

*How do I?*

*An occasional series*

*This week: Radio Games!*

Amateur Radio has dozens of niches. In other articles in this *How Do I...* series we have examined some of the many things folks can do with their ham radio station and identified 28 unique types. There are more. One of the known varieties is the **Contester**. Contesting is also known as Radio-Sport. There is a competitive spirit among Contesters who set out to achieve a high score or to fulfill some other personal goal.

Throughout much of the year, on virtually every weekend, you can find contests on-the-air. Depending on band conditions and the contest rules, you will find contest activity on 160 meters, 80 meters, **40 meters**, **20 meters**, 15 meters, **10 meters**, **6 meters**, 2 meters and on down to the microwaves. The bands in **bold** are the most commonly used for contesting. The bands in **bold italic** attract a small but very determined group of operators, many of them using mobile or portable stations.

The WARC bands (World Amateur Radio Congress) of 60 meters, 30 meters, 17 meters, and 12 meters -- are not to be used for contesting. These bands provide a refuge for those ham operators who are not interested in contesting.

How do you know when there is a contest? Start with the ARRL Contest Calendar published in QST Magazine or visit the ARRL website [www.arrl.org](http://www.arrl.org). One of our fellow ham radio operators, WA7BNM, operates a very popular website [www.contestcalendar.com](http://www.contestcalendar.com)

The ARRL contests generally are held the same weekend each year. Upcoming contests include:

- School Club Round-Up, October 21-25, 2019, where school radio clubs compete to see who can make the most two-way radio contacts (known as QSOs).
- EME (Earth-Moon-Earth), October 19-20, 2019 in which ham operators make two-way radio contacts by bouncing their radio signals off the Moon and back to far-away places on Earth.
- Sweepstakes spans two weekends. The Morse Code (or CW) version takes place

November 2-4, 2019. The voice (or Phone) version takes place November 16-18, 2019. One objective of Sweepstakes is to make two-way radio contacts with every ARRL Section in the USA, and the Canadian equivalent. Such an accomplishment is called a **Clean Sweep**.

Once you find a contest that captures your interest be sure to read the contest rules. Contest rules describe the required content of the two-way radio contact. The contest rules also describe the scoring process using key concepts such as Points and Multipliers. Many contests use the same rules year-in and year-out, but changes sometimes are made. Make sure you have the current rules.

Contest Logging. In order to be eligible for a contest award you must submit a log to the contest sponsor. A contest log is essentially a spreadsheet listing certain details of each two-way radio contact you made with other contest participants. Contest Rules typically specify the required format of this information using the terminology "Cabrillo Format".

Contest Logging typically is performed using PC software. Popular contest logging software applications include N1MM+ and N3FJP. Your search engine will take you to their web sites.

State QSO Parties. Throughout much of the year you will find contests dedicated to a specific state. This type of contest can be a great value to those who are pursuing ham radio awards such as the ARRL Worked All States certificate, or the coveted CQ Magazine USA Counties Award.

The Cumberland Amateur Radio Club takes interest in the Pennsylvania QSO Party. Each recent year a group of club members gathers early one Saturday morning in October and sets up our ham radio stations in a location that typically has very little ham radio activity. We do this in the interest of providing a good experience for the other ham operators who wish to make two-way radio contacts with each of the 67 Pennsylvania counties during the weekend contest. Visit [www.paqso.org](http://www.paqso.org) for additional information.

You might ask yourself "How do I contest?"

- Identify a contest that is of interest to you. Some contests are highly competitive and fast paced. Other contests have a casual, friendly flair.
- Read the rules for that contest.
- You may wish to study prior year results to see how the competition fared. Results usually are posted on the contest website once the scoring has been

finalized. These results can be viewed or downloaded.

- Obtain or configure software for your logging application.
- Conduct some radio and antenna tests before the contest begins.

#### On contest dayí

- Begin by listening to the other ham radio operators as they make contest QSOs. This is a good way to get a feeling for the flow of contest exchanges, what to say, and when to say it.
- When you are ready, get on the air. More time in the chair equates to more two-way radio contacts (QSOs). More QSOs equates to more fun for you as well as fun for the other contest participants.

#### After the contestí

- Submit your contest log to the contest sponsor. The contest rules will tell you how, when, and where to submit your log. Don't miss the deadline which might be as short as 72 hours following the end of the contest period. Five days or seven days are typical deadlines.
- It is customary for the contest sponsor to acknowledge receipt of your log via email. If the email describes errors in your submitted log you may be able to correct those errors and resubmit your log prior to the deadline.
- Wait and periodically check the contest website to see how you placed among the results. It may be several months before the results have been tabulated.

Good Luck! Catch ya on the air!