

STM-- Messaging Your Message #1

Here is a brief description of the parts of a radiogram preamble. This information is intended for those new to traffic handling as well as a review for those active in the NTS.

When sending a formal radiogram, we begin with the preamble, which is the part of the message that is not the message but helps tremendously in its accurate delivery. The preamble includes a message number, precedence, handling instructions, station of origin, check, place of origin, time, and date.

The message number is assigned by the station of origin, the one who prepares and sends the message for the first time. I found something in the word PREPARES or Prep ARES. An operator can begin with number one at the first of the year, the first of the month, or at any time it is convenient. The important part of the numbering is to keep it sequential and keep track. Recently, some operators have chosen to number with decimals, dashes, or letters included. Although this may be an easy system for an originating station, it could lead to some troubles with traffic in the NTS if relaying stations do not pay very close attention. For example, what on voice might be said as, "Number one decimal one. Routine." On CW, would sound like 1R1R and could

be confusing since the receiving station might interpret it as a repeat of the number and precedence instead of just the message number. Perhaps it is best to keep it simple, and stick to the original rules if you will.

The precedence helps the message along the way. Of course, if it is an EMERGENCY precedence which is always spelled out and not abbreviated, the message will be handled expeditiously on every net, cleared first and with all possible speed. If the message is of Inquiry or Welfare precedence, it will be handled before those that are Routine. The decision about a message's precedence is the choice of the originating station. Of course, the operator may be told what precedence to use by an official or agency sending the message. Under normal circumstances, almost all messages are classified as Routine.

Handling instructions are intended for the delivering station. They are optional, but helpful. They range from HXA (Collect landline authorized by addressee within .....miles) to HXG (If toll or expense is involved, cancel message and service originating station). We will be covering all of the handling instructions at a later time.

Next, in the preamble, is the call of the originating station. If you are preparing the message for its first

transmission, you are the originating station and you use your call-sign here. Following the call is the check which is the number of words or groups in the text of the message - just the text, not the addressee, address, signature, or anything else. An easy way to keep track of the number of words is to write the text with five words per line and count the lines.

The place of origin is the location which the message comes from - not necessarily the same as your location. For example, if I receive a message for Jonesboro, deliver it, and get a reply, the place of origin for my return message is Jonesboro - even though I'm in Hot Springs. If Buster, AD5AM, asks me to send a message on his behalf, the place of origin is Rogers (his QTH), even though the message will first be sent from my shack.

The time may be included in the precedence if it is important. It is likely to be there in disaster and welfare traffic, not likely for routine traffic. The date is when the message is written - even if it is not sent that day. It will match with any time given.

END PART ONE

START PART TWO

Message Format #2

The address in a message is easy, but it is often not done correctly. Be sure to get the complete information from the person for whom you are sending the message for. An accurate address is a necessity -- and makes prompt delivery a lot more likely.

The text of the message is, of course, of a non-commercial nature. It should be limited to 25 words or less. It does not include any elements of the preamble, address, or signature. The text is set off from the rest of the message by using the word "break" on voice and BT on CW, Winlink, RTTY, AMTOR, or PACKET before sending the text and just after the text before the signature. Separators in the text are X's, read as "initial X-ray" when sending the message but never read to the recipient of the message. Just pause a little at the end of each word group when you are delivering a message.

When counting the text for the check, each word, initial group (QTH), mixed group (407TH), figure group (2332), city, state, name, etc. is ONE count. Phone numbers in the text are split into three parts -- area, prefix, and four-digit suffix -- and counted as THREE text counts. The separators (X-rays) get a count of one, too. Words which belong apart from another word (well-being) are separated and counted

as TWO. Words which are natural compounds and are written together (makeshift) stay together and are counted as ONE.

If a text contains one or more ARL numbers from the Standard ARL Numbered Radiogram List, the check always reads “ARL #.” Where # is the number of words in the text including the ARL and ARL numbers in the count. For example, “ARL Sixty One and Love to All” would be counted as six. The check would be “ARL 6.” ARL numbers are always spelled out in the text. It is “ARL SIXTY ONE” not ARL 61. Of course, when the message is delivered, the delivering station should always translate the ARL numbers for the recipient, even if it is a ham.

The signature should be a complete as needed for the recipient. If it is to a family member or close friend, “Dad” or “Julie” would suffice. If not, both first and last names are recommended. If the message is from an official, be sure to include that person’s complete title. If the signature includes other data, such as a membership number, Email address or service number, take special care to get the info right. One digit makes a difference.

When you have finished sending or relaying a message, you say, “End of message; No more.” Of course if you have more to send, you would say “End

of message, three more” or however many you have left to send to this receiving station.

Handling traffic is not difficult. Operating aids such as the pink card (FSD-218) and the ARRL Net Directory will answer most of your questions about traffic and the NTS. If not, look for your SM or STM on one of the section nets.

## Net Cooperation

### On Doing the Right Thing

The net should have started four minutes ago. There are stations on frequency, waiting to list or receive traffic. The net control is missing. What happens now? Well, usually the NM will pick up the net or if he/she is a little slow and you are qualified, you call up the net and either turn it over to the regular NCS when he shows, or simply run the show yourself. If you do not, the National Traffic System is not much of a system and messages of importance going through will miss the next net in the chain.

The skip is too long. The net members are not hearing each other. The traffic ca not even be efficiently relayed. As NCS, you announce a new frequency and move the whole net to a better band. If you do not, the net can not function. It is always a

good plan to have an alternate frequency on another band.

Tonight you are NCS, but there is a QSO going on net frequency and it is time to call up the net. You know you could ask for the frequency or just turn on your amplifier, but what impression would that give of your net operation? Politely, you move up the band a few KHz and start the proceedings.

There is traffic listed for Woolly Hollow, which you can handle via a local two-meter repeater. You volunteer. If you do not pick it up, it will be listed a few times and be serviced to the originating station without delivery.

It is time to send a message, so you prepare it in ARRL format, including the check. This way, the receiving station can be more certain that the text is right - and it serves as a good example to others listening. Counting is not all that hard and the famous pink card (FSD-218) has all you need for the details of the format. If you do not, there is danger of error and a missed opportunity for some easy training.

You are busily passing traffic, when the receiving station asks you to speed up (QRQ) or slow down (QRS) on CW. You value the other operator's time, so you comply. If you do not it may mean more fills

or repeats or a lesser chance that the receiver will want to take traffic from you again.

It is another one of those generic messages from someone who does not really know the addressee. Instead of complaining about it, you take and deliver the traffic, meet a nice person on the phone, and make a note to originate some not-so-generic traffic yourself to keep the NTS in tune. Without traffic, it will fade.

Someone has traffic for Ninth Region Net and no regular rep has checked in to the net. You graciously volunteer to take the traffic from our section net to the next level. If you do not, the system breaks down.

You remember it is a hobby. You try to keep nets and all of your Ham activity in perspective. You know the nets need your participation, and so does your family. You choose to keep a balance. If you do not, something suffers.

You see, when you eliminate the choices with less positive results, only the right thing is, left.

END PART TWO

START PART THREE

## Receiving Voice Traffic

## How to Answer

In “Sending Traffic by Voice,” we considered what the sending station says when checking in to a net, listing and passing traffic. So what happens if you can handle the traffic listed for somewhere?

The first statement you will say when you check in or after the NCS asks who can handle traffic for Somewhere, Arkansas. You give your call followed by, “I can take Somewhere.” The NCS will give you instructions -- either to handle the traffic on frequency or to move. For example, the NCS might say, “W0ZUX”, call “K5UZ” and pick up one Somewhere.” You will call the station with the traffic on net frequency, check the copy if necessary, tell him to go ahead and begin to copy the message.

If the NCS says, “W0ZUX”, call K5UZ and arrange,” you, the receiving station, suggest a frequency and move. You know best where you have a TV birdie or how badly the splatter down the band is affecting your reception. You pick the spot, ask if the frequency is in use, and call the station with the traffic.

Chances are the sending station will break often during the sending of the message, so you can interrupt and ask for clarification or repeats. If not,

when the sending station completes the message and stands by, you can ask for fills. There are some easy ways to do it. You might just say, “Please repeat the message number,” or “Please confirm the phone number as 501-563-2439.” If you are uncertain about the spelling of a word, you might ask “Please spell phonetically the word after.”

The pro-words included on the famous pink card, ARRL Operating Aid FSD-218, can be very helpful. Some of them are, “All after..., All before..., Break (the separation between addressee and the text or the text and the signature), Confirm..., Say again...”

Sometimes a sending operator tends to speak a little too fast for the neophyte receiver. If the sender writes out the message as he sends it, this is less likely. The request, “Please speak slower,” is always honored.

When you are certain you have copied the message correctly, just say “Roger” and your call. You DO NOT need to repeat the text to the sender. If you are off net frequency, return to the net and tell the NCS you received one. The NCS will thank you, as do we all. The idea is to get the message through accurately, and you did.

## SENDING TRAFFIC BY VOICE

### What do you say?

When handling traffic on voice mode, there are ways to facilitate the process. Generally, when you check into a voice traffic net, you give the call of the NCS, listen, and then give your call followed by the words “with traffic,” if you have some. The net control will ask you to list your traffic when you are recognized, and you will say how many messages and the name of the city or cities of destination.

Let's say you have four pieces of traffic, so you list them this way, “Two- Conway, one - Mountainburg, one - Thru (going to a higher level of the NTS to go out of state).” The net control will acknowledge your list.

When you are directed to send your messages, the NCS will probably say, “Your Call, move to a nearby frequency and send your two Conway to W5RXU.” You will go to the frequency and listen for the receiving station. You do not call first, since the receiver has to find a clear spot in which to copy your traffic. When you are called, you respond to see if the station hears you okay and is ready to copy. You would say, “W5RXU, this is \_\_\_\_\_. Are you ready to copy?”

In the preamble, you do not need to label the parts. It is customary to say “number” before the message number, but, after that, the receiver already knows

what is coming next, so you can just say the precedence, handling instructions, station of origin, check, place of origin, and date without saying the words, “precedence, handling instructions, station of origin,” etc. That is why we have a message format; it saves time.

As you send the addressee and address, be methodical. Pace yourself. Spell out difficult names or streets. Say the telephone number in three parts, 501 (pause) 563 (pause) 1421. Between the address and the text, say the word, “Break.” This tells the receiving station that you are starting the next part of the message. It is also a good time to stand by in case the receiving operator needs any fills so far, but do not expect a response. If you do not hear anything, go ahead with the text. Here is where labels sometimes help. If you are going to say a letter group which is not an actual word, you can label it as “letter group” before you say it. This also works for number groups and mixed groups (those with numbers and letters). Spell out difficult words. If there are ARL numbered messages in the text, they are always spelled out. It's “ARL SIXTY NINE” not “ARL 69.” At the end of the text, say the word, “Break” again to indicate you are changing to the next section of the message, the signature.

After the signature, you would say, “End, one to follow.” This means it is the end of this message but you have one more for Conway. If you did not, you would say “End, no more.”

## The NCS Says So

### Who’s the Boss?

I think around my house, I might be the boss -- whenever my wife allows it. At work, the boss may be your supervisor or - if you are self-employed - a customer is in charge. It can be the traffic cop on the road, the director at the symphony, or the chairperson at the committee meeting. One thing is for sure. On any National Traffic System net session, the boss is the net control station.

A Net Manager appoints a Net Control Station because the NM trusts the NCS. It is the NCS who must call up the net, make decisions about what to do first and how to do it. Once that net has begun, the NCS is indeed boss.

When the NCS says, “Net Stand by” that means everyone listens. There is no chatter. There is no additional check-ins. It is not a time for visiting, for informals, or for questions. “Net stand by” means -- do not transmit.

When the NCS directs a station to change frequency, to clear traffic on the net frequency, or to decide which is best, the station responds as the NCS directs. If an NCS says, "Please notify me if you leave the net," stations should request permission to leave. If the NCS says (as may often be necessary with poor band conditions), "We are moving this net to 40 meters. Please join us on 7.270 MHz." --- everybody moves. This is not the right time for discussion. The decision has been made.

If a NCS asks stations to check in carefully to avoid doubling, stations should use this easy three-step procedure: (1) Give the call of the NCS (2) release your mic and listen on frequency (3) Then give your call and indicate if you have traffic. Except for "perfect" doubles this should make the job of the NCS easier.

Net Control Stations have some net savvy. They often know who can handle what traffic, who is a likely RN5 or Winlink 2000 representative for taking out-of-state traffic, and if there may be an outlet on another net. They usually know which stations can be of assistance due to signal strength or location in the state.

If you are interested in serving as an NCS, just let the Net Managers know. There are plenty of

opportunities. It is not always stressful being an NCS, but cooperative stations checking in makes it a breeze - even when there is lots to do. Giving the NCS some respect -- listening and following directions -- can really make life easier. Come to think of it, that works when I do that with my XYL, too.