

Readability, Signal Strength, Tone (RST)

The Readability, Signal Strength, Tone system (and the associated numbers) began about 1934 as a way to report this information between radio operators. The tone part of the report is generally valuable only to those stations using CW. Stations using voice use the same numbers but without reference to the tone.

Thus, if a station reports that he is receiving you "5 by 9", it means that you are perfectly readable and your signal is extremely strong.

The system is largely subjective and is based on value judgments. The signal strength meter (S meter) on most modern radios helps take away the guess work of the signal strength. But an S9, or even 10 dB over, means that you are very loud. Being loud doesn't necessarily mean better. But the most important part of each communication is **readability**. It doesn't matter how loud you are if you cannot understand what is being said.

Here is what the numbers mean:

Readability

1. Unreadable.
2. Barely readable, occasional words distinguishable.
3. Readable with considerable difficulty.
4. Readable with practically no difficulty.
5. Perfectly readable.

Signal Strength

1. Faint signals, barely perceptible.
2. Very weak signals.
3. Weak signals.
4. Fair signals.
5. Fairly good signals.
6. Good signals.
7. Moderately strong signals.
8. Strong signals.
9. Extremely strong signals.