

CW Shorthand – Cut Numbers, Prosigns, and abbreviations

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If you spent any time on the CW bands, or, more specifically, on the air during the recent CQWW CW DX Contest, you may have heard some unfamiliar CW characters, or questioned the usage of characters that you knew. More than likely, you heard an experienced operator using a “Cut” number, a “Prosign”, or an abbreviation. For instance, you may have worked someone who said that your signal was 5NN. You probably guess that they were sending 599 to you, however, they were using a Cut number, or an agreed upon shorthand for the number 9.

Cut Numbers – You may think that cutting the number 9 from “- - - .” to “-.” is not a big deal, and you would be correct if you were just working a couple of folks. However, a DX station who may work 200 or more hams during an on the air session may disagree. Propagation doesn’t always stay open and is shifting all the time. If the DX station can save a bit of work per QSO, it adds up! Cut Numbers are used most during a contest where the DX station is focused on rate more than saving time. The stations who are trying to work him are not going to hang around for minutes and the more QSOs he can squeeze into a small timeframe, the better.

In addition to using Cut Numbers for RST, they are also common to use for the stations zone designation or power output. For instance, I worked OM2VL (Slovak Republic) in CQ Zone 15 during the recent contest. The exchange from Vegh was AJ8B TU 5NN AE K which combines Cut Numbers and abbreviations. Vegh sent my call, (AJ8B), Thanks (TU), my signal report – 599 (5NN), his CQ Zone 15 (AE) and the K to terminate the data sent. Then he would go on to the next station. Vegh has almost 300,000 QSOs to his credit, so, I am sure that he leans heavily on these concepts. You need to be careful when and where you use a cut number. The person copying you should be expecting a number, or they will treat what you send as a letter and will get confused. That is why Vegh sent the 5 in the 5NN sequence instead of the Cut Number equivalent. A table of cut numbers is below:

Number	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	0
Cut Number	A	U	V	4	E	6	G	D	N	T

Prosigns: are symbols formed by running together two characters into one without the intercharacter space to make an abbreviation for the most common procedural signals. Prosigns are usually written with a BAR over the characters. For instance, I use BT frequently during a QSO. I use it as a pause to gather my thoughts or to switch to another topic. It would be sent as BT, not BT. (Dah DIT DIT DIT Dah not Dah DIT DIT DIT <Space> Dah) 1 character instead of two.

Don't neglect to learn these by sound. Knowing what they look like on paper is of little value when you are mystified by the sound of long CW characters. Knowing the rules of context that govern the use of Prosigns is also very helpful:

AAA is the period. Use it at the end of a sentence when the following sentence will pertain to the same subject.

AR is used at the end of a transmission when calling a specific station before the two-way contact has been established. Use it in place of K or KN when answering a CQ, or calling someone for a sked.

AS means "Please stand by for a moment", usually used to let the other guy know that you have to talk to someone else in the room, answer the telephone, or fix some technical glitch and that the band didn't just fall out from under your QSO. You'll be back in just a minute.

BT is kind of like the period. Use it at the end of a sentence when the next sentence will pertain to a different topic.

DN is the slash (/). It is used to indicate mobile, QRP, or operation from a different call area than that indicated by your callsign.

IMI is the question mark.

K is used at the end of a transmission means you are listening for an answer from any station. Use it when calling CQ. Once you have established contact with a station and you do not want to be interrupted by a third party, use KN instead.

KN is used at the end of a transmission when only the other party already in the QSO is invited to respond.

MIM is the comma.

R means "Roger" or "Received". Use it at the beginning of a transmission ONLY if you copied 100% of what was just sent to you. Don't use it if anything was missed. Use BK instead, and something like "FB on UR QTH but missed UR name". You can also start a transmission with BK even if something was not missed. High speed operators often use this method instead of KN and R.

SK is used at the end of your final transmission of a QSO. If the other station has not yet sent his "final" you may follow SK with KN.

Abbreviations: Below is a table of common abbreviations used in a typical CW QSO.

Abbreviation	Meaning	Abbreviation	Meaning	Abbreviation	Meaning
73	Regards	GA	Good Afternoon	RCVR	Receiver
ABT	About	GB	God Bless	SIGS	Signals
ANT	Antenna	GE	Good Evening	SN	Soon
B4	Before	GL	Good Luck	SRI	Sorry
BCNU	Be Seeing You	GM	Good Morning	TNX	Thanks
BK	Break	Gud	Good	TU	Thank You
BN	Been	HPE	Hope	TX	Transmit
CLDY	Cloudy	HV	Have	U	You
CLR	Clear	HW	How	UR	Your
CONDX	Conditions	NR	Number	VY	Very
CPY	Copy	NW	Now	WID	Width
CU	See you	OM	Old Man	WUD	Would
CUD	Could	OP	Operator	WX	Weather
CUL	See you Later	PSE	Please	XCVR	Transceiver
ES	And	PWR	Power	XMTR	Transmitter
FB	Fine Business	R	Are	XTAL	Crystal