K9LGU Tips and Hints Volume 4

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Fighting the Band

I can't hear the net. Conditions are terrible! What can I do? No, it's not time to throw the big switch, ground the antenna and head for the reruns on TV. Poor conditions have been plaguing us for months and there will be more as we crawl out of the bottom of the sunspot cycle. The Badger Weather Net has to wait until most of the net is over before the band gets decent. The Wisconsin Sideband Net fights the carrier from foreign broadcast only a few cycles off net frequency (just enough to produce the carrier tone) and a band that might drop out after fifteen minutes of net. The CW nets are crowded into a narrow window trying to avoid QRM, QRN, and extremely long skip – not to mention the nets that tell us now (after we changed frequency and registered our nets with the ARRL Net Directory) that *they've* been on that frequency for years, and they're not moving. So what's a good net operator to do?

It's possible to learn some important lessons here. No, I'm not making this up. We can use this opportunity to make things better. When a disaster strikes, it may not be at a time of good radio propagation. We should be prepared just as we're learning to be by fighting the bad conditions.

The BWN still works very efficiently – shifting frequency to 3984, using a good protocol, relays, and net controls from out of state. The WSBN changes frequency to an alternate, 3986 or elsewhere as the NCS may direct when foreign broadcast interferes. The CW nets strain to hear, use filters, relay for each other, and sometimes QSY to two meters to pass traffic. The BEN uses 7.268 during the summer. If 3555 KHz is busy, look for the CW nets up 1 KHz. The point is, our sections nets are still working. True, it's a battle, but we're learning some important skills along the way. Keep trying. Keep those relays coming. And, by the way, any ARRL member who handles traffic on our section nets is eligible for appointment as an Official Relay Station. Contact me for details or an application. 73 – K9LGU/ STM - WI

Putting a New Slant on Things

FAQ #130 – If the only punctuation allowed in the text of an NTS message is the x-ray as a period, why do we hear the “slant” or “slash” in groups? The answer is (no fanfare necessary) that the “/ ” – otherwise known as the “slant,” “slash,” diagonal,” or “slant-bar” isn’t used as punctuation. It’s used as a character within a group. It might also be called a “stroke,” but – as an older Ham – I tend to avoid that term.

It’s true that all other punctuation, such as the word “query” following a question is spelled out as a word group in the text and counted that way in the check, too. But when the text includes a group such as “N9VC/9RN/CAN,” it is voiced as “NOVEMBER NINE VICTOR CHARLIE SLANT NINE ROMEO NOVEMBER SLANT CHARLIE ALPHA NOVEMBER” or “NOVEMBER NINE VICTOR CHARLIE SLANT 9 R N SLANT C A N” and it’s counted as one group.

When sending that “/ ” character with voice, you can call it a slash, stroke, diagonal, slant, forward slash. or slant-bar. On CW, it’s always DN. It’s a handy *character* within a group, and I guess, on our nets, there are a lot of those. 73 – K9LGU/STM/WI

Your Traffic Checklist

Check This Out

If you participated in Field Day, if you have prepared for ARES disaster work, or if you just need to organize your daily activities, you may have worked from a check list. Here's a checklist to check your traffic handling.

- Have you checked a section net or two this month?

- Should you check the meaning of some QN signals or voice prosigns?

- Do you include the check on each message for practice?

- Have you originated at least one piece of traffic this month?

- Do you have your list of ARRL texts handy?

- Are you aware of which communities you can call toll-free?

- Could you assume NCS duties if needed?

- Did you QNI in to a CW net lately?

- Can your local ARES net count on your weekly check-in?

- When sending traffic with voice, do you use phonetics only when necessary?

- Do those you usually QSO on packet know that you handle traffic?

- Would you know how to handle welfare traffic?

- Did you look at the WNA website this month? (www.wna.eboard.com)

- Do you know how to pace yourself when sending traffic by voice?

- Can you tell what the handling instructions HXF mean?

- Have you practiced copying under poor conditions - just for training?

- Know where your pink card (ARRL Form FSD-218) is?

- Are you able to volunteer to be an occasional 9RN liaison?

- Did you send your monthly activity report to the Section Traffic Manager?

- Have you considered a program on the National Traffic System for your local club?

- Can you identify your county's Emergency Coordinator?

- Do you answer questions about traffic for those new to the hobby?

If you checked all of the above, you are a dedicated traffic operator. Check?

The traffic system only works if we work it. Let's do that as much as we can.

K9LGU/STM

Service Message

FAQ # 203 You volunteered to take a message for someone in your area. Good for you. It will give you a chance to make a connection and show a positive feature of Ham Radio. But there's a problem. You are unable to deliver the message. Maybe the telephone number is out of service, the recipient doesn't answer, the addressee has moved, etc. Now what?

Of course you can try hand delivery to someone living nearby or even the U.S. Postal Service, if you want to donate a stamp to the cause, but handling instructions might show that's unnecessary. So what do you do?

In any case, it's appropriate to send a radiogram explaining the problem to the originating station. You respond to show the sender that we take traffic seriously and enjoy the practice it gives us. We want traffic originators to have faith in us, to know that we can be trusted to make an effort to deliver a message. So how do we format a “service” message?

The sender will need some information. Yes, you'll say the message was not delivered, but you need to be specific about which message, to whom, and why. You can set up your message as you normally would – message number, precedence, etc. If you choose to use an ARRL Numbered Radiogram text, ARL SIXTY SEVEN is a good start.

“YOUR MESSAGE NUMBER ____ UNDELIVERABLE BECAUSE OF _____ PLEASE ADVISE”

So the service message <u>with</u> ARL SIXTY SEVEN might look like this:

NR 277 R K9LGU ARL 8 FORT ATKINSON WI JUL 7
NAME / CALL OF SENDER
ADDRESS
PHONE IF KNOWN
ARL SIXTY SEVEN 88 W9IBL
SILENT KEY 73
K9LGU

A service message that doesn't include the specifics isn't too helpful. If the phone number is wrong, what was the number you received and is it disconnected, a FAX, or a wrong number? If you don't include the name or call of the addressee in your service message and the message number has been changed along the way, how will the sender know which message yours is about?

A service message <u>without</u> the ARRL text might be composed like this.

NR 278 R K9LGU 15 FORT ATKINSON WI JUL 7
NAME / CALL OF SENDER

ADDRESS
PHONE (IF KNOWN)
YOUR MESSAGE 89 TO KC9FYL
NOT DLVD X 920 563
1421 NOT IN SERVICE 73
K9LGU

The point is that it's a courtesy to respond to the sender and explain the problem with a message. This exercises the system. It helps to pinpoint difficulties. It's easy, and it's the proper thing to do. – 73 – K9LGU/STM

Sending Numbers

What's the trick to sending numbers in messages by voice? There are a *number* of things to remember about sending numbers. First, ARRL Numbered Radiograms are always spelled out. So, in the text, it's "ARL FORTY SIX" not ARL 46. By the way, that's not followed by an x-ray.

Second, it's okay 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."

Third, each number is said individually as in the above example, "One, zero, five, zero." It would *not* be "Ten fifty East Street." 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.

Fourth, those pauses are important in the text, too. It might say, ARL FORTY SEVEN 491 N9HTP 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) N9HTP (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. Dropping the pitch of one's voice slightly for prowords such as "figures" can help avoid confusion, too. If operators are savvy traffic handlers 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

Pro's for the Amateurs

FAQ #273 What's with all those prosigns? All After. All before. Addressee. Stand by. More. Break. Check. Confirm. Go ahead. (reply expected) Negative. Preamble. Out. (no reply expected) Word after. Word before. I say again - what's with all those prosigns?

We use prosigns or procedural words because they make it easier to get a message exactly right. When we all use the same set of prosigns, we hear them and respond to them more easily, more quickly, more accurately. We train ourselves so that they are automatic responses even under pressure.

Similarly, a net control station will use some standard phrases to direct a net – "Act as relay between. . ."(QNB) "This is a directed net." (QND) "Can you relay. . ." (QSP) "The net has traffic for you. Please stand by." (QNU) "Send your message for . . . to. . ." (QNK). Of course, the "Q" signals are for CW use only.

Knowing and using the procedural words and phrases makes traffic handling more efficient. Good use of pro's is – well, poetic. It might be a good time to review those signals. Check out the famous pink card or FSD-218 (https://www.arrl.org/files/file/Public%20Service/fsd218.pdf) Roger. 73. K9LGU/ STM-WI

The Most Important Part

What's the most important part of a radiogram? Let's see. The number is important because it's how we keep track of messages. The precedence is important because it tells us which messages need to be handled first. The handling instructions are very helpful in deliveries. The station of origin lets us trace a message and advise the sender. The check checks, check? It's a check on the number of words in the text to be sure we get it right. The place of origin helps us route a reply, and the time and date tell us when a message started (and how long it's been in the system).

The name, address, and telephone number of the addressee are certainly necessary for delivery to the right person. The exact text is essential, too; it's the purpose of the message. The recipient will want to know who sent the message – so the signature should be correct as well. Hmmm.

In short (as good messages should be), ***all*** of a radiogram is important and should be handled error free. We communicate, and we do it well. It's what we do. 73 – K9LGU/ STM - WI

On Doing the Right Thing

The net should have started four minutes ago. There are stations on frequency, waiting to list or receive traffic. The net control is missing. You call up the net and either turn it over to the regular NCS when he shows, or simply run the show yourself. If you don't, the National Traffic System isn't much of a system.

The skip is too long. The net members aren't hearing each other. The traffic can't even be efficiently relayed. As NCS, you announce a new frequency and move the whole net to a better band. If you don't, the net can't function.

Tonight you are NCS, but there's a QSO going on net frequency and it's time to call up the net. You know you could ask for the frequency or just turn on your amplifier, but what impression would that give of your net operation? Politely, you move up the band a few KHz and start the proceedings.

There's traffic listed for Podunk Hollow which you can handle via a local two meter repeater. You volunteer. If you don't pick it up, it will be listed a few times and be serviced to the originating station without delivery.

It's time to send a message, so you prepare it in ARRL format, including the check. This way, the receiving station can be more certain that the text is right - and it serves as a good example to others listening. Counting isn't all that hard and the famous pink card (FSD-218) has all you need for the details of the format. If you don't, there's danger of error and a missed opportunity for some easy training.

You are busily passing traffic, when the receiving station asks you to speed up (QRQ) or slow down (QRS). You value the other operator's time, so you comply. If you don't, it may mean more fills or repeats or a lesser chance that the receiver will want to take traffic from you again.

It's another one of those generic messages from someone who doesn't really know the addressee. Instead of complaining about it, you take and deliver the traffic, meet a nice person on the phone, and make a note to originate some not-so-generic traffic yourself to keep the NTS in tune. Without traffic, it will fade.

Someone has traffic for Ninth Region Net and no regular rep has checked in to the net. You graciously volunteer to take the traffic from our section net to the next level. If you don't, the system breaks down.

You remember it's a hobby. You try to keep nets and all of your Ham activity in perspective. You know the nets need your participation, and so does your family. You choose to keep a balance. If you don't, something suffers.

You see, when you eliminate the choices with less positive results, only the right thing is, er, left.
73 -- K9LGU/STM

CW Nets

I've heard that CW nets are fun. How can I get involved without looking foolish when I check in? -- Great question! First, you should know that CW isn't amateur TV so you won't **look** foolish. Actually, you won't even sound foolish, if you know just a few basics about the net - and you'll be very welcome. Here's how it will sound.

The net control will call up the net like this: CQ WNN CQ WISCONSIN NOVICE NET PART OF ARRL NTS AND WNA LTD QND (This is a directed net.) QNZ (Please zerobeat my frequency.) QNN (Here's the net control.) KB9ROB/ DEAN WNN QNI K.

A station wanting to check in will send a single letter -- any letter -- often part of their call. The NCS will respond with that letter. (This eliminates doubling.) Then the station checking in will send: KB9ROB DE K9LGU GE DEAN QRU (I have no traffic. Do you have any for me?) K

The net control (at the speed of the station checking in) will send: K9LGU GE DENNY TU AS (Thank you. Please wait.) If he wants to call on this station later in the net, he will probably use the callsign's suffix. Like this.

NCS: LGU (Hey, K9LGU!)

K9LGU: K (Yep?)

NCS: RSX (Hey, W9RSX!)

W9RSX: K (Go ahead.)

NCS: U5 LGU 1 (Shift frequency up 5 KHz. and send one message to K9LGU)

K9LGU: GG (Going)

W9RSX: GG (Going)

When the stations return to the net frequency, they'll send their suffixes to let the NCS know they're back.

The universality of the NTS message form makes sending traffic on CW just as easy (maybe easier with full break-in) as on phone. The format's the same and, of course, the objective is the same -- to get the message through as accurately as possible. A CW net is just another network - and more participation is how we can make the net ------- work. 73 -- K9LGU/STM - WI