

by Bob Coomler

Even before you sit down to write out a reception report to your latest prize DX catch, there are several things that you should keep in mind. The first thing to remember is that this will likely be your only link with the station, so make it worth both their time and yours. Because you will have to represent yourself through a letter, you will, as if visiting the station personally, want to give the best impression possible. This involves, among other things, a choice of good quality paper. The actual size is not too important, but things like notebook paper and newsprint just won't do the job. Going to the other end of the scale, expensive stationery is certainly not required either. Standard typing paper or the stationery offered by most radio clubs will suffice nicely. Now, learn how to fold a letter in the proper manner. This may seem like an unnecessary suggestion, but you cannot imagine how poor it looks to pull some weird collection of angles and creases out of an envelope. There are two generally accepted methods of folding letters, depending on the size, and it is strongly suggested that you learn and remember them. First impressions may not always be accurate, but they do tend to be lasting ones. Be neat.

Often the DXer has a choice between using a report form printed by his club or writing out a report in letter form. Which is best? This question has been knocking around for a long time, but the answer seems to be weighted slightly in favor of personal letters. Letters tend to be a little more pleasant, informal, and convey something of the writer's personality. They also have the added advantage of being able to supply greater amounts of information that may be needed for some specific item. Letters really don't require that much more to write, and results do seem to be better.

Report forms also have an advantage of their own. The greatest advantage is that the report form allows a concise compilation of facts for quick reading and checking. This will allow more rapid processing by both yourself and the radio station personnel, although the IRCA doesn't normally have any report forms available.

Regardless of which method you settle on, you must now put the information down in some manner. Typing is of course the most highly advised in that it is the neatest and easiest to read of the various possibilities. Second to this would be a neat job of printing, and this is followed by a neat job of long-hand. A messy variety of the above methods along with the use of pencil are both strictly taboo. For those reading this who are still in school, at least one class in typing and drafting is highly recommended. The reason for the former is obvious, but when you finish drafting you will most likely be printing 100% better than when you first went in. Even if you don't print your reports, such things as loggings and taking report information off the air will be neater, and mistakes will be less likely to occur.

Assuming that you will be writing most of your reports in letter form, we will now have a look at what goes into such a report. The following is going to be geared towards letter writing, but in actual practice those using report forms will find much of interest, particularly in just what information to write.

After the usual prefacing of addresses, date, and greeting, the opening paragraph should make mention of the fact that you were pleased to receive the particular station. Go on to state call letters, slogan used (if any - "Boss Radio," etc.), the exact frequency, the day and date, the times the report will cover, and whether the broadcast heard was regular schedule, frequency check, test, or whatever. The time and date should be reported in the time zone where the station is located. If you are unsure what their time zone is (Daylight Saving Time can be particularly bothersome), put the times in your local zone, but make sure this is clearly stated along with a brief explanation as to your confusion.

A log of program information, as you received it, will follow the first paragraph. Information should be listed according to the time it occurred. Your times should be accurate, if possible, to within 30 seconds. In the event your clock is off some, consistency then becomes the watchword. Station personnel will generally overlook and adjust for any time variation providing it is the same down the line.

In listing the program information you submit for verification, it is generally advisable to include 15 to 20 minutes of material. Many DXers will listen for a much longer period and then choose the most fruitful period of time. Shorter periods may sometimes be necessary if you are working under a severe handicap, but always put in as much verifiable information in your report as possible.

Just what this verifiable material is will be the most important part of this writing. This is the basic stuff around which your report will be built, and providing every-

thing else is up to snuff, will either get you a verie or an empty mail box.

Let's start with music. Contrary to the practices of nearly all beginning DXers and many of the older ones, a title listing of all the records heard is of little value in your report. Radio stations do not keep a log of music played, and there is consequently nothing to check your report against. The most important thing to concern yourself with is the type of music. You should make note of when a selection is played, but attempts to identify it exactly are usually not worth the effort. In the cases of stations with record popularity surveys, it is often good practice to enter the name of the song along with its popularity rating, as this is generally peculiar to just that one station.

Announcements, on the other hand, will provide the bulk of verifiable material in your reports. This does not include the deejay patter between records, but rather items that would appear in the station log such as commercials, station breaks, sign-ons, sign-offs, etc. A tape recorder will be invaluable in this respect, but it is not absolutely necessary.

Going after information for your report is somewhat similar to a conchologist searching for shells by sifting through the sand. Much of what you will hear will be like the sand and have no value whatsoever. However, with practice and perseverance items of value can be gleaned from the "filler" material whether it be sand or entertaining chatter. In the category of things that can pop up are the names of announcers, program names, names of other station personnel, and personal appearances of deejays. It is always best to report these names exactly as you hear them. Names and titles are sometimes a little bit off-beat in order to be distinctive, so don't make "corrections" based on what you think is "right."

A true station break will contain both the station call letters and city of license. It will most often occur on or near the hour or half hour. These are generally recorded in the station log, and therefore you should also make note of them in your report. A word-by-word copy of these breaks is usually easy to get due to their brevity, and should be included whenever possible.

The announcements you hear promoting the station (a station break having only call letters fits this category), programs ("Listen for 5 o'clock News with..."), or contests are called promos. These are often logged, and should be noted word-by-word as with station breaks.

Aside from noting that a news broadcast occurred at a specific time, it is not much value to go into their actual content. Of course, if the news comes from a network or something like the "K-NIL Bloody Action Central" it should be put down in your report. If there is a specific local item covered (an event such as the Burning Stump County Fair) you may include this also.

Weather reports are not necessarily part of the news broadcast, and should have their own entry. Like the news, it is not necessary to go into content other than perhaps recording the current temperature or something out of the ordinary (again local) that was mentioned.

Commercials are a gold mine as far as gathering info for a reception report. Actually, in the industry these are called "spots," and it is best to refer to them as such. The common length for spots are 60, 30, 20, and 10 seconds, so you should round off your own timings to these lengths. There are two main types of spots; live and recorded. This latter category can be further divided into tapes and electrical transcriptions, but for the average garden variety DXer (that's us) it is too difficult to tell the difference, and should be left alone. In your report you should mention whether the spot was live or recorded. If there is any doubt in your mind, assume that the announcer giving the time and temperature is live and everybody else is recorded. Frequently, recorded spots will use "live inserts" such as those often heard for used car dealers and supermarket daily specials. If the live portion follows the recording it is known as a "live tag."

A public service announcement is just that, but is commonly abbreviated to PSA. (This is not to be confused with "Pre-sunrise Service Authorization," which is also abbreviated PSA). These are for such things as the National Safety Council, the Army, and so on.

Station sign-ons and sign-offs are generally a good source of material for your reports. These announcements frequently give such information as owners, operating schedules, addresses, and are most often on tape or at least read from a rarely changed script. If the announcement you hear is of sufficient length, contains a fair amount of exacting information, and you are able to get it down almost word-for-word, then you generally have sufficient information for a reception report. Watch this carefully though, and use only such a brief bit of information only when absolutely necessary and nothing else is available. If you can include such an announcement with the normally

required information, you can consider your report quite complete.

Frequency checks fall into a fairly restricted category. About the only real source of reportable material is the announcements themselves. Again, try and get them word - for - word along with accurate timings of the start and end of transmission, tones and/or music, and announcements. Tones are commonly 1,000 cycles or less, and if you recognize the frequency of the tone you should report it. These frequency check announcements are quite often on tape and are not changed very often, so this little bit of information supplied to the station is generally adequate. If it is a long frequency check and the announcements are all similar (or very nearly so), it is not necessary to repeat each of them in your report. Under no circumstances should you send a report based on hearing a tone alone. This is on a par with failing to include return postage, sending reports on post cards, and digging four letter words into your neighbor's lawn. Don't do it.

What was said for frequency checks also holds true for after-hours tests, but with some elaboration. The tests you will likely hear often consist of music, periods of open carrier, and announcements. Because tests are not part of the regularly scheduled program day, the engineer will often put a favorite album of his own on the turntable in order to have something going through the audio and transmitting equipment, and also to help him stay awake. For this reason it is wise to pay closer attention than usual to the music you hear; he will almost always have a good idea of what it was. He will also usually remember his ad libbed announcements, so copy these also. If the transmitter goes off the air for more than a few seconds, state the times in your report.

In gathering information for a report to a station always keep foremost in your mind that you are verifying to the station that you did indeed hear them; they are only going to confirm this. What you are after primarily are little tid-bits that can apply only to the station you are reporting: local advertisers, announcers' names, contests, and the like. Now, read the last two sentences again and memorize those ideals.

Following your log of program material should come a descriptive paragraph dealing with signal strength and quality. The widely used S-meter variety of reporting the signal is insufficient and totally foreign to most radio people and more engineers than you would imagine. Your paragraph should include such information as percent readability, fading, interference from other stations, atmospheric noise, significant local noise, and a rating of the signal strength itself on a poor/fair/good/excellent scale (or a suitable variation). One of the most appreciated pieces of information you can give is comparing the signal of the station to which you are reporting with the signal of another station in their vicinity. After all the above has been completed, you may include an R-S rating, but it is entirely optional. Above all give an honest evaluation of the station's signal. A sharp engineer can usually detect from your program notes whether or not you are bluffing, and you may lose the "points" you hoped to gain by jazzing up the signal strength. Many DXers enter their local weather information at this point in their reports, but it is of no real value aside from passing the time of day, and you are already taking up enough of the station's time without that.

There is a point that must be made somewhere, and here is probably as good a place as could be found. Many of you are probably somewhat proud of your radio knowledge and like to throw around some of the lingo that DXers are forever using. Okay, but reception reports are not the place for it. As one engineer that was contacted put it, "Some of you guys use terminology that I am not familiar with. They don't teach us a lot of fancy phrases at those six-week license schools." So, keep all mention of veries, Q-code (QRM, QSL, etc.), DX, SINPO ratings, and the like out of those reports.

After the signal strength is taken care of, you should briefly discuss your receiving equipment. Engineers are generally interested in such things, so include the scoop on the make and model of your receiver, the number of tubes, and any boosting equipment you have used. Antenna information should include type, direction, length, and height.

At this point you can include a kind of catch-all paragraph for any questions you might like answered or requests for one thing or another. Station personnel will generally be pleased to answer your queries or include coverage maps, program schedules, or surveys, but do not be a pest about it, and keep all requests to a minimum.

Now let's finish the report up. Your closing paragraph should include your request for a verification, thanks to the station in the case of a DX special, mention that return postage is enclosed, and your appreciation to the reader for his time and efforts. In making a request for

a verification, make it quite clear what you are after. No matter what the circumstances are, you should never demand a verie. Instead, politely ask that your reception of the station be confirmed by a card or letter. Finish up with your signature, enclose return postage, and ship it out within 24 hours of reception (if at all possible, and genuine excuses for not doing this are rare). If you have done a good job of reporting, writing, and the stars are right, you should have a verification forthcoming.

Reports are generally addressed to the chief engineer unless you have information that it should go to some other member of the staff. Verie signer lists are generally questionable in value because the radio business is not 100% stable, and people may move on from time to time.

Reports of tentative reception to stations are generally discouraged as they are not the best public relations devices, and may also result in an invalid confirmation. If you do have occasion to send such a report, make sure that it is justified and the station knows fully that it is just a tentative.

As most every DXer is aware, not every report results in an answer. If you have waited at least 3 months with no luck, still desire a verie from the station, and you believe your report was satisfactory, a follow-up is probably in order. The most satisfactory method is to tune in to the station again and send a fresh report, but this of course, is not always possible. In such a case, send a duplicate of your original report along with a short polite note explaining that it did go unanswered and explain how much a verie from the station would mean to you. Be courteous about this at all times as you have no idea of why a reply did not come back your way. Remember, it could have been inaccuracy or messiness on your part.

Sometimes after repeated follow-ups fail, you may want to send along a prepared card that requires only filling out and dropping in the mail by the station. These are not the most desirable things, but it is certainly better than nothing when no other verie appears. Information included usually shows the call, frequency, location, date, time, power, and a place for an authentication signature. Make sure your name and address are on the other side PLUS postage.

Some DXers have been successfully using recording tape for supplementing their reports. Even though it is a bit out of the area of writing reception reports, a few notes are likely in order.

As this practice matures certain basics are developing. One of these is that a tape is used for program data only, and is not an all-inclusive report in itself. In actual practice, the most common use of tapes comes about when the station is audible for very short periods, and a written log is not possible. Tapes are also very useful in the case of tentatives and rare catches where you want to prove reception beyond all doubt to the station. In any case, your tape should be accompanied by an otherwise complete written report.

As in written reports, anything that can distinguish your station from the multitude of others is what you are after: identification, sign-ons, local spots, etc.

A three inch reel with good quality virgin tape is the most desirable. The speed to use is 7½ ips, and record on one side of the tape only. If you have a choice, record on ½ track. Allow about four feet or more of unrecorded tape or leader on each end for threading through tape machines. Keep the volume as high as practical (beware of hum and distortion), and remember that quality of program material is much more important than quantity.

In Summation

1. Be neat.
2. Radio people are generally quite busy, so be concise.
3. Be accurate.
4. Be courteous.
5. Provide program information that could apply only to that station you are writing to.
6. Avoid terms that the reader may be unfamiliar with.
7. Make all efforts to include 15 to 20 minutes of program material.
8. Give a decent signal strength/quality report.
9. Include return postage.
10. Get that report out within 24 hours of reception.

On the next page is a sample report

Sample Report

360 Degree Circle
Herd, Kentucky 40435
September 24, 1975

C124-3-3

Chief Engineer
Radio Station KSIC
South Naknek, Alaska

Dear Sir:

This Monday morning, September 24, 1975, I had the pleasure to tune in to "Ill Radio" K-SIC, 1020 kHz, from 2:00 AM to 2:30 AM South Naknek Standard Time during your regular schedule of broadcasting.

The program details (as received) are as follows:

- 2:00 - "This is the pill-popping voice of Greater South Naknek, Alaska, Ill Radio KSIC, 1020 on your dial."
 - 30 second live spot for Lying Lennie's Used Cars, 6th and Main.
- 2:01 - News from Mutual in New York.
- 2:06 - End of news, then local weather report. Current temperature was -12 degrees. Continuation of the Bob de Haven Show.
- 2:07 - "Going Home" by the Rolling Stones. Number 7 on the K-SIC Diseased Dozen.
- 2:19 - "Ill Radio Bad-Guy" PSA for Marine Corps.
 - Musical jingle with very young girl singers for "Ill Radio."
- 2:20 - Popular music record.
- 2:28 - Name-It-and-Claim-It contest announcement. Phone number given was 935-8608.
 - Popular music record.
- 2:30 - "This is South Naknek, Alaska. This is 1020 kilohertz. This is Ill Radio. This is KSIC."

Your signal was a consistant "fair" with about 90% readability throughout the entire period I was tuned in. Fading was slight and occurred in 5 to 6 minutes cycles. Atmospheric noise was minimal as was the interference from other stations. The only offender was A3Z in Tonga, but they were quite weak and caused little trouble. Your signal, by way of comparison, was approximately equal to that of KDOC in Kipnuk which I believe is only a short distance from you.

My receiver is a 14 tube Otrab Super Flyer which was used in conjunction with a Nader BS Supreme pre-selector. My antenna is a 137 foot Window that is beamed in an east-west direction, and is at an average height of 40 feet above ground.

If it is at all possible I would like to receive a K-SIC coverage map.

If this report checks out against your station logs, I would very much appreciate receiving a card or letter confirming my reception of KSIC. Return postage is included. Thank you for your time and trouble.

Sincerely,

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Sample Log of Program Information
for a Frequency Check Report

- 3:00 - Carrier on.
 - "This is radio station KSIC, 1020 kilohertz, in South Naknek, Alaska on the air for frequency check purposes."
- 3:00½- 1000 cycle tone
- 3:05 - "K-SIC, South Naknek, Alaska testing."
- 3:10 - Announcement.
- 3:10½- Tone.
- 3:15 - "This has been radio station KSIC, South Naknek, Alaska on the air for its frequency check on 1020 kilohertz. KSIC operates with a power of 5,000 watts as authorized by the Federal Communications Commission in Washington, D.C. KSIC now leaves the air to resume its regularly scheduled broadcast day at 6 AM."
- 3:15½- Off.