



STEERING ACCREDITATION

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INTRODUCTION

Due to an increase in boating traffic within False Creek and to prevent collisions during the Regatta and Festival races, the Alcan Dragon Boat Festival has introduced a Steering Accreditation Course.

The Steering Accreditation Course will consist of 3 parts:

1. Boating Safety
2. A Practical course/test on the water
3. Steering at a Regatta and Festival

Every team must have their steersperson take this Clinic at Dragon Zone or FCRCC. It is recommended that each team have more than 1 person from their team take this course.

To gain full accreditation, a steersperson must:

1. take this course
2. pass the practical test where your basic steering skills are assessed
3. steer in 3 races successfully

Local steerspersons taking the Steering Accreditation Courses from Dragon Zone or FCRCC will be the only people that will be allowed to steer at Dragon Zone, the mandatory practices, the Festival Regatta and Alcan Dragon Boat Festival.

Once you have passed the practical test and steered in the Festival successfully, your accreditation will be good for 3 years.

Thanks to Alan Owen for creating the draft of this Steering Accreditation Course.

DRAGON BOAT STEERSPERSON INSTRUCTION GUIDE

This Steersperson Instruction Guide provides a 'how to' guide of essential information for anyone taking on the responsibility of steering a dragon boat in practice and in competition. This guide covers the following topics:

- A. Boating Safety & The Steersperson's Responsibilities
- B. Rules of the Road
- C. Safe Boating Practices
- D. Undocking and Docking a Dragon Boat
- E. Steering a Dragon Boat in Practice Sessions
- F. Preparing for a Dragon Boat Festival
- G. Festival Racing
 - Starts and Start Procedures
 - Racing Underway & Race Conduct
 - Proper Finish
 - Coping with the Unexpected During a Race
 - Race Regulations - A Steersperson's Perspective

A. Boating Safety & The Steersperson's Responsibilities

While on the water, the steersperson is responsible for the safe operation of the dragon boat and safety of the crew. This requires knowledge of boating safety and safe boating practices at all times.

The Canadian Coast Guard requires the following equipment for a dragon boat:

1. a personal floatation device (PFD) or lifejacket of appropriate size for each member of the crew, the Alcan Dragon Boat Festival requires that each crew member wear their PFD or lifejacket at all times while on the water
2. a buoyant heaving line of not less than 15m in length
3. two bailers
4. a sound signaling device
5. if operated after sunset, a white 360° visibility navigation light at the stern

The Alcan Dragon Boat Festival supplies each dragon boat with: a PFD for each crew member; an orange floating box that contains the heaving line and a Fox 40 whistle; 2 bailers and a white navigation light (for practices that take place after sunset).

- It is your responsibility to ensure that each crew member on your dragon boat has a PFD and wears it.
- Be aware of any non-swimmers on your crew and assign a buddy to the non-swimmer in case of a capsized.
- Be notified of any crew member who has a medical condition that you should be aware of.

- Have your team adopt good skills in getting in and out of the boat at the dock – load and unload from the center of the boat. The drummer and steersperson getting in first and out last.
- Prior to leaving the dock check that the steering oar is securely tied into its bracket.
- Have your crew bail out any water prior to docking.
- Always communicate to your team in a loud clear voice. Because you have responsibility for the safe operation of the dragon boat on the water, your instructions take priority over the instructions of the drummer, coach, or captain.
- Your team should recognize the importance of following all instructions quickly. You are the eyes and ears of your crew while on the water; your instructions must be followed for their safety.
- It is essential that you maintain a quiet boat when you are giving instructions to navigate amongst other boats. Call to your crew to “Listen Up” for instructions – their safety on the water is in your hands – **respect for your calls is mandatory.**
- Always be aware of what is happening on the water in proximity to your boat. Be aware of boats approaching from behind and from either side as well as boats ahead of you.
- Always "brace the boat" (paddles flat in the water) for crew seat changes. This stabilizes the boat and reduces the likelihood of someone losing their balance due to a rocking or unsteady boat while they change positions in the boat.

B. Rules of the Road

The steersperson must be aware of the “Rules of the Road” for safe navigation of the dragon boat. Safe boating regulations apply to all recreational vessels. These Rules of the Road apply to every vessel in all navigable waters – from canoe to supertanker. You as a steersperson must adhere to these rules – develop good boating practices from the start.

- You are required to maintain a proper lookout at all times. You are to determine if there is any risk of collision with another boat and **take all action necessary to avoid such a collision.**
- You should stay to the right hand side when moving into or out of a practice area such as a creek or cove or when moving up or down any channel. Adopt a counter clockwise route around your designated dragon boat practice area.
- When you are passing a boat coming towards you, stay to the right hand side. Indicate your course early so the other boat knows your intention.
- When you are overtaking another boat stay well clear of the boat you are overtaking.
- Any boat approaching you from the right hand side has the right of way – stay clear and yield to the other boat.
- Give larger boats (just about everyone!) the right of way.
- Always check over your shoulder to see that your course is clear before you turn or change to a new course heading.

C. Safe Boating Practices

The following are additional safe boating practices particularly applicable to dragon boating:

- Establish a comfortable and steady steering position, well balanced with knees bent. *You must remain standing while you are steering.*
- Wear shoes with a good grip. A baseball cap is advisable if you expect sun in the late afternoon as you may need to see ahead into the sunset.
- On the way out to your practice or to a race, pay attention to wind, tides and currents. The wind can be seen by observing flags on buildings. A rising or falling tide will

increase the speed of the water (the current) in narrower waterways such as under bridges. A low tide will expose rocks along the shore – keep well clear. (In False Creek, Vancouver, only use the center channel under the Cambie Bridge).

- Be aware of changing weather patterns and avoid gusty conditions that could create swells. Plan ahead and head for shore and to the dock if gusty conditions arise.
- While you are practicing, learn instinctively how your boat turns - push the steering oar right to turn left, etc.
- Learn that your boat reacts differently to the steering oar at different boat speeds – when you are stopped the oar has no steering impact, when you are at race pace the boat responds quickly (requiring a soft steering touch to guard against over steering a course change).
- The angle of the steering oar and depth of the oar also effect steering. Practice and get used to these differences.
- It is a good practice to hold your headings (course, direction) constant and make gradual course changes – don't weave back and forth down the practice area – be predictable in your course headings so other boats know your intentions.
- Practice back paddling the boat, know the turn circle and how to steer a straight course backwards. This will be valuable during race starts as you control the boat and ensure you are in a good position for a 'clean start'.
- When backing up - go slow to prevent the oar from locking in its bracket; if this happens "Hold The Boat" and correct the oar lock and then back the boat again.
- Develop a "local knowledge" of your practice area – learn the routes of tugs, water taxis and the boat traffic in and out of marinas in the area you practice.
- If you see a tug then expect a barge, give them both wide clearance and NEVER go between them. In a cove or creek the barge will generally be tied up close behind the tug. At night the tug may display a vertical mast of lights - this will indicate that it is pulling a barge.
- Stay well clear of the stern of tugs and other boats, the wash created by the boat's propellers can be strong.
- Stay clear of anchored boats. They will have an anchor line stretching forward off their bow and may have a stern line to shore or to a second anchor. (If they have one anchor line rather than two and it is breezy, their bow will point into the wind.)
- Around dock areas watch for boats moving in and out and give them ample clearance. Look up to see if any of the masts of sailboats are moving down a dock lane – if so give them ample clearance as they have limited steering capability when moving out of their dock.
- If you are coming around the corner of a dock with limited visibility stay out from the corner. Have your drummer or one of the stroke paddlers keep a lookout for approaching traffic.
- Do not assume that larger boats see you. Stay well clear and respect their course line. Again, take a predictable course heading and maintain a course that keeps you well clear of a collision course with other boats. *A collision course is one in which the angle between you and the other boat remains constant and the distance between you is decreasing.*
- Do a periodic 360-degree scan of the water to check traffic in your practice area. This is important to ensure that you are staying clear of other boats in the area.
- Give rowing crews a wide berth and respect their course lines. These boats do not have the steering capabilities that you have in a dragon boat. They are also facing backward in their shell and do not have the view of the water ahead that you have from your dragon boat. Steer clear of their coach boat as well – give it room to stay alongside the rowing shell.

D. Undocking and Docking a Dragon Boat

When you have checked the following:

- a) that everyone is wearing a lifejacket,
- b) that the steering oar is secure in its bracket,
- c) bailed any water from the boat, and
- d) everyone is seated

you are then ready to move away from the dock.

Undocking:

- Prepare to move away from the dock when your crew is ready. You must have their attention and check that the way is clear for you to move away from the dock.
- If there is a dock master, adhere to his/her instructions - both going out and coming in.
- Have your crew push the boat away from the dock so that the paddlers on both sides can put their paddles in the water.
- Call for quiet ("Listen Up") then "Paddles Up", then "Back Her Down" if you are backing out from the dock. Use "Take Her Away" if you are proceeding forward off the dock.
- Take your time and be predictable to other boats. There is no need to rush away from the dock area.
- Give small boats the clearance they need. Let them know your intentions when undocking and pick a clear channel to guide your boat through other boat traffic.
- Once clear of the dock, have the crew pull in the rubber fenders that are used to protect the side of the dragon boat.
- Once away from the dock and underway out to your practice area you can turn control of the boat over to the coach. While in transit out to the practice area, take your time and become aware of the other boat traffic, the wind, water conditions, etc.

Docking:

- As you complete your practice and approach your dock, have the crew put the rubber fenders over the side to protect the dragon boat. They should have the dock lines ready to hand to a person at the dock.
- If there is a line of boats coming in then "Hold The Boat" and wait in line for a spot on the dock. If there is a dock master on duty, watch for hand signals as to which dock you should move towards.
- Take a good line into the dock, slowing the boat so the dock people know your intentions as to which side of the dock you are approaching.
- Check if the wind will be blowing you into or away from the dock. Let this govern how you approach the dock. If the wind is behind you then be prepared to hold the boat longer and have the paddles in the water to keep you from blowing in. The paddles will create a drag to slow the effects of the wind.
- Approach the dock slowly, fenders and dock lines ready, then "Hold The Boat" say four or five boat lengths from the dock, then "Let Her Run" to keep some forward momentum to move to the dock without bumping against the dock.
- Call to the crew to keep their hands and paddles inboard on the docking side of the boat – not between the boat and the dock where they could get injured.
- Glide in smoothly and slowly – take it easy. If you need a bit of boat speed after you have stopped the boat within a few boat lengths of the dock, then just use the back four paddlers to take her in the last few boat lengths.

- Make sure that the dragon boat is securely tied at the dock prior to your crew stepping onto the dock.
- Before you leave the boat, prop the steering oar out of the water and onto the seats in the boat. This will minimize its interference with boats docking alongside your boat.
- If you see another dragon boat coming alongside, check that its rubber fenders are in the water and give it a hand to secure it to your boat. Everyone appreciates a helping hand while docking.

E. Steering a Dragon Boat In Practice Sessions

Being a good steersperson takes practice in boat handling as well as being knowledgeable of the Rules of the Road and safe boating practices as covered above. Here are some tips and advice for your practice sessions:

- Check the boat balance after you have run a few lengths of your practice area. Adjust the paddlers so that their weight is even right and left and that the boat tracks relatively straight without a lot of steering correction. You also want the boat to be slightly stern heavy, not bow heavy. Adjust your crew accordingly.
- Steering slows the boat, make small course adjustments, don't zig zag down the course.
- Practice steering close to another dragon boat down the course. You want to get yourself and your crew familiar with another crew racing alongside your crew at close quarters. You should leave a minimum of 3 meters between boats.
- Focus all of your attention outside the boat, watch for other boat traffic and establish a target onshore as a target heading. Don't get distracted by the calls on other boats during a practice race. Your focus is on your boat's course.
- Adjust your boat's course or 'Hold The Boat' as required to stay clear of other traffic.
- Become familiar with the race course: boat staging area, start line, finish line, dock etc.

Practice all calls:

- **Paddles Up** – paddles raised, ready to move into the first stroke together
- **Take Her Away** – start paddling, following the strokes' lead
- **Let Her Run** – stop paddling, let the boat glide forward on its own momentum
- **Hold The Boat** – paddles down in the water braced to stop the boat quickly
- **Back Her Down or Back Paddle** – slowly paddle in reverse to back the boat up
- **Draw Left (or Right)** – paddle perpendicular to pull the boat sideways (all crew or only the front four or back four) - used at a start to counteract the wind blowing the boat sideways in the start lane prior to the start
- **Back Two/Three/Four Rows Only** – back row paddlers to move the boat very slowly forward (at a start)
- **Brace the Boat** – paddles flat out just below the waters surface and still, to hold the boat flat while stopped, for use when crew members change seats in the boat
- **Listen Up** – use this call to establish a quiet boat, to wait for instructions necessary for safety on the water
- **Be Ready** – everyone ready for the start, paddles buried for their first stroke of the race

F. Preparing for a Dragon Boat Festival

Your preparation for the festival should include the following:

- Read the Rules and Regulations for the Festival. (For the Vancouver Alcan Festival they are on the website <http://www.canadadragonboat.com>). Know what your specific responsibilities are in steering your boat to the boat staging area, start line, at the start, during the race, at the finish, and on and off the dock.
- Walk to the shore area close to the start and the finish areas. Observe a start or two, listening to the starters instructions, observing the start area wind conditions.
- Know where the crew marshalling area is and ensure that your team is there in plenty of time.
- Know your boat number which will also be the lane you are racing in.
- When lining up to go down to your boat, be in front of the line so you can load first, along with your drummer.
- In the festival your dragon boat will likely have a dragonhead and tail at the front and back. Allow extra clearance for these when moving in and out of the dock and stay clear of other boats.

G. Festival Racing

Starts and Start Procedures

Now you are prepared, have moved away from the dock and underway to the boat staging area. Key considerations now are as follows:

- Stay as close to the shore as possible and away from the race course.
- It is important that you move to the boat staging area without undue delay. You must listen to the direction of the Race Officials.
- Plan your approach to the boat staging area early which will be 50 to 75 meters back from the Start line. This will give you a sense of any sideways drift of your boat from any wind and enable you to get set up for a good start squarely in your lane.
- At the Vancouver Alcan Festival, the lanes are numbered from 1 to 9 with lane 1 on the North end (**closest to the dock**) with the lane buoy number to your right.
- Try to approach the pre-start line with the rest of the other boats, don't be too early and don't be too late.
- Set up on the same side of the lane as the wind is coming from – this will allow more room for your boat to drift sideways with the wind. If the wind is from your right side, then set up your approach to hug the right side of the lane – this will allow you to drift to the left but remain in your lane.
- Maintain a quiet boat so everyone hears your calls to get a good start – you should be the only one talking as you approach the start line.
- Your decisions are key to getting a good controlled start down the center of your race lane. You control the approach to the start line as you have the best view of the start.
- If you are drifting to the left side, call "Draw Right" for everyone to pull the boat sideways to the right.
- Keep the boat lined up straight, use the back 2, 4 or 6 paddlers (rows 10, 9 and 8) to approach the start line. Using only the back four (or two) paddlers to move the boat up the last few feet will give you more control at the start. Practice this at each practice so you will be ready for your races in a regatta or festival.
- Once the Starter calls all boat to approach the Start Line, the Drummer should guide the boat with hand signals so the head of the dragon boat will be right at the Start Line, too many crews start too far off the Start Line. It will be the Steersperson's job to have the dragon boat as close to the Start Line as possible.

- On the line, ensure that your crew is ready, paddles buried for their first stroke forward. If there is a delay, use the back four paddlers to hold the boat from crossing the line early – “Back Four Only – Back Her Down Two Strokes – Hold the Boat – Back Four Another Two Back – Hold the Boat.” Etc. “Be Ready”.
- If it is windy the Starter may call for a dead slow running start or quick start. This prevents the boats from blowing sideways and gives you better steering control in windy conditions. If a dead slow running start is called, follow the Starters instructions and stay even with the other boats as you are called up to the line. Make sure your crew knows that it is a running start and have them prepared to get off to a quick start. For moving to the line in a running start use your back six paddlers to give the boat momentum and keep it in position – the other paddlers should be in their ready positions for the start.
- Be ready and brace yourself for the surge at the start, don't get caught off balance.
- Be prepared for any wash coming off faster boats.
- Know the regulations regarding broken equipment at the start (explained further below) – take control of the boat from the drummer if this situation arises in the race.

Racing Underway and Race Conduct

This is why you have been practicing and preparing for this day. With the race underway you have one goal only, stay in your lane and guide the boat straight to the finish. Here are some tips to do this well:

- Pick out your steering course to stay in your lane and check it often during the race. You may be steering towards a lane marker on a bridge ahead or for a mark part way between the two finish line buoys.
- While in the race your attention is outside the boat, pick the line to steer and hold it steady. Do not get involved in looking at your crew – this distracts you from your job of keeping the boat straight and true down the race course.
- There will be referee boats following the dragon boats down the course. Obey all instructions directed at your boat, they will call your boat by boat number. I.e. “Boat Four, Move Left” – if this is called to your boat, make a gradual course correction to your left and then straighten.
- Be sure to make any course corrections gradually – over steering can cause problems and collisions. This is why your full attention is required outside the boat and on the course you are steering – so minor changes can be made as you move down the course.
- When one boat is in a position to overtake another boat during a race, it is the duty of the boat overtaking to keep clear of the boat being overtaken at all times; similarly, the boat being overtaken must not alter course to make difficulties for the overtaking boat or boats.
- If there is a risk of collision because you or another boat is off course or for any other reason then call “Hold The Boat” (crews are responsible for taking all action necessary to avoid colliding and minimizing impact with other boats and crews). This is a fun sport, not a life and death duel – always keep the safety of your crew and that of other boats uppermost in your mind.
- If the referee boat calls you to “Hold The Boat” do so at once – do not delay to question why – they can see more of the race course than you can.
- Should a race be stopped in progress, the Referees will display a red flag along with REPEATED blasts from horns, whistles or other noisemakers and give verbal instructions through a loud hailer.
- On the course remember to stay cool if you're alongside another boat. Steer a steady course in your lane. It can seem crowded and noisy on the racecourse – don't let the

noise and proximity of other boats distract you for a minute from your task to steer a straight and safe course.

- Know your race plan and plan with your drummer as to who will call the finishing strokes to your crew. If you are comfortable with this you can call the “Finish It Now” from your vantage point of knowing where you are on the racecourse and how close you are to the finish.

Proper Finish

Oh the glory of victory and the agony of defeat! You have arrived at the finish line by steering a good race. Here’s what to do after you cross the finish line:

- The finish line marker buoys can drift; make sure your boat is well over the line prior to calling “Let Her Run”. Continue to steer straight down your race lane.
- Once you are sure you are over the finish line, call "Let Her Run" then “Hold The Boat” and stay straight – do not turn until you have your boat stopped and know that your turn will not interfere with the course line of other boats.
- Congratulate the crew and then quickly put your attention back outside the boat to select your course to the loading and unloading dock.
- Check over your shoulder and know that your course is clear to have your crew “Take Her Away” back to the dock.
- Proceed to the dock without delay. The race schedule relies on all boats moving back to the dock and unloading as soon as they can so that the races stay on schedule.
- When approaching the dock, stay in line and hold your boat until called in by the dock master. Remember to allow additional dock space for the dragonhead and tail on your boat. Take it easy and guide your boat in slowly, rubber fenders out and dock line ready to hand to the dock assistant.
- Make your way off the dock area quickly. Once you have dropped off your lifejackets and paddles, clear the marshalling area immediately.

Coping with the Unexpected During a Race

When you encounter the unexpected be prepared. The following points should be kept in mind for the times when the unexpected occurs, either in practice or in a race:

- In the event of a crew being in distress, for example, a crew member lost overboard, a crew member seriously injured, the Steersperson or other crew members shall alert the Race Officials by signaling with their paddles held vertically, high in the air.
- Report any injuries to the Dock Master. The Team Manager must submit an injury report to the Race Registrar immediately following the injury.
- If a race is stopped in progress, follow the instructions of the referees. A re-race may be called. This will require you to paddle back to the boat staging area and wait in the boat staging area while the next race is run, then your heat will be re-raced.
- If your steering oar breaks, immediately call “Hold The Boat” and bring your boat to a stop. If you are in a race await assistance and direction from the referees boat.
- If a crew member’s paddle breaks, you must continue to race and be prepared to adjust course. You should have a spare paddle aboard and the crew should pass the paddle to the person who needs it. You should maintain your focus outside the boat – do not be distracted by what is happening in the boat in an instance such as this – your job is the straight course line.
- Should your boat capsize, the crew must:
 - a. remain with the boat;
 - b. check for their buddies;

- c. ensure that the non-swimmers and their buddy are together and safe;
- d. await rescue; and
- e. take a head count, and repeat every 30 seconds until all are recovered and accounted for.

- Confirm that PFDs are properly fastened and stay together with the boat
- Do not attempt to swim to shore
- Minimize loss of body heat by holding still and huddling close together
- Reassure panicking crew
- Arrest severe bleeding; support injured crew
- Provide non-swimmers with additional buoyancy (e.g. handful of paddles)

Race Regulations – A Steersperson’s Perspective

Pay particular attention to your steersperson responsibilities in the following sections of the Alcan Dragon Boat Festival Race Regulations:

- 1) (4.2.1) The various areas of the racecourse – learn these.
- 2) (5.1) You must follow the directions of the Race Officials at all times during the competition. Failure to do so may result in disciplinary action taken against the Crew.
- 3) (6.3.4) The authority of the Referees.
- 4) (6.4.1) Upon clearing the dock.
- 5) (6.4.2) The Boat Staging Area
- 6) (6.4.3) Call forward into Racing Lanes.
- 7) (7.1.4) Lining up for the start.
- 8) (7.1.5) Running starts.
- 9) (7.2.1) The starting call sequence.
- 10) (7.3.1) False starts.
- 11) (7.3.2) Penalty for false starts.
- 12) (7.4.1) Equipment failure off the start and up to 50 meters.
- 13) (8.1) Racing Underway
- 14) (8.2) Proper Finish or DNF
- 15) (8.3) Return to Base
- 16) (9.1) Refereeing and Disqualifications
- 17) (10) Penalties, Protests, and Appeals

Be sure you are familiar with all the rules and regulations so that you will be well prepared for the festival you are attending.

Have a safe and enjoyable time on the water. Steering is a great way to participate in dragon boating.