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Phraseology for Radio Communications During Emergencies

Just as established languages such as English, French and Spanish have certain structure and rules for orderly communications amongst speakers of those languages, radio communications for net operations during emergencies has structure and rules. We look at these rules in this primer:

Overview

For many amateur radio operators, a true disaster happens once or twice in a life time. Those are the moments that radio operators must be at peak efficiency, accuracy and capability to pass the most messages in the precious moments and seconds that are available. People who've gone through the experience say they should have been better practiced and prepared. Standard radio procedures, words and phraseology are the key to radio nets that are crisp and precise that get the critical messages delivered.

The secret to working quickly and efficiently during an emergency is to use common and plain English radio procedures. Strive to get your message through on the first attempt. As you practice your proper radio procedures daily, the flow and rhythm of operating and communicating on a radio becomes automatic and natural which reduces the chance of hesitation and confusion during an actual emergency.

Below are procedure words and phraseology that are consistent with communicators in other radio services. As emergency communicators, we strive to use plain English and common words to reduce the likelihood of confusion and misunderstanding with other emergency responders. Therefore, we do not use procedure codes such as amateur radio "Q codes" or APCO "10 codes".

Initial contact with the Net Control Station (NCS)

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Usually during the onset of an emergency situation, a station will assume the role of a Net Control Station (NCS) to provide order and direction for the radio net. For maximum efficiency, listen carefully to the NCS for instructions and direction for the net.

Interacting with Net Control Station (NCS)

Situation	Transmission	Comment
You request to check into a busy net.	(suffix) CHECK IN.	Use the last letters of the suffix of your call sign to attract the attention of the Net Control Station. The NCS will reply with "(suffix), please say your call sign."
You request to check into a moderate or slow net, or after the NCS has acknowledged the suffix of your call sign.	(callsign) CHECK IN.	If the Net Control Station heard your transmission clearly, the NCS will reply with "(call sign) you are checked-in."
You request to check out of the net.	(suffix) CHECK OUT.	You should not leave the net without checking out with the NCS. Use the last letters of the suffix of your call sign to attract the attention of the Net Control Station. The NCS will reply with "(call sign) checked-out."
You complete your exchange of information with the other station, ID (identify) and clear the frequency for the NCS or next station.	... (callsign).	Your full call sign at the end of the transmission fulfills and complies with Part 97.119(a) for proper identification of a US amateur radio station. Identifying your station at the end of the exchange of transmissions is a common practice in other radio services.
You wish to attract the attention of the NCS once you've checked in.	(suffix) or (tactical callsign).	The suffix of your call sign may be unique enough for the NCS to identify your station. The NCS will acknowledge and call you to proceed with "(suffix) GO AHEAD".
When you have information pertinent to the current exchange of information.	(Suffix) INFO.	The NCS will acknowledge with "(call sign) GO AHEAD with your info."
When the NCS requires radio silence, or a radio operator needs a moment to prepare to receive messages.	STAND BY.	Wait until the NCS or requesting station requests radio activity to resume.
When the NCS or radio		Communicates to the other station that the

operator awaits a call or information from another station.	(suffix) STANDING BY.	NCS or requesting station will observe radio silence and wait for a response.
The NCS or another station has messages for you.	(call sign) I HAVE (quantity) (type) MESSAGES FOR YOU.	The NCS or other station notifies you of the quantity and type of messages to be transmitted to you. Message types could be ICS-213, FLDIGI, the ARRL Radiogram or other type of message.
The NCS or other station requests you change frequency and make contact with (callsign2).	(callsign) CONTACT (callsign2) ON FREQUENCY (new frequency).	You would normally acknowledge the request by reading back the new frequency and identifying your station prior to the frequency change. "(new frequency) (call sign)". If the other station (callsign2) is on the same frequency, the station would likewise acknowledge "(new frequency) (call sign2)" and the NCS would resume the radio net.
You need to gain the attention of the NCS with an item of higher precedence than the transmission in progress.	(suffix) BREAK.	Use the last letters of the suffix of your call sign to attract the attention of the Net Control Station. The NCS will reply with "(call sign) GO AHEAD."
You need to gain immediate attention of the NCS with an emergency message.	BREAK BREAK BREAK - This is (call sign) with an emergency message for (call sign2).	Use your full call sign to attract the attention of the Net Control Station. The NCS will reply with "(previous call sign) standby. (call sign2), (call sign) has traffic for you." This phraseology is reserved for the most important emergencies and should be used sparingly.

When interactive with a Net Control Station, or a Net Operator station, be prepared to wait for the other party to respond. Often, the person is logging or otherwise writing down information before their attention is turned to you. Or, there may be distractions or extra activities at their location such that they may not be able to get to you right away.

Establishing Direct Communications With Other Stations

The protocol for calling another station varies with each radio service, so it is not covered in detail here. However, all radio services exchange signal reports as needed to ensure that the receiving station can hear clearly the transmitting station. The following table outlines the common types of signal reports.

Signal Report	Signal Report Readability/Comment
Loud and clear	100%
Readable	90% to 100% readable
Weak Readable	50% to 90% readable
Noisy	10% to 50% readable
Unreadable	Less than 10% readable
Nothing Heard	Unable to hear a signal

You may also hear a station state "(call sign) RELAY". That means that the station heard the other station, and can relay the message to you. Similarly, if you can hear the weaker station and can offer a relay, you may want to break in and offer a message relay.

Communications for Exchanging and Receiving Messages

The procedure words and phraseology that are common during the exchange of messages are listed below.

Exchanging and Receiving Messages		
Situation	Transmission	Comment
You request the other station to transmit at the end of your transmission.	... GO AHEAD.	GO AHEAD is preferable to OVER for emergency communications.
You request a specific station to transmit.	(Suffix) GO AHEAD. or (call sign) GO AHEAD.	Use the last letters of the other stations's call sign to indicate who should transmit next. If the suffix alone is not enough to uniquely identify the station, use the whole call sign to indicate who should transmit next.
	COPY.	It means that the message or information was received. In some settings, operators may use "Roger", which is the voice version of the morse code proword for "Received". In a multi-agency setting, operators are encouraged to use "Copy" instead. COPY does not convey a positive or negative response to the content of the message. NASA uses it for communications during manned spaceflight.
You respond YES or		Use Instead of "AFFIRMATIVE" and "NEGATIVE". Under

NO to the other station	YES / NO	noisy conditions, "AFFIRMATIVE" and "NEGATIVE" can be confused and mistaken.
When you are ready to copy the message(s).	READY TO COPY.	Indicates to the other station that you are ready to copy a message.
Beginning the transmission of a message.	PLEASE COPY MESSAGE NUMBER (message number)...	This short preamble signals to the other station that the message immediately follows.
The other station is talking too fast to copy the message.	SPEAK SLOWER.	When exchanging messages, you should speak no faster than the other person can write down or type the message. If you speak too fast, the other station will not be able to copy the message on the first attempt, and that is a waste of valuable time on the radio. Also, you should practice writing "ahead" by leaving blank space on the paper and keep up with the other station. During pauses in his transmission, very quickly go back and fill in the word(s) you had to skip over. If you are a student, this is a great skill to master for taking notes in the classroom.
You are spelling the next word phonetically.	I SPELL ...	Use the ITU/NATO phonetics when spelling words.
You request the other station to transmit specific information	SAY (Your Location).	You can specify "Your Location", "Your Name", "Your Callsign", etc.
You request the other station to retransmit part or all of the last transmission	SAY AGAIN xxxx	Do not say "Repeat" or "Come back". Use "Say Again" instead. "Repeat" is used in the military to order another round of artillery fire. You can specify "Your Location", etc, "Word Before", "Word After", or "All Before" or "All After".
You retransmit part or all of the last transmission.	I SAY AGAIN ...	
You have a correction to an item.	CORRECTION.	Proceed to give the corrected item. If you do not get a positive acknowledgement from the other station about the change, you might want to ask if the other

		station copied the correction.
You request a read back from the other station of a part or all of the message that was just transmitted.	READ BACK ...	
You are reading back a part or all of the message that was just transmitted.	I READ BACK ...	
You are confirming that the message was copied completely.	MESSAGE COPIED.	
The transmitting station has more information or traffic for the receiving station.	MORE TO FOLLOW.	
The transmitting station wishes to cancel the message that is in progress.	DISREGARD THIS MESSAGE.	
The transmitting station has sent the last message in a series of messages.	END OF MESSAGE. NO MORE	
When you are through exchanging messages and transferring use of the frequency back to the Net Control Station.	BACK TO NET CONTROL. (callsign)	You may abbreviate it to BACK TO NET if you believe other radio services and non-amateur radio operators are not actively monitoring the net. Your full call sign at the end identifies your station at the end of transmission.

Exchanging Tactical Messages With Other Stations

There are times when stations need to exchange status or progress information, and can do it quickly without bogging down the radio net. These messages are called

"tactical" messages. These are words and phrases common in exchanging tactical messages.

Tactical Messages

Situation	Transmission	Comment
<p>When relaying status or information, attribute the source of the information.</p>	<p>PER person, (status or info)</p>	<p>By naming (person) as the source of the status or information, the receiving party is able to relay the source of the information.</p>

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