



Common Repeater Etiquette & Tips by K1AKS and others

This information contained here is meant to help you be a better "repeater citizen". A lot of the information here is common sense, and is common to almost every repeater. Repeaters are owned by individuals or by a HAM club. So there may be slight differences in what is normal course. Most of what's written here is just what the title says: Common Repeater Etiquette and Tips, as opposed to "laws or regulations".

These tips have been collected from various sources, including websites, suggestions from experienced people, pet peeves and from personal experience. Most hams have been guilty of doing just about everything "bad" at one time or another. It's sometimes pretty easy to fall back into bad habits. So, please take these in the spirit in which they are intended.

The 5 Most Important Tips

- *Listen*
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- *Listen – (All kidding aside, especially if you're relatively new to the hobby, you will learn an awful lot by just listening to the folks who've been around for a while.)*
- *No foul or provocative language.*
- *No slamming anyone on the air.*

"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 is termed as "dropping your call". That means that you'll key up the repeater and just announce your callsign, sometimes followed by "monitoring" or "listening" or perhaps "mobile", if appropriate. If there's a conversation already in progress, wait for the courtesy tone (a beep or Morse code character) after someone finishes their transmission, and just say your callsign. (No need to say "listening", since obviously you are speaking, you're out there.)*
- *If the machine isn't active, and you've dropped your call but nobody responds, 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 nobody around who is interested in having a casual conversation. You can keep trying every few minutes, but there will be times when there just isn't anyone around to chat with. Repeaters tend to be more active during drive times and in the evenings.*
- *Don't continually 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 after a while grows tiresome.*
- *Make sure that you give your callsign clearly and not so quickly that you can't be understood. A good suggestion is to key-down count to one before speaking. 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 call (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.*

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 Dennis (N1KPZ) wanted to call Ron (K1RHM), the correct way to do that would be to say "K1RHM, this is N1KPZ" 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 "Call Please", including your callsign ("Call please, K1AKS"). The next station speaking should recognize you (they'll typically say something like "calling station go ahead" or "calling station standby"). Then the station "turns it over to you" you'd make your call (as above). If after one or two calls and the other party isn't available, simply say "Nothing heard thanks" and give your callsign. If your party is available, and unless the folks who are already using the repeater are willing to turn it 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 open repeaters 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.

Turning over to the next station

- Most repeaters employ a courtesy tone (a beep or a Morse code character) that sounds after you unkey your microphone. This islet the other stations know that you have finished your transmission, Therefore, It's not necessary (and a bit redundant) to say "over" before you unkey. Again this applies to repeater operation. People who work a lot of simplex sometimes have a hard time breaking this habit!
- In a rotation or roundtable (three or more), 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, if there's a rotation on the repeater with N1PA (Paul) and K1HUL (Judi), with the rotation going in that order, just before I unkey I might say "over to you Judi" as a reminder to everyone in the group that it's Judi's turn. There is no regulation that says I have to use Judi's callsign, though it's acceptable to do so. You may sometimes hear people combining their ID in with the "handover" by saying something like "K1HUL to get it, this is K1AKS", which is fine also.
- Also, if someone new has just joined the rotation, it's a good idea to let that person know who "gets it next". So, if I (KA1UMJ (Mark) just joined into a rotation with the other to stations, you might say "KA1UMJ to get it and then give it to Judi, this is K1AKS".

Your Own Signal Quality Into The Repeater

- Sometimes, for various reasons, you might not have a strong enough signal into the repeater. It might be a temporary condition such as you're mobile and too far from the repeater and your 5 watt HT with a rubber duck antenna inside the car just won't work from 60 miles away. In such a case, when you realize that you don't have a good signal into the repeater, it's good amateur practice to stop transmitting until you are in range thenTry Again..

Power

- Use of the minimum power necessary to hold a conversation is always preferable, however, the minimum power necessary does not mean you should be barely tickling the repeater squelch. If someone says that you are noisy, you should increase your power, relocate or take whatever measures you can to improve your signal. Continuing to make transmissions after being told your signal is noisy is inconsiderate to those listening. Many new amateurs start out with a handheld radio as their "first rig". Although convenient and usually less expensive, they are not the most effective radios in terms of performance. Without a good external antenna, operating a handheld radio indoors or inside a car is going to result in a lot of bad signal reports

Open and closed repeaters

- There are a few repeaters that are considered "closed repeaters" This is where the owner or trustee, does not want that machine available for general use. As they own the equipment it is within their rights to restrict access. Thankfully there are not many machines out there that fall into this category.
- Always respect the wishes of the owner/trustee. They have incurred the cost and sweat to put the machine on the air. You use their equipment out of their kindness. Use is not a right but a privilege.

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, it in plain English. If someone doesn't understand, they'll ask you.
- Speaking of using "plain English",
- Q-signals (QTH, QSY, QSL, QRT, QSO, etc.) were developed solely for use on CW (Morse code) where keeping things as short as possible is obviously desirable. A number of the Q-signals (the ones mentioned here in particular) have found their way into common use on phone (voice) modes. To some degree, that's ok and probably unavoidable, but remember when you can, try to just say what you mean. In particular though, don't start every sentence with "QSL" (or its "plain-English" equivalent of "Roger"). Think about a telephone conversation with someone; you wouldn't say "Yes, I understand" **every** time it's your turn to speak, right? That's what's you're doing when you say QSL or Roger at the beginning of your transmission.
- By the way, the purist say "73" not 73s (pet peeve)

Over and under use of ID

- 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 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 people ID whenever someone leaves a rotation (a group round table). 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 you come on the air and say "K1ABC listening" and nobody answers my call, when I decide to stop listening (or turn off my radio, get out of the car, etc.), you do not have to say "K1ABC, clear" since you satisfied the part 97.119 requirements simply by putting your call out in the beginning.
- 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 on repeaters. Since all communications are taking place within a location where the FCC has jurisdiction, it is common practice with using the callsign of station that you "turning over" to. Read further down in the section on that topic for more information on how to do 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 not necessary to ID at the end of each transmission (in other words, just before you unkey your microphone), and is just a waste of time to do so. The exception to this is during a controlled net where you know you will be making a single transmission and likely will not be given another chance to ID before the 10-minute rule would apply. If you're in this kind of situation, you will know it with a bit of experience. 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.

Use of Break

- The use of the word "break" is different in Amateur Radio is different from other radio services such as CB. Don't use the word "Break" to join in a conversation (QSO). The use of the word break signifies there is an emergency and "break, break" or break, break, break" signifies the seriousness of an emergency.

Use of phonetics

- Generally speaking, because most signals are relatively strong into 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 English, so that I'd simply say "K1AKS" (which would be pronounced "Kay One Aye Kay Ess". If another station asks for clarification because they couldn't make out what you were saying, at that point, you can use phonetics to help the other station understand your callsign.
- When you do use phonetics, be sure to use the international standard phonetics, which is easily understood. Using "cute" phonetics might be fun, but you have a better chance of someone understanding you when you use the standard ones. For example, "Kilo One Alpha Kilo Sierra" probably has better chance of being understood than mnemonics such as "Kind One Always Keep Smiling".
- Just to clarify a little, the above rules really don't apply when you are not using a repeater, and in particular, it's often necessary to use phonetics a lot more when using single-sideband in a noisy HF situation. Also, the use of phonetics during certain types of nets such as in ARES maybe appropriate when precision is 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 or E or P". It's relatively common to use the British pronunciation, and that's not considered phonetics.

Signal Reports

- When you are looking for a signal report, the right way to do it is to say something like "K1AKS looking for a signal report", not "K1AKS 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 might not answer a general "listening" not wanting to get involved in an extended conversation.
- Don't over use requests for signal reports unless you have actually made some changes to your station, you will find people will tire of responding to you if you ask for a report too 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 trying to help the other station determine how well they are making it to the repeater.

ALWAYS 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, and meeting in person) to work things out that way.

Some Other General rules to be aware of

- 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 joining in, but of course, use common sense; if they seem like they're open to a general chat with other, then it is likely 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, busy and 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. Occasionally ask if any wants to join in.

"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. 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 station..
- 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 Net Control Station (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 indicate how they are operating. However, many stations will identify as mobile just so that others will know that they are out "on the road".

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.

The 3-minute timeout

- Most 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 likely hear a message in voice or in CW 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 it's identification string usually in Morse Code, the courtesy tone does not transmit until after the repeater IDs, 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.

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.*

Malicious Interference

- *If there is someone causing malicious interference such as kerchunking, touch tones, rude comments etc., **DO NOT ACKNOWLEDGE IT!** Continue your QSO in a normal fashion. If the interference gets to the level where it is impossible to carry on the conversation simply end your QSO as you normally would. Make note of the time and any other information and report the incident to the repeater owner/trustee (usually the call sign on the repeater) or look it up by frequency /location in a repeater directory either in book form or on the web.*