

Radio procedure for athletics events

Hand-held radio is an important communications tool at many events; knowing how to use it properly can avoid confusion and contribute to effectiveness. At local meetings, there may be several officials with different roles using the same channel, hence the need for good discipline. At national meetings, each team is likely to use a different channel, with the Meeting Manager and Comp Director monitoring several at a time.

World-wide protocols exist for use of radio on land, sea and air, governed by the ITU Radio Regulations. The following notes provide a quick overview of key points.

What's inside the box?

The radio contains a transmitter and receiver. Both share the power pack and the antenna. Unlike your mobile phone, the same frequency is used for transmitting (Tx) and receiving (Rx). The antenna can't be used for Tx and Rx at the same time, so you have to choose.

This means:

When you transmit, you will not hear anything

- If two sets transmit at the same time, other users will only hear the stronger signal

Most radios have the same essential controls:

- On/off and volume (*This controls the speaker volume; it has no impact on transmissions*)
- Press to Talk (PTT) button (*You must keep this depressed to transmit; pause for a second after pressing it, or your first words spoken may not be received*)
- Channel selection

At major athletics meetings, it's also likely that you'll be provided with an earpiece and remote microphone, so the radio can be clipped into your belt or pocket. You'll be told which channel to use for your team. It's possible that the Comp Director and Meeting Manager may have a radio which scans all the channels in use, rather than having to carry more than one handset around with them (see below).

Before calling:

- Pause and plan what you want to say – be concise and clear
- Check you're on the correct channel.
- Listen – ensure the channel is not in use so you don't block other transmissions. *Remember that most hand-held sets are simplex (when you hold down the PTT button, you cannot receive and others cannot transmit).*

The initial call:

- Press the PTT (Press to Transmit) button. Pause.
- Say "(Identity of the station called) twice, THIS IS (your identity), OVER"
eg "Comp Director, Comp Director, this is Call Room, Over."
This follows the principle of addressing emails or letters. From childhood, we learn to recognise our own name, even in a noisy environment. Conversely, we don't pay attention when other names are called.
- Release the PTT button and listen.
(OVER is short for "Over to you" – the invitation for the station called to reply).

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Subsequent calls:

- Press the PTT button.
- Say the identity of the station called once, followed by your identity. Then give your message, speaking at normal conversation level. Repeat any numbers to avoid doubt. Finish the call by saying OVER (except your final transmission – see below).
- Release the PTT button and listen.

To end the transmission:

- Finish your final message with the word OUT
*This tells other users that your transmission has finished, enabling them to access the channel without interrupting you. You **never** say “Over and Out” as that’s a contradiction in radio protocol.*

If you missed the identity of someone calling you:

- Say “Station calling (your identity), THIS IS (your identity), OVER.”

To call someone using dual watch or monitoring several channels:

- Refer to your working channel in the initial message
eg “Comp Director, Comp Director, this is Track Ref on Channel 9, Over.”

To broadcast a message to all users on a channel:

- If you need to broadcast a message to all users on a channel, say “All Stations, All Stations, THIS IS (your identity), OVER.”

Most common errors:

- Giving your ID before that of the person you’re calling
- Failing to pause after pressing the PTT button
- Speaking too quickly
- Speaking too loudly

Five Golden Rules:

Pause, plan, listen

Start with the ID of the person you’re calling, before your ID

Keep each Tx clear and concise

At end of each Tx, say “Over”. Release the PTT button

End your last Tx with “Out”.