

Dear OM:

I am sending this reprint of a QST article both to help you as a new amateur in formulating good operating habits, and to show you the kind of material we have in QST for beginning hams. I hope you will find it interesting and useful. If you are not already an ARRL member, join the League now and receive QST every month.

R. Baldwin, Editor QST

Your Novice Accent

And What To Do About It

BY KEITH S. WILLIAMS, W6DTY

A language is a means of communication. It is most efficient when all who speak it follow the same grammatical rules and pronounce its words in the same way. Isolated groups of a given linguistic stock tend to develop differences in speech habits. They speak with different accents, follow different rules of grammar, the difference growing with continued isolation until each group finds it difficult to understand others even though all speak the same basic language.

International Morse code is, in a way, a language. It has been efficient because all of us have followed the same procedure and used the same "*QST English*." Now, however, isolation is beginning to make itself felt. A new accent, a new dialect, the "Novice Accent" is beginning to be heard. It is the one defect in an otherwise excellent innovation in amateur radio.

In pre-novice days an amateur launched forth in the main stream and in very short order lost his beginner's accent and was taken for a native. Now, on the other hand, most beginners start out on 80 or 40 meters confined, by novice status, to band segments populated almost entirely by other novices. They are the isolated linguistic group mentioned above. People speak a language with the same accent as those with whom they live and work. New hams pick up habits and operating procedures of the gang they chew the fat with.

It is increasingly easy to pick out a new General Class operator on c.w. bands. His speed may be up to par and he may have an excellent fist, but his procedure is apt to be rather odd. He has difficulty in understanding just what is going on and his transmissions can be very confusing to the general run of amateurs. Standard ham operating procedure has been established by years of usage. In many cases it is established because it is the most efficient or intelligent way of doing it. In other cases

a certain procedure is used because it has always been done that way and everybody understands what everyone else is doing.

I would like to comment on some specific points concerned with ham operating. I trust it will not be too boring. You old timers can go to the DX department as I want to talk to novices.

Tune Around

When you, Bill Novice, heat up the filaments and prepare for a session of brass pounding, don't be too hasty. It is not good practice to start calling CQ while you're waiting for the receiver to come to life. Check your gear, and when you're satisfied it's all ready, take a few minutes to listen. See what's going on near your own frequency and then tune back and forth a bit. More than once I've heard some good DX going to waste while the brethren are busy honking out CQ's without, apparently, having listened more than two seconds after turning on the rig. Pick some station who is already calling CQ and answer his call rather than adding to the bedlam with a CQ of your own. On the remote chance that you hear no CQ's, go ahead and try one.



Two things are important: (1) your receiver has a tuning dial; use it -- it keeps corrosion from setting in and you may hear someone calling you off your frequency. Many a time I've heard a WN or KN station call CQ time after time and be answered by stations in other parts of the band with no QSO resulting. If a fellow calls CQ, signs and says "K", then starts another CQ in ten seconds you know he's not tuning. He just sits there like a lump, expecting a call on his own frequency. He has few QSO's and he creates beaucoup QRM with his useless calling. (2) Don't make your calls too long. Contrary to your first impression a long call does not attract eager prospects. Rather, just the opposite ... the longer you call the fewer the answers you receive. People are a restless lot. After waiting through ten or twelve CQ's the average operator will lose patience and start looking for someone else. One night, by actual count I heard one

novice operator send 57 CQ's before signing his call! This is pure madness! This applies as much to your calling another station as it does to a CQ. Make your calls short. With a little thought you will realize that if the other station hasn't heard you in the first minute or less he's probably not going to hear you at all.

Three-by-three

A CQ pattern that has proved very successful over a long period is the old three-by-three. CQ three times, sign your call three times, and repeat the whole thing three times. Personally, I punch out four CQ's, sign three times and repeat three. This is more than sufficient and results have been satisfying. When answering a CQ, make your call as short as conditions warrant. For instance, on 40 meters, on a weekday morning about ten o'clock you hear W6DTY calling CQ near your frequency with practically no activity on the band. You only need call about three times, sign your call three times and you're in. If you're 25 kilocycles away, call a bit longer, but not too long because it doesn't take the receiving operator long to tune through the band when activity is light. On the other hand, when QRM is heavy, make your call somewhat longer because it takes a receiving operator longer to comb through the mess. In other words, make the length of your call suit conditions. It is seldom necessary, even under the worst conditions, to call a station more than eight or ten times before signaling your own call.

Don't fall into the habit of expecting all call signs to begin with WN or KN. There are about two hundred other call prefixes in use throughout the world. Once I heard WH6AWU call CQ half a dozen times on the 40 meter novice band, putting in an S9 signal. Now, while most novices on the band would dearly love to QSO the Hawaiian Islands, no one answered until finally some poor soul came up with W5BAWU!

Procedure Signals

Most novices misuse the procedure signal DE. DE means "from" and it is sent only once before each series of a call sign. Do not repeat it before each transmission of your call sign in a series. It is common to hear something like this, "**CQ ... CQ DE KN6ZZZ DE KN6ZZZ DE KN6ZZZ CQ ... ETC.**" This is not good practice. Under poor receiving conditions it is very confusing to the receiving operator who is trying to dope out your call letters. The extra DE throws him every time.

When you sign for the last time on a CQ don't be fancy. Just send the procedure signal "K". This invites anyone who heard your CQ to answer. Do not send [AR], either by itself or followed by "K". When making calls, [AR] is used only when you have called another station but are not yet in contact with him. [AR] is a procedure signal sent as

one character, di-dah-di-dah-dit. It is not sent as the two separate letters "A" and "R". Examples of current, standard procedure are (1) ... **CQ CQ CQ DE KN6ZZZ KN6ZZZ K**, and (2) ... **WN4YYY WN4YYY WN4YYY DE KN6ZZZ KN6ZZZ KN6ZZZ [AR]**.



When you have established contact there are certain preliminaries you should get squared away before you begin discussing the weather. At the beginning of a QSO, on the first transmission from the other station, each operator is interested in two pieces of information first. He wants to know how his signals are being received and where the other station is located, *in that order*. Most operators, for some odd reason, want to know the other fellow's name, but that is third in importance. Until recent years all hands were happy to be called "OM" or "OB" and nobody cared what your name was. Giving the signal report, location and name, *in that order*, has become standard throughout the world and is always sent *first*, prior to everything else. It saves time and avoids confusion if you follow that standard. Example: ... **WN4YYY DE KN6ZZZ R GE OM ES TNX FER CALL [BT] UR RST 579 579 HR IN PODUNK PODUNK CALIF [BT] NAME IS BILL BILL [BT] RIG HR ... etc**. Once the preliminaries are out of the way proceed with the QSO as it may develop. Rag chewing is lots of fun.

Abbreviations

Ham radio is full of abbreviations. There is good reason for this. It saves time. You can say more with less wear and tear on the key. A great many abbreviations are standard the world over. You'll find them listed in handbooks. Don't go overboard, but learn to use the universally understood shortcuts in operating. A good example is "AND." This is a word which is heard only on the novice bands. Learn to send "ES" instead of "AND." It's standard practice; it's quicker and easier to send. While you're at it, learn

the proper use of abbreviations. If in doubt, look them up in the handbooks.

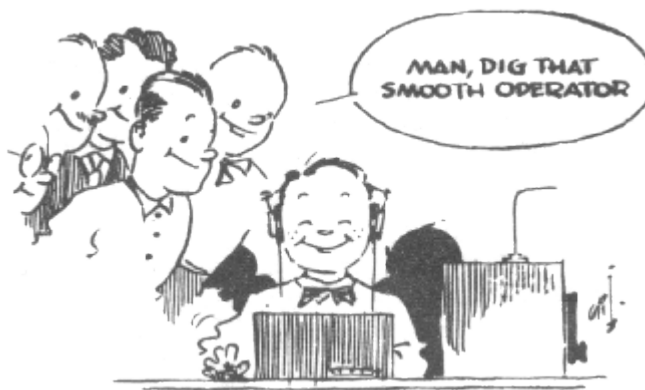
Signals for period and comma were practically never heard on the ham bands until the novices got going. They are still not in use except in the novice bands. You may need to know them to pass a code examination, but they are clumsy and awkward in ham communications. All punctuation can be handled by the question mark and by the [BT] (dah-di-di-di-dah). What do you need with a comma? Nothing! Don't bother to use it. Anyway, some of the old timers might not recognize it (unless they thought it meant an exclamation mark, which is what it stood for until fairly recently). Most novices are currently sending a comma between the name of their town and the name of their state. This is a waste of time and effort. No punctuation is needed there at all. Forget the lengthy, time-consuming signal for period. Just use the long break sign [BT] between sentences or thoughts. It is much easier to send and sounds smoother. The only time in ham radio when formal punctuation signals are called for is in such things as official bulletins, etc.

When you sign over to the other station make it quick and easy and use one of the standard methods. I have heard novices say, "**... NOW I AM TURNING IT BACK TO YOU SO HERE IT COMES ...**" Long winded guff is okay in its place, but it shouldn't become a habit on c.w.. Some of the boys are now sending, "**... SO BK TO YOU ...**" This is an improvement, but it's not universally understood because "BK" means *BREAK*, not *BACK*. All you need to say, really, is "HW?" or "WATSA?" Either signal indicates to the other fellow that you are through for the moment and are about to sign over to him. If it is your last transmission it is customary to part with a certain amount of love and kisses. Don't drag it out into absurdity. Haven't you heard some featherhead send, "**WELL BILL NOW I MUST QRT AND WISH YOU MANY 73S 73S TNX FOR THE SWELL QSO BILL AND 73S BEST OF LUCK AND LOTS OF DX AND BEST WISHES TO YOU AND THE FAMILY SO 73S AND I WILL SEE YOU AGAIN SOON BILL 73S ... etc?**" All you have to say after you've told Bill you must QRT is something like this: **TNX QSO OM 73 GN [VA] WN4YYY DE KN6ZZZ**. Note that it is not necessary to add "S" to 73. By itself 73 means "best regards." If you say 73's you are, in effect, saying, "Best Regardses," which is just plain silly.

More Procedure

Now a word or two about correct procedure when signing over to the other station or when ending a QSO. It's all very simple but much confusion is evident. When you are turning the QSO over to the other operator you need to proceed as follows: ... **SO**

WATSA OM? [AR] WN4YYY DE KN6ZZZ K. The [AR] indicates that you are through for the time being. The K says, "go ahead and transmit to me." Incidentally, there is a variation of the K signal. You may have heard it and wondered what it meant and as like as not you have misused it. I am referring to the procedure signal [KN]. This signal indicates that you are engaged in a QSO, that you are inviting the other operator to go ahead with his transmission and you do not wish a third station ("the breaking station," so called) to interrupt by calling either of you. This signal was originated as an aid in DX operating and is not often needed in domestic communications. Therefore, I don't advise its use in ordinary QSO's. But if you have occasion to use it do it right. It is definitely *not* a substitute for the plain signal "K". I have heard novices end a CQ with [KN]. This is obviously simple-minded. Translated to English it means, "I am calling a CQ, a general call, inviting anyone to answer, but please don't call me!"



When ending a QSO use the signal, [VA]. This is easy. [VA] is never the last signal sent. The last item is either your call or the letter K. If you have made your last transmission but will stand by for the other station's closing remarks you send, " ... **73 ES CUL GN [VA] WN4YYY DE KN6ZZZ K.** The [VA] indicates that you have made your last transmission. If you have completely finished the QSO and wish to remain open for business you just naturally don't put anything at all after your call. If you intend to "close station" and hit the sack you should indicate this fact by adding the signal "CL" immediately after your call. Listening operators are thus informed that you will not be in the market for another QSO. It saves them needless calls.

C.w. operating procedures are fixed by long usage and in part are called for by law. The correct procedure is just as easy to learn and use as is the Sloppy Joe type. If you are just starting on your ham career you might just as well start right. Bad habits are difficult to break. If you find it hard to remember what to send and when to send it

make up a sheet with standard forms and keep it on your operating desk. Refer to it when in doubt; first thing you know your procedure will be automatic. Once learned it isn't forgotten.

R?

Being long winded, I don't mind adding a few items which can be classed as Miscellaneous (or, The Bleatings of an Old Goat). First on the agenda is an ancient complaint about birds who come back with "R" when they have copied only part or perhaps nothing at all of your last transmission. This particular scream of mingled rage and pain has been heard since Marconi first sent three dots across the Atlantic. You'd think that, after all these years, the R-for-Roger pest would have become extinct, but it is not thus. Every day some fellow manages to come back to you with something like this: "**... WN4YYY DE KN6ZZZ R R R OK BUT PLEASE REPEAT MY REPORT AND YOUR QTH ALSO MISSED YOUR NAME AND DID NOT COPY YOUR LAST QUESTION IN THE QRM ... !**" The simple fact that if you send "R" you are indicating that you copied solid everything the other operator sent. Do not send a single R if you missed any part of his transmission. Just send a break sign, BT, after your call when you go back to him, if you missed anything, and tell him what you missed. There is nothing more exasperating than to hear, "**R BUT MISSED EVERYTHING OM!**"

In connection with this business of receipting (R), one other point might be mentioned. If you have copied the other fellow's transmission solid and have so indicated by "R" when you go back to him, he can be expected to have some sense enough to know that you got what he sent. Therefore, it is needless wear and tear on your key and a waste of your time and his to go through this rigamarole of "**OK ON THIS, OK ON THAT, OK ON YOUR RIG, OK ON YOUR WX, OK ON YOUR DOG HAVING JAUNDICE, ETC., ETC.**" Just up and proceed with your remarks and comments. If he asked a question, answer it. If he made a statement that requires no answer, make no answer. It's really very simple.

Another rogue's gallery character is the guy with long, deathly silences. He sends your call, signs his, says, "**R ES TNX FER DPE OM [BT] ...**" then apparently lapses into a coma. When you finally decide that the oaf has suffered a heart attack and departed this vale of tears he suddenly comes to life and burps out a couple of [BT] 's and staggers along with "**RIG HR 807 WID 50 WATTS [BT] ...**," and shoves off for dreamland again. This makes the receiving operator nervous. If your mind goes temporarily blank when you are on the key, *send something* ... a series of [BT] or V, or

most anything. Just don't sit there leaving the other operator to wonder if you are still alive. There is nothing worse than a lot of clatter on the air except complete silence.

Sloppy Sending

Practically topping the list of the Ten Most Wanted Men in ham radio is the bird with the sloppy fist. He makes life a horror for those who try to copy him. He has no idea how many dots he's sending -- he just throws in plenty so that you can take your pick. He runs letters and words together or, just the reverse, he separates parts of letters and chunks of words. He sounds as though he's using a loose toggle switch for a key and sending in Japanese kana code. On top of all this he fouls up his spelling and procedure continually and fills the air with strings of dots to indicate errors. Some operators (?) go on for years blithely unaware that their fists are bad. In fact they may even fancy themselves as artists on the key. They get huffy if anyone suggests that they are not 100% readable. They suggest that the receiving operators need a little practice. If you are one of these boys, you are probably a hopeless case. However, if you know that your sending leaves something to be desired and you are sincerely interested in developing a good, readable fist you can cease worrying -- it's simple. Just practice sending. But not on the air.

Rig yourself a code practice oscillator and send to yourself. The ideal manual fist is one that sounds like a tape transmitter. Don't laugh! It's a skill that is easy to acquire. Of course, to begin with you must know how good code sounds. The simplest way is to turn on your receiver and tune in a commercial tape circuit and *listen*. Tune around, find a station sending press or other traffic and just sit and listen. You don't have to be able to copy it solid. Maybe you can copy only seven words a minute and the commercial station is sending at 20 or 25. No matter. Don't worry about what he's sending, just pay attention to *how* it's sent. Listen to the individual letters; get the feel of his rhythm and spacing. Then adjust your key, get comfortable, and send to yourself. Try to make your hand-keyed letters sound like the tape-sent letters. Send from a newspaper or book and pay attention to spacing between words and letters as well as to the shape of each individual letter. At first it may seem an impossible task but you'll be surprised how rapidly your sending improves. Sure it's a lot of work, but you weren't born with a telegraph key in your hand and you have to learn. You don't write a letter in such an illegible scrawl that it can't be read (or do you?), so why transmit a botched-up mess of dots and dashes to some poor wretch on 40 meters who is trying to read it.

It's Fun!

C.w. operating can be pleasant and easy. It is not, as often averred, a lost art. You are welcome to dive right in and flail away at the old brass pump handle. But, *please*, use genuine International Morse and standard procedure! It will make life a pleasure for both you and your adversaries.



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