

Communication Guidelines

Waller County ARES training material used with permission from Christine Smith, N5CAS.

Let's face it, there are hundreds of people that can talk and talk, and when they finally finish you ask yourself "what did they actually say?"

Within Emergency Communication you will have TWO different levels of communication. The first is in passing traffic on behalf of a served agency. This is known as formal traffic. Under those conditions you pass traffic EXACTLY as written. You change nothing. In some instances you will not understand what the message means. That is fine. Your job is to get the message to the destination as quickly as possible, not to understand it.

When you receive a message from a served agency, read it. If there is any part you cannot read, ask for clarification before accepting the message. You can't accurately transcribe what you cannot read. When you transcribe a message from a served agency, MAKE NO CHANGES! It does not matter if you do not understand the technical meaning. It DOES matter that you pass traffic exactly as written.

Let's revisit the last sentence. PASS TRAFFIC EXACTLY AS WRITTEN!
If you are the author, make your corrections before you are ready to send.
If ANYONE else initiated the message, MAKE NO CHANGES!

The second type of communication is where YOU originate the message, it is not written and where a written response is not required. This is commonly known as informal traffic. In that situation you control what the text of the message will be. Therefore phrasing is up to you. Plan your communications at least as well as you plan what you say when you know you will be quoted. When ever reasonable, write down what you will say before you say it.

In Emergency communication it is important to say as little as possible, yet convey all of the meaning. How can we do this?

1. Brevity and Clarity

The standing "rule of thumb" is - if you can leave a word out without changing the meaning, leave it out. If a description of an item will not add to the understanding of the subject of the message, leave it out. Another item to remember, do NOT use contractions within your messages. Words like "don't" and "isn't" are far too easy to confuse. Add to that the stress and confusion during an emergency and they WILL create problems.

2. Slow Down!

Hams, in general, tend to handle communications as quickly as they can. It has been proven again and again that a three or four second break between transmissions will actually result in information being passed more quickly. If this seems strange to you, take the time to listen to Police, Sheriff's Office or Fire dispatch. They are able to convey large amounts of information very quickly because they maintain a slow, measured pace. In addition, the three or four second break between transmissions insures priority and emergency traffic can gain access to the net without requiring the largest signal on that frequency.

3. **Do not editorialize**

Literally hours can be lost by people inserting their opinion on unrelated subjects. What someone thinks about a ball game or the weather is irrelevant unless weather or the ball game is the subject being discussed.

4. **Listen**

The first requirement for communication is the ability to listen. But, you say, I can tell someone what is required without listening. Not really. Communication is the - two way - exchange of thoughts, ideas or information. Two way. That requires listening. An olde timer once told me "A ham has two ears and one mouth. Therefore he should listen twice as much as he talks". Makes sense. **Communication will be acknowledged.**

5. **Standard ITU Phonetics**

While it may take less effort to speak into a microphone and listen than to operate CW, it does take some care to quickly and accurately convey exact information. Speak distinctly at all times. If information is to be written, pace your speech accordingly. For critical information, or under noisy conditions, spell words with standard ITU phonetics. ITU phonetics were chosen so that each word sounds completely different from all others. A list of ITU phonetics is available in the ARRL handbook and the ARRL logbooks

6. **Numbers**

are pronounced as individuals. The number 509 is pronounced five zero nine, not five hundred nine and NOT five oh nine.

7. **Formal written traffic**

Insure you have asked all questions necessary to have obtained the following:

- Who is requesting and from whom?
- What is the requesters full name/title/agency & location?
- What is the recipients full name/title/agency & location?
- What are they requesting and how many do they want/need?
- Is it a list or single item?
- If it's a list, do all items come from the same place?
- If multiple sources then use multiple messages.
- Is the subject the transportation of an item, or the acquisition of that item, or both?
- Where will it come from (not always the same as the location of the person receiving the request)?
- Where will it go to (not always the same as the location of the person requesting the item(s))?
- When is it needed?
- Time/date as applicable

8. **Getting the message through**

To improve communications you need to improve the difference between the signal and the noise levels (signal to noise ratio) to achieve reliable communications. For our purposes here, noise is defined as any impediment to transmission or reception of information (messages). What form can this "noise" take? Some of the more common ones are:

- Static and background noise on the air
- Equipment or voice sounds around you
- Inappropriate amount of light
- "Loose cannon" tempers

- Improper transmission speed
- Improperly formatted messages

What can you do to maximize message throughput? Here are some of the more common ways to handle impediments.

Static and background noise on the air

Insure you have the proper antenna for the job.

An NVIS will work very well for 40 and 75 meter SSB when your communications range is up to about three hundred miles where a vertical will not. Conversely, a vertical will work quite well for VHF/UHF.

Choose the best band for the job

VHF/UHF are very good for short distances (less than 50 miles) but are useless for distances over one hundred miles. The antennas are quite small.

HF propagation differs by band and antennas are quite large. What distance do you wish to cover?

Make sure your equipment is grounded.

Equipment or voice sounds around you

Use a headset to minimize noise you will hear from the area you are in.

Use a noise canceling microphone to minimize transmitted noise.

When ever possible, locate your station away from the source of noise.

Inappropriate amount of light

Many people do not think of light as a potential problem. Think what happens when you have too much light when you try to read a computer screen or too little light when you try to read printed information.

Stay out of direct sunlight if at all possible.

Try not to be in shade while having to look directly into the sunshine.

Insure there will be sufficient light for you to work at night.

"Loose cannon" tempers

These are very hard to deal with. Your best bet is to ask assistance from your supervisor. A team working calmly toward a common goal will frequently defuse the situation.

Improper transmission speed

Practice sending at the appropriate rate where the other party can copy. That means you shouldn't ramble off the message text at high speed, but pace yourself to the same speed that the other party is copying (about 15 WPM). That translates to about one word every four seconds. As you speak, imagine that you're writing the word in your mind. After a while, you'll get the hang of talking 15 WPM. If you do this right, you'll never get a request to repeat a section.

When asking for part or all of the message to be repeated, get into the habit of saying "Say Again" instead of "Repeat". Repeat is used in the military to fire another salvo of artillery.

Improperly formatted messages

We have had training on Message Handling for formatting information, and will be discussing this again in the future. You might wish to refer to your documentation on this subject.