



gloucesterrowingclub

A GUIDE TO HELPING AT JUNIOR TRAINING SESSIONS



Welcome to GRC

Thank you for your support. Since the Olympics, the junior squad has grown dramatically in numbers. To meet this demand and make sure that the juniors have a worthwhile rowing experience, GRC have increased the number of volunteer qualified coaches and junior sessions. Help is essential to support those coaches to ensure that the safety measures, as advocated by the governing body British Rowing, are implemented.

Without your help the coaches would not be able to provide a safe environment in which to develop the juniors' rowing skills and enjoyment of the sport.

The following paragraphs outline how the junior sessions are organised, ways in which helpers can contribute and aspects of training that helpers will receive. Ideally, the club would like to develop a ratio of: 1 helper to 1 quad (four-man boat), or 1 helper to 2 doubles (two-man boat), or 1 helper to 2 singles, both on and off the water. Previous rowing knowledge can be an advantage, but your presence on the landing stage and the towpath is what really counts.

Whilst the safety of the juniors on the water is paramount, GRC also have to ensure that the equipment is properly looked after so that it is fit for use. Unlike many other junior club sports, the investment required to equip the training sessions on the water is substantial. The average cost of a single scull is £4,000, a double scull is £7,000 and for a quad scull £12,000, plus blades which cost £450/pair. This amounts to somewhere in the region of £70,000 worth of equipment being taken out onto the water each time the juniors train.

Junior Sessions

At GRC, juniors from 12-16 years old are grouped according to ability and own rowing goals, with the chance to change groups as skills progress. Juniors aged 16-18 may have an option to train at the club with the Hartpury College rowing squad. At the weekend the juniors often train alongside the senior GRC squads and also other partnership clubs, such as Cheltenham Ladies College and UWE.

Each week the squad captains and co-ordinators submit requests for boats and blades for each training session. One coach will lead each session (maybe assisted by other coaches) and will plan the session according to the available equipment and number of attendees expected. Specific club boats are rigged for junior use, so that they are able to undertake the rowing stroke within a comfortable range of movement and exertion. The junior boats also have weight categories, so that some are only suitable for lighter or heavier people to use. Bearing this in mind, the session plans are drawn up to accommodate the best fit for individuals in that session, and to allow people to experience both small and larger boats. Invariably this has to change on the day in response to absentees, or damage to equipment preventing its use, or adverse weather conditions forcing the session to become land based.



The sessions are usually divided into three stages:

Stage 1: Registration, Warm up on the land, Briefing and Boating – approx 20-30 minutes

After registration the juniors are sent to warm up on land to prepare their bodies for activity. During this time the coach assesses the conditions on the canal and finalises the crew and boat lists, before briefing the juniors upon their return to the clubhouse. For helpers this can be a frustrating period, sitting around waiting for something to happen.

***Things you can do to help:**

- **Introduce yourself to the coaches and other helpers.**
- **Organise a bike and safety throw line for yourself.**
- **Stand with the juniors when the crews are announced, so that you can be introduced to the crew(s) you will be accompanying.**
- **Join in the warm up activity**

Once crews and boats are allocated, crews carefully manoeuvre their boats off their housing racks and onto waiting trestles on the landing stage, where they are checked before going onto the water. Inexperienced juniors are assisted in getting into the boats on the water and leaving the landing stage.

***Things you can do to help:**

- **Help carry or guide the boats to reduce damage occurring (training provided).**
- **Help check that the boat is watertight, nothing is loose or broken and remind the crew to sign their boat out (training provided).**
- **Help the crew put the boat onto the water and get into it (training provided).**
- **Help check that each rower is suitably clothed for the weather, has water and that the cox is wearing a life jacket.**

If the landing stage is busy, or there is a problem with the equipment, then getting all the crews on the water together may be difficult. Crews will normally be told to row to the new landing stage (on the opposite side of the canal) and wait until the coach arrives.

***Things you can do to help:**

- **Taking a bike and throw line, make your way over to the new landing stage to keep an eye on crews until a coach arrives (training provided).**
- **If there are delays getting all the crews onto the water, or the weather is wet or cold, helpers can cycle with crews up and down the club straight (stretch of the canal between the new landing stage and the first bend) to warm up (training provided).**

Stage 2: Warm up on the water, Technical skills, Practice pieces, Cool down – approx 60-90 minutes

After the warm up, the coach may spend part of the session teaching technical exercises to improve rowing skills. Crews then practice these during pieces of continuous rowing, often over set distances to prepare them for race conditions. Towards the end of the session there is a cool down period, which brings crews back to the club. Throughout the junior's time on the water, helpers can act as extra pairs of eyes and ears, to assist crews



to navigate the canal safely and reduce the risk of injury to themselves and damage to the boats.

***Things you can do to help:**

- **Accompany the crews and alert them to potential hazards, such as: other crews, larger boats, fishing lines and debris in the water.**
- **Assist crews in difficulties, especially if they capsize (training provided).**
- **Help to time crews over set distances, offer encouragement and help them work together to achieve better balance, posture and timing of their stroke (training provided).**

Stage 3: Putting boats away and stretches – approx 15 minutes

The boats are lifted off the water onto trestles for washing down, before being put away on their racks. The end of a junior session can coincide with the start of another squad session, and so a crew may have to wait on the water for a space on the landing stage. Juniors may be tired, hungry, cold or wet by this time and boats will feel heavy. It is important that juniors are encouraged to complete a stretch routine after the boats have been put away.

***Things you can do to help:**

- **Help the crews to lift their boats onto trestles and then onto the racks (training provided).**
- **Help to tie down boats on external racks (training provided).**
- **Help juniors to find their trainers on the landing stage.**
- **If it's cold, get juniors to put more layers on.**

Training for helpers

GRC appreciate that it can be difficult for helpers to feel like they are making a difference. Understandably, helpers would feel more confident if they had a basic level of knowledge of how to look after a crew during a water-based session. Coaches are very happy for helpers to shadow them, or ask questions during the session. This knowledge falls into six categories:

- 1) How to carry the boats
- 2) How to check the boats
- 3) Safety awareness on the canal
- 4) Basic coaching skills
- 5) Actions to take at an incident
- 6) Navigation on the canal

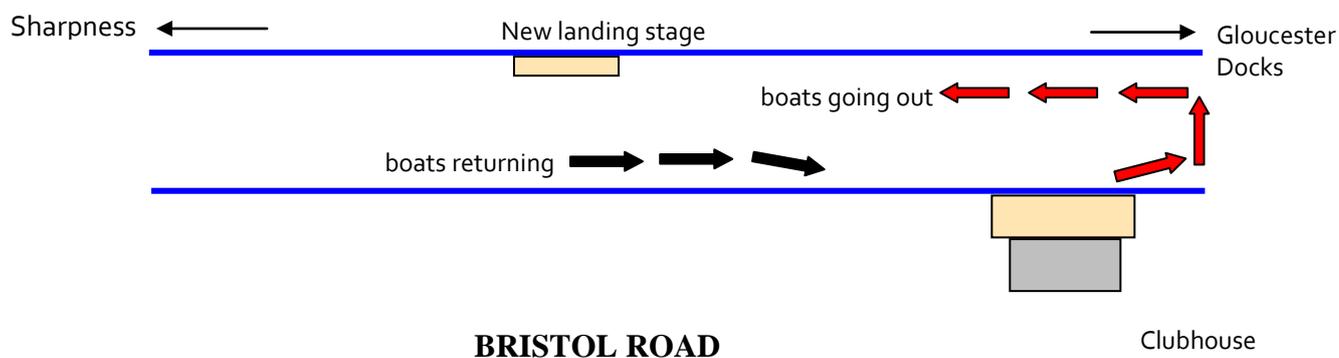
Knowledge for the first five categories can only sensibly be gained through practical experience, observation and questions. The club will endeavour to guide helpers in those aspects, and give practical training demonstrations where possible. Helpers will also be provided with contact details of coaches, bridge keepers and the emergency services, in case support is needed while they are with a crew on the bank.



Knowing what to do if a rower capsizes is a key concern for many helpers. Whilst rowing is not classified as a dangerous sport, there are obviously risks associated with a water environment. The occurrence of serious incidents at GRC is rare, but the risks of injury through collision, or hypothermia from cold water immersion are very real. All juniors are trained in a capsize drill and have a competent level of swimming ability. In the event of a capsize, the main aim of the helper should be to get the rower out of the water as soon as possible. As a guide to reducing the risks of hypothermia, you have about 10-15 minutes to get a rower out of the water in summer months and 5-10 minutes in the colder winter months. There are three stages to take note of:

- **Cold Water Shock (0-3 minutes)** – in the first minutes the rower will be gasping for air and may seem disorientated. **First actions are to make contact with the rower, offer reassurance and ask them to hold onto the boat. If there are signs of injury, or concussion then using the throw line is an option and phoning for support eg. coach, club launch and emergency services.**
- **Swim Failure (3-15 minutes)** – as the water takes the heat away from the body, the ability to swim and self-help is reduced. **Encourage the rower to right the boat, by standing on the nearest rigger and reaching across as the boat rolls over. Give instructions clearly, calmly and in small doses. Some rowers might be able to climb back into the boat unaided and row back to the clubhouse. If not, ask them to swim with the boat to the bank so that they can be assisted (and to get back into the boat, if appropriate). This latter course of action is advised.**
- **Hypothermia (15-30 minutes)** - immersion for a long time leading to collapse. **Encourage the rower to stop moving to conserve heat and bring the knees into the body, or huddle with other crew members. Aim to get them out of the water as quickly as possible, and once on land, keep the rower in a horizontal position and apply extra layers while help arrives.**

The sixth category of Navigation is an aspect which can be outlined here. By applying your knowledge of how users are expected to navigate the canal, helpers can significantly reduce the occurrence of incidents, keeping the crews safer on the water. Below is the good weather circulation pattern for boats leaving and returning to the club landing stage.





Crews must keep closest to the bank on their right hand side, unless overtaking another crew/boat, or avoiding fishing lines or obstacles (bank side bushes or debris in the water).

As a general rule, boats returning to club (from Sharpness to Gloucester Docks) have priority over crews travelling in the direction of Sharpness. It is also common practice for slower crews to pull over and let faster crews overtake. Not all other users stay on their right side of the canal, so it is useful for helpers to warn crews in advance of boats approaching them on the water, so that they can take avoidance action. Helpers can also direct crews to keep clear of fishing lines, especially during fishing competitions, and instruct the crews to spin their boat away from anglers.

Bridges are the most likely place where incidents occur. Another general rule states that crews should not stop within 100m of the bridge and it is especially important that crews can see the bridge lights at all times, to make sure it is safe to pass through.

- **Flashing Red** – Crews must not pass a flashing light, wait until flashing ceases.
- **Red** – Crews must stop and wait for lights to change, or ask the bridge keeper to change the lights, or wait and assess whether it is safe to pass through.
- **Green** – Crews must check that it is safe to pass through before proceeding.
- **No lights means that the bridge is not manned** - Crews may proceed through the bridge having checked that it is clear. A helper on the bank can be very useful in this.

Detailed information can be found on the GRC website, under Club Information – Club Policy – Rules of Navigation.

The canal is also used by many other vessels, often powered and some very large.

Always assume that:

- **Other vessels have not seen you**
- **Large powered craft will not stop (Eduard Elgar, Queen Bodicea & the King Arthur almost certainly will not give way readily to rowers)**
- **It is safer to stay well clear of all other canal traffic**

We hope this has been useful. The GRC website contains information to keep crews safe on the water and there is also a 'Junior and Parent/Carer Handbook' for further general reading. Information is also pinned on the Junior Notice board in the clubhouse. The British Rowing website is a source of best practice guidance for maintaining junior welfare, giving advice on training juniors and enhancing their enjoyment of rowing.