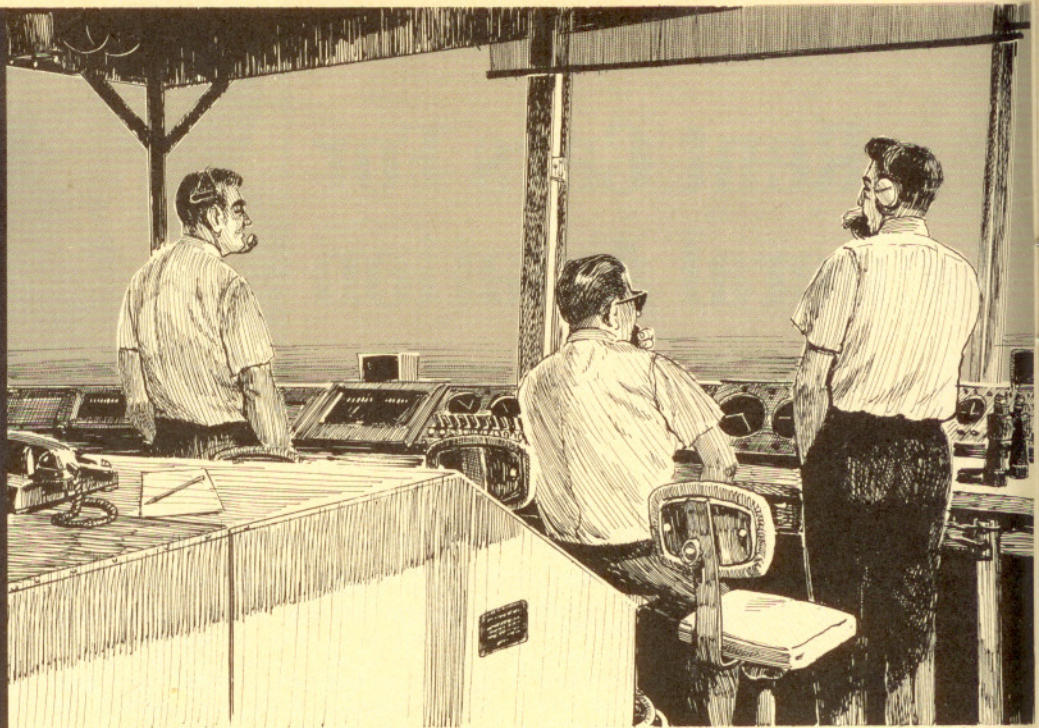


Brevity and proper form in communications pay off in better service and are appreciated by harassed controllers. Good radio manners make the welcome warmer at busy airports

RADIO ETIQUETTE

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■ ■ Will Rogers Tower, this is Piper N Five One Four Echo. I've just taken off from Downtown Airpark, and I am climbing through two thousand three hundred for forty-five hundred. I am VFR to Lawton and request permission to pass through your control zone at thirty-five hundred.

Sometimes you expect the pilot to add: I'm forty-three years old, was born in Elk City, Oklahoma, am married and have three children. He does seem bent on giving his life history.

With a TWA 707 in position and holding on 17R, a Braniff BCA-111 touching down on 17L, a Cherokee on final for 17R, a 310 on base for 17L, FAA's Electra making a missed approach from a back-course ILS, an FAA T-33 downwind, plus an FAA Flight Facilities DC-3 starting a calibration run on the front-course ILS, the tower controller is having apoplexy—he needs to issue an instruction or two. Such a traffic situation is not at all uncommon in our comparatively unbusy part of this aviation world. Our hero, who has called the tower, has blocked the radio frequency for about 18 seconds, and answering him will eat up a few more.

While we aren't primarily concerned with the legality of this flight, it might be appropriate to ask: Was this call really necessary? Downtown Airpark is outside, but on the very edge of, the Will Rogers control zone and airport traffic area. If the weather is adequate for VFR at 2,000 feet and the pilot will get to 2,000 feet above the surface before he enters the airport traffic area, he can cross without so much as a by-your-leave. Of course, it might be imprudent to do so without at least listening to the tower or Approach Control. Notice there is a significant difference

between a control zone and an airport traffic area. The airport traffic area in reality establishes the requirement for communications. The pilot wouldn't have to request permission to cross a control zone only, any more than he would have to ask to cross an airway in VFR conditions.

But back to the use of the radio. Many pilots seem to be afraid of the radio when they first start to use it. After a short exposure, they suddenly start to make up for lost talk. The sad thing is that the latter condition lasts a great deal longer! In a way, though, one can hardly blame them. About all the instruction a student gets on radio usage is just enough to get out of the airport to the practice area and then to get back in.

The FAA's views on proper phrasing when using a radio are given in Part 1 of the Airman's Information Manual. The real meat of the message is only a page and a half or so, so there is little excuse for not digesting the whole thing. There is another 30-page section on ATC procedures, but the vast majority of it is devoted to IFR procedures, so the applicable VFR portion should also be easy to digest. It will help give you an idea of what ATC expects. It goes almost without saying that the key to all brief communications lies in each person who uses the "system" knowing what is expected of others who are also plugged into the system.

When you call in, they want you to state your aircraft make or type and the complete "N" number on the initial contact. In the examples, they break the whole communication down into four parts: (a) the call-up, (b) the reply, (c) the message, and (d) the acknowledgement and ending. The message might require more than one transmission.

They also suggest the use of "This is," "Over," and "Out" at the appropriate items. However, they later suggest these may be omitted during periods of high radio activity. Some tower operators would rather you'd be specific when you call up. They'd like you to say "Skylane" or "310" instead of "Cessna" so they will know what type of airplane they are looking for and what amount of spacing they are likely to need.

Also in the discussion it is stated: "When a message is short, or when it is probable that the call-up will be heard without difficulty, the message may be transmitted following the call-up, without waiting for a reply or an invitation to go ahead." Our modern digital-tuned, crystal-controlled transceivers almost guarantee the call-up will be heard. I don't know what the official attitude is, but I've found that a message which is brief can all be given on the initial contact, and the response most often carries the answer sought.

It is easy to miss your desired frequency by 1 mHz or .1 mHz, so double-check to insure you are on the proper frequency before you speak. Most of my communication problems occur as a result of hastily selecting the (incorrect) frequency.

At most busy airports there is now an ATIS—Automatic Terminal Information Service. The frequency for the ATIS is given in Part 3 of the AIM or the Jeppesen Blue Book. The information given by the ATIS is changed as necessary to keep it current. Each change is identified by a phonetic alphabetical symbol. The ATIS will almost always give you every bit of information you need except clearance to taxi or land. Tune it in and listen. Let it play through two or three times, if necessary, to be sure you get all the

information. The beauty of this system is that you get the information at your convenience, not when the tower or Ground Control wants to give it to you. Once you have the information, call Ground Control and tell who you are, where you are, what you know, and what you want: *Will Rogers Ground, Cessna Four One Zero Eight Victor, Catlin, with Foxtrot, taxi.* He'll give you your taxi instructions.

If you are on a controlled airport without ATIS, listen in on Ground Control a couple of minutes while you are taking care of other pre-taxi cockpit business. You can generally hear all the taxi instructions and information being given to someone else. When you get ready to taxi, give the same information as previously outlined, but instead of "Have Foxtrot" say "Have the numbers." For example: *Wiley Post Ground, Cessna Four One Zero Eight Victor, at Kerr's, have the numbers, taxi.* After you've gone through your checklist, or the "Customers Instantly Go For This Plane's Reputation" (Controls, Instruments, Gas, Flaps, Trim, Prop, Runup) checklist, and you are completely ready to go, advise the tower: *Wiley Post Tower, Cessna Four One Zero Eight Victor, ready on One Seven Left, VFR San Antonio.* When cleared, get moving!

It is not necessary to request a change of frequency if you are going to be out of the airport traffic area before you need to contact someone else. I do think it is wise to keep a listening watch on the tower for a reasonable time. During departure, it is my practice on leaving tower frequency to tune in Approach or Departure Control and maintain a listening watch. I generally prefer Approach, because departing aircraft that might have a dangerous speed differential with me are usually bound for altitudes far above me. In contrast, Approach Control may be dropping a fast bird down to my normal operating altitude, and I'd rather be aware of that traffic.

As you travel along and you want, say, the winds, tune in a nearby VOR and listen. Chances are the very information you need will be requested by someone else. If you do need to make a request, avoid calling just prior to or during a scheduled weather broadcast, and try to be specific on the initial call.

If the air is rough down low, and you don't want to fly below 4,000 feet, and you don't have the equipment or desire to operate above 12,000 feet, your request should reflect this. I think it is proper to listen for a quiet spell, then state your case: *Duncan Radio, Cessna Four One Zero Eight Victor, listening one one zero decimal zero. Will you state the Fort Worth and San Antonio winds between three and one two thousand?*

Often pilots seem to call for weather that they could get by waiting only a few minutes for the scheduled broadcast. Weather situations do not frequently change so rapidly that waiting 10 or 15 minutes will greatly alter your decisions or your flight. If I pass close to a busy terminal, I generally

tune in their Approach Control just to get some idea of their traffic and to alert myself to possible traffic.

As you approach your destination, tune in the ATIS and get the full information. Even if you aren't landing at the airport for which the ATIS is valid, you can get some idea of how things are in the general area.

Whether you contact Approach Control or not is optional, although it is strongly recommended by the FAA in a few locations. Other than those "test" areas, my experience has been that at busy terminals VFR traffic is given little notice by Approach if one advises the controller of his presence, and that he has the "information" but does not specifically request radar advisory service. I've found that about the only communication I'll have from Approach is when they tell me to contact the tower. A call to Approach would be something like: *San Antonio Approach, Cessna Four One Zero Eight Victor, Canyon Lake, four five hundred, with Metro, landing International.*

The coordination between Approach and the tower is not the same at all locations. There is no ATC requirement that Approach notify the tower that they have been working you, if you are VFR traffic. Some towers have radar repeaters so they can see the same thing Approach sees. At Oklahoma City, there is a "hot line" between the tower and Approach which Approach will open when they tell you: *Cessna Zero Eight Victor, you are ten miles west, contact the tower now on one eighteen point three.* This alerts the tower, and should clue the tower that you have all pertinent information, and all you need is your landing sequence and a clearance to land. If I have been working Approach, my call to the tower will be: *San Antonio Tower, Cessna Four One Zero Eight Victor, ten north at three five hundred.* If I haven't spoken to Approach Control, I'll modify that transmission to: *San Antonio Tower, Cessna Four One Zero Eight Victor, ten north at three five hundred, have Metro, landing.*

To keep conversation short I try to avoid such words as: "This is," "I am," "requesting," "instructions," etc. The sample transmissions given above can be made twice as long by adding the unnecessary words. If the long form is used it'd be something like: *San Antonio Tower, this is Cessna Four One Zero Eight Victor. I am ten miles north, requesting landing instructions. I am at three thousand five hundred and I have information Metro.* This transmission could hardly be criticized in view of the instructions in the AIM, but it's about 70% longer than the first example, and it gives no more information.

As with most things in aviation, this all boils down to common sense. Our traffic control frequencies are busy enough that we should strive to cut out unnecessary chatter, even on 122.8. (Recently, I actually heard a pilot call on Unicom and ask the airport to call a commercial broadcast station with a

request that they play a particular record!) A little practice will work wonders. At the National Soaring Championships we had one frequency for control, and the chatter from 80 sailplanes and their crews was unbelievable during the practice period and the first couple of contest days. It was unbelievable because of the quantity and of the triteness of some of the messages. A few days after the contest was under way and the pilots had been gently reminded of their verbosity, the quality went way up and the quantity went way down, and we could live with one frequency with that much traffic. I say again, a little practice will work wonders.

The examples given are based on operations in the Oklahoma City area to relate them to real life. However, the same procedures are usable virtually everywhere, with an occasional slight modification for local conditions. All of the transmissions from the examples above, from the request to taxi at the departing airport to the request for landing instructions at the terminal airport, take less than 40 seconds. See what you can do to kill off the habit of wasting words.

Concise, precise messages will not just happen. You must put some effort and thought into what you say. It is recommended that this process be completed before the mike button is pushed. If we can polish up our manners we will be much more welcome in the "polite circles" of busy airports. □

THE AUTHOR

H. Marshall Claybourn, holder of airline transport and commercial pilot certificates, has qualified for practically all the ratings you can think of: multi-engine land, single-engine land and sea, helicopter, glider, and instrument. He is a qualified airplane, glider, helicopter, and instrument instructor. Professionally, he is an engineer/pilot and a flight-test specialist, presently doing engineering test work for Swearingen Aircraft of San Antonio, Tex. As an engineering test pilot, he also has seen service with Cessna Aircraft Company, Bell Helicopter Company, and with his own company, Claybourn Aviation Company, Inc. For three years, from 1964 to 1967, Claybourn was a member of the FAA Academy staff at Oklahoma City, Okla. AOPAer Claybourn has been active in soaring since 1951, serving as a national officer of the Soaring Society of America for several years. He was team captain for the U.S. World Gliding Team at Leszno, Poland, in 1968. This article, "Radio Etiquette," is the second in Claybourn's "Etiquette" series. The first, "Busy Airport Etiquette" appeared in the January issue of The PILOT.