

Starting At the Beginning

You're A New Ham (Courtesy BAEARS, author unattributed, modified by AB6HB, BARC)

You passed! Now what?

You have about ten days before you can get on the air, which is a good time to learn the important traditions and protocols expected of you as a licensed radio operator. The best ways to learn? 1) Take a "Get On The Air" (GOTA) Class; 2) Listen to the hams on the local repeaters. Repeaters are mini-radio stations that listen for a signal, then re-transmit it at a higher power level, usually from a hilltop or mountain. You can purchase a Repeater Directory at Ham Radio stores. Importantly, the staff there can put you in touch with the Ham Radio club in your area. You should be able to locate a club-operated repeater in your area and enter the frequency in your radio. To transmit to these repeaters you must program a *subaudible* tone into your radio. These are also called PL or CTCSS tones.

Most new hams start out with an "HT" or handheld VHF/UHF radio. (HT comes from the term "Handi-Talkie." The use of "Walkie-Talkie" was never embraced by Hams.) These have become very sophisticated and now offer three, and even four bands, which is a big bonus for a new ham. They are also receivers and scanners on the bands they receive, which means you can listen to some police and fire channels, shortwave, AM-FM etc., depending on your specific radio's features. They generally will only transmit on the ham frequencies but always check it first. You may consider installing a magnetic mobile antenna on your vehicle or an outdoor "base" antenna on your house so you can extend your range. Try enlarging your radio manual on a copy machine for easier reading, and writing programming steps in your repeater book. You can also purchase a *Nifty Mini-Manual* for some of the more popular models of radios, to help you figure out how to program the many functions of your HT.

After a few days you'll learn how we identify ourselves by using call signs and you'll hear a pattern in conversations that will help you avoid mistakes. Two-way radio is typified by mostly equal transmit/receive cycles. In other words talk a little, listen a little, and leave about a 1-2 second pause between transmissions to allow others to join in. Ten-codes are not used in ham conversations. First name and call sign are proper, but last names are not used. If you are asked to repeat your callsign, use international phonetics, (Kilo, bravo, X-ray). Go to: www.BeniciaARC.com/wp/phonetic-alphabet for a copy.

Repeaters are usually built and operated by Ham Radio clubs or individuals. Most of them are open which means any licensed ham may use them. If you use a repeater frequently, you should support it financially by joining the club or users' group. Priority is given to anyone reporting traffic problems or other important information. Usually a courtesy tone is generated after each transmission so "over" is not used. You should wait until you hear that tone before responding.

If you hear any radio traffic involving searches for missing persons or other emergency traffic do not transmit unless you are able to help. Government emergency agencies frequently request help from the ham community and they will indicate clearly when the repeater is available for normal traffic. Always listen before talking.

When your call sign is issued, a good way to begin transmitting is to wait for a quite period on the repeater and to key your PTT (push to talk) button and say "This is (callsign,) anyone around?" These first conversations with just one or two other hams will diminish anxiety. Don't hesitate to mention that you just got your license once you speak to people. You might print out and tape your callsign to your radio.

You'll find the ham community very receptive to new Hams and appreciative that you have taken the time to learn and respect the norms and courtesies the hobby is known for. Listen, think, talk. Listen, think, talk. Listen, think, talk. No one wants to enter a new endeavor, with new equipment and inadvertently cause problems, which is fairly easy to do. Band plans define where on each radio band you should and shouldn't transmit. They are listed in the ARRL Repeater Directory, and in the ARRL Operating Manual. "Simplex" means "radio-to-radio" without a repeater, and the calling frequencies are, well, calling frequencies. If you want to reach someone via simplex on that band you call on that frequency, and then move your conversation to an appropriate frequency.

Coming up to Speed

In addition to attending a Get On The Air class, one way to come up to speed is through magazines. By reading several back issues and the current issue of QST or CQ magazine, you'll get a good overview of equipment, trends, jargon, debates, and most importantly stories about how other hams use their radio operator skills. You may consider joining the ARRL, which includes a subscription to QST. Often times you can do that through your local club. The ARRL is an exemplary organization and is largely credited with maintaining the amateur band allotments in the face of relentless pressure from the wireless industry.

Staying Informed

Local Hams should consider subscribing to Ham Radio forums (free) to be kept abreast of activities in their area. The Benicia Amateur Radio Club (BARC) forum is at: <https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/beniciaarc> and the Mt Diablo Amateur Radio Club (MDARC) forum is at: <https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/mdarc>.

File: New Ham Updated