

## Using ATC

### How to make the most of ATC in Flight Simulator



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If you are a real-world pilot or if you already have knowledge of the ATC system, you'll love using ATC in Flight Simulator. If you're new to ATC, we've worked hard to make your introduction to the system fun and easy. (You may also want to follow the ATC lesson in the Private Pilot section of **Flying Lessons**). The main thing to keep in mind is that the interaction between pilots and air traffic controllers is a kind of conversation; You'll either make requests from controllers or respond to their instructions.

There are two aspects to learning ATC in Flight Simulator: learning the ATC system and language, and learning the **ATC** menu. Learning the system involves knowing who to talk to and what to expect from the ATC controllers who are communicating with you (for more information, see [ATC Defined](#)). Learning ATC commands means knowing how to send messages to ATC that are appropriate to your current flight. The ATC menu displays the response choices available to you. To learn more, see [Using the ATC Menu](#).

#### RELATED LINKS

- [Changing Traffic Settings](#)
- [ATC Settings](#)

When two people attempt to transmit a radio message at the same time on the same frequency, you hear an unpleasant squeal over the radio. In pilot parlance, this is known as getting "stepped on." Stepping on someone else's transmission in Flight Simulator means ATC won't hear your transmission. Time your transmissions so that you don't step on other pilots or controllers.

The next several pages explain how to choose the pilot voice you want to use, how to use the **Autotune** feature, how to tune radios manually, and other nuts and bolts of using ATC in Flight Simulator. Take your time, have fun, and remember: as real as this feels, it's a simulator. No one will yell at you or take your pilot certificate away if you make a mistake, and ATC is there to help guide you.

## Changing Call Signs

In Flight Simulator, you can change the ATC name of your aircraft, thus changing the call sign used by the pilot and ATC. Changing the airline name in the ATC Name dialog box will not change the airline livery painted on the outside of the aircraft.

#### To change your aircraft's ATC name

1. From the main screen click **Create a Flight**, and then under **Current Aircraft**, click **Change**.  
-or-  
On the **Aircraft** menu, choose **Select Aircraft**.
2. In the **ATC name** box, click **Change**.
3. Make selections in the **ATC name** dialog box.
4. Click **OK**.

You can also change your aircraft tail number to any combination of numbers and letters. The pilot and controller use the entire tail number during initial contact. The tail number is abbreviated to the last three characters of the call sign in subsequent contacts. If you always want to hear a short call sign (for example, if you never want to hear the "November" in United States call signs), create a short tail number.

#### To change the tail number

1. Double-click the **Tail number** box.
2. Type a new aircraft identification.

**To change the airline name**

1. Click the **Airline name** list.
2. Select a new airline name from the list.

**To change the flight number**

1. Double-click the **Flight number** box.
2. Type a new flight number.

**To enable the airline call sign**

- Select the **Use airline call sign** check box.  
If this checkbox is not selected, ATC will use the aircraft tail number.

Jumbo jets in the real world are often addressed as Heavy by ATC (such as, "World Travel 1123 Heavy...").

**To hear the word "Heavy" included in the call sign**

- Select the **Append "Heavy" to call sign** check box.

## Choosing a Pilot Voice

When you select an item from the ATC menu, you'll see the text of the message on screen and hear the pilot voice—representing you—saying the phrase. Your messages to controllers are audible, unless you turn the pilot voice off (to learn how, see [ATC Settings](#)), as are controller messages to you and to other planes.

When a one of your phrases is played, the message displays in orange text. Flight Simulator displays controller messages in green text.

You can choose from 10 different options for your pilot voice. If the **Pilot Voice** check box is not selected in the **ATC Settings** dialog box, you can't choose a pilot voice and you won't hear a voice when you send a message to ATC.

**To choose a pilot voice**

1. On the main screen, click **Settings** and then click **ATC**.  
-or-  
On the **Options** menu, click **Settings** and then **ATC**.
2. Select the **Use a Pilot Voice** check box.
3. In the **Pilot Voice** list, click the voice you want to use as your pilot voice.

## Using the Autotune Feature

If you use the **Autotune** feature, Flight Simulator will switch radio frequencies for you automatically, freeing you to concentrate on flying the aircraft and navigating to your destination. When you select an item from the ATC menu to contact a new controller (for example, "Contact Approach"), the radio frequency changes to the new controller's frequency automatically.

When using the **Autotune** feature, you may not hear anything on the radio until you choose an item from the ATC menu, (unless you're already tuned to an active frequency), even if there are other aircraft talking to ATC. Flight Simulator will not autotune the radio until you initiate contact by choosing a message from the menu.

## Tuning the Radios Manually

Pilots who want to do it all can bypass the **Autotune** feature by tuning the radios by hand each time a frequency change is required. (For more information, see [Using the Radios](#).)






1-Standby frequency, 2-Standby flip/flop switch

New menu items appear in the **ATC** window when you tune the radio to a new frequency. If you want to see choices for messages to a tower controller, for example, you must first tune the radio to the tower frequency.

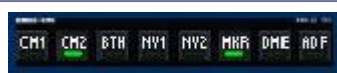
To tune a new frequency into a communication, navigation, or ADF radio

1. Press **SHIFT+2**, or click  on the panel to bring up the radio stack.
2. Position the pointer over the radio frequency you want to change.
3. Use the mouse wheel to change the frequency up or down.  
-or-
1. Point to the standby frequency numbers on the upper right. The pointer changes to a hand.
2. Move the pointer left or right.  
A plus sign (+) or minus sign (-) appears on it.
3. To increase the frequency numbers, position the pointer so you see a plus sign, and then click.  
-or-  
To decrease the frequency numbers, position the pointer so you see a minus sign, and then click.
4. When you have the correct frequency dialed in, click the white button labeled **STBY**.  
-or-
1. Press **C** to select the primary frequency numbers (to the left of the decimal) on Com 1 radio.  
-or-  
Press **C+2** to select the primary frequency numbers on Com 2 radio.
2. Press **PLUS SIGN (+)** to increase the frequency numbers.  
-or-  
Press **MINUS SIGN (-)** to decrease the frequency numbers.
3. Press the **C** key twice to select the secondary frequency numbers (to the right of the decimal) on Com 1 radio.
4. -or-  
Press the **C** key twice, and then press **2** to select the secondary frequency numbers on Com 2 radio.
5. Press the plus key (+) to increase the frequency numbers.  
-or-  
Press the minus key (-) to decrease the frequency numbers.

**Note:** This process also works for the NAV, ADF, and transponder radios by first pressing the **N** (**N+2** for Nav 2), **A**, and **T** keys, respectively, or by using the mouse wheel.

## The Audio Panel

Use the audio panel's **Com 1**, **Com 2**, or **Both** buttons to choose which radios you want to transmit on and listen to. To choose a radio to autotune, transmit, and receive on, click either the **Com 1** or **Com 2** button on the **Audio** panel. If you click the **Both** button, you will still be transmitting on the radio you had previously selected, but listening to both radios. This can be especially helpful on approach, since you don't want to tune away from the controller in order to hear ATIS (if you do, you'll miss traffic calls). You can also listen to the audio identifiers for the navigation radios by selecting their buttons on the audio panel as well. If you have controllers tuned in on both radios, and the Both button is lit on the audio panel, it will sound very busy and perhaps be difficult to understand.



**Audio panel for the Cessnas.**  
The audio panel may look different in other aircraft.

#### To use the audio panel

- Click the button for the radio you want to listen to.

When the green light on the button is lit, the audio channel for that radio is active.

#### To listen to more than one radio at the same time

- Click the **Both** button on the audio panel.

#### To find a particular communication or navigation frequency

- Use real-world navigation charts.  
-or-
- On the **World** menu, select **Map**.
  - Point to the airport or navigational aid whose frequency you are looking for.  
(You may have to use the map's **Zoom** feature).

## Using the ATC Menu

Communicating with ATC in Flight Simulator mimics the way pilots and controllers communicate in the real world. For example, the pilot makes a request, followed by a response from the controller, or the controller gives an instruction, followed by a pilot acknowledgement.


The ATC menu is displayed within a transparent window that you can move and resize. The ATC menu lists the available commands specific to the current state of your flight. You can click items on the panel without moving the ATC menu. Some menus are layered so when you select an item a new menu list appears, and you have to make another selection before Flight Simulator will send the message to ATC. (See the example at the end of this section).

At nontowered airports, Flight Simulator directs your ATC messages to other pilots in the area—not a controller—so don't expect a response.

The menu does not always contain messages to transmit. When the menu contains messages to transmit, the top line in the menu will read, **"Choose a message to transmit to agent name."** When the menu contains no messages to transmit, the top line in the menu will read, **"There are currently no messages to transmit to agent name."**



#### To display or hide the ATC window

- Press the **ACCENT ( ` )** or **SCROLL LOCK** key.  
-or-
- Click the  ATC panel icon.  
-or-
- On the **Views** menu, click **Air Traffic Control**.

#### To select an item from the ATC menu

1. If the **ATC** window is not visible, press **ACCENT** or **SCROLL LOCK**.
2. Press the number key at the top of your keyboard that tunes the frequency you want to tune, or that corresponds to the message you want to transmit. (You cannot use the numeric keypad to make selections on the **ATC** menu).
3. To tune to a new agent, choose **Tune x...** from the menu to display a list of messages to transmit to a particular agent.

The ATC menu overrides other commands of the simulator. For example, if you have something mapped to the 1 key, and the ATC menu is open, pressing 1 will select the first item in the ATC menu.

#### To return to a previous menu

- On layered menus in which you have to select from more than one list of items before the message is sent, select the number on the menu that corresponds to (**-Back-**) to return to the previous menu.

Selecting a landing airport presents a good example. The first menu may have the following selections:

1. **Request Flight Following**
2. **Select landing airport**

If you select **2**, the next menu would list all of the available landing airports nearby. After selecting an airport, the third menu would look something like this:

1. **Request touch and go**
2. **Request full stop landing**
3. **-Back-**

#### To move the ATC menu window

1. Click the **ATC** window title bar and hold down the mouse button.
2. Drag the window to where you want it.

#### To resize the ATC menu window

- To change the width
  1. Point to the left or right window border.
  2. When the pointer changes to a horizontal double-headed arrow, drag the border to the right or left.
- To change the height
  1. Point to the top or bottom window border.
  2. When the pointer changes to a vertical double-headed arrow, drag the border up or down.
- To change the height and width simultaneously
  1. Point to any window corner.
  2. When the pointer changes to a diagonal double-headed arrow, drag the border in any direction.

## Disabling ATC

If you don't initiate contact with ATC at the beginning of your flight, you can fly without any interaction with controllers. You may still hear transmissions to other aircraft if your radio is tuned to a local frequency. Turn off the avionics master switch if you don't want to hear local radio calls.

## Air Traffic Density

You can adjust how much traffic shares the sky with you.

### To adjust the amount of air traffic

1. From the main screen, click **Settings** and then click **Traffic**.  
-or-  
On the **Options** menu, select **Settings**, and then click **Traffic**.
2. Move the **Air traffic density** slider to set the level of traffic you want.

## Add-On ATC

If you're using an add-on air traffic control product, you can't turn off ATC. You can, however, choose not to interact with Flight Simulator's ATC, and ATC will, in effect, not be active. You can also reduce the volume of AI traffic generated in the simulator.

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