Indoor Rowing Course

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Indoor Rowing Course – User Guide

See these videos under Indoor Rowing Course at www.DecentRowing.com

1 - Introduction to Indoor Rowing Course
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What are these skills?
These documents and videos are designed to help anyone improve their skills on a rowing machine. It doesn’t matter if you have never sat on an erg or have been rowing for the last 50 years. If you want to improve your technique, avoid injury and increase your rhythm and speed off or on the water then these essential skills are the best place to start.

Where to start?
There are 5 key ergo skills. Take them one at a time then practice, progress, revise, practice, progress, revise. Rowing is a beautiful, complex and extremely challenging activity. Take it one step at a time, and the rewards will present themselves.

Who can use this?
Complete beginners to experienced rowers and coaches. In many ways starting fresh with no preconceived notions and bad habits will get you rowing fast and comfortably more quickly than someone who has to unlearn bad habits.
How can these skill sessions be fitted into any time-poor rowing program?
For beginner coaches, we recommend carving out some time each coaching session to familiarise yourself with the skills you want to teach by getting the athletes to go for a run or ride and using this time to review each lesson. As little as 20-30 minutes is enough for the coaches to read the lesson, watch the video and understand what to focus on with the athletes when they return. Please print the document from each skill page and take it with you to remind you of the critical components.

Going for a run will also help the athlete learn each skill as they will be more relaxed, allowing them to focus on the new ability.

For athletes we suggest watching the relevant lesson video and understanding the detail before putting it into practice.

Rowing rewards quality first and fitness second especially with novice crews. Any rower who has not mastered the basic movements and technique will struggle to gain fitness on the ergo or in the boat.

How to increase the number of coaches in your school or club?
Most schools and clubs don’t have sufficient coaches, particularly for coaching beginners. Beginners who row without a coach quickly develop bad habits that are hard to correct. We suggest one coach per group of 4 or 5 athletes, but we understand that this is often difficult to achieve. We have therefore designed this set of Ergo Key Skill lessons and its associated Rowing Key Skill lessons series specifically to help solve this problem.

Most people without rowing coaching experience have no problem teaching essential skills if they can understand the basis of these skills. When coaching, it is best to tackle one skill at a time and focus on teaching only that in the session. Hence, we suggest that anyone can teach beginners and intermediate rowers by following the process outlined in this series.

We suggest that the club or school arrange the athletes in groups with one “coach” that has watched and understood the particular Key Skill video and has a copy of the associated pdf document. This coach will then be able to teach the athletes that particular ergo or rowing skill. Once this skill is mastered another skill can be looked at in later sessions.

How to teach athletes?
When teaching athletes how to row it is important to only focus on a small number of items per session. We suggest staying focused on one skill area. It is also important that the athletes execute each lesson as well as they are able. If an athlete is performing a movement or exercise incorrectly, please make sure that they are not left unsupervised and repeating the incorrect action. Otherwise, they will be reinforcing a bad habit with potential long-term issues.

Looking for more info?
In addition to the main video on the website for each lesson, there are many more videos relating to indoor rowing that can be used to supplement your knowledge. Please see below:

Lesson 1 - Posture
Lesson 2 - Catch
Lesson 3 - Finish
Lesson 4 - Catch Connection
Lesson 5 - Rhythm
Indoor Rowing Course - Lesson 1 Posture

Watch this video under Indoor Rowing Course at www.DecentRowing.com

Lesson 1 - Posture

When teaching athletes how to row it is important to only focus on a small number of items per session.

The first lessons should be done on a rowing machine as it is much easier to teach basic technique on an ergo when compared to a boat.

On an ergo you do not have to deal with the issues of balance and oars, hence a great place to start.

The most important lesson, to begin with, is about posture and sequence. If these two fundamental aspects are well understood by the athlete then they will already have the basic ability to row.

Here we step through the sequence and once the athlete has the steps executed correctly and in the right order encourage them to merge them into one flowing movement.

Please print this document and use it to compare the athlete body positions to what is desired.

If you have mirrors in the ergo room, please affix the relevant parts of this document to the mirror so that athletes can educate themselves.
Firstly make sure that the feet heights are set so as the athlete is comfortable with their shins vertical at the catch position with their body bent over and arms extended as in the below photo.

If the shins are not vertical when in the above position lift or lower the feet holders on the ergo to suit.

1.1 Finish Position
Firstly ask the athlete to sit at the finish position with their pelvis vertical and elbows out, sitting tall.

1.2 Hands Away
Ask the athlete to then extend their arms while holding the body unchanged.

1.3 Soft Knees
The next step is to soften (relax) the knees slightly to allow the hamstrings to let the pelvis move more freely.

1.4 Body Over (rock from pelvis)
Next have the athlete rock their pelvis over, essentially pushing the shoulders over as compared to pulling the pelvis over with the shoulders. The pelvis should control this movement.

1.5 Move to Catch (no body movement)
Ensure that the arms are fully extended and straight then move towards the flywheel until the shins are vertical without changing the body position.
1.6 Initial Leg Drive
Holding the same body and arm positions push with the legs until the seat has moved about halfway up the slide.

1.7 Body and Arms
Commence opening the body and using the arms to draw from this point on.

1.8 Body, Arms and Legs together
Continue to drive with the legs, body, and arms trying to have all finish together.

1.9 Finish Position
Back to where we started at 1.1

Once the above sequences are understood and executed as a sequence then have the athlete complete the sequence in a flowing movement. SLOWLY at first and when well controlled, a little faster. Please keep the speed of movement at a level where the sequence and posture positions are correct. Over time this speed can be increased but only if the posture and sequence are correct.
Indoor Rowing Course - Lesson 2 Catch

Watch this video under Indoor Rowing Course at www.DecentRowing.com

Lesson 2 - Catch

This skill focuses on the catch.

Remember not to overload the athlete with too much information!

The catch is one of the most important sections of the rowing stroke, as without a good catch it is difficult for the athlete to use their power effectively.

Here we step through the sequence and once the athlete has the steps executed correctly and in the right order encourage them to merge them into one flowing movement.

If you have mirrors in the erg room affix this sequence to the mirror so that athletes can educate themselves. Please print this page and use to compare the athlete body positions to what is desired.
2.1 Relaxed Grip

Firstly, it is important that the athlete maintains a relaxed upper body while taking the catch. They need to practice having their glutes and core switched on whilst having their upper body relaxed.

Ask the athlete to clench their fist as in the above photo and maintain a relaxed shoulder. They won’t be able to. This exercise will help teach them that a relaxed grip is vital. When rowing look at their knuckles to see if they are relaxed at all times.

2.2 Body Position at the Catch

Ensure that the athlete has the body in a strong position, shins vertical and arms fully extended as per the above image.

2.3 Commence the Drive

Hold the handle to prevent the athlete from moving down the slide and ask the athlete to push with relaxed shoulders. This is to reinforce the understanding of glutes and core activated while having relaxed shoulders. If you wobble the handle while the athlete is pushing this will emphasize the shoulder relaxation needed.

2.4 Practice moving in and out from the catch to half slide

Ask the athlete move from the catch to half slide and back again without moving their body or arms to reinforce the first part of the drive.
2.5 Practice core and glutes engaged and hang off seat with relaxed shoulders.

Ensure that the arms are fully extended and the shoulders are relaxed then hold onto the handle and have the athlete push with legs and suspend themselves off the seat a little. Make sure that their shoulders, arms, and grip remain relaxed.

2.6 Hold and then release the athlete

Hold the handle and have the athlete push with relaxed shoulders and then let them know you are about to release them and let go. You will find that the resulting stroke is well executed and will assist in the athletes understanding of the correct drive sequence and the muscle groups involved.

We suggest repeating the above exercises until the athlete understands them well and have them commence rowing at a slow rate focussing on these areas.

We also suggest that you revisit the posture positions from Lesson 1 - Posture to reinforce the correct body positions and sequence of the rowing stroke.
Indoor Rowing Course - Lesson 3 Finish

Watch this video under Indoor Rowing Course at www.DecentRowing.com

Lesson 3 - Finish

This skill focuses on the finish on a rowing machine. Remember not to overload the athlete with information!

The finish is an important section of the rowing stroke as the finish sets up the athlete for a relaxed recovery. The posture at the finish is important in maintaining power throughout the final part of the stroke. A good finish allows the boat to remain connected to the water at the finish which is important for balance and speed.

First, we go through the sequence and in the right order they can then merge them into one flowing movement.

If you have mirrors in the erg room, attach this sequence to the mirror so that athletes can compare what their movement looks like and educate themselves.
3.1 Finish Position

Have the athlete sit at the finish and make sure that:
- They have their pelvis as vertical as it can be given the flexibility of the athlete.
- Their elbows are out and not next to their body, and above the handle height.
- They have flat wrists.
- Their shoulders are not raised.

They will need to have their core engaged to hold this position correctly.

3.2 Incorrect position - shoulders

In the image above the shoulders are too high. It is best to have them low as in the preceding image.

3.3 Incorrect position – wrists

In the two images above, we demonstrate the incorrect wrist position both cocked up and bent down. Please make sure that the wrists are flat.

3.4 Describe elbows as out rather than up.

Better posture will result if the athlete moves their elbows forward or out rather than up.
3.5 Make sure that the pelvis is vertical and **NOT slumped** as per the image below.

If the athlete struggles to achieve this due to their lack of flexibility we suggest looking at our stretching videos, particularly for hamstrings and glutes.

If the athlete softens their knees immediately after the finish then this will assist the pelvic movement.

**3.6 Handle speed**

After the finish the handle should move away from the body at the same speed that it approached the body, then the shoulders commence moving at the same speed as does the seat. This will provide a smooth flowing movement. We suggest repeating the above position exercises until the athlete understands them well. Have them commence rowing at a slow rate focusing on these areas.

We also suggest that you revisit the posture positions from Ergo Lesson 1 to reinforce the correct body positions and sequence of the rowing stroke.

Now that the athlete understands the content of Key Skills 1, 2 and 3 they should be able to row in a flowing manner without any pauses.

If they now undertake Key Skill 4 to improve power and connection at the catch and Key Skill 5 to improve their
Indoor Rowing Course - Lesson 4 Catch Connection

Watch this video under Indoor Rowing Course at www.DecentRowing.com

Lesson 4 - Catch Connection

Ergo Skill 4 – Catch Connection

After the first 3 Key Skills, it is time to begin bridging the gap between a rowing technique that looks good and one which makes a boat go fast.

This is the lesson that teaches how to get a good connection at the catch on a rowing machine.

It is essential to quickly connect at the catch to achieve a powerful and well-executed stroke.

A good connection on a rowing machine will engage the flywheel from the start of the leg drive.

Please print this document and use to compare the athlete body positions to what is desired.
4.1 Core on when nearing the catch

Have the athlete come into the catch from the finish position and at the point in the image above, just before the catch position. Make sure that they have their core and glutes turned on.

It may help to describe the muscle groups that we are talking about as demonstrated by Ken in the image below.

4.2 Into the catch, heels raised

At the catch we want the athlete to have their heels raised slightly off the foot stretcher as in the image above. This will happen naturally with almost all athletes if their shins are vertical.

4.3 Quick Catch

In the image above, we demonstrate what we mean by a quick catch, if the movement to connect is quick then the speed of movement of the slide can be slower. The quick connection is what is needed so none of the power from the legs is wasted.

The best way to teach beginners how to get a quick catch is to have them brace their core and simply put their heels down quickly as in the image below.

4.4 Weak core

If the athlete has a weak core then you will see that they tend to push the seat up the slide and the body remains close to stationary as in the below image. This means that they should undertake some core strength exercises to improve their strength. We have a series of exercises on the website page.
4.5 Practice the movement.

Have the athlete practice the first quarter of the stroke. Focus on connecting with the flywheel as soon as they start to move the seat up the slide.

Repeat the movement into and out of the catch focusing on connection each time. We also suggest having them “miss” the connection once by moving slowly so as to make sure they understand what “missing the catch” feels like. There will be no weight on the chain and the flywheel will not increase in speed indicating no effective work has been done by the athlete.

We suggest repeating the above exercises until the athlete understands them well and have them commence rowing at a slow rate focusing on these areas.

Revisiting the posture positions from Key Skill 1 will reinforce the correct body positions and sequence of the rowing stroke.

Now that the athlete understands the content of Key Skills 1,2 and 3 and 4 they should be able to row in a flowing manner without any pauses.

If they now undertake Key Skill 5 to improve their rhythm you will find that they will be able to row competently on the rowing machine.
Indoor Rowing Course - Lesson 5 Rhythm

Watch this video under Indoor Rowing Course at www.DecentRowing.com

Lesson 5 - Rhythm

Ergo Skill 5 – Rhythm

This is the 5th and final skill in our series on how to row on a rowing machine and is about rhythm.

When teaching rhythm on the rowing machine the athletes need to understand the difference between the power and the recovery phases of the rowing stroke. If they do, then rhythm is the result.

Rhythm is essential to allow a small amount for recovery with each stroke and getting the most from each drive phase.

When translated into the boat the result is good boat run between strokes leading to maximal speed with the least amount of effort. Rhythm is very important for both the rowing machine and the boat.

Please print this document and use to educate the athlete.
5.1 Correct sequence

Ensure that the athlete understands the key skills from this series 1 to 4.

5.2 Gentle into the catch

Make sure that the athlete understands that:

1. The handle moves into the body and out at the same speed.
2. The shoulders and then the seat move at the same speed.
3. The athlete slows down the movement into the catch to allow time to recover and in a boat to let the boat run.

5.3 Brace for the catch

Make sure that the athlete is braced when coming into the catch with their core and glutes engaged.

Then take the catch quickly, heels down and get connected. Once connected make sure that the drive is powerful through to the finish.

Once at the finish, RELAX. This is most important in that this relaxation must last until just before the catch.

5.4 Power then Relaxation

It is necessary for Rhythm that the athlete feels the difference between the power phase and the relaxed recovery. Once they feel the difference they will understand rhythm. Ask them to exaggerate the relaxation by taking the rate down.

They should find that they can row hard and combine relaxation within the rowing stroke. It is critical that they do not rush into the catch.

The result will be higher efficiency and therefore a faster time on the rowing machine or in the boat.

5.4 Review

Now is the time to review how they row in relation to Posture, Catch, Finish, Catch Connection and Rhythm and redo the relevant portions of Key Lessons 1 to 5 to reinforce any gaps in their technique.

After you feel that they are competent in these areas, we suggest you review the additional information available on our website and use the more advanced techniques for rowing on an ergo to increase their abilities.