

Let's Tour!

A Guide for Coxes

19th March 2026



What do you need to know?

Essential equipment for coxes

The morning briefing

Navigation rules and safety

Checking the boat and crew

Launching and landing

Going through locks

Dealing with difficult conditions

What to wear – yes, even in summer!



Waterproof jacket and woolly hat



Socks and gloves
(preferably waterproof)

**Remember – if it rains, you will
get wet.**

Getting wet = getting cold

The cox's essential equipment – Paddle and boat hook



What's it for?

- Manoeuvring into and out of locks
- Pulling into the bank
- Getting out of tight spaces
- Remember you can paddle backwards as well as forwards!

Lifejackets / Buoyancy aids



Manual – not automatic as it may inflate when splashed! Should have a crotch strap.



Buoyancy aid – acceptable but not ideal as it won't keep your head out of the water



Waist worn buoyancy aid – designed for swimmers not rowers!

Your vital safety equipment



The morning briefing

- Have you got a route map?
 - Where do we start?
 - Which direction?
 - What are the hazards?
 - Weather forecast
 - What do we do if we have a problem?
 - Where can we stop (for loos, refreshments etc.)?
 - Where should we change coxes?



Navigation Rules

- Most canals and rivers have a “right hand rule”
- Keep to the right (as seen from the cox’s seat)
- Pass oncoming traffic port to port (strokeside to strokeside)
- Overtake towards the middle of the river
- Boats going downstream have right of way
- If there are navigation buoys, remember Red on the Right going downstream
- Watch for navigation signs round islands and junctions
- On tidal waters, the navigation rules may change depending on the direction of the tide – e.g. PLA “Tideway rules”
- **Consult the local Waterway Authority for guidance**

Navigation buoys

- What are they for?
 - To mark the sides of well-defined, navigable channels.
 - They are coloured red (port hand marks) and green (starboard hand marks) as seen from the sea.
 - This boat is going upstream – red on the left and green on the right. Downstream it's red on the right.



Current, Tide and Wind

- Warning boards (on the Thames – others may vary)

**CAUTION
STRONG
STREAM**

**CAUTION
STREAM
INCREASING**

**CAUTION
STREAM
DECREASING**

- On rivers the current is usually stronger in the middle of straight stretches and on the outside of bends
- Rowing against the tide can be very hard work!
- Rowing with a strong tide may make steering tricky
- At low tide you could run aground
- On lakes and lochs calm mornings can become rough afternoons as the wind gets up – know where the shelter is.
- **Always check the tide tables and weather forecast before going afloat!**

Our boat and crew



Do they speak English?

Is it the same English?

Check that everyone understands your commands

Practise an emergency stop

Have we checked the boat?

- Rudder fixed properly?
- Riggers, footplates, seats, buoyancy compartments
- Oars the right way round?

Landing and launching

You can't depend on rafts on tours

Launching in awkward places...



- You may need to run the boat in stern first
- Remember to attach a rope!

Landing on high banks...

- Most landing stages along rivers are designed for motor boats and are too high for rowing boats





- You may be able to get in and out if someone on the bank holds the riggers to keep the boat stable e.g. an agile cox
- Crew should keep outside blade flat on water and lean body weight on it until someone on bank can hold a rigger steady

Slipways...



If launching/landing from a slipway, make sure the rudder is in the water to avoid damaging it

You may get wet feet...



Remember the water shoes

Going through locks

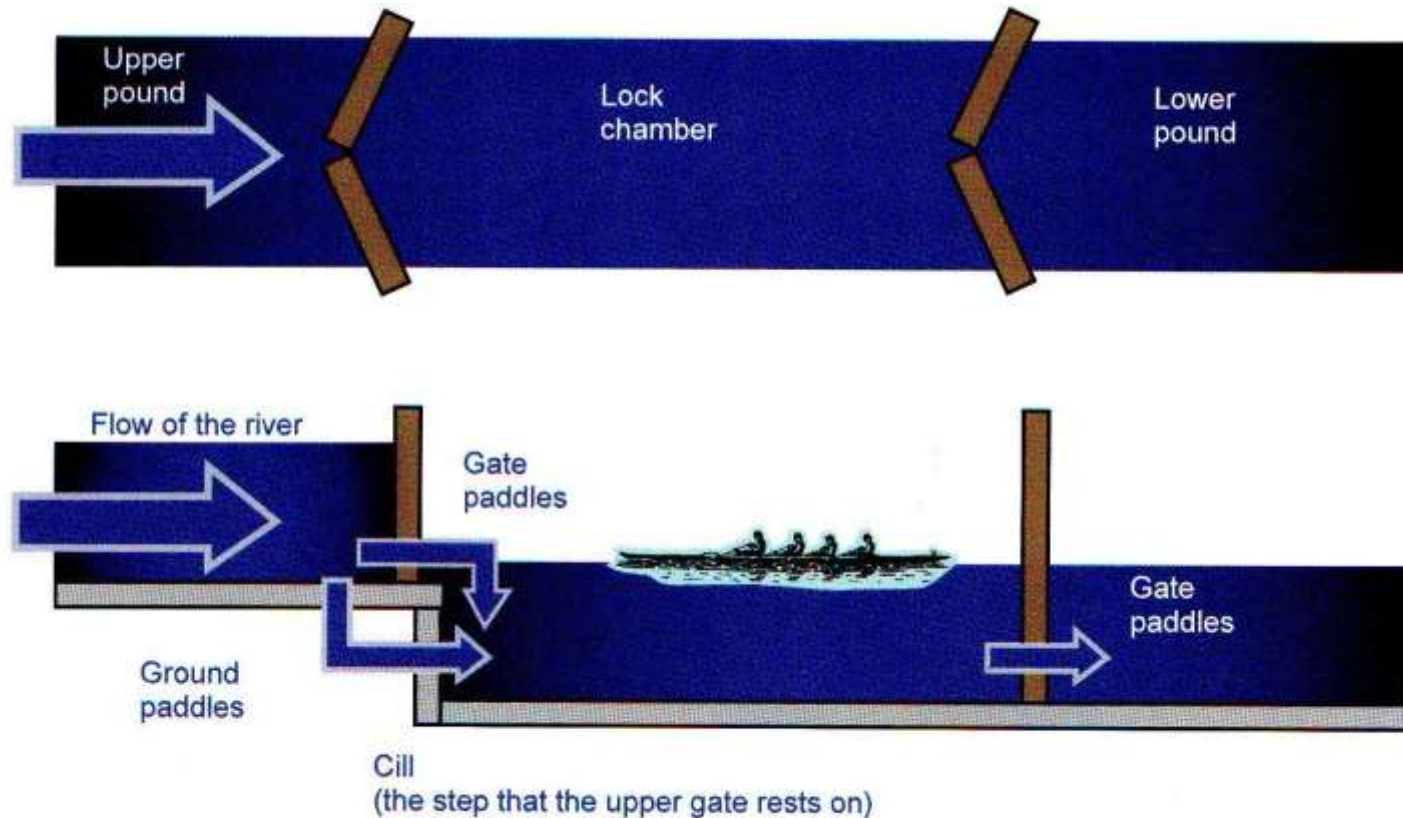
Keep calm and carry on!



Watch for the signs



Locks – how do they work?



The parts of a lock

Locking procedure – going in

- If the lock is in use, tuck into the layby but not too close to the gates and wait for it to open – traffic may come out
- Follow the lock keeper's instructions – he/she may take motor boats in first
- Get straight on the entrance and approach slowly, with one or two people rowing. If the lock is narrow, cox uses a paddle

Locking procedure – inside the lock

- Keep the sculls/oars under control and on the water
- If crowded, rafting up with adjacent boat may be useful
- Don't get too close to the walls and keep riggers, bowball and blades clear of obstructions or steps
- Position boat well clear of gates and use boathook, paddle or rope to keep straight and maintain position – hold onto chains or ladders on lock wall
- If ropes are used, ensure they run freely around bollards and are long enough for fall of lock
- Going upstream, watch out for turbulence from the water coming in
- Going downstream, avoid getting caught on the cill at upstream end

BE ALERT - WATCH OUT FOR POTENTIAL PROBLEMS

Locking procedure – coming out

- If there are motor boats, watch out for propellers as they start their engines
- Exit narrow lock by cox using canoe paddle
- Watch out for weir stream outside the lock
- Do it slowly!

Rowing on Tour

Of course you all know how to row.....

Different from a normal outing?

- You may be rowing 20 – 30 km
- You have to reach your destination, so you can't shorten the outing
- Frequent rest/water/snack stops (every 20 minutes or so)
- Change cox at intervals (may need to change places in the boat)
- If someone is injured or ill, you may have to continue with part of the crew while they rest

Rowing in difficult conditions

- Strong wind
 - Look for sheltered side of waterway
- Rough water
 - Shorten stroke
 - If necessary, have one or two people sit the boat while the others row
- Strong current
 - Straight river – current usually strong in the middle
 - Bendy river – current is usually stronger on the outside of bends
- Heavy traffic
 - Keep a good lookout
 - Stay near the bank if large ships are in the middle
- Wash from motor boats
 - Normal wash – cross at about 30 degrees
 - High wash – position boat parallel to wash with crew sitting in safe position

Low bridges.....



Give the crew plenty of warning – they may need to lie down in the boat

Narrow bridges....



Swing the blades parallel to the boat, but keep the spoons on the water for stability.

To summarise....

Top tips for coxes on tours

- Know where you're going
- Know who's going with you
- Look after your boat - check it before going afloat
- Look after your crew – rest stops etc.
- Look after yourself – adequate clothing, PFD, phone
- Look ahead and anticipate ... remember that most accidents on the water are caused by people not keeping a good look-out

