

Crew Parenting 101

Parent Information

Crew Parenting-101

If you're the parent of a student new to crew, then most likely you're unfamiliar with *crew talk*. Have no fear! Almost everyone, even the kids, are new to the terms and procedures.

Here's a little primer:

1. "Crew" vs. "Rowing"

The term *crew* is used in American schools and colleges to designate the sport of *rowing*. When outside of the academic sphere then the sport is known as rowing, as in the United States Rowing Association or Philadelphia Girl's Rowing Club. The British and European universities and schools have *rowing clubs* and not crew clubs or varsity crew.

2. "Crew Team"

When you use the term *crew* you don't need to use the term team. To say *crew team* is redundant. (This is a very common error!)

3. "Rowing" vs. "Sculling"

Rowing can be a general term to mean rowing a boat with one oar per person or two oars per person. If you really want to get it right, then when a person is rowing with one *oar* then he/she is *rowing*, when rowing with two oars he/she is *sculling* with a pair of *sculls*. Most schools and colleges do not scull, but a few have sculling available to enhance students' skills. Also, see next item.

4. "Boat" vs. "Shell" vs. "Scull"

It is perfectly correct to call the boat a *boat*. Another term that is used is *shell*. Either term is commonly used. Do not make the mistake of calling a shell/boat a "scull" as in "They rowed an eight-man scull or single-scull". A pair of sculls (oars specifically used for sculling) is used to propel a sculling shell/boat (single, double, quad,

octapede). One never uses one scull and you can't row in or on a scull. A single-scull is incorrect when referring to the boat. It is a *single-shell*.

5. “Way-enough!”

Nearly all the terms used in rowing are understandable except for one. When a crew is to stop rowing, the cox'n, coach or someone will call *way-enough* or *way'nuff*. This is a 19th Century American naval term that has carried on through to today.

6. “Crab”

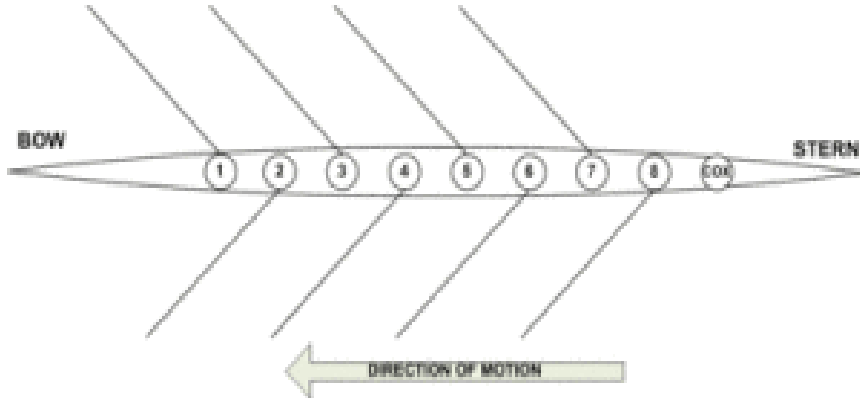
A *crab* is an event when a rower or sculler is unable to extract the oar *blade* from the water at the *finish* of the *drive* (pulling phase of the stroke) and a sloppy stroke occurs. This can happen when a rower loses grip of the *handle*, makes an error in judging when to extract or *release* the blade from the water, or if the boat tips to the side and there's nowhere for the rower to lower his/her hands to extract the blade. The result is usually a falter and some timing problems for a few strokes. However, an *over-the-head crab* is more serious. Its when the oar handle forces the rower onto his or her back and the handle goes over his/her head. This usually causes a great deal of disruption in the boat and in most cases the crew must stop rowing, recover the oar, and then proceed. Still worse, but very rare, thus there is no term for it, is an ejection. This may happen when racing and the boat is moving very fast. The rower catches a crab and the oar handle gets caught in the stomach causing the rower to be catapulted out of the boat. The crew must stop to collect the swimmer and then go on.

7. Boat Orientation

The boat orientation terms are simple: the boat usually travels forward and the forward end of the boat is called the *bow*. The trailing end of the boat is called the *stern*. When facing forward in the boat (like the coxswain but not the rowers) then the left side is *port* side and the right side is the *starboard* side. A rower just beginning to row may get switched from side to side, but at some time may row and develop his/her skills on one side. The side chosen has nothing to do with a person being right-handed or left-handed. Its chosen to make a near equal number of port and starboard

rowers and to balance the potential skill levels. A crew doesn't want to have the best four rowers on one side and the next four best rowers on the other.

Starboard



Port

8. Seat Numbers

The positions in the boat are numbered according to the seating. The seat closest to the bow is #1, next #2, and so on. The rowing seat closest to the stern is #8 in an *eight* or #4 in a *four* and is also called the *stroke seat*. The person rowing in this seat is the *stroke*.

9. Coxswain

The *coxswain* is the person that steers the boat. He/she is a *coxswain* or *cox'n* or *cox* and he/she is *coxing* a boat. A *cox'n* usually uses an electronic amplifier system called a *CoxBox™*. It not only amplifies the *cox'n*'s voice through a speaker system, but it has a built in stroke rate meter and a timer. Some boats, usually fours, may have a *lie-down* *coxswain*'s position in the bow end instead of the *sit-up* position in the stern. He/she is very light so that the crew need not carry extra weight on the race course. Most school and collegiate leagues, as well as international rowing events, have a minimum weight for *coxswains*. The minimum weights are different for girls'/women's crew and boys'. Also, minimum weights may differ from schools to colleges, from league to league, and at international events. Your school or college coach will know the *coxswain*'s minimum weights. A *cox'n* below minimum weight

can still cox but must carry a bag of sand or other deadweight to compensate for the weight deficiency.

10. Boat designations

Rowing boats:

Coxless-pair (2- or 2/wo) – two rowers/no cox'n

Coxed-pair (2+ or 2/w) – two rowers with cox'n

Coxless-four (4- or 4/wo) – four rowers/no cox'n

Coxed-four (4+ or 4/w) – four rowers with cox'n

Eight (8+) – eight rowers always with cox'n

Sculling boats:

Single-sculls or single (1x) – one person sculling (w/pair of sculls)

Double-sculls or double (2x) – two people sculling

Quadruple-sculls or quad (4x) – four people sculling

Octuple-sculls or octapede (8x) – eight scullers (rare)

Sculls is plural and refers to the implements propelling the boat, so you'd never say single-sculd referring to the boat. It seems many experienced rowing people have difficulty with this distinction.

11. Racing

Match Racing format

Most schools and colleges have a match racing season (Spring). This is when two or three schools agree to race side-by-side on a straight, or as straight as possible, course that can fit on the local lake/river/bay. The boats lineup abreast, standing still and a referee/starter, when satisfied that the crews are level and ready to start, will give the commands Attention... Go. The boats start from a standing stop and race in a lane either imaginary or marked by buoys for a set distance. First boat to reach the finish line is the winner.

The international (Olympic) distance is 2000 meters ($1\frac{1}{4}$ mile). High schools may race 1500 meters and master rowers 1000 meters. The Harvard-Yale Boat Race begun in 1852 is 4 miles and the Oxford-Cambridge Boat Race begun in 1829 is $4\frac{1}{4}$ miles. A time is usually taken and the margin between boats is recorded when a flag at the finish is dropped or raised when the bow of each boat crosses the line. Sometimes the margins are given in *lengths*. A length is a boat-length. Visually, it is easy to estimate the distance by boat-lengths. One boat-length would be when the bow (front tip) of one boat is about even with the stern (aft tip) of another boat. There could be multiples and fractions of a length: $\frac{1}{4}$ length, $\frac{1}{2}$ length, $\frac{3}{4}$ lengths, $1\frac{1}{2}$ lengths, 3 lengths, etc. (At the Henley Royal Regatta after a race with a margin of 4 or 5 lengths the result is recorded as *easily*.)

A boat length is relative to the size of the boat in the race. In an eights race one length, about 58 feet, is different from one-length in a fours race, about 40 feet. When a boat is more than 1 length ahead it is referred to as *open-water*. Ask your son/daughter if they won by “open-water” and they may be impressed, but then again...

When the margins are less than a length, then sometimes people use *seats* as a measurement. A seat is the length of one station where the rower sits, approximately $4\frac{1}{2}$ feet. Example: the #2 rower in X boat was even with the #1 rower in Y boat, then X boat is one seat ahead of Y boat. You may hear that a crew won by three-seats, about 13-14 feet. One more term is *deck*. The deck is the unmanned, covered bow section of the boat (about 10 feet for an eight). Again, it is a visual cue. When the bow-ball of X boat is barely ahead of the #1 person in Y boat, then X boat is a deck behind of Y boat. These decks were once covered with a canvas material and so the old term was a *canvass* rather than a *deck*. If you visit Henley Royal Regatta they officially record a deck length as a canvass.

Race times are recorded and it is usually a mistake to compare times from one race to another or from a different day. An imperceptible difference in wind can make a

noticeable difference in times. Maybe times can be compared in no wind conditions, but not much more than this.

Championship Regattas

A Championship Regatta usually will have a maximum of about six boats in a race at a time. Since Championship Regattas may have more than six entries, a system of selecting the faster crews is used. There will be qualifying *heats* to begin to sort the crews out. One format is the first or first few crews go directly to the *grand final* (1-6 places), the next or next few crews go to the *petite* (small) *final* (7-12 places). In another more formal format, there will be *repechage* races to give the non-qualifying crews from the heats a second chance to qualify for the Grand and Petite Finals.

Head Races

In the fall season there are *head races*. The name comes from a traditional English race called the Head of the River. The first head race was the Head of the Charles Regatta in Cambridge/Boston begun in 1965. Now there are many. These are usually open regattas with many events defined in any way the regatta committee wishes to. A junior in one regatta could be anyone under 19 years old, in another it could be defined as high school.

The distance can vary, but usually in the 3 mile range. Sometimes the race course is over a winding river like the Charles. The race is a timed event with each crew starting in single file and negotiating the race course as fast as possible. The start time and finish times are recorded and the elapsed time calculated. The fastest time wins. Sometimes in masters events there is an age adjusted handicap. Crews passing each other is usually exciting, particularly on a narrow river or tight bend. Crews don't really know how they placed until all crews have completed the course and the results are posted.

Henley Races

Henley races are named after a style of racing conducted at the famous Henley Royal Regatta on the River Thames in England. The river is narrow at Henley so only two

boats race and the loser is eliminated and the winner goes on to the next round. This format is popular for narrow and/or short race courses in the U.S.

Hope this helps a little.

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