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Insights

Radio Communications

By *Ralph Butcher*

Good communication skills identify the best pilots and air traffic controllers. Believe me, these skills are appreciated by others who may be distracted or annoyed by nonstandard or excessive communications.

The best communicators exist at all levels of pilot certification, from student pilot upward. They combine standard phraseology with common sense, and they acknowledge controller transmissions with the required information. Nonessential information is never read back unless the pilot wants to verify a controller's instruction or comment.

Twenty years ago, many of today's communication requirements didn't exist. Does that mean we're making progress? Not necessarily. Our legalistic society has increased controller workload. For example, to protect the government from liability after wake turbulence and premature-descent accidents, controllers must issue instructions or make requests that, from a common sense standpoint, are superfluous.

Here are some examples that illustrate a combination of proper communications procedures and common sense:

Controller: "Trainer Five-Five-Lima, taxi to Runway One-Nine-Left via Charlie and Kilo, give way to the DC-9 exiting at Delta, and caution for a Cessna southbound from transient parking."

Pilot: "Trainer Five-Five-Lima, wilco. One-Nine-Left, Charlie, Kilo." (In this example, the pilot does not clog up the airwaves by repeating the complete instructions. Instead, he repeats only the key information so that the controller will know he understood and will comply with the instructions.)

Controller: "Trainer Five-Five-Lima, report the Airbus departing Runway One-Nine-Right in sight, cleared for takeoff, caution wake turbulence."

Pilot: "Traffic in sight, cleared for takeoff, Trainer Five-Five-Lima." (Here, the pilot doesn't need to repeat the instruction to report the Airbus in sight. Instead he can simply comply by the making the report in his response.)

Controller: "Trainer Five-Five-Lima, traffic two o'clock, three miles, indicating three-thousand, three-hundred."

Pilot: "Traffic in sight (or negative contact), Five-Five-Lima." (Never use the military phrases *no-joy* or *tally-ho*.)

Pilot: "Social approach, Trainer Six-Seven-Five-Five-Lima."

Controller: "Trainer Five-Five-Lima, go ahead."

Pilot: "Five-Five-Lima is one-five northwest, two-thousand, seven-hundred, landing Orange County with information Foxtrot."

Controller: "Trainer Five-Five-Lima, squawk zero-two-four-four and ident." (Note that the pilot gives his complete call sign until the controller acknowledges him with an abbreviated version. This is a good example of a cold call. The pilot begins by getting the controller's attention before launching on his intentions. This is a good policy if the frequency is busy, if you think the controller might be talking on more than one frequency, or if it is the preference of local controllers. Otherwise the pilot may choose to make one transmission, including all of the information.

Regardless, he sets the transponder code, identifies, and does not respond verbally because the controller will see the ident.)

Controller: "Trainer Five-Five-Lima, contact Los Angeles Center on one-one-eight-point-four for traffic advisories."

Pilot: "Trainer Five-Five-Lima." (A frequency change instruction must be acknowledged. There is no requirement, however, to read back the frequency unless you question whether or not you heard it correctly and want confirmation.)

Pilot: "Los Angeles Center, Trainer Six-Seven-Five-Five-Lima, five-thousand, five-hundred." (When he moved to the new frequency, this sharp pilot again gave his complete call sign but did not use the phrase *with you*, which simply wastes time.)

Controller: "Trainer Five-Five-Lima, turn right heading one-seven-zero, descend and maintain two-thousand, seven-hundred. You're cleared for the ILS One-Nine-Right approach. Maintain two-thousand, seven-hundred until established on final, contact Orange County tower, frequency one-two-six-point-eight, at Lemon."

Pilot: "Leaving four-thousand for two-thousand, seven-hundred, heading one-seven-zero, cleared the One-Nine-Right ILS. Trainer Five-Five-Lima, wilco." (Again, the pilot is efficient in his communications. He begins to comply with the instructions as soon as he receives them and tells the controller what he is doing. On his readback, he reports only the relevant points.)

Controller: "Trainer Five-Five-Lima, cleared to land Runway One-Nine-Right, plan to exit on taxiway Hotel, advise if unable."

Pilot: "Trainer Five-Five-Lima, wilco, cleared to land Runway One-Nine-Right." (This time the pilot gave his aircraft number at the beginning of his transmission, not at the end as in the previous example. Either way is correct.)

Thanks for tuning in - roger, wilco, over, and out.

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