

RACES/ARES

Message Handling Tutorial

Part 2 - Message Handling Training

Sending the message - The Basics

Efficient traffic handling means getting the message relayed with 100% accuracy in the least practical amount of time. 100% accuracy is especially important if you do not understand the content of the message. If it makes no sense to you, it MAY be appropriate to get an explanation before you put it on the air. This is a judgment call. If you are handling medical traffic, it is helpful but not necessary to understand what you are communicating. But if you are communicating information you do not understand, accuracy is all the more critical.

Send the message ONCE (right the first time). There are many elements of technique that contribute to getting it "right the first time". The most important is, you SEND a message, you DON'T READ it. When you are sending the message, the person receiving it must write it down. Most people can't write as fast as we talk. Therefore, you must slow your delivery to allow the receiving station to comfortably (and legibly) write the message down. If you are too fast, and have to repeat many times, the end result is that it takes longer. It's better to slow your delivery so that the receiving station gets it the first time than to repeat all or part of the message. You might try composing a message and sending it to a tape recorder. Then play the tape back and see if you are comfortable writing it down at that speed. You will probably be surprised. When sending a message, speak slowly, distinctly, clearly, and do not let your voice trail off at the end of words or sentences. Give each and every word equal force. Follow standard procedures as much as possible, and try to do things consistently. That way people receiving traffic from you will be used to your delivery and it won't be a guessing game about what you are going to do next.

Procedural Words:

Sending technique involves the use of certain procedural words and phrases, which help the receiving station, anticipate what is coming ... phrases such as "figures" or "I spell", etc. When first encountered, these procedures sometimes seem a bit artificial and unnecessary. However, these have proven over a long period of time to be useful. When you make them habitual in your message sending, they fall in automatically and become natural. The primary function of these words and phrases is to define the parts of the message, and to alert the receiving station about what is to follow.

The phrase MESSAGE FOLLOWS is used to alert the receiving operator that the message is about to start. The next thing the receiving operator hears must be written down.

The word BREAK is used at the end of the address and again at the end of the text, along with releasing the microphone. This procedure separates the parts of the message as well as giving the receiving operator an opportunity to ask for a fill or other clarification.

If the receiving station requires a fill, he or she should say, "BREAK" in return, and wait for an acknowledgement from the sending station before asking for a fill.

END indicates the end of the message, and is usually accompanied by an indication of whether there are more messages to follow:

END NO MORE, OVER indicates end of message and no more messages.

END ONE MORE, OVER indicates end of message and one more to follow.

END ... MORE, OVER indicates end of message and two or more to follow.

When receiving traffic make sure you have it right before you acknowledge the message. Train yourself to always use OVER when you finish a transmission and want another station to reply. In the process of sending the message, there are various introductory words and phrases that alert the receiving station about what is to follow.

"FIGURE" OR "FIGURES" introduces a number or group of numbers. For example, if the number 528 appears in the message, the sending operator would say:
"FIGURES FIVE TWO EIGHT"

Note that the individual digits are always given ... "FIVE TWO EIGHT", not "FIVE HUNDRED TWENTY EIGHT".

INITIAL introduces a single letter. It is often an initial in a person's name, but not always. It may be the "X" that is used in place of a period in many messages. INITIAL is used any time there is a single letter. Always use phonetics when saying the letter. So if a person's middle initial is "I", it is sent as "INITIAL INDIA".

I SPELL is used to alert the receiving operator that the next thing that will be sent will be a series of letters. If the word or group to be spelled is a pronounceable word, say the word followed by I SPELL followed by the spelling. So if the city name Bethesda appears in a message, it would be sent BETHESDA ... I SPELL ... BRAVO ECHO TANGO HOTEL ECHO SIERRA DELTA ALFA

Phonetics may or may not be used. Whether or not to use phonetics becomes a judgment call on the part of the sending operator, and depends on the quality of communications. If the radio conditions are poor, phonetics generally work better. If we're working on 2-meter FM and both stations are full quieting to each other, phonetics often are not necessary and can actually slow the process down. If spelling without phonetics, deliver the letters slowly and distinctly. If you do use phonetics, learn and use only the standard ICAO phonetic alphabet:

ALFA HOTEL OSCAR VICTOR
BRAVO INDIA PAPA WHISKEY
CHARLIE JULIET QUEBEC XRAY
DELTA KILO ROMEO YANKEE
ECHO LIMA SIERRA ZULU
FOXTROT MIKE TANGO
GOLF NOVEMBER UNIFORM

I SAY AGAIN indicates that you are going to repeat the previous word, group or phrase. It is important that the receiving operator knows that what is coming is a repeat, to avoid incorporating duplicate wording or information into the message.

There is often no punctuation in messages. The letter "X" or "XRAY" is used in place of a period. Questions are indicated with the word "QUERY". If the meaning of the message is dependent on a comma or other punctuation, spell the name of the punctuation out as a word, such as COMMA or PERIOD. Decimal points in numbers are indicated by the word DECIMAL.