

Origin of the 73 and 88 terms used by Hams

In 1859, Western Union standardized on the "92 code", a series of telegraphic abbreviations in which numbers (originally 1 to 92) were assigned meanings. The reason for this adoption was to reduce bandwidth (line time) over the telegraph lines and speed transmissions by utilizing a numerical code system for various frequently used phrases. These were later included as part of the "Philips Code", a series of abbreviations first published in 1879 by Walter Phillips of the Associated Press for use in the telegraphic transmission of press dispatches.

While most of the codes have fallen into disuse, the Form '19' and '31' train orders remained in railroad use long beyond the end of landline telegraphy, and the use of '30' at the end of a news wire story was continued through the teletypewriter era.

The '73' (Best Regards) and '88' (Love and kisses) greetings remain in use in amateur radio CW and voice communications and often at the end of written messages, such as email and radiograms between hams.

NOTE: Making any of these numbers plural (73s, 88s) is incorrect since they are already plural. 73s would mean "Best Regardses" and 88s would mean "Love and kisseses." These make no sense.

Western Union 92 codes

1 Wait a minute.	25 Busy on another wire.
2 Very Important.	26 Put on ground wire.
3 What time is it?	27 Priority, very important.
4 Where shall I go ahead?	28 Do you get my writing?.
5 Have you business for me?	29 Private, deliver in sealed envelope.
6 I am ready.	30 No more - the end.
7 Are you ready?	31 Form 31 (permissive) train order.
8 Close your key, stop breaking.	32 I understand that I am to
9 Priority business. Wire Chief's call.	33 Answer is paid.
10 Keep this circuit closed.	34 Message for all officers.
12 Do you understand?	35 You may use my signal to answer this.
13 I understand.	37 Inform all interested.
14 What is the weather?	39 Important, with priority on through wire.
15 For you and others to copy.	44 Answer promptly by wire.
17 Lightning here.	55 Important.
18 What's the trouble?	73 Best Regards.
19 Form 19 (absolute) train order.	77 I have a message for you.
21 Stop for meal.	88 Love and kisses.
22 Wire test.	91 Superintendent's signal.
23 All stations copy.	92 Deliver Promptly.
24 Repeat this back.	134 Who is

Charlie, NM5CL