

Morse Code Secrets

Submitted by Bill Kasperkoski, WB2SXY

An Old CW Op and a New CW Op were out in a fishing boat one day. The New CW Op said "I wish I could operate CW as well as you."

Not saying a thing, The Old CW Op scratched his chin, set down his fishing pole and grabbed the New CW Op by the back of his head and pushed his face underwater outside the fishing boat, and held him there fighting for a long time. After a while he released the New CW Op.

"Why'd you do that?" the New CW Op wailed, gasping for air.

The Old CW Op just leaned back and said, "When you want to learn CW as much as you wanted to breathe; then you will learn CW."

Greetings to our new members, especially those mentioning that they want to (re)learn CW and want to go after their desired level of CW operating skill!

Over learning and instant recognition are critical here.

Learn the Morse character sounds at the speed you will be using them.

Warmest greetings to all the recent new CW ops, this is a good thing you are doing! You may think this email is long, but it is worth it. Here is an updated resend of my learning CW email.

Congrats and welcome to the wonderful world of CW!

[Tongue-in-Cheek-Mode:ON]

One does not DO Morse Code; One BECOMES a Morse Code operator.
Like learning a musical instrument or a sport, Morse Code does not develop character; Morse Code reveals it.

[Tongue-in-Cheek-Mode:OFF]

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You will find many advantages to CW, some of these you may have heard before:

- 1.) Some DX ops in countries you'll want to work use ONLY CW.
- 2.) Some DX ops only work CW in the Extra segments; you have to go after them where they live.
- 3.) "It's only 3am, here!" You can go into stealth mode, with your key(er) and headphones, and not wake up the entire family in the middle of the night.
- 4.) For us in the East and Central-East NA, Lowband-CW-4am is where you will bag the Pacific areas. There are two gray-lines every day.
- 5.) Especially in CW contests, filter in on your target, set TX offset + or - 30 Hz and if you can hear 'em, you can work 'em. (think 100w and wires)
- 6.) If you miss a character, just forget it; don't miss the next several worrying about it.
- 7.) In fact, the mind is a terrible thing. You may be able to miss about 30% or more of a transmission, and still be able to communicate:

"Teh oerdr of lterets in wdors deos not meattr if the frsit and lsat ltreets are in pacle."

Or, in CW:

"Th. ord.r of l.t.ers in w.rds do.s not mat..r if t.e first and l.st let..rs are in pl.ce"

- 8.) Your target SOLID copy speed should be NO LESS THAN 15wpm. You will be able to copy short words and call signs even faster before you start to miss letters.
- 9.) You will learn to recognize your own callsign up to at least 30 wpm. At 30wpm 5NN sounds like (quickly) "Brrr dah-dit dah-dit."
- 10.) Even if you are not interested in DXing today, if you work a 'rarer' country, state or province, get a QSL (card or LoTW) as you may want the verification in the future and that op may be SK then. Ask me how I know this.
- 11.) You will probably find that 40m will be the workhorse band, so plan to get something that will tune on 40.

For people thinking about going for some of the awards, especially the DXCC-type, you will probably find that CW will top the number of countries that you will (eventually) work, followed by digital and then phone.

Also, if you can't run high power (read voice and RTTY) and big antennas, then use a protocol that digs deep!

On the web look up 'The Art and Skill of Radio-Telegraphy' (TASRT) from Wm. Pierpont, NOHFF, a great introductory free ebook that you will find fascinating. Grab it at:

<http://www.tasrt.ca/TASRT/index.html>

THE SECRET to learning Morse Code

Except in contests, about 90% of all CW contacts will be around 13 -> 18 wpm. When starting out, play cd's/tapes/mp3/computer pgm at about 15wpm -- NO slower -- this is your target working character speed anyway -- and spread out the between-character speed to the point you can copy. This is the Farnsworth Method. The Koch method starts with 2 characters using Farnsworth speeds, and then adds new characters to the ones you already know.

HINT - always listen to practice and on air code at a speed slightly faster than u can comfortably copy.

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I know the reason why they did it, but who ever started teaching Morse at 5 wpm should be shot. More aggravation and headaches have been caused by hitting plateaus then by going for the correct working speeds in the first place. Besides, most of us old guys feel very comfortable hand-keying 12 --> 18wpm, and may have problems with straight-keying much faster than that. Think the word "Paris" in 4 seconds.

For me, the daily work commute was a great listening time, but please, copy in your head! First you will just pick out one letter, then another, soon most, which means it's time for faster practice. Try listening occasionally to 20 to 25wpm practice too. Most students prefer learning with the Koch method, which lives inside the Farnsworth method

Check out: lcwo.net, <http://lcwo.net/> this is a cw learning website, pretty useful, remember 15wpm character speed, net speed lower -- what ever u can copy. You will be able to create Morse MP3 practice files from this website too.

Do most of the copying in your head, write down ONLY the important stuff -- call, name, location. When you do write down info from the other op, call, name, club #, etc, use 8 1/2 x 11 paper folded to 4 1/4 x 11 so u only have to move your pencil 4 inches back and forth - saves time * AND * space on your operating table! I use the backs of folded scrap paper.

When you get a good handle on the code, tune around 7115 kHz, the old Novice slow-code band, for exposure to some QRN/QRM and real live listening, contacts and excellent practice, although by this time they may sound too slow; the mind begins to wander.

Use the straight key up to speeds of 12-15wpm and a bug or iambic keyer above that. My radio allows them all to be used at the same time as it has connectors for them. A reason for going to iambic paddles and keyer, cootie or bug: even an SOS on a straight key has nine movements, on a bug five, and a Bencher three, so conservation of energy and less tiring. Remember, some CW clubs want u to use a straight key, cootie, or bug and that is good. The slower speeds require a straight key as your timing will be thrown off too much for iambic/bug keying. Besides, to me, bugs sound pretty poor under about 25wpm, their designed-in bottom limit. Bugs were designed for commercial operators' use up to about 40wpm.

A good introduction on iambic keying methodology starts about half way thru, (pg 6):

<http://www.morsecode.nl/iambic.PDF>

I don't agree with everything that Chuck Adams, K5FO, says but it's still an excellent article.

Punctuation: use the slash / and ? error ... the other guy knows that I made a mistake. The only time I have heard a comma is between city, state, and not recently. I haven't heard a period over the air in the last year.

Pro-Signs AS, SK, BK. If you don't have anything else to say, send this: "c u l om tn x es 73"

Over learning and instant recognition are critical here; I cannot overemphasize that.

Just my opinions; other opinions, suggestions and ideas welcome. What works or does/did not work for you??

Some Morse Code Resources:

http://www.qsl.net/ik0ygj/enu/ZART_r20101008m.pdf (Underscore after ZART)

<http://www.g4fon.net/CW%20Trainer.htm>

<http://www.tasrt.ca/TASRTVersions/TASRT.pdf>

<http://lcwo.net/>

<http://www.morsecode.nl/iambic.PDF>

I have no business with the above listings, just a happy reader/user.

Hope to work you on the air!

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tnx de Bill WB2SXY sk dit dit

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