

LOST IN TRANSLATION?



Words tend to carry more than one meaning, so it isn't surprising that people interpret technical guides differently. This month **Robin Williams** suggests solutions



"All body swing should be completed by half way up the slide. From half slide the body needs to be stable, particularly the lumbar spine (just around the level of the top of the leggings)." Sounds simple enough, but there are a few what ifs...

Last time we looked at the challenges of getting good communication going so that rowers and coaches speak about technique using the same language. I am sure you find differences of approach within your crew, club and in different regions of the country, so I want to add some further suggestions for solving this. In the April issue I also mentioned that many leading rowing nations have similar guidelines with step-by-step pictorial sequences of the stroke cycle on their websites revealing little variation, so clearly it isn't as simple as just showing people pictures.

So this month I'm biting the bullet and am going to use the latest British Rowing material from the Level 2 Technical Handbook – available shortly as a poster for club

noticeboards and also viewable on the British Rowing website at www.britishrowing.org

The pictures carry useful descriptions of each position and movement, but this will no doubt be interpreted differently out there on the river when people turn the theory in to practice.

Take a picture of Mark Hunter, for example on page 52 of the booklet. This is the top

picture on the page and the description says: "All body swing should be completed by half way up the slide. From half slide the body needs to be stable, particularly the lumbar spine (just around the level of the top of the leggings)." Simple enough; well worded and it's a great picture. BUT – what if...

- Q1 My back is a different shape to his?
- Q2 I can't rock over that much?
- Q3 Can I rock over too much?
- Q4 What happens if I do keep swinging further up the slide?
- Q5 What is he *feeling* when he's in this position?
- Q6 How much *time* does he have before the next movement?
- Q7 What should the hull feel like? And the blades, the balance, the rhythm?

“Whatever the language used and whatever the level of crew, the important thing is to see why this picture matters”

You can see that you could easily write a chapter rather than a sentence about this picture if you were to fully describe what's going on and leave nothing in doubt! Furthermore, Mark can do it already. He's

an Olympic champion, but how hard was it to learn, how long did it take – what did his coaches say to him along the way...? The questions keep coming.

In trying to answer some of these questions, here are a few thoughts.

Questions 1 & 2

You can work on hamstring flexibility and posture to improve the rock over, but what Mark is *trying* to do is transfer his weight on to his feet to be ready for the glide and the next stroke. So, even with less rock over, the main target is to get yourself stable and balanced.

Questions 3 & 4

Yes, you can rock over too much and the consequence is to be short on the slide and over-reached in the trunk, which doesn't make for a good position to load the next stroke. Swinging in to the front creates weight against the hull and makes the catch heavy.

Questions 5, 6 & 7

Mark is feeling in control, relaxed, in a good position and is letting the hull do the work on the slide. This gives him ample time before he has to

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PHOTO: DON SOMMER

work again himself, perhaps a full second if he's paddling steadily. The hull is travelling well, giving maximum distance between puddles, and will not feel heavy or as though it's getting away; it will just feel a part of him.

What next?

So, what next? Well you, your crew and your coach need to flesh this process out and agree what your aims need to be.

For beginners, just dealing with the mechanical sequences is probably sufficient – legs, body, arms in the drive, and arms, body, legs in the recovery – so the language will be simple too.

Improvers will appreciate more levels of detail while experienced rowers will handle a lot more information – arms out long with the handle weight relaxed in the palms, head looking along the stern, shoulders relaxed, smooth sequences, plus moving in rhythm and time with the speed of the hull, breathing patterns, steering, making a call perhaps, relaxing the muscles, letting the boat run under you...

It can become a long list, but frame the language in a way your audience will understand and don't overload them with too many things to think about. It is also worth remembering that to scull like this also needs some physical training to have the strength to work in these positions.

Whatever the language used and whatever the

“What if ... my back is a different shape to his?”

level of crew, the important thing is to see why this picture matters. If you don't rock over like this you may arrive at the entry out of sequence and grab the water with your arms, you may 'trolley' on the slide because you are less balanced, you may even injure yourself by not sitting in a way which protects your discs.

So think about the *positives* – the first part of the recovery is really the follow-through from the acceleration of the last stroke, because of the momentum involved, so it is important for **rhythm**. It prepares you early for the catch so gives you a feeling of **time** during the sliding and being less hurried allows you to **relax**. It makes the next catch **simpler** because you are **stable** in yourself and on **balance** with the hull and more likely to be **in time** with the others. This position is also a **reference** position because it is where the fast arm and body movements have finished and everyone should be at this point together. The hull speed should carry you up the rest of the slide.

Talking points

Words tend to carry more than one meaning so it isn't surprising that people interpret technical guides differently. But as long as you can discuss and agree the broad concepts first – like acceleration, time, rhythm, stability etc – then you are on the way to a common technique. If you can then fit the mechanics to that – tall posture and good use of the legs to help that acceleration; proper sequences off the finish will create time and synchronisation – and then you will all be speaking the same language.

AT A GLANCE

How can rowers and coaches speak about technique using the same language?

1. You, your crew and your coach need to agree the broad concepts of technique first: acceleration, time, rhythm, stability etc...
2. You can then fit the mechanics – tall posture and good use of the legs to help that acceleration; proper sequences off the finish to create time and synchronisation.
3. Frame the language in a way your audience will understand – and don't overload them with too many things to think about.