THE PATH TO MORSE CODE FLUENCY

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Two essential skills enable Morse code fluency:

1) Extreme familiarity with the alphabet: **Instant Character Recognition (ICR)**
2) Character flow skills (keeping up) powered by **Instant Error Recovery (IER)**

These two skills are mutually beneficial; improving one helps improve the other. Instant Error Recovery isn't "letting go" of non-recognition events, *it's never hanging on in the first place*. **Missing stuff isn't failure, it's essential IER practice**!

We begin by learning dit/dah sequences of each letter but that's far from truly *knowing* the alphabet. When each CW letter sound *is* the letter without thought (like spoken letters), that's the level of character sound familiarity necessary for Morse code fluency. To paraphrase Nancy Kott (WZ8C), <u>over-learn the alphabet</u>. Over-learning each letter by their unique acoustic sound is an integral part of the journey to <u>Morse code proficiency</u>.

IER and ICR are equally essential skills; over-learning your ABC's alone isn't enough. You must also instantly recover from non-recognition events. Improving IER requires a ***Try But Don't Care*** attitude; being mentally alert while remaining indifferent to misses. This alert indifference helps get your conscious mind out of the way, thus allowing your super-fast subconscious to 'take a shot'. Be relaxed, go with the flow, adopt a light mental touch attitude. Trying to recognize *every-single-character* prioritizes conscious efforts (slow) while blocking out your subconscious. Your subconscious may not be up to the task quite yet due to insufficient character sound familiarity, but practice using it anyway!

Improving IER helps you practice faster CW sooner rather than later**.** IER skills replace slow conscious efforts with a 'go with the flow, try but don't care' mindset. Practicing with speedy CW builds ICR and IER skills – faster! It's a positive feedback loop: An IER mindset increases your comfort level with fast CW, which then accelerates ICR improvement, which then improves IER skills, which helps ICR, etc. Take advantage of this positive feedback loop - it will accelerate your journey.

ICR isn't a 'recognize letters quickly with plenty of time between them' skill. It's all about word building as letters arrive in the midst of a rapid flow of CW. Get very

familiar with single/unique letter sounds and short recognition intervals (speedy CW)! If you wish, try [word building without CW](#) to check your pre-existing word building skills. If short phrases or sentences are difficult to head copy you may still be decoding dit/dah sequences (too slow). As acoustic character sound familiarity builds, recognition will transition into a background/subconscious task. The brain's conscious retention buffer is then free to build words as letters arrive, follow trains of thought, and understand what's being said.

What about **I**nstant **W**ord **R**ecognition or **I**nstant **S**yllable **R**ecognition? IWR and ISR skills occur naturally as short groups of letters are heard repeatedly (CQ, THE, RST, QTH, TNX, WX, ING, ED, ER, TEST, etc.). Common letter sequences heard often enough will eventually morph into a single sound rhythm. Since this happens naturally over time, IWR and ISR will automatically improve.

My way of learning the alphabet as a single acoustic sound per letter was listening to it a dozen or more times per day at three different speeds. I'd listen to letters in groups of three (AAA BBB CCC DDD etc.) at my current skill level, 4-5 wpm faster, and again at 8-10 wpm faster. As the speed increased it got easier to hear each letter as a single acoustic sound rhythm. I also sent the alphabet a dozen or more times per day. Every time I heard a letter I focused on hearing its unique acoustic sound rhythm. Decoding dit/dah sequences is too slow once you put the pencil down; hearing each letter as a single sound becomes more important.

My IER practice was mostly done by listening to on-air QSOs, rag chews, and short stories on the computer. I prioritized keeping up with the flow of CW character sounds and finally learned to not worry about missing stuff (IER). As I kept going with the flow regardless of non-recognition events I began to get my conscious mind out of the way and trust my subconscious to do the recognition work.

We all learn differently so pay attention and do more of what is effective for you, and less of what doesn't seem to help. When your brain gets tired and it feels more like work and less like fun, stop and pick it up again later. 'Code talk' to yourself and/or out loud through the day, and practice sending and listening to CW multiple times per day. Good luck, have fun, keep practice sessions short and sweet (10 – 15 minutes), and get a QSO code buddy (on-air QSOs beat computer practice). Check out the [Long Island CW Club](#); it's a welcoming community with a rich variety of online classes that will make your journey towards Morse code proficiency more enjoyable.