



# Please, make my day

By Frank Brune  
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**Y**ou can deliver an opinion on some deeply personal issue with tact. Or you can go the *Dirty Harry* route, as in “Your mouthwash ain’t making it!” However you get the facts out, you can be sure of 2 things—the recipient will be offended, and he or she will not change their habits.

This principle applies just as well to pilots and their radio techniques. If you mention a potential area for improvement, the feathers will fly. After that they will continue to do things the way they always have.

This is not to say that we are incapable of change. We readily accept instructions on how to shine our shoes, how to cut our hair, and how to enter the operations building. The key seems to be proper documentation.

When I wrote “Excuse me!” 2 years ago (*Pro Pilot*, Nov 2004, p 112), I knew that the topic was as inflammatory as the Janet Jackson “wardrobe malfunction” that gripped an anxious nation earlier that year. By way of review, the article made note of an increasing occurrence of the admonition

“Any traffic in the area, please advise” over CTAF in the vicinity of airports without an operating control tower. I characterized this shift as a diminishment in radio courtesy, and suggested that we should rely on the methods described in the *Airman’s Information Manual (AIM)*.

Reader commentary on the article ranged from those who found my opinions to be “spot on” to others who thought I sounded like Miss Manners on pure oxygen. Not one of the responders signaled an intention to change the way they did things.

Back then, the *AIM* explained the self-announce and monitor system that was supposed to take place around uncontrolled fields, but there was no overt prohibition of the disputed phrase. This year a change is in place.

At 4.1.9.g.1, the *AIM* now reads, “Pilots stating, (sic) ‘Traffic in the area, please advise’ is not a recognized Self-Announce Position and/or Intention phrase and should not be used under any condition.”

The phrase is still in common use, and I asked a few pilots where they picked it up. I found that it was popular at a couple of major university flight programs.

I asked flight instructors from each of these schools whether the “please advise” phraseology was in the

written curriculum. Both said this was not the case, but that their flight instructors favored the technique. One said that students were assimilating it in a “monkey see, monkey do” fashion.

That sounded like trouble to me. I reached for the 1977 edition of the *Aviation Instructor’s Handbook* sitting on the shelf at my elbow, and turned to Chapter 1: Laws of Learning. Under Law of Primacy, I read, “Primacy, the state of being first, often creates a strong, almost unshakable, impression.” Below this, under faded highlighting ink, was “‘Un-teaching’ is more difficult than teaching.”

It seems that we now have a major “un-teaching” job ahead of us. This problem highlights the importance of researching sources before instilling procedures. To this one could add that the learner has a corresponding responsibility not to place all faith in word-of-mouth solutions.

Many adherents to the current anomaly are emphatically confident in the correctness of their procedures. Most of them are probably not aware that before the 1990s the phrase was almost entirely absent from the airwaves. For those of us schooled in the procedures in the *AIM*, the phrase seems out of place, like the superfluous “with you” some people manage to work into a radio transmission at every conceivable opportunity. But more than being odd, the “please advise” strategy inverts the historic communication protocol for uncontrolled fields.

Every proponent of the “please advise” method I’ve talked to eventually gets around to making this point: “When I say it, I hear from planes that might not have otherwise reported.” And, of course, a dog who barks continuously at the mail carrier until he moves on to the next residence will repeat this apparently successful tactic every time, even though it isn’t usually the noise that causes the mailman’s departure.

Anyway, it is time to move on to other arguments. The *AIM* got the last word in this one. ✈



Crew of Raytheon King Air 300 communicates with ATC during a flight over Maryland enroute to RDG (Reading PA).



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Photo by Jack Sykes