



# OPEN PRACTICE SESSIONS TIPS AND GUIDELINES

## BACKGROUND

Consistent practice is one of the most important factors in Morse code development. Students who practice regularly generally progress more steadily than those who rely only on class attendance.

Solo practice is valuable, but practice with another student or a small group adds something different. It gives students the opportunity to send, copy, listen to different fists, exchange feedback, practice QSO patterns, and develop confidence in a more interactive setting.

For that reason, LICW schedules Open Practice Sessions throughout the week. Students are strongly encouraged to use these sessions to supplement solo practice, regular classes, Guided Practice Sessions, and instructor-led courses.

Open Practice Sessions may be used in many ways, including:

- Sending and receiving practice
- Character and word spacing
- Numbers, prosigns, and special characters
- Call sign copying and sending
- QSO practice
- POTA, SKCC, or other operating exchanges
- Head copy and conversational practice

These sessions are intended to be student-owned, student-focused, and student-conducted. Instructors may occasionally drop in to help, but the sessions are not intended to function as formal instructor-led classes.

Students are also encouraged to attend Guided Practice Sessions where appropriate. Open Practice and Guided Practice serve different purposes, and both can be valuable parts of a student's development.

## GUIDELINES

### 1. Coordinate when possible.

Open Practice Sessions work best when students coordinate with a practice partner or small group ahead of time.



You might arrange this during a regular class, post a request on Discourse, participate in the Code Buddy program, or ask your instructor for suggestions. Be proactive. There are likely other students looking for the same kind of practice opportunity.

## **2. Have a plan.**

Before beginning, take a moment to decide what you want to practice.

Examples might include:

- Sending numbers
- Improving character and word spacing
- Practicing prosigns or special characters
- Copying call signs
- Building QSO confidence
- Working on smoother rhythm
- Practicing recovery after missed copy

Share your goals with your partner or group. Everyone progresses at a different rate, and your practice partner may have similar needs. The best sessions are collaborative and useful for everyone involved.

## **3. Do not be intimidated by the schedule labels.**

The labels on the Open Practice schedule are meant to help students find suitable sessions, not to keep people out.

For example, a BC2 student who is struggling with numbers or special characters may benefit from asking an Intermediate or Advanced student for help. That is perfectly appropriate, especially if arranged in advance.

When possible, coordinate first. Look at the schedule, reach out to an instructor or another student, and ask whether someone might be willing to practice with you.

## **4. Remember that instructors may attend, but students set the agenda.**

Many LICW instructors occasionally drop in on Open Practice Sessions to offer support, encouragement, or brief suggestions. LICW instructors are encouraged to do so when their schedules allow.

Even so, these remain student practice sessions. Students should feel free to set the agenda, choose the exercises, and use the time for the kind of practice they need most.



## **5. Be alert to habits that work against the LICW Method.**

Students may sometimes practice with others who learned Morse code using a different approach. Some methods rely heavily on visual decoding, excessive Farnsworth spacing, character counting, memorized dot-dash patterns, or other techniques that do not align with LICW's sound-first, flow-based method.

Be thoughtful about this. The goal is not to criticize another student's background, but to avoid reinforcing habits that may slow long-term progress.

If you are unsure whether a practice approach is helpful, ask your instructor.

Remember: practice makes permanent, not perfect. Once an inefficient habit becomes comfortable, it can be difficult to unlearn.

## **6. Do not overemphasize speed.**

Many beginning students focus too much on speed, both in sending and receiving.

When sending, it is better to practice at a speed where character formation, spacing, tempo, and rhythm are clean and controlled. Poorly formed code sent quickly is less useful than well-formed code sent at a manageable speed.

When receiving, it is appropriate to stretch slightly beyond comfort. Some mistakes are expected and useful. A good practice zone is one where the student is challenged but still able to remain engaged and recover.

If the speed becomes too fast, ask for QRS. Slowing down is not failure. It is good practice management.

## **7. Review the session before ending.**

Save a few minutes at the end of the session to talk about how it went.

Useful questions include:

- What worked well?
- What was difficult?
- Was the speed appropriate?
- Was the sending clear?
- Did the exercises match the group's needs?
- What should we do differently next time?

A brief review helps make the next session more productive.



## TIPS

### 1. Include sending practice.

Open Practice Sessions are an excellent opportunity to send. Sending helps reinforce rhythm, spacing, timing, and confidence.

If a student does not yet have a key or sending setup, code talking may be used as a temporary substitute, but students should work toward actual sending as soon as practical.

### 2. Give constructive feedback.

Share observations in a helpful and respectful way.

Good feedback is specific, kind, and focused on improvement. For example:

- “Your character spacing was very clear.”
- “The word spacing got a little tight near the end.”
- “That speed felt comfortable for me.”
- “Could we try that again a little slower?”

Avoid turning practice into criticism. The goal is to help each other improve.

### 3. Keep it collaborative.

Open Practice is not a performance test. It is a shared learning environment.

Students should take turns, adjust to one another’s needs, and avoid dominating the session. The best sessions leave everyone feeling encouraged and better prepared for the next step.

### 4. Make practice enjoyable.

Include some fun when appropriate. Practice can include games and informal exercises such as:

- I Spy
- Word association
- Round-table sending
- Call sign practice
- Standard QSO exchanges
- POTA or SKCC-style exchanges
- Short jokes or simple conversational prompts

Enjoyable practice encourages consistency, and consistency builds skill.



## **5. Encourage one another.**

Praise effort, persistence, recovery, and improvement.

A student who misses a character and keeps going is practicing an essential LICW skill. A student who sends slowly and clearly is building a strong foundation. A student who asks for QRS is managing the practice intelligently.

Encouragement matters. Open Practice Sessions should help students build confidence, not pressure.

### **CLOSING PERSPECTIVE**

Open Practice Sessions are an important part of the LICW learning environment. They give students a place to practice actively, learn from one another, and build confidence outside formal class time.

Used well, they can strengthen sending, receiving, rhythm, recovery, and on-air readiness. They also help students become more comfortable working with others, which is an important step toward real CW communication.

Be prepared, be considerate, keep the practice aligned with the LICW Method, and help one another enjoy the process.