



# ARA Learn To Row Handbook



[www.ara-rowing.org](http://wwwара-rowing.org)

# Organising your Course

There are lots of reasons for running a 'learn to row' course for adult beginners. Rowing is a fast growing sport with many benefits for low impact all round fitness, general enjoyment, social outlook and the unique ways in which it can be either an individual or team activity are increasingly recognised. Most rowing clubs can offer potential adult members a great deal for their fees; a fleet of boats, indoor rowing machines, a licensed bar, a gym, new friendships and a great piece of water to explore etc.

For a rowing club, running a 'learn to row' course also has its benefits. It obviously attracts new members to the club, it has the potential to make a profit for club funds and it also creates new links with the local community through the involvement of people from new areas. Make your local authority aware of the course by advertising through them and in the process improving links with them.

Learn to row courses will attract people of all ages, abilities and varying competitive rowing potential. Whether your resulting

new members are in their twenties or sixties they can add something to your club structure. New members provide potential race winners, new coaches, new committee members, new regatta helpers, new skills for work around the club and much more. A top tip is to ask new members, via their membership form, what skills they can offer the club. Also it's a good idea to make it clear from the outset to any new members that the club is run by volunteers and that you always need new ones.

For a learn to row course to be really successful and to benefit your club you need to consider what will happen after the course? Is the club structure set up to absorb these new members? What pathways does your club have for these beginners – a novice group, a recreational group, a veteran group, a competitive group? A wise thing to do would be when you're delivering session one of the course talk to the participants about where they can go within your club and what the club can offer them. Make sure they understand how to join the club properly.



## Planning

The first thing to do is plan your course. Think about the following issues; how many weeks will it be over, how many sessions per week, how long per session? Which night of the week will be the best? Schedule the course to avoid busy club nights.

If you need further information check out the case studies of current successful courses that can be found on the ARA website.

- When will the capsizing drill take place – book a swimming pool?
- How many participants will you accept – max/min numbers?
- How many coaches will you therefore need? Will each coach do every session?
- What boats can be used – will they be free?
- What other equipment is needed – launch, lifejackets, throw lines, indoor rowing machines, TV and video etc.



## Advertise

There are several ways to advertise your course.

- Website – the club website which should be clear and attractive to those visiting for the first time
- Internet – Your local authority website and any sports brochures that they produce
- Current club members places of work
- Flyers in local gyms and with local community groups.
- By forming a direct link with a local company who might be interested in promoting staff fitness
- Let your local authority sports development officer know about the course and they may be able to help you advertise
- Where you advertise may depend on your target participant, juniors, adults over 50's?
- Focus your advertising accordingly and make sure that there are clear contact details and links to an application form. A sample application form can be downloaded from [www.oara-rowing.org/learntorow](http://www.oara-rowing.org/learntorow).

## Cost

It is up to your club to decide how much the course should cost. It is important to remember to factor in the following costs: club membership for the duration of the course (necessary for insurance purposes), ARA membership, possible equipment wear and tear, coaching fees, extra equip-

ment such as video cameras and tv's, profit.

Make sure that your cost/fee reflects the affluence of your area and your target participants.

## The end of the course

When it comes to the end of the course a good way to advertise future courses would be to ask all participants if they'd like to receive a souvenir t-shirt, mug and/or certificate when they complete the course? Also it'd be wise to consider handing out course feedback/self assessment sheets for participants to complete at the end of the course as this will help you understand what is good and what you can improve about the course – an example can be downloaded from [www.oara-rowing.org/learntorow](http://www.oara-rowing.org/learntorow)

Don't forget to hand out club membership forms for those that want to do more rowing with the club.

# The programme

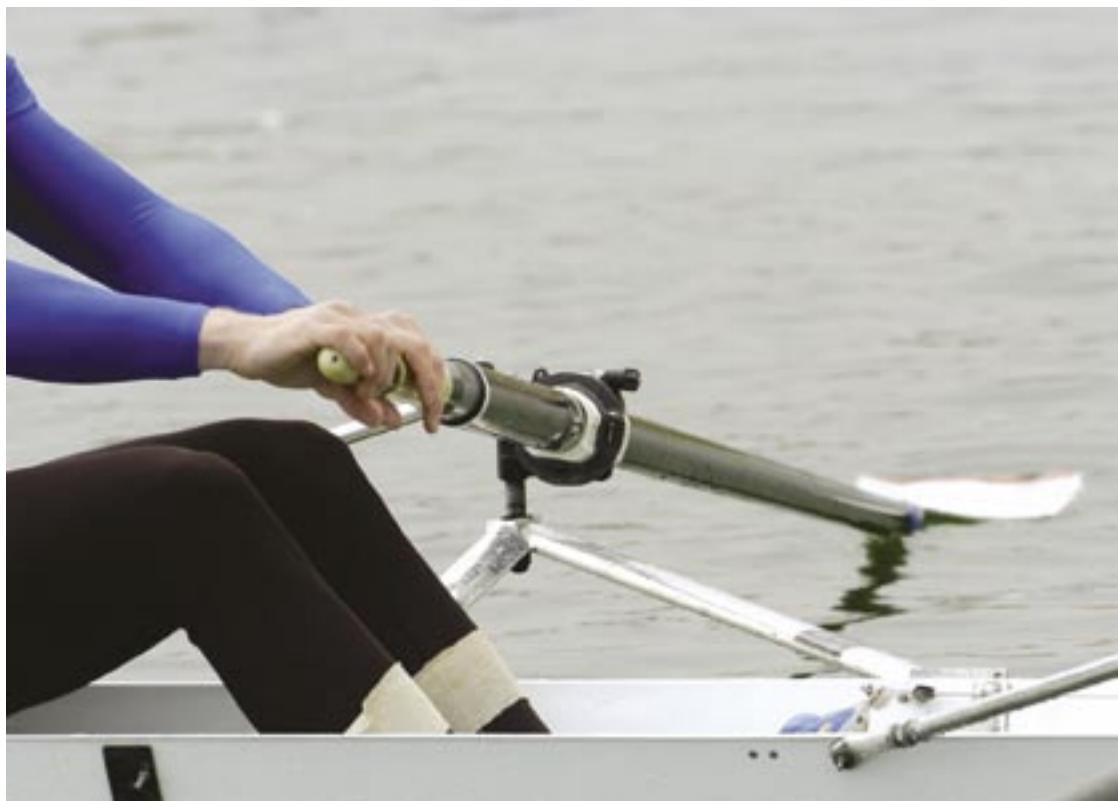
For most people coming to rowing for the first time their primary aim is to get in a boat and have fun on the water as soon as possible. Some will want to develop this into a serious competitive pursuit and others will row purely for fitness and enjoyment. Any learn to row programme, therefore, needs to cater for people with very variable backgrounds in fitness, flexibility and aspirations. In this programme we give you some guidance on how to develop these areas while primarily concentrating on teaching someone the basics of rowing. We have written a 'learn to row' programme across 10 sessions. This is an outline structure that can be followed to the letter or adapted to suit your club and participant needs. It can be used over any number of weeks.

The programme starts from the premise that all beginners will benefit from learning basic skills of boat confidence, balance, boat moving and manoeuvring. These skills will allow the participant to develop rowing from a sound technical background.

The skills introduced to the beginner in this programme can be carried forward and developed as they improve. Many skills can be tested to give added incentive. Testing in module 2 and again in module 10 will illustrate to the participant how much improvement they have achieved.

Along side this structure for a 'learn to row' course we have also written a skill development programme. This explains many of the exercises and skills used in the sessions and tells you how to develop them further as your athlete progresses. The skills programme can be used for beginners through to international athletes and we recommend that you refer to it during 'learn to row' courses and encourage coaches in your clubs to use the skills and exercises for all athletes.

Many of the skills used in the programme can be increased in difficulty to challenge athletes through to international standard. The GB team can regularly be seen doing



skill drills to improve their boat moving abilities and specific technical faults. The use and development of boat skills is now widely believed to be the best way to teach beginners and to develop experienced athletes.

*"These skills are designed for use by beginner and advanced scullers to stimulate the basic feeling for a balanced boat and a relaxed body position. This has often been referred to in early coaching books as 'watermanship', but with the advent of more training on the indoor rowing machines and in the larger boats (fours and eights), there has been a tendency for some athletes to have no development of these reflex skills. This is often seen when some rowers with great strength and indoor rowing machines scores are unable to use their physical strength in a boat and are beaten by a less powerful rower. The following drills can be of great use to help harness the strength and produce boat 'feel' and later – greater boat speed,"* Peter Shakespear – ARA Performance Development Manager, January 2005.

## Technique

The programme and associated skills and exercises aim to build rowing technique that conforms to British Rowing Technique (BRT) guidelines. The basic concept of BRT is that suspension and hanging through the drive phase of the stroke is fundamental to making a boat go fast. This feeling of suspension should be introduced to and grasped by the beginner rower early and is best first explored on the indoor rowing machine.

## Fitness

Participants will start with varying levels of fitness that may or may not match their aspirations within rowing. This programme does not aim to significantly improve participant fitness as it is skills based. However, participants can be encouraged and guided to partake in land activity that will improve their fitness. Check participant background and ask for medical checks if you have any concerns before advising on a fitness programme. During the 'learn to row' programme skill development is the main priority rather than fitness. Children will more than likely be taking part in organised school sport and may also be active in formal and informal sport so they may be gaining good basic fitness from this.

Work with the adult participant to build an



appropriate fitness programme involving the traditional land training activities of running, cycling and swimming. Tailor the programme to the participant's aspirations, home, study and work constraints, base fitness etc. If they already attend a gym then they could work with the instructor there, they may be able to join some club circuit sessions or perhaps they only need to be encouraged to cycle/walk to work occasionally! Any programme that you design for a participant should reflect their aspirations rather than those of the club – they may not want to be the next Steve Redgrave/Katherine Grainger!

Indoor rowing machines (ergo's) can be used to help develop fitness but the participants need to be supervised and technically competent. Ergo technique should complement and reinforce water-based technique and skills.

## Flexibility and posture

Again, participants will start with varying levels of flexibility and understanding of correct posture. These areas are fundamental to injury prevention and skill in rowing and will need to be developed. You may not feel that you have the knowledge to teach these areas or the time on this programme, but there are some basic activities you can do with participants to help them. Brush up your background knowledge first using either of the books sold through the ARA.

- Consider using the dynamic warm up before sessions – a separate download is available at [www.oara-rowing.org/training](http://www.oara-rowing.org/training)
- Many people have tight hip flexors and hamstrings and both of these will restrict the ability to rock over and achieve the cor-

## — Section 2 —

rect posture in the boat

- Encourage stretching post exercise. Particularly focus on hamstring and hip flexor exercises as these are so crucial for the rowing action – a separate download is available at [www.oara-rowing.org/training](http://www.oara-rowing.org/training)
- Posture is important and in rowing, we particularly need to concentrate on getting the pelvis and lumber spine to move together. From this, you can teach participants how to pivot from the hips, tall and strong in the way that you will want them to ‘rock over’ in a boat
- Encourage the strengthening of core muscles through understanding and correction of posture in everyday activities- watching TV on a swiss ball, sitting correctly at

work, standing correctly when washing up/ ironing etc, etc.

- Trunk and core strength is not the only area for work on posture so when the above have been mastered encourage work on scapula shoulder setting exercises.

■ The gluteal muscles are key to generating the power to move a boat. Both the gluteal medius and maximus need to be strong and stable to enable this to happen effectively

- As this is such a specialist area we advise that rowing clubs use physiotherapists and/or pilates classes at local gyms to help identify exercises specific to participants needs.



*Good posture – British Rowing Technique – perfect stroke*

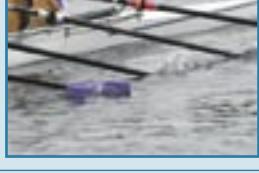


*From British Rowing Technique – perfect stroke, showing suspension in the early/mid power phase*

# Ten modules

The modules below are intended to give illustrations to coaches as to how their course could be structured to achieve the learning outcomes. They are not intended to be the only solution nor is it mandatory to follow this outline in its entirety. However, it must

be stressed that it is good practice to carry out the capsize and immersion session before putting participants on the water. Level 1 Criteria are given in the table below. It is intended that the modules below will cover all the tasks.

SKILL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME	OUTCOME	NOTES
Getting afloat 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Carry the boat out, turn and place on water</li> <li>– Place the blades in the correct swivel and tighten</li> <li>– Adjust to correct backstops position.</li> </ul>	Participants are aware of how to get afloat, (as per initial sessions)
Rowing terms	Understand meaning of; easy Oar, hold it up, back stop, front stop, number off from bow, recovery, catch, finish.	See A-Z of Rowing Terms
Equipment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Identify and name the following: Stern, bow, riggers, foot stretcher, slides, seat, swivel, gate</li> <li>– Blade – spoon, button, handle</li> </ul>	See A-Z of Rowing Terms
Grip and posture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Correct sculling/rowing grip</li> <li>– How to sit in a boat</li> </ul>	See grip guide at end of handbook
Confidence & balance skills 	Circles, rigger dips, sitting, rock and remove hand/s, rigger dips, standing, stand up in boat, slapping or chopping, balance, blades off the water in the safe position	See skill development programme
Manoeuvrability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Paddle on and back down with one or two blades</li> <li>– Basic understanding of how the boat will move</li> <li>– Turn the boat full circle.</li> </ul>	See skill development programme
Stopping skills	Perform an emergency stop and sit in safety position	
Whole stroke	Recovery sequence – Hands, body, slide	
Catch & connection 	Place the blade at the catch squarely with shins vertical and shoulders down	
Suspension & drive	Try suspension drills on indoor rowing machines and in boats and can lift off the seat	
Extraction	Able to sit at backstops and extract square blade when stationary	



## Module 1

**Learning outcomes** – understanding of the boathouse, club rules and etiquette, safety, the course structure. Basic understanding of parts of a boat. Very basic technique on an indoor rowing machine – tasks 2 & 3

**Introduction** – from lead coach, club captain etc

- Introduce yourself, other coaches on the course and any other club officers who might be involved
- Give directions to the fire exits and to club facilities. Take the participants on a club tour
- Allow the participants time to introduce themselves to one another
- Go over water safety, what precautions participants should take, what safety features the club has in place, how safety is assessed per session etc.

**Explain how your club is structured** – how many members, the facilities, what rowing groups there are, who runs the club, when people race. Take the opportunity to mention that the club is largely volunteer-led so that your potential new members know that they will one day be needed to help out!

**Explain the course format** – times, outline the timetable, give participants a contact number for when they're late or can't make a session.

### Explain the options for after the course

– how soon will they have to pay membership, how much is it, which training group will they be able to join? Show a video. This could include, water safety, club activity, how to carry a boat, good technique, a regatta, common rowing terms – Go Faster with Foster (Video / DVD) available from the ARA Shop covers all this.

### Surroundings and equipment

Familiarise participants with the surroundings and with basic rowing terminology. To help we offer an A-Z of Rowing Terms – separate download [www.oara-rowing.org](http://www.oara-rowing.org)

A boathouse treasure hunt is an easy way to get everybody moving around and checking out where things are.

### Practical activity

**Split the group in two** – groups A and B. Rotate the teams at half-time.

**Group A** – to go outside and start learning about boats

- Have a boat out ready and go over the names of parts and seating positions. Draw attention to safety elements- bow ball, sealed compartments, heel restraints. Participants should be encouraged to check these elements are in place before any outing. Remind everybody that in the event of a capsize they should stay with the boat. Start teaching bow and stroke side, red and green, port and starboard.
- Carry a boat and place it in the water. No bent backs. See guidelines for Module 2.

**Group B** – on to the ergo's.

- Basic technique. Give an example of good rowing technique
- Get the participants to have a go on the machines. Explain hands/body/slide action and do some body swing paddling
- Bring participants to front stops and do short slide work from the front. Straight arms, just pushing from the foot stretcher.

## Module 2

**Learning outcomes** – you need to ensure that participants can swim 50 metres in light clothing and that they have carried out a capsize and immersion drill and are

confident when under water and manoeuvring a boat while swimming.

Carry out a capsize and immersion drill with your participants see details on the ARA website – [wwwара-rowing.org](http://wwwара-rowing.org)

## Module 3

In a rowing tank where available

**Learning outcome** – co-ordination of basic rowing movements – Task 8.

- If your area has access to a rowing/sculling tank then this is a good place for participants to get to grips with the basic rowing movement of hands/ body /slide and how to square and feather a blade and place in the water without worrying about balance.
- Be sure to teach good boat posture at all times
- This could also be carried out using a bank tub or even a mock up of boat which can be used on land.

## Module 4

**Learning outcomes** – you need to ensure all novices can correctly getting in to and out of a boat. Establish a safe position in a boat. The participant would also need to have a basic understanding of how height of the blade handle affects the spoon and balance and stability in a boat.

**Understanding basic technique on an indoor machine** – rocking over, suspension – Task 1, 3,4 & 5

Depending on number of participants split in to two groups again. Half outside and half on indoor rowing machines, rotate at half time.

### Outside

For these activities explain/demonstrate/do

**Getting a boat in and out** – Don't assume any knowledge – teach good practice at all times.

- Everyone must work together and follow the instructions of the cox or coach
- Demonstrate the procedure and show what commonly used terms like 'half turn', level etc mean. Explain why the boat points against the stream for manoeuvring to and from the landing stages
- Rolling the boat off the rack – explain that gates should be clicked shut and how much damage other riggers do!

- Emphasise the importance of correct lifting – bent knees and straight backs
- Make everybody aware of the potential hazards to the boat and themselves whilst walking out of your boathouse
- Encourage participants to carry out their own boat safety checks – bow ball, heel restraints, hatch covers, holes and knocks, bolts tight, rudder working
- Encourage participants to wash the boat down and check the hull for damage before racking

**Getting in and out of the boat** – explain/demonstrate/do

- Demonstrate how to get into a boat correctly – where to stand, what to hold on to, what not to hold on to, how you sit down, holding the blade(s) as you get in, doing up the outside gate, sitting the boat for others, check participants don't tie their feet in – explain why this is important. Try and encourage participants to get in and out of the boat independently as soon as possible.
- Adjusting feet – teach to tuck handles in chest whilst doing this. Teach where to adjust feet to, based on slide use and reach in a sweep boat, handles being a fist apart in the finish position for a sculling boat.



**Handle grip** – demonstrate how to hold a blade handle. Loose fingers, wrists flat etc. See the separate download on grip in rowing and sculling [www.oara-rowing.org/technique](http://www.oara-rowing.org/technique)

### Exercises in the boat

Establish the safe position for sitting in the boat. In sweep boats – legs flat/straight, spoons flat on the water, handles at chest height slightly away from the body and at the level of the person in front.

In sculling boats – legs flat/straight, spoons flat on the water, handles at the same height and held with arms out in front of the body.

- Begin some basic skills exercises to give participants a feel for how their blade/s affect the boats balance- hands up and down. Spoons off the water. Return to the safe position between each exercise.
- Keep making sure that everyone is confident with what they are doing.
- Explain square blades and feathered (flat) blades and when they are correct. Allow participants to experiment with this – keep an eye on their grip – see grip guidelines.

### Indoors

Introduce two central concepts; rocking over from the hips and suspension.

#### Rocking over

- Start by getting the participants to sit on the floor with their legs out straight in front and rocking over

■ Help participants to locate their sitting bones and sit on them – putting their hands under their bottoms may help with this

- Practice rocking over from the hips keeping backs straight while on the floor
- Using sit fit cushions can take this exercise further
- Move on to the ergo and repeat exercises without participants touching the ergo handle
- Participants grasp the handle and do arms and body strokes only. Keep checking for correct rock over posture.

### Suspension

Hold or tie the ergo handle at the catch position. Allow participant to grasp handle and pull on it so as to lift their bottom off the seat. Ensure good back and shoulder posture and make sure the seat is in place for the participant to sit back down. Repeat.

## Module 5

**Learning outcomes** – level one skills criteria for confidence and balance skills – task 5.

Exercises to use include:

- Circles
- Rigger dips, sitting
- Rock and remove hand/s
- Rigger dips, standing
- Stand up in boat
- Slapping or chopping blades
- Balance, blades off the water in the safe position



Details can be found in Instructor Award or Level 2 coaching packs.

When you are happy with their progress move to the next area in the Level 1 skill exercises. Keep referring back to the basics to ensure correct procedures, technique and safety.

## Module 6

**Learning Outcomes** – Manoeuvrability (Task 6).

- Paddle on and back down with one or two blades
- Basic understanding of how the boat will move
- Turn the boat full circle



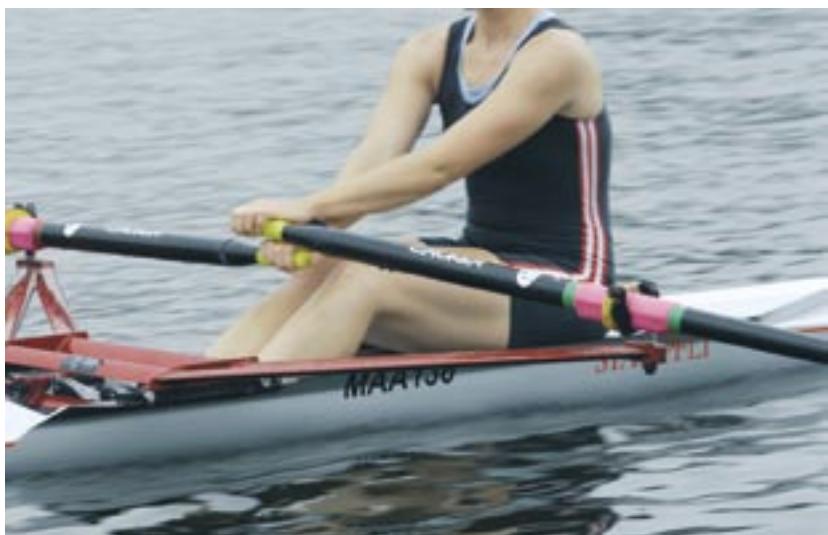
## Module 7

Whole stroke sequence and stopping – tasks 7 & 8.

**Learning outcomes** – the ability to carry out the correct stroke sequence and the ability to stop the boat in a safe and controlled manner.

**Recovery sequence** – Hands, Body, Slide.

**Stopping skills** – perform an emergency stop and sit in safe position.



## Module 8

Catch, suspension and drive.

**Learning outcomes** – develop a strong catch and for the participant to appreciate, suspending themselves from the blade handle.

This module will build on the work carried out in the previous modules and will involve both the use of boats and ergometers.

**Catch** – ability to place the blade at the catch squarely with shins vertical and shoulders down.

**Suspension and drive** – Try suspension drills on indoor rowing machines and in boats and can lift off the seat.

## Module 9

**Learning outcomes** – extraction, recovery and rhythm – tasks 11 & 12

**Extraction** – the ability to sit at backstops and extract square blade when stationary

**Ratio and rhythm** – participants should understand what ratio and rhythm are and why they are important. This could be carried out using more experienced scullers or rowers in crew boats.

## Module 10

**Learning outcomes** – putting it all together.

Carry out fun competitions with the participants:

- Pit stop rigging – to ensure they know how the boat should be put together
- Slalom racing against the clock
- Skills tests against the clock
- Side by side ‘racing’

Events should be appropriate to the participants on any particular course and reflect their desire or otherwise for competition as part of their development as scullers and rowers.



[www.ara-rowing.org](http://wwwара-rowing.org)

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