FLY
AVIATION

**Training aid only, not flight instruction.** Review it with your CFI and get their approval before you use it in training or in the airplane. Check every number against the POH and current FAA sources. Last reviewed Nov 7, 2026 against the FAA Chart Supplement effective Oct 29, 2026.

# RADIO CALLS FOR OUR FLYING

Cherokee 140 · Communications · KONZ and the airports we use

## THE BASICS

Every call answers four questions, in order: **who you're calling, who you are, where you are, and what you want.** Think it through before you press the button, then say it once, plainly.

- **Listen before you talk.** Wait for a gap so you don't step on someone, and so you know who else is out there.
- **Short and standard.** Use the words in the Pilot/Controller Glossary. Skip "um", "with you" and "any traffic in the area, please advise".
- **Call sign.** Say your full call sign on the first call: "Cherokee" plus the full tail number. After a controller shortens it ("Cherokee one alpha bravo"), you may use the short form too. Never shorten it first. This guide writes it as **Cherokee [tail]**.
- **Read back** anything that changes what you do: altitudes, headings, altimeter settings, transponder codes, frequencies, runway assignments, and every **hold short** instruction. End the readback with your call sign.
- **If you didn't understand, ask.** "Say again" is always better than guessing.

### How to say numbers

| Item | Example | Say |
|---|---|---|
| Altitude below 18,000 | 4,500 | "four thousand five hundred" |
| Altitude | 1,600 | "one thousand six hundred" |
| Heading | 030° | "heading zero three zero" |
| Runway | 4 / 22 | "runway four" / "runway two two" |
| Frequency | 119.675 | "one one niner point six seven five" |
| Frequency | 123.0 | "one two three point zero" |
| Altimeter | 30.02 | "three zero zero two" |

| Item | Example | Say |
|---|---|---|
| Transponder code | 4521 | "four five two one" |
| Time | 1430Z | "one four three zero zulu" |
| Speed | 90 kt | "niner zero knots" |

- Say "**niner**" for 9 so it isn't confused with "nein". Say the other digits normally.
- Say each digit of runways, headings, codes and frequencies separately. Altitudes use "thousand" and "hundred".

### Phonetic alphabet

| Letter | Word | Letter | Word | Letter | Word |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| A | Alfa | J | Juliett | S | Sierra |
| B | Bravo | K | Kilo | T | Tango |
| C | Charlie | L | Lima | U | Uniform |
| D | Delta | M | Mike | V | Victor |
| E | Echo | N | November | W | Whiskey |
| F | Foxtrot | O | Oscar | X | X-ray |
| G | Golf | P | Papa | Y | Yankee |
| H | Hotel | Q | Quebec | Z | Zulu |
| I | India | R | Romeo | | |

## AT KONZ: AWOS AND CTAF

KONZ has no tower. Pilots announce their position on the CTAF, **123.0**, and everyone sequences themselves. Start and end every call with the airport name so pilots on the same frequency at other fields know which airport you mean.

| What | Frequency |
|---|---|
| AWOS (weather, runway and lighting announcements) | 119.675, or 734-692-9686 |
| CTAF / UNICOM (traffic calls, lighting) | 123.0 |
| Detroit Approach / Departure | 134.3 (FAA listing). The airport also lists 124.05 (west) and 125.15 (east) |

- **Pilot-controlled lighting:** key the mic on 123.0. The usual standard is 7 clicks within 5 seconds for high intensity, 5 for medium, 3 for low. Confirm in the Chart Supplement.
- **Monitor** 123.0 from about 10 miles out until you're parked, and on the ground before you taxi.

### Runway 22, left traffic

| When | Say |
|---|---|
| Before taxi | "Grosse Ile traffic, Cherokee [tail], taxiing to Runway two two, Grosse Ile." |
| Departing | "Grosse Ile traffic, Cherokee [tail], departing Runway two two, (left closed traffic / departing to the south), Grosse Ile." |
| 10 miles out | "Grosse Ile traffic, Cherokee [tail], ten miles south, one thousand six hundred, inbound to land, will enter on the forty-five for left downwind Runway two two, Grosse Ile." |
| Downwind | "Grosse Ile traffic, Cherokee [tail], left downwind Runway two two, (full stop / touch-and-go), Grosse Ile." |
| Base | "Grosse Ile traffic, Cherokee [tail], left base Runway two two, Grosse Ile." |
| Final | "Grosse Ile traffic, Cherokee [tail], final Runway two two, full stop, Grosse Ile." |
| Clear | "Grosse Ile traffic, Cherokee [tail], clear of Runway two two, Grosse Ile." |
| Go-around | "Grosse Ile traffic, Cherokee [tail], going around Runway two two, Grosse Ile." |

### Runway 4, right traffic

| When | Say |
|---|---|
| Departing | "Grosse Ile traffic, Cherokee [tail], departing Runway four, (right closed traffic / departing to the north), Grosse Ile." |
| 10 miles out | "Grosse Ile traffic, Cherokee [tail], ten miles south, one thousand six hundred, inbound to land, will enter on the forty-five for right downwind Runway four, Grosse Ile." |
| Downwind | "Grosse Ile traffic, Cherokee [tail], right downwind Runway four, (full stop / touch-and-go), Grosse Ile." |
| Base | "Grosse Ile traffic, Cherokee [tail], right base Runway four, Grosse Ile." |
| Final | "Grosse Ile traffic, Cherokee [tail], final Runway four, full stop, Grosse Ile." |
| Clear | "Grosse Ile traffic, Cherokee [tail], clear of Runway four, Grosse Ile." |

- Both patterns are on the same side of the field, flown in opposite directions. If you hear someone using the other runway, sort it out on the radio before you get close.
- Say where you are in a way other pilots can picture: "five miles south over the river", not a waypoint name only you know.
- The pattern sheets put every call next to the leg it belongs to: Runway 22 and Runway 4.

## FLIGHT FOLLOWING WITH DETROIT APPROACH

VFR flight following gets you traffic advisories from radar controllers. It's free, it's workload-permitting, and it's worth asking for on every cross-country out of KONZ.

1. **Get the AWOS first.** Know the altimeter and your plan.
2. **First call, short:** "Detroit Approach, Cherokee [tail], VFR request." Wait for them to answer.

3. **When they say "go ahead":** "Cherokee [tail] is a Piper Cherokee, slant golf (or slant uniform), two miles south of Grosse Ile, climbing through one thousand five hundred to two thousand five hundred, VFR to Custer, request flight following."
4. **They give a code:** "Cherokee [tail], squawk four five two one, Detroit altimeter three zero zero two." Read back: "Squawk four five two one, three zero zero two, Cherokee [tail]." Set the code and check the altimeter.
5. **"Radar contact"** means they see you. You are still VFR: you see and avoid, and you stay out of the Class B.
6. **On a handoff:** "Cherokee [tail], contact Detroit Approach one two four point zero five." Read it back, switch, and check in: "Detroit Approach, Cherokee [tail], two thousand five hundred."
7. **At the end:** "Cherokee [tail], radar services terminated, squawk VFR, frequency change approved." Read back, set 1200, and switch to the destination's AWOS and CTAF.

- The equipment suffix after "slant" describes your transponder and navigation equipment. Use the one your CFI and the flight plan use for our airplane.
- If the controller is busy and says "unable", you can still fly VFR. Keep listening on the frequency if you can.

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# CLASS B, C AND D: THE RADIO RULES

## Class B (Detroit)

- You must hear the words **"cleared into the Class Bravo airspace"** (or "cleared through") before you enter. Flight following, a squawk code and "radar contact" are **not** a clearance.
- If they say **"remain clear of the Class Bravo"**, stay out, even if you were about to enter. Turn or descend away and say so.
- No clearance and no answer? Stay out. Plan a route under or around it, like the routes in the KONZ Airport Guide.

## Class C and D

- You need **two-way radio communication** before you enter. It counts when the controller answers **with your call sign**.
- "Cherokee [tail], stand by" means communication is established: you may enter (Class D, or Class C unless told to remain outside).
- "Aircraft calling Jackson Tower, stand by" means it is **not** established. Stay outside.
- "Cherokee [tail], remain outside the Class Delta" means stay out until they call you back.

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# A TOWERED FIELD: JACKSON (KJXN)

Jackson has a tower from 0700 to 2100 local. Outside those hours it's a CTAF airport. The calls below are examples; taxi routes depend on where you park and the runway in use.

| Frequency | Use |
|---|---|
| ATIS 125.725 | Weather, runway in use, NOTAMs. Note the letter |
| Tower 128.475 | Arrivals and departures, the pattern |
| Ground 121.9 | Taxi on the ground |

## Arriving

| Who | Says |
|---|---|
| You (about 10 miles out) | "Jackson Tower, Cherokee [tail], ten miles southeast, two thousand five hundred, inbound for landing with information Charlie." |
| Tower | "Cherokee [tail], Jackson Tower, enter left downwind Runway two five, report midfield." |
| You (read back) | "Enter left downwind Runway two five, report midfield, Cherokee [tail]." |
| You (at midfield) | "Jackson Tower, Cherokee [tail], midfield left downwind two five." |
| Tower | "Cherokee [tail], Runway two five, cleared to land." |
| You | "Cleared to land Runway two five, Cherokee [tail]." |
| Tower (after landing) | "Cherokee [tail], turn left next taxiway, contact Ground point niner." |
| You (clear of the runway, on Ground) | "Jackson Ground, Cherokee [tail], clear of Runway two five, taxi to the ramp." |

## Departing

| Who | Says |
|---|---|
| You (on Ground) | "Jackson Ground, Cherokee [tail], at the ramp with information Delta, VFR departure to the southeast." |
| Ground | "Cherokee [tail], Runway two five, taxi via Alpha, hold short of Runway one four." |
| You | "Runway two five via Alpha, hold short Runway one four, Cherokee [tail]." |
| You (at the runway, on Tower) | "Jackson Tower, Cherokee [tail], holding short Runway two five, ready for departure, VFR to the southeast." |
| Tower | "Cherokee [tail], Runway two five, cleared for takeoff, right turn out approved." |
| You | "Cleared for takeoff Runway two five, right turn out, Cherokee [tail]." |

- **Always read back hold short instructions** word for word. If you're not sure where you're allowed to go, stop and ask.
- "Line up and wait" means taxi onto the runway and stop. It is not a takeoff clearance.

- Never cross a runway without a clear instruction to cross it.
- The taxiway and runway names here are illustrations. Use the airport diagram for the real ones.

## CUSTER (KTTF) AND OTHER NON-TOWERED FIELDS

- KTTF CTAF 122.7, AWOS 119.075. Left traffic on both ends of Runway 3/21.
- Same calls as at KONZ, with "Custer traffic" at the start and "Custer" at the end.
- Several airports can share a CTAF frequency. Always say the airport name.

## FLIGHT SERVICE AND FLIGHT PLANS

Flight Service gives briefings and opens, extends and closes VFR flight plans. Call **1-800-WX-BRIEF** (1-800-992-7433), use 1800wxbrief.com, or use the radio.

- **Opening on the radio:** call Flight Service on a frequency shown on the sectional near you (122.2 is common). "Lansing Radio, Cherokee [tail], on one two two point two, request to open my VFR flight plan, Grosse Ile to Jackson." Give your departure time when they ask.
- **Closing:** after you land, by phone or radio. "Close my VFR flight plan, Cherokee [tail], landed Jackson at one five two zero zulu."
- **If you forget to close it,** search and rescue starts about 30 minutes after your ETA.
- Flight following does not open or close a flight plan.

## EMERGENCIES AND LOST COMMUNICATIONS

### Emergency calls

- **Mayday, mayday, mayday:** distress, grave and immediate danger. Engine failure, fire.
- **Pan-pan, pan-pan, pan-pan:** urgency. A problem that needs attention but isn't immediate danger: a rough engine, a sick passenger, low fuel.
- Use the frequency you're on. If no one answers, use **121.5**. Say who you are, where you are, the problem, souls on board, and what you intend to do.
- Then **aviate, navigate, communicate.** The radio comes after flying the airplane.

### Transponder codes

| Code | Means |
|---|---|
| 1200 | VFR, not talking to ATC |
| 7500 | Hijacking. Never set it by mistake |
| 7600 | Lost communications (radio failure) |
| 7700 | Emergency |

- When changing codes, avoid passing through 7500, 7600 and 7700 on the way.

### Lost communications, VFR

1. **Check the obvious:** volume, squelch, frequency, headset plugs, push-to-talk, the avionics master, circuit breakers. Try the other radio and another frequency.
2. **Squawk 7600.**
3. **Stay VFR and land** as soon as practicable (14 CFR 91.185(b)).
4. **At a non-towered field like KONZ:** fly a normal pattern, keep a sharp lookout, and land.
5. **At a towered field:** stay outside the Class D, find the traffic flow, enter the pattern and **watch the tower for light signals.** Acknowledge in the air by rocking the wings (day) or flashing the landing light (night). Call the tower by phone after landing.

### Light gun signals

| Signal | On the ground | In the air |
|---|---|---|
| Steady green | Cleared for takeoff | Cleared to land |
| Flashing green | Cleared to taxi | Return for landing (steady green to follow) |
| Steady red | Stop | Give way to other aircraft and keep circling |
| Flashing red | Taxi clear of the runway in use | Airport unsafe, don't land |
| Flashing white | Return to the starting point on the airport | (not used) |
| Alternating red and green | Use extreme caution | Use extreme caution |

## COMMON MISTAKES

- **Talking before listening** and stepping on someone else.
- **Too long.** Say what's needed, then stop. Long calls block the frequency.
- **Leaving out the airport name** on a shared CTAF.
- **Unclear position:** "on downwind" with no runway, or a landmark only locals know.
- **Treating "radar contact" as a Class B clearance.** It isn't.
- **Not reading back hold short instructions,** or reading back "roger" instead of the instruction.
- **Wrong radio selected** on the audio panel, then wondering why no one answers.
- **Forgetting to close the flight plan.**

## SELF-CHECK

– **What four things does every call contain, in order?**

Who you're calling, who you are, where you are, what you want.

– **How do you say an altitude of 2,500 ft?**

"Two thousand five hundred."

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**– Detroit Approach says "Cherokee [tail], radar contact." May you enter the Class B?**

No. You need the words "cleared into the Class Bravo airspace."

**– Jackson Tower answers "Aircraft calling, stand by." May you enter the Class D?**

No. Two-way communication needs the controller to use your call sign.

**– Which instructions must you always read back?**

Hold short instructions, plus altitudes, headings, codes, frequencies and runway assignments.

**– Your radio dies near KONZ. What do you squawk and what do you do?**

7600. Stay VFR, fly a normal pattern with a good lookout, and land.

**– A steady red light from the tower while you're in the air means?**

Give way to other aircraft and keep circling.

**– How do you turn on the KONZ runway lights at night?**

Key the mic on 123.0: 7 clicks in 5 seconds for high intensity (confirm in the Chart Supplement).

## SOURCES


- FAA Aeronautical Information Manual, Chapter 4 (Air Traffic Control): radio technique, phonetic alphabet, flight following, light gun signals, lost communications.
- FAA Aeronautical Information Manual, Chapter 2 (pilot-controlled lighting) and Chapter 6 (emergency procedures).
- FAA Pilot/Controller Glossary.
- FAA Advisory Circular 90-66 (non-towered airport operations).
- 14 CFR 91.126–91.131 (airspace communication rules) and 91.185 (lost communications).
- FAA Chart Supplement entries for KONZ, KTTF and KJXN.
- **Frequencies change. Confirm every frequency in the current Chart Supplement before you fly.**


Training aid only, not flight instruction. The POH in the airplane and its placards win: check every number against them, and fly with your CFI.