

# *The Why and Wherefore of Verification*

*by Cedric Marshall*

As a beginner SWL, your first thrill will be your ability to hear radio stations all over the world. Every continent except Antarctica has at least one high-power station that the average newcomer will probably receive within a few days of starting out.

Before long, your list of countries will grow to twenty or thirty. By that time, you will probably be thinking how nice it would be, instead of simply saying "I heard such-and-such a station last night", to have a more concrete memento of having received the station.

This is where the concept of a "QSL" comes in. A QSL (from the British "Q-code" used in WWII communications) is a card or letter verifying your reception of a certain station, and can only be issued by a representative of the station itself. A good verification gives the time, date, and frequency of your reception as well as the transmitting power used by the station. The fewer of these that are included, the less "complete" your QSL is said to be.



## **SPEEDX**

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There are two types of shortwave broadcasters: the regional broadcasters, who use less powerful transmitters to reach a limited audience usually within their own or a nearby country, and the major international stations which transmit programs to distant parts of the world using powerful equipment. It is usually easy to obtain QSLs from the latter, so we shall deal with them first

Let us say that a foreign station beams an English language program into North America. The station's engineer tries to utilize a frequency that will be propagationally suitable (the science of propagation deals with the many factors involved in transmitting a radio signal over great distances), and one that will be reasonably free of interference from other stations; but even his educated guess does not always assure good reception at the North American end.

For this reason, the broadcasting station would want North American listeners to send in what is known as a "reception report". This is a report from you to the station listing the date and time of your reception (in "Greenwich Mean Time"—most often shortened to "GMT"), the frequency upon which the broadcast was heard (exact if possible—listen for an announcement), and a few details of the reception quality (was the signal strong or weak? Was another station interfering with the broadcast? If so, how badly and what station? Did atmospheric noise or fading have a detrimental effect on your reception? Were you able to receive the broadcast with ease?) Also, tell them something about yourself: Your age, occupation, SWling experience, the kind of receiver and antenna you use. Last, but certainly not least, you should include a number of details about the program you heard; such as song titles, topics in a news broadcast, etc. Your details should cover a listening period of not less than twenty to thirty minutes. The station will then compare your details with their records and transcripts to make sure your report is valid.

The information that the station engineer gets from you and other listeners can now be used to help him decide whether or not to change frequencies. If most of the reports say that reception is good and the broadcast is coming through loud and clear, no changes need be made. If, on the other hand, most writers report bad reception on a certain frequency, that frequency will most likely be abandoned in favor of another. You can easily see why major international broadcasters are so keen to have reception reports from their listeners.

We thank you for your report on the  
reception of our transmission from  
**FARADYS (20 kw)**  
**BLOEMFONTEIN (250 kw)**

DATE: 4th December, 1967

TIME: 0005 G.M.T.

FREQUENCY 4945 Kc/s

**RADIO RSA**

Die Stem van Suid-Afrika  
The Voice of South Africa

*Adrian*  
P.O. Box 8606 Johannesburg South Africa

**RADIO AUSTRALIA**  
OVERSEAS SERVICE

AUSTRALIAN BROADCASTING COMMISSION  
BOX 428 G. S.P.O.  
MELBOURNE

This confirms your reception on

7.19 Mc/s. at 2710 - 2741 G.M.T.

on 21, 23 / 5 / 1967

Transmitter Power  $\frac{10}{100}$  kilowatts.

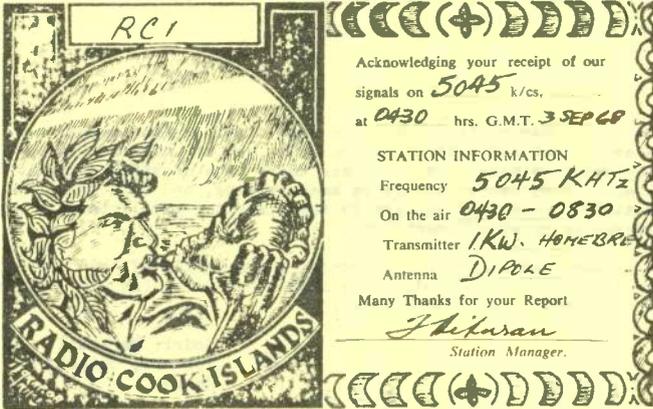
*Simona Chaloupka*  
for DIRECTOR OF OVERSEAS SERVICES

Shown above are examples of "complete" QSLs from major international broadcasters. In both these cases, the verification is on the reverse of very colorful post cards.

As a way of saying "Thank you for your help", the station will send you back a QSL card confirming your reception. Thus collecting QSLs is a two-way deal: First, you do the station a favor by sending them a report; Second, they will do you a favor in return by sending you a QSL. After two or three dozen stations have answered your reports with verifications, you will be very proud of your QSL collection.

It is usually not necessary, but it is always appreciated if you include one or two International Reply Coupons (abbreviated IRCs) with your report, especially if you request additional material such as a program schedule. IRCs can be obtained at your local post office, and can be redeemed for cash by the station at their post office, thus helping to defray mailing and printing expenses. Above all, never forget to be courteous and sincere in your letter to the station; make your report a pleasure, not a chore to read.

Now we get to the bugaboo (and yet prize) of every QSL collector: The lower-powered regional broadcaster. As mentioned before, most of these stations direct their broadcasts to listeners inside their own country or closely nearby. Thus the engineer of an African, Latin American, or Asian station probably could not care less how his station is being received in the United States or Canada; and, since a report from a North American listener is of no real use to him, he would feel no real obligation to answer it with a verification. The first thing to remember therefore, is that any reply from a regional station is a personal favor from them to you.



The QSL card above is from a regional broadcasting station not often heard in North America, and which verifies even less often. A total of five reception reports over a two year span were required to receive it.

Here are a few general ideas to follow when reporting to regional broadcasters:

- 1) Unless the station is known to answer reports submitted in English, send your report in the language of the country the station is located in. Since these stations have no foreign service, they probably would not have a staff capable of handling foreign (to them) language letters. If you don't happen to be a linguist, form letters in French, Spanish, Portuguese, and other languages can be obtained from several radio clubs.
- 2) If it is at all possible, send mint stamps of the country in which the station is located. These are much more convenient than IRCs which have to be taken to a post office to be exchanged (not always "just around the corner" in an underdeveloped country). The major North American supplier of mint (unused) stamps in the correct units and at quite reasonable prices is:

DX Stamp Service (Mr G N Robertson), 83 Roder Parkway, Ontario NY 14519 USA

3) Many regional stations (especially Latin American) are commercially operated. In your program details, try to include the names of products that you hear advertised. This will help convince them that your report is valid.

4) It is always appreciated if you include with your report postcards of your home town, cancelled stamps, newspaper pictures, or the like. One of the biggest challenges when reporting to most regional broadcasters is simply to get the station to open your report in the first place. An envelope well padded with postcards, etc is much more likely to receive attention than one that obviously contains nothing more than a single letter.

5) Write all your reports promptly after reception, and send them via airmail. The stations want up-to-date reports, not ancient history! (This applies also to the international broadcasters).

Eventually, you will run across a station that does not answer your report within a reasonable length of time. If the station is hearable from time to time, the best thing is to listen to another of their broadcasts, and send a completely new report. However, if the station is hard to hear, you should send what is called a "follow-up" (FU) report. This is a xerox or carbon copy of your original report, together with a letter explaining the situation, saying that so far you have not received a reply to your first letter, and you are afraid it may have been lost in the mail...or something to that effect. One important note: Even if you believe the station simply did not bother to answer your first report (and you may well be right), never write your FU in an accusing or rude tone. This would destroy every chance you ever had of getting a QSL. You should ask yourself whether there is any way to improve your first report; if you sent IRCs the first time, send mint stamps this time; or send a self-addressed envelope; perhaps you might also send the FU by registered mail.

You should be forewarned that there are some stations that answer few, if any, reception reports. You can write to these until you are blue in the face, but you still probably won't receive a reply unless there is a drastic change in the station's policy. The only thing to do here is to keep writing, and hope that this change occurs soon. Fortunately, these stations are in the minority, with literally hundreds of others considered as excellent verifiers.

We hope this has been successful in explaining a little of the "why and wherefore"; keeping these few pointers in mind, you should be soon finding your mailbox filled with QSLs from distant lands. Good luck!!

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