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Message Markers – question, answer, request (instruction and intention)

Welcome to DigiMar videos!

In this video, we will examine the use of five message markers: question, answer, and request, but we will also mention instruction, and intention.

Message markers should be used by VTS operators and bridge teams to clarify the purpose of a message. After watching this video, you will be able to recognize the usefulness of these message markers and understand how they can contribute to clearer and more effective maritime communication.

This video uses examples from real-life scenarios. They may have been kept in their authentic form to support learning, even when they include mistakes or deviate from maritime communication standards.

Let us start with a simple example. DigiMar VTS asks the vessel if they carry any dangerous cargo.

“Question. Do you carry any dangerous cargo?”

Do you think the use of “question” makes it clear to the receiver that they are being asked something? In this case, the message marker "question" is used. It precedes the message to make its purpose immediately clear.

Therefore, message markers can be used to emphasize the content of the message, and to ensure that the message is properly understood.

In the next example, DigiMar VTS answers a question previously asked by the vessel.

“Answer. Yes, you have permission to enter the fairway.”

In this case, does the use of the message marker “answer” make it clear that the VTS operator is replying to a question previously asked by the vessel?

VTS can also ask vessels to conduct specific actions, in this case to keep a sharp lookout for a reported missing surfer.

“Request. Keep a sharp lookout for a reported missing surfer.”

It is important to note that “request” should not be used to give navigational guidance.

In the next example, VTS instructs the vessel to reduce their speed to six knots.

“Instruction. Reduce speed to six knots.”

Ships should follow instructions given to them by a VTS unless safety or marine environment protection reasons apply. Only VTS with an appropriate regulatory status can issue instructions.

The final message marker is “intention”. It is only used by ships.



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These examples show how the use of message markers – question, answer, request – can make maritime communication clear and simple. The general use of message markers is good practice, and VTS personnel should use message markers depending on their assessment of the situation, which we will also examine in the following video.

In the VTS Voice Communications and Phraseology published by the International Association of Lighthouse Authorities you will find more suggestions on how to use message markers on pages 10–11.

We hope that this video has been useful and that it will help you to successfully complete the chatbot exercises available at: <https://digimar.si/category/digital-tools/chatbots/>

Thank you for watching and stay tuned for more Digimar videos on effective maritime communication!