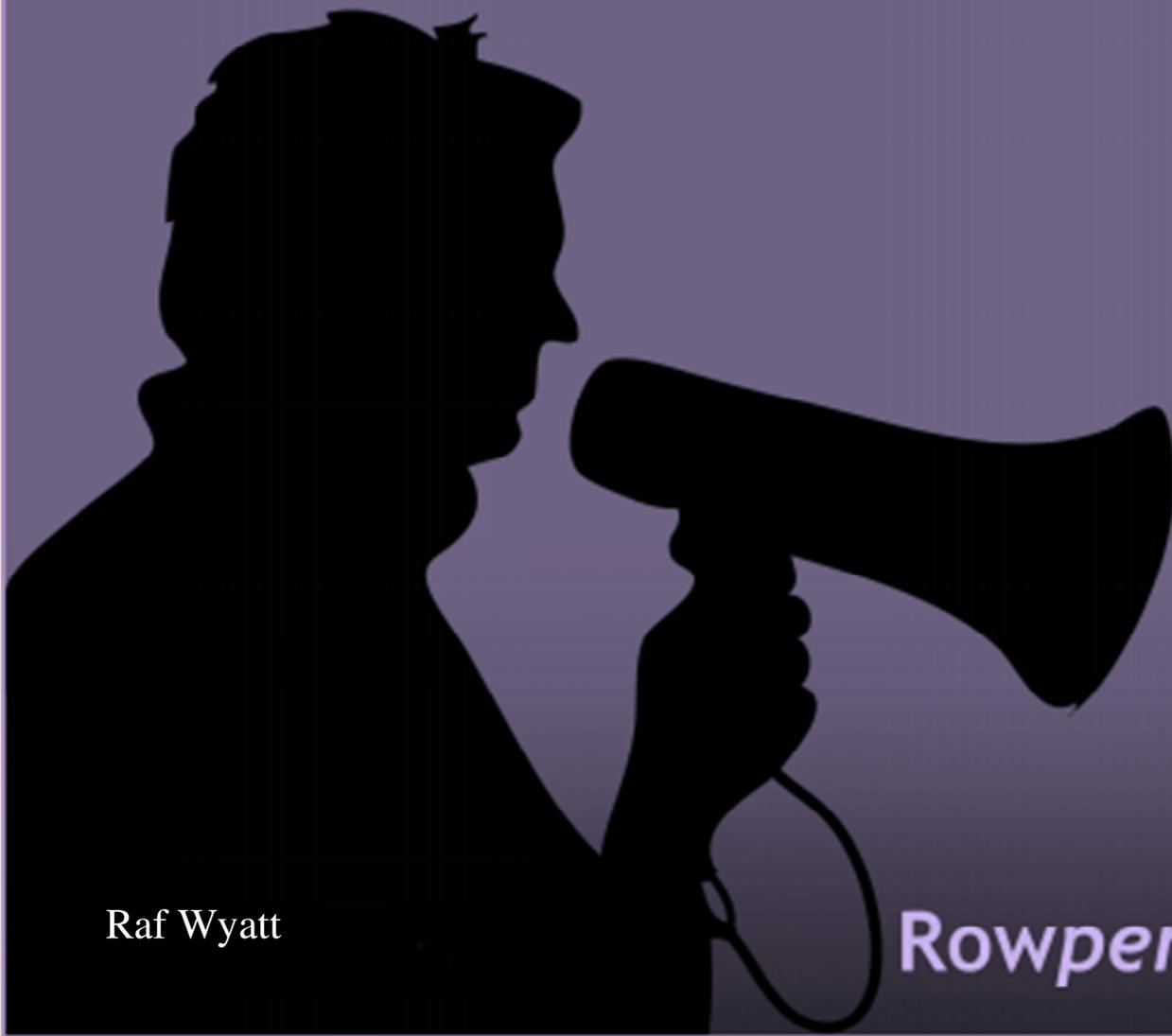


The Rowing Coach:

USING VIDEO TO COACH YOUR ROWING CREW

By Raf Wyatt



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Rowperfect

Not everyone has a mirror flat lake as in Switzerland and a motorboat driver who can put you directly alongside your crew to take perfect rowing video



<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jBJq1Z105e8>

Most of us have to deal with waterways that are crowded, have curves and trees that interrupt your view from the tow-path. That's why the video camera doesn't often make it out of its case until training camp but there are ways of getting more frequent feedback for your crew.

Here are four ways to use video that is still a good coaching aide within the limitations of your river or lake environment.

Do you have a bridge?

We did at one of the clubs I was working for and used it to great effect for before- and after- shots. The coaches decided what it was that the crew was going to improve during the training session and the crew was briefed before they went on the water. The boats were videoed as they approached and moved away from the bridge at the beginning of the outing and again at the end of the outing and the results compared in the boathouse.

This works really well for bladework and timing, keeps your coxswains on their best behaviour, is good for catching the odd-one-out in body positions and if you're lucky as they go under the bridge you can catch the moment when egregious hand faults occur. It doesn't work as well for boat movement nor is it good for crew movement but it has an immediacy that longer videos often lack. The crews really appreciated being able to see the changes they had made as well.

Or a big corner?

By setting yourself up at the apex of a corner you can get the same sort of approach shots albeit with changing angles as the crew goes past. You'll get some side views of your crews as well, maybe enough to determine slide ratios, certainly enough to spot someone moving at a different time to the rest. A tripod helps even if it is a nuisance for the rest of the session and be patient: it takes time to master the zoom and focus and especially if the boat is hidden from view until it rounds the corner.

Or a big boat?

Have you seen the TV crews getting their close-ups of sweat on the brow? They take a couple of people out of their seats and put the cameraman in their place. It's not comfortable but we all know that art is about suffering . . . a good coxswain might be able to do it without stroke and seven being in their place or take five and six out and put a little pressure on the bow four. You won't get the same boat movement as you do for a whole crew but you can focus on body positions or especially on the person directly in front of you.

And then there's always the ergometer

It's not real rowing but you can film from a stable platform, focus on one person at a time, getting side views and shots from in front and behind. You can even set it up with a TV monitor in front of the athlete linked to the camera as you're filming: there's nothing more immediate than the athlete seeing the action as it takes place and as you talk them through it

Do you have perfectly flat training water? The sky's your limit! If the purpose is a technical analysis of individuals I like to work through the crew, in a motorboat sitting at square-off, focusing on one person at a time and then panning out to show how they fit into the rest of the crew.

Step by Step Video Guide

Here is my step by step guide to taking expert video that will enable you to demonstrate to each crew member how their individual technique can be improved.

1. I take 10 strokes of each of their hands on the handles, their body movements, their blades (tricky sometimes to follow the blade during the stroke so try 10 strokes focussed on the point of entry and another 10 of the exit; if your driver is good you can also get right over the blade and catch the water spilling round the blade).
2. Then 10 strokes with the two people rowing in front and behind each athlete.
3. Another 10 of the whole crew.
4. Once I've gone through the people in the boat (remember the coxswain!) then I move onto the boat itself and focus on
 - A. the bow ball,
 - B. followed by the stern

- C. the puddles moving past.
- 5. Some shots of the crew from directly behind the stern and then you can put the camera away.

10 is a nice round number for videoing strokes; I've found any fewer than 7 strokes and you haven't got time in the analysis to point out what you did or didn't like nor time for the athlete to adjust to what you're seeing and see for themselves when you play it back to them.

That's a long video, especially if you're working with eights. Whole crew movements are better done in shorter slices, still 10 strokes from any one viewing point but stay focussed on whatever you set out to change be it finishes or racing starts.

Advanced rowing video techniques

Where possible get direct comparisons:

- 10 strokes doing square blade rowing, 10 strokes normal rowing at 18 rating, 10 strokes at race rating – how do the blades come out of the water each time?
- Or 10 dead lifts in the gym followed by 10 strokes on the water (turn the camera on its side to maximise the effect) – how are we applying the power?
- Or 10 strokes from yesterday and 10 from today – have we changed?
- Or with so many clips of the top athletes available free online try 10 strokes of Mahe Drysdale's finish followed by 10 strokes of yours (it's up to the cameraman to make sure that both pieces of footage are taken from the same angle) – what's your back doing, your hands, your elbows?

Watching your movie

This is where careful planning, even scripting, pay off. Looking at the film with your athletes will take at least 2-3 times as long as the film itself (another reason for training camp movies).

You can reduce the time by having everything set up (viewing room, monitor/screen, cables) before you start. It also helps to know how to work the machines or have someone around who can for you. Do you want to see it first and plan what to say before the crew arrives? Can you make use of frame-by-frame or freeze-frame to emphasize aspects of the stroke? Is the quality good enough to show what you want?

- Brief the athletes as to what to look/aim for at the beginning of the session so they're not distracted by other parts of the stroke.
- Think about how to hold their attention – do you need to have the whole eight there as you go through individual points?
- Are they cold and wet?
- Do they have to get to class?

- Do you need to watch the whole video now? Could you watch now and send everyone an edited copy later?
- Can you upload it to YouTube as a private film so they can review it at their leisure?

If you've got time then you're much better positioned to let them discover their own strengths and weaknesses. The shots you have taken, the shots you use for comparison, the questions you ask – these can all lead to great “a-ha” moments for the rowers, moments where ‘I see’ turns into ‘I understand’.

Take two scullers....

Or better still, take two videos of two scullers and now let's talk about the camera technique

Take 1 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b3KxoFJZgcA>



Take 2 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gQMaxr-gxp0&feature=plcp>



Which video do you find more useful for coaching and stroke analysis purposes?

I get more information about the sculler in “Take 2” because:

- **I can see him.** He fills the screen; he’s wearing light-coloured clothing; the sun is behind the cameraman
- **I can compare one stroke with the next.** The camera stays square off the pin and doesn’t change angle; it also keeps its distance constant
- **There are stripes.** He has stripes on his rowing suit – look how easy it is to see his body angles or the height of his hands; there are stripes on his boat – see what effect he has on the boat. There could be more stripes: what about something to measure stroke length – a vertical stripe on the side of the boat to show where the blade goes in? comes out? Or how about something on the shaft of the sculls to show how deep the blade goes? Or what about the biomechanist’s dots on the body if you want to compare relative speeds of, say, shoulders and seat?
- **I have time.** The slow motion is a great trick, a good way of getting more information from 4 strokes than you would from a further 10 in real time. OK, I would have liked to have seen some stuff in real time as well but this means I catch the detail.
- **There are no distractions.** His is the only boat; there are no waves or wash – nothing to interrupt his rowing.

Anything else? Missing from Take 2 are the shots that include the whole boat, the ones that let you see how the boat is running and whether the rower is in time with the boat – the camera could have been a little further away.

And how would I compare these two scullers?

Oh, just look at the differences in the hands: the way they grip the handle, the way they turn the blades.

Or the differences in core strength shown in the finish positions – don't you just love those stripes now?

And to make the good better?

Such presumption in dealing with an Olympic sculler! But what about the way those blades are drifting out of the water towards the finish of the stroke – could they stay in for longer or could he finish a little before his body to make the finish stronger and the exit cleaner?



About the Author

Raf Wyatt is a consulting rowing coach and has worked in New Zealand, Holland, UK and Switzerland.

Working with Rowperfect UK she is the principal author of the Rowing Coach pages on our website. And she provides advice by Skype and email for club rowing coaches on how to improve their own coaching skills, training programmes and technique.

She lives in Central Otago, New Zealand.

Rowperfect UK sells equipment, book, DVDs and tools for rowing and sculling supporting excellence in technique and coaching.

We aim to sell products that help improve technical skills and deliver fast boats.

Our news page includes coaching advice, commentary from around the web about the sport and product news, special offers and promotions.

Get in touch if you would like us to sponsor and support your rowing club school or university team.