

The Net Control Operators Survival Guide

The Wayne County Amateur Radio Club

W3ARO

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Club Net Coordinator: Jack Arnouts N2KUO

Special Thanks to: Ann-Marie Ruder K8AMR (Resource)

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CHAPTER ONE: Net Formats

The word "net" is short for "network". Networks can be defined as groups of equipment, individuals, and/or agencies acting together to increase efficiency and effectiveness through shared information and resources.

A. DIRECTED NETS

A directed net is formal, has a set of rules or net directives and all communications must go through net control. It controls the frequency with net related traffic only, and has a specified person in charge which is the Net Control Station (NCS). The NCS will issue specific instructions on how he/she wants the net to run. A directed net is one in which it is necessary to obtain permission from the NCS before transmitting to other stations in the net.

B. SCHEDULED NETS

Directed nets are divided into two types: Scheduled and Emergency nets. Scheduled nets have fixed times, frequencies and format. Scheduled nets include ARES, RACES, Club, Traffic and ARPSC nets. The Wayne County Club Net is a Scheduled net.

The Club Scheduled Net is an excellent place to break in a NCO trainee. Most of the time, they are run as a directed net in a relaxed atmosphere. These are great training grounds for Net Control Operators. They may be informational, training or just fellowship. Many clubs make check-ins to the club net part of participation requirements. Our net is open to all licensed Amateur Radio Operators and they are encouraged to join and participate.

CHAPTER TWO: The Net Control Operator

A. DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The Net Control Station (NCS) runs the net. All activity on the Net is directed through the Net Control Operator. The NCS keeps a current list of which stations have checked in by Call Sign, Name and location. As a precaution and to assist in training, the Wayne County Club Net will ask for an Alternate Net Control Operator(ANC). This person will duplicate the logs of the primary station in the event the primary station fails. If a failure occurs the ANC would take over and continue the net without interruption. In a busy situation, the NCS may have one or more assistants to help with record keeping.

The Alternate Net Control Operator is also a training position offering the ideal environment to follow and practice Net Operations and Log Keeping under the supervision and with the assistance of the NCS.

B. PREREQUISITES

The Wayne County Amateur Radio Club has no special requirements for our Net Control Operators. You must have a valid Ham license and have good operating techniques. You do not have to be a member of this club to be a Net Control Operator, but you must follow our Preamble and turn in your logs to the club's Net Coordinator (CNC).

C. LISTENING

Listening is at least 50% of communication. Listening means avoiding unnecessary transmission. A wise ham once said, "A ham has two ears and one mouth. Therefore he should listen twice as much as he talks."

D. BASIC TECHNIQUES

- a. For efficiency note on your net worksheet as many calls as you can before you acknowledge any. Acknowledge all stations heard by call.
- b. If a net is a scheduled net, start on time! Tardiness indicates poor management and doesn't inspire confidence in the NCS.
- c. Use a script (preamble, net instructions) when possible. This promotes efficient operation.
- d. Have pencil/paper ready and write down all calls.
- e. When there is a double (i.e. when two or more stations transmit on the same frequency at the same time), listen to see if you can identify either station by call sign or text, then ask all stations to stand by while you solicit clarification or repeats from each station involved as needed.
- f. During check-ins recognize participants by name when possible to boost morale.
- g. Frequently identify the name and purpose of the net. Advise listeners of the subaudible tones required.
- h. Don't be afraid to ask for assistance if you need it. If you can't hear a station, ask if others can and relay the information.
- i. You will make mistakes. Acknowledging them will earn the respect and support of the net members.
- j. Don't think on the air. If you need a moment to consider what is needed next, say something like "standby" and un-key your microphone. This adds a professional touch.

k. If the net has been quiet for more than 10 minutes, check on operator status. This keeps the net running more smoothly and insures that you know about equipment failures and missing operators as soon as possible.

CHAPTER THREE. The Good the Bad and the Ugly.

A. HABITS TO AVOID

1. Thinking aloud on the air: "Ahhh, let me see. Hmmm. Well, you know, if..."
2. On air arguments or criticism
3. Rambling commentaries
4. Shouting into your microphone
5. "Cute" phonetics
6. Identifying every time you key or unkey the mic
7. Using "10" codes, Q signals on phone or anything other than "plain language"
8. Speaking without planning your message in advance

B. PREPARATION

The Net Control Station is the key to the efficiency of the net. His/her performance also determines the "image" the net presents to the potential member. Therefore, it is important that all NCS operators strive to perform their duties in a careful and considerate manner. The following suggestions will help you obtain your goal.

- Be prepared. Begin the net with the proper logs, forms, pens, pencils and operating aids on hand.
- Ask a family member to answer telephone calls or if you are home alone, you may want to take the phone off the hook.
- Turn down the volume on scanners, other radios, and electronic equipment.
- Make sure your antenna system allows you to radiate the best signal you can.
- Accuracy transcends speed. If you find yourself making errors, please slow down. You must be understood in addition to being heard.

C. RECORDS

Both the Net Control Operator and the Alternate Net Control Operator are required to keep a log of all stations the check into the net. The log will contain the stations Call Sign, Name, Location and remarks as indicated on the log sheet. If the Net Control Operator is unsure of any entries or possible errors, he or she can check with the Alternate Net Control post net and make corrections as needed. Assuming no malfunctions during the net, only the Net Control Operator is required to turn in the log sheets to the Clubs Net Coordinator at the monthly meeting or as soon as it is convenient to do so. If there is a failure during the net, then the Alternate Net Control Operator

would turn in the log information for the date in question. It is suggested that the Alternate Control Operators retain their log sheets until they are sure they will not be needed.

D. THE CHALLENGE

This almost never happens with a club net, but you may have the usual BOZO in your net. Count on it! Look forward to it! It's a challenge to your skills! Lead your B0ZO back into proper procedure by example and gentle reminder. Conducting on-the-job training is part of your job. A good, non-sarcastic sense of humor is invaluable. If you did a good job on your net instructions, you can always repeat an applicable part of the net instructions as a general reminder to the entire net. Do not address that reading of the instructions directly at the B0ZO. Avoid direct confrontation with anyone.

NEVER dress anyone down on the air for a rules infraction. If the problem persists, find a way to get B0ZO off the air. Have him come in and log or be a courier for you ... as a special favor. The rest of the net will be rolling in the aisles.

E. THE IRATE PARTICIPANT

This is one of the toughest problems an NCS will face. If handled incorrectly, it can polarize net participants. Morale will erode and the effectiveness of your net will suffer. People can get their feelings hurt over very little, especially when they are tired and in unusually stressful circumstances. Your first reactions need to be:

- Slow up. Don't respond instantly. Take a deep breath.
- Perform a quick review of what you know about the troubled person.
- When possible take the discussion off line. "John, let's see if we can solve this on the phone. Please call me at 555-1234." This allows the net to continue undisturbed.
- Acknowledge the problem. Give in to the "Problem" whether the subject is right or wrong! Once you agree that there is a problem, the "fight" is gone.
- Empathize with them! Tell them that you can understand how they can feel and that. Were the situation reversed, you would probably feel the same way.
- Ask them to suggest a simple yet reasonable solution. Listen intently! This is the point where they will reveal the real problem. Somewhere in their suggestion, they will tell you what they really want from you.
- If their suggestion/solution is reasonable, tell them that you will try to put it into play. If it is not, make a counter-suggestion that will satisfy the real problem that they have revealed to you.
- When all else fails... give up ... let him win ... politely explain that the net must continue, thank the person for his services, and tell him he doesn't have to stick around. You tried to solve the problem reasonably and he refused. He wins the fight and you won the battle. The rest of the net will respect what you did and morale will remain intact.

F. INTERFERENCE

Most people that interfere with net operations are individuals who think the only way to get recognition is to behave improperly. The best way to handle them is to ignore them. When they can evoke no response at all, they tend to leave. Let them leave without comment. If you comment in any way, these people will persist.

For more protracted cases, plan on having alternate frequencies announced at the prevent briefing. Should the interference become intolerable, move to an alternate frequency. When you move to another frequency, do so under a pre-announced set of conditions at the briefing and without saying anything on the primary frequency. Another successful method involves the use of your local "fox hunters" to track down the offending station. This will need to be a coordinated effort that is not announced on the net frequency.

G. COPYING CALL SIGNS

One of the greatest fears for a new trainee to overcome is that of copying that flurry of check-ins at the beginning of a net. Ear-to-hand coordination is difficult to master for some people. As NCO, you can ask for a slow pace and lots of space between check-ins. Keep copying what you can. You can always go back and ask "The ABC station, please give me your call again". For bad signals, you can ask the Alternate Operator if he copied the station or ask others on the net to relay the information or check their input for weak stations. Don't panic, if you don't get it the station will most likely try again on the next call up. If not, move on, it's no big deal...

Another way to practice is to listen to all the nets that you can. Copy the call signs as best you can as they come in to the net control. Don't worry about getting all of them. Get what you can. Just keep going. If you have access to an HF receiver, some of the hottest, fastest, nastiest check-ins that you will ever hear are on the various traders nets.

When you can copy ten or fifteen call signs out of a "Big Guns" check-in 15 seconds, you are almost a master! The first time you hear one, it's guaranteed to blow your mind! Another source of practice is to tune into a contest on the weekends. Listen to how an experienced contester handles a pile-up. He will copy as many stations as he can get down out of a burst of calls that fly at him, he will say "I've got a group" and then quickly list, verify and work those calls in order. If he missed one, so what? They will try again and he will likely get them on the next burst of calls. Copy right along with him. Get all you can.

H. LISTENING

Practice listening. Sounds kind of dumb? Bad signals abound in amateur radio. Even on FM repeaters, the rubber duck signal and fringe area propagation noise is abundant. You need to train your hearing to sort out the message from the noise. Try detuning your 2 meter rig by moving 5 Hz off frequency and listen to the traffic on your favorite repeater. Try to make sense out of that "bad" signal. You can do it!

I. THE FINALLY

Working as a Net Control Operator can be lots of fun and very rewarding. Keep in mind that for the most part, this is a local net and most of the people you are talking to are your friends. People you know or see and talk with on a regular basis. They are not the enemy and are not grading you on your performance. Take the opportunity to expand your hobby, talk about topics of interest to you. If you have an interest, others will too. Make it your own, take ownership. You will have fun and others will soon be tuning in to spend a few minutes of their time with you as well. The training you receive will be invaluable should there ever be an emergency in our area and your services are required.

If you have questions, concerns or problems, please feel free to contact me for guidance. You can E-mail me at N2KUO@hotmail.com or see me at the next meeting.

73's

Jack N2KUO

Wayne County Amateur Radio Club - W3ARO

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