

Repeater Etiquette & Tips

This document draws heavily from the document called "Repeater Etiquette & Tips", originally written by Dave Kozinn, K2DBK, for the 10-70 Repeater Association of Northern New Jersey. His advice and guidance make sense for any repeater, so why re-invent the proverbial wheel?

Thanks, Dave, for a great piece of work and allowing us to use it.

-Chuck Bland, na6br

Much of what you will read here are commonly used procedures. Many of them are based on the FCC rules that govern amateur radio, while others are based on long used procedures.

But they all have one thing in common, a basis in courtesy. So, if it seems there are a lot of things to remember, relax. If you do your best to be courteous to those with whom you share the repeater, most of these practices will naturally fall into place.

First Things First

When it comes to repeater etiquette, the best starting point, and probably most important to remember, is simply to *listen*. If you're relatively new to the hobby, or to our repeaters, you will learn an awful lot by just listening to the folks who've been around for a while.

Signal Reports

When you are looking for a signal report, the right way to do it is to say something like "K6ABC looking for a signal report", not "K6ABC listening". Saying "listening" or "monitoring" implies that you're listening to the repeater and would like to chat with someone. Often, there will be others "lurking" who might be willing to jump onto the radio to give out a signal report, but won't answer a general "listening" call because they might not want to get involved in an extended conversation.

Unless you have actually made some changes to your station, you may find that folks will tire of responding to you if you ask for a report day after day (or more often).

If you're responding to a signal report request, make sure you're giving accurate information. If you can't hear the repeater itself well, it will be difficult to report back accurate information to the other station. Remember that the information that's useful is how the other station sounds coming into the repeater, not how the repeater itself sounds. Since the repeater itself should be more or less constant to you, you're just helping the other station figure out how well they are making it to the repeater.

Asking for Directions or Other Assistance

Similar to looking for a signal report, if you need directions or some other assistance, be sure to ask for that. As mentioned above in the Signal Report section, just dropping your call might not get an answer, but asking specifically for help will usually will.

Your Own Signal Quality Into The Repeater

Sometimes, for any number of reasons, you might not have a good signal into the repeater. It might be a temporary condition (you're mobile and too far from the repeater; that 5 watt HT with a rubber ducky inside the car just isn't making it from 60 miles away) or it might be a longer term problem. In any case, if you realize that you don't have a good signal into the repeater, it's good amateur practice to stop transmitting until you're able to have a better signal.

"Dropping Your Call" (or how to let folks know you're out there)

When you want to chat with anybody who might be around on the repeater, typically you'll do what folks call "dropping your call". That means that you'll key up the repeater and just announce your callsign, sometimes followed by "mobile", if appropriate.

If there's a conversation already in progress, wait for the courtesy tone (normally the morse "K" or Dah-di-Dah on the 2m machine) after someone finishes their transmission, and just say your callsign. No need to say "listening", since obviously folks know you're out there.

If the machine isn't active, and you've dropped your call but nobody has responded, wait a few minutes (3 or 5 minutes) and try again. If nobody comes back, it could just be that there's nobody around, or at least nobody around who is interested in having a casual conversation. You can keep trying every few minutes, but there are times when there just isn't anyone around who can chat.

Please don't drop your call over and over and over if nobody answers, especially not without waiting a few minutes. As mentioned, there are sometimes folks out there, but they just aren't able to chat, and hearing someone "pleading" over and over gets tiresome.

Make sure that you give your callsign clearly and not so quickly that you can't be understood. On the other hand don't speak so SLOWLY that it takes more than about two or three seconds to give your callsign. Unlike on an HF frequency, where it's desirable to give a long CQ to give another station a chance to find your exact frequency, when you're on a repeater, you're on a fixed frequency and any other station doesn't have to "find" you.

Use of Jargon & Q-signals

One very easy habit to fall into is the use of jargon. Instead of saying "I've arrived at my destination", you'll hear folks say things like "We're destined". It seems to be a very common practice to use "we" when what you really mean is "I". This seems to be one of the hardest habits to break. A good practice is to just say, in plain English, what you mean. If someone doesn't understand, they'll ask you.

Use of phonetics

Generally speaking, because most signals are relatively strong into (and hopefully, out of) the repeaters, you don't normally need to use phonetics when you are identifying (or calling another station). On FM repeaters, good operating practice is to simply identify using standard English, so that I'd simply say "K2DBK" (which would be pronounced "Kay Two Dee Bee Kay"). If another station asks for clarification because they couldn't make out what you were saying, at that point, it's probably OK to use phonetics to help the other station understand your callsign.

When you do use phonetics, be sure to use standard phonetics which are easily understood. Using "cute" phonetics might be fun, but you have a better chance of someone understanding you when you use the standard ones. (That's why they are a standard, right?) For example, "Kilo Two Delta Bravo Kilo" probably has better chance of being understood than "Kinda Two Dark Blue Klystrons".

Just to clarify a little, the above rules really don't necessarily apply when you aren't using a repeater, and in particular, it's often necessary to use phonetics a lot more when using single-sideband on a noisy HF band. Also, the use of phonetics during certain types of nets is a lot more common, and is used when precision is a lot more important.

On a final note on the subject, the phonetic for the letter "Z" is "Zulu". The American English pronunciation for that letter is "Zee", but the British (and possibly other dialects) pronunciation of

that letter is "Zed" which is sometimes used to make the letter sound less like the letter "C". It's relatively common to use the British pronunciation, and that's not considered phonetics.

Over/under ID'ing

According to the FCC rules (Part 97.119), a station is required to identify "at the end of each communication, and at least every ten minutes during a communication". It's certainly important to make sure that you comply with this rule. The 10 minute part is pretty obvious, but the "end of each communication" rule can be something of a grey area, particularly if you're in a large roundtable conversation and one party leaves. Does that mean the communication is over?

To make sure that you're in compliance with the rules, you should certainly ID at least every 10 minutes (many folks use the repeater ID as a cue to ID themselves).

Just to be on the safe side, many of us also ID whenever someone leaves a rotation. (Maybe someday someone will figure out, definitively, if that's necessary, but it's better to be overly cautious.) Of course, before you leave the air, as part of your final transmission you must ID.

It is not necessary to ID or "clear" if you've merely dropped you call and not spoken with any other stations. In other words, if I someone says "K6ABC mobile" and nobody answers the call, when they decide to stop listening (or turn off their radio, get out of the car, etc.), they do not have to "K6ABC, clear" since they satisfied the part 97.119 requirements simply by putting out their call.

On our repeaters, it is not necessary to use any callsign other than your own when identifying. There are rules where this is not the case, but they do not apply to use on our repeater, since all communications are taking place within a location where the FCC has jurisdiction. It is common practice (and there's not really anything wrong) with using the callsign of station that you "turning over" to (but see the section on that topic for more information about doing that). You probably don't want to bother even trying to remember all the calls in a large rotation, and not only isn't it necessary, it does take up the time where someone else could be talking.

It is almost never necessary to ID at the end of every single transmission (in other words, just before you unkey your microphone), and it's really just a waste of time to do so. The primary exception to this is during a controlled net where you know you will be making a single transmission and probably won't be given another chance to ID before the 10-minute rule would apply. If you're in this kind of situation, you'll probably know it. The other exception to this rule is if you're in a fairly large rotation and there's a chance that you might have to leave the air before you have a chance to give a final ID.

Turning over to the next station

One of the reasons why we have a courtesy tone (normally a Morse code "K", or Dah-dit-dah) that sounds after your unkey your radio is to the other stations know that you have finished your transmission. Because of that, it's not necessary (and a bit redundant) to say "over" before you unkey. Of course, folks who work a lot of simplex will sometimes have a hard time breaking this habit!

However, in a rotation, or even in just a conversation between two stations, it's not a bad idea to indicate which station should be the next to speak. For instance, let's say there's a rotation on the repeater with NA6BR, KA6ANF (Joyce), and KC6CJW (Paul), in that order of rotation. Just before I unkey I might say "over to you Joyce" as a reminder to everyone in the group that it's Joyce's turn. There is no regulation that says I have to use Joyce's callsign, though it's acceptable to do so (but

see the section on "over-IDing"). You may sometimes hear folks combining their ID in with the "handover" by saying something like "NA6BR to get it, this is KC6CJW", which is fine too.

Also, if someone new has just joined the rotation, it's a good idea to let that person know who "gets it next". So using our exactly from the previous section, if I just joined into a rotation with the other to stations, Paul might say "NA6BR to get it and give it to Joyce, this is KC6CJW".

How To Call Another Station

If you wish to call another specific station (instead of just dropping your call), you should always give the callsign of the station that you are calling first, followed by your call. For example, if Pat (WA6PFS) wanted to call Bill (KC6BLN), the correct way to do that would be to say "KC6BLN, this is WA6PFS" not the other way around.

If the repeater is active and you wish to call another station, wait for a break between stations, and say you callsign. The next station speaking should recognize you. At that point, you'd make your call (as above). If after one or two calls the other party isn't available, simply say "Nothing heard, thanks" and give your callsign. On the other hand, if your party is available, unless the folks who are already using the repeater are willing to turn if over to you, it's common courtesy to keep your conversation short and possible move off to another frequency (or join in with the group).

Remember that the repeater is a shared resource; if you do need to contact someone and the repeater is already in use, please be considerate and keep your conversation brief.

We're an open, friendly repeater but.....

If two or more folks are in the process of trying to get directions, or there is an emergency or a net in progress, dropping your call just to chat is not appropriate.

If one station calls another specifically (when the machine is otherwise unoccupied), the two stations probably just want to talk to each other. If the two stations are discussing something specific, common courtesy is to just let them talk without jumping in, but of course, use common sense; if they seem like they're open to a general chat with other, of course it's OK to "c'mon in".

Also, if one station calls another, and there is no answer, don't be insulted if the calling station doesn't respond if you "drop your call". They may have been looking for someone specific and really aren't interested in a general chat, or they may have moved to another frequency.

On the flip side of the above: If you are using the repeater with just one other person, try to keep your conversation to a reasonable length. There may be others who are trying to avoid interrupting you, and if you talk for a long time, you're keeping them from using the repeater.

Criticize off-air

Remember that there is almost always someone listening to the repeater. Sometimes it's a fellow ham, sometimes it's a prospective ham listening to a scanner. If for any reason you feel that you have something to say to someone that you might not want someone to say to you over the air, don't say it on the radio. Instead, find a private communications channel (telephone, email, meeting in person) and work things out that way.

Incidental Music

Don't forget that the FCC prohibits the transmission or retransmission of music (and almost anything else that is received over the airwaves; for specifics, see FCC Part 97.113). If you have a radio turned on (this is especially common for many mobile stations), make sure that it's turned down before you transmit.

Mobile vs. Portable

Quick rule of thumb: If you're operating a radio from inside a vehicle (or perhaps while sitting on a bicycle), you are a mobile station, even if you're sitting still. (Sometimes folks will say "stationary mobile"). If you're walking around carrying your radio (usually that pretty much limits you to using an HT), then the common usage of the term "portable" applies to you.

If you're operating a mobile radio from a fixed location (your home or office, for example), even if you're operating off battery power or another emergency source of power, you are still considered to be a fixed (or base) station.

The original usage of the term "portable" means that you are operating out of the call area in which you were originally licensed. The FCC rules used to specify that you had to identify that you were operating "portable" if you were not in your assigned call area but those rules are no longer in effect (for US stations operating within the US anyway.) However, common usage is that if I were to say "This is NA6BR portable", it means that I'm walking around carrying my radio.

Stations are no longer required by FCC rules to indicate if they are operating mobile or portable. There are some nets where the Net Control Station will ask stations to indicate if they are operating as mobile or portable (for instance, during a Skywarn net the NCS will do that to try to keep track of which stations might go out of range during the net) but under normal circumstances, stations aren't required to do that. However, many stations will identify as mobile just so that others will know that they are out "on the road".

The 3-minute timeout

Our repeaters normally have a 3 minute "timeout" setting. The 3 minute length is meant as a maximum length, not a suggested length.

It's considered good etiquette to keep your transmission length shorter than this, especially if there are a lot of people in a QSO, or during busy times on the repeater.

If you exceed the 3 minute limit, the repeater controller will cut off your transmission, and when you unkey, you'll hear a message from the controller letting you know that you have timed out the repeater.

The controller timer resets at the end of the courtesy tone, so "jumping" the tone will mean that the length of your transmission is added on to the length of the previous transmission. In other words, if the person just previous to you speaks for 2 minutes and 45 seconds, at 16 seconds into your transmission you'll get cut off. This is to encourage users to leave a gap between transmissions.

Note that when you drop your carrier and the machine transmits its identification, the courtesy tone does not transmit until after the ID, meaning that the timeout timer does not reset until that point. So, if you transmit "on top of" the ID, you may cause a timeout as described in the previous item.