

K9LGU Tips and Hints Volume 5

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Efficiency

FAQ # 272 We admire efficiency and we practice traffic handling that way, but there are some dangers. For example, when traffic handlers use a “short form” to pass traffic, it can make traffic go very quickly – but it may not always be the best training for those who listen to learn. It makes sense to use the short form in the TCC and at the Area Net levels, because those are the operators who know the form and need the time savings. At the section net level and on local nets, an operator has to make a judgment call.

Since the NTS is the training ground as well as the resource, we need to prepare ourselves to do things as we would in more critical situations. That means not skipping essential parts of a message’s preamble, address, or text just as we would not skip them if we were serving an agency during a disaster. Book traffic sends the parts by sending the common parts first – but all the parts are sent. Choosing when to use shortcuts must be done carefully. Use of techniques such as “Rapid Fire” messages saves time and routes messages through the nets that otherwise wouldn’t be exercised, but it doesn’t preclude sending some messages in full, too.

Then we count what we’ve done to check our efficiency. When a net counts the traffic passed on that net, it counts every message handled. If the message is handled twice, it’s counted twice. If the message is handled off frequency at the direction of the net control, it’s still counted. If, on the other hand, the message is not handled on the radio – it’s not the same. True, emailing traffic via the wired Internet can be a fast way to get it to its destination – but it’s not the same as radio. Winlink? That’s radio. Packet? That’s radio. AM, FM, SSB, CW – yup, you get the picture. Phone lines? Not really. (Except for delivery, of course.) We don’t encourage counting messages not sent via radio as sent.

We can use good pro-words, good pacing, and good sending to add to our effectiveness, but let’s not abandon the basics of accuracy and training for the sake of speed. Remember in the old movies that when the explorer asks the native where his friend caught such a large halibut the native always says, “Efficiency.” 73 – K9LGU/STM - WI

How to properly voice message preambles

FAQ # 277 Yes, this applies to all of us. For an NTS message 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. (two five –not twenty five) Don't use the proword “figures” here. Message numbers should be only in figures anyway – no decimals, dashes, slant bars or letters. Give the precedence (usually routine) but **don't** introduce it by saying it's the precedence. The receiver knows that. Then use phonetics to voice any handling instructions like HXC or HXG.

Next, say the call of the originating station phonetically. There's no need to introduce it by “from” or “*amateur call*” or “*mixed group*” in the preamble. “From my station” is considered poor practice. State the check without labeling it and without any prowords – just the figures of the group count. The receiver already knows what goes in that blank. “With a check of...” is redundant.

Without introducing it, 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. Again, you don't have to say it's the time. Then, without introducing it, say the date – month and day (probably not the year) *without* the proword “figures.” Follow that with the name and address of the recipient using ITU phonetics. No need for “Going to...” or “With an address of...” Then just say, “Break,” listen, and start the text. That's the quick, easy, and correct way. Just say what's in the blank. Do not introduce each part.

ICS213 messages work the same, if the receiver is familiar with the format (and we should be). Just begin with what's in block #1 – if it's used. That's the incident name. You don't have to *call it* “the incident name.” Then say what's in block #2, the name and position of the intended recipient. You don't need to explain. Then go to block #3, the name and position of the person it's coming from. No description or “from” needed.

Block #4 is the subject and possibly preceded by a message number and group count. Here, you could say “message number” and “in X groups”c if it's necessary and then the subject. A comment like “With a subject of...” would be more extraneous words. Just say it. Then say the date, day and month (Block #5), and the local time in 24-hour format (Block #6). Say, “Break,” listen, and start the text.

Extra words and unnecessary descriptors can be distracting and time consuming as well as increasing the chance of mistakes. Sending a message in the correct way, although we're amateurs, sounds much more professional and it works better. K9LGU/STM

Copy

FAQ # 276 When sending messages of any type in any mode, it's important to know your receiver. If you send faster than *you* can write, it's probably too fast for the receiver. If you are hearing interference on frequency, your receiver probably does, too. If you wouldn't understand something without explanation in an operator's note, your receiver will be puzzled as well.

Putting yourself in the place of your receiver helps insure the message will get through and have the same meaning as intended when it was originated. For example, if the check is wrong to start, it will be confusing all along the way. If the spelling of the addressee's name is a guess – it will be on delivery, too. If the text refers to a specific message or a questionable phone number, the text should give that message number it's about or include the phone number in question. If a text includes homonyms, they should be spelled out when the message is sent. Ask yourself - with no other background - if you were to read the message for the first time, would it make sense to you?

The Incident Command System requires use of common terminology or the use of "clear text"—that is, communication without the use of agency-specific codes or jargon. In other words, use of plain English that can be understood by individuals from all responder disciplines. Plain language replaces coded substitutions with common terminology and definitions.

Plain text wording, short sentences, and easy-to-understand terminology can help as messages are composed. Clear, methodical sending will eliminate errors. In other, less famous, words – send unto others as you would have them send unto you. - K9LGU/STM

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

A Check Up on Checking In

PHONE - Before a net starts, tune up your transmitter – well in advance or well *off frequency*. As the net is called up, you'll hear the preamble, the net's purpose and protocol. If the net control station asks for a special order of check-ins, follow those directions. A traffic net will usually ask for liaison stations and stations with traffic first. When traffic is listed, those who can take it are invited to check in. It's a traffic net. Traffic is handled first.

If the NCS says, "Net stand by," everyone shuts up. If the NCS directs two stations to pass traffic, the receiving station calls first. If they move off frequency, they go to a clear spot as directed and ask if it's busy. If it is, they continue moving in the same direction from the net. When they're done, they pause and then return to net frequency.

Only after the net's business are other stations asked to check in. Section nets welcome everybody and often allow for comments later in the net. If you have some business for the net or a relay of a check in, just say your call. Get recognized by the NCS before continuing. Whatever you contribute, always end with your call.

Region and Area nets expect only representatives of section nets and above to check in. Each station who does check in is expected to bring or take traffic. It's not good practice to check in there just to be counted.

CW – Don't tune up on frequency – especially during the net. Pay close attention to the net control's directions. QNA means "Answer in prearranged order." That means the net control wants liaisons first. **QNA 9RN** asks *only* for the 9RN rep. **QNA SSB** asks *only* for the side band rep. Unless you're a rep, wait your turn. Don't check in until the NCS just asks for QNI.

For regular check-ins, a station will send a letter (Any letter is okay; we all have our favorites.) and the NCS will respond by sending the same letter (which means "go ahead") Then the station might check in as follows. KB9ROB DE AG9G GE DEAN QRU (I have no traffic. Anything for me?) K If the station checking in *has* traffic, he or she will list it like this indicating where it's going and how many pieces. KB9ROB DE AG9G GE DEAN QTC MILWAUKEE 2 LA CROSSE 1 K .

When checking in, a station can tell the NCS he will handle some listed traffic like this. DE K3PID GE DEAN QRU QSP LA CROSSE K If the NCS directs stations to move off frequency to pass traffic, it'll sound like this.

NCS: **PID** (K3PID?)

K3PID: **T** (Yep)

NCS: **9G** (AG9G?)

AG9G: **T** (Here I am)

NCS: **U5 LAX 1**(QSY up 5 KHz and pass the one for La Crosse.)

KK3PID: **G** (I'm going.)

AG9G: **G** (I'm on my way.)

If both stations have full break-in (QSK), all the receiving station has to do is hit his key during the message and the sender will repeat the last word and continue. When the traffic has been passed, both stations will listen a moment (in case someone else with traffic has been sent to join them) and then return to the net frequency and send their suffixes to let the NCS know they're back.

On any mode, checking into a net is appreciated. It tests our equipment, reviews our protocol, and shares part of our day with friends as we continue to sharpen our skills.

Invite others to join our section nets. Be prepared to assist new traffic handlers off frequency by exchanging traffic, explaining the NTS format, or answering questions. Don't forget to share how much fun it is to be part of a great net. 73 – K9LGU/STM-WI

Pros 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 *in the same ways*, 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.

Examples: When using "I spell," the sender says the word in the text first, then says "I spell" and then spells the group phonetically. When using "I say again," the sender says the word or group first, pauses, says "I say again" and repeats the group. "Roger" means received and understood. "Affirmative" means yes.

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.

And what about punctuation? It's true that punctuation, such as a comma or the word "query" following a question is spelled out as a word group in the text and counted that way in the check, too. 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 being used as stand-alone punctuation. It's used as a character within a group. It might also be called a "stroke," but – as an elderly Ham – I tend to avoid that term.

So 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. In practice, a sender of the additional identifier added to a call sign often skips the slant and simply pauses briefly. On CW, the slant is always DN. It's a handy *character* within a group, and I guess, on our nets, there are a lot of those.

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>)
73. K9LGU/ STM-WI

R-E-S-P-E-C-T

FAQ # 278 73. Best regards. Regards means respect. So how do you *pay your respects*? Er, maybe you don't have to wait until I'm a Silent Key. Imagine this. -- You have a message to send and an operator near the destination volunteers to take it. You are grateful, so you'll want to show your respect to the receiver by doing the following:

- Let the receiver choose the frequency, check it, and tell you when he's ready.
- Start by actually saying the word, "number" and giving the preamble without identifying or labeling the parts. Show you respect the receiver for knowing what's coming next.
- Spell the name of the addressee phonetically. The street name will need spelling, too. Give the phone number in three groups.
- Say "Break" and listen before starting the text. If you hear no response, continue.
- Speak clearly and pace yourself so the receiver can transcribe the message by hand or keyboard. Spell phonetically any homonyms, uncommon, or confusing words. Respect any problems you can anticipate the receiver might have.
- There's no need to stop mid-message to ask how the receiver is copying. You'll be asked at the "breaks" for any fills.
- Don't use phrases like "today's date," "my station," or "common spelling."
- Say "Break" and listen again at the end of the text. Then say and spell the signature – but you don't have to SAY that it's the signature. The receiver knows what's next. Respect that.
- Be cheerful and patient giving fills – especially under bad conditions. If you're asked to say each group twice, say each group twice. You don't know what the receiver has to deal with in copying your message. Showing respect for the receiver reflects your gratitude and encourages more traffic handling.

So --- if you just keep trying to to send messages with the receiver in mind, I can respect that.

73 – K9LGU/STM

PSHR

FAQ # 279 *How do I get on the Public Service Honor Roll? There are six categories in which you can earn points each month. Scores of 70 or above are printed in QST. All scores submitted in our section go in the monthly STM Report. Here the categories are explained.*

1) Participation in a public service net -- 1 point, 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 (BWN, BEN, WSNB, WSSN, WIN) that are affiliated with the National Traffic System (NTS); NTS region, NTS area, and independent nets that handle traffic; ARES, RACES, 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 will follow the same method as 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. *There is one point granted for each message handled; maximum 40 points per calendar month.*

Here is a reference from the *Public Service Communications Manual* on how to count messages.

Originated--One point for each message from a third party for sending 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 (e.g. NTS or ICS213 format) sent over the air from your station to another amateur receives a point in this category. Thus, a message that is eligible for an Originated point as above receives another point when it is sent on the air.

Likewise, a message that is received on the air conveys 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 cleared. All Sent points require **on-the-air** sending.

Received--A message received over the air gets a Received point, whether 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) still gets 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 strictly an off-the-air function and must be coupled with receipt of the message at your station. Thus 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 ONE message was handled.

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, District Emergency Coordinators, Assistant District Emergency Coordinators, Emergency Coordinators, Assistant Emergency Coordinators, Local Government Liaisons, Net Managers, Official Bulletin Stations, Official Emergency Stations, Official Observers, Official Observer Coordinators, **Official Relay Stations**, and NTS Digital Stations, Public Information Coordinators, Public Information Officers, Section Emergency Coordinators, Section Managers, Section Traffic Managers, Assistant Section Traffic Managers, State Government Liaisons, and Technical Specialists.

More information about the structure of the NTS and the positions and nets that are mentioned may be found in the ARRL's [*Public Service Communications Manual*](#).

4) Participation in scheduled, short-term public service events such as walk-a-thons, bike-a-thons, parades, simulated emergency tests 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 such as SIMCOM, 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 controls, net operators 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. 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 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," sub category 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.

Portion, "b," deals with newer technologies like Web pages and e-mail list servers which 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.

Before the 7th of the month, report your PSHR activity to your STM with a radiogram. Your sample message text (with a check of 10) could look like this:

PSHR APRIL 1/40 2/32 3/10 4/5 5/0 6/0 T/87 73

Looking forward to your reports – 73 K9LGU/STM

Uncommon Courtesy

FAQ # 271 Just how polite are we? We say, "Please" and "Thank you." Our net controls are decisive and directive, but they're never rude or insensitive. We welcome and assist newcomers. You can hear it in a phone NCS's voice. A good CW NCS will always slow to the speed of the station checking in. We compliment, comfort, and congratulate each other when the occasion arises. If there's a significant need for correction, suggestions are made privately, not on net frequency. Small suggestions, such as a reminder to say your call at the end of an exchange, are made politely.

We ask if a frequency is in use. If it is, we use a different frequency.

If an assigned net control can't fulfill the duty, he or she will let someone know ahead of time, so a substitute can be found. Orderly check-ins are complimented. Volunteers are treasured.

Being a relay station a day or two each week makes an operator an integral part of the system.

It's in that spirit of teamwork that we present our recurrent pleas. We need more net control operators and more designated liaisons to other nets – especially on CW. We need folks to fill in as substitutes. We need as many operators in as many modes as possible to get the training and the practice of being a net control or relay station. A good traffic net is part of the service we provide and extended emergency sessions may need many net controls.

Serving as NCS is fun. It's satisfying to make a contact with each check-in. There's a fulfillment in knowing it's been a good net and traffic has been handled efficiently. And when directing stations to handle traffic off frequency, it's even kind of fun to tell 'em where to go – so to speak. It's not difficult. It only requires a good signal, positive attitude, a little organizational ability, and some basic record keeping. There are scripts to follow and plenty of instructional materials available such as

<https://wi-arrrl.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Volume-1.pdf>

Similarly, we also need one Vara HF digital operator in each Wisconsin ARES/RACES District (if not the DEC, then an appointee) to test the special MBO at N9VC once a month to be sure our system *without* the infrastructure works. Contact your DEC or KB9IME to help.

Please? Thank you. 73 – K9LGU/STM – WI

Who calls first?

FAQ #275 - No, this is not an Abbot and Costello routine, although it could be similarly confusing. The question is, when a station is sent off net frequency by the NCS, who should call?

That answer is (no drum roll necessary) the station that is going to RECEIVE the traffic picks the frequency, asks if the frequency is busy and calls first. That's who needs to know if the frequency will work for traffic. At times, the suggested frequency may be busy, so the receiving station will find a clear spot by going in the same direction farther from the net frequency and call there. Only after several unsuccessful attempts will the stations return to the net and report the problem.

If the NCS wants a two-way exchange to be done on net frequency, the station **named** first by the NCS (the receiver) calls first. The NCS might tell the receiving station, "Call (sender) and receive one here." Again, the receiver calls first. Then the traffic is passed right on net frequency.

When the NCS tells a receiving station to "call and arrange," the *receiving* station picks the potential spot off net frequency. The receiver doesn't ask where the sender wants to go or give the sender choices to be discussed and decided on the net. The receiver just picks a spot, tells the sender, goes there, and calls. At times, the receiver may request, "Please send it to me via RMS." The sender confirms. Then it's done on the appropriate digital frequency.

The procedures all save net time, keep order, and demonstrate efficiency. I know some ops may not think that this part of net operation is important. Those are the ones who might say, "Don't care" – but that's the shortstop. 73 – K9LGU/WI-STM