

## CW STUDIES

### Controlling Frustration and Nervousness

By

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We need to know the “WHY” of things. If we do not know how to mitigate frustrations and anxiety, then we will always have frustrations and anxiety and we will not progress in our studies. Ignorance of the causes and effects is what makes us frustrated and nervous in our studies and on the air. Knowledge of our physical and mental state is gold and will give us confidence and make us excel beyond our wildest dreams. This knowledge will help us “own” Morse code and not vice versa, even if we are just starting to learn.

We can always learn this knowledge, but when first learning Morse code it is beneficial. No matter what level of skill you are at, this knowledge is applicable. Also, no matter your skill, YOU are the teacher and need to take responsibility for your studies. In (CWA) CW Academy, you will have an Advisor, not a teacher. We can advise you in your studies and help you gain this knowledge, but in the end, YOU are there to not only be the student, but the teacher and supervisor of your own studies. Many people cannot separate the two and pay the price. CWA is a very proven program for Morse code. If you “buy” into the program (CWA is free) and follow your advisor’s advice, you will excel. There is no doubt. We must, however, face reality. Not every day will be better than the previous one. We need to accept this. We WILL be making mistakes in sending and copying. If no mistakes are made, there is no progress. We need to embrace this and always moderately challenge ourselves. A mistake is an opportunity to learn and progress! We need to always challenge ourselves at any skill level if we want to advance. Patience and perseverance will win the day. We must know WHY we made a mistake, then we can work on overcoming it. If we do not know WHY, we will get frustrated and continue making the same mistakes. Remember, you are the teacher, and your advisor can make you a better teacher.

Even before we learn our first character, we should know the knowledge of how to study and more importantly, WHY are we studying in this way? Sometimes the way we study is harder than other ways, but there is a reason, and we need to know WHY? It makes it much easier to accept this kind of study if you know WHY.

If you follow this advice, you will excel at any level, Beginner to Advanced. I wish you good luck in class and I hope you all will achieve your goals and that you have FUN doing so. Here are my suggestions for success.

Please, do not use ANY visual aids when learning CW. They create bad habits that are hard to break and will block you from increasing speeds. You are really hurting yourself by using them. Please do not! If you have been using them, let your advisor know and they will help you find ways to break this bad habit.

Select times for your code practice where you can be in a quiet place with no interruptions. Sharp concentration is key to copying well.

If you make a mistake, **learn from it, and make it a positive thing**. If you miss a letter, it just means you need more practice with that letter in particular. Or, you may have lost concentration for a split second. See what kind of a mistake it was and learn. As you progress, your concentration time will lengthen, but lost concentration happens to all of us. Your copying skill will develop into a rhythm and a loss of concentration will break that rhythm.

**DO NOT** count dits and dahs. You need to learn by the sound of the characters only. This counting will happen, but you must try not to do it. Copy only in your head. **Do not write everything down**. If you do, you will be creating a roadblock to speed that is hard to overcome.

To start, keep your practice time duration on the short side. Maybe break them into three 15-minute sessions. When you first start your practice, you will need to “warm up” to it. It will take a little time for your brain to start to get into the rhythm of translating code. During the middle of your session, you will tend to be at your best, and near the end of the session, your concentration will drop off and your speed will go down. This is

normal for all of us. That is the time to **stop**. Do not push yourself past this point as you will become frustrated.

**Frustration is the enemy.** If you are starting to get frustrated, **STOP**. Becoming frustrated is normal, do not beat yourself up about it. Just stop and try at another time. But remember, you must practice an hour a day when starting to learn CW. You can break this time up into smaller segments, like 15 to 20 minutes at a time. As you get more accustomed to the practice, your time can lengthen. **You must pay attention to how your brain is reacting to the practice session and change accordingly.** If you are doing well, keep going until your skill starts to drop off. If you cannot get into a rhythm, stop, and try another time. Every session will not be the same as far as your copying is concerned. Some sessions will be better than others. This is normal. It is a direct reflection of your concentration level at the time. Sometimes your brain has other things it is thinking about and you are asking it to “multi-task,” which makes things harder for it. Pay attention to this and modify your sessions accordingly. If you are not having fun, **STOP**.

The name of the game is concentration. If using software applications, do not look at your rate, speed, or anything to distract you. Try to clear your brain of thinking about anything but code. Copy one letter or word at a time. Do not think about how many consecutive letters you have right or the speed you are going or how well or poorly you are doing. Just one split second of thought will break your rhythm.

If your rhythm is broken, and you miss a letter, try **NOT** to think about it and move on. Your next challenge will be to copy the next character and not miss two in a row. Everybody misses something! **Turn it into a positive** and get the next letter right and congratulate yourself for showing good concentration!

Here is an easy way to get some non-structured practice. Everywhere you look, you will see some printing on something. Driving a car, you see billboards, books, ketchup bottles, clock faces.....there is always something to read if you look hard enough. When you see letters or numbers, encode them into CW. If you do not know all the letters or

numbers yet, skip the ones you do know. Pretty soon, you will be able to do this to whole words. Challenge yourself to this during times when you are not in a formal practice session. If you can, listen on the radio to code. It may be fast but try to pick out letters once in a while. This is good practice. Always remember to think... dit and dah in your mind.

Set goal(s) for learning CW. Maybe you want to contest, DX, POTA, SOTA, or rag chew QSO's. You are working toward success at these goals. You need to have "sub" goals or success points along the way to your main goal. I cannot tell you what your goal is, but I can tell you your first sub goal.

**Keep a record of your progress.** Log your practice sessions showing date, time, session, lapsed time, and notes that you can look back on to measure your progress. Record minor goals and try to achieve them.

**Practice every day.** If you do not do that, you will not be successful in your goals. All this practice will eventually pay dividends in the future. You will accomplish things you never thought possible. You just need to give your brain a chance to learn a new language, the same way you learned how to talk when you were a baby. You can do it; you have done it before. You learned by sounds. You knew what the sound of "dog" and "cat" was and related it to the real thing. You did not know how to spell those words until much later. You learned by the sound of those words. It took some time to learn how to talk and relate what you saw with the actual things that you were seeing. This is the way you will learn code, by sound and relate it to letters and words and numbers.

You are giving yourself the parts to make a useful tool. This tool will serve you well for the rest of your life. You will need to use this tool to keep its usefulness. Do not just learn the code and then not use it. You will lose it. Dedicate a year or so to using CW on the air and see what your new skill will do for you. It will embed itself in your brain and you will not forget. Practice at higher speeds to sharpen your tool to a fine edge and have even more accomplishments in your radio career. Remember when you

practice challenge yourself. If you are not making mistakes, you are not learning. Copying 100% of everything you hear will NOT increase your code speed. Increase your speed by two words per minute each time, until you can copy it with ease and then increase again. To reduce frustration, always be at least 60% correct ALL the time. If you try to increase speed too fast, the enemy of frustration is always lurking.

Do not practice immediately before a lesson. Practice copy in the morning, but “give the brain a rest” before class in the evening. That way your mental acuity will be sharper and your copying skills will benefit.

“Warm up your fist” before class. Send for a minute or so to get your timing and muscle memory in tune. Skilled operators do this all the time. For instance, I send “The Quick Brown Fox.....” and Bens Best Bent Wires/5.... before a CW Op mini contest.

**One of the most valuable hints I can tell you is to not practice too much or too long. I call it “Hitting the Wall.”** It is a reason that a lot of people fail at learning code. They think that the harder they practice, the faster and more skilled they will become. The exact opposite is true. Hitting the wall is very frustrating and as stated before, is the enemy. Your brain learns at a certain rate and that rate is different for everyone. YOU, on the other hand, want to learn CW fast. Your brain, if taxed too much, will just not decode anymore. It needs a rest and **YOU** must pay attention to its needs. Practice no more than 45 min to 1 hour a day. Pay attention to your mental acuity and attention span during practice. When it starts to degrade, **STOP**.

No matter what level in skill or CWA class level you are in, Beginning to Advanced, these hints apply. They are not just for Beginners. Apply them to your practice sessions and you will not only increase your skill level faster, but you will have FUN in your practice sessions and feel a sense of accomplishment in knowing you are learning the right way.

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