CW Signal Reports: RST Quick Reference

Readability · Strength · Tone, for Morse code (CW) contacts

5 9 9

Readability 1–5 | **S**trength 1–9 | **T**one 1–9

A CW report is always three digits sent in order R-S-T, e.g. **599** = perfectly readable, extremely strong, perfect note. Send it as "**RST 599**" (often **5NN**), and repeat it (599 599) so the other station is sure to copy.

R: Readability

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

S: Strength

S	Strength
1	Faint, barely perceptible
2	Very weak
3	Weak
4	Fair
5	Fairly good
6	Good
7	Moderately strong
8	Strong
9	Extremely strong (S9 on the meter)

T: Tone

T	Tone (purity of the CW note)
1	60-cycle AC or less: very rough and broad
2	Very rough AC: very harsh and broad
3	Rough AC: rectified but not filtered
4	Rough note: some trace of filtering
5	Filtered but strongly ripple-modulated
6	Filtered: definite trace of ripple
7	Near-pure tone: trace of ripple
8	Near-perfect: slight trace of modulation
9	Perfect tone: no ripple or modulation

Suffixes (added after T)

Suffix	Meaning	Ex.
X	Stable, crystal-quality note	599X
C	Chirp: frequency shifts as you key	579C
K	Key clicks on/around the signal	589K
A	Aurora: replaces T on VHF aurora QSOs	57A
S	Scatter: replaces T on scatter QSOs	55S

Common CW reports decoded

Report	Meaning
599	Perfect copy, extremely strong, clean note
589	Perfect copy, strong
579	Perfect copy, moderately strong
569	Perfect copy, good strength
559	Perfect copy, fairly good strength
549	Perfect copy but only fair strength

Report	Meaning
539	Perfect copy but weak (quiet band)
449	Easy copy, fair strength
339	Hard copy, weak signal, clean note
229	Barely readable, very weak
598	Great signal, slight modulation on note
595	Great signal, strong ripple: check power supply

Contests and cut numbers

In contests and DX pileups nearly everyone sends **599** regardless of real signal quality, so a contest 599 means little. To save time, digits are replaced with "cut numbers," which is why 599 goes out as **5NN** and 100 watts as **1TT**.

Digit	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	0
Cut	**A**	**U**	**V**	**4**	**E / 5**	**6**	**B**	**D**	**N**	**T / O**

Tips: In a casual QSO, give an honest report; it helps the other op judge their antenna, power and conditions. Base S on your S-meter (or your ear on a quiet band) and R on how well you actually copied. Modern rigs almost always earn T9, so a lower T is worth mentioning: it usually points to a power supply, keying or chirp problem.