Basic Pilot Radio & IFR Quick Reference

A concise, authoritative cheat sheet covering standard radio calls, IFR clearances, emergency phrases, lost comms procedures, and pro communication tips. Designed for pilots and student pilots who need fast, reliable reference in the cockpit.

QUICK REFERENCE   RADIO + IFR

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Standard Radio Calls

Master these four core transmissions and you'll handle the majority of everyday ATC communication with confidence and clarity.

1

Taxi Request

"[Airport] Ground, [Callsign], at [Location], request taxi, VFR to [Direction], with information [ATIS]"

2

Takeoff Clearance Readback

"Cleared for takeoff, runway [XX], [Callsign]"

3

Landing Clearance Readback

"Cleared to land, runway [XX], [Callsign]"

4

Frequency Change

"Contact [Next Frequency], [Callsign]"

IFR Clearance — The CRAFT Format

Every IFR clearance follows the same five-element structure. Read it back in order, every time. Internalize CRAFT and no clearance will ever catch you off guard.

The CRAFT Mnemonic

- **C** — Clearance Limit

- **R** — Route

- **A** — Altitude

- **F** — Frequency

- **T** — Transponder

Example Clearance

> *"Cleared to Sydney via radar vectors, maintain 5,000, expect 9,000 after 10 minutes, departure frequency 124.7, squawk 4521"*

Write each element in order as ATC reads it. Read back in the same sequence. Never skip the transponder code.

Emergency Phrases

In an emergency, structure saves lives. Know these two phrases cold — the difference between MAYDAY and PAN PAN determines how ATC prioritizes your call and what resources they mobilize.

🔴 MAYDAY — Immediate Danger

> *"MAYDAY MAYDAY MAYDAY, [Callsign], engine failure, [Location], [Intentions]"*

Declare when life or aircraft is in **immediate danger**. Repeat three times. State callsign, nature of emergency, position, and intentions.

🟡 PAN PAN — Urgent, Not Life-Threatening

> *"PAN PAN PAN PAN PAN PAN, [Callsign], [Issue], [Request]"*

Declare when urgency exists but **immediate danger is not present**. Medical issues, navigational uncertainty, or a precautionary landing all qualify.

Lost Comms — Keep It Simple

📋 **Squawk 7600 immediately** — this signals to ATC that you have lost two-way radio communication.

📻 **Squawk 7600**
Set transponder to 7600 to alert ATC of lost comms immediately.

👍 **Last Assigned Clearance**
Continue flying the last altitude, heading, and routing ATC assigned you.

🔀 **Continue As Filed**
If no assigned clearance applies, proceed as per your filed flight plan.

Squawk 7600

Follow Clearance

Continue as Filed

ATC will clear airspace along your filed route once they confirm 7600. Expect light-gun signals at your destination if approaching a towered airport.

Sound Like a Pro

Professional radio technique isn't about having the perfect voice — it's about structure, deliberate pacing, and disciplined habits. Every experienced pilot started by practicing these fundamentals until they became automatic.

Speak Slower Than You Think

New pilots almost always transmit too fast. ATC mishears, asks for repeats, and confidence drops. Slow down — it sounds more professional, not less.

Don't Rush Readbacks

A readback is your confirmation and your protection. Take a breath, read back every element clearly, and pause if you miss something — then ask.

Clarity Over Speed

One clear, slow transmission beats three hurried ones. ATC appreciates precise language — say exactly what you mean, nothing more.

Confidence Comes from Structure

Memorize the format for each transmission. When you know the structure cold, the words come naturally — even under pressure.

At-a-Glance: Complete Reference Summary

Pin this to your kneeboard. Every critical call, format, and code in one place.

Situation	Transmission Format	Key Reminder
Taxi Request	[Airport] Ground, [Callsign], at [Location], request taxi, VFR to [Direction], information [ATIS]	Always state ATIS letter
Takeoff Readback	Cleared for takeoff, runway [XX], [Callsign]	Include runway & callsign
Landing Readback	Cleared to land, runway [XX], [Callsign]	Confirm runway number
Freq. Change	Contact [Next Frequency], [Callsign]	Read back frequency
IFR Clearance	CRAFT: Clearance / Route / Altitude / Frequency / Transponder	Write it down first
MAYDAY	MAYDAY ×3, [Callsign], [Nature], [Location], [Intentions]	Immediate danger only
PAN PAN	PAN PAN ×3, [Callsign], [Issue], [Request]	Urgent, not immediate
Lost Comms	Squawk 7600 → last clearance → as filed	7600 = no radio

> 🗒 **Remember:** Structure is your best tool. Know the format, and the words will follow — even in high-workload situations.

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