

The following pages are from Pilot Workshop's [VFR Communications](#) Manual

# VFR Communications

A Pilot-Friendly® Manual



*Master VFR Radio Communications with this Simple Guide*

## Request Landing (Class D Airport)

- ① **ATIS RECORDING**  
Tri-Cities Airport information Echo, One one five five zulu observation ...
- ② **PILOT**  
Tri-Cities Tower, Cessna Two Three Six Papa Whiskey, ten southeast, information Echo, landing.
- ③ **TOWER CONTROLLER**  
Cessna Two Three Six Papa Whiskey, Tri-Cities Tower, enter right downwind Runway One Two, report midfield right downwind.
- ④ **PILOT**  
Report midfield right downwind Runway One Two, Cessna Two Three Six Papa Whiskey.
- ⑤ **PILOT**  
Midfield right downwind, Cessna Two Three Six Papa Whiskey.
- ⑥ **TOWER CONTROLLER**  
Cessna Two Three Six Papa Whiskey, Runway One Two, cleared to land.
- ⑦ **PILOT**  
Cleared to land Runway One Two, Cessna Two Three Six Papa Whiskey.

Tri-Cities Airport (KPSC)  
Pasco, WA  
ATIS 125.65  
Towe: 135.3

### TIP

Tower might have you fly right traffic even for a runway that normally has left traffic. Just read back the instruction to ensure that's really what the controller wants.

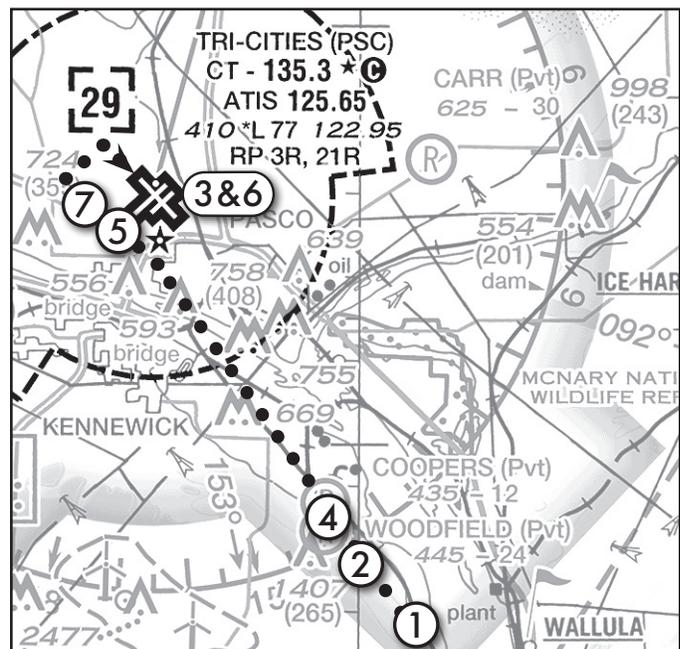
The radio work for landing at a Class D airport starts with listening to the ATIS or ASOS/AWOS 20-25 miles out. Next, establish contact with the Tower: Say hello about 10 miles out ②. The format is:

[Facility Name], [Full Call sign], [Your Position], Information [ATIS letter], [Your Intentions].

Tower will probably respond with pattern entry instructions ③. However, as long as you hear your call sign in the reply, two-way communication has been established and you may enter the Class D. For example, Tower might say in call ③, "Cessna Two Three Six Papa Whiskey, continue, expect Runway One Two." You would continue inbound and anticipate further instructions.

Instructions for getting to the runway might be simple if you're the only aircraft. Call ③ could have been: "Cessna Six Papa Whiskey, Straight-in Runway Three Zero. Cleared to land." Or it could get complex (see "Special Instructions Tower Might Throw Your Way" on page 55). Read back Tower's instructions, but don't trust them blindly. Think about why he's asking you to do something (wind, traffic, terrain, etc.). If any instruction doesn't make sense, ask for clarification in plain English.

Once you land, follow the procedures for towered taxi after landing (see page 27).



## SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS TOWER MIGHT THROW YOUR WAY

If everything works out correctly, the script for landing at a towered airport works as described on the opposite page. But when the timing of multiple aircraft using a limited supply of runways isn't working out, Tower has ways of making it right. Here are a few of the more common ones. (See page 68 for a few of them in context.)

**“Fly downwind; I'll call your base.”** You're on downwind and another aircraft is on an extended final. Tower sees the two of you will meet on short final, which will cause noise complaints from the airport neighbors. The easiest thing is for you to extend your downwind, so Tower assigns that and will tell you when you can turn base. Acknowledge the call and, maybe, delay descent for the runway because your final approach will start further out.

**“Report traffic in sight.”** This is common after the “I'll call your base,” and is combined with a traffic callout. “Cessna Six Papa Whiskey, you're following a Hawker Jet on four-mile-final. Report that traffic in sight.” If you don't see the traffic, your response is, “Looking for the traffic, Six Papa Whiskey.” Your response when you see it is, “Traffic in sight, Six Papa Whiskey.”

**“Follow that traffic.”** This is the third fellow in the trifecta of “Fly downwind” and “Report traffic.” It might all read, “Follow that traffic, base turn your discretion. Cleared to land Runway One Two.” Read back the instruction and keep a safe distance from the other traffic, planning to land second. A variant you sometimes hear is, “Maintain visual separation from that traffic,” specifically

when you're landing behind a departing aircraft.

**“Make right 360 for spacing.”** This fixes the same problem of “extend downwind,” but without you traveling so far from the airport. You'll make a shallow, right turn a full 360 degrees to kill time. A 360-degree turn that takes roughly a minute should do the trick. Acknowledge the call and re-enter the downwind a minute later. A right 360 would be when in left traffic. From right traffic, it would be a left 360.

**“Make short approach.”** This is the opposite solution: You get to land first, but only because you won't fly a full pattern. Tower expects you to fly a close-in base with a higher than normal descent rate to the runway. If you're uncomfortable with it, tell Tower you're “Unable short approach.”

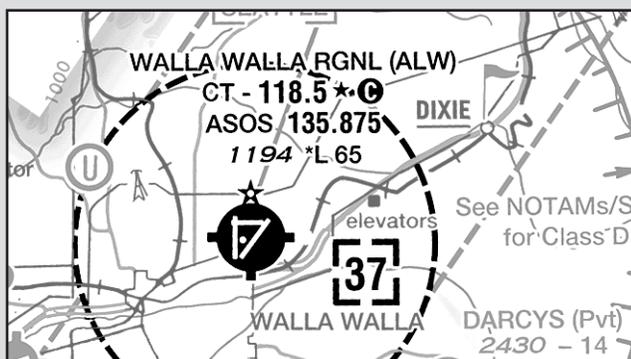
**“Change to Runway [Number].”** If multiple runways are available, Tower might switch you to another runway. Acknowledge and adjust your pattern accordingly.

**“Cancel landing clearance.”** Tower can clear you to land, and then revoke that clearance with new instructions. You can't legally land without a clearance, so acknowledge that and the new instructions, such as “fly downwind, you'll call base.”

**“Make [right/left] traffic.”** Even if the normal traffic pattern is left, Tower can have you fly right traffic (or vice-versa) if needed.

**“Go around.”** It's uncommon, but if Tower's efforts at fixing a problem don't work out, you can be told to go around. Don't argue or delay. Go around now.

## CHECK OUT THAT DATA BLOCK CLOSELY



Some towered airports have an ASOS but no ATIS, such as Walla Walla Regional. In this case, you can tell the tower you have the “one-minute weather” or let them give you the current winds and altimeter setting.

Even though this is not an ATIS, there is usually a provision to add NOTAMs to the ASOS/AWOS at any airport. With a tower, those are more likely to be kept up-to-date.

## Request Landing (with Pilot Requests)

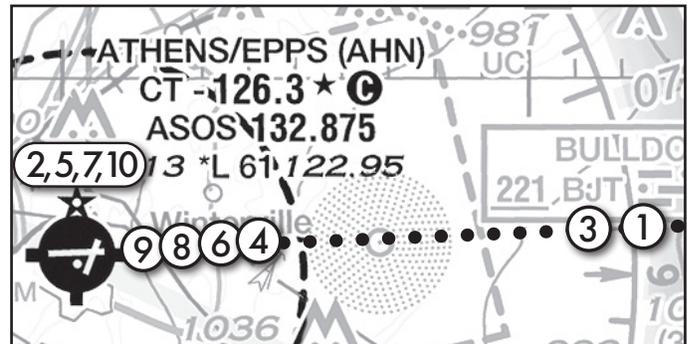
- ① **PILOT**  
Athens Tower, Cessna Two Three Six Papa Whiskey, ten east with Charlie for closed traffic. We have the one-minute weather.
- ② **TOWER CONTROLLER**  
Cessna Two Three Six Papa Whiskey, Athens Tower, wind is actually shifting around. Currently two six zero at one five gusting one eight. Altimeter two niner niner one. Make straight in Runway Two Seven, report three-mile final.
- ③ **PILOT**  
Straight in Runway Two Seven, and report a three-mile final. Cessna Two Three Six Papa Whiskey.
- ④ **PILOT**  
Three-mile final Runway Two Seven, Cessna Two Three Six Papa Whiskey.
- ⑤ **TOWER CONTROLLER**  
Cessna Six Papa Whiskey, Runway Two Seven, cleared for touch-and-go.
- ⑥ **PILOT**  
Tower, Cessna Six Papa Whiskey. We'd like the option whenever traffic permits.
- ⑦ **TOWER CONTROLLER**  
Cessna Six Papa Whiskey, Runway Two Seven, cleared for the option.
- ⑧ **PILOT**  
Runway Two Seven, cleared for the option. Thanks. Six Papa Whiskey.
- ⑨ **PILOT**  
Wind check.
- ⑩ **TOWER CONTROLLER**  
Wind two two zero at one three.

Athens/Ben Epps Airport (KAHN)

Athens, GA

ASOS 132.875

Tower 126.3



Just like Tower can give you special instructions (see page 55), you can make special requests from Tower. The most common might be practice in the pattern, or “closed traffic,” which you would do on your initial contact ①.

Other requests might be about your landing. Requesting and receiving clearance for “the option” ⑥ ⑦, means you can do any kind of landing you see fit (see “Distinguishing Different Kinds of Landings” on page 66).

If you want to land on the latter part of a runway to avoid having to taxi all that way to parking, you might request a “long landing.” You can also request specific runways, or specific pattern entries.

The request “Wind check” ⑨, is unique in that you don’t say your call sign or even the tower’s name. It doesn’t matter who needs to know the wind, but they probably need that information right away.

### REQUESTING A SPECIAL VFR ARRIVAL

A more complex request is a Special VFR (SVFR) arrival. It’s similar to a SVFR departure (see page 36). It follows the same format, except you request it “for landing at [Airport Name].” The clearance lets you fly into the airport surface area airspace with only one-mile visibility and remaining clear of clouds. It’s granted traffic permitting, but could be just the ticket if the towered airport is almost, but not quite, VFR.

## Request Landing (with LAHSO)

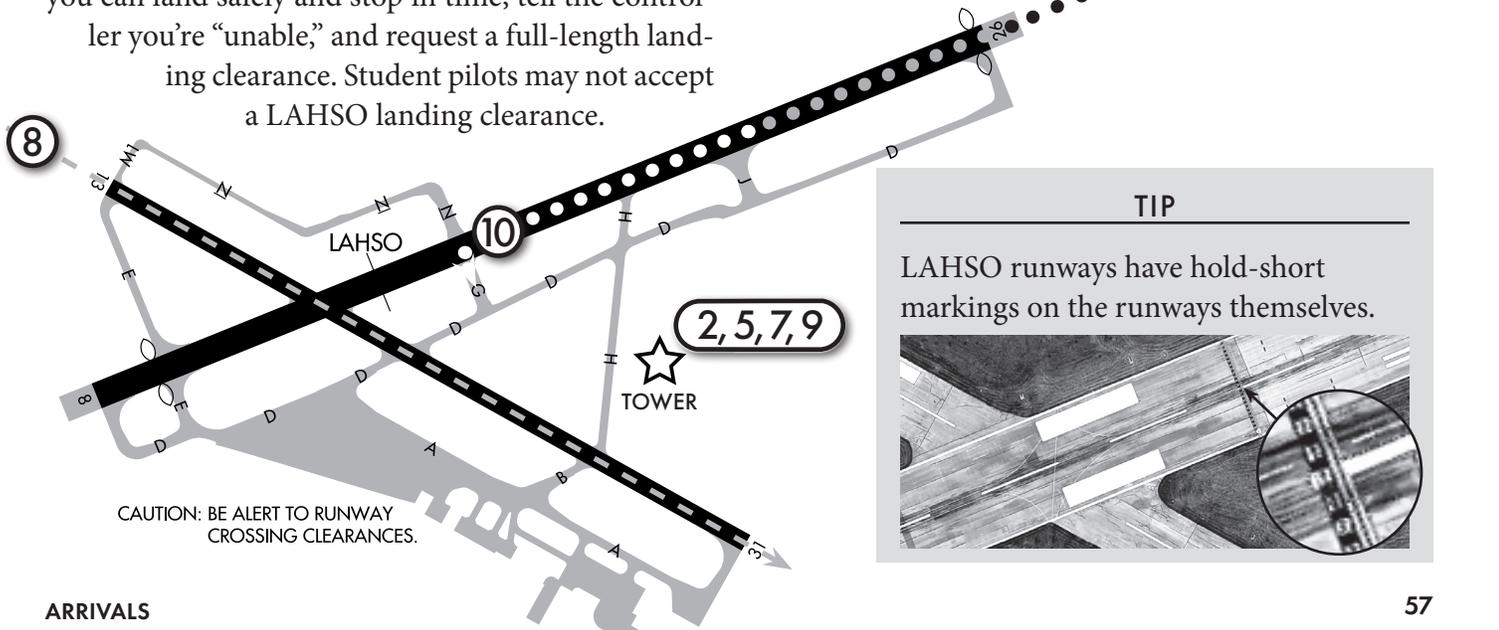
- ① PILOT  
Lancaster Tower, Cessna Two Three Six Papa Whiskey, ten miles east, with Lima.
- ② TOWER CONTROLLER  
Cessna Six Papa Whiskey, make straight-in for Runway Two Six, report two miles.
- ③ PILOT  
Straight in Runway Two Six, report two miles. Cessna Six Papa Whiskey.
- ④ PILOT  
Lancaster Tower, Cessna Six Papa Whiskey, two-miles for Runway Two Six.

- ⑤ TOWER CONTROLLER  
Cessna Six Papa Whiskey, Runway Two Six, cleared to land. Hold short of Runway One Three for landing traffic.
- ⑥ PILOT  
Cleared to land Two Six, hold short of Runway One Three for landing traffic. Cessna Six Papa Whiskey.
- ⑦ TOWER CONTROLLER  
Cirrus Five Kilo X-Ray, Runway One Three, cleared touch-and-go.
- ⑧ CIRRUS PILOT  
Runway One Three, cleared touch-and-go, Cirrus Five Kilo X-Ray.
- ⑨ TOWER CONTROLLER  
Six Papa Whiskey, Ground point eight.
- ⑩ PILOT  
Ground one two one point eight. Cessna Six Papa Whiskey.

Land and Hold Short Operations (LAHSO) mean only part of a runway is available for landing, usually because another aircraft is using a crossing runway. Often the ATIS will notify pilots that LAHSO is in effect. LAHSO points are depicted on charts, so that's a heads up to check the Chart Supplement and see how much runway is available in case you receive a LAHSO clearance. You can also ask ATC if you forget to check. Many rules control how ATC can assign LAHSO, but the radio work is similar.

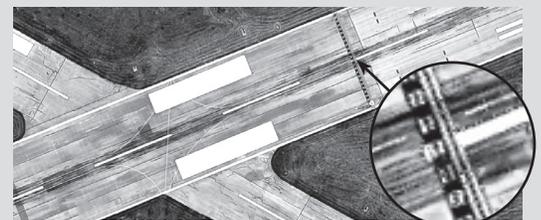
If you receive a LAHSO clearance ⑤, consider whether or not you can accept it. If you're not certain you can land safely and stop in time, tell the controller you're "unable," and request a full-length landing clearance. Student pilots may not accept a LAHSO landing clearance.

Lancaster Airport (KLNS)  
Lancaster, PA  
ATIS 125.675  
Tower 120.9



### TIP

LAHSO runways have hold-short markings on the runways themselves.



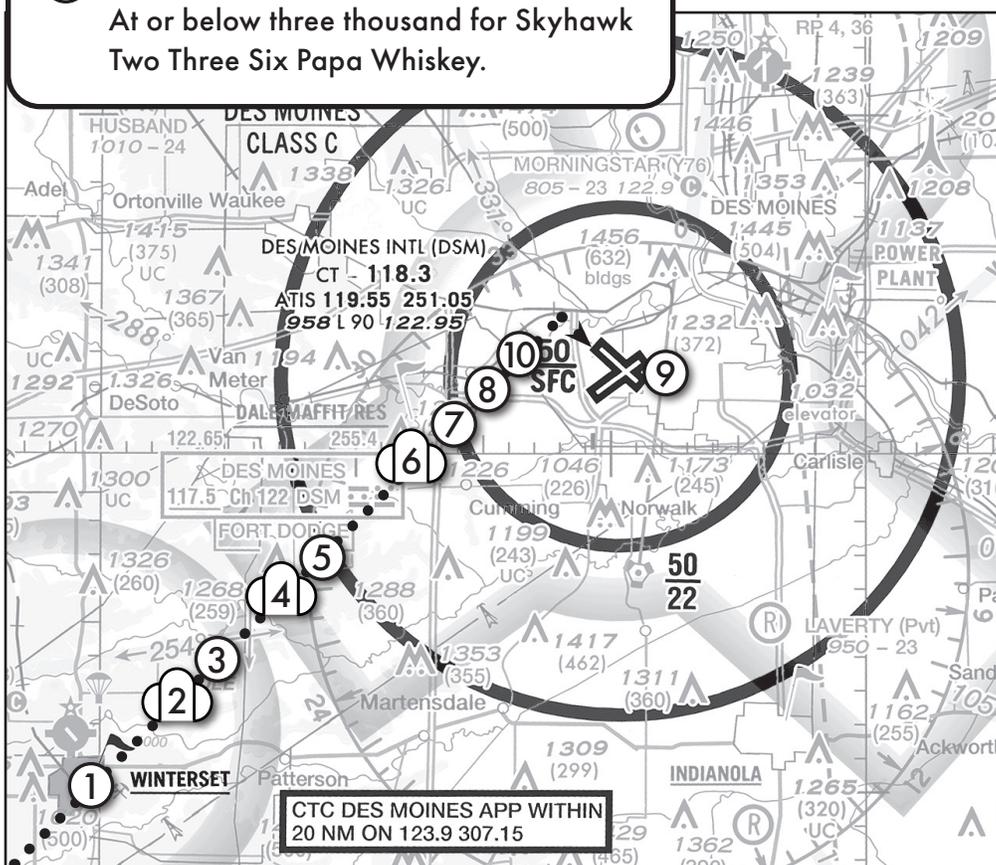
## Request Landing (Class C or TRSA Airport)

- ① PILOT  
Des Moines Approach, Skyhawk Two Three Six Papa Whiskey, over Winterset, Information Kilo. Inbound for landing Des Moines.
- ② APPROACH CONTROLLER  
Skyhawk Two Three Six Papa Whiskey, Des Moines Approach. Altimeter two niner six zero. Squawk five six six seven. Expect Runway One Three.
- ③ PILOT  
Squawk five six six seven. Skyhawk Two Three Six Papa Whiskey.
- ④ APPROACH CONTROLLER  
Skyhawk Two Three Six Papa Whiskey, radar contact two two miles southwest of the Des Moines Airport. Maintain VFR at or below three thousand.
- ⑤ PILOT  
At or below three thousand for Skyhawk Two Three Six Papa Whiskey.

- ⑥ APPROACH CONTROLLER  
Skyhawk Two Three Six Papa Whiskey, contact Tower one one eight point three.
- ⑦ PILOT  
Tower on one one eight point three. Skyhawk Two Three Six Papa Whiskey.
- ⑧ PILOT  
Des Moines Tower, Skyhawk Two Three Six Papa Whiskey, five southwest.
- ⑨ TOWER CONTROLLER  
Skyhawk Two Three Six Papa Whiskey, Des Moines Tower. Enter right base for Runway One Three.
- ⑩ PILOT  
Enter right base for Runway One Three. Skyhawk Two Three Six Papa Whiskey.

### Des Moines International Airport (KDSM)

Des Moines, IA  
 ATIS 119.55  
 Approach 123.9  
 Tower 118.3



### TIP

Note the base altitude of the outer ring of a Class C as you approach (2200 feet MSL here). If you haven't heard your call sign from the controller, you can descend below that altitude and continue a bit closer, because you're below the Class C, not in it. The inner ring, however, reaches the surface.

- ⑪ TOWER CONTROLLER  
Skyhawk Six Papa Whiskey, Runway One Three, cleared to land.
- ⑫ PILOT  
Runway One Three, cleared to land. Skyhawk Six Papa Whiskey.
- ⑬ TOWER CONTROLLER  
Six Papa Whiskey. Say Parking.
- ⑭ PILOT  
Elliott Aviation on the north Ramp. Skyhawk Six Papa Whiskey.
- ⑮ TOWER CONTROLLER  
Six Papa Whiskey, if able, left turn on Romeo. Taxi to parking via Romeo, Bravo, this frequency.
- ⑯ PILOT  
Parking via Romeo, Bravo. Stay with you. Skyhawk Six Papa Whiskey.

The communications for landing at an airport in Class C airspace starts just like a Class D airport: Get the current ATIS while more than 20 miles out, and then contact Approach ①. The format is:

[Facility Name], [Full call sign], [Your location], Information [ATIS Letter]. [Your intentions].

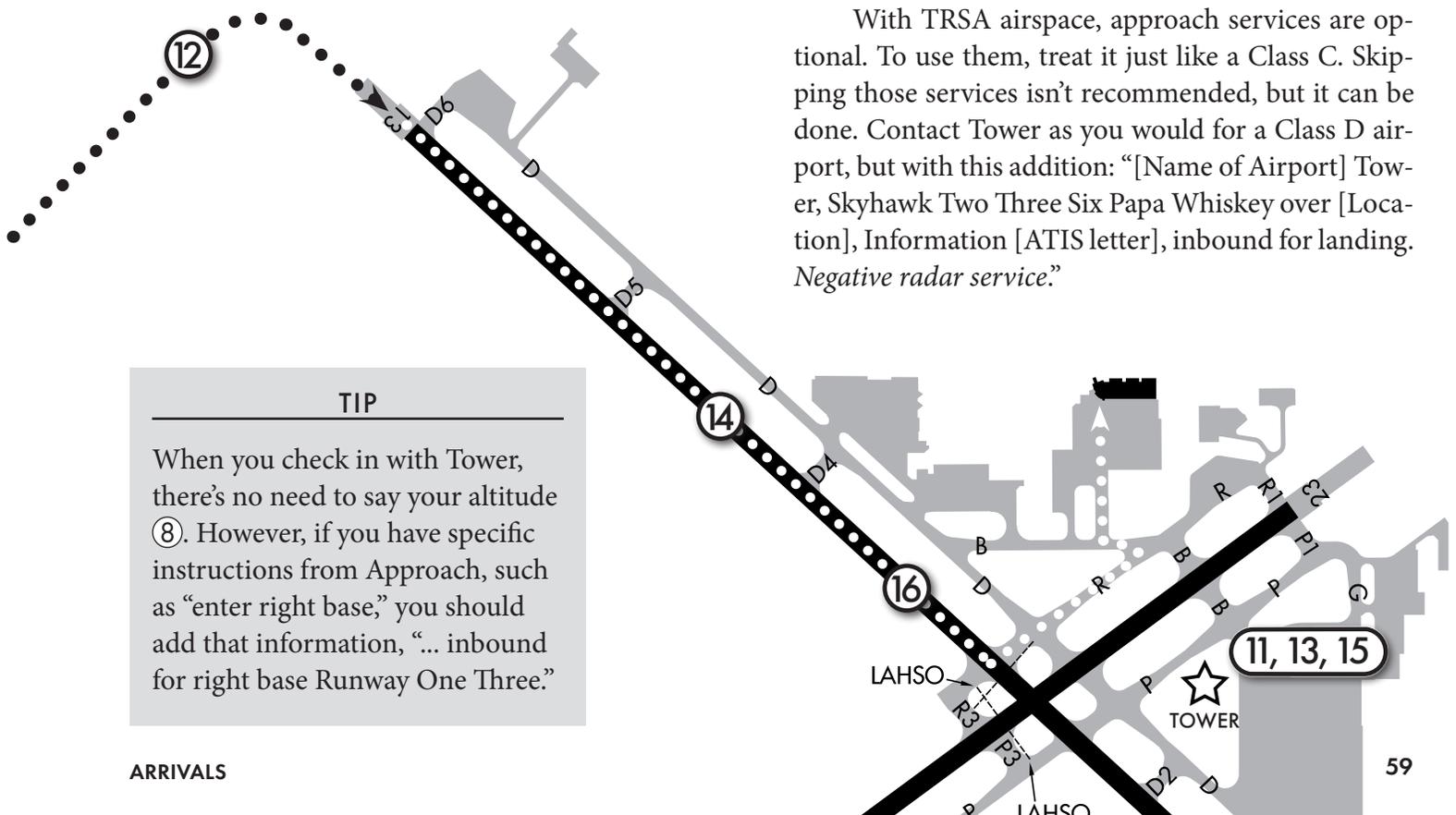
You can state your location relative to the airport, such as “22 miles northwest.” Or, sound like a local by using a VFR reporting point from the Sectional Chart, which is “Winterset” in this example. (See “Unlocking the ‘Secret’ Charted VFR Waypoints and Routes” on page 49.)

Give Approach at least a minute to respond. The controller may be talking to other aircraft on a different frequency you can’t hear, or busy with other tasks. Enter the Class C airspace after you hear your call sign, even if you don’t have landing instructions yet.

The Approach controller will radar identify you, and either tell you to continue inbound ④ or give you a vector to fly. The controller might also issue altitude changes to keep you separated from IFR traffic.

Approach will hand you off to Tower ⑥. From here, it’s just like landing at a Class D airport.

With TRSA airspace, approach services are optional. To use them, treat it just like a Class C. Skipping those services isn’t recommended, but it can be done. Contact Tower as you would for a Class D airport, but with this addition: “[Name of Airport] Tower, Skyhawk Two Three Six Papa Whiskey over [Location], Information [ATIS letter], inbound for landing. *Negative radar service.*”



**TIP**

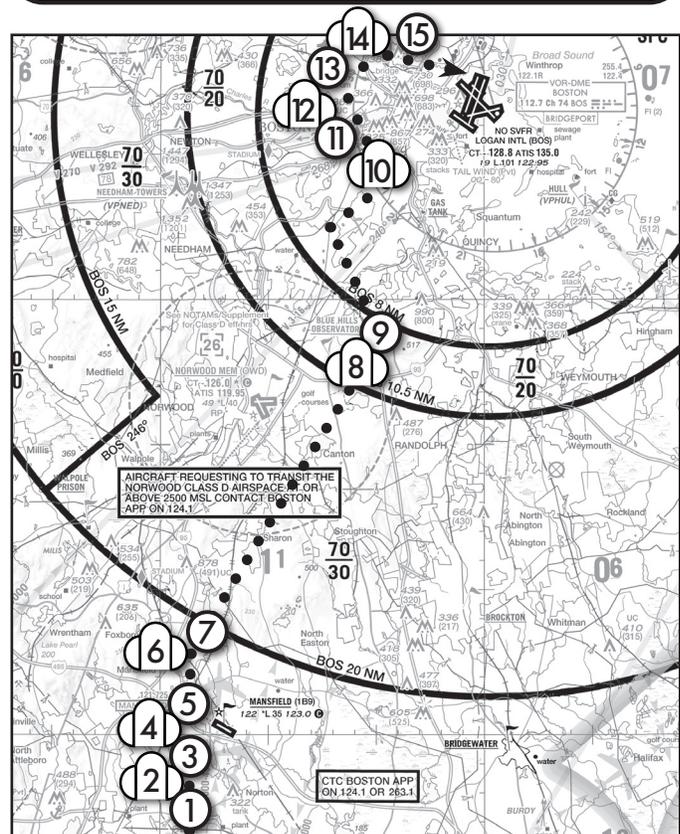
When you check in with Tower, there’s no need to say your altitude ⑧. However, if you have specific instructions from Approach, such as “enter right base,” you should add that information, “... inbound for right base Runway One Three.”

## Request Landing (Class B)

- ① PILOT  
Boston Approach, Skyhawk Two Three Six Papa Whiskey is VFR five miles southwest of Franklin, five thousand five hundred, landing Boston with Information Mike.
- ② APPROACH CONTROLLER  
Skyhawk Two Three Six Papa Whiskey, Verify you're landing Boston?
- ③ PILOT  
Affirmative. Landing Boston. Skyhawk Two Three Six Papa Whiskey.
- ④ APPROACH CONTROLLER  
Skyhawk Two Three Six Papa Whiskey, squawk five six six seven.
- ⑤ PILOT  
Squawk five six six seven. Skyhawk Two Three Six Papa Whiskey.
- ⑥ APPROACH CONTROLLER  
Skyhawk Two Three Six Papa Whiskey, radar contact, one nine miles north of the North Central State Airport. Cleared into the Bravo airspace via direct Boston. Maintain VFR at five thousand five hundred. Expect Runway Two Two Right. Boston altimeter two niner niner three.
- ⑦ PILOT  
Cleared into the Bravo at five thousand five hundred, Runway Two Two Right. Skyhawk Two Three Six Papa Whiskey.
- ⑧ APPROACH CONTROLLER  
Skyhawk Six Papa Whiskey, fly heading three six zero, descend and maintain three thousand.
- ⑨ PILOT  
Heading three six zero, leaving five thousand five hundred for three thousand. Skyhawk Six Papa Whiskey.

*Many ATC descents, vectors, traffic calls, and a frequency change later ...*

- ⑩ APPROACH CONTROLLER  
Skyhawk Six Papa Whiskey, report the field in sight.
- ⑪ PILOT  
Field in sight. Skyhawk Six Papa Whiskey.
- ⑫ APPROACH CONTROLLER  
Skyhawk Six Papa Whiskey, proceed visually to Runway Two Two Right. Descend at your discretion.
- ⑬ PILOT  
Two Two Right and descent my discretion. Skyhawk Six Papa Whiskey.
- ⑭ APPROACH CONTROLLER  
Skyhawk Six Papa Whiskey, make a short approach if you can, contact Tower now, one two eight point eight.



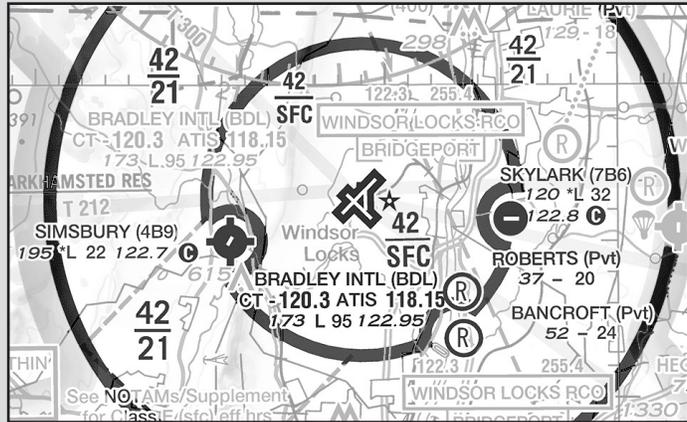


## DEPARTING AND ARRIVING AT SATELLITE AIRPORTS

A satellite airport is an airport within the lateral boundaries of Class B or Class C airspace. Sometimes it's just underneath the shelf of airspace. Other times that satellite airport is close enough that there's an airspace cutout, such as Simsbury and Skylark near Bradley International in Hartford, CT. Rarely, there's an airport inside the surface area.

Landing at a satellite airport is trivial if it's towered. You'll be handed off from Approach to Tower. Landing at a non-towered airport is done by specifying your destination in your initial request. Once you report the destination in sight, expect a description of traffic observed between you and the airport, and "Radar service terminated. Frequency change approved." Usually, you will keep your transponder code.

Departing can be trickier. Departing a towered airport, it's best to request a squawk code and departure frequency from Ground as part of your initial call, just as if you were getting flight following (see page 26). Tower can then hand you off on departure. But before you enter the overlying airspace, you still must hear your call sign (Class



C) or get a clearance to enter (Class B).

Departing a non-towered airport, the most common tactic is simply staying clear of the overlying airspace until you can contact them. If the primary airport is close enough, you may be able to reach them on the ground by radio. You may even be able to reach them by cell phone.

Technically, when departing from an airport inside the surface area, you can take off and contact the approach facility "as soon as practical." This is a rare situation, and it's probably worth a phone call to the Tower or Approach of the primary airport before flight to learn the correct local procedure.

## IFR TRAFFIC AT NON-TOWERED AIRPORTS: WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Instrument approaches are divided into segments: initial, intermediate, final, and missed approach. Instrument pilots talk to Center or Approach until roughly the time they transition from intermediate to final approach. They then change to CTAF. Even if their CTAF radio call isn't VFR-friendly, you may still be able to figure out their location.

The final approach segment shown here begins at ZIRMU and ends at the Runway 25 threshold (RW25). A pilot on this approach at ZIRMU *should* transmit on CTAF, "... five miles out, straight-in for Runway Two Five." ZIRMU is 4.8 NM from the runway (3.5 NM+1.3 NM).

A pilot might only say, "... final approach fix for Runway Two Five." Most final approach fixes are between four and six miles from the runway

threshold. Pilots often change frequencies a couple miles before that, so guessing a pilot at the "final approach fix" is five miles out won't be too far off.

The least helpful call would be "... at ZIRMU." Without the instrument approach chart, you don't know this fix's location. In that case, your best option is to ask, "Pilot at ZIRMU, how far out are you from Runway Two Five?"

