

# Tips and Hints – Volume 1

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## Comaraderie of Ham Radio

FAQ #252 Why do we do this stuff? Part of why we do what we do is because we like people. We enjoy serving others by traffic handling, weather spotting, public service events, and enhancing our skills for use in times of need. We also like the satisfaction of connecting to other humans over the airwaves. Whether the contact is a contest exchange, a rag chew, or the efficient relay of a formal message, it's satisfying to know we've been heard and understood.

It's also great to know that we care about each other. On any net, you'll hear concern for problems and congratulations on successes. We know operators' activities, preferences, and the names of spouses and pets. Hams share the trivia of their lives because they know they have a receptive audience. What could be more interesting than sharing thoughts and feelings with those who have common interests? The adage applies that we may not care how much people know, if we know how much they care.

That's why we need to remind ourselves of why we spend our time, attention, and personal resources on our hobby. That's why we need to welcome those newly licensed or new to an aspect of the hobby such as net operation and traffic handling. That's why we need to show our enthusiasm and willingness to help with challenges like technical problems, scheduling problems, or message delivery. It's why we practice net protocol and encourage others to, too.

There are plenty of frustrations. We fight poor band conditions. We're challenged by equipment failure. We might feel burdened if taking traffic in our neighborhood always seems to fall to us – when we know of many other Hams who could share the duties. We might feel taxed when no one else volunteers to be net control or liaison. We might be tempted to give up when there's just no outlet for traffic we've held for two days. That's when we need to recall the friends we have on the air, the friends who share it all with us. Reminding ourselves of the positive aspects

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## Handling Instructions

FAQ # 243 Can you handle this? Although handling instructions are optional in an NTS message, they're handy and they can be important. Let's look.

HXA (followed by a number) – authorizes a *collect* call within X miles. If there's no number with it, authorization is unlimited. In today's cell-phone environment, HXA isn't seen too often.

HXB (followed by a number) – cancels a message if it's not delivered within X hours of the filing time and requests a service message to the originating station, if you do. Of course, the station of origin must include a time filed in the preamble and be available for a return message.

HXC – asks for a report of the date and time of delivery. It checks on the system and confirms receipt.

HXD – requests data on how a message is handled as it is routed to delivery. Each station handling the message will send this tracer report including when and from whom it was received and when and to whom it was relayed.

HXE – directs the delivering station to get a reply.

HXF (followed by a number)– tells the delivering station to *deliver the message on a specific date*. So HXF 28 means deliver the message on the 28<sup>th</sup>.

HXG – indicates that mail or toll-call delivery isn't necessary. The message may be canceled, and the originating station advised, usually with a message explaining why the original message wasn't delivered. Handling instructions are optional, but they're easy to follow once we have a, er, handle on them. 73 – K9LGU/STM- WI

## Changing Net Control Stations

FAQ #236 Can you tell us again about changing net control stations? Sure. Here's that report from 2019.

### The "Passing" of Net Control

FAQ # 216 No, no, the NCS is not a silent key. Don't stop me if you've heard this story. You have volunteered as a net control station, and you've given the net preamble. You've taken liaison check-ins, solicited and listed traffic, and started to arrange for messages to flow. Just as you are taking regular check-ins to the net, a truck swerves on the road past your house, clips off a fire hydrant, and water starts to flood your porch, your yard (new mud bath), and then ---- your power goes out. After quickly shifting to your battery back-up, you decide to pass the NCS duties and check the damage. In this or any instance, how do you sustain a net by efficiently passing the NCS job?

Like this. Ideally, you have a pre-selected back-up station. If not, you ask someone. In a perfect net, every check-in has been keeping track of the traffic, the routing, and the stations checked in. Okay, we're not perfect, so you'll need to transfer some essential information to the new net control. This becomes even more important on an ARES/RACES net during deployment, especially when it is over an extended period.

When the new NCS is ready, you'll re-state the purpose of the net (so the new NCS op gets the wording for periodic announcements), pass along a list of the traffic outstanding, its precedence and routing, and who the liaison stations are. If you have time, you'll give the new NCS a list of stations currently checked in. You'll note the time and arrange to combine your net reports later. This can be done quickly and clearly.

Now the net can continue and you're ready to er, bail. 73 – K9LGU/STM

P.S. Remember that **accuracy** is our primary goal in handling traffic. Don't forget that a message "originated" is one sent on behalf of another party – not the operator. The receiving station calls first. Figures are voiced individually. "Voicemail" is usually one word according to the Chicago style manual. Reports are due by the 7<sup>th</sup>, and 73 does not have an "S" since it's already plural. Thanks.

## Identifying Your Station

*Who is this ---- really?*

FAQ # 242 What's required for identification in nets? The FCC is clear about identification of amateur stations. Part 97.119 states *"Each amateur station. . . must transmit its assigned call sign on its transmitting channel at the end of each communication, and at least every 10 minutes during a communication, for the purpose of clearly making the source of the transmissions from the station known to those receiving the transmissions. No station may transmit unidentified communications or signals, or transmit as the station call sign, any call sign not authorized to the station."*

It's simple. End with your call. That's all. So what does that mean for traffic handling and net operation? It means during a net a check-in needs to identify when first calling in, and at the end of a comment, relay, or "second-go" if any. Luckily, it doesn't mean each listening station must also identify every ten minutes during the net. If an operator establishes communication with another station off frequency to pass traffic, the required part is the same – every ten minutes and at the end of the communication.

How about the net control? Same deal. The net control station only needs to identify every ten minutes and at the end of a series of transmissions with the net. True, it may help to identify the net and net control much more frequently during the net operation, but it's only "required" every ten minutes and at the "end of the communication" with the net.

During ARES nets and for public service operations, sometimes tactical calls are implemented. They help, but they don't substitute for the FCC requirement – identification with an FCC-assigned call every ten minutes of continuous communication and at the end.

A call sign is like an operator's name. Although we may occasionally misspeak, a call should be said correctly, remembered, and respected. Giving only a call sign is how to get recognized by a net control.

At times, we suffer from over-identification. It may be nice to start with your call – but it's not necessary. Technically, we don't need to say the call of the other station at all – just identify ours. However net controls do ask for their call to be said by check-ins to help avoid doubling. If we spend too much time repeating call signs, we limit time for other content. We don't need the Department of Redundancy Department with calls. So, comments from net participants are fine – if they are solicited by the net control, accompanied with a call sign, and if they're followed by identification in ten minutes or at the end of the operator's last transmission.

Finally, we certainly don't have to accompany our call with the phrase "for I.D." Why else would we identify? 73 – K9LGU/STM - WI

## Mixed Groups

### Reminders:

1. When messages have HX handling instructions, follow them. HXC requires a response. HXF-XX deliveries are held until that XX date.
2. The net control is boss. Do not transmit until the NCS recognizes you. During a net, just say your call to get recognized.

FAQ #239 Is there a trick to voicing *mixed groups and amateur calls* in a message text?  
Yes and no, but it's not that tricky.

The term MIXED GROUP is used to introduce a group consisting of a mix of 2 or more of the 3 types of characters permitted in a group; letters, figures, or slashes (/), but **NOT** for a group beginning with figure(s).

You say, "mixed group," voice one character at a time, letters phonetically, group pause, then go on to the next group. So, for **ICS213**, you would voice it as "mixed group INDIA CHARLIE SIERRA TWO ONE THREE."

Here are some more examples: **R2, A3J, A/X, B/3, MS/4, WB9WKO/NCS, K9NY/EC.**

Our examples would be voiced as

"Mixed group ROMEO TWO"

"Mixed group ALPHA THREE JULIET."

"Mixed group ALPHA SLANT XRAY"

"Mixed group BRAVO SLANT THREE"

"Mixed group MIKE SIERRA SLANT FOUR."

"Mixed group WHISKEY BRAVO NINE WHISKEY KILO OSCAR SLANT NOVEMBER CHARLIE SIERRA."

"Mixed group KILO NINE NOVEMBER YANKEE SLANT ECHO CHARLIE."

Do NOT introduce characters separately within the mixed group. To do so would imply a separate group to copy.

The "/" may be voiced as "slash", "stroke", "diagonal", "slant" or "slant-bar" ("Forward slash" is not necessary and should be avoided.).

If the mixed group starts with a number, it's introduced as **MIXED GROUP FIGURE(s)**  
So **2A** would be voiced as "**Mixed group figure** TWO ALPHA."

If there are two or more numbers beginning the group, it would sound like this:

**24/B** would be voiced as "**Mixed group figures** TWO FOUR SLASH BRAVO"

**146R67** would be voiced as "**Mixed group figures** ONE FOUR SIX ROMEO SIX SEVEN";

(The "R" is used as a decimal point within mixed figure groups.) Again, do not introduce characters separately within the mixed group. That would imply a separate group to copy.

"**AMATEUR CALL**" is used to introduce an amateur call sign in the Address, Text, or Signature (but NOT in the Preamble). Phonetics are mandatory for the letters. So K9STN would be voiced as "**Amateur call** KILO NINE SIERRA TANGO MIKE." Note that call sign groups with slashes appending other information are introduced as mixed groups so K9LGU/STM would be voiced as "**Mixed group** KILO NINE LIMA GOLF UNIFORM SLANT SIERRA TANGO MIKE." Now you won't be mixed up about mixed groups. 73 – K9LGU/STM

## Modeling as Training

FAQ # 248 What's the best way for a new traffic handler to learn and improve? There are a lot of good ways, but the best ways in our section are probably still listening and imitation. Notice how the veteran traffic handlers do it. Listen to where WB9WKO or WD9FLJ pauses as a message is sent. Hear how WJ9L and AC9F always include every part of the preamble and KN9P says each figure individually. Notice how top-traffic-handler NX9K paces her delivery and how KB9ROB confirms a phone number.

Pay heed to the proper procedural words and how they're used. Catch how K9NY asks for a fill – “word before,” “word after,” “words between.” “Say again the group count.” See how frequently NCS KA9BAE lists outstanding traffic. Check out how KC9UC or AG9G volunteer for WIN or 9RN duty even when it's not an assignment. Observe that N9VC's contribution by bringing traffic from the previous night's Late WIN to distribute to SSB stations. Pay special attention to net controls such as AG9G, W9RTP, NX9K, WB9ICH, K9ILJ, KC9FXE and others to see how an NCS can be friendly, yet organized and efficient. These are just a few examples. There's more. Listen for them.

If you get a chance, listen to N9CK on CW. Steve is another of those model operators. He chooses a frequency carefully to avoid interference. He knows how to abbreviate properly, how to send CW traffic fluidly using QSK, stopping the moment he hears a beep, and how to listen intently. He is always prepared and (lucky for those who send to him) he has a good sense of humor.

Imitating the little things done by good operators is an excellent way to improve. Do you keep track of exact call signs, names, and locations of other check-ins? Do you shadow the net control and keep your own list of stations and traffic listed on each net you check? Do you catch that a sender doesn't have to label the parts of the preamble as it's sent? Do you pick up that there's no x-ray after an ARRL numbered text? Do you always end with your call? Have you volunteered as a net control? Do you discern that the term “73” does **not** have an “s” on it or it would be “best regardses?”

Focus, be patient, and look for the little things. Before long, the model for the new folks will be *you*. 73 – K9LGU/STM-WI

## Net Control Hints

FAQ #234 I read "How to Be a Good NCS" Are there more reminders for traffic net controls?  
Yes!

- Prepare before you begin. Check your station operation. Tune up. Have your script and papers ready. Start on time. Set your clock with WWV. If you use a computer program, get it ready, too. Save often.
- Follow the preamble for your net. Know what nets the net reps are coming from or going to. For example, WIN/L and 9RN reps come to the BEN. WIN/E reps take outgoing traffic from the WSBN. Generally, thru traffic is brought to the WSBN, but if someone who can't make it to the WSBN brings it to the BEN, a volunteer can take it to the WSBN.
- If your preamble includes the announcement that emergency traffic can interrupt at any time, there's no need for a separate stand by for emergency traffic.
- Stay in order. It helps avoid skipping a step.
- Give traffic your main attention. If it's a traffic net. Handle traffic first – before additional check-ins, before second goes.
- Limit the commentary from the net control. It's not necessary to comment at length on each operator's comments but do listen to what each operator says – especially if they have a request or list additional traffic. Be succinct.
- Require stations to be recognized by saying their call. Stay in charge. No one should just interrupt. Everything goes through net control. If you need relay help, ask a specific station.
- Second goes should be concluded with a call sign.
- Take frequent stand-bys (like after every three or four second goes) listing outstanding traffic each time and giving openings for additional traffic and check-ins.
- When you send your net report, use a full message. Remember that numbers in the preamble are also said individually but don't need introductions. You're modeling how to do it for those listening.
- If an out-of-section station checks in with traffic for Wisconsin, politely explain that we will take it, but we would prefer routine traffic be sent through the NTS so all levels get more practice. Of course, emergency or priority traffic is always handled immediately.
- Be friendly and welcoming. Greet check-ins by name and pay special attention to new Hams or first-time check-ins.
- Don't be afraid to ask another station to take over as NCS. This STM Report covered that process in July of 2019. You can get a copy from K9LGU if you need one.

## Of O's and Zeroes

FAQ # 235 We strive for accuracy. O is the 15<sup>th</sup> letter in the alphabet. It dates back to 1000 B.C. in the Semitic languages and made its way into Greek and then was absorbed into Roman. It is a letter.

Zero is a numeral. It does mean something even though some say it means nothing, zip, zilch, nada, null, none. It's the additive identity of the integers. It's a place holder in value systems. It is, in short, a number – not to be confused with the letter “o.” And to whomever invented zero – Thanks for nothing.

A number of operators mistakenly might refer to message 106 (number one-zero-six) as “number one-oh-six.” We know what you mean, and it's good you say the characters individually, but we strive for accuracy. Let's keep the zeroes and o's straight. That's not too much to ask.

What's the trick to sending numbers in messages by voice? There are a *number* of things to remember about sending numbers.

First, it's right to preface the voicing of numbers by the word, “figures.” It lets the receiving station know what's coming next. For example, in an address, it might sound like this – “Figures one zero five zero East Street.”

Second, ARRL Numbered Radiograms are always spelled out. So, in the text, it's “ARL FORTY (spelled) SIX (spelled)” not ARL (figures) 46. By the way, that's not followed by an x-ray.

Third, each number is said *individually* as in the above example, “One, zero, five, zero.” It would *not* be “Ten fifty East Street.” In a message number, it's number **five eight** –not fifty eight; number **two one** not number twenty-one; it's number **one two** – not twelve, and number **three five zero** – not three fifty or three hundred and fifty. For a telephone number, it helps to group the digits as they're said – area code, prefix, suffix – 920 563 1421. That would be said, “Nine two zero (pause) five six three (pause), etc. In a preamble, the numbers for the message number, check, time, and date don't have to be introduced with “figures” because the receiver already knows what's coming.

Fourth, those pauses are important in the text, too. It might say, ARL FORTY SEVEN 491 AG9G FEB 16 1508 73. That would sound like this as it is sent, “Letter group, ARL FORTY, F-O-R-T-Y (spelled out) SEVEN, S-E-V-E-N (spelled out) AG9G (phonetically) letter group FEB, figures one six (pause) figures one five zero eight (pause) figures seven three.” The pause doesn't have to be very long, just enough hesitation for the receiver to know to start a new group. Changing the pitch of one's voice slightly for prowords such as “figures” can help avoid confusion, too.

If operators are savvy traffic handlers who are used to working with each other, they might omit some of the pro-words, but the text will still turn out exactly the same. Sending messages with these hints in mind can be very efficient. Good operators send traffic by the, er, *numbers*. (You knew that was coming.) 73 – K9LGU/ STM-WI

## Preamble Voicing

FAQ # 240 Two questions. How do I voice an NTS preamble properly? What do I say and not say? And, second, what's this "famous pink card" traffic handlers are always talking about?

First, the preamble. To do it right, start by actually saying the word, "number." That tells the receiver it's started. Then say the digits of the message number. Don't use the proword "figures" here. [Message numbers should be only the figures anyway – no decimals, dashes, slant bars or letters.]

Give the precedence (usually routine) and then use phonetics to voice any handling instructions. Say the call of the originating station phonetically. There's no need to introduce it as an *amateur call* or *mixed group* in the preamble. The receiver already knows what it is in that blank. State the check without labeling it and without any prowords – just the figures of the group count.

Voice the place of origin clearly – probably with phonetic spelling if the receiver doesn't know the place. Then give the time (if any) with just the figures and any label such as CDT. You don't have to say it's the time. Say the date – month and day (not the year) again *without* the proword "figures." That's the quick, easy, and correct way to voice a preamble.

Next question. So, what about that pink card? Where did it come from? Who developed it? How does it help? Can I get one? Why is it pink?

You ask a lot of questions. Luckily, we have answers, and that's exactly what's on the pink card. The ARRL offered operating aid FSD-218 (our pink card) for years to assist in traffic handling and net operations. Although it's now available on the ARRL website (<http://www.arrl.org/files/file/Public%20Service/fsd218.pdf>) the physical pink card is no longer in stock at ARRL HQ. Don't panic. Through the efforts of our Section Manager, KA1RB, this excellent operating aid is still available in the famous pink card format. It's a great reference for those who don't handle a lot of traffic, for training of new hams, and for inclusion with local emergency activation plans.

On one side of the card, you will find a clear example of how every formal NTS radiogram should be formatted, including explanations of each of the essential parts – the preamble, address, text, and signature. You will find a list of the *precedences* and *handling instructions*, too. The other side of the card lists the international Q signals, QN signals for CW nets, and abbreviations, prosigns, and prowords. Knowing these standard procedural words truly makes traffic handling much more efficient.

You can get a card from the Section Manager, KA1RB, at any Hamfest, from your Section Traffic Manager, K9LGU, by mail, or get copies for your entire group with an accompanying presentation on the National Traffic System. Of course, you can download FSD-218 on the ARRL website at <http://www.arrl.org/files/file/Public%20Service/fsd218.pdf> And the color? It's easy to spot around the shack or when you're mobile. When it comes to traffic, it will keep you "in the pink." (How could I resist?) 73 – K9LGU/STM-WI

## Public Service Honor Roll

FAQ # 238 Okay, so what about those Public Service Honor Roll numbers? What's that all about and how can I be part of it? There's an easy way to tally your PSHR points, report them for publication in our Section Traffic Manager's monthly report and have them published in QST as well. Here's how to calculate your score.

### **1) Participation in a public service net -- 1 point each time, maximum 40.**

A public service net is one that is regularly scheduled and handles Amateur Radio formal messages. Here are examples of public service nets: Local and section nets that are affiliated with the National Traffic System (NTS); NTS region, NTS area, and independent nets that handle traffic; ARES/RACES or SKYWARN nets that meet on a regular basis; net sessions that are activated during emergencies and threats of potential emergencies; public service and safety nets; nets that are established for training radio amateurs in public service and emergency communications.

### **2) Handling formal messages (radiograms) via any mode -- 1 point for each message handled; maximum 40.**

A "handled" message is defined as a message that is originated or sent or received or delivered. PSHR follows the same method as the Brass Pounders' League to count an individual operator's traffic total (also known as station activity report) to reach the figure for the PSHR Category 2. The formal messages may be in NTS, ICS213, Red Cross, or other established format. *There is one point granted for each message handled; maximum 40 points per calendar month.*

In case you missed last month's report, here is a reference from the *Public Service Communications Manual* on how to count messages. Chapter 7 explains.

<http://www.arrl.org/files/file/Public%20Service/MPG704A.pdf>

**Originated**--One point for each message *from a third party* sent via your station. This "extra" credit is given for an off-the-air function because of the value of contact with the general public.

**Sent**--Every message sent over the air from your station to another amateur receives a point in this category. So, a message that is eligible for an *Originated* point as described above receives another point when it is sent on the air. Likewise, a message that is received on the air gets a *Sent* point when it is relayed to another station. A message that you initiate yourself, while it gets no *Originated* point, gets a *Sent* point when you send it. All *Sent* points require on-the-air sending. If sent via RMS, they should be via RF – not the Internet.

**Received**--A message received over the air gets a *Received* point, when it is received for you, received for relaying (sending) or for delivery to the addressee. Any message received which is not eligible for a *Delivery* point (such as one addressed to yourself) is still eligible for a *Received* point.

**Delivered**--The act of delivery of a message to a third party receives a point in this category, in addition to a *Received* point. This is an off-the-air function and must be coupled with receipt of the message at your station. So, you can't get a *Delivered* point unless you first get a *Received* point.

Here's an example for clarification: If I send a message originated on behalf of myself, I know I get only one point for a message SENT. However, if I originate a message on behalf of a third party, and then send it, I get TWO points, (origination and sending). Even though it was ONE message, it was handled in two processes.

**3) Serving in an ARRL-sponsored volunteer position: ARRL Field Organization appointee or Section Manager, NTS Net Manager, TCC Director, TCC member, NTS official or appointee above the Section level. -- 10 points for each position; maximum 30.**

ARRL Field Organization appointees include the following: Assistant Section Managers, Assistant District Emergency Coordinators, Assistant Emergency Coordinators, Assistant Section Traffic Managers, Local Government Liaisons, Net Managers, Official Bulletin Stations, Official Emergency Stations, Official Observers, Official Observer Coordinators, Official Relay Stations, Public Information Coordinators, Public Information Officers, Section Emergency Coordinators, Section Managers, Section Traffic Managers, State Government Liaisons, and Technical Specialists.

**4) Participation in scheduled, short-term public service events such as walk-a-thons, bike-a-thons, parades, simulated emergency tests, traffic training, and related practice events. This includes off-the-air meetings and coordination efforts with related emergency groups and served agencies. -- 5 points per hour (or any portion thereof) of time spent in either coordinating and/or operating in the public service event; no limit.**

This category recognizes the value of public safety communication events that Amateur Radio is often called to participate in. Simulated emergency tests, exercises, and drills are covered by this category. Points are gained by the amount of time that an Amateur Radio operator spends directly involved in operating the event. This also recognizes the value of off-the-air time it takes to meet with the organization or public service agency to plan and coordinate Amateur Radio involvement.

**5) Participation in an unplanned emergency response when the Amateur Radio operator is on the scene. This also includes unplanned incident requests by public or served agencies for Amateur Radio participation. --5 points per hour (or any portion thereof) of time spent directly involved in the emergency operation, no limit.**

This category recognizes an Amateur Radio operator who is directly involved in an actual emergency operation. This includes the operator who is on the scene or out in the field, in the shelter, at the emergency operations center, at the hospital, or other served agency's headquarters or their temporary command center.

The second sentence of Category 5 invites the Amateur Radio operator who is an active participant in an unplanned incident -- or in other words, an emergency operation-- to take credit for his/her participation even though he/she is not physically at the emergency scene.

The intent behind Category 5 is to also include the Amateur Radio operators -- like net controllers, net operation and other radio amateurs that support communications in unplanned incidents-- that are not actually on the emergency scene or at the shelter, etc, but are spending time and efforts for supporting the same emergency communication efforts.

As an example, if the National Weather Service activates SKYWARN, Amateur Radio operators serve as weather spotters from their home (or car, or work, or other locations) during the

weather event. That counts. Then, a tornado strikes, and the Red Cross calls out the ARES members to serve in shelters and to provide support for damage assessment communications. These operators would also be among those to qualify for points under Category 5.

There would likely be several net control operators, net liaison operators, traffic handlers, etc, who are away from the disaster scene, but are spending time to support the Amateur Radio emergency communication effort on behalf of the served agencies (Red Cross and National Weather Service, in this example). They, too, would qualify for points under Category 5.

**6.) Providing and maintaining a) an automated digital system that handles ARRL radiogram-formatted messages; b) a Web page e-mail list server oriented toward Amateur Radio public service -- 10 points per item.**

The portion, "a," is a carry-over from a previous PSHR criteria as this subcategory recognizes the efforts it takes to provide and maintain an automated digital system (like a packet bulletin board or a PACTOR system) that handles ARRL radiogram-formatted messages.

The portion "b," covers newer technologies like Web pages and e-mail list servers that have become popular and effective ways to communicate news and information to the community of radio amateurs that are involved in emergency and public service communication operations and preparedness.

## SET Preparation

FAQ # 241 While we prepare for the annual Simulated Emergency Test, we should be aware that because the word, *SET*, has over 430 definitions, it is good practice to refer to our annual test as the S-E-T, saying each letter individually just like other acronyms e.g. FBI, IRS, CIA, LED, or SOS. In a message text it would be said, "letter group sierra echo tango." So we use the acronym as we get set for the S – E – T and, yes, the SET is coming. October 2 will see the state SET although other districts may have other dates. For example, the SE District is scheduled for October 16. This is an opportunity to show how our nets can support the ARES/RACES organization with trained, efficient, operators.

This will be an exercise involving the NTS nets in Wisconsin with an emphasis on *sending* of messages by voice and digital means. Many ARES/RACES operators have practiced *receiving* messages, but not everyone practices good *sending* techniques. Our goal is to familiarize operators with good voicing, good pacing, and the elimination of unnecessary wording as well as good net protocol. During an activation, time on a net can be precious. Learning to be efficient helps.

So what's new? With apologies to Poet Laureate Robert Zimmerman, "...the times – they are a-changing." Our traffic nets are now supplemented with plenty of technology. We have RMS. We use UHF and VHF as back channels for net operation. WINLink, Echolink, and our own WECOMM system provide great additional avenues for relays and distribution.

Some nets might have changed frequency; some might have changed times of operation. Conditions have required changes in how efficiently traffic must be passed when the band is about to change. New equipment can filter almost everything – except foreign broadcast carriers and folks who don't know what a dummy load is - even though it's named after them. Computers aid in equipment control, protocol training, name/address/ phone/text checking for messages, and even delivery.

So how do we keep up? It helps to remember that, even with all the changes, we're still doing the same task – getting a message through quickly and accurately. We work with those we serve and get the information required to prepare a message in the proper format. We must be skilled at exchanging the message with another station and be able to participate well in organized nets to handle large amounts of traffic. We have to know how to deliver the message to the addressee and create a reply or a service message to the originator.

It's still a procedure of operators sending and receiving. The process is simple, yet there are details that can make it all happen efficiently and with precision. We still learn by listening – and by doing. Much of the traditional continues to work well. For example, we still keep the receiver in mind as we send a message. Even the IARU's Global SET committee encourages participants to use CW "to increase the possibility of stations making contacts in difficult conditions" and "when SSB or data contacts are proving impossible."

Sure, we need to adapt to equipment, conditions, and changes in format, protocol, or assignments, but through continual training we can stay - as one might say in our electronic hobby - current. So don't worry too much when you hear "the times they are a-changin'." We know that. We're changing, too. Thanks, Bob. 73 – K9LGU/STM-WI



## Traffic Is Terrific

FAQ # 253 Hey, Kids, what time is it? It's time again for a quick review. When it comes to formal, NTS or ICS213, traffic, the formats don't change. The standardization makes it more efficient. Each of the four main parts – preamble, addressee, text, and signature – is essential. Here's how it works with an NTS message.

The preamble includes the message number (sequential, figures only, and not unnecessarily long) – so we can document the message; the precedence – so we can prioritize it; and the handling instructions – if necessary to deliver it or confirm delivery. (Don't ignore 'em.) The preamble then lists the station of origin – so we know who first put the message into the system; the check – so we can verify the number of groups in the text; the place of origin – so we can track the message; and the time and date – so we know how long it's been in the system. We don't label the parts of the preamble.

The addressee, address, and phone number are the next crucial part. Groups here are carefully spelled out and always verified if there's any question. There's a break before and after the text. On voice, the sender just says, "Break." (Not "break for text" or "break for signature") On CW, it's BT.

In the text, each group is sent clearly and deliberately, with pauses, prowords, and phonetic spelling that may help the understanding. There's another break and then the signature. By the way, a closing like "73" goes with the text before the break and counts with the check. The signature is the name and title *after* the break and isn't counted in the check.

An NTS message is always in this order so we never have to label the parts as we send them. We start with the word "number" but after that no labels are needed. The receiver *knows* that the station of origin is next or that the signature is going to follow the break after the text. Identifying each part as it's sent is redundant, unneeded, superfluous, repetitive, and unnecessary. (We *might* identify the parts for an ICS-213 message, if the receiver isn't familiar with that form, but its sequence is likewise standard for each ICS213 message.)

The very best way to learn correct sending and receiving of formal messages is by careful listening and by actually sending and receiving messages properly. Do it. Feel free to share the above notes and practice at your local clubs and ARES units.