

ETO Practice Exercises – Survey Text Template

Exercise Message Submission Window:

November 15 00:00 UTC - November 20 08:00 UTC

Difficulty Level: **Advanced**

Purpose:

To introduce participants to the upcoming Winlink Practice Exercise framework, emphasizing accuracy, form familiarity, and the shift from content creation to content transmission. This exercise will also gather feedback to fine-tune the forms and delivery methods before the January rollout.

Objectives:

- Familiarize participants with the concept of Practice Exercises vs. Training Exercises.
- Guide them through creating and installing a Winlink Text Template questionnaire.
- Collect data on preferred forms, frequency of participation, and presentation style.
- Reinforce the expectation that operators should focus on accurate transmission, not content generation.
- Use feedback to refine the January launch strategy and long-term form rotation.

Resources:

- General Notes on Frequently-Seen Mistakes:
https://emcomm-training.org/Winlink_Thursdays.html
- Finding your ETO clearinghouse:
<https://emcomm-training.org/General-Drill-Info.html>
- ETO Location Instructions — With or Without a GPS Receiver for your Computer [PDF]
 - <https://emcomm-training.org/Santa-2023/ETO-Location-Notes.pdf>
- How a GIS map-capable form's default position is determined:
 - From within Winlink Express Click on Help ⇒ Help Contents..., expand Operation, click on GIS Mapping Forms & Catalog Items

Narrative:

Over the past few years, our EmComm training has evolved from weekly Winlink Thursday training exercises to a more sustainable monthly cadence. As we prepare to introduce weekly practice sessions, we're focusing on consistency, accuracy, and teachability.

This exercise introduces the new format: Recurring forms practice exercises for the first, second, and fourth week of each month. And a fifth form practice exercise in months with five Thursdays. Along with this introduction, participants will create a Winlink Text Template questionnaire, then using it they will respond with their preferences, assisting with the direction of future practice sessions, and our training exercises.

We've automated more of the form parsing to provide feedback on field accuracy—because in a real event, radio operators are content presenters, versus message creators. This shift ensures clarity and reliability in digital communications.

Alongside our focus on consistency and accuracy in completing Winlink forms, we aim to build **muscle memory** through repeated exposure to a core subset of forms. These are the ones expected to be frequently used during real-world events, and our goal is for participants to reach a point where populating them feels second nature—quick, confident, and error-free. Your input will help us determine which forms to prioritize, how best to deliver artifacts related to the instruction, and how often you're likely to participate. The goal: a resilient, teachable, and scalable training system that supports both new and experienced operators

This exercise mimics a real-world deployment drill conducted earlier this year, where Emcomm operators conducted radio support for a live charity event with active field stations, equipment, and tactical coordination. Each site received a set of Winlink Text Template files just prior to activation. These templates contained preformatted message structures tailored to the event's needs—ranging from weather updates to delivery status reports—and were used to ensure consistent, accurate communication with the Event Control Station. To use these templates, the operator needed to save these files locally in the appropriate Winlink Express directories, enabling rapid message generation under internet-denied conditions. Remote RMS Gateways were requested to be more than 10 miles away, reinforcing the realism of the exercise.

In this training, participants will be provided with the raw text of a single Winlink Text Template. The Instructions section will walk them step-by-step through retrieving the text from the ETO website, copying it into a plain text editor (preferably Notepad), saving it in the appropriate Winlink Express directory, and using it to generate a

message to their ETO Clearinghouse. This process not only builds familiarity with template handling, but also reinforces the purpose of these templates: to deliver structured, easily consumable data for downstream operations, including automated parsing by apps and loading into spreadsheets for analysis. You should also notice that the overall size of a message is much smaller than HTML Form messages. This could be a vital factor in getting a message through during bad propagation.

Discussion:

With the foundational narrative in place, this section outlines the operational changes and expectations surrounding the upcoming Practice Exercises. These details are essential for participants to understand how the exercises will be delivered, how they differ from Training Exercises, and what role their submissions play in shaping future content.

Additionally, the information gathered from this exercise will help ETO refine the **Practice Exercises** that will be provided during the first, second, fourth and the occasional fifth week of each month. It's important to note the distinction: **Training Exercises** are designed to teach new features or workflows, while **Practice Exercises** reinforce muscle memory and accuracy with recurring forms. This distinction is important because **Training Exercises** will continue to be sent to the ETO Clearinghouse tactical address you have historically used. In contrast, all **Practice Exercises** will be submitted to the dedicated tactical address: **ETO-PRACTICE**.

To support consistency and planning, starting in 2026, ETO will standardize the release of each exercise for you to be able to start working on the exercise around 00:00 UTC on Saturdays. Participants will then have a full six-day window—until 08:00 UTC the following Friday—to complete the exercise. This schedule ensures operators across time zones have equal opportunity to participate and allows for predictable weekly planning. The date associated with each exercise corresponds to the Thursday by which participants are expected to complete it. Exercise submission can be done on any of the six days the exercise spans.

Participants who submit their completed exercise to the ETO-PRACTICE tactical address will continue to receive personalized feedback as we have been doing. In addition to the feedback, they will receive the instructions for the next practice exercise. This feedback loop reinforces engagement and helps operators stay aligned with evolving training goals. For those who miss a week or need access to the instructions outside of a Winlink message, the same instructions will be provided on the ETO website, ensuring accessibility and continuity for all participants. The exact process for the instructions on the Winlink Thursday Website has not yet been finalized. Also, the responses from this exercise may assist in directing the process.

Exercise Instructions:

Installing the ETO Practice Session Survey Template

1. Open your web browser.
2. Accessing the Template.
 - Option 1: Navigate to URL:
https://emcomm-training.org/11-20-2025_Files/ETO_PracticeExercise_SurveyTemplate.html
 - Option 2: Access the Winlink site:
On the Winlink Thursday webpage for downloading this PDF, follow the link stating **Get Text Template Data**.
3. Scroll down until you see a **code block** containing the template text. It will be inside a bordered box with a **Copy** button just above it.
 - a. Click the **Copy** button located near the top-right corner of the code block.
This will copy the entire template text to your clipboard.
 - b. If your browser does not support the copy button, manually highlight all the text inside the code block, then right-click and choose Copy.
4. On your Windows PC, paste to an open Notepad window. Only use Windows Notepad. To open:
 - a. Press Windows Key + R, type notepad, and press Enter.
 - i. Or click Start, search for "Notepad," and open it.
 - b. Paste the copied text into the blank Notepad window by pressing Ctrl + V.
5. Save the file.
 - a. In Notepad, click File -> Save As.
 - b. Validate the Encoding selection is "UTF-8".
 - c. Name the file exactly as:
 - i. ETO-PracticeExerciseSurvey.txt
 - d. Navigate to your Winlink Express personal template directory. The correct path is:
 - i. <WinlinkExpressRoot>\RMS Express\<yourcallsign>\Templates\ETO Forms
 - ii. Replace <WinlinkExpressRoot> with the path on your PC.
 1. If you're unsure where <WinlinkExpressRoot> is located, right-click your Winlink Express shortcut and choose Open file location. This will show you the root directory.

2. By default it is C:\RMS.
 - iii. You may need to manually create the ETO Forms folder inside Templates if it doesn't already exist.
 - e. Click Save.
6. Verify Installation
- a. Open Winlink Express.
 - b. Go to Message -> New Message.
 - c. Click the Select Template button.
 - d. Navigate to <yourcallsign> -> Templates -> ETO Forms and confirm that ETO-PracticeExerciseSurvey.txt appears in the list.

Using the ETO Practice Session Survey Template

1. In the survey there are 4 questions asking for your preferred forms to be used in practice tests. There will be a free form question that allows you to provide the name of a form not provided in lists of the first 4 questions. You may want to look at the Template Manager and familiarize yourself with the name of forms you would wish to have presented as practice forms.
2. If you are still viewing the templates in your personal directory jump ahead to step 4.
3. Otherwise:
 - a. Open Winlink Express.
 - b. Go to Message -> New Message.
 - c. Click the Select Template button.
 - d. Navigate to <yourcallsign> -> Templates -> ETO Forms
4. Select the template ETO-PracticeExerciseSurvey.txt by either double clicking on it or highlight it then click on the **Select** in the menu bar.
5. Each question will have a prompt and either a dropdown list for selection or general entry. Your response will only be written to the message content if you click on the **Accept** button. **Cancel** will leave the response blank. Steps 5 through 10 are the different questions you will be asked when responding to the survey and describe the possible responses.
6. From the drop-down list for choosing your Clearinghouse, select your ETO Clearinghouse FEMA region and press **Accept**.

7. When asked, your Internet Email Address if you wish to receive a copy of the message. Otherwise leave it blank. In either case, click on **Accept**.
8. You will see 4 questions. Each with a drop-down list of form names. Each individual selection specifies a Winlink form you'd prefer to practice with. Providing us with four preferences. While it is expected you select a different form each time, you may select a form more than once. This will be interpreted as you would like to use that duplicate vote to count extra for that form. Press **Accept** to use the selection for a preferred form.
9. For the next question, you will be asked to suggest one additional form you would like to see included. This can be the name of any form in the Standard Templates folder.
10. The next question is asking how you will want to be provided data from the ETO instructions that as a participant you will need to enter.
 - a. Typing Full Content - manually enter the information after reading it.
 - b. Copy-Paste from HTML CodeBlock - This describes the mechanism you used to get the text for this exercise's Form Template and the Tab Delimited ICS-309 text in the September 2025 training exercise.
 - c. Download a file - A link on the ETO Website would be available for downloading a file.
 - d. Register for a message containing data - This would require you to send a Winlink message to ETO, registering you for the exercise and receiving the data needed in the exercise.
 - e. Click on the **Accept** button once you have made your selection.
11. How often do you think you will participate with the Practice Exercises:
 - a. Weekly - means you would attempt to participate in all practice exercises.
 - b. When Possible - means you will attempt to participate in all exercises, but have other duties that will frequently interfere with participating.
 - c. BiMonthly - means you expect to participate at least twice a month on a practice exercise.
 - d. Monthly - means you may participate in one practice exercise a month.
 - e. Not At All - means you are not interested in the practice exercise.
 - f. Click on the **Accept** button once you have made your selection.

12. After responding to the questionnaire, your responses will be written to the New Message window. This template does not have the ReadOnly template command turned on, so you are able to edit the message if needed. There will be a blank line between two lines containing the text “comment”. This line is the place where you can add your own comments concerning our plan for weekly practice sessions. Use as much space you need between the two lines.
13. If you answered all the questions, the To:, Cc:, and Subject fields will have been populated for you.
14. If you don't like your answers, you can just load the template again.

Submit the ETO Practice Exercise Survey Message

1. Validate the **Send as:** is set to Winlink Message
2. Validate the **To:** is your correct ETO Clearinghouse.
3. Validate the **CC:** includes an ETO-BK entry.
4. Click on **Post to Outbox**.

Send the Message

1. Select and open your preferred Winlink Session.
2. Validate your session window heading ends in “Winlink Session”.
3. (Optional) Update your Channels Selection if you haven't for a while.
 - a. Click on the **Channel Selection** menu item.
 - b. Click on the **Update Table Via Internet** menu item if you have internet.
 - c. Once it has refreshed with the new data, click on the Grid Square column and scroll till your grid or one nearby is shown.
 - i. Scroll up and down some and take a look at the gateways nearby and note the mileage and bearing.
 - ii. I find it interesting seeing the frequency of addition of new gateways (specially UHF or VHF that are being added), and often I'm surprised by seeing ones in nearby counties that are closer than some in my county.
 - iii. Note their frequency, often UHF/VHF gateways that are on the same frequency may be able to be used as digipeaters to work the more remote one.

4. Select your gateway, and if there is not radio control, make sure the frequency is correct.
5. Click start to send your message.
6. On completion, there should be a message that will specify how many messages were sent and time statistics about the transfer.
7. Close the Session window if it is no longer needed.
8. Close the Winlink Application window if it is no longer needed.

End of Exercise Instructions

Example Text:**ETO-PracticeExerciseSurvey.txt**

Type: Winlink

To: <VAR ETO_ClearingHouse>

Cc: ETO-BK; <VAR CarbonCopy>

Subj: ETO Practice Exercise Survey ... From - <Callsign>

Def: ETO_ClearingHouse=<SELECT Choose Your Clearinghouse Delivery Address (Based on FEMA Region):, UnSelected=Clearinghouse Not Selected, Region I=ETO-01, Region II=ETO-02, Region III=ETO-03, Region IV=ETO-04, Region V=ETO-05, Region VI=ETO-06, Region VII=ETO-07, Region VIII=ETO-08, Region IX=ETO-09, Region X=ETO-10, Canada-ETO-CAN, Non-USA & Non-Canadian=ETO-DX>

Def: CarbonCopy=<ASK Enter Your Internet Email Address If a Copy is Desired or Leave Blank:>

Def: PreferredForm1=<SELECT Choose Your 1st Preferred Practice Exercise:, ICS-213 General Message=ICS-213, ICS-213RR Resource Request=ICS-213RR, ICS-205 Communications List=ICS-205, ICS-309 Communications Log=ICS-309, Field Situation Report=Field Situation Report, Local Weather Report=Local Weather Report, Severe Weather Report=Severe WX Report>

Def: PreferredForm2=<SELECT Choose Your 2nd Preferred Practice Exercise:, ICS-213 General Message=ICS-213, ICS-213RR Resource Request=ICS-213RR, ICS-205 Communications List=ICS-205, ICS-309 Communications Log=ICS-309, Field Situation Report=Field Situation Report, Local Weather Report=Local Weather Report, Severe Weather Report=Severe WX Report>

Def: PreferredForm3=<SELECT Choose Your 3rd Preferred Practice Exercise:, ICS-213 General Message=ICS-213, ICS-213RR Resource Request=ICS-213RR, ICS-205 Communications List=ICS-205, ICS-309 Communications Log=ICS-309, Field Situation Report=Field Situation Report, Local Weather Report=Local Weather Report, Severe Weather Report=Severe WX Report>

Def: PreferredForm4=<SELECT Choose Your 4th Preferred Practice Exercise:, ICS-213 General Message=ICS-213, ICS-213RR Resource Request=ICS-213RR, ICS-205 Communications List=ICS-205, ICS-309 Communications Log=ICS-309, Field Situation Report=Field Situation Report, Local Weather Report=Local Weather Report, Severe Weather Report=Severe WX Report>

Def: FormOther=<ASK If there is another preferred form - Please provide its name:>

Def: DataPresentation=<SELECT Choose how you would you like the data to be made available to you:, Type Full Content, Copy-Paste from HTML CodeBlock, Download a file, Register for message containing data>

Winlink Thursday Exercise For November 20, 2025

Def: Participation=<SELECT How often to you think you will participate with the Practice Exercises:, Weekly=Weekly, When Possible, BiMonthly=About two weeks a month, Monthly=About one Week a month, NotAtAll=Just the training exercises>

Msg:

--- begin json ---

```
{  
  "First-Preferred-Form": "<VAR PreferredForm1>",  
  "Second-Preferred-Winlink-Form": "<VAR PreferredForm2>",  
  "Third-Preferred-Winlink-Form": "<VAR PreferredForm3>",  
  "Fourth-Preferred-Winlink-Form": "<VAR PreferredForm4>",  
  "Other-Winlink-Form": "<VAR FormOther>",  
  "Data-Presentation-Style": "<VAR DataPresentation>",  
  "Participation-Level": "<VAR Participation>"  
}
```

--- end json ---

Prior to submission, you can place any comments between the following lines:

--- begin comments ---

--- end comments ---

ETO Practice Exercise Form Survey Template, v1.1.2

Example Message Contents
<pre>--- begin json --- { "First-Preferred-Form": "ICS-213", "Second-Preferred-Winlink-Form": "ICS-213RR", "Third-Preferred-Winlink-Form": "ICS-205", "Fourth-Preferred-Winlink-Form": "ICS-309", "Other-Winlink-Form": "Winlink Check-In", "Data-Presentation-Style": "Copy-Paste from HTML CodeBlock", "Participation-Level": "Weekly" } --- end json ---</pre> Prior to submission, you can place any comments between the following lines: <pre>--- begin comments --- This is a comment made while testing the text template. --- end comments ---</pre> ETO Practice Exercise Form Survey Template, v1.1.2