



SUSAN PARSON

# Postflight

## What Not to Say

One of the guilty pleasures I indulge on business trips is watching TV shows I staunchly avoid at home. A common stop on the hotel remote control is TLC's *What Not to Wear*, a faux-reality show whose formula is to find a fashion disaster, use "secret video footage" to show her (it's always a woman) the error of her ways, and engineer a makeover that reveals the heretofore hidden glamazon within.

As I fly around my local airspace each weekend, I have often wished I could borrow the formula and create an aviation-themed show called "What Not to Say." I would secretly tape the radio disasters I hear and, like TLC's Stacy and Clinton, pounce upon the perpetrators with an offer to set them on

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the path to proper and professional-sounding pilot patter. Also like Stacy and Clinton, who provide their fashion protégées with "The Rules" for better sartorial selections, I would equip each audio offender with "The Rules" for proper aviation radio transmissions.

**Learn the Lingo:** Like a real language, Aviation-speak has its own peculiar grammar, syntax, diction, pace, and vocabulary. It even has a dictionary, the FAA Pilot/Controller Glossary ([www.faa.gov/air\\_traffic/publications/atpubs/PCG/](http://www.faa.gov/air_traffic/publications/atpubs/PCG/)), which precisely defines the meaning and proper use of aviation terms. If you want to sound like a pro *on* the air when you are *in* the air, you need to become fluent—in fact, bilingual—in Aviation-speak. That means you listen, learn, and practice. I used cassette tapes (remember those?) to learn foreign languages, so it was natural to use audio aids to master Aviation-speak. I trained my ear by using an aviation-band radio to listen to a local TRACON frequency while I got ready for work. Until I felt comfortable speaking on the fly, I carried fill-in-the-blank scripts for each phase of flight.

**Think Twitter, Not Blog:** Brevity may be the soul of wit, but it is also the Prime Directive in Aviation-speak. If you're familiar with today's social media, you might

find it helpful to think of your radio transmissions as being comparable to the 140-character limit for Tweets. We all know—and certainly we have all heard—pilots whose transmissions are more blog-worthy than Tweet-worthy. As you work to learn the lingo, practice writing what you might say and then make it a personal challenge to cut words to the absolute minimum. Nobody wants to slog through an audio blog.

**It's Not CB Radio:** Personal conversations do not belong on common frequencies. Though this rule seems like common sense and common courtesy, I am always astonished by how many pilots hog the frequency with chatter that is not germane to flight safety or operations. I have wondered how guilty pilots might react if I were to appear at the restaurant, car, or event they arranged in such detail on the party line.

**Don't "Take the Active!"** Please, please, please take heed of this one! Apart from the fact that your fellow fliers need you to leave (not "take") the runway, this phrase is the audio equivalent of tossing litter out the window. The point of radio transmissions, especially around non-towered airports, is to *communicate*. When a pilot is approaching an airport with intent to join the pattern and land, he or she is fervently listening for which runway is in use. Pilots who are "taking" or clearing "the active" clog the frequency without providing a shred of useful information. If you can't quite strike "the active" from your aviation vocabulary, at least append the runway number ... and strive to avoid being a secret audiotape target on "What Not to Say."

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