

Yes, and . . .

Using an Improv Technique for Better QSOs

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What's the most important skill you must master to enjoy using VarAC? It's probably not what you think. The most important skill is the ability to have a meaningful chat with someone you can't see or hear. The only interaction we have is through the keyboard. While that's a great way to exchange information, it's a very hard way to form relationships.

One way to handle this situation is simply to stick "with the facts" which would be name, QTH, working conditions, and the weather. "73, great QSO <DISC>"

But shouldn't we strive for something a bit more? After all, you already have a lot in common with the person at the other end of the communication. This is a better situation than trying to strike up a conversation at a party with people whom you may have very little in common with!

Although it may be a tad uncomfortable to foray into having deeper QSOs, the payoff is tremendous, possibly leading to making a lifelong friend. In any instance, you might find out something you didn't know. And, might I add, make your QSOs a bit more "human." The worst case is that you can't break through your QSO partner's self imposed wall of limitations for making more interesting QSOs.

In the world of improvisational theater or Improv, the concept of "Yes, and..." is a fundamental principle used to build scenes collaboratively. It's not so much a specific training exercise as it is a core philosophy that underpins much of improvisational theater. It's a technique for validating what someone says and building upon it. And isn't that what a VarAC chat should be?

What is "Yes, and..."?

Since this isn't an acting class, let's jump right into how "Yes, and..." fits into building interesting QSOs. The technique consists of:

- **"Yes"**: Accepting something sent to you by your QSO partner. Instead of ignoring their contribution, you agree to it, treating it as something significant.
- **"And..."**: Adding something new to the QSO to keep it moving forward. This addition builds on something they've said, contributing new information, a personal experience, or an insight you might have.

This technique ensures that QSOs develop naturally, encourages collaboration, and prevents the QSO from just stalling out.

Accepting the Offer ("Yes")

In amateur radio, an "offer" is any piece of information, question, or topic introduced by the other operator. Instead of dismissing, ignoring, or giving a minimal response, try fully accepting and acknowledging what's been shared. For instance, someone might say:

"I'm activating a new park for POTA today."

Instead of a curt reply like "Nice, good signal here," use "Yes" to affirm their contribution: "That sounds amazing! I hope the weather is awesome."

Active listening to the other operator's comments, whether about their location, equipment, or conditions, shows genuine interest by acknowledging their input. This builds rapport and encourages the QSO to move forward.

Building on the Conversation ("And...")

After accepting the other operator's contribution, add something new to keep the conversation flowing. This could be a related question, a personal anecdote, or additional details to expand the topic.

"That sounds amazing! I trust the weather is awesome. It rained all weekend for our Field Day this year."

Or maybe:

"That sounds amazing! I bet it was a lot of work. How long did it take you to set up?"

Share relevant details about your own station, experiences, or interests that connect to what the other operator said. This invites them to respond and keeps the conversation alive.

Overcoming Common Conversational Challenges

"Yes, and..." encourages taking small risks by adding to the conversation, even if it's just a small detail. For example, if they mention their location, respond with, "Yes, and is it as gorgeous as they say it is this time of year?"

A good tip is to think about "Yes, and..." responses to common topics (e.g., weather, equipment, QTH) to build confidence. With VarAC, you can even make those into canned messages so you can respond rapidly while thinking about how you can help expand the QSO.

Use "Yes, and..." to pivot to new topics organically. For instance, if the other operator mentions they got a new rig, you could say, "Yes, that's a great rig, and what made you decide to buy that particular radio?"

Something I often do is keep ChatGPT open in my browser so I can quickly find some interesting tidbits I can use to move the QSO along. For example, you could ask ChatGPT “what's a good conversation starter for someone in Twin Falls, ID?” This technique has helped me have chats about The Lost Dutchman's Gold Mine, rock bands, flying, scuba diving, 3D printing, and grain elevators to name a few.

Your Goal is to Make the Other Person a Great Conversationalist

Scott Adams, the creator of *Dilbert*, discusses that everyone is somewhat apprehensive meeting someone for the first time. Knowing that, you can make it a game to see how good of a conversationalist you can help the other person to be. In other words, your job is to solve their problem of how to have a good conversation with you. You're not in the VarAC chat to have the other station learn about you – you're there to learn about them. You want them feeling great about being able to chat with you.

Adams also stresses that you don't need to be witty or fascinating to have a good chat. Instead, focus on being genuinely curious about the other person. People love talking about themselves, so asking questions and listening actively makes you a great conversationalist without needing to “perform.”

The QRZ.com Page

Your QRZ.com page is really important in providing fodder for “Yes, and...” Since VarAC offers a dedicated button that takes your QSO partner right to your page, interesting material on your page increases the chances for one of those great QSOs. If your page is blank, it makes it all that much harder to get into a meaningful QSO with someone.

Conclusion

These strategies provide a structured way to sustain conversations, make QSOs more enjoyable, and build confidence. By practicing these techniques, we can help transform routine exchanges into meaningful connections, even within the unique constraints of VarAC's keyboard to keyboard communication.

There are a number of videos on Youtube that demonstrate “Yes, and...” such as <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qe2a3ppacUk> . Here's a fun TEDx Talk <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ptTnCHa-3pl>