

# BOAT CREW BASICS

## *A GUIDE FOR BOAT CREW CANDIDATES & MENTORS*

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### “Use of Prowords & Phonetic Alphabet”

Last month we examined the basic operating controls of the marine VHF-FM radio. This month we concentrate on how to communicate effectively on the radio, using Prowords and the Phonetic Alphabet.

Just like civilian mariners, we find that Aux members often copy what they hear others using on the radio. This is just as apt to encourage incorrect usage as it is correct practice. Consider the popular use of the non-proword “Good Copy”, by Aux members standing radio watches at local stations and aboard their own facilities. They do it because they have heard others using it and presume it must be correct. However “Good copy” is not an official proword, and its use signals someone who would rather copy others’ technique instead of getting it right!

The bible on this is Chapter 11 of the Boat Crew Seamanship Manual. There, in Section B, you will find the complete list of authorized prowords. You will note that “Good copy” is not listed there. So ignore the fact that you hear that phrase used a lot on the air and discipline yourself to use only authorized, correct prowords.

Prowords, or procedure words, are used to convey a lot of information in minimal on-the-air time; and to adopt a common set of abbreviations to enhance intelligibility of comms. Familiarize yourself with all of the Prowords listed there, but be especially proficient in the use of these:

“**All After**” or “**All Before**” is used to indicate that you refer to all the words sent before or after the text you supply. You might ask “Say again all after ‘Brian Jones, 123 Main Street . . .’”.

“**Word Before**” or “**Word After**” is similarly used to designate the single word before or after the text you supply.

“**Over**” means that you have completed the phrase you wanted to send and now expect a reply. “**Out**” means that you have completed a transmission and do not expect a reply.

“**Roger**” means that you have received and understand the last transmission. So you would not say “Roger, but what is the boat’s name?” “**Wilco** means that you will comply with the requested action.

Request you “**Say Again**” boat’s name means that you want the sender to repeat the boat’s name. “**Wait**” means that you must pause for a moment and you want the other party to stop sending for a moment. You might use “wait” if your pen just ran out of ink. “**Wait Out**” means that you must pause for a longer time.

The Phonetic Alphabet is used to spell out individual letters phonetically, when conditions make understanding the transmission difficult. The Coast Guard and Auxiliary use the International Phonetic Alphabet, not the “Able, Baker, Charlie, Dog, Easy” alphabet of WWII, nor the “Adam, Nora, Sam” alphabet of law enforcement. Boat Crew candidates that I have QE’d know that I ask them to read my uniform name tag and spell out my last name. I expect to hear “Papa, Echo, Tango, Echo, Romeo, Sierra, Oscar, November”, rattled off quickly and confidently.

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