

A Guide for New Hams

"How to sound like an experienced operator"

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This article is intended for the beginning ham, who will usually operate in the 2-meter or 440 band. While some of the ideas presented may seem obvious, keep in mind that all of the items I mention can be observed on any relatively busy repeater in just a few hours of listening. The following comments are intended to help those new to our hobby get off on the right foot and as a result feel a bit more at ease while operating.

The most important tool available to you is your receiver; listen to the techniques used by others on the frequency you wish to operate on. For instance, in some areas the phrase "W4XYZ monitoring" means you are looking for someone to talk with, while in another area it might be customary to merely say your call sign, i. e. "W4XYZ". In a few areas "monitoring" means just that-- you are listening, but don't really want to talk. A few weeks ago I heard a station announce, "monitoring" about ten times before anyone realized he wanted to join the on-going conversation. You will have more satisfying results if you employ the regionally accepted method of initiating a contact.

Generally, it is a good idea to avoid the use of phrases that are or have been associated with non-amateur radio services, such as citizens band or public safety. This can be a difficult habit to break, especially for those who have used citizens band for some time before becoming amateurs. Citizen's band users have developed unique ways of using terms that were once exclusive to amateur radio; the meaning of the same word or phrase can vary widely between the two services. Attempts to use citizen's band terminology won't make sense to most amateurs and due to the common use of unauthorized frequencies and power on the citizens band, (practices that most hams frown upon), will often make it difficult for them to accept you.

The same is true if you use commercial or public safety radio in the course of your employment or other day-to-day activities. After a day's work where the use of "ten codes" and other specialized designators are used, it is sometimes difficult to avoid the use of those terms, especially in stressful situations. Remember that plain English works just fine most of the time on any radio system, amateur or otherwise, particularly if you are in doubt about the correct phrase to use.

Be aware that you will, as a rule, get some kind of indirect feedback when you do something unusual. Out of courtesy, most hams will not immediately and directly tell you that you are doing something they don't approve of. A classic example of this is someone who works a distant or low power station who is barely readable; you will hear the in-direct suggestion in phrases such as "you're noisy into the machine" and the frequent requests to repeat missed transmissions. What this operator really wants to say is probably "please increase your power, find a better location or go away, your signal is exceedingly unpleasant to listen to." The corollary to this is the signal report "plenty of audio", which decodes to "turn your microphone gain down." If you have doubts about your operating style or the quality of your signal, call on a more established member of the group to help you.

No one is going to expect you to know all the nuances of amateur lingo right away, as most of us sounded somewhat less than graceful on our first contact. As you continue to operate, the terminology will become easier to remember and employ, and you might even find yourself wondering why it seemed so difficult at first. You may even have the opportunity to help someone else learn amateur radio's dialect.