

## ***THE A-B-Cs OF EFFICIENT MESSAGE HANDLING***

**A. THINK** about what you are about to say.

**B. LISTEN** to what is happening on the channel -- you may cover up a conversation already in progress.

**C. SPEAK** in clear, concise words and letters in a manner that they can be easily written down. (meaning speak S-L-O-W-L-Y)

**THINK:** For instance, when you THINK about what you are going to say, review it in your mind and ask yourself: "Does it make sense?" "Can it be shortened without losing it's meaning?" And "could the meaning of the message be confused by the receiving party?" A classic example of a simple sentence that has multiple meanings is: "BABY SWALLOWS FLY"

Does this mean that small baby birds can fly or that an infant has swallowed a fly?

As you can see, messages can have multiple or unclear meanings. If you are unsure about the meaning or text of a message, ask the originating party to clarify it for you. In addition, try to understand how the message will be handled. If your message consists of "This is station 16, and we need more cots and food from the Red Cross," you will eventually be asked:

Who is making the request? How many cots? How much food, and of what type? Where is each to be delivered? When are they each needed? How are set-up of cots and serving of food to be handled? These incomplete open-ended messages only serve to occupy precious "Air Time" and slow the progress of your message through the "system."

**LISTEN:** When you LISTEN, you are more alert to what is happening, chances are you will be prepared for incoming traffic or questions long before you are called. You can then use this extra time to prepare for what you are planning to say. Even more importantly, when you are listening to what is happening over the air, you will be able to paint the "big picture" in your mind of what is happening. You know where other stations are, what they are doing and how the situation is developing. This will enable you to judge whether or not the Net Control station is able to handle your "routine" traffic without "repeats" -- and using excessive air time.

**SPEAK:** When you SPEAK, you should be thinking of the clarity of the message and how you are going to pronounce words. Any words or phrases that would be easily misunderstood or confused should be broken into syllables and emphasized in the proper spot if needed. Do not hesitate to emphasize parts of words to convey the proper meaning or give the phonetic alphabet (Alpha, Bravo, Charlie,

Etc.) when necessary. When will emphasis of a word or phrase be needed?  
Anytime there is doubt of your meaning. So, when in doubt, C-L-A-R-I-F-Y!

**SPEED:** While you are talking, one (or more) persons are attempting to write the message down with a minimum of errors. A good general rule is to speak about half as fast as you can write. Only send THREE to SEVEN words at a time then unkey, wait THREE seconds, then give the next THREE to SEVEN words. This will enable the station to ask you for clarification of certain words and, more importantly, enable emergency traffic to interrupt. If the message is spoken too quickly, the Net Control Operator will have to ask for repeats and might have to rewrite the message so that someone can decipher it. Be prepared to repeat part of or the entire message, if requested to do so.

**READBACK:** If you are unsure if the receiving station has copied your message correctly, ask for a “readback”. The station will then read the traffic back at normal speaking speed. You should also be prepared for readbacks on traffic that you have received. Be sure to do this only when necessary, as this takes additional air time. If you missed a word or part of the message, ask the sending station to either repeat part or all of the message using the techniques below. These types of repeats are also known as “fills”.

Sample Requests for “Fills”:

“Repeat all Between \_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_”  
or  
“Repeat all after \_\_\_\_”

### ***PRIORITY OF TRAFFIC SAMPLE MESSAGE TRAFFIC BY PRECEDENCE/PRIORITY***

If your message is of a **ROUTINE** nature:

Operator: “Station 1” (after making sure that the frequency is clear)

Net Control: “Go ahead Station 1”

Operator: “We need 100 gallons of diesel fuel for the main generator at this location within two hours”

Net Control: “Station 1 needs 100 gallons of diesel fuel for the main generator within two hours. Net Control (Call Sign)”

If your message is of a **PRIORITY** nature:

Operator: “Station 1, Priority traffic” (After making sure that there is no other priority or emergency traffic on the frequency)

Net Control: "Go ahead Station 1 with priority traffic"

Operator: "One of our CERT volunteers reports that eastbound Yorktown at Newland is now impassable. A temporary barrier has been set up to divert traffic."

(In messages of this length, it is essential that they be given in small pieces so that they can be written down by Net Control. Unkey your mike for three seconds between message segments.

Conclude with "End of message."

Net Control: (Reads back the message and [only if necessary] asks for repeats or fills and completes the traffic with "Net Control (Call Sign)")

If your traffic is of an Immediate (**EMERGENCY**) nature:

Operator: "Station 1, immediate traffic" (After making sure that there is no other emergency traffic on the frequency)

Net Control: "All non-emergency traffic standby. Go ahead Station 1 with immediate traffic"

Operator: "We have three female juveniles with major burns and one 28 year old male with a broken leg at this location. Request paramedics or advice as to what to do. We have no medical supplies available but we do have people with limited first-aid experience"

(See above for instructions in passing lengthy messages)

Net Control: (Reads back the message and asks for repeats, if necessary, or fills and completes the traffic with "Net Control (Call Sign)")

### ***MESSAGE FORM ICS213***

As part of the Incident Command System, forms have been standardized. The ICS213 form is used for transmitting and receiving messages. While it is not always necessary to fill out this form, it is necessary if requests are being made from another agency or emergency communications group. As communicators, we do not request. We request on behalf of the person needing information or action.

**To:** To whom is the message directed? It may be to a person or an agency. It is always better if we can attach a name to the request. At minimum, the agency must be identified. It would be a good idea for later tracking to insert the call sign of the radio amateur taking the message from you to further identify the message and reply.

**Position:** Identify the location of the individual to whom this is sent. The more information, the better to assure the message gets to the right person.

**From:** Someone has made the request. The name of that person is important so that when the reply comes back, we can be sure the requestor receives the information needed. Insert your call sign in this box as well.

**Position:** As much information as possible is helpful in identifying the requestor. The reply to the message may come back during a different shift.

**Subject:** A short description of the message. This should be as short as possible. As there is no space on the ICS213 form for a message number this would be a good place to insert a personal identifier of the message (jrh003)

**Date:** Current date.

**Time:** Identify the time as to AM, PM, Local, UCT. It is probably better to use local time on a 24hr basis unless the project is being tracked on some other time system.

**Message:** Create the message using the rules above.

**Signature:** If possible, have the originator of the message sign the message. This is important if the request is for assets or anything other than information. Who is authorizing this?

**Position:** What is that person's title or position.

**Reply:** Your request should have a reply. If, based upon the type of emergency, you are not receiving a reply in a reasonable time frame, you should follow up on your request. If the reply is "wordy," or "chatty" ask the sender if you can rephrase the reply or if the sender can rephrase the reply for you.

**Date:** Enter the current day you receive the reply. It may be a different date than when the message was sent.

**Time:** Use the same time reference as used when sending the message.

**Signature:** Ask the requester to sign that they received the information.

Keep the message or a copy of the message for the official record of the event.