

Serving as a Net Control Operator

By Don Downs, NØAGX

As a newly licensed amateur radio operator, nets were something that had interested me in the hobby of amateur radio from the start. Now, having been in the hobby for forty years, I have acted as net control station (NCS) for several kinds of nets. Nets I have had the privilege of acting as NCS were special event nets, public service nets, severe weather nets, emergency response nets, and HF nets. They all have a simple basic requirement of the NCS and that is to listen and respond.

How well you listen and how well you respond makes the difference between a poorly run net and an efficient one in which the accurate exchange of information is accomplished. There are several tools that an efficient NCS can use in conducting and encouraging a well-run net.

Focus

Listening to what someone else is communicating requires focus. Eliminate distractions. Separate yourself from other sources competing for your attention. If another radio is on, at a minimum turn it down, or get another operator to tend to it. Focus your attention on listening to what is being said. Try not to translate what the other party is saying. By translate I am saying don't substitute your own words for his when relaying the information. If you don't understand, ask.

Dialect

A key component of being able to focus is using a common dialect – or use the same language. In emergency operations, it is strongly advised that you stay away from Q or Ten codes so that others down the information chain can

interpret what has been relayed without confusion. Only a radio operator is going to understand that you are 10-8 (in service) or asking to acknowledge receipt with a QSL. Call signs are the radio operator's unique identifier, yet this is perhaps the most common source of confusion. Getting an amateur's call sign incorrect is both frustrating and confusing when it is so easy to resolve by asking the operator to utilize phonetics when checking into the net. The lack of a common system of mnemonics is a pet peeve of mine, having a military background. Several letters of the alphabet are difficult to distinguish when pronounced without phonetics. For example I have difficulty deciphering the difference between the letter F and S, Q and K, J and G. These are several combinations I frequently mistake for one another. Perhaps you have others? A benefit of using a common set of phonetics is that if you hear only part of the call sign, you can with some certainty decipher what was said as exemplified by the following example:

The call sign KOJQW would - said by itself - perhaps be heard as KOGKW. That would give any operator pause in wondering if he had been heard or not. Given phonetically the call would sound as Kilo Zero Juliet Quebec Whiskey. If static had blocked out a part of those letters, the NCS could well piece together the call if expecting the NATO phonetic use over the Western Union set where Juliet and John may have an identity crisis. Reference the Phonetic Alphabet Tables included at the end of this document.

Transcribe

Memory is not infallible. Write the information down on a piece of paper next to the time the exchange occurred. This is the point of the exchange where the NCS will be strongly tempted to translate to capture the information. Resist translating and try to

capture the keywords. Editorializing is strongly discouraged unless the purpose of the net is of a social nature.

Acknowledge

Acknowledge what has been heard. This is the opportunity to correct any misunderstandings or errors in transcription. It also cuts down on operators trying to check-in a second time.

Get Involved

The best way to break into a net is to participate and learn the nets format. Several nets are listed to the right. Check-in to one or all of them and start to become involved in an aspect of amateur radio that will lead to a deeper appreciation of the hobby. An excellent resource for locating nets of interest to you is to check the ARRL Net Directory available on-line at: <http://www.arrl.org/arrl-net-directory-search>

Commit

Volunteering to serve as NCS is easy and rewarding, but it does require commitment to being available. However, the skills you develop handling routine net communications can be readily put to use if the occasion arises and you find yourself thrust into duty at a moment's notice. Get in touch with your net's NCS and ask to be put into the rotation today and you will have started something you can look back on with pride and gain recognition by other radio amateurs in your area.



Area Nets

Northeast Public Service Net Sundays 8PM
147.06 MHz

Itasca County Public Service Sundays
7:30PM 146.880 MHz

Arrowhead ARC Net Sundays 9PM 146.94
MHz

Vermillion Tues Nite Net Tuesdays 8PM
147.060 MHz

Vermillion Weather Net Wednesdays 8PM
147.060 MHz

Knife River Weather Net

CW Net

Iron Range Net Saturdays 8AM 3.919 MHz

24 Group week days 7:30AM 3.924 MHz

PICO Net

NATO Phonetic Alphabet

Letter	phonetic letter
A	Alpha
B	Bravo
C	Charlie
D	Delta
E	Echo
F	Foxtrot
G	Golf
H	Hotel
I	India
J	Juliet
K	Kilo
L	Lima
M	Mike
N	November
O	Oscar
P	Papa
Q	Quebec
R	Romeo
S	Sierra
T	Tango
U	Uniform
V	Victor
W	Whiskey
X	X-ray
Y	Yankee
Z	Zulu

Western Union Phonetic Alphabet

Letter	phonetic letter
A	Adams
B	Boston
C	Chicago
D	Denver
E	Easy
F	Frank
G	George
H	Henry
I	Ida
J	John
K	King
L	Lincoln
M	Mary
N	New York
O	Ocean
P	Peter
Q	Queen
R	Roger
S	Sugar
T	Thomas
U	Union
V	Victor
W	William
X	X-ray
Y	Young
Z	Zero