



# IALA GUIDELINE

## G1132 VTS VOICE COMMUNICATIONS AND PHRASEOLOGY

DRAFT

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# DOCUMENT REVISION

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June 2021	Update of document and inclusion of VTS phraseology. Change of title to "VTS Voice Communications and Phraseology"	Council 73

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

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Effective communication is an essential component for operations in the maritime environment and is achieved when the intended meaning of the sender and the perceived meaning of the receiver is the same.

The use of standard messaging structure and phrases enables us to communicate quickly and effectively despite differences in language and reduces the risk for misunderstanding.

These principles are essential for the safe and efficient communication, noting:

- IMO Resolution *A.857(20) Guidelines for vessel traffic services* [1] states:

“The efficiency of a VTS will depend on the reliability and continuity of communications and on the ability to provide good and unambiguous information”.

- IMO Resolution *A.918(22) IMO Standard Marine Communication Phrases* [2] states:

“As navigational and safety communications from ship to shore and vice versa, from ship to ship, and on board ship must be precise, simple and unambiguous so as to avoid confusion and error, there is a need to standardise the language used.”

- IALA Recommendation *R1012 VTS Communications* [3] states:

“The level of safety and efficiency in the movement of maritime traffic within an area covered by a vessel traffic service would be enhanced by ensuring that VTS communications are harmonised through standard phraseology, procedures and technology for the delivery of precise, simple and unambiguous communications to the bridge team and allied services.”

Standard message structure and phraseology reduce the risk that a message will be misunderstood and aids the read-back process so that any error is quickly detected. Ambiguous or non-standard phrases are frequent causal or contributory factors in marine casualty, incident and near miss situations.

## 2. DOCUMENT PURPOSE

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The purpose of this guideline is to assist authorities implement practices specified in IALA Recommendation *R1012 VTS Communications* associated with ensuring VTS communications are harmonized through the use of standard message structure and phrases to:

- Facilitate clear, concise, and unambiguous communications that are timely and effective.
- Minimise misunderstanding of the intent of messages and reduce the time required for effective communication.
- Mitigate complacency amongst VTS personnel.

### 2.1. RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER DOCUMENTS

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This Guideline, *G1132 VTS Voice Communications and Phraseology*, is associated with Recommendation *R1012 VTS Communications* [3], a normative provision of IALA Standard *S1040 Vessel Traffic Services* [12]. To demonstrate compliance with the Recommendation the provisions of this Guideline need to be implemented.

The guideline will also assist:

- VTS authorities prepare standardized operating procedures for communication and should be read in conjunction with IALA Guideline *G1141 Operational Procedures for Vessel Traffic Services* [13].
- VTS Training organisations incorporate the use of standard VTS phraseology into their course curriculums.

### **3. DOCUMENT STRUCTURE**

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This document consists of three parts:

- Part A sets out the general principles for VTS Communications;
- Part B provides more general guidance on message composition, delivery and interpretation; and
- Part C identifies a number of standard phrases for use in VTS operations.

## **4. PART A GENERAL PRINCIPLES OF VTS COMMUNICATIONS**

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### **4.1. INTERNATIONAL / NATIONAL OBLIGATIONS**

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ITU Radio Regulations [11] require shore-based operators to be appropriately qualified:

“No. 48.1 § 1 Administrations shall ensure that the staff on duty in coast stations and in coast earth stations are adequately qualified to operate the stations efficiently.”

VTS personnel should hold appropriate national qualifications to operate the VHF marine radiotelephony equipment. These qualifications should include operating procedures relating to distress, urgency, safety and routine communications.

### **4.2. LANGUAGE**

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English language should be used for all VTS communications with ships and allied services unless use of an alternative language has been agreed. If an alternative language be used, VTS personnel should be mindful that not all participants may understand what is being communicated.

### **4.3. CONSISTENCY**

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Attention should be given to the correct use of phraseology where applicable to establish efficient, clear, concise, and unambiguous communications.

VTS Authorities should implement appropriate procedures to ensure the consistent and correct use of VTS phraseology in all instances in which they are applicable.

### **4.4. IMPORTANCE OF USING STANDARD PHRASEOLOGY**

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The use of standard phraseology is important in order to avoid:

- The receiver/s not hearing the message correctly. When the standard phrases were adopted, consideration was given to choosing words and phrases that sound distinctly different and therefore cannot be confused under any readability circumstances.
- The receiver/s not understanding the message. This may be due to e.g., using phrasal verbs or other words that are not commonly known. The different levels of knowledge of the English language contributes to this as well.
- Ambiguity, i.e., the transmitting person may mean one thing and the receiving person may understand something else.
- The message having to be repeated, resulting in delay in response and frequency congestion.
- Parts of the message being incorrectly acted upon.

#### 4.5. CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

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Differing cultural experiences and backgrounds may result in different responses to situations. A lack of awareness of these differences could increase the possibility of errors and misunderstandings.

When VTS personnel communicate cross-culturally special attention should be made to:

- Share crucial information with ships to create a common perception of potential dangers, even if this information seems “obvious”.
- Use closed loop (or Read-back) techniques when information may be misunderstood such as the number of persons on-board or information that would benefit others using the VTS area, instructions or advice.



## 5. PART B MESSAGE COMPILATION, DELIVERY AND INTERPRETATION

### 5.1. COMPILING A MESSAGE

The purpose of standard phraseology is to convey information or instructions unambiguously to a specific recipient or recipients. Use of standard format and content will help to achieve this purpose.

Standard phrases are identified in Part C for use in operational circumstances where time may be critical or where misunderstandings might compromise safety, however there will be many situations where such urgency does not apply and no standard phrase has been identified. In such circumstances, plain language<sup>1</sup> or locally adopted phrases should be used following the general guidance on phraseology below.

#### 5.1.1. MESSAGE STRUCTURE

Message structure provides the framework to convey information or instructions unambiguously using a standard format and content structure.

Radio communications messages should have the structure as shown in Table 1:

Table 1 Radio communications message structure

<b>1. Establish contact</b>	(Name of ship/Call sign) this is (name) VTS	
<b>2. Exchange information</b>	a. Message marker	See 5.1.2 Message markers
	b. Phrase(s)	
<b>3. End of message</b>	Over	When expecting a reply
<b>4. End of conversation</b>	Out	When expecting no reply

Note (1): Further information is available in Recommendation *ITU-R M.1171: Radiotelephony procedures in the maritime mobile service (M.1171-0 (10/95))* and IMO Resolution *A.954(23) Proper use of VHF Channels at sea* [4].

Note (2): All relevant ITU regulations for the maritime service are contained in the ITU's *Manual for use by the Maritime Mobile and Maritime Mobile-Satellite Services (Maritime Manual)* [10], which is required to be held on-board every ship.

There are some general rules for construction and content of messages, which should be considered:

- Use message markers.
- Use standard phraseology. Some standard phrases and the message intent are detailed in Part C.
- Avoid unnecessary words (e.g., “what time do you think your ETA is at the pilot station, thank you”, should be: “what is your ETA at the pilot station”).
- Keep the subject, verb, and object as near to one another as possible.
- Use the active form (such as “INFORMATION. Ship BRAVO is overtaking you” instead of passive “INFORMATION. You are being overtaken by ship BRAVO).
- The use of action words (e.g., PROCEED) should come before the condition (e.g., time or location).

<sup>1</sup> Plain language is writing that is clear, concise, well-organized, and follows other best practices appropriate to the subject or field and intended audience.

- Each phrase should contain only one topic.
- A maximum of two message markers and two phrases should be used in one transmission to avoid an overload on the recipient.
- Information must be relevant, as accurate as possible and timely.
- Spell out words using the phonetic alphabet (Section 5.1.3) and use phonetic numbers (Section 5.1.4) as required for the names of buoys, stations, call signs etc.
- Ships should be clearly identified (e.g., by name and call sign) and it may also be beneficial to identify by ship type, for example “container ship Maersk Rotterdam”. In many cases, the message element will be preceded by the identity of the ship about which information is being provided.

### 5.1.2. MESSAGE MARKERS

To facilitate shore-to-ship and ship-to-shore communications, message markers should be used to increase the probability of the purpose of the message being properly understood.

Message markers increase the effectiveness and urgency of VHF communications as required and may help emphasise the content of the message or to ensure that the message will be properly understood. Whilst the use of message markers is not obligatory, their general use is good practice and VTS personnel should apply these depending on the assessment of the situation. Their use is strongly recommended when a degree of stress or urgency exists, when there are language difficulties and when responding to unsafe situations.

There are eight message markers as defined in IMO Resolution A.918(22) *Standard Marine Communication Phrases (SMCP)* [2]. Seven of them are frequently used by VTSs and are explained in more detail below. The message marker should be spoken preceding the message or the corresponding part of the message.

#### 5.1.2.1. Information

This indicates that the following message is restricted to observed facts, situations etc.

<b>VTS</b>	INFORMATION. Water level at breakwater is 4 metres.
------------	---

<b>VTS</b>	INFORMATION. Container Ship Maersk Dusseldorf [position] inbound and will take tugs at Swanson Dock swing basin.
------------	--

Note: This marker is normally used for navigational and traffic information, etc. Information is to assist on-board decision-making process.

#### 5.1.2.2. Advice

This indicates that the following message implies the intention of the sender to influence others and may include a recommendation.

<b>VTS</b>	INFORMATION. Container Ship Maersk Dusseldorf [position] inbound and will take tugs at Swanson Dock swing basin.
<b>VTS</b>	ADVICE. Reduce to safe speed.

Note: The decision whether to follow the ADVICE still stays with the recipient. ADVICE does not necessarily have to be followed but should be considered very carefully.

#### 5.1.2.3. Warning

This indicates that the following message implies the intention of the sender to alert others to potential dangers.



<b>VTS</b>	WARNING. You are approaching shallow water distance 6 cables.
------------	---

Note: This means that any recipient of a WARNING should pay immediate attention to the danger mentioned and confirm the ship's position, course and speed in relation to the warning. Consequences are up to the recipient.

#### 5.1.2.4. Instruction

This indicates that the following message implies the intention of the sender to direct the action of others.

In a VTS area, ships should comply with instructions given to the ship by a VTS unless contradictory safety and/or marine environment protection reasons exist. Masters may be required to report on their actions should they decide to disregard any instruction given by a VTS.

It is important, therefore, that when an instruction is issued by a VTS it has the appropriate regulatory status and authority to do so.

<b>VTS</b>	INSTRUCTION. Remain West of No 1 Buoy until ship X has passed.
------------	--

#### 5.1.2.5. Question

This indicates that the following message is of interrogative character.

<b>VTS</b>	QUESTION. What is your maximum draft?
------------	---------------------------------------

#### 5.1.2.6. Answer

This indicates that the following message is the reply to a previous question. An answer should not contain another question.

<b>VTS</b>	ANSWER. Pilot boarding 0800.
------------	------------------------------

#### 5.1.2.7. Request

This indicates that the following message is asking for action from others with respect to the ship and signals that something is to be arranged or provided. Request should not be used involving navigation or to modify COLREGS [6].

<b>VTS</b>	REQUEST. Wait for pilot at (location).
------------	--

#### 5.1.2.8. Intention

This message marker indicates that the following message informs others about immediate navigational action that is intended to be taken. The use of this message marker is logically restricted to ships and is not to be used by VTS.

### 5.1.3. PHONETIC ALPHABET

The phonetic alphabet is used to distinguish between letters, which sound similar when transmitted over the radio. They are commonly used when transmitting call signs and in cases where a single letter is used to designate something.

Pronunciation of the phonetic alphabet is as shown in Table 2:

Table 2 Phonetic alphabet and pronunciation

Letter	Spelling	Pronunciation	Letter	Spelling	Pronunciation
A	Alpha	<b>alfah</b>	N	November	no <b>vem</b> bar
B	Bravo	<b>brah</b> voh	O	Oscar	<b>oss</b> cah
C	Charlie	<b>char</b> lee	P	Papa	pah
D	Delta	<b>dell</b> tah	Q	Quebec	keh <b>beck</b>
E	Echo	<b>eck</b> ho	R	Romeo	<b>row</b> me oh
F	Foxtrot	<b>fok</b> strot	S	Sierra	see <b>air</b> rah
G	Golf	<b>golf</b>	T	Tango	<b>tang</b> go
H	Hotel	hoh <b>tel</b>	U	Uniform	<b>you</b> nee form
I	India	in dee a	V	Victor	<b>vik</b> tah
J	Juliet	<b>jew</b> lee <b>ett</b>	W	Whiskey	<b>wiss</b> key
K	Kilo	<b>key</b> loh	X	X-ray	<b>eck</b> ray
L	Lima	<b>lee</b> mah	Y	Yankee	<b>yang</b> key
M	Mike	<b>mike</b>	Z	Zulu	<b>zoo</b> loo

### 5.1.4. PHONETIC NUMBERS [NUMERALS]

Numbers are to be spoken in separate digits. For example:

“wun fife zeero” for 150

Pronunciation of numbers shall be in the phonetic form as shown in Table 3 :

Table 3 Phonetic numbers and pronunciation

Number	Spelling	Pronunciation	Spelling	Pronunciation
<b>0</b>	zero	zeero	Decimal	<b>day</b> see mal
<b>1</b>	one	wun	Hundred	<b>hun</b> dred
<b>2</b>	two	<b>too</b>	Thousand	<b>tou</b> sand
<b>3</b>	three	<b>tree</b>		
<b>4</b>	four	<b>fower</b>		
<b>5</b>	five	<b>fife</b>		
<b>6</b>	six	six		
<b>7</b>	seven	seven		
<b>8</b>	eight	ait		



Number	Spelling	Pronunciation
9	nine	niner

Spelling	Pronunciation
----------	---------------

### 5.1.5. POSITIONS

Positions may be passed either in latitude and longitude or relative to a mark. In considering which method is most appropriate, the sender should recognize that the recipient will first have to plot a position passed in latitude and longitude in order to assimilate the information.

When latitude and longitude are used, these shall be expressed in degrees and minutes (and decimals of a minute if necessary), north or south of the Equator, and East or West of zero degrees longitude.

<b>VTS</b>	WARNING. Dangerous wreck reported in position 15 degrees 34 minutes North, 61 degrees 29 minutes West.
------------	--

When the position is related to a mark, the mark should be a defined charted object.

<b>VTS</b>	WARNING. Fishing vessel not under command bearing 120 degrees from Fairway Buoy 1.2 nautical miles.
------------	---

### 5.1.6. BEARINGS

The bearing of the mark or ship concerned is the bearing using 360 degree notation from True North unless otherwise stated. Bearings may be either from the mark or from the ship.

<b>VTS</b>	INFORMATION. Pilot boat is bearing 215 degrees from you.
------------	--

### 5.1.7. COURSE

As a general term, "Course" refers to the intended direction of movement of a ship through the water. Unless it is intended to use this term in a general sense, one of the specific descriptors below should normally be used by VTSs and expressed in 360-degree notation from True North unless otherwise stated. A mariner will not normally use a decimal course (i.e., course 162.3 degrees identified on the VTS Decision Support Tool (DST) would be referred to 162 degrees when stated over the radio). See Table 4:

Table 4 Course descriptors

Course Made Good	That course which a ship has made good over ground, as a result of the effect of currents, tidal streams and leeway.
Course to Make Good	That course which a ship is to make good over ground, after allowing for the effect of currents, tidal streams, and leeway.
Track	The path followed between one position and another.
Planned Track	The path to be followed between one position and another.
Heading	The horizontal direction of the vessel's bows at a given moment measured in degrees clockwise from True North.

Example:

<b>VTS</b>	ADVICE. Course to make good 127 degrees.
------------	--



### 5.1.8. DISTANCES

To be expressed in nautical miles or cables (tenths of a nautical mile), the unit always to be stated.

### 5.1.9. SPEED

To be expressed in knots (nautical mile per hour).

'Speed' refers to speed through the water. If speed over the ground is intended, then this should be stated as 'Speed over the Ground' (SOG).

### 5.1.10. TIME

Time should be given in local time in a 24 hour format. Mariners do not usually add the suffix "hours".

### 5.1.11. GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES

Place names should be those that are on navigational charts and publications.

Where this is not available then latitude and longitude should be used.

### 5.1.12. ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviations will often save time in speech. Many abbreviations are so commonly used in normal speech they are more familiar than the original, unabbreviated form (i.e., radar). Abbreviations in radio transmissions may be used provided that:

- they are quicker and easier to use than the full word (e.g., ETA/ETD in place of Estimated Time of Arrival/Estimated Time of Departure);
- they are sufficiently well known to avoid any confusion and subsequent confirmatory transmissions; and
- if there is any confusion, the full term is readily substituted.

## 5.2. DELIVERING A MESSAGE

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VTS communications should be professional, clear, concise, consistent, and accurate.

Speech and vocal patterns should be adjusted in order to increase the likelihood of mutual understanding regardless of experience or native language.

### 5.2.1. PREPARATION WHEN USING VHF

The proper use of VHF equipment is essential if transmissions are to be successful. In particular:

- VTS personnel should consider the volume and positioning of the microphone.
- It is important to listen on the channel before transmitting to ensure there will be no interferences from another station.
- A brief pause is normally required before starting to speak there may be a delay in transmission after pressing the press to transmit (PTT) button.

### 5.2.2. TONE AND VOLUME

The tone of the voice is crucial for mutual understanding. A message should be supported by the tone of voice used. Research has indicated that how words are expressed is just as important as what words are used.

Transmissions should be sent with a polite tone of calm confidence, and professionalism. VTS personnel must always remain professional even if they receive overly familiar or aggressive transmissions.



The volume of the voice is important. The volume of a transmission should be at a level used for normal conversation. Shouting is unprofessional and causes distortion, whilst speaking too quietly could result in the message not being heard.

### 5.2.3. EMPHASIS ON KEYWORDS

The keyword is the most important part of the message. This should be spoken slightly louder and longer than its neighbouring words to provide emphasis (e.g., WARNING SHALLOW water AHEAD of you).

### 5.2.4. SPEECH RATE

Speech rate is the speed at which a speaker conveys the message. Key points for speech rate are:

- Modulating speech at a slower rate of around 120 words per minute (WPM) is highly recommended for clear and effective communication.
- In emergency situations and in developing unsafe situations, a slower rate of 100 WPM should be applied so important information can be clearly and accurately delivered under high-pressure and cognitively challenging conditions.

In an international environment where people from different linguistic backgrounds speak with their own accents, intonation and pronunciation, it is crucial to maintain an appropriate rate of speech. This increases the likelihood of comprehension and reduces anxiety.

### 5.2.5. WORD GROUPING AND PAUSING

It is generally recognized that the use of four words in a short phrase is best understood by listeners. Therefore, understanding can be enhanced considerably by dividing sentences into smaller groups, or phrases, and by pausing briefly between word groups. VTS personnel can also moderate their speech rates by pausing between each word group.

The effect of word grouping and pausing is important for the following reasons:

- It gives listeners the time to process each pack of information that is delivered.
- It enables speakers to prepare subsequent information for delivery.
- It decreases the use of unnecessary fillers like ‘um, hm, uh, ...’, which hinders mutual intelligibility.

<b>VTS</b>	INFORMATION. (pause) Container ship Stardust (pause) not under command in position (pause) 2.1 nautical miles (pause) southeast from Morrison lighthouse (pause)...
	1 word+(pause)+3 words+(pause)+5 words+(pause)+5 words+(pause) +4 words+(pause)

### 5.2.6. QUESTIONING TECHNIQUES

Information flow within a VTS is paramount. A VTS often gathers and disseminates information based on real time situations within the VTS area. In the computer world the term ‘garbage in, garbage out’ is often used. The same applies to VTS communications, if you ask the wrong questions, you will probably get the wrong answer.

To ensure effective questioning the following techniques should be used:

- Closed Questions
- Open Questions
- Funnel Questions

#### 5.2.6.1. Closed questions

A closed question usually receives a one-word answer, or a short factual statement.



VTS	QUESTION. Do you have any defects?
-----	------------------------------------

VTS	QUESTION. Are you able to see the entrance beacon?
-----	--

### 5.2.6.2. Open questions

Generally open questions deliberately seek longer answers and are the opposite of closed questions. Open questions usually contain terms to elicit further information.

VTS	QUESTION. What is the nature of your problem?
-----	---

### 5.2.6.3. Funnel questions

This questioning technique involves the use of a series of questions. Initially general questions are asked which increase in detail with each subsequent question. With funnel questioning it may be useful to start with one or more closed questions before following up with more open questions.

VTS	QUESTION. Do you see the Princes Inner Buoy?
VTS	QUESTION. Is the buoy lit?
VTS	QUESTION. Is the buoy in the correct position?
VTS	QUESTION. Describe the damage?

### 5.2.7. AMBIGUOUS TERMINOLOGY

Some words in English have meanings depending on the context in which they appear. Misunderstandings frequently occur, especially in VTS communications, and have resulted in accidents.

The use of local terminology should be avoided as this can lead to confusion. For example:

#### MAY/MIGHT

Do not say: "You may/might enter the fairway".

Say: "ANSWER. You have permission to enter the fairway".

#### SHOULD

Do not say: "You should anchor in anchorage Z4".

Say: "ADVICE. Anchor in anchorage Z4".

#### COULD

Do not say: "You could be running into danger".

Say: "WARNING. You are running into danger".

#### CAN

The word "CAN" describes the possibility, or the capability of doing something.

Do not say: "Can you adjust your ETD from the berth by 20 minutes?"

Say: "QUESTION. Are you able to adjust your ETD 20 minutes earlier?"

### 5.2.8. RESPONSES

When the answer to a closed question is in the affirmative or negative, consider the need to repeat the appropriate phrase or add an explanation in the response.

For a response in the affirmative say:



“Yes...” followed by the appropriate phrase.

For a response in the negative, say:

“No...” followed by the appropriate phrase.

Where a message is received and only acknowledgement of receipt is needed, say “received”.

If information requested is not immediately available, advise the caller to “Stand by” and consider the need to indicate the time interval within which the information will be available.

### 5.2.9. CORRECTIONS

When an error is made in a message, say:

“Correction” plus the corrected part of the message.

<b>VTS</b>	Pilot boarding time 1400. CORRECTION - pilot boarding time 1430.
------------	---

### 5.2.10. REPETITION

When communication is difficult, phrases or words may be transmitted twice. If any part of a message is considered sufficiently important, the message should be repeated using the appropriate phrase:

“Repeat” followed by the corresponding part of the message.

<b>VTS</b>	The tide is 1.2m – REPEAT – The tide is 1.2m.
------------	---

When the message is not properly heard, say:

“Say again”.

### 5.2.11. DISTRESS AND SAFETY COMMUNICATIONS

Guidance on distress and safety communications is provided in the ITU publication *Radio Regulations Volume 1 (2020) Chapter VII*. [11] This includes distress (MAYDAY), urgency (PAN PAN) and safety (SECURITÉ) calls and messages and operational procedures for such calls over Digital Selective Calling (DSC) or voice channels.

More detailed guidance is published by IMO in the GMDSS Manual [7] which includes:

- “distress, ... urgency ... and safety .... communications shall have absolute priority over all other transmissions”.
- “All stations which receive a distress alert or a call transmitted on the distress and safety frequencies ... shall immediately cease any transmission capable of interfering, .... set watch on the radiotelephone frequency associated .... and prepare for subsequent traffic”.
- “Coast station ... in receipt of distress alerts or distress calls shall ensure that they are routed as soon as possible to a rescue coordination centre”.

A VTS may receive distress and safety communications (e.g., VTS working channel or VHF channel 16). VTS personnel should, therefore, be trained and practiced in responding to distress and safety communications.

## 5.3. HOW TO INTERPRET A MESSAGE

Interpretation of the message requires skills such as encoding in order to achieve effective communications. Just as confusion can arise from errors in encoding, it can also arise from decoding especially during emergency situations. There could be a number of reasons (internal/external factors) that influence the decoding procedures which should be considered, see Figure 1 below.

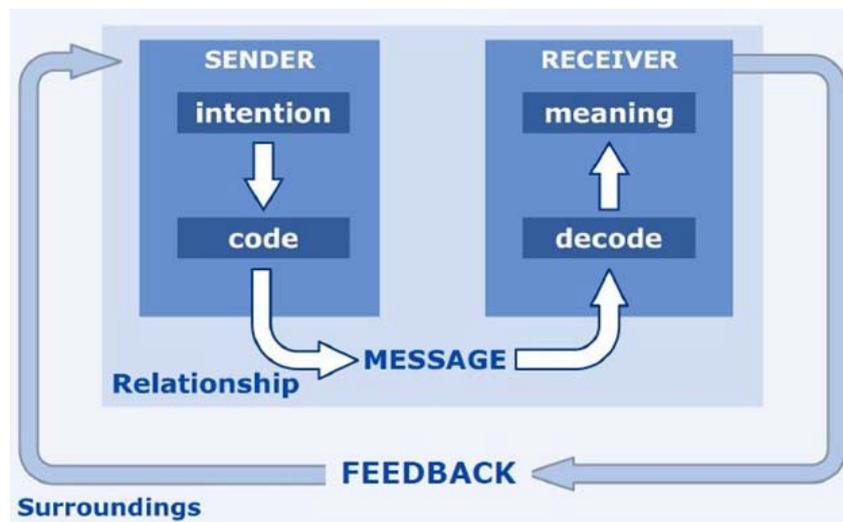


Figure 1 Communication process

### 5.3.1. EFFECTIVE LISTENING SKILLS

Effective listening skills are used to actively understand information provided by the speaker and it can be categorised into the following steps:

#### 5.3.1.1. Listening

Listening involves the reception of sounds from the sender by:

- avoiding interruptions;
- clearing one's mind of distractions; and
- focusing on the speaker.

#### 5.3.1.2. Clarity

The sender and receiver both have a responsibility to ensure that what is said is understood:

- Ask open questions to probe for further detail if required.
- Avoid asking leading questions.
- Avoid coming to conclusions before the sender finishes.
- Be aware of the sender's choice and application of words.
- Encourage feedback through questioning.

#### 5.3.1.3. Interpretation

Interpretation not only requires verification of what the sender has said, but also the understanding of the information given.

Steps to ensure understanding are:

- Communicate your interpretation and verify its accuracy.
- Identify the main issues.
- Do not assume what the sender will say, particularly when receiving routine communications.

### 5.3.2. CLOSED LOOP COMMUNICATIONS [READ-BACK]

Misunderstandings in messages received may include half-heard words or guessed-at numbers. The potential for misunderstanding increases with the complexity of messages and may cause the bridge team to:

- accept inadequate information received; or
- determine for themselves the most probable interpretation.

Closed-loop communication is a technique used to avoid misunderstandings. The sender gives a message, the receiver repeats a received message, or an appropriate part thereof, back to the sender to obtain confirmation of correct reception.

When the receiver correctly repeats the message back, the sender will say “YES” (a response in the affirmative). When the receiver incorrectly repeats the message back, the sender will say “NO” (a response in the negative) and repeat the correct message. If the sender, the person giving the message, does not get a reply back, the sender must repeat it until the receiver starts closing the loop. If there is difficulty in confirming reception of a message, the sender may need to consider rephrasing the message.

Closed-loop communication should be used to confirm that messages from VTS personnel are correctly received and understood. This can be achieved through the following steps:

- The VTS operator requesting the recipient to repeat back important information (for example, repeat advice, repeat instruction or repeat back).
- The recipient reading back or acknowledging in a manner to clearly indicate they have understood the message and will take appropriate action.
- The VTS operator listening to the read-back to ascertain that the message has been correctly acknowledged and take immediate action to correct any discrepancies revealed by the read-back.

VTS	INFORMATION. Berth changed to Elm five, read back over.
SHIP	Berth changed to Acorn five, over.
VTS	NO. Berth changed to Elm five, read back over.
SHIP	Berth changed to Elm five, over.
VTS	YES. Out

### 5.3.3. INFLUENCE OF INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL FACTORS

Some factors such as mental and emotional state, health, culture, working environment, distractions etc. can influence the interpretation of communications. Efforts should be made to minimise their negative effects on communications.

## 6. PART C STANDARD PHRASES

### 6.1. OVERVIEW

The aim of this part is to establish globally harmonised standard phrases for use by a VTS. VTS personnel should be familiar with these phrases, which should be remembered for immediate recall. It follows that the number of standard VTS phrases should be limited to those that VTS personnel can reasonably be expected to learn and this section, therefore, restricts the number of standard phrases to those operational circumstances where it is judged that time may be critical or where misunderstandings might compromise safety.

Message markers have intentionally not been included in the standard phrases as the appropriate message marker may differ dependent on the context.

These standard phrases are not intended to replace or contradict the International Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea, 1972 or special local rules or recommendations made by IMO concerning ships' routing. Neither are they intended to supersede the International Code of Signals [5] nor to replace normal radiotelephone practice as set out in the ITU Radio Regulations. They are designed to complement the phrases in SMCP adapting them as necessary to align with current recognised best practice, recognising that SMCP has not been updated since 2001.

The following typographical conventions are used throughout this part to clearly emphasise the recommended phrases:

- ( ) brackets indicate that the part of the message enclosed within the brackets may be added where relevant;
- [ ] square brackets indicate optional content;
- / oblique strokes indicate that the items on either side of the stroke are alternatives;
- ... dots indicate that the relevant information is to be filled in where the dots occur;
- (*italic letters*) indicate the kind of information requested; and
- ~ tildes precede possible words or phrases which can be used after/in association with the given standard phrase.

### 6.2. GENERAL

#### 6.2.1. GENERIC COMMUNICATIONS

Table 5 Generic communication messages

Message Element	Message Intent
RECEIVED	Information has been received and only acknowledgement of receipt is needed
PERMISSION (to)	Permission for proposed action granted
CHECK	Examine (something) in order to determine its accuracy, quality, or condition, or to detect the presence of something
CONFIRM	Request verification of something: (e.g., permission, instruction, action, information, intentions). For example, <i>Confirm you have received the following...?</i>
CONTACT	Establish communications with...
CORRECTION	A change that rectifies an error or inaccuracy

Message Element	Message Intent
DISREGARD	Ignore last message / Consider that transmission as not sent
DO NOT	Direct or recommend that an activity may not be carried out
(I) REPEAT	I will state my message again
(I) SPELL	Phonetic spelling follows
MAINTAIN	Continue in accordance with the condition(s) specified or in its literal sense, e.g., "Maintain your course"
NO	"No" or "Permission is not granted" or "That is not correct" (response in the negative)
OUT	End of transmission. No answer is required or expected
OVER	End of transmission. An answer is expected
READ-BACK	Repeat all, or the specified part, of this message back to me exactly as received and understood
REPORT	Pass me the following information
REQUEST	A request for information or intentions
SAY AGAIN	When a message is not properly heard, a request to retransmit all or a portion of a transmission
STAND BY	Wait and I will call you
YES	"Yes" or "Permission is granted" or "That is correct" (response in the affirmative)

### 6.2.2. RADIO CHECKS

General phrases used when replying to radio check requests are given in Table 6:

Table 6 Radio check messages

Message Element	Message Intent
HOW DO YOU READ ME	Question to the ship on the clarity of the VTS signal strength
READ YOU LOUD AND CLEAR	Information that the radio check was received loud and clear
I AM NOT ABLE TO READ YOU	Information that the message had not been received and understood

### 6.2.3. VTS OPERATIONAL STATUS

Table 7 VTS Operational status messages

Message Element	Message Intent
(VTS name) OPERATING AT REDUCED CAPACITY UNTIL (time) [details]	Notification that the VTS is operating at reduced capacity [due to a given reason]
VTS OPERATIONS SUSPENDED DUE TO (details) [UNTIL]	VTS operations are interrupted [due to a given reason (e.g., protest action, strike, emergency situation)]

## 6.2.4. REQUESTING REPORTS

Table 8 Requesting reports messages

Message Element	Message Intent
REPORT [AGAIN] AT (location or time)	Request to report [again] when the ship has reached a specified location or time
REPORT WHEN LEAVING (location / VTS area)	Request to report when the ship has left the VTS area or a particular location
REPORT WHEN PASSING (location)	Request to report when the ship is passing or has passed the specified location
REPORT ETA AT (position)	Request to report the estimated time of arrival at the specified position

## 6.2.5. CALL REQUESTS

Table 9 Call requests messages

Message Element	Message Intent
CALL (VTS/allied service) [AT (time/position)] ON (channel)	Request to contact [at the specified time or position] the VTS or allied service on a VHF channel
CALL AGAIN (event/time)	Request for the ship to call the VTS again when a specified event occurs (e.g., after last line, when pilot boards) or in a specified time period

## 6.2.6. USE OF OTHER VHF CHANNELS

Table 10 Use of other VHF channels messages

Message Element	Message Intent
CHANGE TO CHANNEL (channel ID)	Request to change VHF channels
MAINTAIN WATCH ON (channel ID)	Request for the ship to maintain a listening watch on a specified VHF channel

## 6.2.7. REPORTING OF SHIP IDENTIFICATION AND PARTICULARS

When entering the VTS area a ship's identity and particulars should have been passed in advance. If not, these may need to be clarified through an instruction to report or a question asking for specific details.

The message marker QUESTION would normally be used prior to these message elements. See Table 11

Table 11 Reporting of ship identification and particulars messages

Message Element	Message Intent
WHAT IS YOUR (details)	Request specific information (such as last port of call, route, maximum draft etc.)
DO YOU HAVE (details)	Request for specific information (e.g., Pilot Exemption Certificate)

## 6.2.8. SPEED

Speed when unqualified refers to speed through the water. If speed over the ground is intended, then this should be qualified with Speed over the Ground (SOG). See Table 12

Table 12 Speed messages

Message Element	Message Intent
DO NOT EXCEED (speed)	Instruction that a specified speed is not to be exceeded
MAINTAIN SPEED	Keep a specified speed
REDUCE SPEED	Instruction or advice for the present speed to be reduced
PROCEED AT SAFE SPEED	Ship to proceed at a safe speed
SPEED LIMIT (speed) [IN (area of)]	Notifying a ship of a speed limit in a specified area
WHAT IS YOUR MINIMUM SAFE SPEED	Request to a ship to report its minimum safe speed
WHAT IS YOUR SPEED	Request to report the ship present speed

### 6.2.9. ENGINE

Table 13 Engine messages

Message Element	Message Intent
KEEP YOUR ENGINES READY	Request for the ship to keep their engines ready
REPORT WHEN ENGINES READY	Request to report when the engines are ready

## 6.3. PROVISION OF INFORMATION

### 6.3.1. TRAFFIC INFORMATION

Table 14 Traffic information messages

Message Element	Message Intent
AHEAD [distance] [details]	Inform a ship that there is a ship/object in front of it [distance details] [other details may be added]
ALTERING COURSE	Inform a ship that another ship is changing direction
ANCHORING (in position)	Inform traffic that a ship is getting ready to anchor
ANCHORED (in position)	Inform traffic that a ship is anchored
(fishing/pleasure) BOATS IN (position/area)	Inform ship that traffic, with unknown intentions, is in the area
CONSTRAINED BY (details)	Inform traffic that a ship is restricted in her ability to deviate from the course she is following, due to some specific conditions (e.g. draft)
CROSSING (details)	Inform traffic that a ship is proceeding in a direction near right angle with traffic flow or route. Alternatively, the ship is proceeding through an area/fairway (one side to another)
OVERTAKING	Inform that a ship is overtaking another ship
DEPARTING (details)	Inform traffic that a ship is departing an area or alongside/anchor berth
DUE TO (details)	Inform that other considerations need to be taken into account such as traffic in the area

Message Element	Message Intent
EASTBOUND/ WESTBOUND/ NORTHBOUND/ SOUTHBOUND	Directional information about a ship's movements
ENTERING	Proceeding into a port/fairway/channel/area
INCIDENT IN (location/area)	Advising of an incident in an area/location
INBOUND	Ship is proceeding into a port/fairway/channel/area
LEAVING	Used in the context of navigational information or advice e.g., leaving the channel
MEET	Encounter one or more ships
NAVIGATIONAL HAZARD (details)	Advising of a specific navigational hazard (e.g., derelict ship, uncharted rock, pipeline leaking gas, shallow water)
NO TRAFFIC INFORMATION	To inform that the VTS has no available information regarding traffic that may affect the ship's intended movements
(activity) OPERATIONS IN (position/area)	Advising of operations such as dredging/diving/survey in a specified position/area
OUTBOUND	Ship is proceeding out of a port/fairway/channel/area
PASSING (location or ship)	Inform a ship where another a ship is relative to a location, AtoN or a ship that is overtaking another
UNDERWAY	Means that a ship is not at anchor, made fast to the shore, or aground

An example of traffic information:

<b>VTS</b>	TRAFFIC INFORMATION. – Ship Northumbria AHEAD of you distance 3 miles is ANCHORING in position (XX)
------------	---

### 6.3.2. WEATHER INFORMATION

Table 15 Weather information messages

Message Element	Message Intent
GALE/STORM/TYPHOON EXPECTED IN (location) AT (time)	Inform about pending adverse weather conditions
VISIBILITY AT (location) IS (x metres)	Information about restricted visibility in a specified area
WIND (at location) (direction in degrees True/cardinal) (speed)	Communicate the wind direction from which it is coming and speed at specific location (XXX)

### 6.3.3. TIDAL/HYDROLOGICAL INFORMATION

Table 16 Tidal and hydrological information messages

Message Element	Message Intent
CURRENT DIRECTION	Indicates the direction to which current is setting (going)
CURRENT SPEED	Indicates the speed of the current (knots or meters per second)
TIDE IS (rising/falling/high/low)	Information about the tidal conditions in the area
TIDAL CURRENT DIRECTION	Indicates the direction to which the tidal current is setting (going)

Message Element	Message Intent
TIDAL CURRENT SPEED	Indicates the speed of the tidal current (knots or meters per second)
WATER LEVEL AT (position) IS (metres/cm)	Information about the water level in the area

### 6.3.4. INFORMATION BROADCASTS

When providing Information, the VTS may direct the message to a particular ship. Alternatively, general information may be to all ships in the area by a routine broadcast message. This may contain a number of the message elements listed above combining traffic information, weather information and tidal/hydrographic information. A broadcast is directed to “All Ships” and this call is normally repeated three times before the message itself is transmitted. The message should start with the message marker INFORMATION.

Broadcasts may also be used to transmit emergency information in the event of a major marine, environmental, security incident or on suspension of any VTS services, advising of any special restricted / safety areas and any communication restrictions or changes. In such circumstances the broadcast message should follow ITU/GMDSS manual procedures.

An example of a routine broadcast message:

<b>VTS</b>	<p>All Ships, All Ships, All Ships</p> <p>This is (VTS)</p> <p>INFORMATION</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- VLCC Shield inbound via Fiddlers Channel is constrained by her draft.</li> <li>- Wind at Sharp Point 320 – 20 knots.</li> <li>- Water level at Green Terminal 4.2 metres – 0.5m above prediction.</li> </ul> <p>All ships this is (VTS) OUT</p>
------------	---

## 6.4. MANAGEMENT OF SHIP TRAFFIC

### 6.4.1. NAVIGATING IN THE VTS AREA

When a ship enters the VTS area there is an exchange of information, such as:

- Verifying the ship’s identity.
- Confirming reporting requirements.
- Providing relevant traffic information.
- Providing navigational / fairway information.
- Establishing compliance with IMO requirements (charts and publications, passage plan, mechanical defects, personnel shortfalls).

The VTS may also need to provide guidance, advice or instructions for the approach/entry to the VTS area such as those messages shown in Table 17:

*Table 17 Approaching and entering a VTS area messages*

Message Element	Message Intent
AVOID (details)	Request to avoid something (e.g., area, location, object)
CHECK YOUR POSITION	Request for the ship to check their position
DO NOT PROCEED (details)	Instruct the ship not to continue or proceed
DO NOT ENTER	Instruct the ship not to enter
DO NOT CROSS	Instruct a ship not to cross a certain point or area (e.g., the fairway or TSS)
DO NOT OVERTAKE	Instruct a ship not to overtake
KEEP CLEAR OF	Request to keep clear of an activity (e.g., diving operation)
KEEP A SAFE DISTANCE OF (XX miles/cables/meters) [FROM]	Request for the ship to maintain a specified minimum safe distance of (state unit) [from an area or an object]
LEAVE (details)	Instruct a ship to leave an area (e.g., fairway/recommended route/track)
MAINTAIN ETA TO (location)	Advise, Request or Instruct to maintain a specified estimated time of arrival to a location (e.g., pilot boarding ground)
NAVIGATE WITH CAUTION	Request for the ship to navigate or proceed with caution
PASS (details)	Request for the ship to pass to a relative direction or area (e.g., NW of location)
PERMISSION TO ENTER (details)	Permission provided to enter an area such as a VTS area, fairway
PERMISSION TO CROSS (details)	Permission provided to cross into an area or line
PROCEED TO (position / area) [AT (time)]	Proceed from the present position to the specified position [at a specified time]
REMAIN IN PRESENT POSITION	Advise, Request or Instruction to remain in a specific position
REMAIN OUTSIDE (area)	Advise the ship to remain outside an area
RETURN TO (details)	Request for the ship to return to (area, location, route)
WAIT FOR (details)	Request for the ship to wait for an event (e.g., ship (name) leaving berth, ship (name) ahead of you, improvement in visibility)
WIDE BERTH REQUESTED	Request for the ship to give the area or object a wide berth
WHAT ARE YOUR INTENTIONS	Question requesting the ship to advise of its intentions (e.g., movements, passing, overtaking)

## 6.4.2. BERTHING

### 6.4.2.1. General

*Table 18 Entering berth messages*

Message Element	Message Intent
BERTH (name) [(port / starboard side) TO]	Notification of berth allocation [notification of side to the berth wall]
BERTH AVAILABLE AT (time)	Advising the time the berth is expected to be available

Message Element	Message Intent
BERTH CHANGED TO (provide new berth)	Information about a new berth
BERTHING DELAYED UNTIL (time / by XX hours)	Advising that berthing will be delayed until a specified time
BERTH OCCUPIED	Advising that the berth is not available
[Ship] LEAVING BERTH (name) AT (time)	Information that a (ship) will leave a berth at a specified time
WAIT UNTIL BERTH IS AVAILABLE	Instructing or advising a ship to wait until the berth is available

#### 6.4.2.2. Departure from berth

Table 19 Departure form berth messages

Message Element	Message Intent
REPORT WHEN SINGLED UP	Request for the ship to report when it has singled up
REPORT WHEN READY TO DEPART	Request for the ship to report when the last line has been let go
REPORT (XX minutes) BEFORE DEPARTURE	Request for the ship to report a specified amount of time before departing

#### 6.4.3. PROCEEDING FROM OR TO AN ALONGSIDE BERTH OR ANCHORAGE

##### 6.4.3.1. Approving permission to proceed

Based on the information available, the VTS assesses that it is safe and gives approval for the ship to proceed from or to an alongside berth or anchorage, subject to the discretion of the Master.

Prior to, or immediately following, a request to proceed from an alongside berth or anchorage, the ship should be notified of the position and intentions of other traffic or any other conflict avoidance measures and, after approval has been given, other ships should be notified of the impending departure (see section on “Provision of Traffic Information”). See Table 20.

Table 20 Proceeding (berths and anchorages) messages

Message Element	Message Intent
PERMISSION TO (enter / depart / proceed) FROM/TO (berth/anchorage/ lock/creek) [TO (location and/or subject to condition)]	Permission has been granted to proceed to undertake an activity (e.g., enter, depart, proceed)  From a location (e.g., berth, anchorage area, lock, creek, fairway, pilotage area) from (departure) or to (arrival) which permission has been granted.  [Optional - Destination or other conditions may be included as appropriate]

Example where a VTS provides permission to proceed from a location:

VTS	(ship name) PERMISSION TO (depart / proceed) FROM (berth/anchorage/lock/creek). [Subject to condition]
-----	--

Example where a VTS provides permission to proceed to a location:

VTS	PERMISSION TO PROCEED TO (berth name/anchorage designator)
-----	--

### 6.4.3.2. Denying permission to proceed

If the VTS assesses that it is not safe for a ship to proceed from or to a berth or anchorage, the response from VTS should be direct to the ship and the response must be unambiguous, clear and issued with the message marker INSTRUCTION. See Table 21.

Table 21 Denying permission to proceed messages

Message Element	Message Intent
CALL AGAIN IN (time)	Requesting ship to call again later or at a specific time
DO NOT (details)	Instruction that the permission has not been granted, or activity has been cancelled (e.g., leave berth)
NO	Response to a ship request advising that an activity has not been granted. This should be backed up with a formal instruction
REMAIN (alongside/berth/anchorage) (give reason)	Instruct the ship to hold position at a location (e.g., alongside, a berth, anchorage) for a specified reason

Example where a VTS denies permission to proceed from a location:

<b>VTS</b>	NO INSTRUCTION. (ship name) REMAIN ALONGSIDE/AT (location/anchor) (give reason) [CALL AGAIN (in ... minutes or after event has passed)]
------------	--

Example where a VTS denies permission to proceed to a location:

<b>VTS</b>	NO INSTRUCTION. (ship name) DO NOT PROCEED TO (berth name/anchorage designator) (give reason) [instructions and/or notification of expected availability]
------------	--

## 6.4.4. ANCHOR OPERATIONS

### 6.4.4.1. Anchoring instructions

Table 22 Anchoring instruction messages

Message Element	Message Intent
ANCHOR (in position/area)	Instruction to a ship to anchor in a nominated position/specified location
ANCHORING PROHIBITED (details)	Advising that anchoring is prohibited. Further details may be provided on specified areas or the entire VTS area
ANCHOR TO WAIT FOR (details)	Request for the ship to anchor until a specified time or event (e.g., tug, berth, pilot)
DO NOT ANCHOR (details)	Request for a ship do not anchor in a specified location (e.g., fairway / outside port limits)
REPORT WHEN ANCHOR DROPPED	Request for a ship to report when the anchor has been let go or dropped
REPORT WHEN AT ANCHOR	Request for a ship to report when the ship has settled to its anchor

#### 6.4.4.2. Weigh or heave up anchor

Table 23 Heave up anchor messages

Message Element	Message Intent
HEAVE UP ANCHOR (details)	Request for a ship to weigh or heave up anchor (details such as a specified time)
REPORT (XX minutes) BEFORE HEAVING UP ANCHOR	Request for the ship to report before they weigh or heave up anchor
REPORT WHEN UNDERWAY	Request for a ship to report when the anchor is clear of the water and the ship is underway

#### 6.4.4.3. Dragging anchor

Where a ship has been identified to be dragging anchor, it may be appropriate, to issue an all ships broadcast to notify all ships in the area of the developing situation. See Table 24

Table 24 Dragging anchor messages

Message Element	Message Intent
CHECK YOUR ANCHOR POSITION	Request or advise for the ship to check position of its anchor
YOU ARE DRAGGING ANCHOR	Sensor information indicates the ship is dragging anchor

#### 6.4.5. PILOTAGE

Depending on the waterway there may be local differences in terms used such as pilot station, pilot boarding ground. Similarly, when referencing the pilot's activities such as on bridge or on-board. To meet the needs of the pilot service local procedures may have different nomenclatures and terminologies. See Table 25

Table 25 Pilotage messages

Message Element	Message Intent
PILOT BOARDING TIME (time) [AT (location)]	Information when the pilot will board the ship at a specified time [and location]
PILOT CANNOT BOARD [reason]	Advising that the pilot cannot board the ship [reason may also be given]
PILOT DELAYED	Advising that the pilot will be delayed
PILOTAGE SUSPENDED	Pilotage service is unavailable
PILOTAGE RESUMED	Pilotage service returned to normal
WAIT FOR PILOT AT (location)	Instruction or Request for the ship to wait for a pilot in a specified location



## 6.5. RESPONDING TO DEVELOPING UNSAFE SITUATION

Careful consideration should be given regarding the most appropriate message marker to be used. See Table 26.

Table 26 Responding to developing unsafe situation messages

Message Element	Message Intent
COURSE TO MAKE GOOD (details)	Advising the ship about a recommended course
DANGER OF CLOSE QUARTER SITUATION WITH (details)	Advising the ship is passing close to another ship
YOU ARE APPROACHING (details)	Advising the ship by continuing in the same direction it will approach some obstacle / danger (e.g., submerged wreck) ~ shallow water ... bearing ... distance .... NM ~ submerged wreck ... (cardinal points) of you
YOU ARE LEAVING (details)	Inform the ship that it is about to leave an area (e.g., fairway/recommended route/track)
YOU HAVE DEVIATED FROM (details)	Advising the ship has deviated from intended route (e.g., passage plan)
YOU HAVE LEFT (details)	Inform the ship that it has left an area (e.g., fairway / recommended route/track)
YOUR POSITION (details)	Advising the ship its current position relative to a location/landmark - .../ bearing ... degrees Distance ... nautical miles/cables... kilometres /metres from .... ~ in the centre of the fairway ~ on / not on the radar reference line (of the fairway) ~ on the ... (cardinal points) side of the fairway

## 7. DEFINITIONS

The definitions of terms used in this Guideline can be found in the International Dictionary of Marine Aids to Navigation (IALA Dictionary) at <http://www.iala-aism.org/wiki/dictionary> and were checked as correct at the time of going to print. Where conflict arises, the IALA Dictionary should be considered as the authoritative source of definitions used in IALA documents.

## 8. REFERENCES

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