

Ham Radio 101
How and what to do After Getting your License
By Hal Silverman WB6WXO
Revised December 2011

In the last edition of the Propagator, we re ran an article that dealt with the protocols using the repeaters and, in general, the use of the UHF/VHF frequencies.

This is the second installment that deals with the protocols and courtesies using the HF bands.

So here we go. OK, you have studied hard got down to the testing center and passed the General Class license exam.

You bought a nice HF rig from the Candy Store (e.g. HRO) and erected a decent tower or a wire, etc. and now you are ready to operate. Before you send out your call, do this. Listen, listen and then listen some more. Get a feel for the band and the propagation for that band. Each band is different.

Make sure that you are in that portion of the frequency band that permits general class operation. If you are planning to operate SSB, then also make sure that you are not going to transmit in a portion that is reserved for CW.

I would suggest that you keep a 3"x5" card, with the frequency allocations, next to your microphone that details the frequencies and modes available to the General Class license holder.

You are also permitted to call CQ. If you call CQ, then any station may answer you? If you call CQ DX, then you are interested in contacting a foreign station.

Also it is important to identify your self every ten minutes. It is an FCC requirement. If you don't someone on the air will remind you.

If you are not sure, then review these privileges using your license manual.

If you have a desire to work DX stations (foreign stations), then listen to where the stations are transmitting. Some DX stations use a split frequency to transmit and receive.

If you meet someone on the air and you want to have a daily or weekly pre-arranged schedule, then set up a time and frequency. Just remember that you don't own the frequency. Courtesy and common sense is the watchword.

You may have to have a back up plan such as using an instant messenger on the computer or an alternate frequency and time.

It is also permissible to politely break into a QSO with the idea of asking your contact to move frequencies.

Always conclude by giving your name and call sign, 73, and a "thank you". It goes a long way.

You may think that goes without saying. I have been licensed for over 40 years and I have heard a lot of rude and crude hams.

There are a number of nets from all over the world. Listen and see if they ask for guest check-ins. Then go ahead and check in. It will give you an idea of what propagation is like and you might meet a group of hams that you can identify with.

It is ok to have an unlicensed person in your shack and have that person talk on the air as long as you control the station. It is proper to announce that an unlicensed person is going to say "hello". It may be a way of getting an unlicensed person interested in ham radio. Remember, however, that controlling the station is an FCC requirement.

If you work a DX station, and want to exchange QSL cards (radio contact confirmation cards), ask the DX station if he would be willing to exchange cards with you. You will have to send your card first. He or she will give you directions as to go about it. If he tells you to send it directly to his home, then look up his address on the web. A good place to look is <http://www.qrz.com>. If the operator tells you to send it via the bureau, then check the ARRL web site for outgoing QSL services.

Don't forget to send a SASE (self addressed stamped envelop) and include a US dollar for return postage.

DXpeditions usually go to remote spots in the world where very few hams operate. If you come across any rare DX stations, listen a while and see if the station has any specific instructions. The DX station may be using a split frequency or may want to contact certain portions of the world. Sometime with USA contacts, contacts may be made by district. Listen to the operator for a while and get the QSL information. He generally won't

repeat it after every contact. Don't try and "rag chew". It is not the time or place.

Arnie, N6HC, has made several presentations from his DXpeditions. The next time he speaks at one of our meeting, it is well worthwhile to listen to him. You can gather a lot of insight as to what goes into these adventures.

CW operation is not dead. It is not required for a license any more. However, it can be fun operating CW. It takes a while to build up a comfortable operating speed. There are CW operators at SOARA. Ask at meeting and a CW operator will be glad to assist and give you advice.

This article has only touched on a few aspects of operating on the HF bands. Learn the personalities and propagation characteristics of each band by listening on the different bands.

The propagation is governed by the sunspot cycle. The sunspots are coming out of a low point of the 11 year cycle. When this article first appeared in 2008, we were at the bottom. Since that time, the sunspot cycle has improved and now provides some openings on 10M and 6M. Higher band conditions should continue to improve over the next few years.

Take some time and listen. Sometimes I will listen on 10M FM on a 10M repeater frequency. That will give you a hint if 10M is open.

My closing suggestion is to enjoy this part of ham radio. There are many slices of ham radio open to a General Class license holder. Pick out a slice and enjoy it and then add to it as time passes.

Remember, that SOARA has many members that are seasoned veteran HF operators. If you have any questions, seek them out and ask your questions.

You also may send your questions to me at WB6WXO@SOARA.org. or to Heiko Peschel at AD6OI@SOARA.org