



THE LICW METHOD

Research, Evidence, and Instructional Rationale

VERSION 5.1

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LICW is committed to ensuring digital accessibility for people with disabilities. We strive to continually improve our curriculum, teaching methods, and training devices to enhance the user experience for all. This document has been optimized for screen readers used by the visually impaired.

REVISION HIGHLIGHTS:

Version 5.1 adds an Academic Foundations introduction and references to the companion Academic Positions papers while preserving the instructional framework established in Version 5.0. Automatic Character Recognition (ACR), Continuous Flow, Loose Focus, Instant Flow Recovery, Word Discovery, and purposeful practice remain central to the Method.

The guide unifies Conversational Head Copy and Callsigns and Exact Copy through a shared recognition foundation while distinguishing the listening postures and conditioned responses appropriate to different receiving objectives. It describes LICW's sound-first instruction, continuous-entry curriculum, overlapping class levels, Project OverLearn, and progressive development from proficiency through fluency to mastery.

Throughout, the emphasis remains on individual development, supportive instruction, and meaningful on-air participation, guided by the central principle: **CW is not learned; it is practiced into automaticity.**

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A NOTE BEFORE THE METHOD

Many students arrive at LICW carrying the same quiet fear.

They may have learned some characters, practiced with software, listened to recordings, or tried to return to Morse code after many years away. They may recognize individual characters accurately and even copy reasonably well in short practice sessions.

And yet, when real code begins to flow, something changes.

A missed character becomes a distraction. A missed word becomes a loss of confidence. The student fixates on what has already passed, tries to reconstruct it, and suddenly loses what is arriving now. **The sound keeps moving, but the mind stops.**

Many students interpret this experience as failure.

At LICW, we see it differently. Recognizing individual characters is an important beginning, but Morse code proficiency requires much more. Students must develop the ability to remain with the sound as it moves, recover from missed information, recognize larger patterns, and communicate in real time.

CW is not learned; it is practiced into automaticity.

Our purpose is not simply to help students memorize characters or achieve a particular speed on a practice screen. It is to help them become capable, confident CW operators. Progress is individual and rarely follows a straight line. A missed character is not failure. A difficult class is not a verdict. Yesterday's stretch can become tomorrow's comfort zone.

The LICW Method provides a structured, continuous path from the first unfamiliar sound to confident on-air communication. It gives students direction without imposing arbitrary deadlines, and instructors a consistent approach without requiring identical teaching styles.

The Culture Guide describes how LICW should feel. The LICW Method describes how we help students move forward. **A student should feel welcome here. A student should also be helped here.**

Ultimately, the measure of our Method is the student who stays with it. The student who returns after years away. The student who stops apologizing for being slow. The student who misses a word and keeps going. The student who makes a first contact.

The student who becomes an operator.

That is the purpose of the LICW Method.

ACADEMIC FOUNDATIONS

The LICW Method is informed by historical Morse code research, contemporary principles of skill acquisition, and the accumulated instructional experience of LICW. The companion publication, LICW Academic Positions & Research, documents the academic questions, evidence, limitations, and instructional reasoning underlying our approach.

References to individual Academic Positions papers are provided throughout this guide for readers who wish to explore the supporting rationale. These references distinguish established research findings from LICW's instructional interpretations and practices.

LEARNING MORSE AS SOUND

LICW teaches Morse code as sound, as a practiced skill, and as a means of communication. Instruction begins with the ear. Characters are introduced as complete acoustic patterns, not as visual dot-and-dash sequences to be counted, translated, or reconstructed. In Beginners Carousel 1 (BC1), an unfamiliar character is played before the instructor identifies it. Students first become acquainted with its sound, then connect that sound directly to the character and practice it among familiar material.

The Beginners Carousel is continuous-entry rather than tied to a single beginning date. New characters are introduced individually, with no more than three new characters in an hour. The character sequence supports useful words, operating abbreviations, numbers, prosigns, and recognizable portions of real QSOs from the beginning.

The Carousel normally begins at approximately 12 WPM character speed. Modest enhanced spacing may be used temporarily when needed, then progressively reduced as students learn to receive in a more natural rhythm.

Instruction preserves complete character sounds while gradually strengthening the ability to hear characters in succession.

LICW refers to the desired recognition capability as Automatic Character Recognition (ACR): progressively reliable recognition of a character from its acoustic pattern without deliberate reconstruction of its elements. Students develop ACR through continued exposure and practice. It is not defined by a particular number of milliseconds or a universal speed threshold.

Companion references: AP-02, AP-03, AP-04, AP-05, AP-06.

DEVELOPING CONTINUOUS FLOW

Character recognition is taught alongside the ability to stay with arriving Morse code. LICW calls this Continuous Flow. Students practice remaining engaged with the incoming stream instead of stopping to analyze every item, revisit what has already passed, or insist on perfect copy before continuing.

From early guided practice through the Intermediate and Advanced curriculum, students learn to receive increasingly continuous material. They develop the capacity to hold useful information briefly, notice familiar groupings, discover words and phrases, and follow developing meaning while the sound continues.

LICW teaches Loose Focus: relaxed, alert attention that stays engaged with the signal without excessive effort or self-monitoring. We pair this with Alert Indifference, the habit of responding to a successful recognition or a miss without becoming emotionally absorbed by either.

Misses are part of receiving. Instant Flow Recovery (IFR) is the practiced response of releasing a missed item and returning attention promptly to what comes next. Students practice recovery rather than trying to repair every gap while the transmission continues. When the task requires exact information, uncertainty is managed by appropriate verification or a request for a repeat.

ACR and Continuous Flow are developed together. Better recognition supports continuity, and continuous receiving gives recognition the real-time setting in which it must operate. Neither perfect isolated copy nor speed alone is the endpoint.

Companion references: AP-03, AP-15, AP-19, AP-20.

ONE FOUNDATION, DIFFERENT RECEIVING OBJECTIVES

The same underlying receiving foundation supports different operating purposes. In Conversational Head Copy, the receiving objective is to follow meaning as it develops. Students practice recognizing, retaining, combining, and understanding what they hear, rather than mechanically recording every character in order to discover the message.

In Callsigns and Exact Copy, the receiving objective is to preserve and verify specified information. Callsigns, serial numbers, park references, reports, names, locations, and formal traffic may need to be retained, written, typed, checked, or repeated accurately. The operator uses a listening posture appropriate to that goal while maintaining Loose Focus and Continuous Flow.

With practice, recognition can lead to different conditioned responses. An operator may hear, recognize, and write or type. In conversational reception, the operator increasingly hears, recognizes, retains, combines, and understands. We teach students to select the response that fits the information being received, and to shift between these objectives within an ordinary QSO.

Brief notes and annotations remain useful when they support the receiving objective. Callsigns and Exact Copy is an optional, continuous-entry Guided Practice program alongside the conversational curriculum, not a separate character-recognition method or a required academic level.

Companion references: AP-17, AP-18, AP-19.

SENDING AND COMMUNICATION FROM THE BEGINNING

LICW develops sending as an integral part of communication. Beginners practice rhythm, timing, spacing, clear character formation, and appropriate operating procedure while listening carefully to the sounds they produce. Hear It, Send It, and related exercises connect auditory recognition with purposeful production.

A straight key is LICW's preferred starting recommendation for many beginners, but it is not a requirement. Paddles, keyers, and adaptive

devices are valid choices according to a student's comfort, needs, and accessibility. The objective with any device is readable, confident communication.

Feedback focuses on what the receiving operator actually heard. Instructors use receiver responses, demonstrations, and supportive corrections to help students develop accurate timing and useful exchanges without turning every error into an interruption or a judgment.

QSO structure and operating conventions are introduced progressively. Students encounter callsigns, exchanges, abbreviations, prosigns, and practical operating material while they are still building their basic recognition and sending skills.

Companion references: AP-10, AP-11, AP-24.

A CONTINUOUS PATH FROM PROFICIENCY TO MASTERY

LICW teaches through a developmental continuum rather than fixed graduation deadlines. The Beginners Carousel, Beginners Guided Practice and Intermediate Prep, Intermediate classes, Advanced classes, and focused supplemental programs offer multiple opportunities to practice, consolidate, and extend skills.

The path to proficiency begins with sound familiarity, direct recognition, short-word Character Flow, sending, QSO procedure, and early on-air participation. The path to fluency develops sustained reception, Instant Flow Recovery, Word Discovery, and increasingly natural Conversational Head Copy. Advanced instruction extends these abilities toward greater speed, complexity, endurance, and confident operation under demanding conditions.

Class levels overlap intentionally. Students may attend a comfort-zone class to strengthen dependability and a stretch class to practice under manageable challenge. A stretch environment should become more comfortable with repeated exposure. Students may repeat material, remain at a level as long as useful, or move between offerings based on present capability rather than a calendar.

Functional fluency and cognitive fluency are both valued. An operator may communicate effectively using transcription, familiar exchanges, or structured support while continuing to develop the ability to understand conversational CW with less deliberate assembly. Every stage can include meaningful operating success.

Companion references: AP-12, AP-13, AP-14, AP-20.

PRACTICE, OVERLEARN, AND RECOVERY

Independent practice is a central part of the method. Classes provide demonstrations, purposeful assignments, interaction, feedback, and encouragement; students build lasting capability through repeated practice between classes and on the air.

Practice is distributed, manageable, and matched to the learner's present abilities. Exercises may adjust speed, duration, material, repetition, recording demands, interference, and operating complexity. Familiar work establishes a dependable baseline; carefully chosen stretch work creates useful challenge.

Project OverLearn extends practice beyond initial success to strengthen dependability and resilience. Periodicity alternates a sustainable baseline, a deliberate push beyond present comfort, and a return to a manageable level for stabilization. The push is practice exposure, not a requirement for perfect performance at the higher speed.

Students learn to manage workload and fatigue. When recognition, sending, logging, or attention begins to deteriorate, they may slow down, simplify the task, pause, or take a break. The method favors purposeful, repeatable practice over exhaustion or continuous score chasing.

Words per minute, accuracy, and recognition response time can inform practice, but they do not define the student. Instructors also attend to continuity, recovery, comprehension, retention, sending quality, exact-copy reliability, and operating confidence.

Companion references: AP-16, AP-21, AP-23.

THE LICW INSTRUCTOR AND LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

LICW instruction is live, interactive, and supportive. Instructors model the desired behavior, give students opportunities to listen and respond, observe what the receiver actually experienced, and offer specific feedback without embarrassment or pressure. Students can miss, recover, ask questions, and continue participating.

Instructors use professional judgment rather than inflexible scripts. They adjust the presentation, exercise difficulty, pacing, practice assignment, and feedback to the student in front of them while remaining consistent with the sound-first, flow-based foundation.

The academic learning environment protects trust and privacy. Academic classes are not routinely recorded or automatically transcribed; accommodations and exceptions follow current LICW policies. Accessibility is part of responsible teaching, not an afterthought.

Training tools support independent learning when they develop listening, Flow, recovery, comprehension, and operating skill. Decoders may be appropriate as accessibility aids or for limited verification, but in auditory-development practice they should not replace the act of receiving by ear. New tools and exercises are welcomed and evaluated against the student skills they are meant to strengthen.

Companion references: AP-24, AP-25, AP-26, AP-27, AP-28.

GET ON THE AIR

On-air participation is part of the learning process, not a reward reserved for students who have achieved perfect classroom performance. LICW encourages supported first contacts, familiar QSO formats, POTA hunting, nets, club activities, Field Day practice, and other manageable operating opportunities as students become ready to try them.

The method succeeds when a student can enter a real exchange, recognize enough to participate, send understandable CW, remain engaged when

something is missed, ask for clarification when it matters, and gradually become more capable through continued operation.

That is the LICW Method: learn Morse as sound, practice recognition into automaticity, establish Continuous Flow, train the response that fits the receiving objective, and turn developing skill into confident communication.

Get On The Air.

Companion references: AP-22.