

Email acknowledgment: 10-4, good buddy!

Those who have worked with radios use a system of speech codes called "**APCO 10 Codes**" or "10 Codes" (see **APCO: Association of Public-Safety Communications Officials**). 10 Codes were adopted to provide clarity and brevity for the operation of two-way radios. Perhaps the best known 10 Code is "10-4" which translates to "Message Received." 10-4 is replied as a means of acknowledging the sender's message.

Think of 10 Codes as the modern text message abbreviations (e.g. *LOL = Laughing Out Loud, OMW = On My Way*, etc.); they provide the parties involved in a two-way conversation a fast way to understand the message through a series of short numerical phrases.

For example:

> ***Person 1:*** *"Let's meet up for lunch in 30 minutes at Panera."*
>
> ***Person 2:*** *"10-4."*



The phrase “10-4” gained popularity in movies like **Convoy**, **Smokey and the Bandit**, and even **Goldmember**. In today’s email-dominated world of business communication, how many times do you send an email without an receiving acknowledgment that the message has been received and understood? Most times we are left wondering if the recipient received the message, lost the message, is ignoring the message, or is working on it. I suppose one could send a read receipt request but some email systems do not support that functionality. Worse yet, in some organizations the act of asking for a read receipt can send an insulting passive-aggressive message to the recipient. We send and receive so many emails every day that an active and deliberate email acknowledgment really helps put the sender’s mind at ease and also helps the recipient prioritize the most important email-initiated tasks.

I recently sent an email to a colleague that involved a request to perform a task that would take a few hours. I knew she would not be able to get to the task for a while, but to my delight, I received the following response (paraphrased):

> *Hello –*
>
> *I wanted to acknowledge your email and let you know that we are running the analysis you requested and will let you know the results and next steps by end of day today.*
>
> *Thanks,*
>
> *[Name]*

In other words: *“10-4, Good Buddy!”*

I immediately felt relief that my request was on her radar, she was working on it and gave me a time line

for completion. It had all the elements of an effective email 10-4:

- Message received
- I am working on it (or will work on it at a specified time)
- I will respond to you by a specified date/time



All too often emails are sent and the recipient begins working on the request without sending an acknowledgment. In these cases, the sender is left wondering “gee, I wonder if he/she got my note…” Worse yet, if the request takes multiple days to complete, the sender can really get worried that the request is not being worked on. Even if it is a simple “message received” response, it is still better than emailing the typical “black hole” inbox.

I was thrilled to receive the “10-4” email this week from my colleague. Even though it was a simple act of email communication, it gave me tremendous peace of mind that the task would be done. Imagine if everyone to whom you sent an email acknowledged the request! Maybe we’d stop calling it email and start calling it Smokey-mail.

10-4, over and out!

justin greis

hi, i'm justin

(nice to meet you)



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