Welcome to the South End Rowing Club – San Francisco’s oldest rowing club – Since 1873

Congratulations! You have found us. The South End Rowing Club (SERC) is a very special community, with extraordinary members and an amazing history. South Enders have been rowing boats on the Bay recreationally and competitively for 147 years! We take great pride in the club and hope you too will become part of its rich and eclectic fabric. The mission of the South End Rowing program is as follows:

*The oldest San Francisco rowing club is dedicated to inclusive & participatory rowing; challenging oarswomen and oarsmen to their personal excellence. And through our safe & excellent oarsmanship, we continue to promote and encourage the rowing sport & the San Francisco Bay rowing tradition.*

This rowing clinic overview is geared towards those new to rowing and is intended to be read prior to your participation in an “on the water” rowing clinic. Rowing basics will be covered during the “on land” instruction part of the clinic, but you will realize your “hands on” experience on the water with your certified rowing instructors. You will be introduced to San Francisco Bay water knowledge, the process of launching / retrieving rowboats, rowing techniques and personalized instruction in rowing wooden & fiberglass Whitehall boats in Aquatic Park. Although lots of information will be presented, it will all come together with repeated rowing outings on the water.

New to the 2020 rowing season, I will be requesting of all clinic participants that they partake in two of our regularly scheduled Thursday evening “boat nights” *prior* to clinic attendance. Your participation works in several important ways:

- You will meet many of our fantastic rowers and hopefully be able to “buddy up” with an experienced rower for future outings,
- You will provide tremendous benefit to our rowing program by volunteering your time and energy for an hour and a half or so,
You will learn about our glorious fleet,
And bonus of bonuses, you will receive a scrumptious home cooked dinner for your efforts!

For simplicity, the rowing process will be broken down into **five** main areas:

1. SAN FRANCISCO BAY WATER
2. BOATS / BOAT LAUNCH
3. ROWING / MANEUVERING
4. BOAT RETRIEVAL
5. CERTIFICATION

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**1. SAN FRANCISCO BAY WATER**

Open water rowing is an inherently dangerous sport where we encounter hazards including cold water, strong tides and currents, motorized vessels, marine animals, and flotsam and jetsam. Rowers must practice common sense, safe procedures, and have emergency plans.

It is essential to understand the basics of SF bay water and its inherent actions prior to rowing boats in the bay. Unlike rowing in lakes or rivers, the bay has its own special dynamics that need to be understood in order to work with and not against Mother Nature.

- The bay Floods (Fills) and Ebbs (Empties) 2 times every day.
- Slack water is approximately a half hour window between tides. The water generally does not move one way or the other during this roughly 30-minute windows.
- Know how to read a tide book.
- YouTube Video Gary Emich and others on tides: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ogk7A6cu-SQ&list=PLu9t2dSV5kRB_JDVA0aq_W-rIw454Wjgy&index=5](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ogk7A6cu-SQ&list=PLu9t2dSV5kRB_JDVA0aq_W-rIw454Wjgy&index=5)
- The wind kicks up most every afternoon and can be fierce. Mornings are usually calm and are generally the best times to row in the bay.
- Generally, you will row into the tide when beginning your row and thus will return with the tide (more below in “Rowing section”).
  - When starting out and fresh / strong, you row into the tide.
  - When tired or have experienced equipment issues – you row with the tide upon return to SERC.
2. BOATS / BOAT LAUNCH

A word about our fleet. This clinic will focus on rowing our wooden boats and fiberglass Whitehalls. Once a general knowledge of bay rowing is gained, these skills will form the foundation for rowing other boats in our fleet. Other boating opportunities include shells, coastal rowers, and / or sweep rowing in the barge. Our Viking class boats are the premiere wooden Whitehalls in the club. The Valhalla, Valkyrie and the Thor are advanced boats and access to row them will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. We adore and guard these valuable boats like Odin (the Viking God) would!

You will need to prepare your boat with proper and required equipment prior to departure from the dock. Launching a boat is a distinct process that needs to be mastered prior to launching a boat on your own. All steps below are mandatory for new rowers. A note: These guidelines are geared towards those new to rowing. Many of the experienced rowers have their own processes for launching, rowing and retrieving the wooden boats.

- Inspect boat for damage prior to rowing. Never row boats that are marked as under repair.
- Collect a marine radio from upper level behind cook shack. Tune to channel 16 (coast guard traffic) or 69 (swim communication channel – for piloting swims).
- 1 personal floating device (PDF) per person in the boat and 1 square “throw” per boat required.
- 1 bailer and 1 sponge.
- Air horn, coast guard approved whistle or comparable noise maker.
- A dry bag with simple first aid kit / spare tools (adjustable wrench, zip ties and roll of duct tape) and a VHF (very high frequency) radio are strongly recommended for each rower to purchase. The rower should have the ability to contact the Coast Guard for assistance if needed, and especially when rowing alone. Personal belongings can go into the dry bag (bring snacks and water for longer rows). Secure bag to inside of boat. Preferably a location that can accessed from your seat.
- Collect a set of oars. Check hand grip position for overlap – do this for each set of oars in boat prior to departure. Walk oars down to end of dock separate from boat. Place oars inside and on far side of boat (on the other side of the boat that you are entering from) for a clear path of entry.
- If you are piloting a swim, collect an orange and yellow flag (indicates “man overboard”). Insert flag into hole at stern of boat. Insert only at start of swim. Wool blankets are also good for “pulled” swimmers, if any.
• Check the seat for smooth and uninterrupted sliding. Use a cloth rag to clean the tracks of grit. Check that your foot stretchers are functioning properly and in good working order and that the straps are not broken.

• Roll boat to pivot point at the end of dock – to location of dock winch before the pivoting portion of the dock. Generally, if dock is less than 30-degrees, you can safely roll boat to end of dock to water level.

• If very low tide (when dock angle is more than 30-degrees – or whenever rower feels the need for winch assistance with boat launch) – then raise dock to level position. Move boat to end of dock and secure boat with bow line to one of the cleats that are closest to dock winch. Use winch to slowly and safely lower boat to water level.

• There is a yellow 4”x4” block equipped with two “pins” at the water’s edge of the dock. Ensure that prior to rolling boat from dock’s pivot point to waterline, that this block is in place with both pins inserted. This block is the backstop for the dolly wheels as you move the boat to / into the water. Make sure you line up the boat and dolly so that the wheels engage the yellow block.

• Lift and push boat off dolly and orient the boat so that bow points towards the Golden Gate Bridge. Secure bow line to cleat. If single rower, tie bowline to cleat (with bow into tide). If two rowers, bow seat rower to hold boat and stroke seat to move dolly to upper dock – and place it above the dock pivot point on opposite side of dock from winch. Ensure dolly is secured from wind by turning upside down.

• Leave dock untethered when you depart (or dock will be “perched” with a tide change and you will require assistance from someone on shore to lower the dock so that you can retrieve your boat). It is best to allow for some slack in the dock cables in anticipation of tide changes.

• Bow seat to fend off boat from dock. Stroke seat into boat first. Use “burden boards” for stepping into boat. Avoid stepping on any wood members other than the burden boards. Stay low and centered. Stroke seat fends off dock by grasping rope attached to end of dock. Bow seat enters boat. Both rowers secure waterside oars. Rowers push boat off dock (never use blade end of oar to do so. The handle end of oar is acceptable to push off with). CHECK FOR SWIMMERS BEFORE PUSHING OFF OF DOCK. Bow seat secures second oar and rows boat to a clear distance off the dock. Stroke seat secures second oar.

3. ROWING / MANEUVERING

• You are rowing – backwards!

• **Bow** = front and **Stern** = back of boat. Bow seat and stroke seat positions.

• 1.) Catch, 2.) Drive, 3.) Release/Finish, 4.) Recovery

• ROLES IN BOAT: Bow seat steers. Stroke seat sets rowing pace – setting “the stroke”. Do not confuse these roles.
Once stroke pace is set, bow seat “matches” stroke seat’s pace. If disruption in stroke seat’s stroke, bow seat needs to adjust and respond accordingly. You have the advantage of seeing the stroke seat rowing movements. Avoid clashing oars.

If danger is perceived, any rower can call “hold water”! This action will rapidly halt the forward progress of the boat. Both rowers need to know how to hold water. This rowing concept will be taught on the water.

- **ROWER AWARENESS:** Bow seat will need to be vigilant in looking out for swimmers, other vessels, obstacles always and especially within the cove / close to the SERC dock. Looking behind you every 2 to 3 strokes in the cove is a good rule of thumb for good safe visibility.

- The bay is filed with navigational hazards such as buoys, posts and channel markers, Anita Rock and sand bars. In the clinic we will instruct on right of way and general navigational rules. All rowers must be aware of all bay features.

- **STEERING CALLS:** “Right and Left” calls from bow seat for steering rather than “Port and Starboard”. While rowing, your left hand holds the Starboard oar. Right hand holds the Port oar. Port and Starboard are standard rowing terms you should learn. However, for simplicity when first learning to row, right and left can be used. Example: “3 hard on left!” = for the next three strokes you will pull harder with your left and lighter with your right hand. This will steer the boat in the direction of the right side / port side.

- **STOPPING THE BOAT / TURNING:** A “Hold water” call means you are encountering danger and need to immediately stop the boat. To hold water, you drop your blades in the water “square” (not feathered) and brace your oar handles near the center of your chest. The pull can be quite strong – but if you push with your hands into the handles and hold your core firm, the boat will come to a halt.

  - You can turn a boat gradually by rowing stronger / harder with the oar opposite of the direction you want to go.

  - You can turn a boat quickly by continuing to row with your outside oar but stop rowing with the inside oar (direction of turn), or

  - You can turn the boat quickest by holding water on the inside oar and continuing to row with your outside oar.

  - You can turn the boat in a circle by “backing” strokes with the inside oar and alternating with regular strokes with your outside oar. This is called a “river turn”. This is usually done at a stand still.

- **BOW SEAT STEERING TO A DESTINATION:** Look behind you for your destination. Once you are pointing the boat at your destination – note what object is on your stern. Now, when rowing – hold this object on your stern. Call “right” or “left” stokes to stroke seat rower to adjust and keep this object on your stern. This method will get you to your desired location – without having to frequently look behind you.

- **ROWING WITH OR AGAINST THE TIDES:** Our general rule of thumb when determining your rowing destination is that:
• When starting out and fresh / strong, you row into the tide. This happens close to the shoreline.

• When tired, returning the boat to the club or experiencing equipment issues – you row with the tide upon return to SERC. This generally happens farther offshore (to get the full effect of the tide).

• CRABBING OR FERRY ANGLE: Depending on the tide, “crabbing” the boat may be necessary. When rowing to Alcatraz from SERC, you will be rowing across (perpendicular to) a tide (either ebb or flood) rather than with or into the tide. In this case, orienting the boat at a 45-degree angle to the incoming tide, is called crabbing or using a ferry angle. Rowing at this angle will move a boat effectively across an incoming or perpendicular tide.

• FEATHERING: This rowing concept will be taught on the water and is an advanced technique most useful for boat efficiency when rowing into a headwind. If not utilized, blades become “sails” effectively slowing down the forward motion of the boat.

## 4. BOAT RETRIEVAL

• Row boat back carefully towards the SERC dock with awareness of your surroundings. This is a busy swimmer zone.

• When bow seat feels able to navigate boat to end of dock solo – the stroke seat can stow their oars. Place oars inside the boat on the side away from the dock which clears a path for exiting the boat.

• Bow seat will look out for swimmers and with light power, row the boat to the SERC dock. Bring boat to dock so that bow is oriented “going with the tide”. Generally, this orientation will allow the tide to swing the stern of the boat to a retrieval position.

• Once boat is at end of dock bow seat grabs fixed rope on end of dock and fends off from dock. Stroke seat exits boat (low and centered) by using burden boards. Bow seat now stows oars.

• Stroke seat to retrieve dolly and roll it to the end of the dock for positioning to retrieve the boat. Stroke seat secures the dolly in place between yellow (square) and red (triangle) boards. The curved side of the red triangle board will be placed on the “uphill” or shoreside and face the dolly wheels.

• Stroke seat fends boat off dock while crouching down outside of boat on dock. This allows the bow seat rower to exit a stabilized boat (low and centered). Wear dock shoes you don’t mind getting wet. 90% of the time, your feet will get wet when fending the boat off from the dock during launch and retrieval. Do not let your feet getting wet affect how you handle the boat at the end of the dock.

• With both rowers now on dock and holding onto the bow line and bow of boat, both rowers “swing” boat to a perpendicular position aligning the bow with the dolly. Ideally, the tide should assist with this. (Occasionally, the wind, from the west, can be of greater force than the tide. In this case, bow seat should bring in boat to the end of the dock with bow going “with
the wind” so that the wind will swing boat’s stern around to perpendicular position for retrieval.). If you miss it on the first go (boat swings past perpendicular), another alternative is to spin the boat around another full 360 degrees to (re)align the bow perpendicular to the dock.

- When boat is nearly perpendicular, boat is to be “dipped” 3x by rowers and when boat raises after 3rd dip, both rowers lift and pull the boat onto the dolly. Once the bow of the boat is up onto the dolly, rowers will be on opposite sides of the boat. Each rower places their water side foot onto the wheel of the dolly / the red triangle board (“choke”) – effectively holding all in place. Once each rower is positioned in this manner, the boat is again lifted and pulled into place so that the dolly is centered underneath the boat.

- Remove the chalk (red triangle of wood) and place to the side of the dock. Collect other belongings if any, and place into boat.

- If dock is less that 30-degrees, each rower, on opposite sides of the boat, rolls the boat to the boathouse (1 rower on bow and 1 on stern is also effective).

- If dock is greater than 30-degrees, use bow line to attach boat to either of two cleats closest to the dock winch (not cleat closest to water). Secure bow line to cleat. Rowers can alternate winching dock up to level position (hard work after a long row). Once level, secure winch handle with attached rope to lock dock to current level. Roll boat to the boathouse.

- If other dollys are at end of dock (meaning other rower are out on water), return dock to waterline and leave rope off winch handle. If yours is the last dolly on dock, ensure dock is winched to level position and place rope on the handle to lock dock in place. An important double check at this point – check the log book to see if any shell boats are out. They do not have dollys but will still require access to a dock at the waterline upon returning.

- ROUGH WATER RETRIEVAL: When the wind and waves have made controlling the boat difficult you have the option to drag the boat up onto the dock to secure it.

- Remove the yellow pinned wheel block and set it off to the side with the pins pointed away from the center of the dock, not up. Wet the docks center board as this will make it easier to drag the boat up.

- You are now able to bring the boat straight up or on a diagonal, which ever method seems less likely to damage anything. Once the boat is on the dock, one rower will secure it with the bow and stern lines using the cleats on the sides of the dock. The other rower will keep the boat vertical.

- If the boat is flooded with water and equipped with a plug now is a good time to pull it and let the water drain out. Do not forget to replace the plug.

- Level and secure the dock. If necessary, find a SERC good Samaritan to help you straighten the boat onto the center of the dock; then place the dolly on the land side of the dock, block the wheels, put your waterside foot/feet onto the dolly wheel and red triangle and drag the boat up onto the dolly.
5. Roll boat back to the outside of the boathouse. See notes above about raising the dock of pivot portion of dock is too steep to roll boat up the dock.

- With boat outside of boathouse, remove belongings from boat. Return bailer / sponge, air horn, marine radio and PFD’s, SERC drybags and flags to their homes.
- Place oars horizontally onto the PVC stretchers. Hose oars down with fresh water. Dry them and return them to their home. Please do not store oars upright against the building as windy conditions can blow them over and damage them.
- Wipe down boat with chamois cloths drying the outside. Do not use fresh water on interior or exterior of boats. Use sponge to remove any water inside the boat. If the small wet/dry vacuum is near the sponge rack, vacuum any water from the bottom (bilge)
- Care for the ropes; coil them neatly if dry on the upper bow deck. It’s an art! Hang them loosely on bow / stern if wet.
- Roll boat back to position in boathouse. Place rubber mat under stern keel. Boats are always to rest on the stern, not bow. Make certain that oar locks are closed. Take note to keep boats clear in the upper boat house of the marked access to the Handicapped restroom. Take pride in how you have placed the boat back in the boathouse. Your name is in the logbook for all to see.
- Sign boat in and add any comments into log book. Document details of any damages or maintenance issues in the log book. Notify Boathouse Captain if any damages. If the boat is too damaged to row, place a note in the boat to advise potential next rower of its damaged condition and that it is not for rowing until it is repaired (by & funded by you!).
- After showering / before leaving club, check one last time for water in the lowest part of the boat. Sponge it out, if any is present.
- WELL DONE! You are on your way to becoming an important link in the chain of SERC rowers!!

5. CERTIFICATION (for self-launch and retrieval)

- Generally, it will take between five to eight rows in the cove and / or near shore rowing with a certified rowing instructor to become certified for self-launch and retrieval of the heavy wooden boat class. Once you become self-sufficient and confident, your certified instructor can vouch for your competency to the Rowing Commissioner and/or the Boat House Captain.
- The club offers separate training for other boats in the fleet including the Viking class boats, rowing shells, lite/coastal boats, power boats, South End or Hurly barge rowing and kayaks.
• The more you row, the more efficient and proficient you will become. Practice makes perfect! Getting out on the water often will bring your rowing skills up to snuff in no time. Contact your rowing buddy’s / mentors who you’ve met at boat night and get out there!

South End Rowing Rules and Boat Care:

• Boats are to be rowed only by South End members in good standing. Guests can pay the standard guest fee of $10.00 and can join you in a rowboat as a non-rowing participant.

• Boats are not permitted west of the Golden Gate Bridge. Boats should only be rowed in conditions of 15 knots or below from sunrise to sunset.

• All boats at the Club are available on a first come, first serve basis – except for SERC scheduled swims when pilots will have priority of boat use.

• Each SERC member is fully responsible for bringing each boat back the way they found it and for reporting any damage or vessel malfunction in the logbook or to the Boathouse Captain. If damage is incurred, the member who checked the vessel out is responsible for managing the repair process to completion and paying for any necessary parts or labor.

• BOAT CARE 1: Never be afraid or too proud to ask for help! First, we want you to be safe; second, our boats are priceless, and repairs are time consuming, expensive, and sometimes difficult. Take care of our beautiful fleet!

• BOAT CARE 2: Don’t bang the boats! Most damage occurs when the boats bang into the bumper at the dock edge, and when folks drop or bang boats onto the dock, dollies or other hard things. Baby the boats! Come in slowly and carefully at the dock; fend off the boat, get it off the edge of the dock as soon as you safely can. Lift and slide the boats onto dollies rather than heaving and dropping.

• BOAT CARE 3: Mind the interior! Try not to let oars and things bang the varnish at the boat interior; put PFDs under them or carry them down. Better for the boat and the oars to avoid vibration and banging. When wiping boats down, always put a sponge under the stern keel to prevent damage to the brass keep strips. Keep out the sand; wipe it up carefully with damp sponge or vacuum first thing when you get back. Care for the ropes; coil them neatly if dry; hang them loosely on bow / stern if wet. Don’t “grind” a wet sandy rope into the deck when coiling; it’s like sandpaper on the varnish!
Rowing Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs):

**Q: How do I get started rowing?**

A: Contact the Rowing Commissioner or Boathouse Captain. The South End also offers Rowing Clinics throughout the year, though early registration is required.

**Q: Can I take a Rowing Clinic at SERC to learn how to row and see if I like it before joining?**

A: No. No non-members can row SERC boats. You must join first. You will also be required to attend two boat nights prior to being permitted to attend a rowing clinic. These boat night experiences will go a long way towards helping you to decide whether joining the club/rowing is right for you.

**Q: I just joined and want to learn out to get out on the water ASAP, how do I do that?**

A: SERC is a volunteer run club, so nothing here happens ASAP per se, having said that, the best way to make that happen for yourself is to start VOLUNTEERING and MEETING PEOPLE. Come to boat night, mingle, help repair the boats, ask around for a mentor. Rome wasn’t built in a day. Eventually you’ll find someone with enough time and a schedule that aligns with yours to get out on the water. We’re all friendly, so just ask and be persistent. It is not uncommon to take some time to find a regular group of mentors.

**Q: I’m a cleared SERC rower now, can I take a friend out in a double (two-person boat) and have them row with me?**

A: No. Only SERC members may row boats. Your guest may join as a non-rowing passenger.

**Q: May non-members use the boats?**

A: No. South End boats are not available to the public, nor for rent. In fact, members themselves may use boats only after they’ve been certified by either the Boathouse Captain, Rowing Commissioner or certified trainer. Exceptions are made for visiting rowers from other clubs who may be invited to row in a double or a barge with a South End member(s) and must be cleared with the Rowing Commissioner or Boathouse Captain.

**Q: If I start rowing at SERC and something happens to a boat while I’m on the water, who pays for it?**

A: You do. As a volunteer run club with very low dues, each SERC member is fully responsible for bringing each boat back the way they found it and reporting any new damage. If damage is incurred, the member who checked the vessel out is responsible for managing the repair process to completion and paying for any necessary parts or labor.

**Q: May I store my own boat at SERC?**

A: No. Privately owned watercraft are not allowed to be stored on premises.

**Q: Is there a competitive rowing team at SERC?**

A: We’re competitive, but we do not have a regular crew. Except for the barges (South End and Hurley), our boats are either singles or doubles. Rowing at SERC is generally more social and recreational than competitive.