



## READING COMPREHENSION NUMBERS AND LETTERS

The transmission of individual letters is quite straightforward, with the universal use of the ICAO alphabet. It gets trickier when it comes to the transmission of numbers.

Numbers are everywhere in air-ground communications. They figure (pun intended) in aircraft callsigns, altimeter settings, flight levels, altitudes, headings, airspeed, transponder codes, frequencies and weather-related data. There is hardly any message without them. Being able to understand and note down numbers easily, without having to ask ATC to repeat the message, makes for greater efficiency. It keeps the workload from building up unnecessarily, both in the cockpit and on the ground. Furthermore, it helps alleviate the strain on often congested radio frequencies.

The rules to transmit numbers are rather precise, and since doing so in English is a skill you are more likely to need across the Channel, here are some excerpts from the CAA's CAP 413, the British equivalent of the SIA's "Manuel de formation à la phraséologie". This reference book, also known as the UK Radiotelephony Manual, details in chapter 2 - pages 6 to 9 - the rules for the transmission of numbers.

There is one basic rule: "all numbers shall be transmitted by pronouncing each digit separately"... and two exceptions:

*1 - "All numbers used in the transmission of altitude, height, cloud height, visibility and runway visual range information which contain whole hundreds and whole thousands shall be transmitted by pronouncing each digit in the number of hundreds or thousands followed by the word HUNDRED or TOUSAND as appropriate. Combinations of thousands and whole hundreds shall be transmitted by pronouncing each digit in the number of thousands followed by the word TOUSAND and the number of hundreds followed by the word HUNDRED"*

For example 200 is two hundred; 2500 is two thousand five hundred; 25 000 is two five thousand.

*2 - "all six figures shall be used when identifying frequencies irrespective of whether they are 25 kHz or 8.33 kHz spaced, with the decimal point being indicated by the word decimal. Exceptionally, when the final two digits of the frequency are both zero, only the first four digits need be given."*

It should also be noted that in radio communications, the "h" disappears from "thousand" and "three" which are pronounced "tousand" and "tree".

Sounds complicated? Well, not so much with some practice!

In the next exercise, listen to the recording and find the missing numbers in the transcription. In some of these recordings, you'll sometimes hear "point" instead of "decimal". It's specific to the United States, according to the US AIP. You'll also hear numbers grouped by two, especially when a readback has been incorrect, in order to repeat the information in a different way.

