

Climbing Communication Updated June 2018

Effective formal communication in a climbing system relies on commands that follow three foundational principles:

1. **Communication Agreement:** Communication between climbers and belayers should be anchored to a script that is agreed upon prior to the need for the communication.
2. **Communication Precision:** Communication should strive to minimize the amount of oral traffic needed to relay information between parties.
3. **Communication Action:** Communication should imply an impending action, and therefore should unambiguously initiate that action. Communication also may be used to affirm the completion of an action.

Common Verbal Communication When Belaying

Command	Who Says	Communication	Action	Affirmation
"On Belay?"	Climber	I want to start climbing, are you ready to belay me?	Belayer assembles or double checks belay system.	"Belay On"
"Belay On"	Belayer	Rope is belayed.	Belayer has constructed the belay system on the rope; rope is secured.	"Thank you", "Climbing", or none
"Climbing"	Climber	I'm ready to start climbing.	Belayer actively belays.	"Climb On"
"Slack"	Climber	I need some slack.	Belayer provides slack.	"Slack" or none
"Tension"	Climber	I need the rope tight, because I am going to weight on the rope.	Belayer provides a taut rope to take the climber's weight.	"I've Got You"
"Falling"	Climber	I'm falling.	Climber falls and the belayer catches the fall.	"I've Got You"
"Off Belay"	Climber	I no longer need the belay.	Belayer deconstructs the belay system. Note: Belay is not removed unless "Off Belay" is clearly heard from the climber!.	"Belay Off"
"Up Rope"	Climber	I need the belayer to remove all the slack.	Belayer removes all the slack, but does not take weight.	No need for affirmation
"That's Me"	Climber	Stop pulling or feeding rope.	Belayer stops pulling or feeding rope.	No need for affirmation
"Watch Me"	Climber	I am making a move in which I might fall.	Belayer continues to actively belay.	"Watching"

Common Verbal Communication When Rappelling

Command	Who Says	Communication	Action	Affirmation
"On Belay"	Belayer	I'm giving my partner a fireman's belay so they can rappel.	Provide an attentive fireman's belay.	No need for affirmation or "Thank You"
"On Rappel"	Rappeller	I want to start rappelling.	Rappeller rappels.	"Rappel On"

Common Verbal Communication When Lowering

Command	Who Says	Communication	Action	Affirmation
"Ready to Lower" or "Lower"	Climber	I'm free from the anchor, leaning back, and ready to lower immediately.	Belayer lowers the climber.	"Lowering"

Warning Commands

Command	Who Says	Communication	Action	Affirmation
"Rock"	Anyone	A rock (or object) is falling and I need to warn everyone below.	All take measures to avoid the falling rock.	No need for affirmation
"Rope"	Anyone	A rope is falling and I need to warn everyone below.	All take measures to avoid the falling rope.	No need for affirmation

Common Verbal Communication for Managing Rope Length

Command	Who Says	Communication	Affirmation
"Half Way"	Belayer	Half the rope is left for climbing.	No need for affirmation or "Thank You"
"No More Rope"	Belayer	No more rope remaining.	No need for affirmation or "Thank You"

- **"Thank You"** can be used by anyone to acknowledge communication.
- **"Again"** can be used by anyone to ask for a command to be repeated.
- Add a person's **name before** a command with multiple climbers or teams within hearing.
- Add a rope **color after** a command when multiple ropes are in use.

Troubleshooting Communication Challenges

- Select belay stances and pitch lengths that enable communication, when feasible.
- Visual communication is helpful when verbal commands are inaudible. Develop a visual communication system with your partner.
- Beware of Rope Tugs.
- A second rope can be a communication tool too.
- Radios, Cell Phones, and Technology

Troubleshooting Loss of Communication

Before leaving the ground, all members of a climbing team need to agree on their actions (a “protocol”) if communication is lost. This is most common in a multi-pitch setting, but can occur on single pitch climbs as well. The protocol to follow will depend on the type of climbing and whether a person is a belayer or climber. The goal of the protocol is to guarantee that all climbers are always on belay when not clipped to an anchor! Below are suggested protocols for troubleshooting loss of communication.

Single-Pitch Climb		Multi-Pitch Climb	
Leader <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reach the end of the pitch, and build the anchor. • While still on belay with the rope, move around or back away from the anchor to reestablish visual or audible communication with the belayer. Once communication is established, lower or belay as planned. • If communication can't be reestablished, go back to the anchor and immediately rig a belay from above for all followers. • Once the belay is rigged, start pulling all the rope through the belay. • Belay the second to the anchor and retreat. 	Belayer <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep belaying until the climber reestablishes communication; look up for visual signals. • If communication can't be established, let the leader pull all the rope through the belay, then remove the anchor and start climbing, as for multi-pitch. 	Leader <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Climb to the “end of the pitch”. • Build an anchor, clip in, and send “off belay”. • If no response, immediately assemble the belay for the follower, and start belaying; send “belay on”. • Belay the rope until the follower reaches the anchor. 	Belayer <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Belay the leader until “off belay” is heard (and communication is fine) or all the rope is fed out. Warn the leader at half length (“half-way”) and end of the rope (“no more rope”). • When the rope is fed out, Send “no more rope”, prepare to climb. • Disassemble the anchor. • Start climbing, send “climbing”. • Climb to the leader, slowing down when necessary to keep rope slack minimized.

Resource

The American Alpine Club (2017, January 20). Climber Communication [Web blog post]. Retrieved May 29, 2018, from <https://americanalpineclub.org/resources-blog/2017/1/19/4xm1fcsag6b7xqf1p1w1qp7vdpp1ha> .