

Rowing is a very safe sport: serious incidents are rare and you're more likely to be hurt travelling to or from the boathouse than when on the water. But we want to keep it that way, so there are rules to follow.

Risk assessment

Every rower is responsible for assessing risk before boating. There are two main risks in rowing: collision and drowning.

Risk of collision

On our canal this is the main risk. Club rules require the following:

- **When rowing or sculling boats meet**, crews heading away from Manchester must pull in, oars on the towpath, to allow crews going the other way to pass.
- **In all other cases** normal canal rules apply: keep to the right (starboard, bow side) except when overtaking. There is just enough room for a narrow boat to pass while a crew is rowing but it needs skill and care: if in doubt, pull in *to the right* with the oars on the bank, or in the reeds, as far as possible.
- This convention only determines *who should pull in*. All crews must keep a normal look out and in the case of a collision both crews would be to blame.
- The crew making room must do so when the oncoming boat is **100m away**. Two eights on a collision course cover that in ten seconds.
- Because the steersman is right at the stern, a narrow boat has a huge blind spot forward. Even though narrow boats move slowly *the 100m rule still applies*.
- The bow rower will check that there is a properly-fitted bow ball which at least meets the ARA specification. Even these will not entirely avoid impaling a rower in a severe collision.
- No beginner will row beyond Brooklands or Timperley bridges until given permission by a club coach or other official.
- Crews with novice coxes will not go beyond either bridge without a bank party, who will assume responsibility for keeping a look out and ensuring the safety rules are followed.
- All crews must give a wide berth to the Cruising Club's rope-hauled pontoon, about 300m beyond Brooklands bridge. *(Continued...)*

- If there is **fog** no crew will go out unless it is possible to see *clearly* as far as the first "gate" across the towpath.

Risk of drowning

Our canal is very safe: all but the smallest juniors can keep their heads above water by touching the bottom, and the bank is never far away. There is one anti-drowning precaution, however, which all rowers will follow: checking the heel restraints, which are there to prevent you drowning in an upturned boat because your feet are stuck in the shoes.

- Straps or strings must be in **good condition** so they don't break when most needed. They must be secured independently: string looped under the footplate and attached to the heels at both ends is no good.
- No more than **50mm of heel lift** (about two fingers' width) is allowed: any more and the bending of the shoe will stop your foot coming out.

When TRC boats are out on other water an additional risk assessment must be made: *are there sufficient rescue launches, with enough seats, to get the whole crew out of the water within five minutes?*

In all cases the following club rules will be followed:

- In singles and doubles *do not rely on your ability to get back in*, unless you have practised it often, in rowing water not in a pool, and are confident of your ability to do it reliably first time. Sudden and unexpected immersion in cold river water causes confusion and saps strength, and failed attempts to get in make it worse. In winter you may have only 60 seconds before your strength starts to ebb away.
- Capsized rowers must concentrate on getting the *head and torso out of the water*. Unless getting back in, heave yourself up onto the upturned shell, then paddle to shore with your hands. ("Straddle and paddle")
- Fours and eights must have sufficient buoyancy to support their crews, torsos out of the water, when fully swamped. If the boat founders in rough water the crew will still be able to paddle slowly to the side. The club has buoyancy bags for those racing boats which need them.

Recording incidents

Every incident, trivial or serious, can teach us something but we have to record it or the opportunity is lost. All incidents – especially capsizes, swampings, collisions, vandalism and altercations with barges – will be recorded in the incident book, which is kept on the shelf inside the boathouse door. From time to time I will transfer the details of the incidents to the ARA's online reporting system.