

Basic Communication Guidelines

Let's face it, there are hundreds of people that can talk the ears off of a brass monkey 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. I repeat the last sentence for greater infasis. PASS FORMAL TRAFFIC EXACTLY AS WRITTEN!

If you are the author, make your corrections before you are ready 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, or sometime tactical traffic. In that situation you control what the actual text of the message will be. Therefore exact 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. Whenever it is 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? While this list tonight is not extensive, I hope it covers the main points and will challenge you to continue to learn to be the best communicator you can. These tips should help you whether you use your skills for contesting, emergency communications or both.

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. Speak distinctly at all times. If information is to be written, pace your speech accordingly. Remember this: A loud voice cannot compete with a clear voice, even if it's a whisper.

2. 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. The important information on such a subject as a ball game would be the score, and on the weather, the conditions you observe, no what you think the storm may do or not do.

3. Listen

The first requirement for good communication skills 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 dialog. That requires listening. A most intelligent man once said "A ham has two ears and one mouth. Therefore he should listen twice as much as he talks". Makes sense.

4. Always use Standard ITU Phonetics

While it may take little effort to speak into a microphone and listen, it does take some care to quickly and accurately convey exact information by voice. 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 and is readily available at several sources.