MetroAir Virtual Airlines

COMMUNICATING WITH ATC AND PILOTS V 1.0

NOT FOR REAL WORLD AVIATION

GETTING STARTED

One of the main reasons for people using VATSIM is that it offers live ATC that you, the pilot, can listen to and respond to. In this guide we will outline a few of the basic communication tools used in VATSIM and show you how to use them.

If you haven't already looked over the Phonetic Alphabet document and are unfamiliar with it then now would probably be a good time to look over it. In all aspects of the aviation world people use what is known as the 'phonetic alphabet' which basically replaces single letters 'A' 'B' 'C' etc… with an actual word to avoid any miscommunication. In the piloting world this alphabet is most commonly heard whilst on the ground when taxing to and from the runways.

If you are new to VATSIM or maybe not as confident with ATC procedures then it is probably best to work your way up slowly. We recommend that you start listening into some of the various communications while on the ground so that you become more familiar with the wording. Also it might help if you listen in at an airport you are more familiar with.   We also recommend doing your first initial flights in an area that is less busy until you get used to communicating with ATC so the controllers have more time available to work with you and help you.

COMMUNICATING WITH ATC

While flying on VATSIM, you are not always guaranteed to have an active ATC online. You should always check prior to pushback if there is any active ATC covering your area. You should also continue to monitor ATC throughout your flight for monitoring if and when ATC coverage changes.

When communicating with ATC, you should always be professional and respectful of all other pilots and the controller themselves. You represent not only yourself, but your airline as well. If you are using voice communication, only 1 person should ever be speaking at a time. If you start talking and you hear someone else start at the same time, you should both stop transmitting immediately and pause for a second before trying again. The controller always is given priority, followed by anyone needing to read back instructions.

Remember while communicating with any ATC you should always speak clearly and acknowledge any commands in the proper manor. If you are unsure of what you are being asked to do then you should ask for further clarification. DON'T wing it!

CONTACT ME'S

While flying on VATSIM you are not always guaranteed to have an active ATC online. However, if you should venture into airspace with an ATC online or if the ATC comes online while you are flying in their airspace then you will automatically be given a "Contact me" message in a pop out box. It will read something like this: "Contact me on XXX.XXX".

There are also other occasions when you might get a "Contact me" such as; from a VATSIM Supervisor.

Now I hear you asking "Why would a supervisor want me?" This could be for several reasons such as:

- They want to assist you
- Verify that you are online and at your computer
- They are reacting to a complaint that may have been sent in about you if you have made an error
- Responding to you as you sent a Wallop command

All "Contact Me"s are important whether it's a controller or a supervisor and should be responded to immediately.

COMMUNICATING WITHOUT AN ACTIVE ATC

As previously mentioned, ATC is not always available and therefore you need to broadcast cast any of your movements via the VATSIM Unicom channel. Having no ATC online does not mean that you can fly blindly. You have to remember that you are representing your VA. The Unicom channel acts as a messenger system to all pilots in your vicinity. This means that you need to broadcast your intentions such as landing or taking off so that other pilots who may be on approach or at the airport know what you are doing. It is the pilot's responsibility to communicate effectively with each other in order to avoid any conflicts.

In order to connect with the Unicom Channel you must dial in 122.80 into your COM1 radio just as you would if you were contacting the center or tower. If you use Squawkbox then you can just type '.com1 122.80' into the chat line and press enter to set their COM1 radio. All communications must be made by text but should you wish to then you can communicate via voice (this is only supported on some pilot clients and is optional).

ATIS (AUTOMATED TERMINAL INFORMATION SERVICES)

ATIS messages are issued by ATC on a pre-recorded loop for pilots to listen to before takeoff and before landing to gather the local weather information around the airport they are departing or landing at. It includes information on clouds, temperature, dew point, wind and what the active runways are. The start of each ATIS message begins with a letter of the phonetic alphabet, this letter indicates how up to date the information is. When you are contacting the controllers you should indicate this letter.

You should always listen to the ATIS messages (when available) before you contact the departure or arrival controllers. To listen to an ATIS message you need to set your COM1 radio to the frequency listed in your pilot client.

PRIVATE MESSAGES

Should a pilot want to communicate with either a friend or fellow VATSIM pilot then they may do so by using the Private chat function via their pilot client. To do this simply type .msg MET123 into the pilot client window and press enter. (MET123 is an example of a call sign but it could be AAL/DAL/SWA etc...).

Private messages should never be used for communicating aircraft movement, intentions, replying to controller instructions, etc. All of that communication should happen on the controller's frequency, or via Unicom.