

Topic of the month: March 2025

Using the Radio Properly

Portmoak has a published frequency of 122.915, which can be used within 10 nm of Portmoak and up to 2,000ft AGL. Using the radio can aid situational awareness (especially around the circuit) and is highly recommended. It is, however, important that a consistent standard and layout of communications is used to avoid confusion.

This basic principle from the CAA fits our frequency well: “Aircraft announce their position and separate themselves from other aircraft in accordance with the Rules of the Air and any published aerodrome procedures. Only carry out a manoeuvre (such as taxiing, take-off or landing) if you are satisfied that it is safe to do so and that it will not bring you into conflict with other traffic.”

General Guidelines

- If possible, **keep the microphone close to your mouth.**
- **Speak clearly and directly into the microphone.**
- **Ensure that the transmit button is firmly pressed** prior to speaking and not released until you have finished.
- **Avoid transmitting when someone else is, including if they have a stuck transmit key** – radios are half duplex and they will not hear you. Wait for them to stop transmitting.
- **Before transmitting, listen for ongoing conversations.** Avoid interrupting a conversation unless absolutely necessary (for example, a launch failure or to say STOP).
- **Avoid unnecessary ‘filler’ words that don’t change the meaning of your message.** For example, “this is”, “and” or “with you” at the start of transmissions.
- **Avoid using voice inflections to imply meaning**, such as to ask question – instead use a questioning word or phrase. For example, “confirm north cable?”
- **When calling the Winch from Base, avoid attempting to confirm radio contact first.** It is unnecessary to call “Portmoak Winch, Base” for every launch and wastes airtime an aircraft in the circuit might need. Instead, pass the glider type and cable immediately in the initial call.

Layout of Communications

Fundamentally, all radio communications follow a very similar basic layout. For your initial call to another station, you should prefix your message with the callsign you’re calling followed by your callsign. For example, “Portmoak Winch, Base, K21, north cable” (where Base is calling Winch). Notice the lack of “this is”, “calling” and “on the” – these are unnecessary filler words, serve no purpose, and only waste airtime an aircraft may need to make a traffic call.

For a short time after communication has been established, your callsign can be omitted if doing so is unlikely to cause confusion and it is obvious you are making the call. For example, "Winch, take up slack" (where Base is calling Winch after providing the glider type and cable).

When you are not addressing a specific station and are instead making a 'blind' transmission to everyone (such as a downwind call), you should call the callsign "Portmoak Traffic."

Portmoak Traffic (blind calls)

At minimum, you should make a blind call to "Portmoak Traffic" when downwind to land. Keep the call short and only include essential information. For example, "Portmoak Traffic, LZS, right downwind, centre field." If you are behind another aircraft, include your position in the sequence (if there is 1 aircraft ahead, include "number 2" at the end of your transmission).

Do not assume that the other aircraft in the circuit have heard you or are aware of your presence.

Portmoak Base

The "Portmoak Base" radio station is unlicensed and does not provide an Air Traffic Service – in simple terms, this means that you must not say anything that could be construed as a clearance or instruction and can only provide information. Note that visiting or overflying aircraft may assume they are talking to a qualified radio operator – **you must use the callsign "Portmoak Base"** to avoid this confusion, and **you must never call yourself anything else**, including "Portmoak Radio" (which has a special meaning and requires a license to use). Do not use the phrase "at your discretion" for the same reason.

If an overflying aircraft calls, they may request 'airfield information' or simply tell you their position and intentions. If they do, provide as much helpful information as you can – this includes the type of launch methods in use, whether the aerotow is airborne, the general likely location of gliders (for example, to the north on Bishop ridge), and essential traffic information. For example, "G-ABCD, Portmoak Base, winch and aerotow active, tug is airborne, caution gliders to the north on Bishop ridge." Remember that they are unlikely to understand (or even know) how we operate.

If there is a launch failure, announce it: "Portmoak Traffic, Base, launch failure in progress."

Aircraft Callsigns

On gliding frequencies, it is common for pilots to use their BGA trigraph as their callsign (for example, "LZS"). This must not be done on any other frequency, such as when talking to an air traffic controller or at an airfield like Balado, as it is likely to cause confusion. On these frequencies, you must use your full G-reg such as "Glider G-CLZS" and abbreviate to "Glider G-ZS" (the first letter and last two letters). You must only abbreviate your own callsign once the other station has abbreviated it and doing so is unlikely to cause confusion.

FRTOL

If you don't have one already, getting a Flight Radio Telephony Operator's License (FRTOL) may be a good idea. Getting the FRTOL will ensure that your level of radio telephony is high and allows you to legally communicate with Air Traffic Service Units and on non-gliding frequencies. Those with an SPL can have it added directly to their license for free. Everyone else can have it issued standalone.

The BGA runs a FRTOL course every year. Nearby flying schools at Balado Airfield and Fife Airport can facilitate both the theory and practical exams, usually for a reasonable price.

Further reading: <https://www.caa.co.uk/media/vfybdqgv/safetysense22-radiotelephony.pdf>

Happy Soaring

Ollie