

Similar-Sounding Identifiers: Say Exactly Which One

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Why this matters

Two labels may differ by one letter. Noise, a weak radio signal or a familiar nickname can turn that small difference into the wrong selection. Agreed phonetic words help people communicate letters distinctly. The check is whether both people identify the same actual item, not whether someone can recite an alphabet.

Objective: Communicate a complete identifier using the agreed convention, then confirm that it matches the instruction and the actual item.

Key hazards or failure points

Sound-alike letters; zero confused with letter O; missing prefixes or suffixes; transposed digits; unreadable labels; local nicknames; a correctly repeated identifier taken from the wrong document.

Practical controls

- Agree the site's phonetic and number convention before the task. Keep the approved reference available. Do not invent substitute words during the exchange or assume every crew uses the same convention.
- State the complete required identifier, including distinguishing letters, digits and separators. Using the ICAO convention listed by FAA, B is Bravo and D is Delta; confirm that convention is the one adopted for this task.
- Receiver repeats the identifier; sender checks and confirms it. Match that identifier with the current task instruction and physical label through the authorized safe method. Spoken accuracy does not establish equipment status or isolation.

Verify It in the Field

Practice with two clearly marked paper examples, B-14 and D-14, with no operational action requested. Under the agreed convention, distinguish "Bravo dash one four" from "Delta dash one four." Have the receiver write the identifier and compare it with the sender's card.

From a safe position, compare one real task identifier with its authorized instruction and readable label. Do not enter a restricted area, touch hazardous equipment or remove a cover for this exercise. Record the exact identifier and any mismatch requiring correction.

Check the message at the actual communication positions. Ask about unclear characters, including letter O versus zero if relevant. Record the adopted reference, sender/receiver, actual decoding result and time. Hold a questionable match rather than using location or appearance to guess.

Stop and reassess

Pause selection or action for an unreadable label, incomplete identifier, different repeat-back, inconsistent convention or document mismatch. Obtain an authorized correction and recheck. Do not rename or relabel equipment informally to make the conversation easier.

Ask the crew

1. Which two identifiers here could be confused?
2. How do we distinguish the letter O from zero?
3. What evidence proves the spoken identifier matches the intended item?

Use the task plan and required specialist decisions before exposure.

Sources: DOE-HDBK-1028-2009 Vol. 2, p. 28; FAA AIM §4-2-7; HSE communication guidance. Full references: webpage..

Free next step: [JHA/JSA planning & field-verification worksheet](#)

Expanded guidance and separate forms: toddjeromejenkins.com/toolbox-talks/phonetic-alphabet-equipment-identifiers

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