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FORMATTING A RADIOGRAM TEXT - THE COUNTER PERSON

An EM basic studies training module - (updated from previous training modules)

The art of communicating via the written word has suffered immensely over the past several decades. Effective (and polite) letter writing has nearly become a lost skill in our high-speed culture of sound bytes, email blurbs, and ten-second TV commercials. The focus of our educational institutions is towards more technology, with less emphasis on the language arts.

95% of all EMCOMM traffic is third party. Yet most originating operators have trouble composing a message *text*, and the third party that is sending a message (whether they represent a “served agency” or are a member of the public), will certainly NOT be familiar with formatting a RADIOGRAM. They will provide an address and the essence of what it is they want to say. It is up to the **counter person** to compose the actual message text.

Composing a short, concise message, as in the TEXT of a RADIOGRAM, is a style of writing that emphasizes BREVITY. Clear, concise communications. Sadly, this ability is a dying art and a skill that is rarely taught. It is not difficult to learn if the person is literate at a basic high school level. It only takes a few minutes to think about, and properly compose a message TEXT, *before* getting the message approved (signed/initialed by the sender) and handing the RADIOGRAM to the operator on duty.

"The Counter Person" is the person at an emcomm traffic station who greets the person who has a message they need sent and who formats the message. Ideally, the counter person should not be the radio operator on duty. (An exception would be a TYPE 4 ARCT -- one operator on duty at a mobile or portable location.) The counter person may be an off duty radio operator, but it is not necessary that he or she even be a licensed operator. (This will depend upon the volume of traffic being sent/received and the number of available skilled operators.)

1 - The text should be 25 words or less (including any “X” separators). A method exists to allow longer messages, but that will not be discussed here.

2 - The message should convey EXACTLY what the sender wants to say. No more -- no less.

3 - The message should be worded so that it CANNOT BE INTERPRETED IN ANY OTHER WAY. (This is a MUST!) If possible, have someone else review the message TEXT to ensure this.

4 - Leave out unnecessary words and phrases. MODIFIERS (adjectives {e.g. - very} and adverbs {e.g.- please} are usually not necessary.

5 - DOUBLE CHECK the PREAMBLE, the ADDRESS, and telephone number (if any), plus the SIGNATURE, for accuracy and completeness. If a reply is requested either within the text or in the handling instructions (HX), a return address and/or telephone number is added after the signature.

6 - It is a good practice to show the formatted message to the originator and have him/her initial it as being what they want sent.

7 - The message is then transmitted EXACTLY as formatted. Relay and receiving stations must NEVER change anything. If there is a question or problem along the way, the message should be "serviced" back to the originating station.

8- PRACTICE...may not make PERFECT, but it sure helps a lot! These skills can be practiced at home and you don't even need to be on the air.

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Here is a link to the official ARRL standards for formatting and sending radiograms.

Pay particular attention to Chapter 1, The ARRL Message Format for hints on determining the count for non-words (paragraph 1.3.4)

Chapter 2, Sending Messages on Voice provides the standards for voicing all elements of the Radiogram. Pay particular attention to paragraph 2.1.5 for hints on voicing non-word information.

<http://www.arrl.org/table-of-contents-nts-methods-and-practices-guidelines>

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