



Goring Thames
Sailing Club

Officer on Duty (OOD) Top Ten Tips – 2024

Here are a few pointers to help make your day go well to supplement the OOD Manual (downloadable from the “Club” + “Operational Documents” Section of the website www.goringthamessc.org.uk).

1. If in doubt ask for advice! (Sailing secretary, regular racer...). Everyone has to “do their turn” and will be happy to help.
2. Plan ahead

1 Week before:

Check your team are confirmed and know what time to turn up. Dutyman will show the other members of your team and their contact numbers/email addresses;

Suggested minimums: OOD 90min before start of the first race,

Safety Officer (SO) 60min, Assistant to OOD (AOD) 30min.

Make sure you understand the format of the races you will be running. If you are running a pursuit race and have a Topper or Optimist competing you will need to get the start sequence going a considerable time before nominal “zero” time!

3. Review the OOD manual

2-3 days ahead

- a. Start watching the weather forecast and Environment Agency river conditions. <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/river-thames-current-river-conditions> .

If it looks like extreme conditions (very strong winds or very strong river flow) seek advice from the Sailing Sec or a Flag Officer. It might be prudent to roster another safety crew.

- b. **Make or buy the cakes and milk for afternoon tea. (Suggestion: Semi-Skimmed milk tends to work)**

On the Day

1. On arrival at the club check there are no gross problems that could really spoil your day. E.g. electricity is working, there’s fuel for the rescue boat. Switch the kitchen hot water on.
2. Don’t delay the start of the main races significantly for one straggler who’s turned up late.

The timing of the day is quite tight and if a race starts late it is hard to catch up. On the other hand if it is a glorious sunny day and people can’t launch because of other moored boats be sympathetic, maybe ask bystanders to help shuffle boats around so everyone can get going in time.

3. Setting the course – hopefully you've got down early enough to have a few minutes watching the pattern of the wind on the water. Use the part of the river that has the best wind which may mean the bulk of the course is mainly upstream or downstream of the clubhouse.
4. Consider holding a briefing about 15min before the start, make sure everyone knows the format of the races, explain the course and starting sequence to any novices.
5. If it's a pursuit race write down on piece of paper the order in which the boats will start (slowest first) and the times they should start (including personal handicaps when relevant). In the middle of a pursuit start sequence it's easy to lose your place. When it comes to the finish of a pursuit race make sure you've got enough people to help you record where everyone is at the finish bell.
6. During the race write down the time every boat completes a lap, even for a pursuit race. This will help you if there is any confusion about how many laps a boat has done.
7. Finishing – Times (minutes and seconds) are needed for every boat in a points (handicap) race, just position in a pursuit race. Consider using a camera or your phone's camera/video/audio to record the order boats finish and transfer to results sheet later. It's easy to get confused if 3 or 4 boats cross the line close together.
8. Results – Please ensure all names/times/sail numbers etc are clear and readable. At the current time there is no need to calculate the results yourself unless you are interested, though we are currently looking at ways of automating this. Pin the signing on sheet and results sheets to the board by the phone or (ideally) take home, scan and email to gtsc.results@gmail.com

Red Boards

How do I know if it's safe to go out on the river?

Our lovely stretch of the river is a delight to be on and generally very safe. But consideration always needs to be given to how fast the river is flowing and no one should go out on the water if the stream is particularly strong. This is most likely to be the case after long periods of heavy rain as the water makes its way to the sea. This causes the flow rate to increase, usually 2-3 days after the rain.

So how can I tell if it's safe to go out on the river?

The first place to check is the Environment Agency's website (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/river-thames-current-river-conditions>). Look for the section that refers to where we are – the Benson Lock to Cleeve Lock reach.

If under "Current conditions" it says "Caution strong stream" with a red background then club equipment must not be used (sailing dinghies, SUPs or kayaks). All organised club events will be cancelled. This is generally referred to as "Red boards" and if you pass a lock you will see a red board hanging from lock gate. This means the Environment Agency advises all boats (powered or unpowered) not to navigate.

There are two further levels of warning you may see, both referred to as "Yellow boards" which are "Caution stream increasing" and "Caution stream decreasing". For both of these the Environment Agency advise all unpowered boats not to navigate.

So, if you see either of these then the same rule generally applies, club equipment must not be used (sailing dinghies, SUPs or kayaks) and better to come back another day!

There is an exception if safety boat cover is available and the conditions are otherwise good. In this case the organiser of an event may use their discretion to run an event taking into account the stream status, weather and wind conditions and the experience level of those taking part.

Note when the stream is increasing it is generally not considered safe to run an event, especially for junior or inexperienced sailors.

Even if no warnings are showing please always take a few minutes to assess the river conditions before going out on the water. A northerly wind coupled with visible water flow can be particularly

challenging for a beginner to make progress upstream in any craft. It's always worth heading upstream initially so you can judge how easily you can make progress against the stream.

Try and enjoy the day as well – It's a great opportunity to improve your sailing by watching what those at the front of the fleet are doing differently from the back!

Neil Champion
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