Marine Radio Communications Primer

The following are guidelines for AuxAir marine radio communications. Each of the typical radio calls are described, along with suggestions for how to make them clear and concise.   The end of the document contains fill-in-the-blank forms that can be copied and used on a kneeboard during flight.

THINK before keying the microphone – what exactly do you plan to say?
LISTEN before keying the microphone – don't step on someone else
SPEAK using proper (professional) radio phraseology

If you are having trouble making contact:
1) Tune to one of the Weather channels and listen. If you don't hear the broadcast, you have a problem with the radio, antenna, or antenna cable.
2) Check your volume knob, and intercom settings.
3) Check your squelch.
4) Make sure you are on a "USA" (ALPHA) channel.
5) If the Watchstander doesn't reply, wait thirty seconds before calling again. If they still don't reply – stay off the radio. They are probably busy working a case on another channel. Just call in on the next fifteen minute cycle. If you still can't reach them, use a cell phone.

Note: In the exchanges below, text within brackets [] are optional phrases. Fewer words are generally better.

On the first call in each exchange:

Start by saying WHO you are calling two (2) or three (3) times. This is done to get the Watchstanders attention.
For example: *SECTOR NEW YORK, SECTOR NEW YORK, [SECTOR NEW YORK]*

Then, tell them WHO YOU ARE:
For example: *[THIS IS,] AUX-AIR FOUR-TWO-NINER, FOXTROT-SIERRA*

Note: that the complete tail number is provided. Don't be confused by the callsign used by ATC, which is usually *AUX-AIR NINER-FOXTROT-SIERRA, or CHARLIE-GOLF-XRAY NINER-FOXTROT-SIERRA*.

Lastly, tell the Watchstander what channel you are calling on:
For example: *CHANNEL TWENTY-ONE [ALPHA], OVER*
Note: The watchstander in the Sector/Station is monitoring several radios, tuned to different frequencies – this gives them a heads-up as to which radio to use.

On subsequent calls within the exchange:

Start by saying WHO YOU ARE CALLING once:
For example: *SECTOR NEW YORK*

Then, tell them WHO YOU ARE:
For example: *AUX-AIR NINER, FOXTROT-SIERRA*
Note: the callsign may be abbreviated to the last three numbers/letters of the callsign

Lastly, send your message.
For example: *POSITION – TAPPAN ZEE BRIDGE, HEADING SOUTH, OPS NORMAL, OVER*

If you do not require a reply, substitute *OUT*, for *OVER*. Similarly, if the watchstander says OUT on their reply to you, this means they are done with you, and do not need a reply.

Examples

Establishing a Radio Guard

This is done each time you get in the air, or you move from one Sector's Area Of Responsibility (AOR) to another's:

SECTOR NEW YORK, SECTOR NEW YORK, [SECTOR NEW YORK]
[THIS IS,] AUX AIR FOUR-TWO-NINER, FOXTROT-SIERRA
CHANNEL TWENTY-ONE [ALPHA]
OVER

The Sector responds with:

AUX AIR FOUR-TWO-NINER, FOXTROT-SIERRA
[THIS IS] SECTOR NEW YORK
CHANNEL TWENTY-ONE ALPHA
OVER

Then, you send your message:

SECTOR NEW YORK
AUX-AIR NINER, FOXTROT-SIERRA
DEPARTED CALDWELL
MINUTE ZERO-FIVE (minutes after the hour)
TWO POB
[REQUEST YOU] ASSUME OUR RADIO GUARD
OVER

Typically, the Sector will respond with something like this:

AUX AIR FOUR-TWO-NINER, FOXTROT-SIERRA
[THIS IS] SECTOR NEW YORK
ASSUME YOUR GUARD
MINUTE ZERO-NINER (minutes after the hour)
FIFTEEN MINUTE COMMS ON CHANNEL TWENTY-ONE ALPHA
[ALTERNATE CHANNEL SIXTEEN]
[SECTOR NEW YORK] OUT

Note: If the Sector says "OVER" – they expect you to confirm receipt of their message. You would then reply with:

SECTOR NEW YORK
AUX-AIR NINER, FOXTROT-SIERRA
ROGER (or however you read them, LOUD AND CLEAR, WEAK AND BROKEN, etc.)
OUT

Of course, if you didn't understand the Sector's last message, you would reply with:

SECTOR NEW YORK
AUX-AIR NINER, FOXTROT-SIERRA
SAY AGAIN [YOUR LAST]
OVER

Providing a Situation Report (SITREP)

Every fifteen minutes (from establishment of the guard, NOT the last call) you are required to report in with your position, heading and operational condition:

SECTOR NEW YORK, SECTOR NEW YORK, [SECTOR NEW YORK]
[THIS IS,] AUX AIR FOUR-TWO-NINER, FOXTROT-SIERRA
CHANNEL TWENTY-ONE [ALPHA]
OVER

The Sector responds with:

AUX AIR FOUR-TWO-NINER, FOXTROT-SIERRA
[THIS IS] SECTOR NEW YORK
CHANNEL TWENTY-ONE ALPHA
OVER

Then, you send your message:

SECTOR NEW YORK
AUX-AIR NINER, FOXTROT-SIERRA
POSITION NEWBURGH-BEACON BRIDGE
HEADING NORTH
OPS NORMAL
OUT

Note: If you having trouble with comms, or want to confirm the Watchstander received your message, you should end your position report with *OVER*.

Some of you might ask, why geographic locations are provided rather than lat/lons. Reading off a lat/lon requires time. You should always strive to keep your radio transmissions brief. Remember that you are typically traveling faster than a mile every 45 seconds.

If the watchstander requests lat/lon on SITREPS, it should be provided in addition to the geographic location. Only degrees and minutes would usually be provided. However, if you are vectoring a surface asset (boat), or reporting a specific location that someone will need to return to, you should provide lat/lon to the maximum precision possible. Note that you should confirm which way the GPS you are using displays lat/lon (minutes and seconds, or minutes and tenths of minutes). Make sure whoever you are reporting the lat/lon to knows which you are using (i.e., seconds or tenths).

Securing the Radio Guard

This is done when you have your destination airport in sight or after you've established a Radio Guard upon entering an AOR for a different Sector:

SECTOR NEW YORK, SECTOR NEW YORK, [SECTOR NEW YORK]
[THIS IS,] AUX-AIR FOUR-TWO-NINER, FOXTROT-SIERRA
CHANNEL TWENTY-ONE [ALPHA]
OVER

The Sector responds with:

AUX-AIR FOUR-TWO-NINER, FOXTROT-SIERRA
[THIS IS] SECTOR NEW YORK
CHANNEL TWENTY-ONE ALPHA
OVER

Then, you send your message:

SECTOR NEW YORK
AUX-AIR NINER, FOXTROT-SIERRA
LANDING CALDWELL
[REQUEST YOU] SECURE OUR RADIO GUARD
WILL CALL WHEN ON DECK
OVER

Typically, the Sector will respond with something like this:

AUX-AIR FOUR-TWO-NINER, FOXTROT-SIERRA
[THIS IS] SECTOR NEW YORK
SECURED YOUR GUARD
MINUTE TWENTY-FIVE (minutes after the hour)
[SECTOR NEW YORK] OUT

Do not forget to call the watchstander on a landline after you are safely on the deck!!!!

ESTABLISHING A RADIO GUARD

THINK

LISTEN

SPEAK…

SECTOR _____, SECTOR _____, [SECTOR _____]
       (sector or station)

AUX-AIR _____
      (tail number)

CHANNEL _____ [ALPHA]

OVER

After the Sector/Station responds:

THINK

LISTEN

SPEAK…

SECTOR _____
      (sector or station)

AUX-AIR _____
      (tail number)

DEPARTED _____
        (airport)

MINUTE _____
     (minute past the hour)

_____ POB
(number)

ASSUME OUR RADIO GUARD

OVER

SITUATION REPORT (SITREP)

Remember: This is made ever fifteen minutes from the time the Radio Guard is established, not from the last call.

THINK

LISTEN

SPEAK…

SECTOR _____, SECTOR _____, [SECTOR _____]
      (sector or station)

AUX-AIR _____
      (tail number)

CHANNEL _____ [ALPHA]

OVER

After the Sector/Station responds:

THINK

LISTEN

SPEAK…

SECTOR _____
      (sector or station)

AUX-AIR _____
      (tail number)

POSITION _____
      (geographic position)

HEADING _____
      (cardinal direction)

OPS NORMAL

OVER (or OUT)

SECURING THE RADIO GUARD

Note: If things start to get really busy in the cockpit, you might want to consider closing the guard out via cell phone after you have landed.

THINK

LISTEN

SPEAK…

SECTOR _____, SECTOR _____, [SECTOR _____]
        (sector or station)

AUX-AIR _____
        (tail number)

CHANNEL _____ [ALPHA]

OVER

After the Sector/Station responds:

THINK

LISTEN

SPEAK…

SECTOR _____
        (sector or station)

AUX-AIR _____
        (tail number)

LANDING _____
                (airport)

SECURE OUR RADIO GUARD

WILL CALL WHEN ON DECK

OVER