

Tips for the newcomer to Ham Radio!

(And even good info for the seasoned ham!!!)

First of all, welcome to ham radio and congratulations on passing your technician license test! This page is designed to help you learn how we communicate via ham radio, and deals mainly with repeater usage.

(1) You probably have bought a handy talkie, which is good, as it is a very versatile radio. You can use it through a base antenna and power supply as a base unit, through a mobile antenna and cigarette lighter plug as a mobile, or simply use it as an HT. (NOTE: You will need some type of external antenna for mobile and base use... Most of Maine is not very handy talkie friendly!)

(2) Many new ham radio operators were formally CB'ers. There is nothing wrong with that. CB radio does have its place. But, ham radio and CB differ greatly.

(a) CB's transmit in AM, or amplitude modulation mode. This means that when you get louder in the mic, the received signal gets louder. Your new HT transmits in FM, or frequency modulation mode. If you get louder in your HT, the signal only gets wider, causing distortion. Getting closer to the mic WILL NOT help your signal go any farther. In fact, your radio, and repeaters have circuits designed to cut the audio OFF if it gets too wide!

(b) We do not talk like CB'ers. We don't use "10" codes, we don't say "good buddy" or the like. There is one phrase used on CB that you DO NOT use on ham radio unless you have an emergency. That is "break, break". That signal is recognized on ham radio as an operator having an emergency. You will get chewed out if you use that phrase and do not have an emergency! We sometimes use "Q" codes, but they are not necessary on repeaters. We just talk normally, like 2 guys (or girls) having a conversation over a cup of coffee.

(3) Don't use the "roger" or "over beep" feature in your radio. All of our repeaters have a neat feature called "courtesy tone" that lets you know when the other user unkeys, no need to add additional "noise" to your communications, plus, the built-in roger beeps are annoying!

(4) If no one is on the repeater and you would like to start up a conversation, simply call the station you wish to talk to. Say "WA1XXX this is KC1XXX calling". Or if you want to just put out a general call to anyone, simply key up and say your call sign.

(5) If you have just tuned to a frequency, listen for a few seconds to see if it is in use. If you don't hear anyone, you might ask "Is frequency in use, KC1XXX". If it is all clear, make your call.

(6) Kerchunking the repeater without identifying is in direct violation of FCC Part 97 rules and regulations. Also, it is very annoying to repeater control operators as he / she is responsible for every transmission on the repeater and must turn the repeater OFF when illegal transmissions are made. Also, be considerate late at night, say from around 11:00PM until 6:00AM. Repeaters have to be monitored, and some of us who are the responsible parties do so with a scanner on the head of our bed! If you need to use the repeater, go ahead. But if simplex will work, try it!

(7) If you have questions, ask. There are always courteous operators listening that would like to help you learn to communicate the right way!

(NOTE: if you do happen to get a "bad egg" just ignore them...)

(8) Enjoy your new hobby! But remember, don't spend too much time on your new radio, because you need to be studying for your upgrades to General and Amateur Extra class!

(9) As you get more into the hobby, even though you are a Technician licensee, you might consider purchasing some type of rig that does all mode VHF communications. 2M SSB is a fun way to work DX, and 6M DX is the "magic band", where there are stations on SSB, CW, and digital, such as PSK31. YOU ALREADY HAVE THOSE PRIVILEGES THERE! And you will have a rig that just may have the HF bands that you will need when you get your General and Extra tickets!