Radio Etiquette

1. Learn The Lingo

Perhaps the most important tip to know about two-way radio communication is that certain words and phrases should be used when greeting, speaking to, and saying goodbye to another party. That's because some words used in everyday speech don't always transmit clearly over two-way radio waves.

- Affirmative: Yes
- Negative: No
- Roger or Roger That: this means the message was heard and understood
- Say Again: I need you to repeat what you just said
- Stand By: Please wait
- Over: I have finished speaking; often used at the end of a sentence to let the other party know they can speak
- Wilco: I will comply/follow instructions
- Copy or Read: usually used in a sentence to confirm your message was heard/understood, as in "Do you copy me?"
- Out: This is said to indicate the conversation is finished ("Over and out.")

This is all so you can understand each other and nothing is misheard. One thing you always want to do before an OP is create a panic word that you only use in case of extreme emergency. Airplanes transmit "Mayday" three times so it goes "Mayday, mayday, mayday!" and you should always transmit your panic word three times. Since airplanes use mayday, we will need to come up with something else.

2. Pause Before You Speak

It's a good practice to pause for a second after pressing the PTT (press-to-talk) button on your two-way radio before you actually start to speak. This ensures your first word or two won't get cut off, which means you'll have to repeat yourself.

3. Keep Your Communication Short and Concise

Avoid speaking for a long period of time when you're using a two-way radio. It clogs up airways and someone else may have an important callout they need to make.

4. Speak In A Clear, Normal Tone

Try to avoid speaking too fast when using walkie talkies. Speak in a normal tone of voice; quiet speech or shouting may not be heard clearly over the devices. Keep your radio's microphone about 3-5″ away from your mouth so your voice won't sound too loud to other radio users. Remember, be clear and concise. You may have an accent, southern drawl, or other issue that you don't even realize and you could put out a transmission that no one else understands or people need to strain to understand over radio.

5. Assume Others Can Hear Your Conversation

When using two-way radios assume that other people within earshot can hear your conversations, and remember that you don't have exclusive use of the frequency. You never know when someone could be listening with a scanner or your opposition is writing down/recording everything you're saying. Don't say anything over radio that you could not afford a third party hearing.

Keeping number 5 in mind, brings us to point 6:

6. Identify Yourself

Walkie talkies don't always have caller ID and are meant to be picked up and used by anyone, so it's good etiquette to identify yourself when you start your conversation. You also want to address the person you're speaking to before you state your name. Example of this could be:

"Shield Lead 1, this is Shield Rear 2, need backup, over."

or

"Dog, this is Cat, roger wilco, moving to assist, over and out."

However there are rare times it's more prudent to NOT assign anyone on the team a callsign. Depending on where you are, who you know could be listening, how long/secure/risky/remote the OP is, a multitude of factors play into it. It's usually a good idea to assign some but some guidelines can be worked around and ignored if you have good enough justification.