

How do I?

An occasional series

This week: Help! I want to QSL and do not have any QSL cards!

Q: What is the purpose of the QSL card?

A: To confirm a radio contact made with another station. A valid QSL card may be used as proof of your claim for the various ham radio awards and certificates.

Congratulations! You just worked a new station. Maybe it was your first ham radio contact ever. Or maybe you worked a Special Event like the 13 Colonies, Route 66 On-The-Air, or a once-in-a-lifetime event such as W3R celebrating the 120th Anniversary of the Rockville Bridge. Those radio contacts all have one thing in common -- you really want a QSL card.

Exchanging QSL cards is one of the traditions that makes ham radio special. Even many non-hams have an idea what a QSL card is.

What if you are new to the hobby and do not have your own QSL cards yet. Some of these events require submission before their deadline passes. What to do? You can buy ready-made QSL cards or you can make your own!

Traditional paper QSL cards are available with standard designs, or your cards can be highly customized, depending on your desires. I find that people sending a lot of cards tend to use some of the plainest designs, while very customized photo cards tend to come from hams who do not send out a lot of cards.

Do not panic. There are several articles in the **How Do I?** series <https://www.radioclub-carc.com/resources/> about QSL cards and QSL alternatives such as Logbook of The World and e-QSL. You probably will discover that many special events do not use LoTW or e-QSL, so it is going to be a paper card or nothing.

What is needed in order for a QSL card to be valid?

Try to think like a newspaper reporter. When a reporter writes a newspaper article he or she uses building blocks to tell the story -- **Who**, **What**, **Where**, **When**, **Why**, and **hoW**. In ham radio those **Ws** are an important part of the QSL card data and tell the story of the radio contact you made with another ham radio operator.

Static Information – About You and Your Radio Station

If you operate your ham radio from your home this information most likely stays the same from day to day.

Your Call Sign. Easy to find and easy to read. The other ham will be looking for this as a starting point.

Your Name. The other ham will use your name when mailing his QSL card back to you. It should be the name your USPS Letter Carrier will recognize.

Your Mailing Address. The other ham will use this to mail his QSL card back to you. If you are sending your QSL card to a ham located in a different country please include USA or United States of America as part of your address.

The following data items are “optional” but for many recipients the card has no real value for award purposes without them.

Your Station Location. If the location of your station is different than the address at which you receive mail then the actual location of your station needs to be specified for award purposes.

Your Maidenhead Grid Square. This is a 4 to 8 character geographic location reference. For most ham radio purposes the first four characters are sufficient. For additional location precision some specialized ham radio operators use the six character or eight character formats. Six characters will identify what I call a neighborhood-sized area.

Here in Cumberland County, Pennsylvania we are located in Grid Square FN10. My station is located at FN10mg. Some Dillsburg addresses are in FN10lc. Don't know your Grid Square? Go to https://www.levinecentral.com/ham/grid_square.php

The County in which your station is located. There are prestigious ham radio awards available to those who make radio contacts with all 3,077 US counties.

The **CQ Zone** in which your station is located. Associated with the prestigious CQ Worked All Zones award.

The **ITU Zone** in which your station is located.

All of the above can be pre-printed if you have cards made commercially or if you use software to make your own cards. What? I can make my own cards? Yes.

Variable Information – About the Radio Contact you and the other station made.

This information is specific to each radio contact you make.

The **Station Call Sign** you worked.

The **Date and Time** of your radio contact. Most hams probably use the starting time. A good habit is to use Coordinated Universal Time (UTC) in your logbook and on your QSL cards. And, take steps to clearly indicate which part of the Date is the Month, and which part is the Day. Those of us located in the USA typically write dates as Month, Day, Year. However, in other parts of the world it is common to write dates as Day, Month, Year. If you specify the format in a heading there will be question as to which method you are using.

The **Band (wavelength)** or the **Frequency** on which the contact was made.

The **Mode** used when making the contact. Many awards have a requirement that both stations must use the same Mode when making a contact designated for award purposes. You can cover this requirement by specifying “Two-Way” along with the actual Mode. For example: Two-Way CW, Two-Way SSB, Two-Way FT8, a so on..

The **Signal Report Sent** – The report you gave the other station See additional information about the RST System of signal reporting later in this document.

Some QSL cards include the **Signal Report Received** – The report the “other guy” gave you.

If you would like to receive a return QSL card from the station, please say **PSE QSL**
If you already received a QSL card from the station you worked please say **TNX QSL**

(continued)

What was that? Did you say I can make my own cards? **Yes.**

It can be somewhat expensive if you make a lot of QSL cards, but there is some free or low cost software that you can use to design and print your own QSL cards. This can be a great way to get started while you explore other printing options.

For hams who frequently change operating locations this lets you create a customized card for each location or event from which you get on the air.

QSLmaker is probably the oldest app. It has been updated several times since I first tried it maybe a decade ago. <http://www.iw5edi.com/ham-radio/3819/qsl-maker>.

If you like QSLmaker, but want to do more with it, try **QSLWizard** from Alpine Software. <http://www.alpinesoft.com/asqslwizard.html>. It sells for \$19.95 currently.

Not using Windows? <http://www.radioqth.net/qslcards> is a free website where you can create cards and print them from a PDF file. If you want to make a lot of QSL cards, create a free user account to store your set up information.

If you are going to print your own QSL cards, pay attention to what size and type of paper your printer can handle. I like QSL cards, and e-QSL is a reasonable compromise between a physical card and something easy to exchange. I was able to print e-QSL cards on white 90# stock with my inkjet printers. But when I got a color laser printer, it would not print them. Turns out, if I had read the reviews, I would have known it only handles paper up to about 28#. Live and learn!

There is another option.

Get a supply of 3x5 inch or 4x6 inch index cards. Neatly print your call sign, name, address, county and grid square

Then include the QSO variable information: **Call sign** of the station worked, **Date and Time** (UTC format please), **band or frequency, mode** (phone/SSB/FM/AM, CW, digital or the specific digital mode, like FT8. PSK31. Olivia. RTTY and so on, and a **signal report**.

The RST System for Signal Reporting

For most modes the signal report is 2 or 3 digits. For example, 59 or 599. This is known as the RST System:

While it is somewhat subjective, the following chart should assist you in giving meaningful signal reports.

R - Readability

- 1 Unreadable
- 2 Barely readable, occasional words distinguishable
- 3 Readable with considerable difficulty
- 4 Readable with practically no difficulty
- 5 Perfectly readable

S - Strength

- 1 Faint—signals barely perceptible
- 2 Very weak signals
- 3 Weak signals
- 4 Fair signals
- 5 Fairly good signals
- 6 Good signals
- 7 Moderately strong signals
- 8 Strong signals
- 9 Extremely strong signals

T – Tone

T is used in CW and digital modes Modern radios will almost always produce a 9

- 1 60 Hz AC or less, very rough and broad
- 2 Very rough AC
- 3 Rough AC tone
- 4 Rough
- 5 Filtered AC but ripple modulation
- 6 Filtered Tone but ripple modulation
- 7 Near pure but trace of ripple
- 8 Near perfect but slight trace of modulation
- 9 Perfect tone, no modulation

The following bits of information can be found on many QSL cards. These are completely optional.

1. A photo. Could be a photo of the operator, the shack, the antennas, the view from the porch, local landmarks, and the like.
2. Equipment used. This information is seen less often than in the past, but many hams list the transceiver and antenna used.
3. Affiliated club logos or roster numbers. Some hams place an ARRL logo on their QSL card. Other membership groups issue roster numbers. For example the 10-10 ten meter group, OMISS, Straight Key Century Club and Quarter Century Wireless Association. You can receive awards for make a confirmed QSO with a certain number of members.
4. This may seem trivial, but your continent can be important. One of the first awards many amateurs received was WAC - Worked All Continents. A purist wants the continent listed.
5. Any designators for the location from which you operated. Parks On The Air - Include the POTA number please! Likewise for Summits On The Air, Islands On The Air, and Lighthouses.

There, you now have a QSL card you can mail. If sending to a Special Event operation don't forget to enclose your self-addressed, stamped envelope!

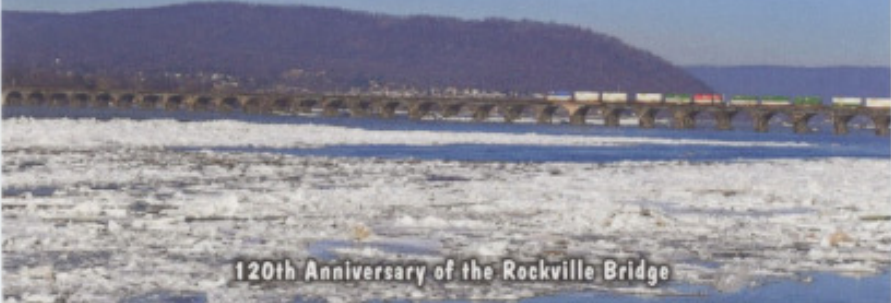
Catch 'ya on the air!

QSL Card Sample – Front and Back


As used by Special Event Station W3R
 Celebrating the 120th Anniversary of the Rockville Bridge

W3R

Pennsylvania




120th Anniversary of the Rockville Bridge



Cumberland Amateur Radio Club K3IEC

<https://www.radioclub-carc.com/>



The Rockville Bridge is the longest stone masonry arch railroad bridge ever built, with forty-eight 70-foot spans and a total length of 3,620 feet. It is made of 220,000 tons of stone that took 600 workers two years to build. The bridge crosses the Susquehanna River about 5 miles north of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. The eastern end is in Rockville and the western end is just south of Marysville.

It was completed in 1902 by the Pennsylvania Railroad, it remains in use today by the Norfolk Southern Railway and Amtrak's Pennsylvanian route. The bridge opened March 30, 1902

The bridge was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1975 and was designated as a National Historic Civil Engineering Landmark in 1979.

Photo by N3FWE

KB3IHF QSL Cards

Confirming QSO with	DATE			UTC	MHZ	MODE	RST
	D	M	Y				