



## RADIO CHECK

**Five by Five** is the best of 25 possible subjective responses used to describe the quality of communications. As receiving stations move away from an analog radio transmitting site, the signal strength decreases gradually while noise levels increase. The signal becomes increasingly more difficult to understand until it can no longer be heard as anything other than static.

In voice procedure (the techniques used to facilitate spoken communication over two-way radios) a transmitting station may request a report on the subjective quality of signal they are broadcasting. In the military of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) countries, and other organizations, the signal quality is reported on two scales;

The first is for [Signal Strength](#)

The second for [Signal Clarity](#)

Both these scales range from one to five, where **one is the worst** and **five is the best**. The listening station reports these numbers separated with the word "by". **Five by five** therefore means a signal that has excellent strength and perfect clarity — the most understandable signal possible.

"Five by five" (occasionally written "5 by 5", "five-by-five" or "5-by-5") by extension has come to mean "I understand you perfectly" in situations other than radio communication, the way ***Loud and Clear*** entered slang, post-World War II. A further shortened form is "five by".

The term is arguably derived from the signal quality rating systems such as shortwave's SINPO code or amateur radio's RST. Given that this slang spans not only generations but also a spectrum of communications technologies (spark-gap transmitters, shortwave, radio telephone, Citizen's Band CD radio, cellular among others) and organizations (hobbyist, commercial, many military branches in different countries), there are many interpretations in popular misuse. No definitive interpretation of the phrase can be considered 'correct' anymore.