the stretcher, pushing the slider seat towards the bow.

Long: The length of the stroke in the water. So 'she's really long' said to a woman rower could really be a nice complement.



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Miss water: A verb for missing part of the drive by making a faulty catch or in other words when the oar blade sweeps air before anchoring into the water.

Recovery: The recovery is the slide back to the initial part of the stroke, the reverse action of the drive, to recover the position for the catch into the water. Also the extra 800 calories rowers need to eat after an hour of competition level rowing.

Skying: When the blade is too high above the water during recovery, caused by a rower carrying the hands too low.

Washing out: When an oar blade comes out of the water during a drive, creating surface wash, losing power and unsteady the shell.

ABOUT ROWERS

Ergometer: Commonly known as an “erg”, it’s a rowing machine that closely approximates the actual rowing motion. Erg scores from 2K tests (or other distances) are used by coaches to assess a rower’s aerobic and endurance capabilities. The rowers use the Concept II, which utilizes a flywheel and a digital readout so that the rower can measure his “strokes per minute”, the distance covered and power output.

Erg Piece: The set distance done on the erg for determining an erg score. Usually measured in increments of 500 meters, typical erg pieces are 2K (2000 meters), 5K, 6K and 10K.

Erg Test: During a test, a rower will row a set distance (or erg piece) and try to clock the fastest time possible. The resulting erg score is an objective measure of fitness. However, on the water the weight, technique and team coordination also impact the performance of a boat so coaches temper the erg test score with subjective factors when assembling a team.

Split: The standard measurement of speed on an erg or the amount of time in minutes and seconds required to travel 500 meters at the current pace. So a split of 2:00 is a speed of 2 minutes per 500 meters or 4.17 meters per second.



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Openweight/Lightweight: Refers to the rowers, not the boats. Lightweight rowers must weigh in under a set weight (usually a maximum weight of 150 lbs for men and 130 lbs for women) to compete in a lightweight event. Open weight races make no distinction for the weight of the rowers. The benefit of weight classes is that weight affects not only the amount of height and muscle that an athlete has, but also how much mass an athlete has to adversely affect the acceleration of the boat. Lightweight crews tend to be slower than openweight crews, though only marginally. Lightweight rowing is popular at the junior level because many of the athletes have not finished growing yet. Coxswains have their own weight limitations and do not affect the weight classification of a crew.

In 2: The command used on rowers for getting things done on time

Power 10: A call for rowers to do 10 of their best, most powerful strokes. It's a strategy used to pull ahead of a competitor.

ABOUT RACES

Uni: The spandex unitard worn to races that doesn't arrive from the manufacturer until half way through regatta season.

International distance: is 2000 meters, commonly known as 2K. The racecourse is divided into six lanes and each 500-meter section is marked with buoys.

Beginning a race: At the start of a race, all boats are aligned in assigned lanes, with the stern of each boat even with the others and squarely facing the course. Each boat is allowed only one false start; two means disqualification.

Racing start: First strokes of the race, usually shorter and quicker than those used during the body of the race.

[Racing Start with a Power 10](#)

Rate or Stroke Rate: Number of strokes per minute being rowed by the crew. This usually varies during a race, with 42-50 at the start of the race to 34-40 during the body of the race and 40-48 at the finish. Speed is determined in part by stroke rate but also by technique.



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Henley: The race to watch.

- [Why they Go to Henley](#)

Head Race: A timed race where the boats have a staggered start.

- [Oakland Strokes at Head of the American 2010](#)

Crashes: They happen, sometimes at home, and sometimes in college.

- [Ignatius Stop Rowing!](#)
- [Even Harvard Does It.](#)

Regatta: Always a good idea to watch a regatta or two online before you attend one so you can see an example of the other 98% of the race before the finish line. If you have 8 minutes to spare, this is one way to spend it or 2 min for pain in the water.

- [Rowing East Coast College Style](#)
- [Pain in the Water](#)

Prepared by Oakland Strokes with assistance from USRowing.