How to use a microphone

aired by KI5MA

People love hearing you when you come through sounding loud and clear. Sometimes, anything less might be out of your control at the moment, such as your location or your radio power level or a better antenna. But one thing that you usually have control of, to help you sound better, is the way you speak into your microphone. And the way you speak into your 'mic' (pronounced ***mike***) often depends on the type you're using and its features.

A ham radio microphone is built a little differently than one for a cell phone, because it's designed to pick up a somewhat different frequency set and sound quality than a cell mic is. Locate your little microphone hole, if that's what your radio presents to you, like with most built-in and hand mics. Most desk mics have a much more obvious interface.

Built-in mic

A typical HT has a microphone implanted somewhere in its face. Get your mouth as close to the mic hole as you can get it, then speak with a slightly louder-than normal volume. Also, speak across the mic, instead of blowing directly into it, to prevent *puffing*. If you're using a Baofeng radio and are feeling brave, remove the face of the HT body and drill out the mic hole to about an eighth of an inch.

Hand mic

Keep your mouth one to three inches away from your mic, then speak with normal loudness. Speak across the mic, instead of blowing directly into to. If you're using a Baofeng or TYT hand mic, you might want to take the mic apart and drill out the mic hole to about an eighth of an inch, then surround the little mic with a couple of cotton balls. Also, try and keep still while you speak. It's easy to fidget while transmitting, which can result in sending everybody an annoying crackling, crunching sound.

Desk mic

Keep your mouth one to three inches away from your mic, then speak with normal loudness. You're free to speak directly into to the mic, because most have a built-in puff shield. Even so, avoid blowing air into the mic as much as you can. Avoid picking up a desk mic while you're transmitting, which can result in everybody hearing the annoying stretching and rubbing of your mic cord.

Microphone features

Many microphones have settings and other features that let you control the quality of your audio, but those are typically confined to hand and desk microphones. Here are some controls, along with their suggested settings, that might apply to *your* mic:

- VOX (voice-activated transmit) : *turn it off*, unless you're certain you want to use it, and know how to
- mic gain : keep it turned down *below 35%*

- speech processor or compression : *disable* this feature unless you're on SSB (single sideband) and know how to use it to your advantage
- AGC (automatic gain control) : keep this control set to *SLOW*
- volume control and squelch have no effect on how you sound to others

No matter what kind of mic you're using, there are ways to improve your sound quality by remembering a few simple tips. Make sure you sound as good as you should, by requesting an audio check on the air. Honest feedback on your audio will often provide the best results, and might even contradict some of the guidelines just listed here. And get a second opinion; two sets of objective ears are sometimes better than one from a biased friend. Just keep in mind that their ears are not your ears, and so your own assessment or preferences might differ from theirs.

Probably one of the best ways to know how you sound is for somebody to record your transmission, then send you the audio file. Or you can get on the WebSDR and listen for yourself, although the timing on that can be a bit tricky. Finally, don't talk with your mouth full or while shuffling papers or with music playing in the background.