

A Guide to Radio Etiquette

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Using a radio is a fantastic way to keep in touch, whether you're coordinating with family on a GMRS (General Mobile Radio Service) network, chatting on FRS (Family Radio Service), or getting started in Amateur (Ham) Radio.

Good radio etiquette, the "unwritten rules" of the airwaves, is essential for smooth, clear, and effective communication. Following these basics helps everyone on the channel hear what they need to hear, respect shared airtime, and ensures that critical information gets through when it matters most.

Ready to talk the talk? Let's get started!

Essential Radio Etiquette

- **Speak Clearly and Simply:** Use easy-to-understand words. Think before you talk. Speak slowly, clearly, and use a normal voice. Yelling won't make your message faster or clearer.
- **Identify Yourself and Recipient:** This is key when multiple users are on the same channel. GMRS Rule: Use your callsign at the beginning, every 15 minutes during, and at the end of a transmission. On your first transmission, it's a good practice to spell out your callsign using the International Phonetic Alphabet (e.g., "This is Whiskey Romeo Mike Tango 291").
- **Wait for Confirmation:** Make sure your recipient has heard you and is ready to receive your message before continuing.
- **Keep Messages Short:** Get to the point. For long messages, let your audience know at the start, and break the message into smaller, manageable parts. (This also protects your radio from overheating and excessive battery drain.)
- **Avoid Private or Sensitive Information:** Assume everyone can hear you. Radio channels are shared and open to the public.
- **Don't Interrupt:** If someone else is talking, wait for them to finish. Repeatedly pressing the PTT button only causes interference. Exception: For emergencies, announce "Break, Break!" and wait for a response.
- **Listen for your Call Sign or Name:** Do not reply unless you know the call is directed at you.

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- **Acknowledge Direct Contacts:** If someone calls you, acknowledge them with either: "[Your Callsign], go ahead" (ready to receive) or "Standby" (you need a minute).
- **Remember to Pause (The "Two-Second Rule"):** After pressing the PTT (Push-to-Talk) button, wait two seconds before speaking. This ensures the beginning of your message is transmitted, especially on repeaters.
- **Don't Use Slang or Bad Language:** Keep the airwaves family-friendly and professional.
- **Make Routine Radio Checks:** Make sure your radio is on, batteries are charged, and functioning properly.

Common Operating Phrases (Radio Lingo)

Phrase	Meaning	Note
Roger That / Copy That	Message received and understood.	Avoid "10-4 good buddy", that's for CB radio.
Affirmative	Yes	
Negative	No	
Go Ahead	I am ready for your message.	
Say Again	Please repeat your entire last message.	
Over	My message is finished, and I am inviting others to respond.	This is the signal that you are releasing the PTT button.
Out / Clear	My conversation is finished, no answer is required or expected.	Once you say this, the conversation is officially ended.
Radio Check	What is my signal strength? Can you hear me clearly?	
Read You Loud and Clear	Your transmission signal is strong, and I can hear you fine.	

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Phrase	Meaning	Note
Wilco	Abbreviation of "I will comply."	This means you will complete the task requested of you.
Break, Break	Interruption to a transmission to communicate urgently.	Use only for urgent, non-life-threatening reasons.
Emergency, Emergency	Distress call.	Use only when there is an imminent danger to life or property and immediate assistance is required.
Stand By	Wait for a short period, and I will get back to you.	
I Spell	The next word will be spelled out using the International Phonetic Alphabet.	

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International Phonetic Alphabet

When communicating on the radio, some letters can sound alike (like 'P' and 'B,' or 'M' and 'N'). The International Phonetic Alphabet (often called the NATO Phonetic Alphabet) is a standard tool used worldwide to eliminate this confusion by assigning a unique word to every letter. This is essential for spelling out call signs, names, or critical words over the air.



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Getting Started After Your GMRS License

With a GMRS license, you can set up a "network" for your entire family, as they are all covered under your single license.

1. **Assign Unit Numbers:** It's a great idea to assign a unique Unit Number to each family member. This is much faster and clearer than using names. For example: Unit 1, Unit 2, Unit 3, etc.
2. **Practice:** Practice using your family's shared call sign and unit numbers to make conversation smooth.

Conversation Example

A typical conversation might sound something like this:

Unit 3 Calls Unit 1	"Whiskey Alpha Bravo Charlie 123 Unit 3 to Unit 1"
Unit 1 Responds	"WABC123 Unit 1, go ahead Unit 3"
Unit 3 Message	"Dad, do you know where the truck keys are?"
Unit 1 Response	"I've got them with me. I'll be back at camp in a few minutes."
Unit 3 Acknowledgment and Clear	"Copy that, thanks. WABC123 Clear."

Remember the Rules: You must identify with your family's shared call sign at the beginning and end of a conversation, and every 15 minutes if it's an extended one.