



# Sweeping Surf Boats

## Coaching Manual 5th Edition



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This chapter is an extract from Chapter 16 of *“The Surfboat Book – Complete Coaching Manual”* written by Kim Marsh.

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## Sweeping Fundamentals

Sweeping fundamentals can be broken up into body position and sweep oar position. These two simple concepts enable the Sweep to balance and steer.

### Balance

The Sweep needs to feel balanced standing at the back of the boat. They should be relaxed enough to feel comfortably stable. The ability to be balanced will become second nature allowing you to focus on other matters. This can be compared to becoming proficient on a surfboard when you no longer need to worry about your balance. Rather you can focus on the manoeuvres you would like to do. Once a Sweep can balance it becomes easier to keep the boat even. The Sweep stands on the rear platform in a position that enables the gunwales to be level. Allowance may have to be made for rowers on one side being heavier than those on the other.

The feet are placed pointing more or less across the hull so that a line through the shoulders points along the boat towards the bow. The front foot may point a little towards the bow. Most Sweeps prefer to have their feet shoulder width apart.

**COMMENT: There are differences in the stance of many talented sweeps. A developing Sweep may adapt a stance to suit their own feel.**

The placement of the feet assists you to control the sweep oar as you move your body towards the oar or away from it.

The knees are kept slightly bent to act as shock absorbers. The stance should be loose and flexible.

The head is kept in the centre of the body to assist balance. The eyes look towards the front of the boat

The sweep oar connects you to the water and assists you to balance. The sweep oar blade must be kept in the water at all times except perhaps at the buoy turn. Sweeps easily lose balance when their blade is taken out of the water.



*Sweep's stance with shoulders pointing forward.*

*Note position of feet*

The quarter bars are often used by novice Sweeps for balance and stability. Most surfboats have two quarter bars. While learning novices tend to stand with a leg either side of the rear quarter bar, gripping it with their knees to stay upright. Avoid this if possible and stand in the space behind the bars. Rely on using the sweep oar and your feet for balance. Gripping with your knees will prolong the learning period and promote the wrong stance for wave catching.

Experienced Sweeps move back and forth over the quarter bars to change the position of their body weight in the boat. Moving forward may assist the run of the boat.

Novice Sweeps need to anticipate the surge of power that occurs when a crew commences rowing a stationary boat. The Sweep's body will tend to overbalance backwards unless they lean their body slightly forward and bend the knees.

### Steering

Hold the oar slightly away from you to prevent it transferring force to your body. Maintain sufficient oar shaft inboard to allow for leverage. The closer to the end that you hold the oar, the heavier it will feel. "Woofa" Barnett states "Steering a surfboat is a combination of balance and ability to steer the craft with body weight in lieu of excessive strength". He refers to the "steering pocket" which is the working area of the sweep oar blade. This is a fairly small area where the Sweep places

the blade to feel most balanced. They constantly make small movements using the wrists and forearms in a similar way to a round rowlock rower feathering a blade. Small, quick movements within the “steering pocket” are better than large strokes.

**COMMENT: A few great Sweeps have held their oars at the very end. It is not recommended for novice Sweeps.**

Sweeps may be right handed or left handed. Nearly all boats are rigged with the stroke seat on the port (left) side. A left handed Sweep will hold the oar handle closer to the stroke rower’s head than a right handed Sweep.

The sweep oar blade is used differently on a swell or wave than at other times. Mostly the blade is in a floating position flat or slightly angled to the water surface. The blade maintains a little weight (force) on the surface but without much resistance. The blade only remains upright in the water when on a swell or wave.

The sweep oar blade can cause drag. Let the blade sit lightly in contact with the water while the boat is just rowing along. The blade almost sits on top of the water. The boat is steered by rotating the angle of the blade to the water except when it is on a wave



*Position of hands on sweep oar handle*

**COMMENT: The concept of steering by rotating the blade on the water is one of the most profound aspects of surfboats.**

Rotating the blade will smoothly steer the boat to port or starboard without upsetting the boat. The action of rotating the blade can be assisted by the Sweep lifting the oar handle to apply additional force on the water. Using large rowing actions will unsettle the boat and cause difficulty for the rowers. The action of the blade turning and pressuring the water is felt through the boat. It can cause a braking action.



*Sweep oar blade is rotated to steer except on a wave*

Woofa Barnett describes a right handed Sweep making a course correction to the right - "Push the sweep oar away from the body and at the same time roll handle towards you, this feathers the blade. The oar handle is pushed till left arm and shoulder are fully extended". It may be necessary to take a number of such strokes. He describes a course change to the left by a right handed Sweep as "much easier to perform than a right hand change, as it only requires a pushing motion. With the blade in the correct trailing straight course position, it is squared up, and the Sweep leans on the oar handle and pushes with body weight. There is hardly any movement of the handle away from the body.....Again quick short, correct pushes are the best method to effect a left hand course change. After each push the sweep only has to stop the push and the forward motion of the craft pulls the blade and handle back to the original straight course position".

The Sweep's hands can detect the forces on the boat. This will not occur if the oar is held too tightly into the body. A light touch helps to balance the boat without interfering with the rowers. Gradual movements can be taken by just squeezing pressure through the blade onto the water allowing the steering direction to be fine-tuned. The faster a boat is moving, the quicker it will react.

The easiest time to make steering adjustments is when the rowers are recovering between strokes with their blades out of the water. This is also the time that the Sweep is most likely to upset the boat's balance. When the boat starts to turn it will continue to turn until you do something about it!

## Going to sea

After observing the surf conditions, think through what you are about to do.

- Assess the conditions before taking a boat to sea.
- Observe the edge of the shoreline.
- Consider the degree of difficulty for a crew to board the boat and take the initial strokes.
- Observe the wave zone and the way the waves are breaking.
- Check for currents that will influence the direction you steer and observe the wind beyond the break.
- Consider how you will safely return the boat and crew to shore.

Do not take a crew to sea unless you are confident that you're sweeping ability and the ability of your crew matches the conditions

Before the crew boards, point the boat in the right direction. Do not allow the bow to drift sideways off the desired direction. Instruct the Bow and Second Bow to hold the bow in position. You may need to point the boat a little in one direction to allow for it to turn slightly as the boat leaves the edge. This may be caused by a current; cross wind on the bow; or by the rowers on one side pulling the boat around. Anticipate which way you think the boat will turn during the first 3 to 4 strokes. You may notice that the boat will turn to port (left) if you are right handed. Conversely the boat may want to turn to starboard (right) for left handed sweeps.

Give the command for the rowers to board at a time when the bow is down. The Sweep must not push the boat until the rowers are in the boat. If you push while they are going over the gunwale you will cause the rowers to over balance. The best time for the Sweep to board is when the bow is up such that the tuck is a little lower.

During a race the crew will usually board on the starter's gun. Instruct the rowers to wait for your command if conditions dictate. There are many different ways Sweeps board the boat at the start of a race. They attempt to push the boat and ensure they successfully board the boat while minimising any disruption to the rowers.

**COMMENT: Do not be tempted to push the boat too far. It is embarrassing for the Sweep to be left behind.**



*Don McManus, Bilgola diving across the tuck.*



*Agile Jack Pattison of Austinmer jumping onto the tuck.*



*Matt Collins of Bungan, pushing the boat after checking for potholes and depth*



*Matt Collins jumping onto the tuck bum first, in a method used by many Sweeps*

## Sweeping through the break

Going through the wave zone concentrate on your job rather than focusing too much on the rowers. Read the water and anticipate the speed of the boat in relation to approaching waves. The Sweep should stand behind the back quarter bar through the wave zone to help lift the bow. Practice the skill of lying back on the tuck to lift the bow over waves. The Sweep will find it is better to hit some waves at a slight angle to lessen the force of the hit. The wave will straighten the boat as long as the angle is not too great.



*Kevin "Bluey" Myers showing that a 71 year old Sweep can effectively boardWaiting*

The Sweep may have to wait near the impact zone when the waves have sufficient power to stop a boat. While waiting in a large surf, many experienced Sweeps will stand on the foot chops or even the tuck decking to gain a better view of the waves. Do not allow a waiting boat to be sucked towards the breaking waves. The crew may need to "check" (row backwards) the boat.

**TIP:** Practice with the crew to help develop a feel for "when to go" and "when to wait". The Bow rower will usually advise whether you made the wrong decision! Practise in a small 60 to 90 cm surf (2 – 3 feet) rather than 180 cm (6 foot) waves!



*Don McManus showing his expertise at making it over a difficult wave by attacking it at a slight angle*



*It appears that Don has avoided a back shoot with a slight angle to the wave and some inspired momentum from the crew.*

### Hitting a wave

The Sweep can help to lift the bow slightly by leaning back when hitting a wave. The sweep oar handle must be pushed aside if a wave pushes the boat backwards. This minimises the chance of the sweep oar being broken in a backshoot. The best time to hit a wave is just after it has broken.

### Commands

Commands used going through the break must be loud, clear and consistent. It is best if only the Sweep speaks through the critical impact zone. Think about the commands you will use. It is confusing for rowers if they have not heard a particular command before.



*Sweep pushing oar aside and helping to lift bow by placing weight on tuck*

### TIP: All Sweeps at a club should use the same commands.

Be concise when giving a command. Do not swear or portray your nervousness. Sometimes it is best not to express everything you are thinking (or fearing). The relevant commands are:

- “STOP” - To prevent the boat from rowing under a wave.
- “TAKE A STROKE” - Used while waiting in the break to give the boat a little momentum before being hit by a broken wave.
- “BACK UP” or “CHECK IT” - Used to take backward strokes to enable the boat to move away from a breaking wave.
- “FORWARD” or “FRONT CHOCKS” - To instruct the rowers to come forward into a catch position regardless of which part of the stroke they are taking. This lifts the bow and enables the crew to take a clean catch as they come down the back of the wave.

Beyond the wave breaking area the surface will vary from smooth to choppy. In smooth conditions the Sweep may move forward. The further forward the higher the hands need to be to keep the sweep oar blade in the water. In a choppy sea the Sweep may stay behind the back quarter bar or between them.

The Sweep should inform the crew of their position in a race. Sweeps must minimise the amount of turning around they do as it can rock the boat.

Rowing beyond the break the Sweep needs to stay focused and concentrate on their job. Steer the shortest path to the buoys, making allowance for the wind.

**COMMENT: In extreme wind and chop conditions the Sweep may consider a direction that makes it easier for the rowers to take effective strokes (not recommended for novices.).**



## Buoy turns

The Sweep will consider the influence of wind, swell and current to determine the course to steer in and out of the turning buoys. The bow should be as close as possible to the buoy.

**TIP: Be aware that extreme wind and swells can push the boat sideways during a turn, causing the buoy to come up on the wrong side of the boat.**

The boat should be rowed fast into the buoy as the momentum assists the turn. The aim is not to stop the boat during the turn otherwise the rowers will need to recommence rowing a dead boat. Good buoy turning techniques maintain some boat speed, enabling the boat to leave the turn quickly.

The buoy colour can be difficult to see in high seas with a low sun. The Sweep may have to count along the buoys to locate the correct one.

There are many types of commands Sweeps give approaching the buoys. They may give a command "10 TO GO" to indicate to the rowers to lift the speed. Some Sweeps add another command "3 TO GO". The Sweep gives the command "BUOYO" to tell the inside rowers to dig their blades in. The Sweep or a rower may give the command "ROW" for digging rowers to recommence rowing.

The Sweeps action at the buoy turn is now one of the most varied aspects of surfboats. Some Sweeps rigorously assist by pushing / rowing with the blade while others simply take the blade out of the water. The debate for and against these styles is best decided by testing them for yourself.

### Removing sweep oar blade from water method

The easiest method for a novice Sweep is to hold the quarter bar with one hand while pushing the sweep oar handle down with the other hand to remove the blade from the water. The rowers spin the boat on their own. Alternatively the Sweep sits on the tuck and removes the blade from the water by pushing down on the oar handle. The Sweep recommences steering as the boat comes away from the buoys.

Trial a few variations in relation to Sweep's weight distribution aft as well as leaning over to influence the balance of the boat

### Pushing sweep oar blade method



Sweep taking sweep oar out of water at buoy turn as crew commences "digging"



Sweep continues to hold sweep oar out of water during turn

The traditional, but more difficult method is for the Sweep to push the sweep oar blade through the water. The technique commences with the Sweep lifting the oar handle over their head as the rowers commence digging. The Sweep rotates their body, such that they face out the back of the boat. They push hard on the sweep oar handle, helping the tuck to spin around. As the boat straightens up, the Sweep turns to face the bow. They then pass the sweep oar handle behind their back to resume its position on the correct side of their body. There are variations on the traditional theme. This technique applies to a right handed Sweep doing the usual clockwise turn. Left handed Sweeps are advantaged by being able to simply push the oar, without having to spin their bodies around.

**COMMENT: A deciding factor in the Sweep's buoy turn technique will be the speed of the boat coming away from the buoys**



Sweep throws sweep oar handle over body and commences to rotate body at start of buoy turn. The crew may be able to use the swell concealing the hull as they come out of the turn.



Sweep rotates body backwards preparing to push sweep oar.



Sweep pushes sweep oar handle as crew continues turn

The Sweep usually maintains a level boat during the turn to ensure the outside rowers can take clean strokes. However a few crews purposely drop their gunwale to allow the boat to spin with minimal resistance from the keel.

The rules regarding buoy turns have been fine tuned in the SLSA Surf Sports Manual. Sweeps need to review the manual before competing. The following is an extract from the SLSA Surf Sports Manual. The rules now prevent a boat impeding another crew regardless of whether the impeding boat is approaching or departing the buoys. "The turn shall be effected giving due consideration to other competing Crews. The turn should be kept as tight as is required, so as not to impede other competing Crews. This applies when approaching and departing the turning buoys (see diagram in Surf Sports Manual). Impeding another Crew may result in penalty or disqualification." As you approach the buoys, take note of the location of the crews on either side of your position. This may influence your angle in and out of the turn.

## Sweeping from buoys to wave zone

After turning the buoys steer back to the nominated side of your gate buoy. Before leaving the beach it can be helpful to select a visible marker on the shore that you can steer back towards. This may be a building or colourful tent.

The Sweep will find it easier to adjust the direction of the boat when it is moving fast rather than when it has slowed coming off the back of a swell.

In windy conditions the Sweep may be able to assist the rowers to take clean strokes on the trip home by making small adjustments in the course. The wind can affect the Sweep's ability to keep the boat on the intended course. Strong cross winds can push the tuck quite violently. Constant pressure may have to be kept on the sweep oar by leaning the body into it (as is the case with a right handed Sweep and the north easterly on the Australian east coast). If the wind is from the Sweep's back, the oar handle must be pulled. Avoid removing the blade from the water as this will allow the wind to push the tuck around much more quickly.

**COMMENT: It is surprising how much a strong cross wind will blow the back of the boat around while it is running home on swells. These conditions are testing for the most experienced Sweeps.**

Running home on swells, the bow may drop, causing the tuck to rise. This can lift the sweep oar blade out of the water. Sweeps can stand on the foot chocks to lift the oar handle higher.

The Sweep will notice that it is more difficult to balance the boat while on the foot chocks as the centre of gravity is raised. Therefore they may need to move up and down on the chocks – being careful not to rock the boat.

The Sweep needs to particularly stand correctly with bent knees when running on a swell or catching a wave. The shoulders face up the boat. Try to keep the oar handle off your body and only lean into it as required.

## Wave catching

There is an age old sweeping secret to catching waves. The secret is PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE!

The two most important things are positioning the boat and keeping the blade in the water. There are two aspects to positioning. One is the angle of the boat to the swell/ wave. The other is the location of the surfboat in relation to the run onto the waves. In a race the Sweep may adjust boat speed to optimize the take off location. During training a Sweep will often locate a stationary boat where they feel they will achieve the best take off. If stationary, start rowing at about half pace and increase speed as the swell approaches. Aim to achieve full speed as the swell reaches the boat.

The Sweep will have observed the surf and will be aware where the waves are breaking and the way in which they are breaking. Watch other boats on waves to see if their bow is influenced by currents.

It is better to row ten strokes onto a wave than only three or four, as the rowers on either side will be pulling more evenly. After only a few strokes one side may have pulled more strongly than the other, making it difficult for the Sweep to hold the correct course. The Sweep has more time to set the boat up square to the wave when extra strokes are taken.

**TIP: Keeping a boat straight on a wave is much easier if the boat is rowed onto it quickly. Some rowers will ease off when the pressure comes off their blade as the boat takes off on a wave. Rowers should keep rowing hard until the Sweep gives them a command.**

The Sweep should step up onto the foot chocks as early as possible as the boat is running onto the wave. This will help to raise the handle and keep the blade in the water as the boat slopes down the swell.

**TIP: The Sweep should set the direction of the boat at 90 degrees to the wave rather than 90 degrees to the beach.**

At the take off and rowing down the face, some Sweeps will set the direction of the boat just off 90 degrees to enable them to give it a little push to square it up just before the wave breaks. If the boat is too far off the perpendicular it will be very difficult to straighten it up. Foot chocks are used to raise the handle enabling the blade to stay in the water.



On a wave the sweep oar blade is held vertically in the water and used as a rudder. The Sweep should focus ahead and avoid turning around. The crew can keep the Sweep informed of any significant action on either side!

**TIP: The most common reason for a surfboat going sideways is the Sweep not keeping the blade in contact with the water.** The Sweep may prefer to have both feet behind the rear quarter bar on a wave.

Once the speed of the boat on the wave gathers its own momentum, the rowers can cease rowing. The command on smaller waves can be "EASY OAR" or "LET IT RUN" – the rowers will stop rowing and come forward on their seat with the blades kept above the water. If the wave is a little more challenging it is better to give the command "TRAIL OARS" – the rowers let their oar handles go and remain seated while the oars trail along the gunwales. Rowers should keep their hands and fingers off the gunwales.



Sweep oar blade is held vertically to steer while on a wave



Many Sweeps will have both feet behind the quarter bars when they are on the chocks while others such as this Queenscliff and Long Reef Sweep effectively straddle the quarter bars. Note Matt Hamilton of Queenscliff is one of the few Sweeps that can very effectively hold the end of the sweep oar handle.

On larger waves the rowers need to move to the back of the boat to prevent the bow digging in. The command given is "COME BACK" or "COME AFT". The rowers finish the stroke, trail oars and move to the back of the boat without rocking it.

**COMMENT: A common fault is to call the crew back too late. Calling them back too soon can also be a problem causing the boat to fall off the back of the wave. The crew is then left floundering in the wave impact zone, needing to return to their seats, regather the oars and commence rowing.**





Crew in “easy oar” position after rowing onto wave. They may need to “trail oars” or “come aft” as wave progresses. The redistribution of weight in the boat is significant as a crew comes aft. The combined weight of the crew is much more than the boat.

The Sweep should bend the knees as the crew is coming aft to cushion any rocking of the boat. The rowers should leave their seats together and remain crouched as they move towards the back of the boat. This keeps their centre of gravity low. Sweeps usually find that larger crews are more difficult to steer. Their centre of gravity is higher and there is more hull in the water.

Steer down the wave by pushing or pulling the handle. Be sure the boat is square to the wave when it breaks.



Most Sweeps pull sweep oar inboard as boat takes off on wave to provide increased leverage with a shorter length of oar beyond sweep rowlock.

**TIP: The “Ronny Wriggle”, named after Ron Payne, can help keep a boat straight steering down a wave. The Sweep slightly moves the sweep oar to prevent the boat settling into its own track. The “wriggle” helps the Sweep to feel which side of the boat the pressure is coming from.**

When the wave breaks the sweep oar handle may be pushed down into the boat. The Sweep’s stance should prepare for the downward force on the sweep oar handle. Bend the knees. The breaking wave may shoot the boat towards the shore. The Sweep needs to lean forward and anticipate the increased forward momentum to prevent over balancing backward. It is critical to hold the handle up and keep it in the water. One of the rowers may assist the Sweep by pushing up on the handle.

On a wave the sweep oar should be held with a fair amount of shaft inboard to provide sufficient leverage. A few notable exceptions have been known to hold the end of the handle.

Sometimes the boat may stall slightly. Stay focused when the wave breaks. The bow may lift up if the crew has come aft. This will affect steerage. The boat will be easier to turn as there is less keel in the water. But it will be more prone to swinging sideways. The Bow rower should move forward to bring the bow down and maintain the run of the boat.



Bow pair moving forward to keep boat running on wave.

Note stroke assisting Sweep to keep handle up and sweep oar blade in water.

**TIP: Keep the handle away from the body when the sweep oar blade is vertical. A vertical blade can react quite violently to forces and may throw a Sweep out of the boat. Sweeps such as Don McManus will lean over the handle to counter such forces. This is known as “staying over the work”.**

There are situations which can occur where the Sweep’s ability to control the surfboat will be challenged:

#### **Late take off**

A “late take off” occurs when you are forced to catch a wave after only being able to take a few strokes. This happens when a wave looms up giving the boat no chance to avoid catching it. The Sweep should stand on the foot chocks and hold the sweep oar handle as high as possible to anticipate the downward slope of the boat. The blade will come out of the water if the handle is not held high. Ensure the boat is precisely square to the wave and call the crew back as soon as possible.

#### **Wave breaking behind surfboat**

When a wave breaks behind the boat the crew needs to row as hard as possible to maximise speed. Bring the crew aft just before the broken wave catches up to your boat. If the weight is still in the bow the boat will be difficult to steer.

#### **Veering to finish line**

If you need to veer towards the finishing area while on a wave, steer in the necessary direction after the wave has broken. Do not steer at an angle on an unbroken wave – it can be done, but wait until you are an expert sweep with a very skilful crew.

#### **Avoiding another boat on same wave**

There may be a need to avoid other boats while you are on a wave. You may be going straight with another boat slewing across the wave towards your crew. Generally you should veer away to lessen the impact of a collision. Alternatively, continue straight if there is no time to slew and rock the gunwale of the boat up in an attempt to prevent the other boat mounting your boat and endangering your crew. This is known as “showing your side”. It is best to raise an arm to make it obvious that you have slewed on purpose to avoid the other boat. (It may be difficult to remove a hand from oar to raise arm!). Hopefully the Course Judges will rule in your favour.

**COMMENT: In very important races a Sweep may be tempted to let the other boat collide with them without taking evasive action, to increase the chances of a favourable ruling. This is a big call and it may pay off. But it could also result in avoidable injuries.**

**Broaching:** When the boat “slews” (also known as “broaching”) the Sweep should pull the sweep oar handle inboard and bump along as the boat goes sideways. The crew must keep the weight on the high side to prevent it turning over. There may be an opportunity to straighten the boat. It is important for the Sweep to stay in the boat. They are of no use to a crew once they leave the boat. The Coach/Sweep should instruct novice crews on what to do if the Sweep does go overboard before going to sea.



Sweep is raising handle high to keep breaks in shallow water. In a tight race finish the Sweep may risk leaving the rowers in their seats in order to row to the line. It is foolhardy for any but the best Sweeps to take such a calculated risk.

## Sweeping the boat onto the beach

As a wave approaches the beach it may lose momentum. Steering may become difficult as the boat slows down. Boats often unexpectedly slew in the final stages of a wave as cross currents influence the slowing boat. The Sweep needs to remain focused.

It is possible the boat will fall off the wave as it diminishes. The Sweep may send one or more rowers forward to keep the bow down and the boat running. It may even be necessary for the rowers to regather their oars and commence rowing. This is done by all the rowers moving forward down the centre of the boat. They sit down together to maintain balance and lean back to retrieve the oars. The rower's own oar handle will be on the other side of the boat. To avoid rocking the boat, push the oar shaft trailing beside you, (below the rowlock) away from the gunwale. This helps the rower behind you to retrieve their oar.

Coming into the edge of the shore can be a dangerous stage of a race or training session. The Sweep should retain control of the boat until it hits the shore. Slewing on a shallow edge can be very dangerous. On hitting the sand some crews will jump straight out while others will wait for commands such as "OARS ACROSS", then "LEGS OVER" followed by "OUT".



Sweep is focusing on keeping the boat straight and maintaining momentum as it comes into shore by sending the crew forward.

The crew must get out on the seaward side if the boat comes into the shore sideways. Never allow a rower to disembark on the shoreward side. They can be knocked under the boat if a wave hits while it is side on to the edge. Quickly move the boat out of the water and away from the edge.

## Gaining surf knowledge and sweeping skills

Knowledge of the surf comes from experience and sweeping skills are developed with practice. The initial sweeping skill to master is to be able to stand in the back of the boat. Practice balancing both on your feet and on the oar while you keep the gunwales even. It is sensible to learn to balance on flat water. When you are confident with your balance, experiment with steering on flat water.

**COMMENT: Do not venture into rough water until you feel confident that you can balance and steer the boat on flat water.**

Next progress to the open sea. You will notice that the water surface has energy in all but the smoothest conditions. Move your body with the movement using your knees as a shock absorber. When you are confident with your ability to balance and steer on rough water, practice taking the boat through the wave zone. When you are competent standing in the boat and steering effectively through the wave zone, progress to wave catching.

**TIP: Do not be afraid to ask experienced sweeps for advice.**

Run some swells to become accustomed with the feel of the boat when it gathers its own momentum. Feel the importance of steering with the oar in a rudder fashion while ensuring the blade is kept in the water. Practise when to give commands such as "EASY OAR" and "COME AFT". Also practise stepping up onto the foot chocks.

Catch small waves focusing on remaining square to the wave. As your skill improves challenge your comfort zone to ensure progress

To gain surf knowledge, learn to observe conditions and watch experienced sweeps. Try to develop an appreciation of the effect that particular conditions and waves will have on your crew and surfboat.