

Scripts for the aircraft radio

Using the radio in the airplane has intimidated too many people for too long, so here are some scripts that you may keep in the airplane and just read to the tower, or whom-ever you are talking to. There are several items to remember in almost every radio transmission. These are:

- ✓ Who you are talking to
- ✓ Who you are
- ✓ Where you are
- ✓ What you are going to/ wanting to do
- ✓ And, any comments

I want to take you through these scripts in order, based upon the kind of airport you are using. We think of airports as being either with a control tower, or with out a tower.

Class Gulf or Echo

Airports located in class G or E airspace are all handled the same, and are considered non-towered airports. The only difference is that in Class “E” airports you need to monitor the weather because if the weather is less than 1000 broken, or less than 3 miles visibility, the field is IFR and you need to get a special VFR clearance prior to entering or leaving the airspace notated on your chart with a magenta dashed line. While there is no regulation requiring you to use the radio, it is a good idea so all the other airplanes know who is there and where they are in the traffic pattern. With that in mind, let’s enter the traffic pattern at Arlington airport. According to the Airman’s Information Manual (AIM) we need to enter the traffic pattern on a midfield 45° angle to the downwind, and broadcast in the blind as they say, so you are talking to everyone around Arlington.

Who are you talking to: Arlington Traffic	Who you are: Cherokee 1854T	Where you are: on the 45 to left downwind runway 34	What you are going to do: Landing Arlington
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Notice the nonstandard for class G and E airports is that you want to say the airport name at the end also. This is so that if someone missed the airport name at the beginning of your broadcast they would hear it at the end as well.

The AIM goes on to say that you should announce every leg of the pattern, so you would enter downwind and say “Arlington traffic, Cherokee 1854T left downwind runway 34 landing, Arlington.” After turning base you would say “Arlington traffic, Cherokee 1854T left base runway 34 landing, Arlington,” and turning final again you would say ““Arlington traffic, Cherokee 1854T on final runway 34 landing, Arlington.”

For departure from a class G or E airport it is the same: “Arlington Traffic, Cherokee 1854T departing runway 34, Arlington.”

Class Delta

Most control towers (Class Delta airspace) these days have Automated Terminal Information Service (ATIS) now. I mention this first, because you’ll need the information prior to your initial contacting with the tower. ATIS is updated hourly, a few minutes before each hour, and each report is coded with a letter of the alphabet. For example a typical ATIS for Paine Field would be: “Paine tower information Quebec, 1451zulu. Wind calm, visibility 9er, light rain. Ceiling seven hundred overcast, temperature 5, dew point 5, altimeter 3007.

ILS runway 16R approach in use landing and departing runways 16R and 16L. Advise on initial contact, you have Quebec.”

They may add some additional information regarding land and hold short operations, but we’ll discuss that when it happens. So, with that in mind, here goes.

I want to set up a typical training scenario. The lesson will be to fly to the east of Paine Field for some air work, and then return later for a landing.

The order in which information is given to the tower is: Who are you talking to – Who are you – Where are you – What do you want to do – Remarks.

In our scenario, we would talk to/and or listen to the following entities in this order.

- 1 – Listen to ATIS (128.65)
- 2 – Talk to Paine Ground Control (121.8)
- 3 – Talk to Paine Tower (120.2) West tower (132.95)

Our verbiage to Ground Control would be: (Who are you talking to) “*Paine Ground Control*, (Who are you) *this is Cherokee 1854T*, (Where are you) Northwest School of Aviation, (What do you want to do) *taxi for takeoff* (Remarks) *VFR eastbound, with Quebec.*”

Paine Ground Control could reply, “Cherokee 1854T, Paine Ground, Taxi to runway 16L”

You would respond “Roger Cherokee 1854T taxi to runway 16L.”

NOTE: *** Certain things require that you read back (repeat what ATC said) and these are: All “Hold Short” instructions, all runway assignments, and/or any clearance that may be confusing or that you do not understand or are unable to comply with.

Notice that in each instance I spelled out the whole aircraft call sign. (Cherokee 1854T) The tower is the only one that can abbreviate the call sign. They could have replied the first time with: “**Cherokee 54T**, Paine Ground, Taxi to runway 16L” in which case we could have then shortened our reply to 54T also.

When you are ready to take off, we need to talk to the tower. Paine Field has two control tower frequencies. For runway 16R/34L (the west runway) the frequency is 132.95. The frequency for the east runway 16L/34R is 120.2.

Again, Who are you talking to – Who are you – where are you – what do you want to do – remarks. So, you would say: “Paine tower, Cherokee 1854T ready for takeoff 16L – left crosswind departure.”

The tower will reply: “Cherokee 54T, cleared for takeoff, left crosswind departure approved.” – OR “Cherokee 54T, hold short, landing traffic.” If the tower gives you a “hold short” clearance, you must “read back” this clearance. This means you must say to the tower “Roger, Cherokee 54T holding short 16L.”

The same sequence of events happen when you are inbound for landing at a tower controlled airport. Who are you talking to – Who are you – Where are you – What do you want to do – Remarks.

Step one is get the latest ATIS information, and then call the tower. You should be over or close to one of the VFR checkpoints as shown on the chart. These are the little magenta golf flags. For this example I'll use Snohomish airport. Our initial contact would be: "Paine tower, Cherokee 1854T, over Snohomish Airport landing with Quebec."

The tower has many options for landing. If they are not busy, they may simply say: "Cherokee 54T make left base entry to 16L, cleared to land." Most likely, they will want you to make a full traffic pattern, so they will say: "Cherokee 54T enter left downwind runway 16L, report downwind."

Your reply would be: "Roger, enter left downwind 16l, report downwind, 54T"

Upon becoming established on downwind you would call the tower and say: "Paine tower Cherokee 54T left downwind runway 16L."

The tower will give you a landing sequence at this time, and the traffic you are following. Something like Cherokee 54T, you are number three to land, you are following a Cessna just turning base, report that aircraft in sight.

Your reply would be: "54T looking for the traffic." Or "54T, traffic in sight." As soon as you report the traffic, you will be told, "Roger 54T, follow that traffic, you are cleared to land."

If, in your initial call, you had requested touch and go landings, you will receive instead of cleared to land, "54T, cleared for touch and go, make left closed traffic."

After your last landing, the tower will instruct you to contact ground control. Again, Who are you talking to – Who are you – where are you – what do you want to do – remarks, so you would say: "Paine ground, Cherokee 1854T, clear 16L, taxi to Northwest School of Aviation." And ground control will say: "Cherokee 54T, taxi to Northwest School of Aviation." You say: "54T"

Class Charlie

For entry and departure to a Class Charlie airport things are only a bit more complicated, because you get to fly with positive RADAR control so you will talk to Approach or Departure Control in addition to the tower.. This only means that you need to get a discrete squawk code for your Mode C transponder. Again like the Delta airport, get ATIS prior to calling anyone.

In this scenario we'll be landing at Portland International Airport in Oregon. It's the closest class C airport to here. Once you have the ATIS Code, call Approach control and tell them the normal stuff. "Portland Approach Control, Cherokee 1854T, Woodland, Landing with Whiskey." They will reply "Cherokee 54T, squawk 0345, altimeter 30.20, Expect left base entry to runway 10L." You respond "Squawk 0345, altimeter 30.20." Pretty soon they will tell you "Cherokee 54T, RADAR contact 2 miles south of Woodland indicating 3500 feet." Your reply is "54T."

Approach control will give you traffic advisories if there is a conflict. They will say "Cherokee 54T, Traffic 11:00 three miles, a 747 climbing out of 4000." Your response is "54T, I have the traffic" if you see the 747,

or “54T looking” if you don’t. When you get the traffic in sight, say “Portland Approach, 54T has the traffic in sight.”

Since you already know to expect a left base to runway 10L you start maneuvering to enter an extended left base. When you are within a few miles, approach will say “Cherokee 54T, contact Portland Tower, 118.8, so long.” Again your reply is “54T switching to tower, 118.7.”

Your contact to tower now is abbreviated, since they know you are coming. Approach has already coordinated with them. So you say “Portland Tower, Cherokee 1854T with you on left base for 10L.” The tower will give you your landing sequence, such as “Cherokee 54T you are number three following the Horizon Dash 8.” Again your response would be “54T has the Dash 8,” and tower would say, “54T, maintain visual separation with the Dash 8, cleared to land.” After landing and clearing the runway communication with ground is the same as Delta airports.

Departure from a class “C” airport is the same as class “D” with the exception of getting your departure instructions prior to taxi. This includes your route and transponder code. This is called Clearance Prior to Taxi, and sometimes has a separate frequency. Communication would be “Portland Clearance, Cherokee 1854T is ready to copy instructions for a departure to the north.” Departure would say “Cherokee 54T fly runway heading to 1000 feet, then left to 340. Contact Departure Control on 134.25, Squawk 0376.” You would read back this clearance “54T runway heading to 1000 then left turn to 340, Contact Departure Control on 134.25. Squawk 0376.”

Then you would follow the procedure for class “D” for the actual communication for ground and tower. There is the minor exception that you will be handed off to departure control after you clear tower’s airspace. And tower will say “Cherokee 54T contact departure control 134.25. Have a good flight.” You would respond “54T switching.”

Contact with Departure Control is straight forward. “Portland Departure, Cherokee 1854T with you.” With you works, because again Departure Control knows you are coming. Departure Control will say “Cherokee 54T, RADAR contact.” Once you are clear of the Charlie airspace Departure Control will say, “Cherokee 543T is leaving the Class Charlie airspace. Squawk 1200, frequency change approved.” Sometimes they will say “Squawk VFR” but this means the same thing.

Class Bravo

OK so now the big bad airspace around the nation’s busiest airports. Guess what? The only difference between C and B is that you need to listen to hear the magic words “You are cleared to operate in the (name of airport) airspace. Maintain VFR.” Remember that VFR in “B” is three miles visibility and clear of clouds. Exit is the same as “C” but again you need the magic words “You are cleared...”

That’s all there is to it. Just remember: who are you talking to – who you are – where you are – what you want to do and then any remarks.

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