

## Frequently Asked Questions for Para-rowing

**Question:** An individual with a visual impairment has asked to join the Rowing Club; will he/she be able to row in a single scull?

**Answer:** There is no reason why an individual with a visual impairment should not be able to row in a single scull. Coaches should always perform a risk assessment on planned activities. They would need to do the same in this instance particularly thinking about what other water users there are and what level of supervision is required. Help with navigational direction from the coach or a fellow sculler alongside will be helpful. The use of one-way radios can be used to aid steering.

**Q:** A wheelchair user has asked to try rowing. How do I ensure that they can get into a rowing boat safely?

**A:** A wheelchair user may or may not require help when transferring from a wheelchair to a boat – remember to always ask rather than assume what assistance they may require.

There will be different considerations and basic guidelines depending on whether the athlete is transferring from a shore or pontoon/dock. A transfer from a shoreline may require two people to assist, to support either side of the boat.

If the individual rows regularly from a particular venue, it may be worth considering permanent aids to help them transfer. Such aids vary from simple devices such as a sliding board, which is useful where the transfer gap is wide and the seat in the boat is at a similar height to the seat of their chair. A simple transfer box will help them transfer from wheelchair to transfer box then onto pontoon/dock, before transferring to the boat. A hoist can be installed on a stable dock, however, this may be unsuitable for a floating pontoon.

FISA has published coaching resource materials which you may find helpful, as it illustrates a methodical and safe way of self and assisted transfer to the rowing boat.

Further information is available here: <http://www.worldrowing.com/coaches/>  
Level 1 Para-rowing 9. and 10. Para-rowing Coaching Considerations

**Q:** If an athlete has a spinal cord injury; is it safe for them to row?

**A:** Depending on whether the athlete has a complete or incomplete injury will determine what assistive devices they may require in the boat. These may include stable boats, postural support seats, pressure sore prevention cushions/pads, strapping, pontoon floats to provide additional stability in the boat, etc.

In discussions with the athlete, you will be able to determine on what assistive devices they may need (seats, cushions, strapping) based on the level of their injury and what parts of their body might be affected by paralysis and loss of function.

FISA strongly advises that athletes are classified prior to taking part in rowing activities where they will answer a set of pertinent health questions.

In addition to a set of questions that record pertinent medical history, the coach can ask the athlete if they wish to share relevant information to make their rowing sessions a safe and enjoyable

experience. All information should be kept confidential but, with their consent, may be shared with coaches to ensure that their needs are met when taking part in rowing activities.

Further information is available here - <http://www.worldrowing.com/coaches/>  
Level 1 Para-rowing - [7. Para-Rowing Equipment and Regulations](#)

**Q: What if the para-rower has limited hand function?**

A: Gloves are available to aid handgrip on the indoor rowing machine or on an oar, such as the 'Active Hands™ general purpose gripping aid'. This consists of a self-closing Velcro glove that tensions to wrap fingers around oar/scull handle. These are widely used by para-rowers and particularly ideal for those with tetraplegia/quadriplegia, cerebral palsy, stroke recovery, finger amputees or any disability that affects hand function. It works by the tightening of a strap in the upper section, which gently pulls the hand into a fist shape, in order to facilitate an ergometer, oar or scull handle. The wrist strap is also adjustable and the aid is padded to reduce chafing.

<https://www.activehands.com/product/general-purpose-gripping-aid/>

**Q: If the individual has a hearing impairment; is it safe for them to go out rowing?**

A: As their coach, you will always need to assess the risk before agreeing on any activity. There should not be a concern as long as they understand the rules of the water-way and are aware of other water users, the environment and conditions. There does not need to be much modification to a coaching session, other than to ensure that there is adequate supervision from a safety/coaching boat or other crews/scullers alongside if they are in a single scull, to warn of any danger.

**Q: How will I communicate with the athlete if they have a hearing impairment?**

A: Ask the individual. They know their own preferred means of communication best. Some rowers are able to lip-read and some may choose to use simple sign language which can be agreed between coach and athlete.

**Q: If the athlete has a visual impairment will they be able to row with others when they can't see what everyone else is doing?**

A: Yes. Rowing is a sport that relies very much on feel and once they have been taught the basic rowing technique on a rowing machine and in a sculling boat on a one-to-one basis with you as coach, they will soon be able to row with others in crew rowing.

A visual impairment does not constitute a serious limitation for performing the rowing movement. In practice, a sighted rower does not constantly look at his/her blade or crew members, but relies on an instinctive 'feel' for the boat.

The athlete will be able to feel how the boat is moving and how others are moving in the boat. They will be able to keep in time with the others in the crew by listening for clues - the sound during the placement of the oar in the water at the Catch and removal at the Finish. In crew boats, a coxswain can give specific commands to help them follow the crew rhythm and timing.

There are many exercises that coaches can use with crews that are relevant to individuals with a visual impairment. These include simple placement drills and 'slapping' the water before the catch, This will

help the athlete (whether they have full or partial sight) become more aware of where their oar is in relation to the water at the catch.

Additional aids can include having straws in the boat at the catch indicating where they need to raise their hands to – this provides a physical and kinaesthetic stimulus. You can also place tactile markers on the oar or scull handles to indicate when the blade is 'square' and the correct relation to the water. These can be easily removed, once they have learnt the skill.

Further information - [http://www.worldrowing.com/coaches/10. Para-rowing Visual Impairment](http://www.worldrowing.com/coaches/10.Para-rowing%20Visual%20Impairment)

**Q: How can an athlete keep in time in a crew boat if they have a visual impairment?**

**A:** If the athlete is in a crew boat that has a coxswain, it is the coxswain's role to ensure that the rhythm of the boat is transferred from stroke to bow and to provide any additional support to an athlete with a visual impairment. In a coxless boat, another crew member will pay particular attention to timing, rhythm and coaching calls to help the individual concentrate and enhance the kinaesthetic feel and feedback from the boat itself. You should reassure the athlete and, where possible, fully integrate them into sighted crew boats.

**Q: How do we know if an athlete with a disability is eligible for Para-rowing?**

**A: Classification Eligibility Guide** - FISA has created an online tool to help potential para athletes determine their eligibility for para-rowing and to give an indication of what sport class they may be eligible for. The online tool is available here - [Classification Eligibility Guide](#)

Please be advised that the tool provides an indication only. The actual sport class can only be determined after pre-classification and consequently international classification by a FISA panel before an event.

The following document lists eligible impairment types and medical diagnostic requirements for classification:

[http://www.worldrowing.com/mm/Document/General/General/12/68/57/EligibleImpairmentsandMedicalRequirementsf\\_Neutral.pdf](http://www.worldrowing.com/mm/Document/General/General/12/68/57/EligibleImpairmentsandMedicalRequirementsf_Neutral.pdf)

For any questions regarding classification please contact: [classification@fisa.org](mailto:classification@fisa.org)