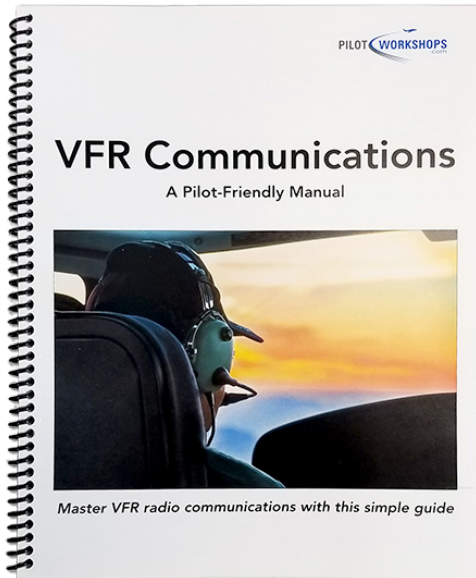


A Quick-Reference Guide to Non-Towered Airport Communications



*What to say and when to say it when you're operating
around non-towered airports.*

If You Find This Guide Helpful...



This Quick Reference Guide to Non-Towered Airport Communications is excerpted from our *Pilot-Friendly Manual for VFR Communications*.

On the last pages of this guide you will see the table of contents for the full manual. In addition, the *Pilot-Friendly Manual for VFR Communications* comes with videos for each scenario so you can see and hear what to say and when to say it.

[Get details and video samples here...](#)

Free: If you don't already get them, be sure to sign up for the Pilot's Tip of the Week from PilotWorkshops. Join over 185,000 pilots who have been getting these quick, concise and valuable tips since 2006. Created by our team of nationally recognized experts. [Use this link and you'll also get our "Caught on Camera" videos.](#)

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[Visit our website](#) for details on our products including our *Pilot-Friendly Manuals for IFR Communications* and for a wide range of panel-mounted GPS units.

— You are free to share this guide, as is, with other pilots. —

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The basic radio call contains “the Four Ws”:

[Who you’re talking to], [Who you are], [Where you are], [What you want].

So a hungry teenager might say:

“Mom, your son Jack, in the living room, request a sandwich.”

Yes, it actually is that simple. Not only that, the required vocabulary for the average pilot really isn’t any larger than the vocabulary of the average teenager.

How To Use This Manual

Many pilots find radio communication one of the most intimidating parts of aviation. This is true of rated pilots, as well as student pilots. Some pilots go through great pains and extra fuel just to avoid talking on the radio. That's too bad, because there's a secret to radio communications:

They all follow a simple script.

Once you know the script, it's easy to sound like a pro, and that's how this book works. Most texts on radio communications for pilots feature lots of explanatory text about phases of flight, or airspace classes, and then give snippets of transcribed radio calls as examples. We flip that model on its head.

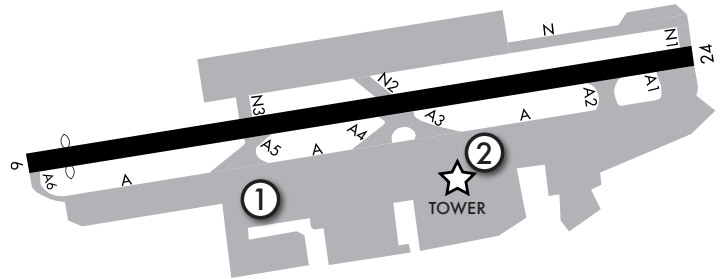
We asked: "What are the most common radio calls a VFR pilot would hear or make?" We wrote scripts for each of those scenarios, and created graphics to help you visualize who says what, and where they are when they say it. Finally, we dissected each script to explain the why and how behind the what. Consider the result a field guide to all the things VFR pilots and controllers say in the wild.

Read the audio script for each scenario first, using the numbered ball flags to connect the words with the graphic. (Helpful tip: If the line is by "Pilot," that's you.) Visualize what's going on when each call is made. Next, read the discussion. Tips and sidebars expand on individual scenarios. Finally, watch the associated video on the PilotWorkshops website. You'll see and hear the scenario come to life.

You can read the book from start to finish. Each section covers an aspect of flight: Ramp Ops, Ground Ops, Departures, Enroute Ops, Arrivals, Closed Traffic, and Special Cases. Or you can use it as a reference guide. Think about the kinds of communications scenarios you're likely to encounter on a given flight. Re-read those topics before you get in the airplane. Instead of fumbling for the right procedures and phraseology when you key the mic, they'll be fresh in your mind.

Because this book addresses both the official radio phraseology, and the real world of aviation communication, we've made some choices. For example, you'll see our scripts use the official "niner" for speaking the number nine. Out there in the U.S. airspace, perhaps 75 percent of pilots do that. Maybe that's because it's the "right" way. Maybe that's because it's

① PILOT
Hello world, this is what I'm saying on the radio. How do you hear?



① Ball flags show who is speaking and (if possible) where the speaker is. This includes Pilot (you), Ground, Tower, and other pilots. Your flags have a heavier border as well.

③ This style ball flag appears when the speaker is at a remote location you can't see, such as Approach, Center, Flight Service, or ATIS.

TIP

Tip boxes like this have useful tidbits, like the fact that if a controller doesn't answer right away, he or she may be talking on a radio frequency you can't hear.

SIDEBARS: A BIT MORE INFO

Sidebar boxes delve into topics further than a simple tip. You can read them, or not, as you see fit. Although we think they add useful information relevant to the scenario on that page.

November Two Three Six Papa Whiskey,
Monitor Tower one two eight point eight.

Watch the videos to hear how it sounds in practice.

The Phonetic Alphabet

THE AVIATION PHONETIC ALPHABET

If you're new to aviation, we feel your pain in learning to memorize the word for each letter. Here's a tip: While you're driving or walking around town, read license plates to yourself using phonetic letters. You'll have it in no time.

A	Alpha (AL-FAH)
B	Bravo (BRAH-VOH)
C	Charlie (CHAR-LEE) or (SHAR-LEE)
D	Delta (DELL-TAH)
E	Echo (ECK-OH)
F	Foxtrot (FOKS-TROT)
G	Golf (GOLF)
H	Hotel (HOH-TEL)
I	India (IN-DEE-AH)
J	Juliett (JEW-LEE-ETT)
K	Kilo (KEY-LOH)
L	Lima (LEE-MAH)
M	Mike (MIKE)
N	November (NO-VEM-BER)
O	Oscar (OSS-CAH)
P	Papa (PAH-PAH)
Q	Quebec (KEH-BECK)
R	Romeo (ROW-ME-OH)
S	Sierra (SEE-AIR-RAH)
T	Tango (TANG-GO)
U	Uniform (YOU-NEE-FORM or OO-NEE-FORM)
V	Victor (VIK-TAH)
W	Whiskey (WISS-KEY)
X	Xray (ECKS-RAY)
Y	Yankee (YANG-KEY)
Z	Zulu (ZOO-LOO)
1	One (WUN)
2	Two (TOO)
3	Three (TREE)
4	Four (FOW-ER)
5	Five (FIFE)
6	Six (SIX)
7	Seven (SEV-EN)
8	Eight (AIT)
9	Nine (NIN-ER)
0	Zero (ZEE-RO)

more fun to say. (It sounds so “Top Gun.”) However, far fewer controllers, and only a handful of pilots, say “tree” for the number three, or “fife” for the number five. We’re not aware of a single incident where that caused a problem. So we don’t do it here.

It’s a script, so we spell out numbers and phonetic letters, as well as capitalize words like “Tower” when it’s a name (“Contact Boston Tower”), but not when it’s just a reference (“Contact the tower”). The same is true of runway names: “Runway Two Two.”

We include discussions of some non-standard practices as well, so you’re fully informed. You can decide how to conduct business for yourself.

We model less verbiage. Look at this request:

“Hello Portland Tower, this is Cessna Two Three Six Papa Whiskey. We’re about ten miles to the south at two thousand feet, and we have ATIS Information Uniform. We request permission to transition your airspace at two thousand feet, heading to Lewiston.”

If you take out all the unnecessary words, the same information can be transmitted this way:

“Portland Tower, Cessna Two Three Six Papa Whiskey, ten south at two thousand. Information Uniform. Request transition at two thousand toward Lewiston.”

The second one contains the critical information, and leverages all the things that can be assumed. If we call a Tower and say “ten south” without a landmark, we must be talking about the airport; “at 2000” must be our altitude. It’s not a heading, and certainly isn’t an airspeed. Including more words here and there is fine. For example, saying your “... ten south of [landmark] ...” is important if calling someone other than a tower. You don’t have to be perfect. You can even crack a joke when radio traffic is light. But brevity leaves more time for the important stuff.

We assume that you have at least a bit of experience with aviation radio; understand how to tune a frequency, transmit and receive, or monitor two radios at once; know what the term “squawk code”

COMMON AVIATION ACRONYMS USED IN THIS BOOK

AGL – Above Ground Level. The distance between you and grass, rocks, airports, or other forced landing sites below you.

AIM – Aeronautical Information Manual. The book of all things aviation. For communication, focus on Chapter 2, sections 1 and 2; and the P/CG.

AIRMET – Airmen’s Meteorological Information. Warnings about obscuration (clouds and rain), turbulence, and icing.

ARTCCs – Air Route Traffic Control Centers. The radar rooms at 20 major ATC regions of the continental U.S. Called “Center” on the radio.

ASOS/AWOS – Automated Surface/Weather Observing System.

ATC – Air Traffic Control. Usually in reference to the people, as in, “ATC told me to climb.”

ATIS – Automatic Terminal Information Service.

CT – Control Tower. Abbreviation found on Sectional Charts for the tall building with the antennas on top and the controllers inside.

CTAF – Common Traffic Advisory Frequency. The frequency used by all aircraft announcing their intentions at a non-towered airport. That’s “non-towered” not “uncontrolled.” CTAF is how pilots collectively keep the situation under control.

D-ATIS – Digital Automatic Terminal Information Service.

FAA – Federal Aviation Administration. The people who are always there to help.

FBO – Fixed Base Operator. The people who are sometimes there to help, but with things you really need like fuel, coffee, and a rental car.

FSS – Flight Service Station. The people who try

to help remotely, and usually do a pretty good job.

IFR – Instrument Flight Rules. Like VFR, but in the clouds. The focus of our next comms book.

MSL – Mean Sea Level. A nearly arbitrary distance from the center of the earth that defines the baseline altitude above which we measure our height.

NAS – Naval Air Station. Top Gun for real.

NOTAM – Notice to Airmen. A cryptic system for disseminating critical, flight-related info.

PIREP – Pilot (Weather) Report. An eye-in-the-sky snapshot of the actual weather, radioed in.

RCOs – Remote Communications Outlets. Radio transceivers scattered across the country used to contact Flight Service.

SIGMET – Significant Meteorological Information. Like AIRMETs, but bigger, badder, and covering more potential hazards.

TRACON – Terminal Radar Approach Control. An ATC radar room smaller than an ARTCC, controlling airspace near a Class B or Class C airport. Call them “Approach” on the radio.

TRSA – Terminal Radar Service Area. Like a TRACON, but usually even smaller and complaining they get less respect. Treat TRSA airspace like Class C airspace and you can’t go wrong.

UNICOM – Universal Communications (frequency). Used for non-flight-critical information. Often the same frequency as non-towered CTAF.

VFR – Visual Flight Rules. See sky, go fly.

VOR – Very High Frequency Omni-directional Range. An antiquated navigation system that might come in handy if the GPS constellation ever fails. They make great reference points for your position when talking to ATC, however.

means, and how to enter one into a transponder. We assume you can read Sectional Charts and the Chart Supplement, as well as online sources, such as Skyvector, or apps, like ForeFlight. Just in case, though, there’s a review in the back of the book.

All the examples in this book use real airports and facilities with their real frequencies. That said, this book is a snapshot in time, so please don’t use it

as your reference for the current airport information before a flight.

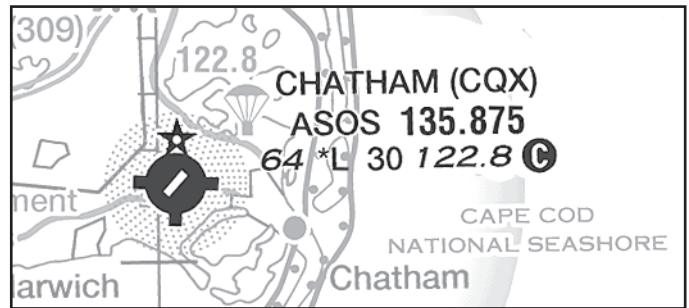
Other books go into much more detail about each topic covered here. This book focuses on “The Four Ws,” as explained on the very first page. If there’s something you don’t see here that you think should get included in a future version, please let us know.

Now that we’re ready, let’s check the weather ...

Monitor Automated Airport Weather

① Chatham Municipal Airport, Chatham Massachusetts, automated weather observation two three two seven Zulu. Wind two five zero at seven. Visibility one zero. Sky condition clear. Temperature two one Celsius. Dewpoint one four Celsius. Altimeter two niner eight eight. Remarks, density altitude eight hundred.

Chatham Municipal Airport (KCQX)
Chatham, MA
ASOS 135.875 or (508) 945-5034



The majority of U.S. airports have an Automated Surface Observing System (ASOS) or an Automated Weather Observing System (AWOS) that measures, collects, and disseminates weather data.

Hourly METARs come from ASOS/AWOS, but when you tune a published ASOS/AWOS frequency, you'll hear the "one-minute weather," which is really the average over the past several minutes, but that's too long a name.

You should be able to receive the ASOS/AWOS broadcast within 25 NM of the airport and below 10,000 feet AGL. In most cases, it plays continuously on the published frequency. Occasionally, this is heard over the voice portion of a local NAVAID. At many airports, you can listen to the observations via telephone.

ASOS/AWOS frequencies usually appear in the airport data block on a Sectional Chart. Frequencies and phone numbers can also be found in an airport's Chart Supplement listing.

As far as practicable.
AIRPORT MANAGER: 508-945-9000
WEATHER DATA SOURCES: ASOS 135.875 (508) 945-5034.
COMMUNICATIONS: CTAF/UNICOM 122.8
 Ⓡ CAPE APP/DEP CON 118.2 (1100-0400Z‡ May 15-Sept 30, 1100-0300Z‡ Oct 1-May 14) CLNC DEL 127.3
 BOSTON CENTER APP/DEP CON 128.75 (0400-1100Z‡ May 11

True to their name, one-minute observations are updated every sixty seconds. They're made by a digitized voice, and are generally formatted like METARs. Different stations have different sensing and reporting capabilities, ranging from just the altimeter setting to more complex observations like precipitation type and lightning.

Most towered airports have an ASOS/AWOS, but you won't find the frequency on the Sectional Chart, because towered airports broadcast weather via the Automatic Terminal Information Service (ATIS, see next page).

If the phone number for ASOS/AWOS at a towered airport is listed in the airport's Chart Supplement listing, you can listen to the one-minute observation via telephone.

When part-time towers close for the evening, they usually connect the ASOS/AWOS to the ATIS frequency, so you'll hear the automated voice of weather intelligence there. Sometimes airport NOTAMs are included on the automated voice of ASOS/AWOS as well.

TIP

Menu	KCQX Chatham Municipal	Maps
● VFR		54m ago
KCQX 282056Z 01011G20KT 10SM CLR 21/14 A2969 RMK AO2 SLPNO 6//// T02110139		
Time	16:56 EDT	
Winds	010° at 11 - 20 kts	
Visibility	10 sm	
Clouds	Sky clear	

Winds reported on the AWOS/ASOS broadcast are in degrees magnetic, just like runway numbers. The same information in a METAR—even if you receive it via ADS-B—is in degrees true.

Image from ForeFlight

Call Airport Personnel Via UNICOM

Concord Municipal Airport (KCON)
Concord, NH
UNICOM 122.7



- ① PILOT
Concord UNICOM, Cessna Six Papa Whiskey

After they find the radio ...

- ② UNICOM OPERATOR
Cessna calling Concord UNICOM, go ahead.

- ③ PILOT
I just realized we forgot to fuel up last night.
We're in the southeast corner of the ramp.

- ④ UNICOM OPERATOR
Cessna Six Papa Whiskey, I'll send the truck.

- ⑤ PILOT
Thanks. Hey, is the restaurant still open for
breakfast? We could use some coffee.

- ⑥ UNICOM OPERATOR
Not since 1994. Sorry.

Back in the old days (like the early 1990s) many small airports still had a UNICOM operator. This person monitored the airport's Universal Communications (UNICOM) frequency, and could tell you the local weather conditions, or the runway airplanes were using, as well as answer questions, call for a rental car, catch the mechanic before he left for the day, and much more. Those days are largely gone.

There still may be someone at a Fixed Base Operator (FBO) who will answer a call to UNICOM. You can call from the ground or from the air. Because there's no guarantee anyone will answer, it's best to make contact before reciting your life story. Conversely, sometimes an FBO at a non-towered airport will contact *you* on the UNICOM frequency when they see you taxiing in. This works because the UNICOM frequency is usually the Common Traffic Advisory frequency (CTAF) as well.

UNICOM exists at towered airports, too. You wouldn't use them to get advisories, since the Tower controllers provide that information.

However, you can use UNICOM for a service request. If there's an FBO at the airport, there's usually someone listening to UNICOM. Just remember to simultaneously monitor ATC on a second radio.

Some non-towered airports use MULTICOM, which is always on 122.9 and means there's no person on the ground to talk to. Both MULTICOM and UNICOM usually serve as the frequency for aircraft to announce movements on and over the airport.

PILOT-CONTROLLED LIGHTING

Though not really VFR communications, the runway lighting at non-towered airports is usually controlled by the pilot via the CTAF/UNICOM frequency. You'll find confirmation of this in the Chart Supplement. In general, seven mic clicks turn all the lights on as bright as possible. Five mic clicks may dim them, and turn off accessory lights. Three mic clicks may

dim them further. If the lights are pilot-controlled, there's a star by the "L" on the Sectional Chart, as seen at KSKX (opposite page). An "L" with no star, such as KVKX (see page 7), means they turn on at sunset. No "L" means no lights.

RWY 33: Thld dsplcd 557'. Trees.
SERVICE: FUEL 100LL LGT ACTIVATE MIRL Rwy 09-27 and PAPI
Rwy 09 and Rwy 27—CTAF.
AIRPORT REMARKS: Attended irregularly. Fuel 24 hr self serve. Airframe

Request a Radio Check at a Non-Towered Airport

How do you actually know your radio is working? The easiest way to find out is to request a radio check.

At a non-towered airport, you can ask the UNICOM operator (see opposite) or another airplane you hear on the CTAF. Often UNICOM and CTAF are the same frequency. These appear on the Sectional Chart or Chart Supplement.

State who you're calling, your call sign, and the words "radio check," or "How do you hear me?" Because this is a non-towered airport, you may use your full call sign, as shown on this page, or an abbreviated one, as shown on the previous page. However, if you hear another aircraft on the frequency with a similar call sign, you should use your full call sign to avoid confusion.

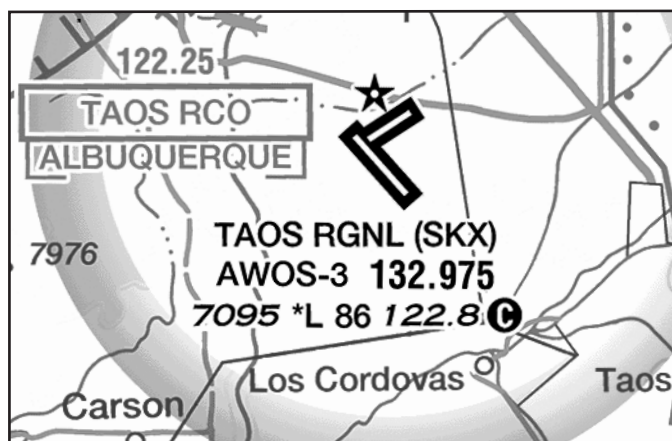
Depending on who you call and who responds, the response you get will vary from an informal "loud and clear" or "pretty weak," to a more formal report like "three by five." The numeric one answers the question, "What's the strength of my signal?" and "How do you receive me?" using numbers from 1 to 5. There's a lot of confusion about which number is which, and this sort of reporting doesn't seem to be officially mandated by the FAA anyway. Just know that for both strength and readability, the higher the number the better.

No matter what response to your radio check, common sense dictates that if someone replies, your radio is working well enough for them to have heard you. Most of the time, that's all you need to know.

If no one is around to hear, you can also use a handheld radio to check. Transmit on your aircraft radio and listen for your voice (or even just mic clicks) on the handheld. Having a handheld is a good idea, just for the day your aircraft radio *doesn't* work.

- ① **PILOT**
Taos UNICOM, Cessna Two Three Six Papa Whiskey, radio check please. How do you hear me?
- ② **UNICOM OPERATOR**
Cessna Two Three Six Papa Whiskey, Taos UNICOM, you're five by five. Sounds good.

Taos Regional Airport (KSKX)
Taos, NM
UNICOM / CTAF 122.8



At busy airports, some FBOs have their own dedicated frequencies. These "ASRI" frequencies are listed on the FBO websites, and in their listings on many aviation tablet apps.

The ASRI is useful to contact a specific FBO. These FBOs usually monitor the UNICOM frequency as well, so you can often contact them on either frequency.

Image from ForeFlight

TIP

FEATURED

Signature
FLIGHT SUPPORT
A BBA Aviation company

100LL \$4.40
Jet A \$5.41

(505) 471-2525

129.07 ASRI, 122.95 UNICOM



FBO

Jet Center at Santa Fe

(505) 780-4455

129.45 ASRI, 122.95 UNIC...

100LL \$5.12
Jet A \$5.46

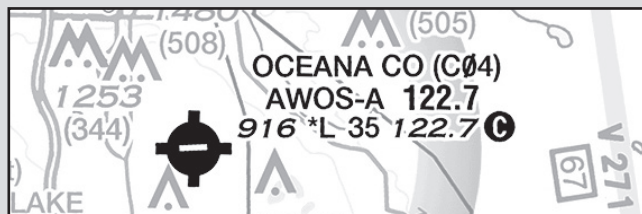


ADDITIONAL AUTOMATED AIRPORT ADVISORIES

Before the days of automated weather, it was a human being on the airport who told you the current field conditions. That person might also provide advisories in their role as a UNICOM operator.

These days, the weather is usually broadcast continuously on the ASOS/AWOS frequency (see page 4), and the UNICOM conveniences are from a person who you hope is listening when you broadcast.

Oceana County
Shelby, MI
CTAF/AWOS-A 122.7



AIRPORT REMARKS: Attended irregularly. Fuel 24 hr self serv repairs on call 231-861-2210 or 231-730-6644. R rough and soft when wet. Radio controlled model acft o end. For DIGIWX AWOS click mic 2 times 122.7. For 231-861-4272 (arpt manager residence) or 231-742 Administration bldg access: V, then III-II simultaneous 15-33 dsplcd thlds marked with 3' yellow cones.

AIRPORT MANAGER: 231-861-9910

WEATHER DATA SOURCES: AWOS-A 122.7 (231) 861-7415.

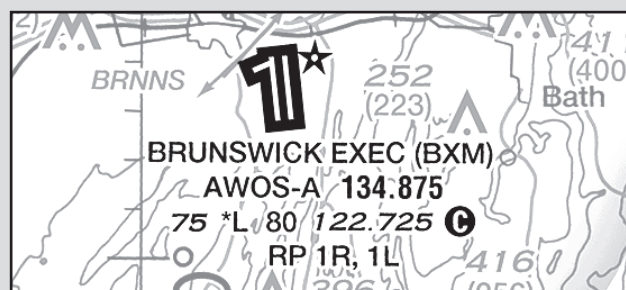
COMMUNICATIONS: CTAF/UNICOM 122.7

Except sometimes it's not a person.

Some airports have pilot-controlled automated AWOS broadcasts. These are denoted with "AWOS-A" or "AWOS-AV" in the airport information on the Sectional Chart and the Chart Supplement. The AWOS-A can be on the CTAF frequency, or on a discrete frequency. In either case, the pilot clicks the mic twice without speaking to play the report. It will play once, and then stop. Click the mic twice again if you missed some detail the first time through. Occasionally, the system misinterprets aircraft calls to each other for a request and broadcasts a weather report right over pilots talking to each other.

The Chart Supplement for Oceana County (above) shows instructions in the Airport Remarks. Brunswick Executive (below) has a similar system, but on a discrete frequency, and has no instructions in the airport remarks. It's up to you to know the AWOS-AV (similar to an AWOS-A) won't broadcast until you request it with a mic click.

Brunswick Executive Airport
Brunswick, ME
AWOS-AV 134.875



19L, HIRL Rwy 01R-19L—CTAF.

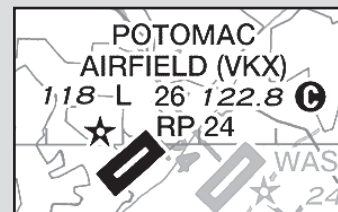
AIRPORT REMARKS: Attended 1200-0000Z±.

WEATHER DATA SOURCES: AWOS-AV 134.875 (2)

COMMUNICATIONS: CTAF/UNICOM 122.725

Some airports take this a step further with an "automated UNICOM," transmitting weather, plus airport advisories and radio checks on demand. The digitized voice explains: "Click your mic three times for an advisory, four times for radio checks." Automated UNICOMS appear as "AUNICOM" in the Chart Supplement (below).

Potomac Airfield (KVKX)
Friendly, MD
CTAF/AUNICOM 122.8



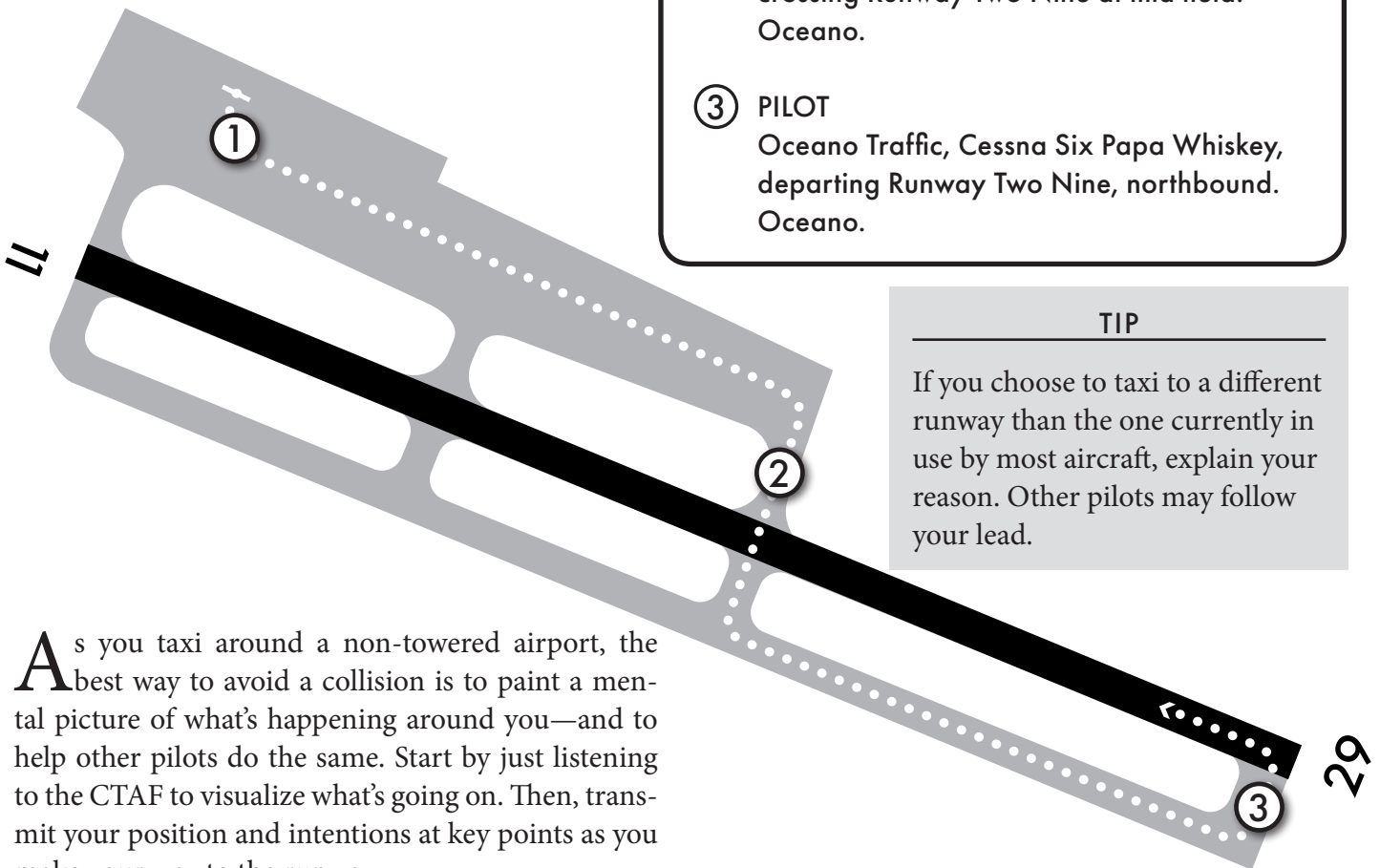
AIRPORT MANAGER: 301-248-5720

COMMUNICATIONS: CTAF/AUNICOM 122.8

® POTOMAC APP/DEP CON 124.7 125.65 (DC-FRZ)

Announce Taxi to the Runway

Oceano County Airport (L52)
Oceano, CA
CTAF 122.7



- ① PILOT
Oceano Traffic, Cessna Six Papa Whiskey, on the ramp. Taxi to Runway Two Nine. Oceano.
- ② PILOT
Oceano Traffic, Cessna Six Papa Whiskey, crossing Runway Two Nine at mid field. Oceano.
- ③ PILOT
Oceano Traffic, Cessna Six Papa Whiskey, departing Runway Two Nine, northbound. Oceano.

TIP

If you choose to taxi to a different runway than the one currently in use by most aircraft, explain your reason. Other pilots may follow your lead.

As you taxi around a non-towered airport, the best way to avoid a collision is to paint a mental picture of what's happening around you—and to help other pilots do the same. Start by just listening to the CTAF to visualize what's going on. Then, transmit your position and intentions at key points as you make your way to the runway.

Calling your taxi from the ramp ① is optional, but it's a good heads up for other pilots that you're moving on the airport property.

You must make a separate call for each runway you are about to cross. Refer to the runway by the end in use (Runway 29 in this case) and make the transmission before you cross, then wait a moment in case someone replies—perhaps urgently if they're about to occupy the same piece of pavement.

The call for takeoff ③ is discussed in departures on page 11, but it's here for context. But again, you would wait before moving in case someone replied.

To make it clear you're communicating to other aircraft about aircraft movement, be sure to use the word "traffic" after the airport name (as opposed to

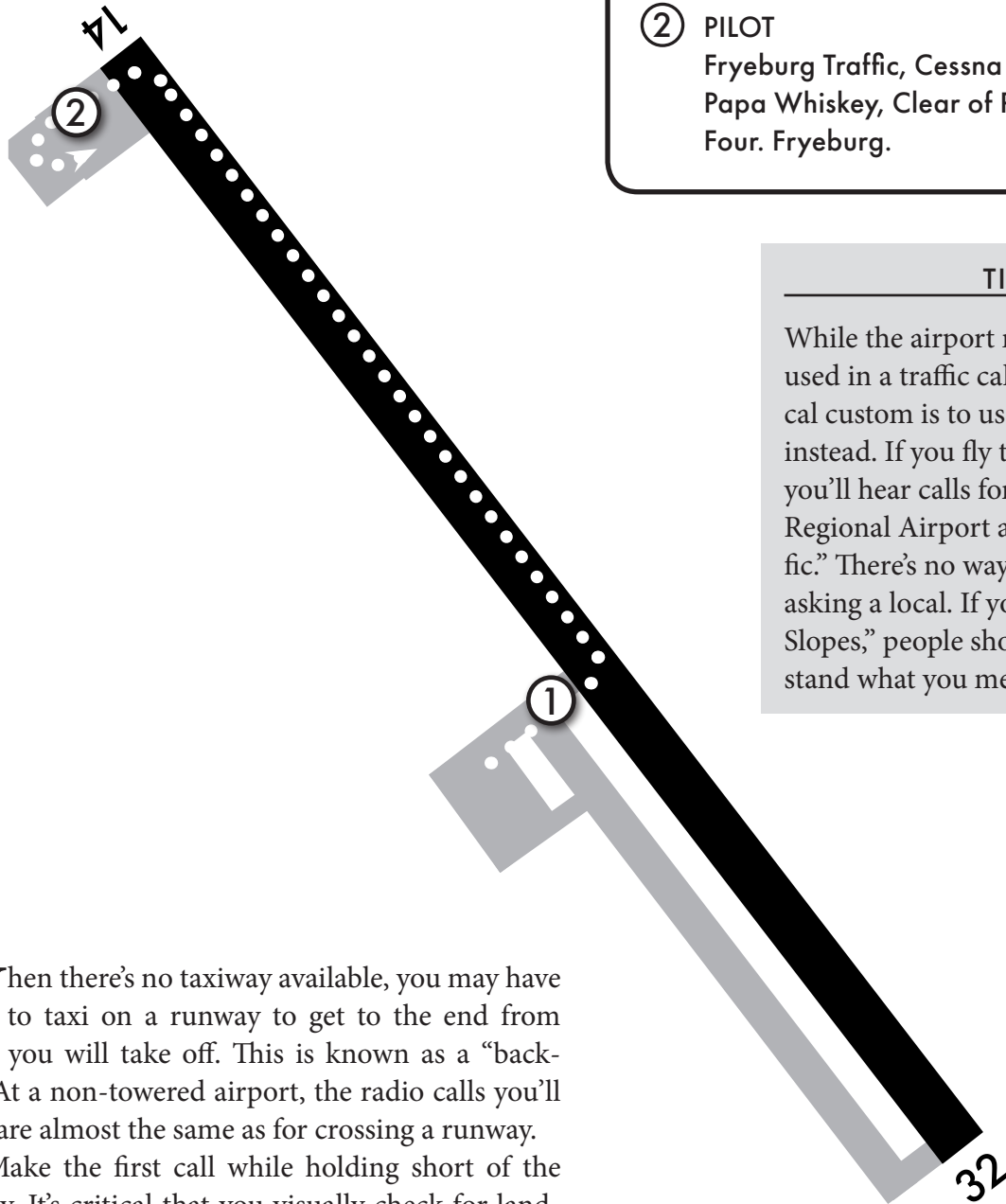
"UNICOM"). To reduce confusion in case nearby airports share the same frequency, repeat the airport name at the end of the call. The format is:

[Airport Name] Traffic, [Aircraft type and/or call sign], [Position and/or Intentions]. [Airport Name].

A truncated N-number is acceptable, so long as it uniquely identifies you. "Skyhawk" might be better than "Cessna" because a Cessna could be a two-seat trainer or a 12-person jet. Even "Yellow Cub" or "Blue Low-wing" is OK if you're the only aircraft around fitting that description.

Announce Back-Taxi on Runway

Eastern Slopes Regional Airport (KIZG)
Fryeburg, ME
CTAF 122.8



① PILOT
Fryeburg Traffic, Cessna Two Three Six
Papa Whiskey, back-taxi Runway One
Four. Fryeburg.

② PILOT
Fryeburg Traffic, Cessna Two Three Six
Papa Whiskey, Clear of Runway One
Four. Fryeburg.

TIP

While the airport name is normally used in a traffic call, sometimes local custom is to use the town's name instead. If you fly to western Maine, you'll hear calls for Eastern Slopes Regional Airport as "Fryeburg Traffic." There's no way to know without asking a local. If you call it "Eastern Slopes," people should still understand what you mean.

When there's no taxiway available, you may have to taxi on a runway to get to the end from which you will take off. This is known as a "back-taxi." At a non-towered airport, the radio calls you'll make are almost the same as for crossing a runway.

Make the first call while holding short of the runway. It's critical that you visually check for landing or departing aircraft (at both ends, especially if the winds are calm), then wait and listen after you announce your intentions. If you don't see any other aircraft, and nobody responds with a conflict, go ahead and taxi onto the runway.

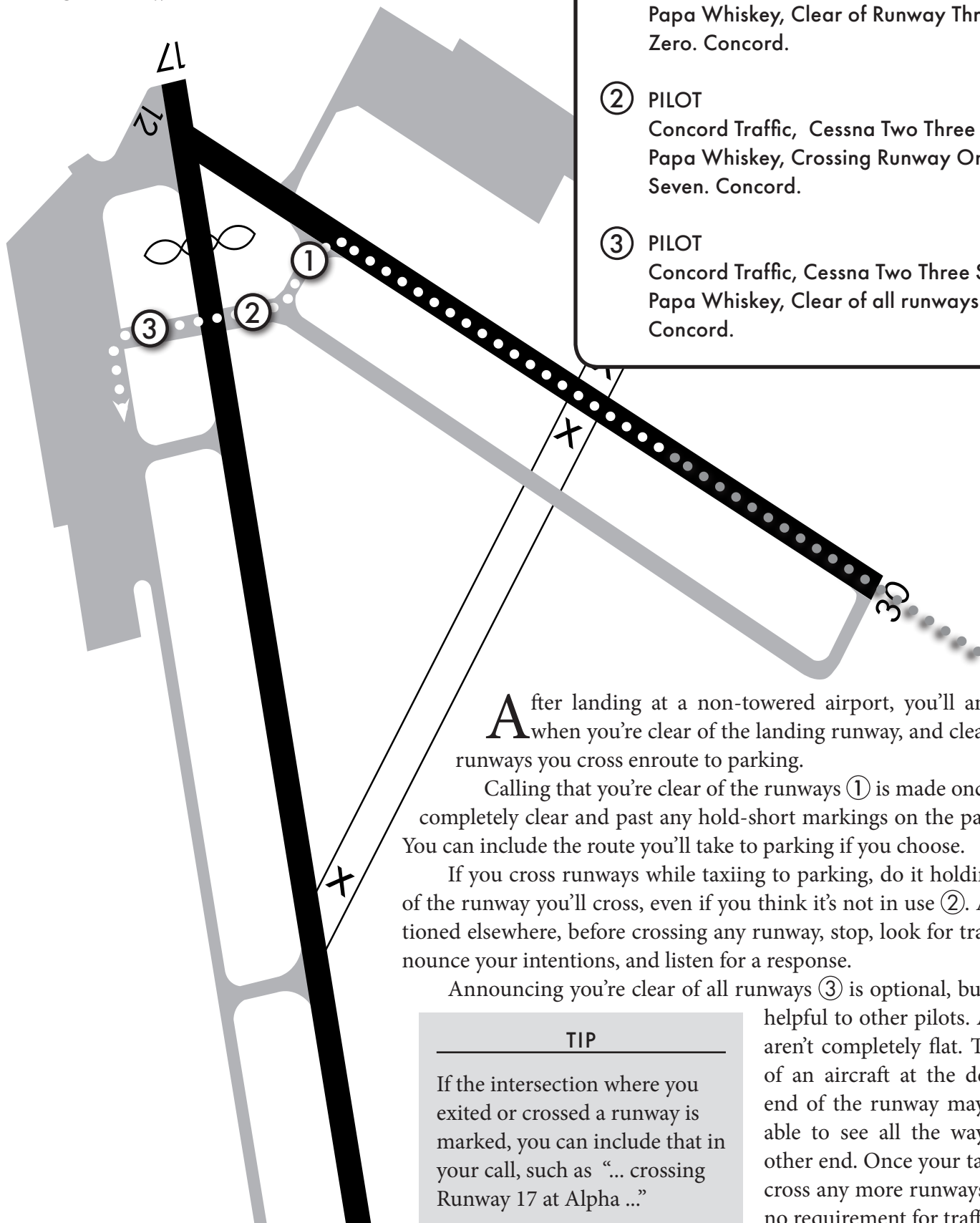
Call ② is optional, but helpful to other aircraft if you pull off the runway to do a run-up. Some runways don't have sufficient space to pull out of the way,

so make this call only if your aircraft is completely clear of the runway.

If you did your run-up before back-taxiing, you might not make call ② at all. You can simply turn around at the end of the runway, and make a call announcing your departure (see page 11).

Announce Taxi After Landing

Concord Municipal Airport (KCON)
Concord, NH
CTAF 122.7



- ① PILOT
Concord Traffic, Cessna Two Three Six Papa Whiskey, Clear of Runway Three Zero. Concord.
- ② PILOT
Concord Traffic, Cessna Two Three Six Papa Whiskey, Crossing Runway One Seven. Concord.
- ③ PILOT
Concord Traffic, Cessna Two Three Six Papa Whiskey, Clear of all runways. Concord.

After landing at a non-towered airport, you'll announce when you're clear of the landing runway, and clear of any runways you cross enroute to parking.

Calling that you're clear of the runways ① is made once you're completely clear and past any hold-short markings on the pavement. You can include the route you'll take to parking if you choose.

If you cross runways while taxiing to parking, do it holding short of the runway you'll cross, even if you think it's not in use ②. As mentioned elsewhere, before crossing any runway, stop, look for traffic, announce your intentions, and listen for a response.

Announcing you're clear of all runways ③ is optional, but can be

helpful to other pilots. Airports aren't completely flat. The pilot of an aircraft at the departure end of the runway may not be able to see all the way to the other end. Once your taxi won't cross any more runways, there's no requirement for traffic calls.

TIP

If the intersection where you exited or crossed a runway is marked, you can include that in your call, such as "... crossing Runway 17 at Alpha ..."

Announce Takeoff and Leaving Area (Non-Towered)

- ① PILOT
Hawthorne Traffic, Cessna Six Papa Whiskey, departing Runway Two, left-downwind departure. Hawthorne.
- ② PILOT
Hawthorne Traffic, Cessna Six Papa Whiskey, turning left crosswind, Runway Two. Hawthorne.
- ③ PILOT
Hawthorne Traffic, Cessna Six Papa Whiskey, turning left downwind, Runway Two. Hawthorne.
- ④ PILOT
Hawthorne Traffic, Cessna Six Papa Whiskey, on left downwind, Runway Two, departing the pattern to the southwest. Hawthorne.

Once you've taxied to the departure runway as described in the non-towered ground ops section (see page 8-9), take one last look and listen for other traffic in the airport pattern. Presuming no one is landing or still on the runway, and no one is talking on the CTAF frequency, the format is:

[Airport Name] Traffic, [Call sign] Departing [Runway name], [Direction of departure] [Repeat Airport Name].

State the airport name at the head and tail of your transmission, because multiple airports might be on the same frequency. Also, state the actual runway number rather than "Taking the active." There's no room for confusion that way. All runways at a non-towered airport are potentially active.

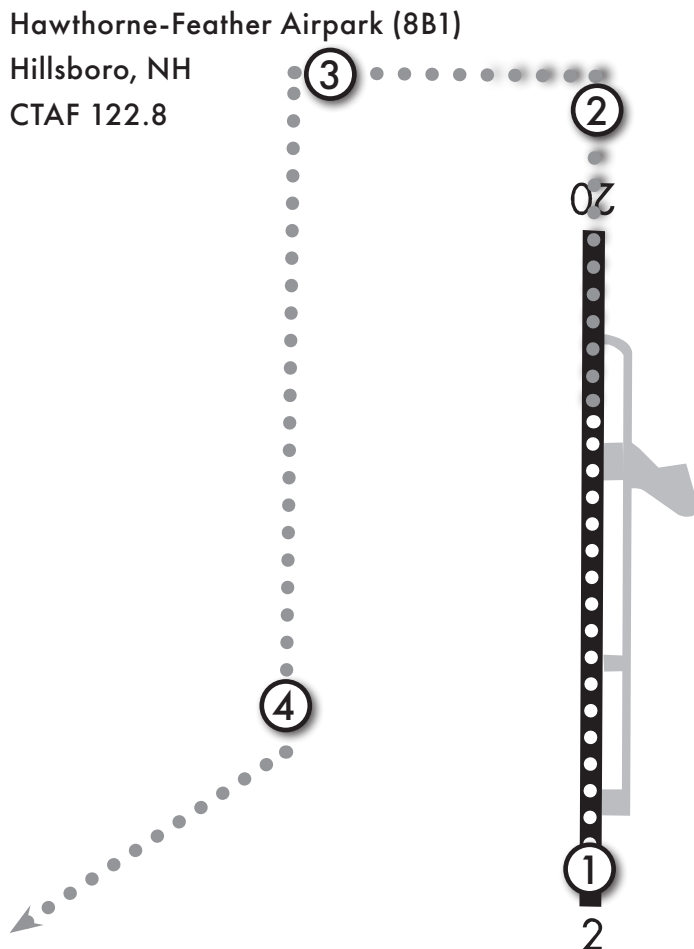
Once you're in the air, state your position and your intentions ② such as, "Upwind, departing straight-out" or "Turning west for a crosswind departure." The idea is to let everyone know where you are and where you're headed. Also let people know when and where you're leaving the pattern ④.

Keep listening on the CTAF until you're about 10 miles out, especially if you hear incoming traffic. It's also polite to pass along any important information you have about the winds, obstacles, etc.

If the non-towered airport you're departing is a satellite of Class D, C, or B airspace (meaning it's in the airspace, but not the primary towered airport), be sure to contact ATC "as soon as practicable" after takeoff. The same goes for any controlled airspace you plan on entering or transitioning through.

TIP

There are many opinions about which departure and arrival patterns are "legitimate" for non-towered airports. For example, some pilots would not turn southwest as shown here until past the airport. Whatever you personally choose, the most important thing in terms of communication is saying where you are and what you plan to do—even if someone else doesn't think you should be doing it that way.



Announce Approaching a Non-Towered Airport (without Overflight)

- ① PILOT
Astoria Traffic, Skyhawk Six Papa Whiskey, ten south of the airport at two thousand. Astoria.
- ② PILOT
Astoria Traffic, Skyhawk Six Papa Whiskey, five south at two thousand. We'll enter a forty-five for left downwind Runway Two Four. Astoria.
- ③ PILOT
Astoria Traffic, Skyhawk Six Papa Whiskey at one thousand five hundred descending for a forty-five for left downwind for Runway Two Four. Astoria.

JUST SAY NO TO ATITAPA

When you fly around non-towered airports, you'll eventually hear it: "Any traffic in the area please advise."

Don't be that pilot.

AIM 4-1-9 (as of this writing) even states, "Pilots stating, 'Traffic in the area, please advise' is not a recognized Self-Announce Position and/or Intention phrase and should not be used under any condition."

These queries on the CTAF must be a longing for the old days when you could ask the UNICOM operator for an airport advisory. For

most airports, those days are gone, and the correct procedure is to get the current weather condition for the airport, listen for traffic announcing their intentions, and work your way into the flow, announcing your intentions.

Don't ask other pilots to do your work for you.



There are many ways to approach a non-towered airport, and plenty of debate about the best way to enter the traffic pattern. However, there's general agreement about what to *say* as you do it: Tell folks who you are, where you are, what you're doing, and what your next move is.

When you're about 10 miles out, announce to anyone in the area where you are ①. It's assumed that you're on your way to the airport. About 5 miles out, update your position, and tell everyone your plan ②.

If you're approaching from the same side as the traffic pattern, it's best to announce that you're on the AIM-approved 45-degree entry to the downwind ③. Once you're in the pattern, you'll make additional calls (see page 14).

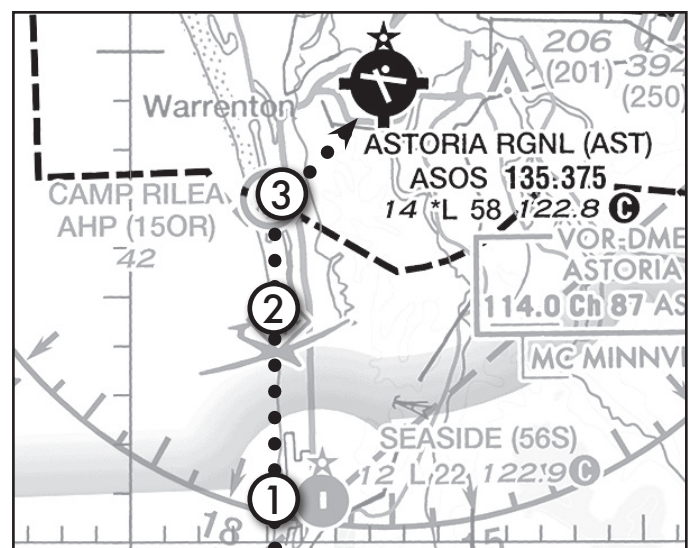
When other aircraft are in the pattern, make it clear where you're joining the flow. If you heard a Piper Cub announcing a turn to downwind when you were on the 45 entry, call ③ could end: "... a forty-five for left downwind, *number two behind the Piper Cub, Astoria.*" Now the Cub pilot knows you'll follow. Similarly, you could add, "... looking for the Piper Cub," to let him know you don't have him in sight yet.

Even if you don't hear anyone else near the airport or in the pattern, make all the calls. Like using your turn signal in a car even when nobody else is present, it develops good habits.

Astoria Regional Airport (KAST)

Astoria, OR

CTAF 122.8



Announce Approaching a Non-Towered Airport (with Overflight)

If you're planning to overfly a non-towered airport, the first two calls are the same: About 10 miles out, announce that you're approaching the airport ①. When you're about 5 miles out, update your position and tell everyone your plan ②.

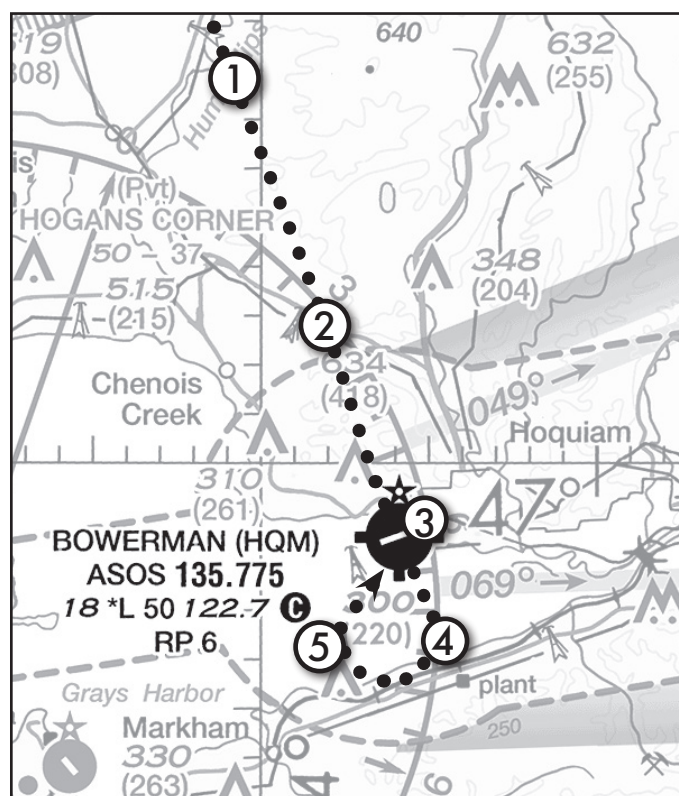
As you pass overhead, that's a great place to make call ③, because everyone knows exactly where "over the airport" is. If you're overflying the field and not landing, that might be the last radio call you make for this airport. If you're crossing overhead to enter the pattern, you can mention that when overhead, or you can make that clear in the next call as you return ④. Depending how tightly you maneuvered, you might make one more call as you're on the 45 entry to the downwind.

Regardless, paint a picture that anyone can understand, and be consistent. If you say you're going to do something, do it. If you change your mind, let everyone know. It's better to be known as "that pilot who talks a lot on the radio" than "that pilot who had a mid-air because nobody knew what he was doing."

Bowerman Airport (KHQM)

Hoquiam, WA

CTAF 122.7



- ① PILOT
Hoquiam Traffic, Skyhawk Six Papa Whiskey, ten north of the airport at two thousand. Hoquiam.
- ② PILOT
Hoquiam Traffic, Skyhawk Six Papa Whiskey, five north at two thousand. We'll be overflying the airport, north to south at two thousand. Hoquiam.
- ③ PILOT
Hoquiam Traffic, Skyhawk Six Papa Whiskey, over the airport, southbound at two thousand. Hoquiam.
- ④ PILOT
Hoquiam Traffic, Skyhawk Six Papa Whiskey, maneuvering south of the airport to enter on a forty five for left downwind for Runway Two Four. Hoquiam.
- ⑤ PILOT
Hoquiam Traffic, Skyhawk Six Papa Whiskey, at one thousand five hundred, descending for a forty-five for left downwind for Runway Two Four. Hoquiam.

TIP

If you cross over the airport, it's best to do it perpendicular to the runway in use and 1000 feet above traffic pattern altitude (TPA), or 2000 feet AGL. Flying perpendicular means you're less likely to conflict with someone climbing out of, or descending into, the pattern. Crossing 1000 feet above TPA keeps you clear of both traffic at the typical pattern altitude, and high-speed traffic (jets and stuff) that commonly use a TPA of 1500 feet AGL. Cross at TPA only if you plan an immediate turn downwind.

Announce Pattern for Landing (AIM Standard for Non-Towered)

- ① PILOT
Wrangell Traffic, Cessna Six Papa Whiskey Midfield Left Downwind for Runway One Zero. Wrangell.
- ② SUPER CUB PILOT
Wrangell Traffic, Super Cub Seven Delta Foxtrot, back-taxi Runway One Zero. Wrangell.
- ③ PILOT
Wrangell Traffic, Cessna Six Papa Whiskey turning left base for Runway One Zero. Wrangell.
- ④ SUPERCUB PILOT
Wrangell Traffic, Super Cub Seven Delta Foxtrot, departing Runway One Zero, left crosswind departure. Wrangell.
- ⑤ PILOT
Wrangell Traffic, Cessna Two Three Six Papa Whiskey, turning Final for Runway One Zero, full stop. Wrangell.
- ⑥ SUPER CUB PILOT
Wrangell Traffic, Super Cub Seven Delta Foxtrot, departing the area to the east. Wrangell.

TIP

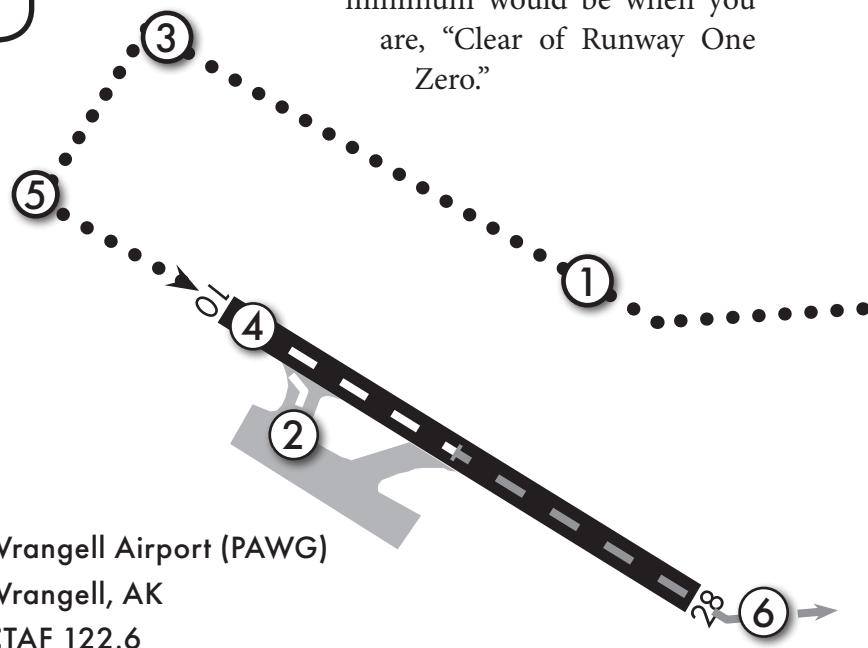
Seeing another aircraft in the air can be tough, so it's best to give as descriptive a position report as possible, without reciting your life story. That's why "mid-field left downwind" is better than just "left downwind." You might also hear, "left downwind abeam the numbers." Announcing "turning left base" or "turning final" has the double benefit of being more specific, and leveraging the fact that a banking airplane is easier to spot.

The linchpin of safety in a non-towered traffic pattern is clear communication. Each pilot must know the position and intention of all other aircraft. Flying a standard traffic pattern—and communicating with standard radio calls—makes that work.

As you enter the pattern, think about how the intentions of other aircraft you hear might affect your plan. If an airplane will be back-taxiing ②, you must leave enough room for that airplane to depart before you land. Your traffic calls ①, ③, & ⑤ keep that pilot aware of your position, and how much time he has to get out of your way. You also need a plan in case it doesn't work out. What if the Super Cub is late starting the takeoff roll? You'll have to go around, but will you side-step to keep his aircraft in sight? He's going left, so you might head right and say, "Cessna Six Papa Whiskey is going around for aircraft on the runway. Side-stepping to the right for the departing traffic."

Your last call before landing should include the kind of landing you will do ⑤. "Full stop" lets anyone who is behind you know that you'll need enough time to stop and clear the runway (especially if you must back-taxi to do it). If you say "touch and go," a pilot behind you might allow less space because you won't be on the runway for long. Saying "low approach only" means you won't even touch down.

Once you land on the runway, you'll make the necessary ground operations calls (see page 10). The minimum would be when you are, "Clear of Runway One Zero."



Announce Closed Traffic (Non-Towered Airport)

Practicing touch-and-goes all alone at a non-towered airport can be one of flying's great joys. Even when you're the only airplane in the pattern, it's important to announce your position as you turn onto each leg. You never know when another airplane (or five) will join you.

Start by reporting that you're departing for "closed traffic" ①. Some pilots prefer to say "for touch-and-goes," or "remaining in the pattern." Any of these phrases inform other pilots you're not departing the pattern, which is the important point.

Make calls as you turn onto each successive pattern leg: crosswind, downwind, base, and final ②-⑤. The call on final should include your intentions for this landing, such as "touch-and-go."

When you've worked up an appetite and decide to head to the airport restaurant, say "full stop" instead of "closed traffic" as you turn onto final. If you decide to venture out of the pattern for a far more expensive burger, add that to your call on final instead: "... touch-and-go, then departing the pattern to the north, Redlands."

TIP

On crosswind, watch out and listen for traffic entering the downwind, either from your right, on a long downwind, or ahead and to your right on the 45 to downwind. (For right traffic, those would be to your left.) Once on base, look and listen for traffic on final, including pilots flying an extended straight-in.

- ① PILOT
Redlands Traffic, Skyhawk Six Papa Whiskey, departing Runway Eight, closed traffic. Redlands.
- ② PILOT
Redlands Traffic, Skyhawk Six Papa Whiskey, turning crosswind Runway Eight. Redlands.
- ③ PILOT
Redlands Traffic, Skyhawk Six Papa Whiskey, turning downwind Runway Eight. Redlands.
- ④ PILOT
Redlands Traffic, Skyhawk Six Papa Whiskey, turning base Runway Eight. Redlands.
- ⑤ PILOT
Redlands Traffic, Skyhawk Six Papa Whiskey, turning final Runway Eight, Touch-and-go. Closed traffic. Redlands.

Redlands Municipal Airport (KREI)
Redlands, CA
CTAF 123.05



Announce Closed Traffic (with Traffic)

- ① PILOT
Jackson County Traffic, Skyhawk Two Three Six Papa Whiskey, departing Runway Three Three, closed traffic. Jackson County.
- ② PILOT
Jackson County Traffic, Skyhawk Six Papa Whiskey, turning Crosswind Runway Three Three. Jackson County.
- ③ WARRIOR PILOT
Jackson County Traffic, Warrior Five Six Seven Niner Yankee, entering forty-five for left downwind Runway Three Three. Jackson County. Cessna on crosswind, just realized we're cutting you off. You want us to make a three-sixty and get behind you?
- ④ PILOT
Negative, we have you in sight. We'll follow you. Skyhawk Six Papa Whiskey.
- ⑤ WARRIOR PILOT
Okay, appreciate it.
- ⑥ PILOT
Jackson County Traffic, Skyhawk Two Three Six Papa Whiskey, turning left downwind Runway Three Three. Jackson County.
- ⑦ BONANZA PILOT
Jackson County Traffic, Bonanza Five Seven Papa, four miles south on the RNAV Bravo instrument approach. Straight in for Runway Three Three, traffic permitting. Jackson County.
- ⑧ WARRIOR PILOT
Jackson County traffic, Warrior Five Six Seven Niner Yankee, turning left base Runway Three Three. Jackson County.

- ⑨ PILOT
Jackson County Traffic, Skyhawk Six Papa Whiskey, midfield left downwind Runway Three Three. Jackson County.
- ⑩ WARRIOR PILOT
Jackson County Traffic, Warrior Five Six Seven Niner Yankee, final Runway Three Three, full stop. Jackson County.
- ⑪ PILOT
Jackson County Traffic, Skyhawk Six Papa Whiskey, turning base Runway Three Three, Jackson County.
- ⑫ PILOT
Jackson County Traffic, Skyhawk Six Papa Whiskey, turning final Runway Three Three, number two, touch-and-go. Jackson County.
- ⑬ BONANZA PILOT
Jackson County Traffic, Bonanza Five Seven Papa, two-mile final Runway Three Three. Number three behind the Cessna turning final now. We'll slow it down. Low approach only. Jackson County.
- ⑭ WARRIOR PILOT
Jackson County traffic, Warrior Five Six Seven Niner Yankee is clear of Runway Three Three. Jackson County.
- ⑮ PILOT
Jackson County traffic, Skyhawk Six Papa Whiskey, upwind, Runway Three Three. Jackson County.
- ⑯ BONANZA PILOT
Jackson County traffic, Bonanza Six Five Seven Papa, final Runway Three Three. Low approach only. We will offset to the east on the go for the Cessna on upwind. Jackson County.

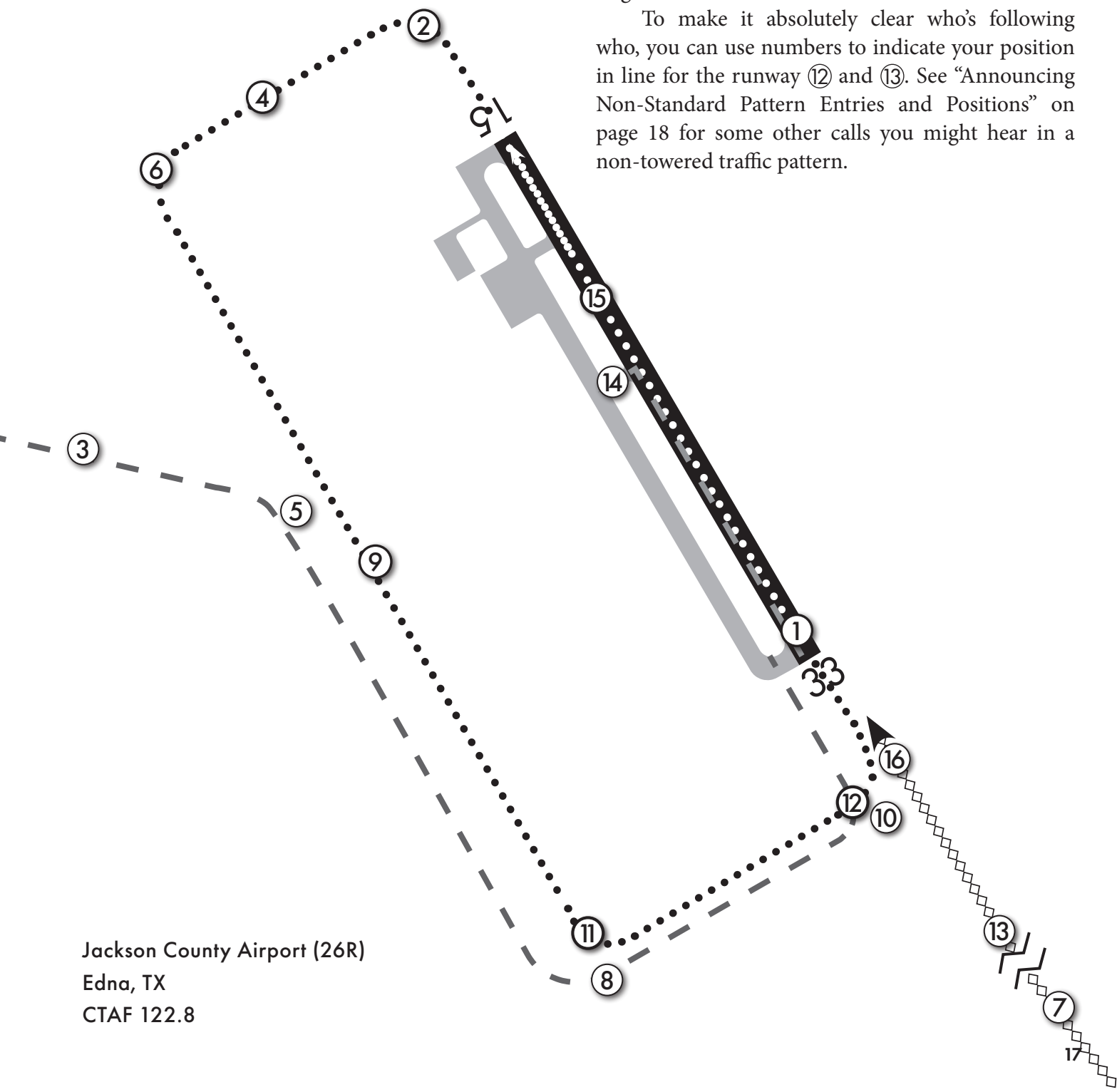
Announce Closed Traffic (with Traffic, continued)

Practicing touch-and-goes at a non-towered airport becomes more challenging—and interesting—with other airplanes in the pattern. You'll practice communication skills, visualization skills, and etiquette, along with your takeoffs and landings.

With other aircraft, it's critical to say you're departing for "closed traffic" every time you take off (1), and to make calls as you turn onto each leg (2, 6, 11, 12). When something unexpected happens, or

there's a conflict, politely work things out (3-5). At an airport with instrument approaches, be aware that airplanes may be descending straight-in and may reference their position by the instrument approach. The instrument pilot in (7) was polite enough to also say his direction and distance for VFR pilots. When a new aircraft announces like this, they might not have heard your previous position report as they just got on frequency. In that case, an extra position report (9) might be in order.

To make it absolutely clear who's following who, you can use numbers to indicate your position in line for the runway (12) and (13). See "Announcing Non-Standard Pattern Entries and Positions" on page 18 for some other calls you might hear in a non-towered traffic pattern.



Jackson County Airport (26R)
Edna, TX
CTAF 122.8

ANNOUNCING NON-STANDARD PATTERN ENTRIES AND POSITIONS

You'll hear all sorts of interesting position reports at non-towered airports. Sometimes these feel like local geography tests: "Wrangell Traffic, Supercub Seven Delta Fox is over the river." When you're new to the area and struggling to find the airport, knowing another aircraft is over some river somewhere with some kind of intention isn't helpful.

Other position reports deviate from the standard with varying degrees of acceptability. Without passing judgment on any of them, here are a few you might hear so you know what they mean.

Right traffic. Traffic patterns are made with left turns unless otherwise marked. Regulations require you fly the pattern as published. The Chart Supplement and the segmented circle around the windsock for Wrangell show right traffic for Runway 28, so the traffic calls will be "Right downwind Runway Two Eight," and "Right base Runway Two Eight." There is no right (or left) for final. It's always just "... final Runway Two Eight." This matters because if one pilot decided to fly Runway 10 and the other decided to fly Runway 28, they'd meet head-on on downwind. Note that while you're forbidden from flying counter to the published pattern at a non-towered airport, a Tower can assign you right or left traffic to any runway as they wish.

Midfield crossing to downwind. This goes by different terms in different places, but the mean-



ing is the same: The aircraft, at pattern altitude, is approaching the downwind leg from the opposite side of the airport, and will cross midfield perpendicular to the runway. Then the aircraft will turn directly onto the downwind leg. This is the preferred method in Canada, and has gained popularity in the U.S. However, some will argue it is counter to recommendations in the AIM.

Straight-in. Pilots approaching the airport already aligned with the landing runway may announce they are landing straight-in. This is exactly what it sounds like: They are on a final approach that's miles long. A polite pilot flying straight-in gives right-of-way to any aircraft already in the pattern. Straight-in is a common occurrence if the aircraft is landing from an instrument approach. (See page 64 for what the radio calls for this might look like. See "IFR Traffic at Non-Towered Airports: What You Need to Know" on page 62 for more.)

Extended downwind, extended base. Usually pilots saying this mean they are entering the pattern on a long version of one of these legs, similar to straight-in being an "extended final."

Short final. This pilot is within a quarter mile or so of touchdown on the runway. This is a helpful call when you think another aircraft is unsure of your exact position on final.

If you're unsure what another pilot is doing or where they are, simply ask them in plain English. "Super Cub at Wrangell, will you start your takeoff roll soon? We're turning final now ..."

ANNOUNCING A GO-AROUND

When you abort a landing and start climbing on the upwind leg, it changes the timing for all other aircraft operating in that pattern. As soon as safety permits, announce your go-around and your intentions: "Wrangle Traffic, Cessna Six Papa Whiskey, going around. Remaining in the pattern. Wrangle."

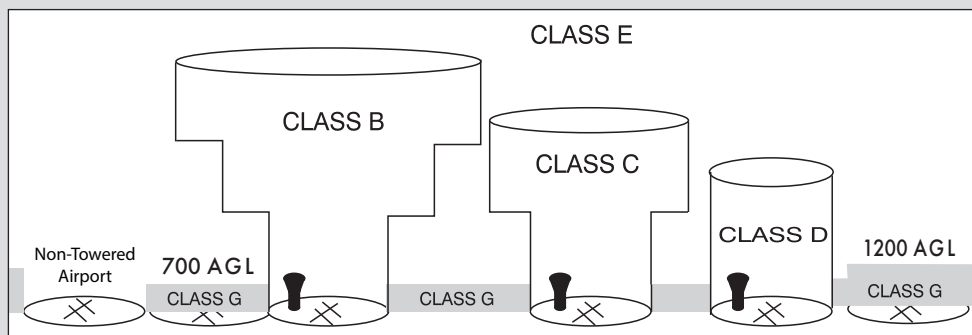
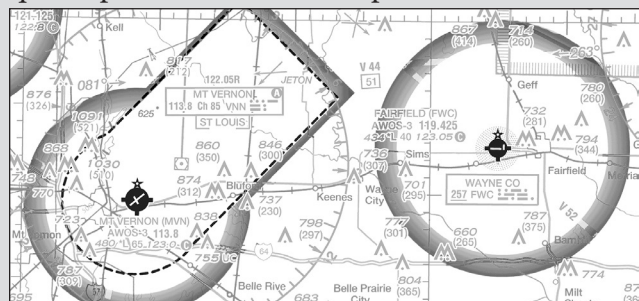
This is equally important at a towered airport. The call can simply be, "Portland Tower, Cessna Six Papa Whiskey, going around." As you climb, Tower will instruct you what to do to keep all the aircraft in the pattern separated.

AIRSPACE REVIEW

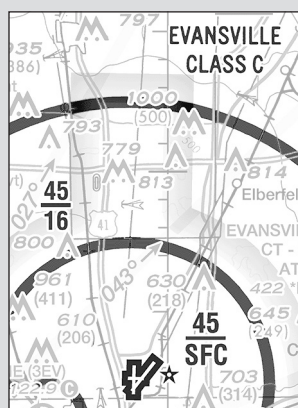
Sectional excerpts show airspaces top-down, but it's worth a quick review looking from the side using your favorite diagram from the AIM. The key for communications is understanding who you talk to, when, and where.

Here are a few essential items. See the FAA's Chart Users Guide to decode all a chart's secrets.

Most non-towered airports have Class G airspace from the surface to 700 feet AGL. That's "uncontrolled," meaning ATC exerts no influence in here. The airspace is marked by a magenta border, feathered on the side where controlled airspace begins at 700 AGL and sharp where controlled airspace begins at 1200 AGL. Occasionally, controlled airspace starts at the surface, and is marked by a magenta dashed line. This means you can request Special VFR to this airport.



For Class D, the blue dashed line shows the lateral limits, and the two-digit number in the square is the top of the cylinder in hundreds of feet MSL, so "29" is 2900 feet MSL. A minus sign means "not including" so "-29" means the airspace top is 2899 feet MSL.



Class B, Class C, and TRSA airspace, show lateral limits, plus top and bottom altitudes. The 45/16 means the top of the Class C is 4500 feet MSL and the floor is 1600 feet MSL. The 45/SFC means Class C from 4500 feet to the surface.

RADIO TIPS AND TRICKS

Yeah, yeah. You know how to use a radio, but there are a couple of useful tips and tricks that sometimes get skipped in flight training.

Tuning frequencies ending in .07. On some radios, you need to pull out a knob that's usually labeled "25kHz" or similar. With that knob out, the frequencies increase half as quickly, but you access twice as many: 122.075 ... 122.100 ... 122.1025, etc.

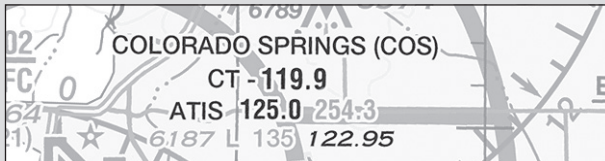
Monitoring the standby frequency. Some radios (GTN 650/750, IFD540/440, SL30, GX60, and

others) let you monitor both the active and the standby frequency at the same time. The standby automatically mutes when there's a transmission on the active. It's perfect for listening to an ATIS/ASOS/AWOS without the frustration of listening to two radios at once using the audio panel.

Quick tune of 121.5. On some radios, holding down a button will automatically make the emergency frequency of 121.5 active. Check your manual; it could be a life-saver.

SECTIONAL CHART DATA BLOCKS

Critical radio frequencies you might need in the air appear on the Sectional Chart in the airport data block. For towered airports, this includes the tower frequency, marked by a preceding “CT,” a labeled ATIS or AWOS/ASOS frequency, and the Unicom frequency in italics.

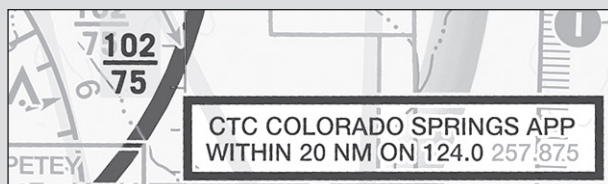


Non-towered airport data shows an ASOS/ AWOS frequency, if there’s a station on the field with transmitting capability, and the Unicom/ Multicom frequency in italics. An inverse “C” after a frequency means it’s the CTAF, which is often shared with Unicom.



At airports with part-time towers, the inverse C usually appears after the tower frequency, meaning the CTAF shares the tower frequency rather than Unicom.

A data block at the periphery of Class B, Class C, and TRSA airspace shows the frequency to call when approaching from that direction.

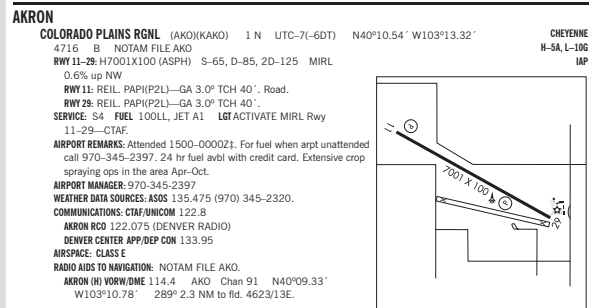


Remote radio stations co-located with VORs appear above the VOR name. RCOs are similar.



CHART SUPPLEMENT COMM DATA

The Chart Supplement (formerly the Airport/ Facility Directory, or A/FD) is one of the best places to find radio information for airports.



AIRPORT REMARKS: Attended 1500–0000Z†. For fuel call 970–345–2397. 24 hr fuel avbl with credit card. Extensive crop spraying ops in the area Apr–Oct.
AIRPORT MANAGER: 970-345-2397
WEATHER DATA SOURCES: ASOS 135.475 (970) 345–2320
COMMUNICATIONS: CTAF/UNICOM 122.8
 AKRON RCO 122.075 (DENVER RADIO)
 DENVER CENTER APP/DEP CON 133.95
AIRSPACE: CLASS E

Weather Data Sources shows any ATIS/ AWOS/ASOS, including a phone number to call and listen, if available. Communications includes all the airport frequencies, plus the best contact frequencies for Approach or Center controllers, and Flight Service via an RCO, if available. It’s also worth reading the Airport Remarks, which will mention any frequencies for pilot-controlled lighting.

For more complex, towered airports, this list can get quite long. The Chart Supplement entry has the added benefit of telling you how to address ATC, such as “Springs Tower,” for “City of Colorado Springs Municipal Airport.”

AIRPORT MANAGER: (719) 550-1910
WEATHER DATA SOURCES: ASOS (719) 637–9696 LI
COMMUNICATIONS: ATIS 125.0 719–596–7040 UN
 BLACK FOREST RCO 122.25 (DENVER RADIO)
 Ⓡ SPRINGS APP CON 120.6 124.0
 SPRINGS TOWER 119.9 133.15 GND CON 121.7
 Ⓡ SPRINGS DEP CON 124.0

Table of Contents for the complete *Pilot-Friendly Guide to VFR Communications*

This manual is organized around communications tasks. Each task is an *action* you take: monitor a frequency, request a departure, and so on during a flight. The actions tell you quite a bit about the situation. For example, you “announce” your intentions at a non-towered airport, but you “request” the equivalent operations at a towered airport.

The tasks are divided up by phase of flight, from the ramp area, through taxi, departure, enroute, and arrival. Closed pattern ops merit its own section, as do the items that don’t happen on every flight. You can think of this list as the 55 most likely VFR communications you’ll take part in while flying, including a few times when you’re just listening.

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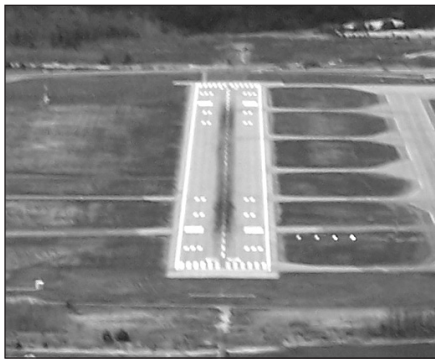
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