

Unwritten Rules of Flying  
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The Unwritten rules of flying R/C

Even if you're a member of the friendliest club around, that doesn't mean there will be zero conflict amongst the membership. When you get a few dozen people together there are going to be, shall we say... "tensions", from time to time. Just about any tension can be traced to the fact that someone did something that is considered "discourteous", breaking one of the unwritten rules of RC field etiquette. In several cases the offender did not even know his/her actions upset anybody and thereby often repeats it.

Combining my personal observations of the last couple decades of flying R/C along with reading plenty of bitching and moaning on the forums, I've created a list of common R/C field etiquette when flying with other aeromodelers. Some of these may actually be written rules in certain clubs but all the same, violating them is considered universally discourteous and in many instances a safety concern.

\* When starting or running up an engine, be conscious of the prop blast. Always be aware of where loose items and exhaust residue is being directed. Dust, grass clippings and oil can quickly coat other individuals and/or their equipment.

\* Dogs and other pets are best left at home. Approximately 65% of the respondents to a message board poll agreed that a flying field is not a good place for a dog. If you must insist on bringing a well behaved pet to the field, keep it leashed at all times. Always clean up any mess left by them and dispose of it appropriately.

\* Children are the future of this sport and should never be discouraged from visiting a flying field. Good behavior, however, is paramount for their safety and keeping them from damaging some very expensive equipment. Pre-schoolers should always have an adult's undivided attention. In other words, if you bring a child and you intend to fly, delegate your supervision to a trustworthy adult for the entire time you're dealing with the airplane. For the very same safety reasons, children of grade school age should not be granted permission to wander the pit area without an adult.

\* Keep the language clean! Remember this is a family sport. Many modelers have children grandchildren, nieces and nephews they are trying to involve in R/C. These individuals should not have to worry that profanity will be used in front of the younger ones.

\* Always be cautious of the prop arc and the area forward. Be sure the immediate area is clear before starting or running an engine above idle. Thrown or broken props do happen and are very dangerous. For the safety of yourself and others, alert people in your immediate area that may have their attention directed elsewhere, that you are about to start an engine.

\* Keep engine-running time in the start-up area or pits or to an absolute minimum! The closer the flight line or pilot stations are to start up areas, the more of a concern this becomes. Engine noise on the ground makes it difficult for flying pilots to listen to the sound of their own plane and distinguish any changes in engine performance. High throttle runs should be kept very

short, just a few seconds. If you need to idle an engine for an extended period time, (anything estimated to be over one minute) it should be done in a location away from spectators and flying members. Many clubs short on pit space have an engine tuning station far away from the flight line that is to be used for extended engine running. However, in my experience, few members rarely use it or even know about it. So ask if your club has a tuning station or would consider installing one.

\* When walking in proximity of the flight line or onto the field to retrieve an airplane, avoid walking directly in front of other flying pilots.

\* Avoid taxiing your plane in the proximity of pilots that have an airplane in the air. To a flying pilot it can be very unnerving to have a plane taxi very close to his/her proximity while they are trying to keep their eyes on their own flying airplane. (It doesn't matter if the pilot station is guarded or not, please steer well clear.)

\* (Updated) This used to say; you should not claim a frequency for no more than 15 minutes, whether your plane was airborne or not. That was when 72 MHz was the rule but since frequency sharing is all but a distant memory with the widespread adoption of 2.4 GHz, this one will now read: Do not claim a flight station for more than 15 minutes. Many clubs have a limited amount of stations in order to control the number of aircraft that can be in the air at once.

\* If you need to walk onto the runway, make sure everybody understands your intentions before you step onto it. Observe all requests to land before you go. Spend as little time there as possible and announce when you are clear of the runway as well.

\* Call out your intentions or difficulties to others that are flying. Some examples are: "Taking off", "Coming in/Landing", "Touch and go", "On the field", "Off the field", "Dead stick" or "Lost control". This last one can be useful to you the pilot as well. Others that are not flying will visually track where the plane goes down and be of great assistance in locating it.

\* Give landing aircraft priority use of the runway and the airspace immediately surrounding should a go around be necessary.

\* Give a student pilot's airplane plenty of space when flying. Beginners can become overly worried about traffic and will concentrate on collision avoidance rather than maneuvers that improve their skills.

\* Student pilots should consider that their instructors may have also brought planes of his/her own they wish to fly. They may also be working with more than one student. Be patient!

\* Always control your aircraft, whether on the ground or in the air, with the belief that radio failure can and will happen at any moment. Flying directly towards the flight line and diverting at the last minute may be exciting, but trust me it makes people on the flight line and pit area very nervous. Repeated stunts have resulted in the permanent loss of more than one daredevils flying privileges.

\* Do not adjust equipment of a fellow modeler (IE: needle valve) without consent.

\* Keep unsolicited advice to an absolute minimum. Safety concerns should always be politely brought to the attention of a fellow modeler. But if it's just general advice and you can't help yourself, be brief, be concise, present your suggestion once and move on. Just keep in mind if you really do know your stuff, your advice will be solicited.

\* Some pilots do not mind holding conversations while flying and some do not like to at all. Unless you are very familiar with the pilot, assume he/she prefers not to chat. Wait until their plane is back in the pits and the engine is off.

\* When standing in the immediate vicinity of a flyer, be sure to provide plenty of space and stand back a foot or two to allow him/her clear vision up and down the flight line.

\* Help search for downed aircraft when possible. The next search and rescue mission could be for your plane and you will welcome the assistance. If you are the first one to the crash site, unless the damage is very minor, let the pieces lie until the owner arrives so he/she can take inventory or even investigate a probable cause.

\* To continue the topic of lost planes. If its your plane that went down, no matter how distraught you are over damaging or even losing an aircraft, be sure to show your appreciation to your search party for helping you look, since they likely spent precious flying time helping you.

\* If you are visiting another flying field, take as much time as necessary to familiarize yourself with the rules and the peculiarities of field. Ask questions about anything you are unsure of. Also, be humble and suppress negative comments. The members are well aware of any shortcomings and do not want to hear criticism from outsiders. Always remember you are a guest in their home!

\* This last area is a rather tricky subject and could be an entire article on its own. We're talking about styles of flying that have proven not to be a good mix in some clubs. The division is between pilots that do maneuvers low, slow and in close (3-D airplanes and helicopters) vs. those that fly airplanes in a more "traditional pattern". To say this diversity has created hard feelings in too many clubs is a huge understatement. Considering how deep seated some factions have become, just saying there needs to be more communication, compromise and understanding appears to be an overly simplistic solution. However, a lack of that is what created the problem.

\* Those flying 3-D or helicopter pilots need to realize that many of the maneuvers they perform, such as hovering, can be very disconcerting to other pilots, just to name one concern. If you wish to spend part of your flight doing maneuvers in the space immediately over the runway, express your intentions ahead of time as to work out a compromise with others. If you're in the group that has difficulty flying at the same time 3-D or helicopters do, you must understand that if club rules allow, these pilots have equal privilege to airtime for expressing their styles. Politely express your concerns to those pilots, to work out a compromise.

\* Whether it comes from an impromptu agreement at the field or an adopted club policy, like I said before, everybody needs to communicate and compromise so that vastly different styles are not battling for the same air space at the same time.

The point of this article is to get beginners as well as experienced pilot's thinking about their own actions and routines. Those with many years experience should consider this an update. Maybe you saw something that innocently has been part of your standard operating procedure for many years and did not realize was discourteous. Believe me, others have. Things do change and old dogs can and should learn new tricks. No matter how long you have been in this sport or how much you think you know, you may very well make an etiquette blunder and get approached on it. Yes, it's difficult to not take it personally or be insulted, but graciously accept the input and make an effort to incorporate a change.

This is certainly not an absolute list, if you feel there is an important item that was address feel free to leave a reply below. Regardless if everything was addressed it all comes down to the fact that each of us needs to be conscious of how our actions impact those that we share the flying field with. Just simply communicating and being courteous will earn respect; make anybody a joy to fly with, and a welcomed guest or member at any flying field.