

Sample CW RAG Chew QSO Template for the Beginner

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There nothing to a CW Rag Chew QSO really. Once you have a shiny Call Sign from the FCC it is time to get on the air and have some fun. The saying, “When I get better at CW I will get on the air” should be, “When I get on the AIR I will get better at CW!!!”.¹

The opinions and statements in this “Sample CW Rag Chew QSO Template” are my own with a few additions which are based on over 40 years of amateur radio experience. If there are mistakes or inconsistencies, they are my own. Amateur Radio practices change over time and the suggestions here may not reflect the most current ideas of what is included in a good example of a Rag Chew QSO. There are many web pages that can be referred to as examples of what is necessary or good practice in CW QSOs. Many of these resources have differing opinions of what constitute proper CW etiquette and often reflect geographic location or service.

Within the basic CW QSO format there is prominently “The Big Three”. These includes the RST, NAME, and QTH. These pieces of information form the basic beginnings of a rag chew CW QSO. For a contact to be “counted” in any context only the call signs and signal report are needed to be copied and received. The structure of a Basic CW Rag Chew QSO will include these plus the additional exchanges. In contests and other events there are known special requirements for the contact to “count” as a QSO for points. What we are going to explore is the format basics of a CW Rag Chew QSO.

For the basic QSO, Call Signs, RST, Name, and QTH are the usual exchanges. If a QSO goes past these, additional information is passed along: a station’s RIG, Antenna; the weather; the age of the operator or how long they have been a Ham; and their occupation. These form the next layer of information that is part of a CW RAG chew exchange. Many other topics can and do get discussed during QSO’s. The suggestions and tips presented here should alert you to what to expect

in a normal CW QSO exchange. Prepare to make your first QSO on the air by following this simple template.

For the new Ham or the one just starting out making contacts using CW, stick to the “Big Three”. After you get the basics of a QSO down, consider adding other ideas as your code proficiency and smoothness with sending increases. These will be included in a Sample QSO below. Again, don’t wait to be perfect. GET ON THE AIR. Sending speed is a trap that new operators attempting a CW Rag chew may fall into.

Remember the saying, “Speed Kills”. It applies to your success as a new CW OP on the air as well. Most will tell you they believe they can send faster than they can copy. If your Head Copy speed is 16-18wpm (words per minute) resist the temptation to send at the top end of your copy speed. Even though you have practiced sending at 25wpm and feel confident in sending quickly, what would happen if someone came back to you at speed? The Suggestion is to send at 2-4wpm slower than you can comfortably head copy when starting a QSO.

Consider that your persona, your “face” and reputation on the air is based on your sending to a great degree and your copy ability second. What is known about you is initially only your Call Sign and rhythm and clarity of your sending CW. SPEED is always second. It is far more important to send intelligent copiable code than CW that is fast sloppy with characters of poor formation that run together without spacing between words. When you get on the Bands for a CW QSO, your sending needs to be heard and understood first and foremost. The RST (Readability, Strength, Tone) usually does not include your ability to decipher poor sending but it could. How would the report go, “UR RST is 579 = difficult copy HR from that bug HI HI”. I have never heard that before, but it has been contemplated more than once.

An iambic keyer is no panacea either to good sending. You must practice sending and recording your sending playing it back to yourself to see if you are satisfied. This allows a check that your sending is smooth and intelligible. There are many tools to use to perfect your sending. The best is a CWA Advisor in one of the CWA courses that can be found at <https://cwops.org/>.¹

It is a courtesy to return to a sender at the same speed as they are sending or slower. This is not always what happens. Sometimes, even if a station is sending back to you at too fast a speed for you to copy easily and you request a "PLS QRS" (please slow down), the other station may not be able to or not use to sending slower. Do not assume the other station is being rude or unkind in sending faster than you can copy. There may be other issues that do not allow them to slow down easily. Just finish the QSO politely with a "TNX fer the QSO must run es GN 73 SK de (your call) E E. Move on and try again up the band.

A word about Pro-signs and abbreviations is needed. There are many abbreviations that CW operators use sending shorthand that speed up the exchange of information. The list is long and referenced below.

Part of your skill that is being developed as a CW operator is to evaluate the CW ability of a station you are in contact with. If the station is sending full words and not using any standard CW abbreviations be careful in your sending of excessive shortcuts. Your partner at the other end may not understand that BC is because or that GN is good night. I have been in QSO's where my partner is sending me so many abbreviations that I had a hard time trying to figure out what they were trying to tell me. The tip here is to tailor your sending speed and content to the station you are in QSO with.

The best example of recent memory is what was experienced last week with the use of the prosign BK. The "Break" is most often used with a short exchange or question, not after a 5-minute sending message. After a short question a BK was used; the other station did not respond.... all that was heard was silence. Silence is the other thing that Kills a QSO. The station was not used to or did not understand the use of the "Break", so the question was sent again politely with the call signs followed by the customary K inviting the other station to respond. The other station then answered the question. Know who you are in contact with is the tip.

Here is a short Format for a Rag Chew QSO followed by a more detailed example:

Basic CW Rag Chew Format:

CQ CQ de N7MQ N7MQ K (2 X 2 format or 3 X 2)

N7MQ de KK6M KK6M K (1 X 2 for clarity if weak signals)

KK6M de N7MQ Intro, RST, Name, QTH, HW? KK6M de N7MQ KN

N7MQ de KK6M RRR = TNX RPT STEVE = RST, NAME, QTH = HW? N7MQ de KK6M KN

KK6M de N7MQ final exchange 73 SK KK6M de N7MQ K

N7MQ de KK6M final exchange 73 AR SK N7MQ de KK6M E E

E E (dit dit from a shave and a haircut)

The intro middle and final as well as additional exchanges are further detailed in the QSO that follows. Use the format above to get started and the example below to dig into what to send.

An incidental important point here is if you are going to send the DIT DIT at the end of a QSO, only do so after the other station signs with an SK, not when you are the first one to Sign Clear (CL), It would be improper to do a Wrap up and send DIT DIT as follows:

KK6M de N7MQ final exchange 73 SK KK6M de N7MQ E E (DIT DIT)

N7MQ de KK6M final exchange 73 AR SK N7MQ de KK6M E E

The reason is simple. The “Shave and a Hair Cut” is the final wave goodbye or Elbow Bump. You would not say goodbye to someone and not let them also give their final salutations before you turned around and walk away. That would be impolite. If you use the final the DIT DIT, this is the final wave. Only do so after the final SK.

Detailed Example of a CW RAG CHEW QSO

CQ CQ DE N7MQ N7MQ K

N7MQ DE KK6M K

KK6M DE N7MQ = GA ES TNX FER THE CALL = UR RST IS 599 599 = NAME HR
STEVE STEVE MY QTH IS WY WY = HW CPY? KK6M DE N7MQ KN

N7MQ DE KK6M R GA STEVE TNX FB RPT = RST 579 579 = OP HR ROY ROY ES QTH
LAX LAX = HW? N7MQ DE KK6M K

BK NAME? NAME? BK

KK6M: BK ROY ROY HW? BK

KK6M DE N7MQ = R R R TNX FER THE RPT ES INFO ROY = MY RIG HR IS KX3 RUNS
100W WID AMP ES ANT IS A 4 ELE YAGI UP 76 FT = WX IS WET AND COOL 45F =
HW NW? KK6M DE N7MQ K

N7MQ DE KK6M SOLID COPY STEVE = RIG IS ELECRAFT = K3S RUNS KW ANT IS
LOOP AT 65 FT = WX SUNNY ES WARM 88F = AGE 70 HAM FOR 40 YEARS = SO
HW? N7MQ DE KK6M KN

KK6M DE N7MQ = FB COPY ROY WID QSB = AGE HR IS 50 ES BN A HAM FER 6 YRS
= RECENTLY RETIRED BUT NW BACK TO WORK AS CERTIFIED TOWER MONKEY =
KK6M DE N7MQ K

N7MQ DE KK6M FB STEVE = RECENT RETIRED NURSE ANESTHETIST = LIVING THE
DREAM = HW? N7MQ DE KK6M K

KK6M DE N7MQ FB ROY = GUD CPY WID MORE QSB HR = TNX FER THE INFO ES
QSO = PSE QSL VIA LOTW = 73 ES HPE 2 CU AGN SK KK6M DE N7MQ K

N7MQ DE KK6M = FB STEVE WL QSL LOTW ES TNX QSO GD 73 AR SK N7MQ DE
KK6M E E (or dit dahdah dit dit - a shave and a haircut).

N7MQ: E E (dit dit)

NOTE: you can spell out the abbreviated words anytime based on the experience
of the station you are in QSO with. I find it best to limit the abbreviations with
newer CW operators especially. It is just too confusing and difficult to copy so

many abbreviations when new. Maybe you noticed in the above QSO that N7MQ added extra words while KK6M kept his transmissions streamlined. Both are correct. Steve loves to send and wanted to exercise his new paddle. In this example there are many subtleties that can be explained in detail if there are questions about any specifics.

One note here is the use of AR and SK. There are some OPs that send these prosigns AFTER the call signs (EU especially) while currently they are heard before the call signs. I believe BOTH are OK depending on the organization's protocol you are following. This is a small detail. The important idea here is to know what these prosigns mean when you hear them. I invite you to specifically use the SK at the end of the QSO BEFORE the Call Signs to signify that you are done transmitting.

Bill Leahy KOMP comments:² *“There are certainly differing views on using some of the prosigns like AR and SK. This stems from the operating rules and protocols put out by the International Amateur Radio Union³ (vs the ARRL):*

<https://www.rsq-info.net/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/1-Eth-operating-IARU-ENGLISH-version3-2010.pdf>

for instance, SK should be sent at the END of the QSO (page 25) and the ARRL⁴;

<http://www.arrl.org/quick-reference-operating-aids>

SK	End of contact. SK is sent <i>before</i> the final identification.
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The AR prosign controversy has been debated ad-nauseum and it depends on its interpretation, there are some gray areas in prosign usage, BUT the point is, to USE them. In the case of SK, whether you use it before or after the ID is immaterial. The point is, convey the information that the QSO is ended from the sender's point of view.”²

Also note that the AR is used by one station and not the other at the end of the QSO. The use of AR has been contentious.

Jerry Weisskohl AC4BT comments⁵: *“Please note the use of “AR”. This is a controversial topic between experienced Hams in its proper usage in the CW QSO. “AR” means ‘end of transmission’ but can also mean ‘I have nothing more to say for this transmission’. When I use it, I have always used it at the end of the QSO when signing off. For example, ‘KK6M de AC4BT 73 hope cul AR SK.”* ³

The use of the BT prosign or = is an older practice that is discouraged currently by some organizations, specifically FISTS ⁶. I find that using BT is useful instead of the older use of a period. The BT can be instituted as a pause when the OP runs out of ideas and needs a moment to think. Dead air is a QSO killer so just sending a couple BT’s or a comma is like saying Umm during those ‘at loss for words’ moments. One last mention.

The Q signals usually indicate a phrase not a single word. As an example, the ARRL document “[Communicating with Other Hams](#), indicates that QTH means, “My Location is _____” or QTH? indicates “What is your location? Knowing that, is it meaningful to send, “QTH HR IS _____”. The short answer is no. However, referring to what was said earlier about knowing your QSO partner, sometimes it is helpful to send full words and fill in the QSO with understandable words. Two examples:

KK6M: N7MQ DE KK6M R GA STEVE TNX FER THE FB Report = UR RST IS 579 579 =
OP HR IS ROY ROY ES MY QTH IS LAX LAX = HW COPY? N7MQ DE KK6M K

Shortened version

KK6M: N7MQ DE KK6M R GA STEVE TNX RPT RST 579 579 OP ROY ROY QTH LAX
LAX HW? N7MQ DE KK6M K

My take on this. Both are correct depending on the circumstances. Take your pick and most of all GET ON THE AIR AND HAVE FUN.

References:

[CWops.org](#) ¹

[Bill Leahy KOMP](#) ²

[The International Amateur Radio Union](#) ³

[ARRL Communicating With Other Hams](#) ⁴

[Jerry Weisskohl AC4BT](#) ⁵

[FISTS A Basic CW Operating Manual](#) ⁶

[Making a QSO](#) ⁷

[QSL.NET](#) ⁸

[Electronic-Notes.com](#) ⁹

Addendum

Simple list of must know CW Abbreviations and Prosigns:

Basics of calling

- CQ - calling any station
- de - this is
- K over
- KN over only (to a specific station)
- GM good morning
- GA good afternoon
- GE good evening
- GN good night
- GL good luck

Common Abbreviations:

- es – and
- TNX - thanks
- TU - Thank You
- Fer- for
- Rig – Radio
- ANT – Antenna
- WX – Weather
- BN - Been
- HW? - How do you copy?
- CPY – COPY OR CPY? - HOW DO YOU COPY?
- FB - Fine Business or Good Job

- OM - Old Man, endearing term for Amateur Radio OP
- OP - Operator or Name
- HR - here
- NW - now
- HPE 2 CU AGN - hope to see you again
- 73 – Best Regards (not plural single numbers. Seventy Three is incorrect)

Basic Q signals - full ARRL List [here](#):

- QTH -- my location is
- QSL -- confirmation of information received
- QRS -- please slow down
- QRX -- stand by usually followed by a number to indication how long
- QRT -- finished transmitting and shutting down the station
- QRP -- low power
- QRO -- high power
- QRN -- noise coming from NATURE
- QRM -- Man Made noise
- QRZ -- who is calling
- QSY -- change frequency to

Procedural signals or Pro-Signs

Prosigns are sent as a single sound no separation between characters. As noted by [W2LJ](#), there is some confusion about what is and what is not a prosign! Here is the list I stand by.

- BT - separation of thought or separation of content (=)
- K – go or over
- KN – over only
- BK - break
- AR - end of transmission message
- CL – clear
- SK - end of all transmissions

All comments and suggestions for further revisions can be sent to KK6M (at) ARRL.net. This document was intended as a brief introduction for the new ham wanting to get started operating on the air using CW.