

# Listen Up, Be Brief

In our experience, many of the challenges pilots experience when communicating with ATC stem from not listening. Here are a few ways it happens, and what you can do about it.

## “WAS THAT FOR US?”

You're droning along, maybe listening to some music on your iPhone, when you suddenly realize you haven't heard from ATC in a while. You turn up the volume, and hear your callsign. After you respond, the controller says something like, “We've been trying to reach you for 20 minutes; contact YXZ on 119.95” or some such. What happened?

You were listening to the music is what happened. That or you turned down the COMM side's volume. Yes, it can be dull and boring when flying direct to a destination hundreds of miles away, but you still need to hear what ATC is doing. If a lot of flights are worrying about ride reports, talking about icing or asking for deviations around weather, those flight conditions can affect you, too. But mostly, doing this aviation “thing” the right way means staying on top of everything associated with your flight, including communications.

## CHECKING IN

Spend much time in the terminal or en route environments and you'll inevitably get a frequency change. Once the new freq is dialed in, the natural thing to do is immediately mash the button and announce your presence, right? Wrong.

You need to ensure you're not interrupting something. Listen for a few seconds, maybe up to a minute if the frequency is busy, to ensure you're not going to be stepping into the middle of an ongoing conversation or—the worst-case scenario—an ongoing emergency. If the controller is non-stop rattling off heading and altitude changes for various aircraft, keep your mouth shut. He or she has accepted you as a handoff, and you're listening, so you won't miss anything. If and when things calm down, a simple “12345, niner thousand” or the equivalent will suffice, not a lengthy “Cessna Skylane 12345, level at nine...uhhh...niner...uhhh...thousand, direct destination, and...uhhh...are you painting any weather for us?” Save it for when it's quieter.

