

# On the erg

Photos by  
**John West**



**James Wilton**, head coach at University of Worcester Rowing Club, explains the sequence

**T**he first thing I'd like to impress on a beginner who is learning the rowing stroke is to keep it simple. There may be many components to it, but in the first instance they can be broken down into a set sequence to help the athlete focus on just one thing at a time.

## #1: Catch

In the catch position you should relax and extend your arms. Maintain a neutral spine (see below for how) with an activated core, ready for the stroke and with the body pivoted over from the hips to roughly the 11 o'clock position. The shins should be vertical. For more on achieving the catch position, see pages 56-57 of August's R&R.

## #2: Drive

Exhaling through the drive, press your legs down hard and suspend your bodyweight from the feet through the handle. As the legs approach straight, your body is opened to roughly the one o'clock position. You should feel 'light' on the seat.

**What is a neutral spine?** Mark Edgar explains...

The neutral spine position is that mid zone where the lowest lumbar vertebra sits squarely on top of its associated lumbar intervertebral disc and the sacrum. The result is that the lumbar spine is neither in a flexed nor extended position. In this position, we expect the spinal muscles to be at their most effective.

## James Wilton & UWRC

James Wilton joined the University of Worcester Rowing Club in 2008 with a remit to take one of the newest clubs in the country to top flight competition. A former president and development squad coach at the University of Birmingham, James is a Level 2 coach and is currently working towards his Level 3 qualification.

Since its founding in 2004, the University of Worcester Rowing Club has grown to over 50 members. More at [www.worcesterunirowing.com](http://www.worcesterunirowing.com)



### #3: Finish

The body has now reached the one o'clock position and the arms have been drawn through to a high position – usually close to the base of the sternum. Your wrists should be flat, ideally with your elbows above or level with the handle. Make sure that your trunk is long with your body supported through the core.

### #4: Recovery 1

At the beginning of the recovery you should tap the hands down a short distance – yes, even on a rowing machine – and move them away at the same speed that they were drawn in. Allow the hands to draw the body over, maintaining your posture. Feel your shoulders move over the natural arc created by the pivoting from the hips. Once your body is at the 11 o'clock position, keep this angle and your legs will bend as you begin the slide. Your head should be up and you should be inhaling ready for the next stroke – one breath or two per recovery depending on the rower and the stroke rate.

### #5: Recovery 2

As you continue to recover, you must maintain the posture and body angle already set. The only noticeable change is the increase in leg compression. Whilst working to achieve good posture, it's important to feel relaxed in the recovery to ensure you are ready to apply power in the next stroke.

### #6: Catch Preparation

On the water, the last quarter of the slide is vital and so it should be impressed upon a beginner to take time in achieving a front-stops position – image 1. As before, the change here should be only that the legs continue to compress: everything else should be held in position with relaxed control through the core. Ensure that you are breathing in so that you are ready for the drive. Mentally too, you will need to consider the movement of the stroke that you are about to take.

### Finally...

In the early sessions for any beginner it is hugely important to make the stroke as simple as possible by breaking it down into logical steps. The more sequential the stroke is, the easier it will be for them to understand it – and, on the water, for the coach to be able to co-ordinate several beginners into a cohesive crew. ▀

## Top three points

1. Work to ensure a neutral spine at all times
2. Keep the stroke simple, keep it separated in order
3. Relax! Be prepared to work hard once you are comfortable with the stroke, but take it easy until then

#3



#4



#5



#6

