

Common Pilot-ATC Radio Phrases



DISCLAIMER: This is a partial list of pilot and air traffic control (ATC) phrases. A complete list can be found in the Pilot/Controller Glossary. Other important information can be found in the Aeronautical Information Manual (AIM).

Basic Radio Communications

ABEAM

Means an object is 90 degrees to the left or right of the track of your aircraft or another specific location.

ACKNOWLEDGE

If asked to acknowledge by a controller, it means they want you to confirm that you understood their latest instructions.

AFFIRMATIVE

Affirmative simply means...yes.

BACK TAXI

This means to taxi on the runway the opposite direction of the flow of takeoffs and landings.

BLOCKED or STEPPED ON

Used to describe when a radio transmission was not readable due to multiple radio transmissions on the same frequency.

CLEARED FOR THE OPTION

The “option” gives the pilot discretion to choose their action during an approach and landing. This includes touch-and-go, low approach, stop and go, or a full stop landing.

CLEARANCE

Air Traffic Control clearance is an authorization given to an aircraft by air traffic control to proceed under specified conditions, ensuring safe and organized air traffic management. It includes details such as the route, clearance limit, and any necessary instructions for the flight.

CLEARANCE INSTRUCTIONS AND READBACK

Pilots should read back *those parts* of ATC clearances containing altitude assignments, vectors, runway/taxiway assignments as a means of mutual verification. Include the aircraft identification in all readbacks and acknowledgments. It is the responsibility of the pilot to accept or refuse the clearance issued.

CLOSED TRAFFIC

It means successive trips around the traffic pattern in which the pilot does not exit the pattern.

DIRECT

Instruction to fly a straight path to a navigation aid, fix, or point.

EXPEDITE

Quite simply...hurry up. If you are told to expedite some instruction from ATC, it means to comply promptly. However, always remember you should never compromise your safety. If you can't perform the task safely, tell ATC “unable.”



FLIGHT FOLLOWING or TRAFFIC ADVISORIES

Flight following or Traffic advisories are when ATC provides information about other air traffic in your vicinity. However, as Pilot-in-Command you are ultimately responsible for seeing and avoiding other aircraft.

GO AROUND

A procedure when a pilot abandons the approach to land. ATC will direct the pilot which direction to fly.

HOW DO YOU HEAR ME

This is a question that can be asked about the quality of a radio transmission. A good transmission can be answered with “loud and clear,” but a bad transmission can be met with “garbled” or “barely readable.”

IDENT

When a controller tells a pilot to “ident” they are asking them to press Ident button on the transponder.

LAND AND HOLD SHORT OPERATION (LAHSO)

A Land and hold short operations is when the aircraft is instructed to land and stop before a specific location on the runway. As the PIC, you have the authority to accept or reject the LAHSO instruction.

LINE UP AND WAIT

“Line up and wait” is the instruction given to a pilot just before takeoff allowing them to taxi onto the runway, line up for takeoff and wait for further instruction. Line up and Wait can only be authorized by ATC and is not authorized at airports without ATC.

MAKE SHORT APPROACH

This is an abbreviated downwind, base, and final leg of a traffic pattern, used to get on the ground quicker than the standard traffic pattern.



MONITOR

ATC may tell pilots to monitor a frequency. One of the most common examples is after landings, a pilot will be told “taxi to the ramp, monitor ground.” Monitor means switch to switch to the Ground frequency and listen for further instructions.

NEGATIVE

No.

NEGATIVE CONTACT

If you are issued a traffic advisory, and after visually searching for the traffic you still don't see them, you can inform ATC “negative contact on the traffic.”

NUMEROUS TARGETS IN VICINITY

Used by ATC in lieu of individual traffic advisories for each aircraft in the vicinity.

PROGRESSIVE TAXI

Progressive taxi instructions are precise, step-by-step instructions on how to reach a location on the ground. It can be used at unfamiliar airport and want to prevent getting lost.

ROGER

I acknowledge hearing and understanding your transmission. It does not mean ‘yes’.

RUNWAY HEADING

The magnetic heading of the runway.

SAY AGAIN

A request to repeat the previous radio transmission.

STOP AND GO

A landing where after touching down, the aircraft is brought to a complete stop, then a takeoff is performed from the spot in which the aircraft initially came to a stop.



SQUAWK VFR

Means to enter “1200” in your transponder.

TRAFFIC IN SIGHT

Used to inform ATC that you have spotted and will maintain visual separation from the aircraft.

TRAFFIC NO FACTOR

It means that the identified traffic it no longer poses a safety hazard and separation is adequate.

TRAFFIC NO LONGER OBSERVED

It means the controller can no longer see the traffic.

UNABLE

Simply, the pilot cannot comply with a request from ATC, or ATC cannot grant a request from a pilot.

WILCO

It means I’ve heard your transmission and will comply with the instructions.

Student Pilots Radio Identification

Air Traffic Control wants to assist student pilots in acquiring sufficient practical experience. To receive additional assistance while operating in areas of concentrated air traffic, student pilots need only identify themselves as a student pilot during their initial call to a FAA radio facility. EXAMPLE- Aurora Tower, Cessna N12345, student pilot,...

***“Communications is one of the three most important factors in aviation safety.
Not for you, but for others that crave the freedom of the sky.”***

Unknown Aviator

