



## FINDING THE RIGHT ROWING PROGRAM

If you are new to rowing, welcome to our sport and community! We hope you will enjoy your experience and will want to share it with others for a long time to come.

When it comes to rowing, no doubt you have heard rumours of blistered hands, early mornings and hard work. And guess what? They're all true! What keeps rowers going, however, are the deep friendships, meaningful accomplishments and great memories. Plus, it's a fantastic way to stay fit and add to your mental wellness.

Perhaps the most important thing any new participant can do is to decide what you want out of your sport experience. Are you really competitive and want to make it to the Olympic Games, or are you looking for a great reason to get outdoors and enjoy some exercise on the water with some new friends? Likely, you will fall somewhere between the extremes along the continuum. There are hundreds of great reasons to be involved in the sport. Knowing your motivations will help you choose the best program for your ambitions.

A few samples of initial rowing-related goals can include:

<b>Less Competitive</b>	<b>More Competitive</b>
<b>Improve my fitness</b>	Achieve excellence
<b>Work in a team setting</b>	See technical and physical improvements
<b>Get exercise in the outdoors</b>	Learn about training and competing
<b>Try something new</b>	A chance to race and compete
<b>Meet new people</b>	A chance to win

Rowing involves either sculling (two oars per person) or sweeping (one oar per person). The sculling boats include a quad, double and single, while the sweep events include pairs, fours and eights. Once you get going, you may develop a passion for either sculling or sweep rowing – or both! Keep this in mind when you look at your program options.

We recommend starting with a Learn to Row program. This will help you explore your motivations and goals for rowing. Learn to Row programs are initial 'Come Out and Try' rowing programs that introduce you to all aspects of the sport and give you a sample of what rowing will offer as you continue. Most clubs provide this opportunity. These programs may take place every day over a one- or two-week period, or may be once a week for eight weeks. Regardless of how it's scheduled, at the end of a Learn to Row program, you will have a good grasp of the rowing experience. This will help you figure out which program is right for you.

**Did You Know?** Oared vessels were used for war, fishing, commerce and transport long before humans began keeping written historical records. It wasn't until the early 1700s that boats began racing one another purely for sport. These races were typically held between professional watermen on the River Thames in England.



## A Program for Every Preference

Most clubs offer a variety of program options. The club manager or administrator should be able to tell you about the different opportunities that club offers. Determining your motivations for rowing will help you choose a program that suits you, and fits your aspirations. You want to be sure to select something you'll be happy with. For example, if you have competitive aspirations but register in a recreational program, you will likely feel dissatisfied; and if you just want to be recreational, yet register for a competitive program, you won't enjoy that, either (or at least...not yet!)

Once you have a clear handle on your reasons for wanting to row, ask about the options offered by the club and seek some guidance toward the program that best reflects you and your desires. Ask whether you can switch programs if things don't feel right. Rowing clubs and coaches want you to enjoy your sport experience and will do what they can to accommodate you; with advance notice and open communication, switching programs down the road shouldn't be a problem.

The following categories outline the spectrum of rowing programs at most clubs in Canada:

- Club rowers may row in a Junior (under 18), Senior (19+), or Masters (21+) training group. These groups may also be further categorized as recreational or competitive, depending on the skill level and availability/desire for increased training within the groups.
- Junior rowers (middle or junior high and high school athletes) may be divided further into the Junior A, B or C category, with Junior A being the oldest rowers.
- University/college athletes are divided into Novice, Junior Varsity and Varsity.
- Many of the above categories that row in competitive races are also divided further into Lightweight Rowing (up to 57 kg for women and 70 kg for men) and Heavyweight Rowing (no minimum or maximum standards).
- Para-rowing programs are offered for athletes with physical impairments.

Many clubs also offer shorter one-day, week-long, or seasonal events like youth summer camps, multi-sport camps and corporate rowing events.

Other recreational opportunities at some clubs include touring and coastal rowing, an exciting new opportunity for rowers who are looking for a new challenge. Coastal rowing pits rowers and their seaworthy boat against the rougher water conditions of the open ocean. More and more coastal regattas are being offered across Canada; you can find out more about touring and coastal rowing opportunities on the RCA website.

Some schools offer programs where the local rowing club introduces students to the sport on the ergometer (rowing machine), and then offers a "Come Out and Try Rowing" day down at the club. The junior rower may then have the option to row for their school in competitions, or



to row under the name of the club. Check whether your school has a rowing program, or if there's a possibility of starting one!

### If You Want To Be Competitive

If you choose a competitive program, you may want to consider your long-term objectives. Rowing offers many exciting opportunities. Youth rowers can row for a provincial team, earn a scholarship to row at university, or even land a position on the Canadian Rowing Team!

Learning to work hard for such a tangible and admirable goal are skills that will prove worthy wherever life takes you, in your rowing career and beyond. But keep in mind: an ambitious goal like rowing for a provincial/national or varsity team demands long, hard hours of dedication to training and skill improvement. Your coach can advise you on the expectations for the road ahead.

### If You Don't Want To Be Competitive

You don't need to have world-dominating or scholarship-winning ambitions to enjoy rowing! The fun and teamwork alone are worth pursuing. Sport is a great way for young people to exercise independence, develop positive life skills and take responsibility for their future.

### Not Just Your Average Rower?

If you are a rower with special needs or are differently able, be sure to communicate your relevant information with your club and coach as soon as you can. Sharing the workarounds and adaptations that have worked for you in other sport or learning situations helps you and your coach find solutions to any rowing-related issues. Saying, "Maybe if we tried this..." or, "This worked in the past, what do you think?" can go a long way toward creating mutual understanding between you and your coach, and making positive rowing progress.

These guidelines should get you off to a great start and on your way to a long and satisfying experience with rowing.

**Did You Know?** Rowing has won more Olympic medals for Canada than any other sport. Have you ever thought about competing on the world stage?

## **FAQs**

Here's a sampling of questions you can ask your coach or program director as you're getting ready to register:

### *What should I wear to my first sessions?*

Yes, rowers often wear close-fitting, sport-specific attire, but you don't need to head out to the Spandex Depot right away. Avoid loose clothing that could get caught in the moving parts of a rowing shell. You will also want something that won't bunch up or get in the way as you row.



Your coach and your teammates can help guide you toward gear that feels comfortable for the season and for your training intensity.

*How often and when do you train?*

This is an important question! Some programs train 10-14+ times a week, both early in the morning and later in the evening. Others might meet two or three times a week, either in the morning or after school/work.

*What are the expectations of the program, and can you accommodate any special situations?*

Some programs operate on a drop-in basis; most have set crews that rely on athletes arriving on time for every session.

*What are the club's and coach's goals for this program?*

Some programs train to compete locally, regionally, nationally, and even internationally. Others don't race at all, but focus instead on fitness and participation.

*Will there be a crew selection event? If so, how and when will it occur? Will selection be final after the selection event?*

Many coaches of competitive crews have a particular process for selecting their crews. Knowing how and when selection takes place will help you prepare for it.

*What are competitions like?*

Rowing competitions are traditionally called regattas. Regattas involve a series of boat competitions on a buoyed course that can include heats, semi-finals and finals. Regattas can vary in distance, including sprint (500 m) races, as well as 1000 m and 2000 m races. There may also be head races that can be 4-8 km long. These competitions usually occur on one or both days of a weekend, and may be followed by social events. Skills events are also now being introduced to regattas in order to assess skill development in new rowers. Find more information about the RCA CAN ROW Skills Event at [www.rowingcanada.org](http://www.rowingcanada.org).