

Coaches' Expectations for Rowers

by Rebecca Clark, on the behalf of ARC's coaches, Revised March 2021

Putting together boats and lineups for practices and regattas is a complex and challenging task. When putting together entries and boat lineups, coaches consider a combination of factors, and always have to make difficult and frustrating compromises. I know of no coach who has ever said this task is easy, and this is true at all levels of our sport. That said, coaches **always** aim to be transparent and fair about the processes they use to put together boat lineups and regatta entries.

Coaches always strive to make decisions that are **best for the team as a whole**; favoritism is unfair, unhealthy, and has absolutely **no place** in the sport of rowing. Because of all this, coaches will ask rowers to do things that are different from what rowers might expect ("Why am I not in the fastest boat?" ...and trust me, I have been here many times and can tell many stories.).

Part of the team mentality in rowing is being aware of this bigger context and **being willing to make an honest individual contribution for the benefit of the team**, no matter what seat or what boat you are put in. Coaches notice and are grateful when they observe rowers adopting this attitude and approach.

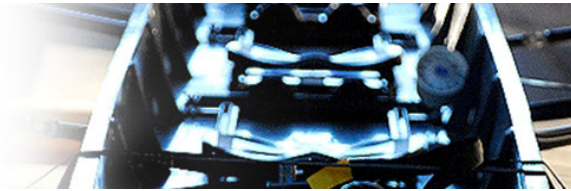
When planning for regattas, coaches strive to provide rowers with an optimal number of races (not too many, not too few). They also strive to ensure that the racing experience is high-quality for the participants. If the racing experience is not challenging, student-athletes are not able to learn and grow as athletes. If the racing experience is too discouraging, student-athletes will struggle to stay motivated (and won't continue to learn and grow as athletes).

Some of the major criteria that coaches consider when they are putting together boat lineups include:

1. **Consistency**: Is the student-athlete regularly and consistently coming to practice to work on improving all aspects of their rowing? Does the student-athlete show a consistent level of effort throughout practice?

Note that it takes a minimum of 3 practice sessions per week to maintain fitness and make progress in rowing. **Rowers seeking to race are asked to commit to attending this minimum number of practices per week.** ARC strives to offer as many options as possible to help athletes reach this minimum.

2. **Physical and technical capabilities**: Coaches strive to match athletes with others who are at a similar level of physical and technical capabilities so that all are



able to make an equal contribution to moving the boat, and so the boat moves together well. This is a big part of why the novice racing category exists in rowing: to intentionally group beginners together to level the playing field and provide a competitive environment that is fun and rewarding. Sometimes there can be two rowers who have equal physical capabilities, but their individual rowing styles are so different that they are not compatible in a boat. To evaluate physical and technical capabilities, our coaches use a combination of assessment tools, including measuring erg racing times and conducting different types of time trials on the water (because ergs don't float!).

3. Mental capabilities and teamwork: Competition plays a special role in sports: it demands that student-athletes try to perform to their highest potential, which is a challenging thing to do. Different people approach competition and challenges with different mindsets. In some cases, it is possible to get student-athletes to work with other student athletes who have very different individual approaches and mindsets towards racing. In other cases, it can take just as much emotional and communication work for a group of athletes to reach this kind of agreement and work together well, as it takes physical and technical preparation. Because of this, be aware that coaches also evaluate the mindsets of athletes to see if it is possible to match up athletes with similar mindsets, so the athletes can focus on making improvements in other arenas of the sport (physical and technical abilities, above). This is also why coaches generally aim to match up rowers who have had opportunities to practice together with each other: that practice time is valuable for establishing trust as well as building good coordination and clear communication within the boat.

All three of these categories factor in, so athletes should work on self-improvement across **all** these aspects of rowing. It is not good enough to be a fast and proficient rower if you are disrespectful towards others and rarely show up for practice. **Overall, the best rowers are those who can get into any boat and row well.**

Meanwhile: Whenever you find yourself getting frustrated about your progress in rowing (notice that I said whenever, not *if*), or whenever you are unsure about what is expected of you, please have courage and ask your coach or coaches for help. You can always ask your coaches, "What can I do to improve?" and they will do their best to identify what you can do. That's what they're here for.

In the end, the goal of practicing and going to competitions is to challenge yourself to row well, go fast, discover new potential in yourself, and have FUN. (yes, fun!) We all only control our own individual actions towards these ends. It is only when we focus in on making these kinds of individual improvements and making our own individual contributions at every single opportunity in practice and races that we can experience the biggest rewards that rowing has to offer.