

Getting Into Amateur (Ham) Radio

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What is amateur (ham) radio?

Amateur radio, also known as ham radio, is a hobby enjoyed by hundreds of thousands of Americans and millions around the world. They enjoy communicating with one another via two-way radios and experimenting with antennas and electronic circuits.

All kinds of people are amateur radio operators, also known as "hams." Hams are young, old, men, women, boys, and girls. You never know who you'll run into on the amateur radio bands: young and old, teachers and students, engineers and scientists, doctors and nurses, mechanics and technicians, kings and entertainers. People from all walks are amateur radio operators.

How do you get into amateur radio?

With a little study, most people can obtain a Technician Class license. The Technician Class license is the most popular license for beginners. To get a Technician Class license, you must take a test with 35 multiple-choice questions. The test covers basic regulations, operating practices, and electronics theory.

If you are someone who can learn on his own, there are several study guides available that will teach you what you need to know to get a Technician Class license. The first two listed below are FREE!

- The No-Nonsense, No-Code Technician Class License Study Guide, by yours truly. This study guide is FREE for downloading from <http://kb6nu.com/wp-content/uploads/2006/07/2006techstudyguide.pdf>. This study guide will help you get your license, but getting your license is only the beginning. There is still much to learn, and to get the most out of amateur radio, you will have to continually learn new things.
- HamElmer.Com Technician Test Study Guide. This study guide is also free for downloading from HamElmer.Com. Rather than just teach you the answers as my study guide does, this study guide explains topics in a bit more detail.
- The ARRL Ham Radio License Manual (ISBN: 0-87259-963-9). This book is a publication of the American Radio Relay League (ARRL) and costs about \$25. It's a fine manual, but why pay \$25 when you can get a study guide for free?

Once you have obtained a study guide and started studying, you can take practice tests online to measure your progress. Practice tests are available online at:

- QRZ.Com - <http://www.qrz.com/p/testing.pl>
- AA9PW.Com - <http://aa9pw.com/radio/>

Where Can I Take the Test?

Amateur radio examinations are administered by Volunteer Examiners all over the country. To find an exam session near you, go to the ARRL website - <http://www.arrl.org/arrlvec/examsearch.phtml>.

What can you do with a Technician License?

Technician Class licensees have all amateur radio privileges above 30 MHz, including the very popular 2-meter band. They can also operate phone (voice), Morse Code (CW), and digital modes on the 10m band and CW on the 80m, 40m, and 15m bands. The 80m, 40m, 15m, and 10m bands are in the shortwave portion of the radio frequency spectrum, and are the bands most commonly used for long-distance communications.

What about Morse Code?

Passing a Morse Code test is no longer a requirement to get an amateur radio license. Even so, you might want to consider learning it. It's not that difficult, and it's a lot of fun.

There are many computer programs available to help you learn Morse Code. The one I always recommend is G4FON Koch CW Trainer. Not only is it one of the best ways to learn the code, it's FREE! To download this program, go to www.g4fon.net.

Join a Club!

Finally, I would heartily suggest joining a club near you. Joining a club will help you find experienced hams that can help you pass the test and select and use equipment. Joining a club will make ham radio more fun, too! To find a club near you, go to <http://www.arrl.org/FandES/field/club/clubsearch.phtml>

About the Author

My name is Dan Romanchik, and my amateur radio callsign is KB6NU. I love teaching amateur radio classes and helping people get started in the hobby. If you have any questions about the material above or ham radio in general, e-mail me at kb6nu@kb6nu.com or phone me at 734-930-6564.