

# STEERING CLINIC NOTES



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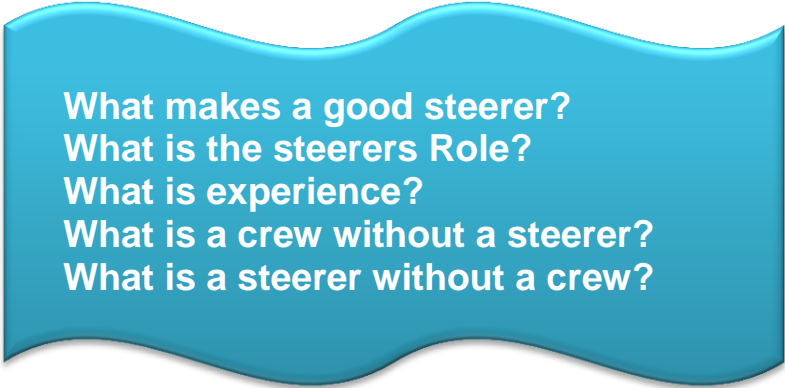
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**Note:** This guide was put together to complement a series of steering clinics. It is not intended to be a “perfect” guide, but rather a collection of my experiences over 14 years of steering. It also does not cover every aspect of steering, but hopefully it does provide new steerers or paddlers who want to learn to steer with some insight and a starting point.

The key to improving your steering ability is time on the water and learning from every scenario and experience. – Lara Collins

## STEERING:



What makes a good steerer?  
What is the steerers Role?  
What is experience?  
What is a crew without a steerer?  
What is a steerer without a crew?

### Key responsibilities:

- Ensure the canoe is safe. Whether Training or racing
- Keeping the canoe straight (Or on the best line) and using safest course / line, based on wind, current, time of the day
- Do everything possible to make the job of paddling easy for your crew (a straight line A to B is not always the best / fastest line. It may be useful to tack towards B to preserve crew energy when windy and introduce periods of surfing downwind).
- Contribute to the forward momentum of the canoe as much as possible
- Be efficient

### SAFETY

Always before training or racing ensure that the canoe is rigged safely. Ensure that you have sufficient safety equipment (Tubes, lights, bailers, Bungs and lifejackets!)

Always take a spare steering paddle. Whether it is training, racing, sprints or marathons always take a spare paddle that you can steer with. You never know when you will need it and more than likely it will be the time you don't take it. Steering paddles Break – Especially if you are doing turns. Be prepared.

### CONDITIONS

Take notice of the conditions; is the tide coming in or going out? Where is the wind coming from? What is the current doing?

Learn to read the tide (And if you can't then read the paper) It makes a big difference to your crew if you know what the tide is doing and when you are paddling against it. View [www.surf2surf.com](http://www.surf2surf.com) or [www.windguru.com](http://www.windguru.com) to check on tide and surf.

For big races, do some pre-race prep. Review the course map. Find out the tides, Look at some charts to determine the deep water. Visualise the race from start to finish.

### **RACE BRIEFINGS:**

Ask Questions – Make sure you know exactly what the course is. Don't just assume you are going to follow everyone else. Make sure you know what the tide is doing and think about where the best place to start the race is.



- Ask what the start procedure is.
- Ask where the finish line is.
- Ask where the race markers are and what colour.
- Leave no doubt in your mind!

Don't be shy to ask, because everyone else is probably thinking the same thing. (Even when people are rolling their eyes and thinking you're a nuisance or a know all)

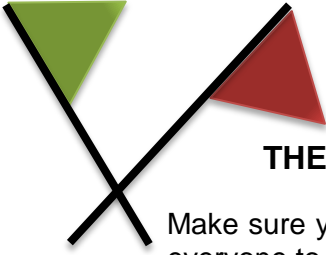
Take all the information back to your team and tell them the course before you start the race. This does 2 things:

- 1 - The crew know where they are going (in a long race this can be important mentally)
- 2 - It reinforces it into your own mind.

**You are responsible for the safety of your crew! make sure you know what the conditions are doing and you feel comfortable with the conditions! Whether racing OR training.**







## THE START:

Make sure you get out on the water with enough time for everyone to warm up. Tell your crew where you are going to start and why you are choosing that starting spot, get there early enough to set up. Take note of the current and wind, if it is behind you know that it is going to push you forward.

Line yourself up in such a way that you will not stress out your crew before the race.

Look at the crews around you. Take note of the steerers. Stay away from potential crashes (beginners steerers are to be avoided. Line up next to experienced steerers. They are less likely to crash into your waka).

Start lines are notorious for T-Bones and canoe carnage! Where possible stay clear of it, it will only stress your crew out. In order to stay clear you need to be aware of your

crew's ability off the start line. If your crew is not able to get out fast off the line they are more likely to get caught up in a bunch, more reason to stay away from the bunch.



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## STEERING STROKES:

### Ruddering or Poking

This is when the Paddle is used as a Rudder against the side of the canoe. If you poke on the left side of the canoe the canoe will turn left. If you poke on the right it will turn right. The key here is the depth of the paddle in the water and the angle of the blade of the side of the canoe.

The more depth of the blade the more "Bite" the turn has.

The more angle of the blade the more "Bite" the turn has.

The position of the rudder determines the drag on the canoe. You can direct the canoe subtly or drastically; creating maximum or minimum drag. It is possible to rudder the canoe in a way that is almost impossible to feel.

Try and poke with the blade in front of the body line. It feels natural to complete a stroke and end up with the paddle Ruddering slightly behind you. This type of rudder creates maximum drag. Your body will slightly turn towards the paddle; putting more body weight on that side.

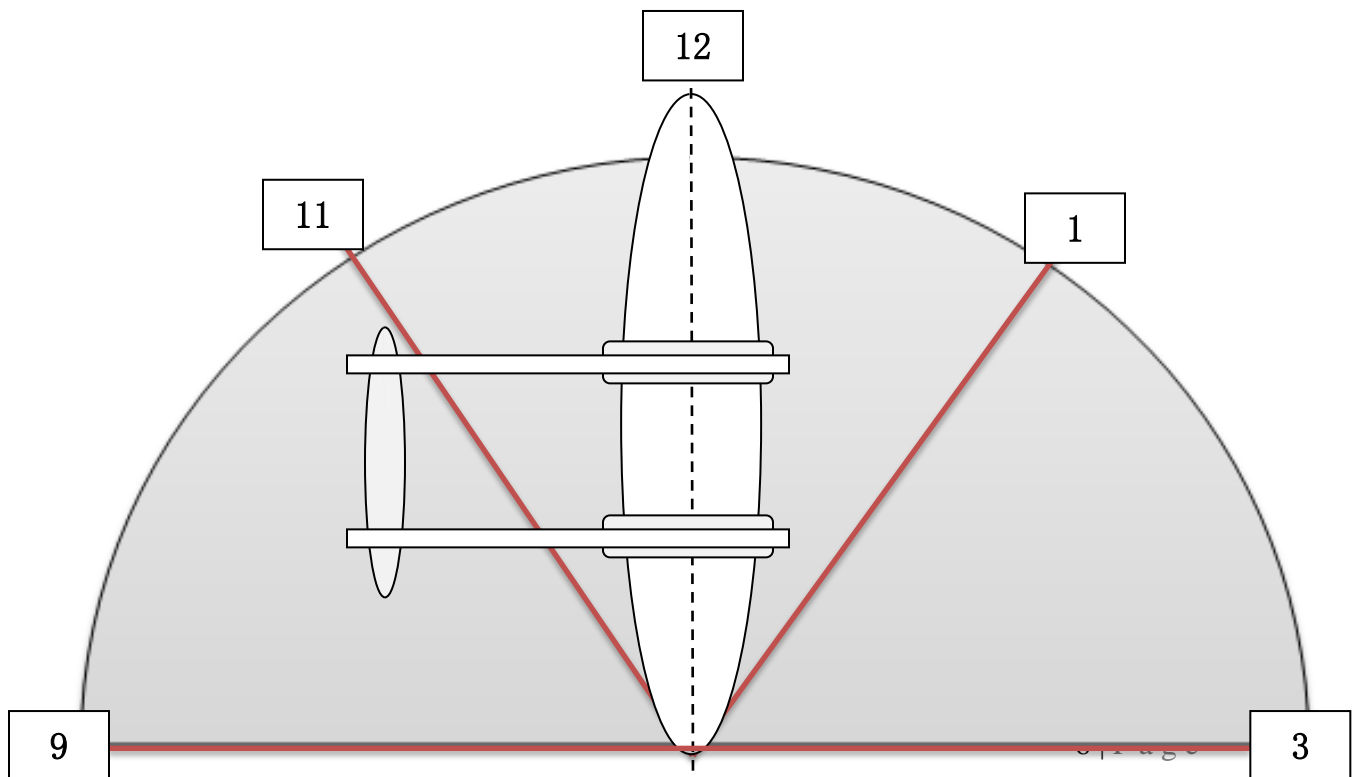
When poking, or ruddering, try and spend minimum time in that position, as while you are doing that you are not paddling and you are dead weight for your team mates to pull (may be the time length of 3 strokes average). When paddling straight after that, shorten strokes and paddle faster to alleviate the back drag...



Minimum to maximum amount of drag depicted in the pictures above

### Paddle Steering

Think of the steering paddle as the big hand of a clock. At 12 O'clock the paddle is going straight and is contributing only towards forward motion. If you paddle on the left and move the paddle to an 11 O'clock angle (pushing the water under the canoe) the canoe will make a small adjustment to the right. 10 O'clock, slightly more to the right, 9 O'clock (Or 90 degrees) a lot to the right. Same thing happens on the other side.



The depth of your paddle and drive of your top arm also determines how much impact you have of the direction of the canoe. You can make subtle paddle steering strokes or drastic ones. Always try and keep your body centered in the canoe, your head up and focused on your target and the ama.

When paddle steering, strokes are shorter than other paddlers strokes, but with a strong acceleration at the end of the stroke.

Steer keeps the canoe down on left side (more weight on left cheek) and check waka balance at all times

### **The Hang:**

This is when you hang out the side of the canoe to get more leverage and make a bigger correction to the direction. It is most usually done on the left of the canoe (for obvious reasons hanging out on the right is not done too often) It does make a big impact on direction, but also puts a big drag on the ama. It is something that a lot of steers do too often.

### **Paddle steering versus Rudder**

Remember first and foremost, especially when learning to steer that the Number 1 goal is to go straight!

Many people will tell you that to be a good steerer you need to paddle. and yes the more you paddle the more you are contributing to your crews forward momentum, but if this is at the expense of the best line then you are not doing you crew any favors.

### **Over correcting, Over Steering**

Many steerers make the mistake of over correcting. This is when you make an adjustment to the direction and but end up going the too far, so you end up having to correct it. You can be correcting yourself all the way down the course.

Generally speaking if the canoe is turning right and you wanting to turn left ...poke on the left but only hold the paddle in the water long enough for the canoe to stop its rightward movement and then only as long as it takes to reach half the direction you intend. The canoe will generally do the rest of the work with shear momentum. If you steer it from point a to point b it will more than likely go past you intended direction and you will have to steer it back again and again and again. This is over steering.

### **Small adjustments**

Make small corrections to the line of the canoe with soft touches. This is better than making big drastic changes that more often than not need to be corrected again.

It's all about anticipation and good feel of waka glide. Focus on working with the back of the waka well, keeping the front in sight at all times; therefore, visual to the front and feel to the back.

Stroke rate of a steer is sometimes slightly faster than the rest of the crew, so slightly out of time...

### **Body Alignment:**



Be aware of what effect your body weight has on the canoe. Leaning too much on either side of the waka can have a negative effect. Too much on the right can cause the Ama to become light. Too much on the left you compress the ama and create more drag. When steering on the left you should try and keep centered. Once you have a feel for the waka you can lean slightly on the right to lift the ama to help you get on waves.

Always keep your head up and your eyes on the ama and the target

Use your hips while centered. They move with the canoe (pressure left or pressure right side), when torso remains static or compensates, mainly when ruddering on the right side.

### **Let the canoe do some of the work**

You don't need to steer all the time. You will find that the canoe (if the seating is even) can hold a pretty good line, especially if you are heading into the wind or if it is directly behind you. Don't steer if you don't have to, but always watch the nose of the ama, it is the same as the nose of the canoe and if you see turn even slightly, anticipate it.

Also the longer you leave your paddle in the water the more drag you are creating. This drag compounds and slows the forward momentum. If you are poking especially a series of many small frequent pokes have more of an effect on steering and less effect on Momentum.

### **MOMENTUM**

The more momentum the canoe has the easier it is to steer. Essentially it is harder to steer a slow crew than a fast one. If the crew is struggling, it will make your job harder. Know this.

If you are coming up to a turn or the water gets a bit rough and the paddlers ease off, you will have a harder time steering the canoe. It is important for paddlers to know this.

If you can anticipate a rough patch encourage your crew to put in a little extra effort, it will make everyone's job easier.

The best way to test momentum is to try and turn a stationary waka. It is very hard.

### **PROTECT THE AMA**

The ama is always on the left.

This creates a drag on the canoe. The canoe will therefore naturally turn towards the Ama

If you rudder on the right you are taking a little pressure off the ama. A really strong rudder on the Right can flip the canoe. So it is important to balance the canoe and when conditions are rough and there waves or wind on the Ama side, know when to rudder on the right. You may need to get number 5 to paddle on the left in order to stabilize the canoe.



Always watch the ama. It can tell you a lot

### **TECHNIQUE:**

You are the 6<sup>th</sup> paddler. Your technique in the canoe is as important as everyone else's. When you are paddling you should be in time, you should be using good form, so that your contribution is not lost. This means that you have to train at **just paddling** some



times. It is important for everyone else in the team to recognize this. You will benefit physically and it also means that another member of your crew can have to opportunity to steer.

If everyone knows how to steer and at least grasp the fundamentals than the crew will all have a better feel for the canoe and to an extent a great appreciation for the seat 6.

Always keep your head up use your peripheral vision.

Don't put your head down. If you do you will lose direction of the canoe and possibly not anticipate something in front of you.

#### **YOUR LINE:**

The straightest line is not always the quickest.

Wind, current, land and tide all play a factor. And sometimes taking a gamble may just pay off. If there is a head wind or you are paddling into a current try and stay in the lee of the land. If it is behind you, Use it.

Look for wind patterns on the water ahead and anticipate them.

Once you have determined your line. Hold it.

#### **TALKING IN THE CANOE**

As a steerer if you are going to say something, it has to be:

- Loud so everyone can hear
- Constructive
- Positive
- Consistent with training



Don't just call out "Timing" you need to tell the person or people who are out of time; who they are or what side they are out of time on. And they need to know that you may do this and that it is a good thing.

Get crew members to pass down information to the stroke, especially if it is windy.

Encourage – never discourage.

Make sure you discuss talking in the canoe before every race.

#### **Get to know your paddlers body language!**

You can tell a lot by a person's back, the way they hold their head, their shoulders etc...If you can see someone needs some encouragement. Give it. Pass that feedback down the canoe. Remember to be clear and audible.

Do not talk too much, let the captain do most of it (remind technique, calls for different strokes, strategies). Just come in when needed (help for turns, next marker is..., position of other crews, etc.)

#### **POST RACE:**

Always reflect on your race or training. And think of at least 3 things you would have done differently. Write them down if you have to so that you remember them forever. Each time you come across a similar situation or similar conditions you will have a plan for what to do next time.

Talk to other steerers.



## TIME ON THE WATER

Just like anything you need to spend time steering so that every little feel of the canoe becomes second nature. Every time you go out there are different conditions and you need experience all of them. Every time you train think of something to work on just for you. "I am going to focus on paddle steering and keeping a straight course" etc. OR "I am going to trying and make less drag with my rudder strokes"

Pick a point and try to keep a straight a line as possible (with as little corrections as possible.

Ask your crew for feedback. (But firstly make sure they understand what they are talking about.)

**You will get better.** Awareness and anticipation are the keys.

As your confidence improves, so will the confidence your crew has in you. This is very important.

If the crew has confidence in their steerer, then they will concentrate on their task at hand and that is paddling.

## A FEW TRICKS:

### 1. Passing canoes:

Where possible position your canoe so that you are passing other crews on the right hand side, this will:

- 1: protect your crew from the other crews ama
- 2: Allow you to possible put off you opposition by making their paddlers have to change sides.
3. Make other crews uncomfortable. Keeping an eye on you on their right side means changing the focus to the non ama side of the waka, this is disturbing for lots of paddlers as they always fear the waka tipping.

### 2. Make rudder strokes when your crew can't feel them:

There will be occasions when you have to rudder the canoe to keep it on line. It is way easy to affect the direction of the canoe if you do not have 5 anchors (paddles) in the water. So if you anticipate that you need to drastically rudder the canoe you can make a bigger difference and have less impact on the crew if you do it while they are doing a "Hup"

More advanced, once you feel confident paddle steering you could try paddling steering off time from you crew. Your paddle is in the water while theirs is not - you will not get as great forward motion but it is easier to adjust direction and you may only have to do 2 paddle steering strokes instead of 4.

### 3. Always Have Empathy for your paddlers.

Try and do everything possible to help them out, as they will for you. Big team effort. Pick a good line, be gentle on the rudder, don't write your name down the course and learn to feel the canoe and anticipate what the canoe will do. Do your own thing. Keep an eye on the other waka, but take your own line.

## TURNING THE WAKA

*(This is one option to turn the waka, there are other ways to perform the turn, but this can be a good starting point for new teams)*

Turning the Waka – is 100% team work. If everybody does their Job, the Waka will turn 180 degrees very quickly. The team that wins the race will more often than not be the team with the best turns. The team with the best crew work...

- It is important that the waka has speed going into the turn

### SEATS JOBS

Going in to the turn **No. 1** should be paddling on the left so that hand positions are in the correct place. When the Steerer Calls out “**TURN**”

- **No.1** comes over to the right and jams their paddle down the side of the canoe and holds it there. (The paddle becomes a lever)
- **No.2** comes over to the left, leans out with arms stretched and creates an anchor with his/her paddle for the Waka to pivot on.
- **No.5** does the same as number 2 but on the right side (as depicted in the picture below).



When the steerer calls out “DRAW”, Both **No.1, No.2 and No. 5** draw the water underneath the waka. All paddlers must be in time when doing this and the paddles should be deep, pushing the water underneath the waka. The faster this is done the quicker the turn will be.

**No. 3 & No.4** continue to paddle with power eased off, ready to back paddle or paddle out as soon as the turn is made, the power for the start out of the turn is going to come from these 2 seats. They have to be watching what is happening



**No.6** - The steerer's job is to set the waka up for the turn. To come in on the correct angle and to bring the back of the waka around the buoy. The Steerer will call the Turn.

Everything must be done quickly without hesitation; if the forward momentum of the canoe is lost then the turn becomes very difficult

### **THE PADDLE OUT (One option)**

This is very important, and must be powerful

When the Steerer calls "PADDLE OUT" The turn is complete and paddlers must react immediately.



**No.1 & No.2** stay on the left and paddle forward, **No.3** should be on the left and No. 4 on the right along with **No. 5**.

A "HUP" should be called 3 or 4 strokes after the 'paddle out" - For this change number 2 and number 5 stay where you are everybody else changes. Short change (5 strokes maybe) as 2 and 5 need change.

From this change the **No.1** should be winding the stroke back up to sprint pace and getting the canoe moving, all paddlers should be at maximum power.

Sprint hard and get ready for the next turn and repeat!