

# Repeater Etiquette

Radio signals know no borders. When we use amateur radios and repeaters, our transmissions should be tasteful, correct, and clear. Ham Radio is a self-disciplined hobby, and using proper repeater etiquette is one example of our collective ability to self-regulate a communications capability. Some common rules are presented below to remind all repeater users, and new hams, of the proper ways to share a valuable communications resource.

**Starting a QSO via a directed call.** There are two main ways by which a QSO can begin, one is via a directed call and one is via monitoring. A directed call is where one amateur calls another amateur individually, such as “*N2QSO from N2HAM*”. In such a case, N2HAM is looking for one particular individual, N2QSO. It generally is not an invitation for anyone other than N2QSO to return the call. If N2QSO doesn’t answer the call, N2HAM may just clear off by saying “*N2HAM clear*”, or may clear and listen for other calls by saying “*N2HAM clear and listening*”. The “*and listening*” or “*and monitoring*” implies they are interested in hanging around to QSO with anyone else who might be listening at that time. “*Listening*” and “*monitoring*” don’t mean you are listening to somebody else’s conversation, they mean you are listening for other people who may want to call you to start a new QSO. Likewise, just saying your call by itself with nothing following it is meaningless. If you were to say “*N2QSO*”, people listening wouldn’t know if that means you were monitoring for calls, whether you were testing, or whether they missed the callsign of a party you were calling. Be concise, but be complete.

**Starting a QSO via a monitoring call.** If the repeater is not in use, simply stating your callsign followed by “*listening*” or “*monitoring*” implies that you are listening to the repeater and are interested in having a QSO with anyone else. Calling CQ on a repeater is generally not common, a simple “*N2QSO listening*” will suffice. There is no need to repeat the “*listening*” message over and over again as you might do when calling CQ on HF. Once every few minutes should be more than sufficient, and if someone hasn’t answered after a few tries, it probably means there is nobody around. If someone is listening and wants to QSO, they will answer back. Avoid things like “*is anybody out there*” or “*is there anybody around on frequency*”; it sounds like a bad sci-fi movie.

**Joining a QSO in progress.** If there is a conversation taking place which you would like to join, simply state your callsign when one user unkeys. This is the reason for having a courtesy tone: to allow other users to break into the conversation. One of the stations in QSO, usually the station that was about to begin his transmission, will invite you to join, either before making his own transmission. Don’t interrupt a QSO unless you have something to add to the topic at hand. Interrupting a conversation is no more polite on a repeater than it is in person.

**Interrupting a QSO to make a call.** If you need to make a directed call to another amateur but there is already another QSO going on, break into the conversation during the courtesy tone interval by saying “*Call please, N2QSO*”. One of the stations will allow you to make your call. If the station you are calling returns your call, you should quickly pass traffic to them and relinquish the frequency to the stations that were already in QSO; don’t get into a full QSO in the middle of someone else’s conversation. If you need to speak with the party you call for a significant length of time (say, more than 15 seconds), ask them to either wait until the current QSO has cleared, or ask them to move to another repeater or simplex channel to continue the conversation.

**Roundtables and “Turning it Over”.** When more than two amateurs are in a QSO, it is often referred to as a “roundtable” discussion. Such a QSO usually goes in order from amateur A to amateur B to amateur C and eventually back to amateur A again to complete the roundtable. To keep everyone on the same page, when any one amateur is done making a transmission, they “turn it over” to the next station in sequence (or out of sequence, if so desired). Without turning it over to a particular station when there are multiple stations in the QSO, nobody knows who is supposed to go next, and there ends up either being dead silence or several stations talking at once. At the end of a transmission, turn it over to the next station by naming them or giving their callsign, such as “*...and that’s that. Go ahead Joe.*” or “*...and that’s that. Go ahead HAM.*” If it’s been close to 10 minutes, it’s a good time to identify at the same time as well, such as “*...and that’s that. N2QSO, go ahead Joe.*”

**Identifying and Who’s Who?** By FCC regulations, you must always identify at 10 minute intervals and at the end of a transmission. If you are making a test transmission or calling another party, this is a one-way transmission. Since it has no “length” as there is no QSO taking place, you should identify each time you make a call or a test transmission. When identifying yourself and another party (or parties), or when making a directed call, your callsign

goes LAST. “*N2QSO, N2HAM*” means that N2HAM is calling N2QSO, not the other way around. There is no need to identify each time you make a transmission, only once every 10 minutes. You do not need to identify the station with whom you are speaking, only your own callsign, but it is generally polite to remember the call of the other station. Avoid phonetics on FM unless there is a reason for using them, such as the other station misunderstanding your callsign. When phonetics are needed, stick to the standard phonetic alphabet.

**Demonstrations.** From time to time, an amateur may want to demonstrate the capabilities of amateur radio to another non-amateur. The typical way to do this is to ask for a “demo” such as “*N2QSO for a demonstration.*” Anyone who is listening to the repeater can answer them back. Usually telling the calling party your name, callsign, and location is what they are looking for, not a lengthy conversation. Someone doing a demo may ask for stations in a particular area to show the range of amateur radio communications, such as if the calling station is in the Poconos they may ask for any stations in south Jersey or Harrisburg areas, which is more interesting than demonstrating that they can talk to someone in the same town as they are in.

**Signal Reports.** If you are unsure how well you are making it into the repeater, DO NOT kerchunk the repeater. Any time you key up the repeater, you should identify, even if you are just testing to see if you are making the machine. “*N2QSO test*” is sufficient. Do not use the repeater as a “target” for tuning or aiming antennas, checking your transmitter power, etc. Use a dummy load where appropriate, or test on a simplex frequency. If you need someone to verify that you are making the repeater OK, ask for a signal report such as “*N2QSO, can someone give me a signal report?*” “Radio check” is a term most often used on CB, “signal report” is what most amateurs ask for.

**Language.** Aside from some of the techno-syncretisms inherent in amateur vernacular, use plain conversational English. The kind of English that would be suitable for prime-time television, not R rated movies. Avoid starting or encouraging conflicts on the air. If a topic of conversation starts to draw strong debate, change the subject. Avoid “radioese” lingo whenever possible. CB has its own language style and so does amateur radio, but the two are not the same. Amateurs have “names”, not “personals or handles”. Although many new hams have graduated from the CB ranks, let’s try to keep CB lingo off the amateur bands. When visiting a new repeater, take some time to monitor before jumping in to get a feel for the type of traffic and operating mannerisms of that particular system. Some repeaters are very free-wheeling in that there are people jumping in and out of conversations constantly. Others primarily have directed calls on them and discourage ragchewing. Others are member-exclusive repeaters. Listen before you talk, when in Rome do as the Romans do.

**Emergencies.** If there is a QSO going on, break into a conversation with the word “*Break*” or “*Break for priority traffic.*” DO NOT USE THE WORD BREAK TO JOIN IN A QSO UNLESS THERE IS AN EMERGENCY! All stations should give immediate priority any station with emergency traffic.

**Malicious Interference.** If there is malicious interference, such as kerchunking, touchtones, rude comments, etc. DO NOT ACKNOWLEDGE IT! Continue the QSO in a normal fashion. If the interference gets to the level where it is impossible to carry on the QSO, simply end the QSO as you normally would.

**Power.** Use the minimum power necessary to complete a QSO. However, the minimum power necessary doesn’t just mean you are barely tickling the repeater receiver squelch. If someone says that you are noisy, increase power or relocate or take whatever measures you can to improve your signal. Continuing to make transmissions after being told your signal is noisy is inconsiderate to those listening. The amateur radio manufacturers continue to come up with newer, smaller handheld radios, many with power levels well under a watt. Many new amateurs start out with a handheld radio as their “first rig”. Although convenient, they aren’t the most effective radios in terms of performance. Without a good external antenna, operating a handheld radio indoors or inside a car is going to result in a lot of bad signal reports.