

Sagamore Rowing Association
2018 Adult Learn to Row – Day 2

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Overview:

- Day 1: Safety, Carrying Equipment, Getting Into/Out of the Shell, Holding the Handles, Comfort in the Boat, Basic Technique
- **Day 2: Release, Steering and Stopping**
- Day 3: Recovery, Relaxing the Hands, and Backing
- Day 4: Entry, Letting the Blade Float, and Spinning the Shell (backing and rowing)
- Day 5: Drive, Level Hands, and the Two Ways to Steer
- Day 6: Rhythm, Swing from the Hips, and When to Look Ahead

Curriculum:

Release, Steering and Stopping

We will first briefly review the goals from day one which included: safety; carrying equipment; getting into/out of the shell; holding the handles; comfort in the boat, and basic technique.

Today's goals are to teach the release, work on steering by rowing one side at a time, and how to stop a shell quickly.

As a reminder when entering the shell, please be mindful of where you step. Once you are seated in the shell, please take a moment to check to see that you have a light hold on the handles, keeping the handle in the fingers, not palming/squeezing the handle. A relaxed hold on the handles will help you sculling in many ways.

- **Release**
 - The release is the point in the stroke that the blade leaves the water and turns from vertical (square) to flat (feathered).
 - *Note, some coaches may refer to the "release" as the "finish".*
 - We teach the release as a sequence of five movements:
 - Tap down slightly
 - Feather the blades
 - Hands away
 - Body swings forward
 - Then just bending the knees (quarter slide)
 - The goal is to make this look like one smooth, continuous movement.

- **Steering**
 - In the beginning, the easiest way to steer is to row on just one side.
 - Keep the hands level. Level hands make for a level boat.
 - Look out at your blade and see what the blade is doing.
- **Stopping**
 - You may occasionally need to stop a shell quickly.
 - To stop, tilt the blade slightly, say 30 degrees and lift the hands together.
 - This is best done just after the release.
 - You can also use this concept for steering by dragging one blade on the water.

Agenda:

- 6:30 - All athletes and coaches bring down the launch(s)
- 6:35 - Assign groups and meet with your coach
- 6:40 - Oars down
- 6:50 - Launch shells
- 7:00 - On the water
- 7:40 - Land
- 7:40-7:45 - Shells/oars up
- 7:45-7:55 - Wash and rack
- 7:55 - All athletes and coaches bring up the launch(s)
- 8:00 - Done

CHAPTER 3

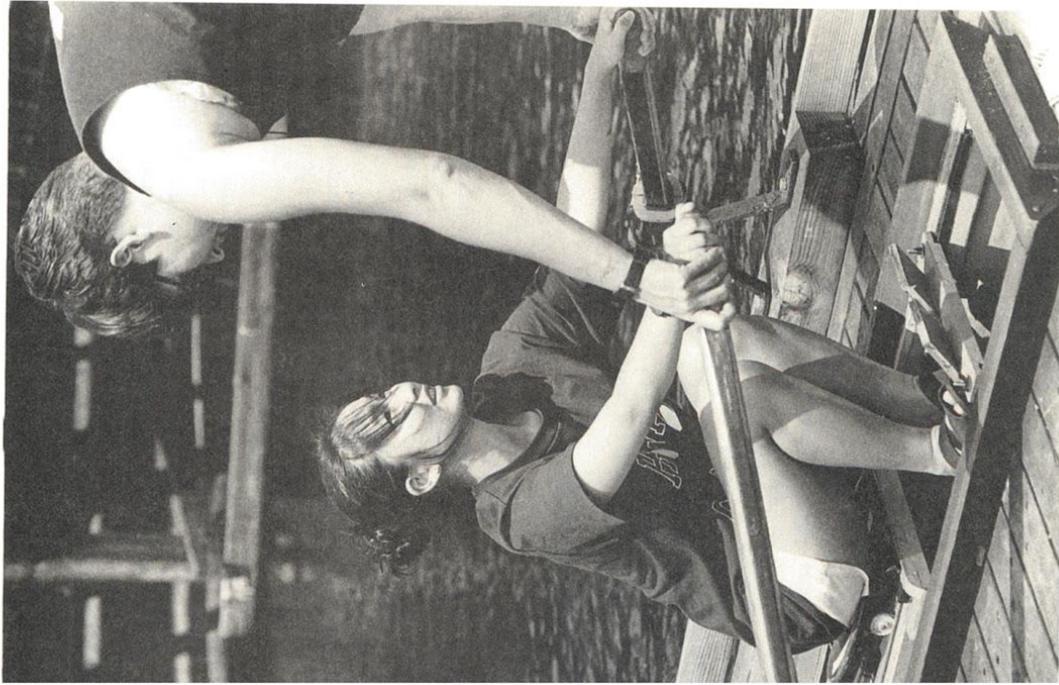
TECHNIQUE

If rowing can be made to seem easy, it will be easy.

—Steve Fairbairn, famous Australian rowing coach

What is technique and why do you need it? While these questions may seem rather foolish, they lie at the heart of understanding the relevance of all those skill-building drills you may inevitably be asked to suffer. They are also, quite frankly, the queries that lie largely unspoken on the lips of almost every sculler. If you are a coach and you can't adequately answer these questions, you have no reason to expect your charges to follow your direction. After all, how difficult can the sculling motion be? Why waste time on boring exercises and theory instead of just enjoying the natural, fluid motion?

Indeed, at least a few boat manufacturers espouse the belief that an initial ten-minute lesson is adequate for most people to be on their way. The rest will come through self-practice and intuition. Plenty of potential buyers are willing to believe this. You can usually spot these people on the water or in a health club, looking a little rough perhaps, but nevertheless enjoying themselves in a training shell or on a rowing machine. To those of us with some expertise in rowing, what these folks are doing may seem disturbing and



tor. Kate Matwychuck, working with a novice in the sculling tank.

aesthetically incorrect, and our immediate instinct is to correct or refine the motion. But who is to say, really, what proper technique is?

The basic elements of the sculling stroke *are* fairly well defined by the equipment: the sliding seat, the dimensions of the boat, and the oars. Therefore, you would think that if you put a group of novice scullers into rowing shells and provided them with very basic instruction, eventually they would figure out naturally the best way to use sculls. While this hypothesis is attractive, one of the fundamental problems with it is that sculling is *not* a natural motion, despite what it may look like from afar when performed by good scullers. Within the deceptive framework of those smooth strokes lies a studied and very subtle set of complex movements. Without the help of a knowledgeable coach or experienced sculler-mentor, you would need to have substantial knowledge of physics and human physiology to be able to figure out an efficient, natural stroke. Or just be damn lucky.

TECHNIQUE VS. STYLE

One other problem with the “learn naturally” hypothesis is that the sculling motion, as simple and as restricted as it looks, leaves plenty of room for individual interpretation. Thus, left alone for a while, our group of guinea pig novice scullers would probably all exhibit slightly different ways of rowing. Which one would be correct? Given an equal level of fitness, the sculler who could move her boat farther faster would have figured out the best way to row. So what is technique and why do you need it? *Technique, simply stated, is the most efficient way for you to move your boat across the water. That’s it.*

What this definition acknowledges is that every individual sculler will eventually develop his or her own style, or interpretation of basic technique. It doesn’t mean, however, that you should forgo the initial process of learning the basics through the help of a coach or another sculler. Once you have learned enough to be able to analyze your own stroke and to compare it to others, you can begin to experiment with some ideas of your own.

Like beginning artists, many novices try to copy the style of other scullers they observe—especially those who are winning big races. Important lessons can be learned through such imitation, but keep in mind that every sculler will scull somewhat differently, depending on what his or her body can do. Don’t fret if you don’t row exactly the same way as the next big sculler to rise to the top. Just

make sure the basics of your stroke are kept intact, and your own style will develop quite naturally on its own.

Developing a good stroke is both a science and an art, a conscientious study of stroke mechanics and an effort to translate these ideas through your body and your boat. The two processes need not be at odds with each other. If you are like most scullers, throughout your first few years of development you will jump back and forth between analysis and synthesis, theory and practice, technique and style.

BASIC STROKE MECHANICS AND TERMINOLOGY

Ideally, the stroke cycle is a continuous, fluid motion, with no real beginning or endpoint. In order to understand and analyze the rowing motion, however, labeling and discussing its different components is helpful. Classically, the stroke is divided into two parts, the drive and the recovery. The drive, literally, is when the oars are being driven through the water by the force of your body upon them, propelling the boat. The recovery is when the oars are out of the water, being readied for the next stroke.

The beginning of the drive, when the oars contact the water, is known as the **catch**. The end of the drive, where the oars come out of the water, is commonly known as the **finish**, or release. As you progress in sculling you will come to understand these two points less as starting and end points for the drive and more as transition areas that link the drive and the recovery. Likewise, you will come to learn that it is the fluidity of the catch and the finish, or how smoothly the oars engage and disengage from the water, that marks your skill as a sculler.

Naturally, during the drive the objective is to apply force to the oars in a manner that is not only powerful but efficient. During the recovery, the objective is to exit smoothly from the water and ready the blades and the body as gracefully as possible, so as not to disturb the continued glide of the shell. Herein lies one of the elemental challenges in the art of sculling: how to balance power with grace.

BODY MOTION

The foundation of good rowing begins with an understanding of the basic body movements used to execute a stroke. Before you get too caught up in the more complex tasks of holding and feathering the

THE USE OF ERGOMETERS AND ROWING MACHINES

Some coaches argue that it is better to learn how to scull in a real boat from day one, and that rowing machines are not only a waste of time but actually detrimental to the development of good sculling technique. They have a valid point. No rowing machine can reproduce the conditions of real rowing. At best, ergs provide rowers with a decent way to keep in shape during the winter and give coaches a general indication of each athlete's fitness level. They do not, unfortunately, teach you much about finesse, both in terms of bladework and in regard to those extraneous body movements that may upset the balance and the glide of the shell.

With this in mind, I suggest you spend as many of your days on the water as possible. Still, as an initial training device, and for those without access to a boat, an ergometer can prove a useful tool. For those interested in competing, ergs are also very helpful in establishing just how hard you can push yourself. Free from the technical constraints and distractions of the water, erg training can give you a glimpse at your ultimate physiological potential.

oars or how to balance a boat, you should make sure that you know how to efficiently generate power and travel back and forth smoothly on a sliding seat. If you have access to a decent rowing machine or a rowing tank, I suggest that you begin your first efforts here, on dry land. Within a few minutes, especially with the aid of a mirror and/or a coach, you can establish the rather simple but important sequencing between the legs, the back, and the arms.

Beginning at the Finish: The Recovery Sequence

While practicing on the water, most crews and scullers tend to begin the stroke from the finish position, where the legs are laid flat and the oar handles are drawn into the waist (see fig. 1). The blades are

feathered, and lie flat on the water to help balance the boat at a dead stop. From here the arms extend forward, over the knees, and then the back is bent forward, pivoting from the hips. Bend forward only as much as your flexibility allows; i.e., don't slouch or hunch over your oars (see figs. 2 and 3).

The upper body is now set and can be drawn forward by relaxing the hamstring muscles and allowing the knees to bend. As much as possible, try not to pull yourself forward by drawing against the footstretchers, or shoes. This will stop or check the glide of a shell. As you gently slide forward, control your approach to the catch with your hamstrings and keep your upper body poised but relaxed and your arms straight. Also be careful to maintain the established angle between your hip and shoulder (i.e., don't straighten up or hunch over) (see figs. 3 and 4). It is during this controlled movement of the body toward the stern that the oar blades are also being rolled into the squared position.