

Top Tips for Coxing the Tideway

Coxing the tideway is a daunting experience, but with a little knowledge and preparation, it's not as scary as it might seem. First things first, watch the 'Coxing a Tideway head' on YouTube: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RSI8XiXfpng>
Lots of good advice and a few snippets of what it's actually like.

It's all about the marshalling....

Main piece of advice is to **be VERY organised about the marshalling arrangements and rules** etc. The best thing you can do for your crew before the race is to be totally in control. That way, all they have to do is row, and to be honest, that's all rowers are capable of anyway. The race is the easy bit. If you know what you're doing you will be far less daunted by the 299 other crews all afloat at the same time (it has to be seen to be believed, think log jam!!)

Other TOP TIP - **keep calm and do not worry if marshalls / other crews shout at you**. They almost certainly will, especially the posh ones from London who think they rule the rowing world! Just be polite, do as the marshalls say (as far as possible), and stay out of trouble.

Each race's website / email correspondence gives extensive marshalling / competitor's instructions. Print these out and study them in great detail. Know your crew number, as this will dictate where you need to marshal and at what time. You'll also need a good map of the marshalling area, with crossing points if you need to cross the river relative to where you boat from. Everything is explained relative to the 'Middlesex' (North) and 'Surrey' banks, and the various bridges. You might also like to print out the general tideway rules, which apply when the river is no longer closed for racing. These will tell you which side of the river to be on (as it changes with the tide) and where you can cross (there should also be marshalls to tell you). This is mostly relevant if you boat from Chiswick and need to row all the way back once the race has finished. There will be lots of marshalls in small boats, they are sometimes a bit grumpy but ignore that and ask them anything you're not sure of.

Boating from Putney (eg Vesta): you'll need about an hour to get to the start (generous, but better to be early than late).

Boating from Chiswick (eg Thames Tradesmen): you're practically at the start already but you'll need to boat before the race starts if you have to cross the river to marshal.

So, boat in plenty of time, and row up to the start. Stay close to the boat in front of you, you'll probably need to row full crew. Stay close into the bank to avoid the stream (fastest in the middle of the river). If you stop, try and point your bows a little to the bank to prevent the boat turning into the river on the stream. Watch out for shallow patches. Be very careful around bridges, the stream is strong. Row full crew and don't stop if you can help it. Remember that once you're through a bridge, the stream may still sweep you back towards it so be aware and keep rowing if you can.

Find other crews with similar numbers and join the queue. If you're number 204, you'll stop behind 205 and in front of 203. Then you basically have to wait your turn. Try to keep your bows pointing into the bank. Remember that the river flows FAST so even if you're tucked right

into the bank, you'll be moving (backwards!) Make sure you keep crew alert as they will have to help you out by taking strokes to keep you in position relative to the other crews, and also to keep you tucked in. Don't let a situation develop, time to get OCD about keeping the boat where you want it! Much easier to deal with a little situation than wait until you're horizontal across the river the being swept back towards Barnes Bridge.....it does happen, so be careful. Then it's more shouting from marshalls, lots of crews in a stress rowing hard up to the start... But you'll be in position and relaxing with your crew (in the sunshine?!?!?)

The race itself

The race will start and you'll see the faster crews go past. Have a look at where they steer. They'll be IN THE MIDDLE! (that's my top tip for the race part. STAY IN THE MIDDLE!!!! got it???) As the divisions go off, you'll gradually move up towards the start. Keep close to the crew in front, keeps the marshalls happy. Be a bit careful as the water level will go down a bit before you start, so look out for the shallows. Stay as far away from all obstacles as you can!

OK so the RACE. Shortly before you start, you'll need to get your crew ready. The marshalls shout 'tops off' but use your common sense and watch other crews. When you are ready to turn, everyone pretty much turns together. LISTEN hard to the marshalls at this point.

When you're given the OK to turn, a good way to do it is to start with just the side closest to the bank rowing on for a couple, then the other side to square their blades in the water. You probably won't need to do a normal spin as the stream will catch the bows and help you out. So just be alert and aware of where your boat is going. If it goes a bit wrong, don't panic, even if they are shouting, they're just stressed about their precious race. Stay focused and get yourself sorted.

You'll then be able to see Chiswick bridge - big grey arched thing. The start is just the other side of it, so it's good to think of the bridge as your start line so you'll be at race pace in plenty of time. Then you're off and racing and all you have to do is execute your race plan and steer. And then we get on to 'the racing line'. It's actually pretty difficult to even know where you are relative to the bank on your first go, so focus on doing a good job, but don't worry if it's not quite perfect.

Simple steering

VERY IMPORTANT - STAY IN THE MIDDLE! follow the curve of the river, and **don't cut the corners**. If that is all you can do, that is ABSOLUTELY FINE for a first go, and even second....third. The difference between a terrible line and a perfect line is huge, but the difference between a perfect line and just staying in the middle will only be small. You're better off not worrying too much and therefore having brain power to shout pertinent things at your crew and worry about other crew around you.

More advanced steering (one opinion, there are many)

For more steering tips, there's a good guide on Twickenham RC's website:

<http://www.twrc.rowing.org.uk/coach/tideway.htm>

Anything involving lining trees up with church steeples is possibly taking things a bit too far, this

guide is fairly straightforward and achievable. Something like this (based on TWRC's account, helps if you read while looking at a river map):

- From Chiswick to Barnes, stay pretty central, perhaps slightly left of middle, but no less than 1/3 of the river's width from the left hand bank.
- After Barnes, take the rest of the corner a bit wider, but still no less than 1/3 of the river's width from the right hand bank.
- Then stay almost straight until you get to the next bend, where it's pretty important to stay over to the left (the middle will do though!!).
- Stick close to Chiswick Eyot (funny island thing noticeable only to the experienced eye. It's covered in reeds, that may help).
- STAY WIDE (left) round this bend (or in the middle, that's fine! just don't cut the corner!!)
- As you start getting close to Hammersmith, you want to find the magic lamppost. Stay wide for as long as you can, then head for the 'second lamppost from the right hand buttress' - ie to the left of the buttress itself so you're still under the wide gap of the bridge. Apparently this is where the fastest stream is. And all your supporters will be there so good to head for some cheers!
- Then it's easy, just stay on the right (still 1/3 of the river's width from the right hand bank) all the way home. Pretty important not to drift left here as the water over on the left half of the river is pretty dead. Again, the middle will be fine!
- Don't crash into the black buoy!!! It's the biggest cliché in tideway racing. It's not even black anymore, it's yellow, and it has flashing lights on it. It's not actually that big, it's like an oil drum, and it's not that easy to see..... In reality, you'd have to be pretty daft to crash into it given that it marks the start of a long and obvious line of boats! But it does happen....

If that's too much, IGNORE IT and simply stay in the middle. The stream will take you to a certain extent. The main things from the above are **staying wide around the big bend before Hammersmith, going under the right side of the bridge (but not cutting that corner!), then staying to the right after Hammersmith all the way home.** If you can remember those three things plus staying in the middle at all other times, you'll do a great job. But if you can only remember to stay in the middle, that will be perfectly good enough! (If anyone starts talking about lining up church steeples with random trees, just nod politely and then forget all about it...)

During the race

Overtaking..... If you are being overtaken, you are supposed to get out of the way. Ideally, go wide rather than cutting the corner as this will keep you in faster water. But in reality, just steer in the sensible direction to get out of their way a bit....not too much.....it's a big wide river and they will have plenty of space. Might be an idea to have stroke /bow organised to tell you about any crews, but don't steer until they're about 1/2 a length from you, or even closer. If you are doing the overtaking then great, hold your line if you can as they SHOULD move out of your way. They may not, so make sure you're in a sensible position to steer round them (wide of them relative to the corner if you can).

Oh, and look out for the green and red channel buoys that they've now put all over the flippin' river! In theory you should be miles away from them but plenty of crews manage to 'find' them!

The finish

And finally, the finish. Good to know where it is, for starters! If in doubt, keep rowing at race pace until the bridge. There will be a big sign (on one side or the other, this seems to vary!), and maybe even a bell to tell you you've finished. See the race instructions for what to do after that. It's VERY important that you keep the crew rowing even after the finish. Go through both bridges full crew so that you keep out of the way of other finishers. There will be more marshalls (shouting), probably one to tell you where to spin but it will be fairly obvious.

Then paddle carefully back up to where you boated from (very close if you're in Putney, a bit of a hike if you're at Chiswick!) Be VERY CAREFUL of the shallows now, as it's extremely easy to beach the boat. Make sure the crew are all listening up and not chatting excitedly about their race - that comes when the boat is safely off the water! You can paddle half crew unless told otherwise, get some kit back on. But try and keep pace with the other crews. It is likely to be utter chaos..... so keep your focus, stay calm, and try to stay out of trouble. If you're headed back to Chiswick, make sure you know the river rules and where to cross. Then also be VERY CAREFUL getting people out of the boat. You'll need to keep the boat in deepish water, and don't let them all just jump out because swimming at this point would be embarrassing..... Hopefully you'll have someone there to help.

And that's it, you've survived, and hopefully had a great race!