

# Glossary of rowing terms

## Boat Classes

In competitive rowing events, abbreviations are used for different boat classes.

### Weight

- L, LWT or Lt: [Lightweight rowing](#)
- If not present the crew is open weight

### Age

- J: Junior (Under 19 years of age)
- B: Senior B (Under 23 years of age)
- Masters: over 27, includes a letter designation for the average age of the crew:
  - A - 27–35 years of age
  - B - 36–42 years of age
  - C - 43–49 years of age
  - D - 50–54 years of age
  - E - 55–59 years of age, and so forth.
- If none of these abbreviations are present the crew is Senior A

### Gender

- M: Men's
- W: Women's
- Mixed: Equal numbers of either gender (excluding coxswain)

### Crew Size

- 1, 2, 4, 8: The number of rowers in the crew.

### Discipline

- x: [Sculling boat](#)
- If not present then the boat is [sweep-oar](#)

### Coxwain

- +: Coxed (with [coxswain](#))
- -: Coxless (without coxswain)
- If not present then the boat is coxless, except for an eight.

## Examples

- M8+ = Men's eight
- W4- = Women's coxless four (or "straight four")
- LM2- = Lightweight men's coxless pair
- BM1x = Men's single sculls under age 23
- JW4x = Junior women's quad
- Masters WC2x = Masters women's double sculls with average crew age between 43-49
- Mixed Masters 8+ = Eight with 4 women and 4 men as rowers and a coxswain of either gender

## The Athletes



An 8 oared sweep racing shell (8+).

Ambidextrous (bi-sweptual)

(UK) A rower who can row both on stroke side and bow side. (US) A rower who can row both on the starboard and port sides of the boat.

Bow (or bow seat)

The rower closest to the front or bow of a multi-person shell. In coxless boats, often the person who keeps an eye on the water behind him to avoid accidents.

Coxswain

The oar-less crew-member, usually included, who is responsible for steering and race strategy. The coxswain either sits in the stern or lies in the bows of the boat.

Engine room

The middle rowers in the boat. In an 8-person shell, these are generally seats 5, 6, and 3 and 4 to a lesser degree. They are generally the biggest and strongest rowers.

Port

(US) A sweep rower who rows with the oar on the port or left side of the boat.

### Sculler

A rower who rows with two oars, one in each hand.

### Seat number

A rower's position in the boat counting up from the bow. In an eight, the person closest to the bow of the boat is "bow," the next is 2, followed by 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 and finally 8 or "stroke." In certain countries the seats are numbered the opposite way, from stroke up to bow.

### Starboard

(US) A sweep rower who rows with the oar on the starboard or right side of the boat.

### Stroke (Seat)

The rower closest to the stern of the boat, responsible for the stroke rate and rhythm.

### Sweep

A rower who rows with one oar (in both hands).

## **The Boats**

Sometimes called "shells" in the US

### **Sweep**

In a sweep boat, each rower has one oar.

### Eight (8+)

A shell with 8 rowers. Along with the single scull, it is traditionally considered to be the blue ribbon event. Always with coxswain because of the size, weight and speed of the boat

Four (4-) or (4+)

A shell with 4 rowers. Coxless fours (4-) are often referred to as straight fours, and are commonly used by lightweight and elite crews and are raced at the Olympics. In club and school rowing, one more frequently sees a coxed four (4+) which is easier to row, and has a coxswain to steer.

Pair (2-) or (2+)

A shell with 2 rowers. The Coxless pair (2-), often called a straight pair, is a demanding but satisfying boat to master. Coxed pairs (2+) are rarely rowed by most club and school programs. It is no longer an Olympic class event, but it continues to be rowed at the World Rowing Championships. The bow loader coxed pair was nicknamed "the coffin" due to the difficulty for the cox to escape in the event of a capsize.

### **Sculling**

In a sculling boat, each rower has two oars, one on each side of the boat.

### Quad (4x)

A shell having 4 rowers with two oars each. Can be coxed (4x+) or coxless (4x-).  
Triple (3x)

A shell for three scullers with two oars each, usually without a coxswain. These boats are considerably rare.

[Double](#) (2x)

A shell for two scullers generally without a coxswain.

[Single](#) (1x)

A shell designed for an individual sculler. Very good for skill development, particularly beginners, and a very competitive class at world events, WRC. Extremely rare is the coxed single which is only used as a training boat or for adaptive rowing.

## Open Water Boat

A shell with positive flotation, self-bailing capacity, a non-binding stretcher, and no forestay so re-entry is easier. These boats are generally shorter and wider at the waterline than boats designed for flat water racing.

## Equipment / Parts of the boat

The term "[Rigging](#)" is used to describe how the boat is outfitted, including all of the apparatuses (oars, outriggers, oarlocks, sliding seats, etcetera) attached to a boat that allow the rower to propel the boat through the water. It is derived from an old [Anglo Saxon](#) term *wriġan* or *wrihan*, which means "to clothe." It literally means to outfit or clothe a boat. "Rigging" is also used to describe the configuration of the boat and settings of the apparatuses. The following terms are often associated with a boat's rigging, along with other often used terms for equipment used in rowing.



The inside of a double scull. Shows the seat, slides, backstops, footplate, shoes and riggers.

### Backstay

a brace which is part of the rigger of sweep rowing boats, which extends toward the bow from the top of the pin.

### Backstop

The stop mechanism on the seat slides which prevents the rower's seat from falling off the sliding tracks at the back end (towards the boat's bow) of the slide tracks. Also, in the UK, the sliding seat position closest to the boat's bow. As a command, it instructs the crew to adopt this position. (The US calls this seat position the "back end").

### Blade

The spoon or hatchet shaped end of the oar or sweep.

### [Bowloader](#) / bowcox / bow steered

When a coxswain is placed in a seat partially enclosed in the bow of the shell.

### [Bow](#)

The front section of a shell.

### Bow ball

An essential small, soft ball no smaller than 4 cm diameter securely attached to a rowing or sculling boat's bow. Primarily intended for safety but also useful in deciding which boat crossed the finish line first in very close races.

### Bow number

A card holding the number assigned to the boat for a race.

### [Cox box](#)

Portable voice amplifier; may also optionally incorporate digital readouts displaying stroke rate, boat speed and times.

### [Ergometer](#) (also ergo or erg)

An indoor rowing machine.

### Foot stretcher

An adjustable footplate 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 slide frontstops. (also *Footplate* and *Footchock*)



Two sculling oars. The "blades" are at the top of the picture and the handles are at the bottom of the picture. The blades are "hatchet blades."

**Frontstop**

The stop mechanism on the seat slides which prevents the rower's seat from falling off the sliding tracks at the front end (towards the boat's stern) of the slide tracks. Also, in the UK, the sliding seat position closest to the boat's stern. As a command, it instructs the crew to adopt this position. (The US calls this seat position the "front end")

**Gunwales**

(pronounced: gunnels) The top rail of the shell (also called Saxboard)

**Handle**

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

**Hull**

The actual body of the shell.

**Launch**

A motorboat used by rowing instructors, coaches or umpires. Referred to as a "coach boat" in Canada.

**Oar**

A slender pole which is attached to a boat at the Oarlock. One end of the pole, called the "handle," is gripped by the rower, the other end has a "blade," which is placed in the water during the propulsive phase of the stroke. The blade portion of the oar is similar to a razor blade or a piece of paper: Essentially two-dimensional, the third dimension is very thin, although it should be noted that there is a very important element to the third dimension of the blade, namely that it is curved into a sort of hydrofoil, which helps provide much of the thrust.

**Oarlock**

The rectangular lock at the end of the rigger which physically attaches the oar to the boat. The oarlock also allows the rower to rotate the oar blade between the "square" and "feather" positions.

**Port or Portside**

(US) The left side of the boat when facing forward.



An Oarlock attached to a Rigger

**Rigger**

A "Rigger" is the rowing slang name for an [Outrigger](#). It is a projection from the side (gunwale) of a racing shell.<sup>[1]</sup> The oarlock is attached to the far end of the

rigger away from the boat. The rigger allows the racing shell to be narrow thereby decreasing drag, while at the same time placing the oarlock at a point that optimize leverage of the oar. There are several styles of riggers, but they are most often a triangle frame, with two points attached to the boat, and the third point being where the oarlock is placed. Rigging is also used to describe whether a boat is stroked by a port or starboard (i.e. port-rigged, starboard-rigged). With sweep rowing, riggers typically alternate sides, though it is not uncommon to see two adjacent seats rigged on the same side of the boat.

### Rudder

Adjacent to the skeg and used by the coxswain (or in some coxless boats, by a rower using a "toe") to steer the boat via attached cables. Extra-large rudders are used on narrower and/or bendier rivers.

### Scull

(a) An oar made to be used in a sculling boat where each rower has two oars, one per hand (b) A boat (shell) that is propelled using sculling oars, e.g., a "single scull," is a one-person boat where the rower has two oars.

### Seat

Molded seat mounted on wheels, single action or double action. Single action is fixed bearing wheel, double action is wheel on axle that rolls on track and rolls on horns of seat. A secondary meaning 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.

### Seating

Seating positions in a racing shell are generally numbered from the bow to the stern in English-speaking countries, unlike many non-English-speaking countries which count from the Stroke forward. Generally the forwardmost rower is called the "Bow" and the aftmost rower the "Stroke", regardless of the number of rowers in the boat, with all other seats simply being numbered. So for instance the crew of an eight (with coxswain) would number off from the bow: "Bow", "Two", "Three", "Four", "Five", "Six", "Seven", "Stroke", whereas a four (with or without coxswain) or a quad would number off: "Bow", "Two", "Three", "Stroke".

### Shell

The boat used for rowing.

### Skeg (or fin)

Thin piece of flat metal or plastic that helps stabilize the shell in the water.

### Slings

Folding, portable temporary boat holders. Two are required to hold a boat.

### Starboard (or Starboard side)

(US) The right side of the boat when facing forward.

### Stern

The rear section of a shell.

### Stretcher

A slang abbreviation for **Foot Stretchers**.

## The Commands

"(#) Fall in/out"

These commands tell the rower(s) either to stop rowing or to start rowing with everyone else. (#) indicates the number of rower(s) who should start or stop – e.g. “Bow pair fall-out, stern pair fall-in in two..”

"(#) Hit it" or "(#) row on"

Tells the rowers to row until told to stop –e.g. “Two, hit it..”

"Back it"

To have the rowers place their blades at the release position, squared, and push the oar handle towards the stern of the boat. This motion causes the shell to move backwards.

"Check it/her down"

Square the oars in the water to stop the boat.

"Count Down" (or "number off")

Tells the crew to call out their seat number, starting at the bow, when ready to row.

"Down on port/starboard"

Means that the boat is leaning to one side or the other. Rowers on the side that is down must raise their hands, and the other side must lower their hands.

"Hands on"

Tells the rowers to grab the boat next to their seats, so that the boat can be moved.

"Hard on port/starboard" (or "port/starboard pressure")

The rowers on that side of the boat must row harder (and the opposite side must row slightly easier) in order to facilitate a sharper turn.

"Hold Water"

(USA) Emergency stop, also used after the command way enough. It instructs the rowers to square their blades in the water to stop the boat.

"In 2..."

Most water commands are appended prior to the command to take place after two strokes. For example "In 2, Power 10" or "In 2, Weigh-enough."

"Let it/her run"

To stop rowing after a given piece of on the water rowing length, but to put the handles of the oars either to the gunwales or out in front of the rower, in such a manner that the oar paddles are parallel to the water yet not touching it. This allows the boat to glide for a distance leaving no paddle wake in the water. Similar, but not exactly the same is the command "Gunnel", where rowers push the oars until the handle touches the boat's gunwale.

"Paddle"

Tells a crew to row with just enough pressure to move the boat. The paddle command is also used to bring a crew down from full pressure at the end of a workout piece or race.

"Power 10" (or "10 firm" )

The command to take 10 strokes at more than full pressure. Used for passing and gaining water in a race. (sometimes "Power 5", "Power 20", or "Power 30")

"Ready all, Row"

Begin rowing.

"Set it up"

Reminds the rowers to keep the boat on keel.

"Shoulders, ready, up"

Tells the crew to lift the boat from any position below their shoulders, up to shoulder height. Can be reversed to lower the boat from heads to shoulders, i.e., "Shoulders, ready, down!" This is the best position for carrying a shell.

"One foot up & out"

The command for exiting a team boat.

"On the square"

To row without feathering the blades on the recovery.

"Watch your blades (side)"

Tells one side to look out at their blades, and take action to prevent them possibly hitting something.

"Weigh enough" (or "Wain... 'nuff", or "Way enough")

(USA) The command to stop what ever the rower is doing, whether it be walking with the boat overhead or rowing.

## The Stroke

Catch

The part of the stroke at which the oar blade enters the water and the drive begins. Rowers conceptualize the oar blade as 'catching' or grabbing hold of the water.

Crab

A rowing error where the rower is unable to timely remove or release the oar blade from the water and the oar blade acts as a brake on the boat until it is removed from the water. This results in slowing the boat down. A severe crab can even eject a rower out of the shell or make the boat capsize (unlikely except in small boats). Occasionally, in a severe crab, the oar handle will knock the rower flat and end up behind him/her, in which case it is referred to as an 'over-the-head crab.'

Drive

The propulsive portion of the stroke from the time the oar blade enters the water ('catch') until it is removed from the water ('release').

Feather

To turn the oar so that its blade is parallel with the water (opposite of *square*).

Finish

That portion of the pull-through just as the oar is taken from the water.

Inside hand

The oarsmen's hand nearest the oar lock. This is the feathering hand.

Lay-back

What the rowers have when they sit with their legs flat and lean towards the bow of the boat with their body.

Leg Drive

Power applied to the stroke, at the catch, by the force of driving the legs down. Often heard being yelled from the coach boat.

### Outside hand

The hand of a rower that is placed on the end of the oar handle.

### Rating

The number of strokes executed per minute by a crew. (*also Stroke rate*)

### Ratio

The relationship between the time taken during the propulsive and recovery phases of a rowing or sculling action.

### Recovery

The non-work phase of the stroke where the rower returns the oar from the release to the catch.

### Release

At the end of the drive portion of the stroke. It is when the oar blade(s) is removed (or released) from the water.

### Run

Distance a shell travels during each stroke.

### Rushing

Term for when rowers move too quickly along their tracks into the catch. The boat will lose the feeling that it is gliding or "running out."

### Set

The balance of the boat. Affected by handle heights, rowers leaning, and timing, all of which affect the boat's balance, after which the coxswain tells rowers to "set the boat". (see *keel*).

### Shooting your slide

Term used for when an oarsman's seat moves toward the bow faster than his shoulders.

### Skying

Term used to describe a blade that is too high off the surface of the water during the recovery. The rower's hands are too low causing an upset to the balance of the boat (the "set").

### Split time (split)

Amount of time it takes to row 500 meters. Displayed on all ergs and on coxboxes installed on boats with *speed coaches* (see above).

### Square

To turn the oar so that its blade is perpendicular to the water (opposite of *feather*).

### Stroke

1. One complete cycle through the process above.
2. The rower in the stern of a multi-person shell, whose timing is followed by the other rowers.

### Stroke rate

The number of strokes executed per minute by a crew. (*also rating*)